

ATLANTIC NORTHEAST

Winter 2026



Volume 4

Issue 1

In This Issue

Atlantic Northeast Magazine

Winter 2026
Volume 3 Issue 2

Editor in Chief Matthew Perry

Atlantic Northeast is a submission driven literary and arts magazine focusing on the Northeastern United States and Canada. If you would like to submit, please visit our website www.atlanticnortheastmag.com

Cover by Ali Saunders

Stay in touch by following us on Instagram or sending an email
Instagram: @AtlanticNEMag
atlanticnortheastmag@gmail.com

Thank you to everyone who shared their work with us.

Atlantic Northeast Graphic by Jeffrey Iacoboni
<https://jeffreiacoboni.com>

©2025

Contributors - Page 3
Editors Note - Page 4

FICTION

Spades
By Daniel Elfanbaum
Page 7

Communes, Hippies, and Beachgoers
By Ihor Pidhainy
Page 11

NON-FICTION

Holding Pattern
By Shelley Russell
Page 15

REVIEW

Review of Aracelis Girmay's *Green of All Heads*
By Beth Brown Preston
Page 21

PHOTOGRAPHY

On the Cover
By Ali Saunders
Page 5

Photography by Ali Saunders
Page 14

Contributors

Daniel Elfanbaum lives near Boston and runs a reading series called Two Page Tuesday.

Ihor Pidhainy was born in Fredericton New Brunswick and raised in Toronto. He is a college lecturer who lives in the American South. He has published short stories in Big Flash Literary Review, Union Spring Literary Review, Vermilion and other journals. Follow him at [instagram.com/pidhainyihor/](https://www.instagram.com/pidhainyihor/), [, bsky.app/profile/ipidhainy.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/ipidhainy.bsky.social), and x.com/ihorpidhainy.

Shelley White Russell is a writer who lives in central Arkansas. She thwarts melanoma as her day job, but her writing has been featured in The New York Times, Literary Mama, BBC's Dear Daughter, Kelly Corrigan's podcast, and the less literary but still fabulous Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology. She can be found on [instagram @shelleywrussell](https://www.instagram.com/shelleywrussell).

Beth Brown Preston is a poet and novelist. A graduate of Bryn Mawr College and the MFA Writing Program at Goddard College she has been a CBS Fellow in Writing at the University of Pennsylvania; and, a Bread Loaf Scholar. She has published three poetry collections with the Broadside Lotus Press and Aquarius Press/Willow Books, and two chapbooks of poetry. Her work has appeared and is forthcoming in Atlanta Review, Another Chicago Magazine, Callaloo, Calyx, Chiron Review, Hiram Poetry Review, Seneca Review, World Literature Today, and many other literary and scholarly journals and magazines.

Alexandra "Ali" Saunders is an up and coming writer and photographer from Harvard, Massachusetts. She is currently studying English and Philosophy at Tulane University in New Orleans. Her work varies but is mostly focused on what she believes to be most important: empathy and love. Saunders work spans from poems, to beautiful film images, op-eds, children's stories, compositions, and more. She adores capturing the world through film photography, especially capturing her beautiful home, Massachusetts where she is very proud to have been born and raised. Aside from her creative work, Saunders is a Division I Track & Field Athlete, She loves the Boston Red Sox, Princess Diana, and being with people she loves.

Editors Note

Dear Readers,

You may have noticed that this issue is coming out late. Our "Winter" issue is now firmly into spring time, just like how our last summer issue came out after Labor Day. We've also stopped our usual print run that we were able to do when we first starting publishing. I love this magazine and it is a privilege to have people entrust me with their work for review and publication, but lately, its been getting hard for me to keep up with it.

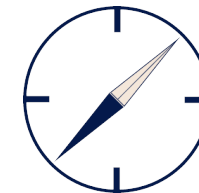
Like with a lot of things, life starts to get in the way. My family is growing, I have another full time job, and I worry that Atlantic Northeast is not getting the full care and attention that it deserves. I started this magazine to showcase how great this region and its artists are, and it's something I take seriously.

This is all a long way of saying that the magazine is going to be taking a pause. We won't be doing a Summer 2026 issue as my family will be welcoming our second baby in just a couple of weeks. We are planning to be back for Winter 2027..

I have so enjoyed reading all of the great work that has been submitted, and hearing from different writers and photographers about how they found Atlantic Northeast and that it feels like the perfect home for their work. With everything happening in the world right now, spaces for artistic expression are so important now more than ever. We hope to be back soon, and I appreciate your understanding and patience.

Sincerely,
Matt Perry

P.S. If you would like any print copies of our first five issues, please email me at atlanticnortheastmag@gmail.com with your address and I can send you some.



On the Cover



By Ali Saunders

Spades

By Daniel Elfanbaum



My buddy explained with gestures and the graphs he'd pulled up on his phone that it was more or less a sure thing. He went on and over again about probability theory and variance and the finite number of cards in the deck — and fifty-two other things — but I gave him the two grand because I'd already told him I would, because I had the money, because I was then trying to punish myself for agreeing to things when I was drunk by making sure I followed through with them. I was trying more often to do the right thing. I was going out more than I meant to. My buddy came to meet me for drinks by the office most weeks when he was in the city, and I'd come home late to the cat. I told myself this would help, so I gave him an envelope of cash.

The office was downtown and I lived a-ways away and took a bus to the train, getting off a stop or two before I needed to so I could walk a little before settling in. My job was uninspiring and fine.

Climbing up from the station there was a shouter who shouted about how the key to success was making good with God, that God held the keys to man's happiness. I couldn't remember the last time I went to shul or when the high holidays were. They must have been coming up soon or I'd already missed them. I'd removed the holiday calendar from my phone last spring because there were too many fast days and I wasn't observing anything anyway. It was cold given the season, but it was at least bright and clear and I had remembered to bring a hat. I made a mental

note to decide later if I wanted to take any action about the shul thing. I had completely forgotten about it by the time I badged into the stairwell and climbed the eight flights of stairs to the office.

I was going up these eight flights because the doctor told me I needed more exercise, and because I didn't want to ride the elevator with Tim, who'd pushed his way into the building through the other set of revolving doors the same time as me.

He said, "Hello!" and I said, "Hi Tim," and he asked where I was going when I split from the path to the elevators. I told him I took stairs for my health.

Tim took a breath and said, "That's really great you know, I ought to do that myself, but I've still got that bad knee from skiing last winter out in Colorado, and I'm supposed to take the kids to Florida for Thanksgiving, you know, to see my parents and because it's Carrie's turn to have them for Christmas, and to make it a special trip we're going to do the Disney thing and it'll be a lot of walking, even if they have those over air-conditioned shuttles that go from the hotel to the parks directly — we're staying at one of the park hotels — but I still want to make sure my knee has time to rest and all,

because you've still got to walk in the park once you get there, chasing the kids trying to get signatures from all the movie characters — how they manage those whole-head masks in that heat I don't know — and you and I, we're not getting any younger —"

I said I was sorry to cut him off but I had a meeting and eight flights of stairs to climb. He gave me a wave as he badged into the elevator area and said he'd see me up there, so I climbed for my health and was indeed on time for my hypothetical meeting.

My buddy flew back from his trip and he called to say that the variance had been against them. Though he himself had done as well as was expected, the team as a whole was on the left side of the standard deviation. I had apparently studied the wrong kind of math in school, so I said okay but what does that mean. He said that there would be no positive returns this time, and that I could get fifteen hundred back now if I wanted to or I could keep it in for the next round where they would most likely (statistically speaking) turn a profit. He was not apologetic but was doing a lot to reassure me. Some aphorism about going into business with friends kept trying unsuccessfully to bubble up in the back of my brain. He

said, "We have our little advantage but sometimes you still don't win in the short term," and I said that was fine, to keep the money in, but in truth I'd sort of been counting on it coming back, thinking that I, too, might want to go somewhere warm for Thanksgiving. I took the train and searched for cheap flights while waiting for the bus home and finally remembered to check the calendar.

It turned out that I'd missed Rosh Hashanah but had not yet missed Yom Kippur, so I asked around a little, but nobody I knew was going unless they were flying home to wherever it was they'd come from. There was a shul I'd gone to for the holidays when I first moved to town, but I wasn't friends with the couple who'd taken me anymore. I'd heard they moved to the suburbs and had a kid or two, so at least I wouldn't run into them if I did decide to gate-crash. On the synagogue's website it said that you were supposed to be a member or pay for a ticket, but I was down five hundred and their website was hard to use. I didn't trust the look of the credit card form. I didn't want to be added to another mailing list. I opened the garment bag at the back of my closet and gave my suit a sniff, checked to see if I still owned any black socks.

My buddy and I met for drinks and he still seemed worried that I was upset about the money even though I told him I wasn't. I repeated the line about it being time in the market, not timing it. He said it wasn't really a market though, and I agreed with him and said that maybe my problem was that I needed to make good with God.

He said, "What's making good with God for if half the time he breaks his own covenant and the other half the time he lets us spin and spin with our long beards and curly guys arguing about the proper length of cloth for the altar of a temple we'll never rebuild? Not to mention, you know, all of the actually bad things that happen. What you need to do is go out and meet someone, make good with something new and let go of the old. Find a therapist. Make a covenant with someone who actually wants to do the thing. Who won't disappear on you. Or else make claims about the one right way to live a life. It's a numbers game. You've got to sit at the table, not in some pew."

We'd been drinking and he was exaggerating, but he also meant what he was saying.

I stayed only for the morning part of services because it was

a Thursday and I'd forgotten to tell anybody that I might take the day off. I snuck out in the general exodus before Yizkor even though the Rabbi reminded the congregation again (and this I remembered from the last time) that the mandate to leave if you've got living parents is just a superstition (but don't tell this to the Chabadniks, who say the opposite, and have the first result on the internet when you search). So I walked with the other folks whose parents were also still alive and then walked with those that were parents themselves towards the rented church where the children's services were being held, and then by myself I kept on walking toward the train downtown.

I thought about sitting at casino tables while waiting by the coffee machine in my suit and dress shoes, wondering if the chairs were comfortable, if it would be like in the movies. The machine made a final whir and sputter as what would have to pass for steamed milk dribbled out into my cup, and I heard Tim appear, nervous about something, and he asked me what kind of trips I had gone on when I was a kid with my parents. I guess Carrie had said something about it. I said I had a meeting (which, this time, was true) but that I had, in fact, had a good time in Florida around when I

was his kids' age, that I was sure they'd have good memories of it later, that it was a nice thing of him to be doing. He seemed happy about my saying so, and I felt that this was near enough to a mitzvah.

My buddy called to say he wouldn't see me at the bar after all because he was boarding a plane, last minute, because of something or other to do with the team, something to do about hours and accounting, forecasting and a more advanced way to manage bets across tables over time, to reduce the variance, to do more with their halves of a percent, and to deal with somebody who I guess had fucked up a little bit or a lot, and I said that was fine. He sent me a picture of himself with a fresh haircut and a new pair of glasses: a costume, a disguise. I said he looked good as a blond and hoped that he would therefore have more fun, that his flight would be easy and safe.

I said to myself that this was fine: good in fact. One less night out and I wouldn't have wanted to wear my one good suit to the bar; I wouldn't have wanted to so publicly break my hypothetical fast so soon before sundown. I took a walk and called my parents while I waited for the train and asked about their service. •

Communes, Hippies and Beachgoers

By Ihor Pidhainy



The Hippies had taken over the park.

I should start with who the hippies were and why they were in the park.

You might know of the hippies who protested the Vietnam War and were into drugs (mostly weed) and all that sort of thing. At

least that's what I heard about from the older generation and YouTube.

But the hippies in our neck of the woods weren't from the States. They were homegrown, mostly Toronto and Hamilton, but others who drifted across the country, mostly through Toronto. The park was a carved out space of grass and trees that stood between the main road that passed through the county and the little sideroad that divided the park from the lake. The park wasn't much as parks go – but it did have some benches, and you didn't have to worry about snakes or fierce insects or wild critters.

And there was the beach by the lake – it was the only public, sandy stretch in the area, so it was popular with the kids and the moms during the week, and on the weekend some of the visitors from the city.

We were here for the summer. My grandparents had bought a tiny cottage on Chancy's Drive, a short dirt road off of the main road that passed the park. It was a group of small bedrooms, a kitchen and living room, with an outside well for water and an outhouse as the main facility. (Later my dad and uncle would add rooms

and a second floor) Dad drove up on weekends, and mom, who was a homemaker and my grandma, would keep us busy during the week – going over to the field for walks and especially down to the beach whenever weather was fair.

The problem began when the hippies moved into the park, set up their tents, and blocked off access to the lake because it went through their commune. That would mean a five minute drive up the road, down to the post office and along the lake rout for another five minutes. But we mostly walked and what had been ten minutes at most was now thirty minutes nearer the boat ramp. That was too much for our mom who was getting us ready for a younger sibling, and so we couldn't go to the beach. (Don't get me wrong – I like hippies, and I liked their music – but as a kid not going to the beach was murder.)

...

When my dad came up on the Thursday and heard about the Commune and the hippies, he was upset. He didn't care for the hippie lifestyle, and he hated anything to do with communes and communism. He had been born under communism, and held no love of even the most innocent imitation.

On Friday morning, my father got up early, shaved and put on his usual trousers and long-sleeved shirt. He asked mom about wearing a tie, but she dissuaded him. We went as a group to the beach. The hippies had put up a fence with a sign – Stay Out: Commune of Love an' Joy. My father, and a couple of friends, pulled down the fence here and led us across the park. It was about noon, so any free love that the hippies were notorious for was not on display.

“Hey, what the *** are you doing?”

“This is public property, and we are going to the lake.”

“Listen, you’ve just crossed into the Free Commune of Lake Ouentironk, and you have no right to do so.”

“This belongs to the public and it is open to our crossing.”

“Man, this is stolen land, and we’ve reclaimed it from the state.”

The leader of the group, Ted, was a tall skinny dude with a short beard and long hair. My sister later told me he had gentle brown eyes. He was dressed in jeans and a t-shirt.

My dad and him got into an argument. I thought they might fight, but they got deeper and deeper in the conversation about the land and who belonged to and why. After twenty minutes, my mom herded us children down to the beach, where we spent the afternoon, before heading home.

Ted and my father were still arguing, though they now were each drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette. Around them, my dad’s friends and some of the older hippies sat and listened to the debate.

“I’ll join you later, Elizabeth,” my father noted to us and turned back to his debate.

...

Later that evening, my father came home with an agreement that locals would pass through the walkway between the highway and lake anytime between dusk and dawn. The commune would refrain from loud nights during the week. On the weekends, Ted and his hippies started carrying snacks and sodas for beach goers.

The next summer the commune was gone. Ted and his wild eyes and the hippies had disappeared in the wind. My father still wore trousers and a long-sleeve shirt to the beach. •



By Ali Saunders

Holding Pattern

By Shelley Russell



ZIGGY JEREMIAH's birth certificate is hard to make out in the dim lighting of what used to be a bedroom. Tucked in a green envelope atop his tiny denim overalls, its playful font oozes cheery optimism. Ziggy's eyes—alert, aqua orbs—stare upward, contemplating loose wiring and sagging ceiling tiles for heaven knows how long. Never hugged or nestled in a crib, Ziggy lies zip-tied to a faded yellow box with crushed corners. His pacifier, locked in place since his birth year (1985, the rosy banner proclaims above a smiling cabbage) has soothed him for decades. No adoptive rescue seems imminent.

The tag sale that snagged us was a sprawling yard full of junk on the outskirts of town. Jerri whipped the car into the driveway on a whim.

"It'll be fun! Surely there's *something* there we need." I was dubious, fiddling with her Tesla door handle I found annoyingly unintuitive. The enormous man overseeing the wares stayed rooted to a recliner facing the small tv he'd run to the front yard. Random merchandise tumbled from tables and weathered in piles in the grass.

"You have a lot of things!" I offered cheerfully.

"Wait'll you see inside," he said flatly, his eyes not leaving the television. Jerri and I looked to the house, torn between running into and away from it.

Jerri smirked. "Oh, *hell*, yeah."

An episode of *Hoarders* would have looked spartan, a downright Marie Kondo affair compared with this place. Nothing here sparked joy. Tetanus, maybe. Once a respectable ranch home in Gloversville, it had morphed into a floor-to-ceiling warehouse: furniture, decor, books, toys. It proved a challenge to navigate. One room held only dolls: true nightmare fodder straight out of a horror flick. Ziggy lived here.

...

When my friend Jerri and I discuss Richard Russo books, we end up laughing at some scene laced with his trademark humor

poking fun at his hometown, but gently so. His characters and small-town vignettes capture *his* town, but register as our own towns, our own neighbors, our own nutty flawed selves. Russo's hometown of Gloversville, New York (a tiny burg an hour west of Albany, in the foothills of the Adirondacks) is the thinly veiled "North Bath" in his narratives, inspired by this place that once savored wild success as the center of upscale glove production for the world. Spoiler alert: people quit wearing gloves, and Gloversville died on the vine.

Russo landed the Pulitzer with *Empire Falls*, which we adore, but our hearts belong to his Fools: *Nobody's Fool*, then *Everybody's Fool*, and more recently, *Somebody's Fool*. In them, giant empty factories cast shadows on the present day. His town (the actual one, and his literary one) stirs when a fancy car from Manhattan wheels up to a derelict warehouse, its owner walking around eyeing its potential. Townsfolk hold their collective breath, hoping the money connected with this guy's BMW might fund a business venture breathing new life into the community. Things never seem to pan out.

No strangers to small town life, Jerri and I recognize much of what being reared in that setting shaped us into. She is a proud Kentuckian, while I sprouted in Arkansas. Like Russo, we hold a tenderness for where we've been raised, while still leaving it behind for greener pastures. Our careers satisfied our academic aspirations, plus the perk of an occasional weekend together to catch up. When we committed to the date this fall, we threw out several options. Jerri thought of Gloversville.

"Wait, where?" I was pushing for Savannah.

"Russo's hometown. You know: *Things are looking UP* there!"

She referenced our favorite passage from *Nobody's Fool*, when the beleaguered town of North Bath, in a fit of optimism, strung a banner across its failing Main Street: "*Things are Looking ^ in Bath!*" But time and town infighting resulted in things, unsurprisingly, not looking up, and the banner left discarded in the thawing snow slush of Main Street, a metaphor for good intentions coming up short.

Tickled at the idea of visiting the "real" Bath, we locked into our admittedly bizarre pilgrimage to Gloversville. We booked a cute cabin on a lake outside of town called "Whole Lotta Love", which we soon discovered, despite its ample love, had decidedly less hot water. We messaged our host about the frigid dribble from the stingy shower head.

"It *should* work," our host offered, hopefully.

Beyond hot water, there was a similar dearth of dining venues in the greater Gloversville area, which explains how we rolled up outside a tired honkytonk, lively with liquor and locals. The grass lot sat crammed with vehicles parked in no consistent pattern, rendering half of them pinned in by others. This posed no problem, as the patrons we found inside seemed unencumbered with departure plans. We stood awkwardly in the entry by the pool table as regulars eyed our interruption.

A grizzled waitress led us to a corner with struggling houseplants and a clear view of the night's entertainment: two

rotund, low-ponytailed guys belting Eagles' covers with the sunny energy of Tim Walz. Spotting crumbs on our vinyl tablecloth, the waitress unceremoniously wiped them away with her forearm as she handed us menus.

"Stay away from the goulash." Her low, graveled voice had seen its share of smoke breaks out back. We nodded, equal parts alarmed and grateful.

...

The next morning, invigorated by a jolting cold shower, we felt eager to take on Groversville properly. In Full Russo Mode, we aimed for a diner on Main Street, a setting he centers often in his books.

A tiny, unassuming place, Groversville Palace Diner seemed strangely named; hard to conceive what royal family might lay claim to the humble joint, though a sign in the window touted its centennial celebration last year, thus outlasting many fancier places—helped by low overhead, we wagered, both financially and literally, as we ducked into the low-slung venue. Housed in a converted railroad car, it felt even more diminutive in the shadow of the hulking vacant factory next door, plywood wedged over most of its windows. ZIMMER'S GLOVES, the faded paint whispered from atop the russet brick carcass.

The only available seats were stools at the counter, a front row view of the one-man-show named Richie. Inches away from his frantic breakfast choreography, we marveled. Waffle House would look clean and sluggish compared to Richie. I'd seen larger cooking set ups in an RV, yet he wrangled cubed potatoes, bacon, pancakes, and

eggs from his grill with chaotic finesse. Wiry and gaunt, he'd study written orders lined up on the shelf, pivoting manically, plating dishes and sliding them onto the Formica beside me. The phone rang often; he yelled out to no one in particular.

"Take it off the hook. They know I'm busy."

After cooking bacon, he'd reach for a sodden dish rag to wipe the excess grease, then return it under the grill. We winced. He sprinkled chocolate chips onto a pancake and into his mouth as he worked. Hygienically suspect? Perhaps, yet, this decrepit grill turned out a breakfast so divine we ate our words: fit for a king, after all.

We gathered from Richie, who didn't mind talking as he bounced about (and chatted with others too, all by name) that his family had run the place for decades, though he'd never intended to join them. He had, in fact, run another direction—to construction, but for reasons he didn't share still ended up in the family business. Today he was pissed because he covered the shift for his brother, who'd begged off for a wedding upstate, but Richie found out from a woman who joined us on the barstools, working the crossword, that he hadn't gone to the wedding after all.

"So I'm up at four, cutting potatoes, and he *didn't even go*? I won't make that mistake again, I guarantee that," he complained grumpily, flipping another pancake. Several folks chuckled, clearly skeptical of his claim.

Heartily fortified, we headed up Main Street, aiming for the library. In our research, we'd come across a 2015 article

detailing the plight of the town's public library. Generous Carnegie funds had built the ornate, marble structure in 1904. Optimism reigned; it was hard to imagine any ebb of the town's success. Time passed, however, and finances needed for building maintenance had, like the glove factories, fizzled out. The town had asked Russo, who now lived in Maine, the article said, to chair its fundraising drive for plumbing and air conditioning needs. Unable to find any followup stories, we were excited to see the grand library for ourselves.

Heading up the deserted street (*where are the people?*) we approached the palatial white building, fussy as a wedding cake in an otherwise drab tableau. We found it closed, midday on Saturday. Bummed, we pivoted for other options, finding it a challenge to find *anything* open. A church across the street espousing tenets of "Open Minds, Open Hearts, and Open Doors," meant it metaphorically, as the door was locked. We found a literal open door further down, a beautiful old art deco building identified in marble as the Jewish Community Center. A green metal sign in the uncut grass out front touted its reincarnation as "The Fly Shack."

The guy at the counter of the fly-fishing shop seemed startled to see us. We browsed politely among the nets, lures, and waders, marveling at humans' penchant to hyper-specialize in clever and detailed ways. I asked the man if there was a lot of good fly fishing nearby.

"Not really," he said. I looked confused. "Most of our business is online," he explained. "The owner got a great deal on the building, so..." He shrugged.

...

The rest of town felt like a collective shrug. A real estate office showcased properties in its front window; eight of the nine frames stood empty. A community church flew a dubious banner: "Celebrating 20 years of God's Goodness!" (What evil had Jehovah wrought twenty-one years ago?) We hustled over to a calendar of events posted on one storefront, finding it unhelpful, as it detailed 2018. From a weedy, vacant lot, a Little Free Lending Library box beckoned: empty, except for a pamphlet wondering where I would spend eternity.

A professional-looking brass plate outside one business intriguingly marketed "The MAN Program: Managing Anger Naturally." Anxious to learn how one naturally manages anger, we tried the door. Locked. We pretended to be angry.

"Fight or flight, baby," Jerri joked. "He chose flight."

"Naturally," I agreed.

...

We found a Co-op on Main Street; tidy and eager, it embraced the kitchen sink approach to success, cobbling together so many wares of unrelated nature as to invite vertigo. A cooler of broccoli and cider nudged against a rack of jewelry. Bags of flour slumped beside fashion scarves, and "hand-dipped" chocolates (unclear whose hands, or when they dipped) rested near local artists' watercolors. Our favorite pairing displayed off-brand M&Ms next to Diva Cups. We were the only shoppers.

Saddest of all was the massive mural looming over a vacant lot

on South Main. Large block letters insisting “BOOKS ARE MAGIC” hovered above a serpentine dragon rising from an open book. Book titles, including Russo’s, crammed the remainder of the wall. In black and white, several children were superimposed, looking pleased at the idea of magical books. Unsettlingly, the paint had peeled from one child’s head, giving the impression that books might have damaged his brain. Ivy grew menacingly up the torso of another child, rendering his smile more of a grimace. The elements seemed intent on reclaiming any fleeting literary joy they may have felt.

“Grim,” I declared. Jerri nodded, uncharacteristically mute.

...

Our heads reeling from the Twilight Zone of that ghost town, we regrouped and headed outside the city limits, finding that riveting tag sale and (happily!) not being murdered there. Eventually, we landed at the clear winner in the region: Saratoga Springs. We recognized it as the fictional “Schuyler Springs” of Russo’s stories, the town down the road that seemed to get all the breaks; its thriving vigor stood in stark contrast to Gloversville’s woe.

...

Anchored in the success of its famed horse track, this town was everything Gloversville wasn’t. The same beautiful buildings on its main drag sat neatly painted and jam packed with upscale boutiques catering to moneyed guests. Designer leather goods, dainty dresses, and hipster restaurants wedged into every available storefront. Pedestrians crowded sidewalks, happily shuffling in and out of the shops.

We dined at Hamlet and Ghost, an uber-cool venue with creative cocktails highlighting “fresh basil notes” and artfully posed entrees festooned with black burgundy truffles or garlic aioli. Richie had done little festooning at the Gloversville Palace Diner, unless you count butter, which he festooned the hell out of.

...

On our last day, we tried another swing at the Gloversville Library, whose posted hours showed a leisurely 11am start. Luckily they were open, though at first we weren’t sure, as the grandiose front doors were locked; a small sign directed our entry to the unassuming, plain back door. The inside felt tidy and fresh, though, and the ornate rounded stairwell and foyer well preserved. We found a hat tip to our man Russo in a shadowy case under the stairs.

“Pulitzer prize-winning author Richard Russo, who grew up going to the Gloversville Library, told a New York Times reporter in 2015 that he had a feeling that if it weren’t for the Gloversville Free Library, he probably would not be a writer,” the note card read, next to a couple of his books in the glass case. We cheered to find proof, however modest, this town claimed him.

Shari, a cheery older woman who bent the “by appointment only” rule for the Local History room, took us to the second floor, which we learned was normally off limits to patrons.

“It’s the budget cuts,” she shrugged sadly. “They’ve trimmed our hours and staff just to keep going.” It seemed that the fundraiser we had read about had been “sort of” successful, funding basic repairs, but the heating and air fix had fallen short of

expectations, necessitating, as Shari groaned to describe, the shifting of the non-fiction books to the upper floor, and the more popular fiction titles downstairs, as the elevator was unreliable and the temperature upstairs fickle.

Shari wasn’t a local, but grew up in a neighboring town, then moved out of state. She’d returned recently to care for relatives. What Shari lacked in factual knowledge about Russo, she made up for in dogged effort, rooting through yearbooks and running literature searches for Russo ties. She was, without a doubt, the happiest Gloversville occupant we had encountered, and we relished her sunny vigor, even if it didn’t lead to much. She was the human equivalent of a Main Street banner, optimistic without any real supporting evidence.

Together, we had a grand time studying old photos of the town’s heyday:

Proud merchants in three-piece suits smiling in doorways of freshly painted factories, workers grinning from upstairs windows.

Main Street jammed with joyous crowds as Barnum and Bailey elephants shuffle uptown.

Eager schoolgirls peering up from sewing machines at Gloversville High, bulletin boards overhead detailing “basic glove styles.”

Knitting mills, leather mills, silk mills, glue mills: bursting with prosperity, all in service to an industry that would never end, until it did.

...

So much cheer. None of it registering with us there that weekend, except maybe Shari, who emailed me later with a

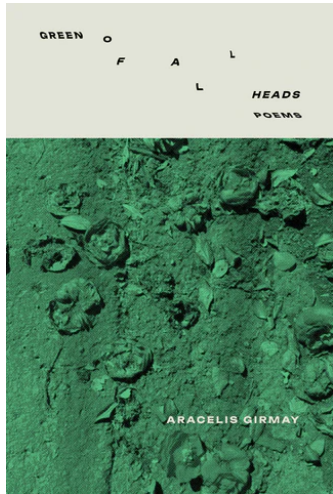
chipper “hope this helps!” and a link to Russo’s Wikipedia page.

In the end, we deemed it one of our favorite trips. Jerri and I giggled through much of the weekend, charmed by colorful characters that felt ripped straight from Russo’s pages. We sipped wine in Adirondack chairs as the sun dissolved in the lake, relishing our shared joy in the absurd. We savored Saratoga Springs’ vibrant energy and sighed over the flat grayscale of Gloversville.

Books aren’t magic. Dragons aren’t real. But a different form of alchemy may still be at play. Ozymandias rise and fall; what sparkles now is neither lasting nor immune to society’s next chapter. Hell, even Russo himself seemed forgotten: this man *intent* on seeing the good bones of his town, ultimately made no lasting impact there.

What draws us to Russo has less to do with time’s forward march, and more his take on its fallout. He focuses less on the boulder (which, face it, has one stage direction, and performs it religiously) and more on us, flawed Sisyphian halfwits, and our ham-handed jabs at improving our lot, forever shifting shoulders and locking our knees. Russo’s trademark: humorous tenderness for our frailty, is perhaps the real sorcery, a sort of kid glove to hold the pain, with a bit of room for hope.

Meanwhile, the crumbling factories sit patiently, broken-paned eyes staring outward, like Ziggy Jeremiah, awaiting a savior. Not aiming for a happy ending, exactly—those are fictional, after all—but a moment of grace, perhaps, when things might finally start looking up. •



Review of Aracelis Girmay's *Green of All Heads*

By Beth Brown Preston

From BOA Editions, Ltd., 2025

Aracelis Girmay is a poet who creates her work across genres. She is the author of a new poetry collection - *Green of All Heads* (BOA Editions, 2025) - her fourth poetry collection written over the span of a decade. In these poems, she explores grief, motherhood, and memory in a volume inspired by the sudden accidental death of her father who, along with a good friend, was fatally struck by an auto. By using inventive forms with rich imagery she finds connections and possibilities in the face of a terrible loss. Her poems move from the personal experience of death to the communal and political creating new perceptions of life and death while spanning the geographies of Eritrea, Puerto Rico, and America.

While mourning her father, Girmay also celebrates the births of her children creating a timeless intergenerational connection to aging with the arrival of new life. She uses memories and family histories to unravel the emotions of grief, and to examine how death is experienced both individually and communally. The poems of *Green of All Heads* are experimental in form with a fluidity and multi-directionality of language which the poet employs to seek commune with the deceased, finding beauty and self-knowledge in the natural and supernatural. Moreover, the work explores new political avenues in questioning corporate/capitalist control over the events of birth and death.

In many African-based cosmologies, death is not the end of life, nor does it signal the absence of the living. "Heads" are not only the seat of reason and thought, but also the home of a sacred realm in which time expands, and memories of our ancestors still survive. Aracelis Girmay mourns her father's death, but the experience leads to her explorations of the body, memory, political history, capitalist/economic control over death, and the trans-physical in grief.

This collection opens with a poem titled "Funeral" - a detailed retelling of the circumstance surrounding her father's death and a description of the funeral proceedings. The poet then compares the events of her father's funeral, imposed upon the family by the coroner's office and the Offices of Funerals, with a traditional funeral she once attended in

Santurce. She uses the language of ownership to refer to her father's funeral:

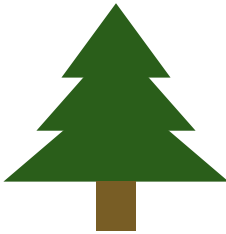
"They charged us for every service. We gave them our dad's own money for the tools, the coffin, the room. They gave us a limit, a maximum number of people who could be present, because this death was not ours." ("Funeral," p. 16)

Aracelis Girmay recently was interviewed by author and poet Rachel Richardson in Issue 55 of *The Adroit Journal*. In her interview, Girmay relates how this collection of poetry came into being through the intensity of her family's grief, then moved slowly outward in almost concentric circles taking in the geographies of her life experience. Through the fact of a death, her poems trace the lineage between grandparents, siblings, and her own children. Building upon the pain of mourning, her verse describes the way the "machinery of capitalism" places a price on everything - including the occasion of birth and death. Girmay has said: "I've always been interested in these questions of intimacy and pressures of the state and imagination, and the extent to which our imaginations are shaped by the state. These are questions that are important to me that I have thought a lot about across my books, but the births of my kids and then eventually the death of my father - and before that his illness - brought me into a new dimension with these questions." (Interview, *The Adroit Journal*, Issue 55)

Girmay acknowledges several poets who have influenced this work - Kamau Brathwaite, Jean Valentine, or Gwendolyn Brooks. Of Valentine she has said: "I think about Jean Valentine, whose voice - or voices - I feel led by more than ever in the new work that I'm making...there's something structurally happening in my new book: an interest in spokenness, but also in making a text that is a written language and silence. Something I learned from Jean is that these currents that run beneath the couplets, or the stanzas, might then poke their heads out later." (Interview, *The Adroit Journal*, Issue 55)

Aracelis Girmay was born and raised in Santa Ana, California. She received a BA from Connecticut College in 1999 and an MFA in poetry from New York University. She is the author of three previous poetry collections - *the black maria* (BOA, 2016), *Kingdom Animalia* (BOA, 2011), and *Teeth* (Curbstone, 2007). She was a finalist for the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2018. Her books have also been named finalists for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. She has received fellowships from the Whiting Foundation, Civitella Ranieri, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Cave Canem Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Jerome Foundation. She is on the editorial board of the *African Poetry Book Fund* and, until recently, was the Editor-at-Large for the *Blessing the Boats Poetry Selection*. She is currently a member of the faculty at Stanford University.

Green of All Heads has been long listed for the PEN/Voelcker Award. In 2015, Girmay was the recipient of a Whiting Award, and the judges' citation noted: "her project seems to be our deep and ongoing subjectivity, our vulnerability to history, to one another, to desire, and to the belief in something large and lasting that we might belong to."



www.atlanticnortheastmag.com