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The Turning Leaflets

Spring 2026

Contents

The Turning Leaflets project is a quarterly zine created through collaboration between TTLJ staff and members from the writing community.

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

Masthead
Megan Eralie-Henriques
KM Hanslik
Lauren McKinnon
Libby Kasseulke
Allison Mei-Li
Maddison O'Donnell
Kira Rosemarie
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The Turning Leaf Journal

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first time ever, I have been participating in the challenge to write one poem each day in celebration. Today is the fourteenth day (yes, I'm writing this editorial letter the day before the Leaflet is released). So far, I've written twelve bad poems, and two that have potential. When all 30 poems have been written, maybe there will be a few more with potential. It's too soon to decipher a lesson learned, but I'm thinking a lot about the title of my Grandfather's book. After all, what is the NaPoMo challenge if not an effort to establish a daily habit of practice?

That said, if there is a lesson I've learned so far, it's this: there are no "bad" poems during practice. The purpose in practice is to be bad. To mess up. To make mistakes. To pencil-in notes in all over the margins. And to keep going.

The idea of practice is nothing revolutionary. I can't begin to count how many times this has been the advice given to me, the essential step towards anything resembling success. Like my grandfather's mother, I often reflect on the art of practice (I'm going to call it an art-form, because isn't that what it is?). We didn't talk specifically about practice during our conversation with Millie Tullis, but on the subject of writing style, Tullis shares this: "The longer I've written, the more clearly I understand what I like to read, how I want to write poems, how I want to write this poem." Practice is the key to uncovering what's true for you, just as it is for me, for Millie, Jacob, Bri, or for any writer, in and beyond this leaflet.

No, this isn't a plug for you to begin the Poem-A-Day challenge (although it isn't too late to start). All I hope to suggest here is that you begin to ask more questions about how you practice your craft. And if you need help getting started, then you're in luck! This leaflet is full of wisdom.

So, reader, I'll leave you with my grandfather's question: Have you done your practicing yet?

Megan Eralie-Henriques

experiencing love while learning to define it.

Next month, my son turns fourteen, and I still feel such an affinity with the mother I was that night staring at my baby in the bathroom mirror, and with all the iterations of mother I once was and will be in the future. By allowing us a glimpse into the deeply raw and human moments that have defined her motherhood journey, Mei-Li shows us there is room for every single one of those reflections to be seen and held.

Allison Mei-Li is a writer and speech-language pathologist living in Southern California. She is the author of *A History of Holding: Poems on Motherhood,* a book that explores identity, the stories our bodies hold, and how it feels to be a human while raising one. Her work has appeared in anthologies, podcasts, and journals including *Rust & Moth, MER Literary,* and *Sky Island*, among others. When she's not writing, she reads poetry submissions for *The Turning Leaf Journal* and designs tote bags and stickers for poets. Visit her at writtenbyallison.com or on social media @writtenbyallison.

Bri Gearhart Staton (she/her) is a poet living in southeastern South Dakota. A graduate of Augustana University's psychology, theatre, and gender studies programs, Bri's writing explores womanhood, identity, and experiences that exist in the periphery. Bri's poetry has been published by *Button Poetry, Page Gallery Journal, Wildscape, Livina Press*, and in several anthologies. A mother of two, Bri's objectively hilarious children are the joys of her heart. Connect with her on Instagram @bristaton.writes

Letter from the Editor:

Letter From the Editor: Have You Done Your Practicing?

Dear Readers,

Preparing this Leaflet has me thinking about the inclination I had as a young, moody teenager, to journal in poetry. Looking back at my personal archives, I cringe and fight the urge to burn what I find in them. Then I remember this was poetry for the sake of poetry. It wasn't trying to be "good." It wasn't even trying to make meaning. It was me, creating art from feelings that didn't exist to please anyone else. These poems were the earliest renditions of me finding my voice–even if it was whiny and close-minded–and it was teaching me what I did, and didn't, like in poetry.

The craft essay in this leaflet, written by Jacob Butlett, offers several nuggets of inspiration on the subject of using writing prompts as an entry point into meaning-making. Jacob asks "How can any writer be expected to learn if one doesn't write again and again and again?"

My grandfather, who was a very skilled musician and professor of music, was also a great quote-maker. He wrote three books, one of which had this title: Have You Done Your Practicing? The title is a callback to a question his mother, a prolific musician herself, often asked him as a child, but is also perhaps the most important lesson extended to his descendants: practice, practice, practice.

We're nearing mid-April at the time of publication. April, as most of you probably know, is National Poetry Month (in hindsight, this Leaflet should have intentionally been poetry-forward, so I'm glad to have had the happy little accident of it being that anyway). For the

with deep insight and community care.

When reading poems about motherhood, there is something so compelling about the art of both seeing and being seen. Mei-Li has a gift for both, often centering the gravity of the poem in its final lines, leaving readers heartsick with recognition and eager for more. But the narrative strength of these pieces is deliberate from the very first lines, transporting readers to a darkened room lit only with the glow of a computer, a beach day with kelp crowns, and even a grief-filled trip to a mall Build-A-Bear. In centering readers in the specificity of time and place, Mei-Li really shines, but she also creates haunting liminal spaces where the "where" is deliciously nebulous. In "[Search History, III]," we see the manifestation of anxiety through search engine queries like "baby never sleeps," paired with "how to feel safe in my body." In "What the Nurse Said," we experience the world that lives within the pause between two halves of a sentence. "Aftershock" features the internal seismic shift of a family of two becoming three.

And there's room for levity here, too. In "The Fine Print," a poem in the form of cheeky legalese, Mei-Li writes, "You may receive reminders from persons at the coffee shop that 'It All Goes So Fast:' however, the absence of such reminders does not permit the Mother to forget." In "Texts I Almost Sent My Son Before I Remember He Doesn't Have a Cell Phone," the bubble reading, "Omg just saw a trash truck lol" made me laugh out loud. I, too, would have sent a text message not unlike that in my son's earliest years.

And yet the most emotionally compelling moments in Mei-Li's collection come from her tender recounting of conversations shared with her toddler son as he begins to navigate the world around him. "Lasterday" is masterful in showing how time can be abstract to both child and mother. In "The World Has Not Been Cruel to Him Yet," we see how good and bad is defined through a child's eyes side-by-side with his mother's fear of an unaccepting world. And "Love Poem" thrusts us into the poignant tug of war of a child

Craft Essay

Take Your Writing to the Next Level: Let Poetry Prompts Inspire You!

Jacob Butlett

Teaching creative writing to undergraduates taught me, with no surprise, that most students believe the myths and misconceptions about poetry. (There are too many to list here. But the lie that poems must rhyme and must be cryptic is particularly irksome.) As I gave a plethora of lectures on poetry writing, especially those on the technical side of writing, I noticed the challenges my students faced in learning how to write meaningful poems. In response, I began to put more emphasis on this: the inspirational power of poetry prompts.

Writing a poem without having any serious experience writing one can be daunting. I asked my university students to illustrate the stories of their lives one word at a time. To help them, I assigned this three-step poetry writing prompt:

- **Step 1:** List and describe six moments from your childhood or early adulthood in which you strove to achieve, accomplish, or overcome something of great personal significance. Think of specific memories that could be retold as stories. What got in your way in reaching your goals? Where were you when these events happened?

- **Step 2:** Describe each moment/memory in 4 or more sentences (six mini paragraphs total, one for each moment). Feel free to label each moment with a heading. Do NOT analyze your notes yet.

- **Step 3:** Out of those six moments, select three that stand out the most. Now answer these questions: Why do your chosen memories stand out? Are the memories funny? Depressing? What makes them particularly personal and noteworthy? Be vulnerable. These three moments/memories could be expanded into poems.

Poetry prompts like this can be a godsend. My students spent less time staring at blank pages and falling for the lie that they must follow certain "rules" of poetry, and more time writing.

I love poetry because I love storytelling and the inventive ways writers can describe and meditate on topics or moments close to their hearts. But I've struggled to write poetry, too. By following a prompt that resonates with me, I can compose my thoughts within a framework without the stress of having to come up with one on my own. A great poetry prompt isn't great because a great poem may or may not come from it, but rather because it inspires a writer to keep on writing. How can any writer be expected to learn if one doesn't write again and again and again?

Why is this important? Well, imagine a smoky bar at dusk. People drink beer and play darts while jazz performers play in tawny beams of spotlight. And there you sit at a small table in the middle of the room, alone, enjoying the ambience. Then someone you may or may not know takes a seat across from you and whispers, I have something I need to tell you. So, you lean in, eager to listen. A great poem is that person, drawing you in with their words, alive with exigency, with concern, with, perhaps, wonder.

Some writers think writing poems based on prompts is cheating. Readers will know I'm using prompts, these writers complain. Thankfully, only worried writers care whether a poem (or any other piece of art) was inspired by a prompt.

Advanced writers can benefit from prompts. In fact, many poems in Languish, my forthcoming book, were inspired by prompts.

Book Review

"My Baby Was Not the Only One Who Had Just Been Born:" The Making of a Mother in Allison Mei-Lei's A History of Holding

Bri Gearhart Staton

Once, in the wee morning hours when my son was six weeks old, I, sleep-deprived and wet with milk, woke to the realization that my baby was missing. Frantic, I overturned the bedsheets, felt his empty crib, looked underneath my bed, and finally, desperate, ran to check the bathroom, where the mirror's reflection showed I had been holding my sleeping son over my left shoulder the entire time. I remember thinking that no one told me that the love I felt for my son would have to live among the anxiety and absolute wreckage of his arrival; life as I knew it as disrupted as the rumpled bedsheets and the constant ache of love in my heart matched only by the delirious question, "My god, what have I done?"

If my mother-self then had read Allison Mei-Li's stunning debut poetry collection, A History of Holding, she would have wept in recognition. Here, Mei-Li makes room for the myriad and nuanced emotions of early motherhood. From the intense yearning amid fertility complications, the devastation of miscarriage, and the fear and excitement of pregnancy onward, Mei-Li pieces together an intimate mosaic of new motherhood with striking vulnerability. And while this collection centers parenting at its core, the poems within are marked with the tear-stained thumbprints of motherhood specifically, its societal inequities and unfairness balanced tenderly

MT: For me at least, writing is a weird mix of seeking solitude and seeking community. Community helps me feel rooted, motivated, and seen. I get energy from what my friends are working on and writing with others has often helped me out of a writer's block. I also think solitude is important—following your own specific interests, questions, and obsessions. People support me in that pursuit, but I always feel like the sole primary investigator. You'll have readers, but I think you should also like making it for yourself, by yourself. Both friendship and solitude have made a better writer.

Millie Tullis is a poet, editor, and researcher from northern Utah. She holds an MFA from George Mason University and an MA in American Studies & Folklore from Utah State University. Her poetry has been published in *Dialogist, Sugar House Review, Cimarron Review, Dialogue, Ninth Letter*, and elsewhere. Her digital micro-chapbook, *Dream With Teeth*, was published by Ghost City Press in 2023. Her research has won awards from the Utah Historical Society, the Folklore Society of Utah, and the American Folklore Society. She is the editor-in-chief of *Exponent II*.

Languish explores my history of mental health issues, namely depression. Prompts, especially eclectic ones, helped me to channel my past into poems. Anyone who wants to take their writing to the next level should read The Crafty Poet, a wonderful book of writing tips and prompts. Languish would likely not exist if not, in part, for The Crafty Poet.

I treat every poem I write as a form of play and practice. For myself, and my students, I keep learning by developing and finding prompts that encourage me, directly or indirectly, to worry less and create more. Now I want others to develop and find prompts that speak to them.

Jacob Butlett is a Pushcart Prize- and Best of the Net-nominated author with an MFA in Creative Writing. He works as the Head Poetry Editor at the Blue Earth Review. His creative works have been published in many journals, including *the Colorado Review, The Hollins Critic, The MacGuffin, Lunch Ticket,* and *Into the Void*. He received an Honorable Mention for the Academy of American Poets Prize (Graduate Prize) at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC), sponsored by the Academy of American Poets. He also completed the course on writing best-selling fiction offered by The Great Courses. He is the author of a book of poems titled *Stars Burning Night's Quiet Rhapsody* (Kelsay Books, 2024).

An Interview With *Millie Tullis*

In Millie Tullis's new poetry collection, These Saints Are Stones*, a faithless daughter is haunted by her third-great-grandmother, Martha, a woman who married her stepfather at sixteen and became a sister-wife to her own mother. Tullis cannot stop uncovering details about Martha, who left no written history behind; her silence permeates this collection, which is rife with gaps and fragments, scraps of memory that blend with dreams. Sparse and spare, these poems echo the red desert landscape where the speaker's ancestors lived and died, where she hunts for graves among the rocks and confronts a past she can never fully know. After all, like a sampling of lace, the cloth of women's history is more hole than thread.*

In March 2026, Volume 1, Issue 1 contributor Millie Tullis, celebrated the release of their debut poetry collection, These Saints Are Stones, published by Signature Press. I was eager to have a conversation with Millie about this collection, especially as someone who also grew up part of the Latter-Day Saint (Mormon) religion and feels haunted by family history. Tullis brings research and years of obsession to their work, and shares some of that process with us in this interview, as well as ideas about grounding both the reader and the self as a writer within our work.

Megan Eralie-Henriques: After my first read-through of These Saints Are Stones, I felt most struck by the depth of research and life-long study you've poured into this project. Additionally, I've been thinking about obsessions in my own work, how there are some subjects I just can't let go of, even if I don't quite know what I'm going to do with them. I just know I have to write about them.

different than Martha's experience with her faith. If I were growing up in the church now, it would be a different experience still. And I think the history is fascinating, but I never wanted to get caught up trying to fill in all this context for a reader. A poem isn't the place to paint all the history and background. Poems are up to something else.

That was a tricky balance at some points in the book—how much I needed to ground a reader. That also was a factor for me in ordering these poems. Martha's marriage dynamic was so strange and so hard to understand, so it needs comes in early, and clearly. The second poem, "After," ends on Martha (though she is unnamed):

> No one is named
> for my grandfather's great grandmother,
>
> a pioneer girl
> who married
>
> her mother's husband
> at sixteen.
>
> Who delivered him
> twelve children.

Diction was also an important element for these poems—I tried to speak clearly and concisely, with very simple diction, in order to let the strangeness, the complexity, seep through plain language. "After Pinto Cemetery," reflect this dynamic in the work. It begins, "When I call my husband about the graves / it's all clarifying relationships" and ends:

> I crave simple sentences. But
> confuse
> mother
> father husband
> daughter sister wife.

MEH: You talk about ways you've worked to ground the reader in your work. How do you ground yourself as the writer? Do you have any writing habits or routines that help you get into the work?

flour sack
babies on
our hips
long skirts
matching
pale bonnets
we sewed with
our mothers

You push/pull a handcart on the trail for days. You eat food by a campfire. You learn your pioneer's story (or, if it's not quite a story, you learn the facts about their life). At various points during the Trek, people take turns getting up and telling those stories, speaking as the historical person, describing their difficult trek and their faith. Some of the historical people die on the trail, and that's part of the story we'd tell about them. While I hadn't thought about it as a reenactment at the time, that's an important part of what it is. A historical reenactment is also a kind of haunting—an obsession with a narrative from the past, running through it again and again.

I wish I remembered more about the Treks I went on, but I do remember that me and my family members were cast as our ancestors. I wish I could remember, truthfully, if I was Martha or one of her sisters. I think I was Martha, and went with that in the poem, but I can't be certain. But I also think the fact that I can't remember makes sense—I memorized a few facts, but I knew so little about her life and her story. She was a name on my chest, but not a real person in my imagination and memory.

MEH: For readers who didn't grow up within the Mormon-sphere, what is important for them to understand before reading your book? Is there anything you want to make sure they have the context for?

MT: Giving context was something I struggled with when writing these poems, and something that I thought about through each version of the book. I think it's especially tricky because Mormon history, culture, and theology is complex, and because it has changed so much. The Mormonism I grew up in during the 90s was so

When you were a child, first visiting your family cemetery in Pinto, did you know right away how significant this visit would be? At what point did you realize this was something you would write about?

Millie Tullis: Thank you for this question! I love that you started with obsessions. As a kid, I did not walk through Pinto Cemetery thinking, "I'm going to come back to this." But something about that memory and that moment did stick with me. It's interesting—our obsessions as writers, what grabs and won't let go. Memories and research often provide starting points for me as a writer. Sometimes, after writing and thinking about a memory, I can see clearly why it mattered to me—why I remember this moment when so many other things are forgotten. Other connections stay a little more mysterious, or onion-like—there can be all these layers of "why" beneath an obsession, a memory. You can keep writing into it over and over and uncovering different things.

I think at the root, I've been interested in gender, place, Utah Mormon identity, and family dynamics for a very long time. But the research behind these poems was deliberate. I was obsessed and went digging for what I could find about these women, my ancestors who had shared a husband as mother and daughter. This is also why haunting is a theme in the book, because I was obsessed with finding out what I could, reading and writing into these questions about their lives again and again. It took a very long time for me to put these poems down.

MEH: Your acknowledgements express gratitude for your MFA cohort's early reading of these poems. I'm wondering if you could tell us more about how this project developed, when it became These Saints Are Stones, or how much your MFA work contributed to this project.

MT: Moving to Virginia for my MFA was a big transition for me. I wasn't born in northern Utah, but all my memories included living there. Being away from home changed the way I wrote about home

in a helpful way (and by "home," I mean family history, Utah Mormon culture, relationship to place and landscape, all that). I don't think I saw home more clearly by leaving, but I saw it differently, and so I could write back on it with more than one lens. And workshopping with writers who did not have my same background, context, or cultural baggage was hugely helpful. At first, I was surprised that they were all very interested in my dead Mormon poems, but that gave me some confidence, like, "this could be a project." Overall, I got very lucky with my MFA cohort and my mentors—I had a really, really wonderful MFA experience.

MEH: I've also found it really helpful to share my work with readers who have little to no contextual information about the LDS-sphere, but at first that felt kind of scary. I think there are aspects of every writer's work that causes them to think "no one will understand this" or even "no one is going to care about this." What would you say to someone who is feeling those kinds of internal criticisms, with writing or publishing?

MT: Yes, I used to think: this is a strange little poem—is it good-strange? Or is it just an exercise? And sometimes you need someone else to respond to it to help you feel that out. But time has given me more confidence in feeling out what I want a poem to be (though my process of revising, of figuring out what a poem is up to, is slow.) I still benefit from my writing community and a reader's response, but I also trust myself. I trust myself more than I did as a younger writer. If I really think something is interesting, someone else will too.

Not everyone is a reader for every book, and that is also okay. I love Lydia Davis, who can be sort of relentless in her writing style. Davis said, "A reader can throw his or her hands up and say, that's enough, and that's OK; I write it the way I want to write it." The longer I've written, the more clearly I understand what I like to read, how I want to write poems, how I want to write this poem. My advice to a writer struggling with internal criticism would be to read more and write

more; notice what you love to read, in terms of content, style, voice, anything, and write work you would love to read. And hopefully it's also always an evolving target—you read new things and write in new ways, and your obsessions evolve too.

MEH: Your poems titled "Reenactment" describe a quintessential Mormon youth experience: Trek. A literal reenactment of the Mormon Pioneers crossing the plains from Illinois to Utah, typically in a desert or forest setting. When I went, I was one of the unlucky few who didn't have a pioneer ancestor to connect with, but you did. I'm wondering what your relationship to Martha was like at this point in your life. What did living in her shoes for four days teach you about her? What did you know then?

MT: You pointed out something this poem touches on that I think is interesting. There is the kind of "elite" aura that can come with being a descendant of an early Mormon pioneer in a Mormon Utah cultural context. I can't speak to this as an absolutely universal Utah Mormon experience, but it was something I was aware of as a kid in Utah. Because family history is sacred—literally sacred, members do redeeming work for their dead family members in the temple—there was a lot of pride in coming from those early converts who suffered so much to get here. If you go to any Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum in Utah, you can see how highly that identity is valued. Anything belonging to a pioneer is worth preserving, because pioneers are so precious in cultural memory, identity, and family narratives. And that was something I thought about with these poems too: is this work sacred or profane? Maybe it's both.

Trek was also designed to be a sacred experience. It is also very much about that pioneer suffering and historical memory. Everyone in your company is assigned the name of a historical person. You wear their name, and you wear historical-ish pioneer clothes. In the first "Reenactment" poem, I describe how "we good / girls / pushed and pulled / handcarts" with