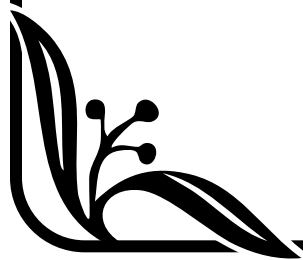


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Correctomundo
SELECTED WRITINGS 2001 – 2026
BRUCE HAINLEY
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FEBRUARY 2026

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OBITUARY OPEN CALL

ZOO (non-specific)

COMMITTEE agrees: the animals captive today must be the last. What would it do, to free them into a world they are no longer part of? What relation does a captive animal have to a free herd? Against such a relation, the same relation. COMMITTEE preached continuity, moderation. And so it was decided: the animals are to remain in their cages. Yes, all of them. Should they be desexed so they can no longer breed? What would be the ethics of denying those whose fate is already decided their children? You cannot say that life perpetuates cruelty—a referent is missing. Still, it is decided, the animals must be desexed, for their own good. The zoo will then be re-zoned from a site of entertainment into a site of education. Placards will explain the colonial history of these structures, and visitors will come to witness the ancient horror. It will no longer be considered an appropriate activity, this exhibition of giraffes, koalas, pandas, polar bears, wolves, hyenas, elephants, ostriches, peacocks, other birds you scarcely remember. Instead, children old enough to contemplate abuse will be guided appropriately. See what civilization did to these poor creatures: civilization destroyed their worlds. When the animals finally die out, the zoos will remain as museums. You'll be able to tour the cages. Sometimes it will appear like a comedy. The replica lake, the tiny river. Mediation teams will say somberly: Yes, this is where they kept the tigers—in this small enclosure. A pet of the greatest misfortune.

1. Sanja Grozdanić

When We Leave, It's Our First Honest Choice, Each Day
That Follows, an Act of Resistance

Even before we break the veil from womb to world,
Our lives are not ours to decide.

What is wrong, and what is right, is resolute.
We do not choose home, yet it acts on our behalf.

A rusting belt, no longer swinging,
Balking in the face of blatant falsehoods.

Jerry and Joe put Uncle Sam in a suit with a cape.
Truth won't save any more than Justice can.

The elusive binary, stokes, divides, and determines.
'HELL IS REAL' in this place.

What we know of home are barren interstates,
Flanked by high fructose animal feed, sunshine in
liquid form.

Living to work each day on a windowless warehouse floor,
Soon to be another bygone industrial archaeology.

Pregnant teens forced to join the mono-culture,
A domestic cage, so suffocating and small.

What then is ours? A legacy of broken promises,
Of following tidy and careful steps, to leveling up.

62. Jordin A. Caudill

January 7, 2020 (C.M.P. + A.C.)

I lost you piece by piece throughout my life until, one night,
only traces of you remained. That long night, I slept on the
sofa in your home, feeling cold blood in my veins, dreaming I
was in a dark forest, chased by the growl of an invisible wolf,
until I heard a desperate cry from the bedroom. Someone
else was facing the unthinkable, and I had to be strong again.
I am waiting to grieve. Years and time slip through my
fingers, and I feel this immense love for you in my chest,
love that cannot reach you, that sometimes does not allow me
to breathe. I am waiting for the day I will be freed from the
image of you with your mouth open, your body just naked
flesh, among strangers and your wife, my mother, losing
equilibrium forever. I am waiting for her liberation and my
chance to see both of you in myself.

63. Manuela Pacella

I first saw Martha Whythblath read at the Altamont Poetry
series, back when it was at the Altamont Theater. Now I
think there's a hotel there, but this must have been in 2014.
Martha had asked Caleb Beissert, the host, to pretend that
she wasn't going to show.

I had never seen so many people at a poetry reading
before. And I had never seen a poetry crowd in Asheville so
sober before. They looked like they were coming to a funeral,
like they were there to remember something that it was a
sin to forget. Or something like that. They all had books in
their laps and were leafing through them. Maybe some had
brought them to get signed, but it felt more like a chance to
talk about her work. People would look over each other's
shoulders, pointing out lines, sharing joy with strangers. It
was nice.

But when the crowd heard she wasn't coming, they
started to drink hard. Caleb suggested that, instead of doing
the traditional open mic, they should take turns reading
from the books they had brought. Surprisingly, almost
everyone did. I saw people who had never read a poem in
public learn to perform a poem just based on the responses
of a cheering crowd.

I saw three bearded men trade lines from *Treatise on
Skin and Night* as if they were reading a single poem. I
saw this kid, Gary, who I worked with in the dish pit at
Bouchon, who's fingers were always covered in band aids,
read the three yellow poems from *North Carolina Pyramid
Cult* backwards, tearing out the pages and spitting on them.
People read like they were leading a chorus, twenty strangers
singing a poem like some kind of ancient Greek, improvising
drunken melodies and stomping their feet.

It was a couple hours before Martha showed up, dragging
a file cabinet she had found next to a nearby dumpster, as
sober as a gun. She stood up on that little stage behind the
microphone next to that file cabinet and looked at us for a
while. Then she sat on it, adjusted the mic, and breathed
into it. Holding her hands around it, so the whole room was
her breath.

Martha drowned in the French Broad River in 2023.
When I heard this was the first thing I could think of: A
performance where she was just as present before and after
she arrived.

I never really talked to Martha. I wanted to, but it seemed
better to see her make moments like that, without trying
to get in the way. I did sort of talk to her once after a show
at the Crow and Quill, when I saw her recite the 14-line
poem "Dr. Oscillator to the OR or ER" 30 times in a row. I
admitted that I didn't really know how to talk about poetry.
She told me that she didn't really know how to talk, but that's
the whole point of writing.

I learned a lot from Martha Whythblath. I'm grateful for
her life. Maybe we're missing what else she could have given
us. I don't know. These things are hard to say with poets.

64. Justin William Evans

Allen Davis: August 23, 1927 – February 17, 2025

I had seen Uncle Allen, 98 years old by now in both 2021
and 2022, visiting a retirement home for diplomatic folks in
Virginia. Upon learning of his death, I got mom on the phone
first and I used the words for the first time...role model. I
reminded dad a story Allen told me on each visit. Dad was
little and banging on a wooden toy. Allen, annoyed with
the noise, sarcastically asked if the job was done? To which
dad replied, 'not yet'. Now on the phone, dad reminisced
spotting Allen's bald head and trench coat on TV at President
Kennedy's funeral accompanying the Dutch queen. Uncle
Allen was my Grannie's older brother. He went to Annapolis
and served in the navy before transitioning to the foreign
service, holding US ambassadorships to both Uganda and
Guinee-Conakry in his late career.

I remember how proud I was when I told him I would
move to Cameroon with the Peace Corps. Allen showed
me—a queer farm kid in Tennessee—it was possible to see
the world.

65. Todd Lanier Lester