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The Turning Leaflets project is a quarterly zine created through collaboration between TTLJ staff and members from the writing community. Inside each leaflet is a letter from the editors, 1-2 craft essays and/or book reviews, and an interview with contributors.

Submissions for craft essays and book reviews are open on a rolling basis. For more information, please visit our website: www.turningleafjournal.com

Masthead

Megan Eralie-Henriques

KM Hanslik

Lauren McKinnon

Allison Mei-Li

Alithea Mounika

Maddison O'Donnell

Kira Rosemarie

Castle Yuran

The Turning Leaf Journal



Spring 2025

Letter from the Editor:

On the Joys of Creativity, Community & Connection

Dear readers,

It is with a glad heart that I welcome you to The Turning Leaflets! Inside these pages we aim to provide a snapshot of the goings-on at our magazine, including contributor news, as well as insights and commentary on the wider literary community. We very much value connection, commentary, and constructive feedback, and hope that this project serves as a springboard for a wider and more involved dialogue! We want our readers and contributors to feel welcomed and heard here: this is a place for you, beyond the confines of the submission-publication process.

One of my own personal goals this year has been to foster and build a strong and wide-ranging community, somewhere to share the joys of writing as well as connect on a personal level. I believe that especially right now, during a time when automation and efficiency are prioritized above human connection, it is especially invaluable to draw resource from one another and create unique, uplifting art which captures the intricacy and imperfection of life and personhood. I am personally extremely excited to hear from you all what's going on in your worlds, get to know you a bit better, and celebrate in your successes and achievements!

Is there anything you wish you could change?

I wish I could change the feeling of being an imposter, like you're not good enough. That could go for anything, but especially for writing. It's always a good reminder to know that writing is art, and art is subjective. If someone doesn't like it but you do, that's okay; as long as you're proud of your work and are striving to get better and to continue making that art, you're set.

We're searching for good news. Is there anything you've been celebrating recently?

My nomination for a Pushcart Prize by The Turning Leaf Journal is huge for me and continues to be something I'm grateful for and excited for all the time. One of my poems, "An unlikely place for a panic attack is Belle Tire," was recently featured in the anthology *Tangled Lives*, edited by Teresa Berkowitz, who edits the amazing *Tangled Locks Journal*, where the poem first appeared. I've also got a lot of travel coming up, for work and for fun, and I'm celebrating the final days of winter!



Hannah Ryder holds an MFA from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Her work appears in *West Trade Review*, *Judy Magazine*, *Baylife Magazine*, *The Turning Leaf Journal*, and *Tangled Locks Journal*, among others. One of her poems can be found anthologized in *Tangled Lives*, and another poem, "Ogeechee," was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Find more at hannahryder.com

What projects are you working on right now?

I've got a few that I'm toying with, some short stories and some essays, focusing on the small turning points that change a person and how humans connect and reconnect with themselves and with others. The feeling of fitting in or not fitting in also shows up in my pieces whether I think about it consciously or not. I'm planning some longer works that delve into the realm of science fiction with themes around bodily autonomy and policing.

Do you have any writing advice?

When you have an idea, whether it be a sentence, or a character quirk, write it down! It seems simple, but I would always tell myself I'd write it down later and then it would be gone. I've got bits and pieces in my phone, on scraps of paper, in margins of other things. You never know when you'll need it!

We're interested in themes of change here at TTLJ. What changes have you experienced lately, and how/have they influenced your work?

Change is one of my favorite things to ponder! I've changed how I look at my writing, how I do it, why I still want to do it. A big change in my life has been moving, as I've been moving quite a bit since 2019. New scenery, people, streets, and the like are great for me to think of new things while also enjoying a new place.

How do you define change?

Change can both be the scariest and the most exciting part of life. I define it as how we grow as people. Not experiencing even a bit of change makes, for me, an unfulfilled life.

I find creative pursuits such as writing to be transformative yet self-affirming processes; the things that I write, also write me, and along the way I discover I'm still in the process of becoming. I'm my longest unfinished project, and that seems to me to be a huge part of humanizing our experience. Writing can be a grueling, unforgiving process, and I believe many of us (myself included) can become wrapped up in others' perception and lose sight of our original creative goals. I hope that within this community, we can focus not on perfection but progression: on openly giving and receiving constructive feedback and maintaining authenticity throughout our creative works. We very much value the insights and experiences of our readers and contributors alike, and would love nothing more than to offer a place where open dialogue and diversity encourage the ready flow of ideas and inspiration.

We sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to the unfolding of this project, including of course the editorial and reading team here at *The Turning Leaf*, as well as all of our past, present, and future contributors and readers! If it takes a village to raise a child, then it certainly merits a hardworking group of individuals to bring a literary project to life! We have so many wonderful moments and stories to share with you, and we hope you find comfort and hope in these pages as we have.

This is an exciting new chapter for us at *The Turning Leaf Journal*, and we hope you are just as excited as we are! Here's to this ever-unfolding thing we call life—let's make it the best it can be, together!

Warmly, and with love,

K.M. Hanslik

What was your writing process like for “Ogeechee?”

I wrote the poem in grad school in Savannah, GA, a place famous for its live oaks. I can just imagine what they’ve seen, and how people have impacted the earth, for better or worse. I wrote it quickly after going to my car, which I had parked on a side street blocks from class, one of the only spots I could ever seem to find. I edited it for form and length, as my first drafts always tend to be too long (more of a brain dump than anything else).

What (if anything) did you struggle with while writing?

I struggled with packing a punch and a story into as few words as possible, and figuring out breaks, as I hadn’t studied much poetry, so after a few rounds of revision and playing with form, I finally got the piece to be where it is today.

What does this piece mean to you? And has the piece changed meaning for you since writing it?

The piece represents an important time in my life; when I think about Savannah, I think about grad school, moving away from all family in Michigan and taking a big leap in coming to SCAD to continue studying writing. Back then, it didn’t mean so much as it does now, especially the themes of change, as I have since moved from Savannah several years back.

How does this piece fit in with your other work?

I write in many genres, so much so that I have trouble pinning down which genre I’m more inclined to than others. As for the content, nature, the past, and connections with other humans is in line with other work, as those themes I am deeply interested in.

My mentor advised:

Writing is about love. Your writing should bring more love into this world.

For some, this might mean the poem or essay you wrote was for you. It is enough to thank your body for naming what needed to be named on the page and let it be.

I don’t believe writing always needs to be seen by others to serve its purpose. Ask yourself, what was the purpose of this essay or poem? Was it to learn and become a better writer? Is it for my eyes only to process? Will releasing it into the world cause others harm?

For most poets and nonfiction writers who vein creativity to the unasked questions of our bodies (why does it still ache?) This response may cause tossing and turning. There’s the ethical dilemma of writing about people you know versus trying to create space to be recognized as a writer in the world. For me, writing to bring love into the world felt insurmountable when so much of my writing revealed violence and trauma.

It takes a radical act of self-love to transform our ugliest, darkest moments into something learning, valuable, and sparkling. In this sense, creative nonfiction and autobiographical poetry can live full of love, regardless of the subject. It’s magic when we pour the shallow waters of our body into a form to admire and learn from.

Hannah Ryder
Ogeechee

do you live there
in the once-magnificent home
without doors,
peeling goldenrod paint and
broken windows across from that place where that kid
died?
the sparrow making its nest
squeaks down as the ancient woman replies
yes but one day the live oak will
take over
and we will all be returned to the same
ground
that we stand on now.
we'll ask it for
forgiveness
and apologize for what we've done.
like backwards Jesus, she says.
like backwards Jesus, I reply.

An Interview With
Hannah Ryder

Hannah Ryder's poem, "Ogeechee," was published in Volume 1, Issue 1 of *The Turning Leaf Journal*. In Fall 2024 we nominated "Ogeechee" for the Pushcart Prize.

Hannah's lyrical precision is what first caught our attention, but the poem's meditative reflection on how places hold memory, especially of tragedy, invited us to return to it. We're reminded of the inevitability of nature's reclamation but "Ogeechee" feels like a prayer for forgiveness—not from a divine savior, but from the earth itself.

In this interview, conducted asynchronously in February 2025, Hannah shares more about her writing process, inspirations, and how movement—across geography, and across genres—continues to shape her creative path.



Can you tell us a bit about your background?

By day, I'm a technical writer, but I also write feature articles and copyedit for a lifestyle magazine. I love to stay connected in the literary community by working with journals—right now, I'm a volunteer screener at *Ploughshares*, so I get to read some amazing things from both up-and-coming and established essayists. Though I'm a native Michigander, my home base is currently central Virginia. I hold an MFA from the Savannah College of Art & Design and continue to learn about writing as much as I can.

Craft Essay

Writing as an Act of Radical Self-Love

Lauren McKinnon

During my undergraduate and graduate workshops, my writing revealed the unruly and rotten—fights on a beach strewn with the remains of broken jellyfish, glass bottle babies haunting women.

At the time, I wrote what poured out and published near nothing because of the grotesque resonance of my own voice. I struggled to submit the hundreds of essays, poems, and short stories because what I wrote revealed real people who'd touched my life in some way. More than that, it revealed me.

For almost ten years, writing had evolved into a space of naming, processing, and empowering. Publishing felt too naked. I continued to write and hide, write and hide. Writing was a therapeutic passion, a pipedream I chipped away at.

In an email chain where my mentor encouraged me to submit a poem I'd written to a recommended journal, I admitted I hated submitting anything for publication because of my fear for how the people I mentioned in my writing might react.

Do you have any writing rituals?

I always like to have some sort of noise—preferably lo-fi—as complete silence makes me distracted somehow. I like to write in the dark, with only my laptop screen for lighting (maybe not the best for my eyes, but the best for my writing mindset!). Recently I've been more diligent about copying my work over to another document and working from there to save anything I had written previously instead of editing the same chunk of text over and over and risk losing work.

What is inspiring you lately?

I'm in Apalachicola, FL, right now, and it made me remember how much I missed the south. The palms, the endless ocean, white sand beaches, and new places and their history is always inspiring for me, as are walks on the beach and zoning out a bit. I've been reading more short stories lately—SCAD alum Halle Hill's debut collection *Good Women* inspired me to look at each sentence I write and see how I can dive deeper into what I'm saying. I've recently finished *Sunburn* by Chloe Michelle Howarth and the smooth prose also inspired me to sit heavily not only into the overall themes of my writing, but the sentence-level attention to detail too.

Are there any writers or publications living rent-free in your head? What is it about them that captivates you?

I've loved Pat Conroy for over a decade and his work is still a huge inspiration and motivator for me. On a sentence level, he wrote with such beauty and honor of the craft, and I think that kind of care is what draws readers in. I also constantly think of *I Who Have Never Known Men* by Jacqueline Harpman and *Beartown* by Frederik Backman—talk about captivating and packing a punch in an economical number of words! In short, the story matters to me, but the craft of it all, the precision and love at the sentence-level, that's what I live for.