Summer 2026

The Turning Leaflets



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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

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Letter from the Editor:

Letter From the Editor: Oops! All Book Reviews.

Dear Readers,

The book review, in my opinion, is a too-often overlooked opportunity for writers, especially writers trying to find their footing in the publishing world. Even without publishing in mind, the book review is an excellent way of analyzing and reflecting on what's been read. What made this book, this poem, or this essay effective? Would I recommend it to a friend? Is this something I should model my own work after? What feeling lingers after the final words? These are all questions worth exploring in a book review.

Here are my top three reasons you should be writing book reviews:

1. Reading is the foundation to any writer's success. You're reading already (or if not, you should be). Thoughts about what we read formulate naturally, so we might as well put them down on paper and turn them into something instructional and reflective.

2. Reviewing someone's work often leads to forming new connections. A personal relationship to a writer is not required to write a review of their book. In fact, I think it's better if they are a stranger! So, if there's a particular niche you're trying to fit your work into, writing a review of a book already in that niche is a great excuse to reach out to that writer and open a conversation with them. This relationship could lead to more opportunities! (And if you do personally know someone who publishes a book, writing a review for them is one of the greatest gifts you could offer them.

1. Reviewing someone's work often leads to forming new connections. A personal relationship to a writer is not required to write a review of their book. In fact, I think it's better if they are a stranger! So, if there's a particular niche you're trying to fit your work into, writing a review of a book already in that niche is a great excuse to reach out to that writer and open a conversation with them. This relationship could lead to more opportunities! (And if you do personally know someone who publishes a book, writing a review for them is one of the greatest gifts you could offer them.)

The following four reviews vary in length. Some are quite short–others more expansive. We limit the word count to 650 (occasionally allowing up to 1,000), which is just enough space to concisely explain what the book is about and why we should read it. A book review should not meander too much. Its job is to convince.

With exception to my introduction, this leaflet is entirely book reviews. We received an influx of book review submissions, and rather than making folks wait a year for publication, we threw them all into a single leaflet! Across the following pages, you'll discover collections of poetry and essays covering topics from illness and loss to sexuality and the natural world. Three of these reviews were sourced through submissions; the final review written by one of our wonderful readers, Maddison O'Donnell. At the end of the leaflet is an instructional guide on writing book reviews for The Turning Leaflets.

Let us know if you pick any of these books up, and send us a review of another book you recently read! Submissions are always open to craft essays and book reviews.

Happy Reading!
Megan Eralie-Henriques


AFTER
FORGIVENESS
ALAYNA
POWELL

Book Review

Alayna Powell's After Forgiveness

Jonathan Fletcher

In only twenty-seven pages, Alayna Powell readily and courageously examines love and loss, illness and recovery, trauma and joy, and other timely subjects that lend themselves to serious reflection and introspection.

With titles that vary in length, frankness, and opacity (titles such as "Roots," "The Hull of the Muscadine Grape," and "I want to spend the rest of my days fishing with my father"), After Forgiveness, Powell's latest chapbook of poetry (published by *Bottlecap Press*), both questions and affirms, explores and reclaims. In "Milk & Butter Bread," a meditation on illness and loss, the speaker acknowledges the complexity of feelings around their mother's disease: "I'll be sure I've found / the meaning in my mother / getting cancer. I was God / twiddling her fingers. . ." (Powell 8). Beyond the notable use of a female pronoun for the divine (a theologically refreshing image that recurs in the collection), the piece masterfully evokes questions of philosophical import through arresting imagery, as well as sophisticated enjambments that allow for especially multivalent monostiches:

> We've only ever known
> anguish in this vast womb, spun
> by her: meticulous fingers,

palm swaying.
When I return home
there is a cool cup of milk
& butter bread
waiting for me

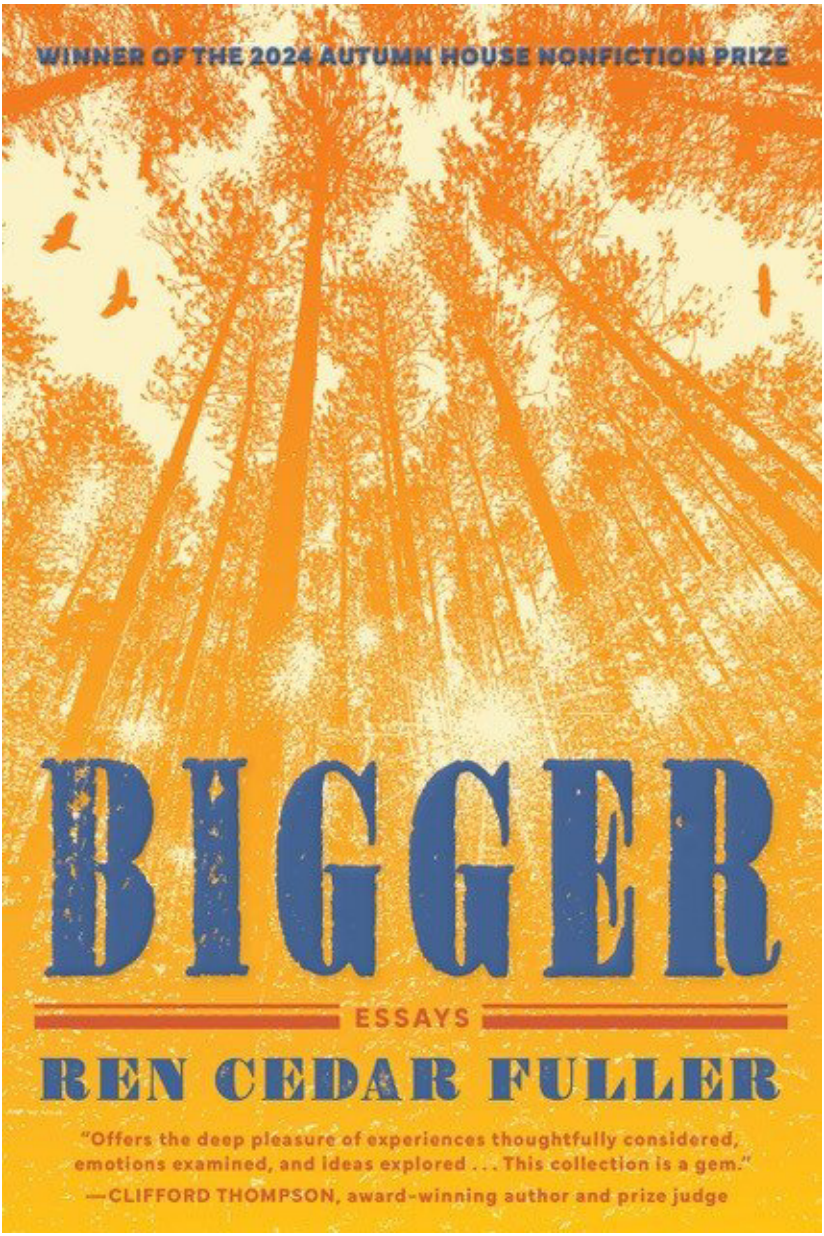
(emphasis added, 9)

What makes After Forgiveness stand out is not simply the artistry with which Powell recounts and imagines (proving herself a poet to watch) but the diversity of form within. Throughout her collection, the reader is treated to numbered poems, pieces in couplets, prose poems, and everything in between. None of it, though, feels artificial. Though full of original moves and unique structure, After Forgiveness is nothing if not sincere, however playful at times. Not always an easy read, her latest chapbook of poetry is a rewarding one. It is a necessary one. Ignore it at your peril.



Alayna Powell *(she/they) is a biracial, Black, hybrid writer who has lived in six states. Her poetry, flash fiction, and book reviews have appeared in Poetry Foundation, The Bangalore Review, Tinderbox Magazine, and elsewhere. She is the recipient of The Good Life Review's 2025 HoneyBee Prize in flash creative nonfiction. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and an MLIS certificate in Archival Studies from the University of Alabama, where she served as the 2025 Poetry Editor for Black Warrior Review. Her debut chapbook, After Forgiveness, was published by Bottlecap Press in 2024.*

Jonathan Fletcher *holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Columbia University School of the Arts. His work has been featured in numerous literary journals and magazines, and he has won or placed in various literary contests. A Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best Microfiction nominee, he won Northwestern University Press's Drinking Gourd Chapbook Poetry Prize contest in 2023, for which his debut chapbook, This is My Body, was published in 2025. Currently, he serves as a Zoeglossia Fellow and lives in San Antonio, Texas.*



In our teenage years, decades ago, boys were supposed to keep their hair short, girls were supposed to keep their legs together, and queer people were supposed to keep hidden until they moved to the big city.

Book Review

Bigger: Essays by Ren Cedar Fuller

Vani Mandava

The most important literature for my review was our mother's words, which I followed as though they were the breadcrumbs in a fairy tale, slipping through a little girl's fingers while she walked deeper into the forest.

These are Ren Cedar Fuller's words when talking about reconstructing her mother's when she can no longer communicate with her children due to her failing mind. Her heartwarming collection of essays titled Bigger is an exploration of relationships with people whose differences make them at once relatable and vulnerable in the current climate. Ren writes about her neurodiverse father, her transgender child, her mother's Alzheimer's, and her hidden disability.

The author, a Seattle resident who grew up in rural California is a parent educator, a retired preschool director and a facilitator for TransFamilies, an online support hub for families with gender diverse children. She won Under the Sun's Summer Writing Contest and her essays have appeared in HerStry, Hippocampus, New England Review, and North American Review.

In Naming My Father, she approaches her father's neurodiversity with the sensitivity of a career child educator and the empathy of a parent who approaches her own childhood hurt with grace. Tar Rocks explores the comforting embrace of a young summer friendship while navigating the tenuous relationship of a teen with her family.

In Checklist for a Sign-making Party, Cedar Fuller talks about changing times as she remains a steadfast cheerleader to her teenager's journey, with the constant conflict between holding on, and letting go.

Ren Cedar Fuller writes about her experiences as a daughter, sibling, mother and partner with a tenderness for the relationships in her life, in a rich narrative storytelling style that takes the reader in the midst of the wonderful people in her life with their strengths and frailties.

Her style is bereft of labels and diagnoses and instead focuses on the deep human experience of the people that surround her with a subtext of celebrating the differences that enrich human relationships.

The book will be a helpful read to anyone who may be navigating the world with a loved one who is neuro-atypical, non-binary, or living with a hidden disability. As part of Ren's reading group, I loved watching the process of each essay in the book unfolding and the deep thoughtfulness with which Ren approached each story. Even though our lives could not have been any more different, her stories made the world more comforting and intimate for me as I connected with her writing through the fabric of our shared emotions.



Ren Cedar Fuller *is the author of Bigger: Essays, winner of the Autumn House Press Nonfiction Prize. She also won Under the Sun's Summer Writing Contest and her essays have appeared in HerStry, Hippocampus, New England Review, North American Review, and Under the Sun. Ren taught public school in California, Oregon, and Washington before founding a nonprofit early learning center near Seattle. She teaches parent education around Seattle and facilitates parent meetings at TransFamilies, an online support hub for families with gender-diverse children. She lives in Seattle with her husband, Jason.*

Vani Mandava*, an academic having published extensively in academic journals, now finds joy in creative writing. Originally from Mumbai, India, and having lived most of her adult life in Seattle, Washington, she feels at home anywhere there is an ocean to the west. As the bewildered mom of a teenager, she has found inspiration in the words of other personal storytellers and has found community through her writing group and writing practice.*


POEMS by ALLISON FIELD BELL
all that blue

Book Review

Allison Field Bell's All That Blue

Rachel Turney

Allison Field Bell's debut poetry collection, All That Blue, is a coming-of-age tale of a girl finding herself, particularly her sexuality. The protagonist is a traveler, searching the world for self-discovery. Who is Allison in California? Who is Allison in Greece? Is she a lover, a friend, a lost woman?

Field Bell grapples with place in her collection. She is rearranging herself and her life both figuratively and literally and wrestles with the idea of mother and daughter and where she fits in this narrative and loop of womanhood. In "How is This Supposed to End" Allison even says, "…I want to be anything other than woman." This feeling resonates with most women, and indeed most people, who have, at some point, questioned themselves and maybe even their existence.

A fantastic writer of the natural world, Field Bell has a beautiful way of gently connecting nature to human emotion, human form, and human experience. Most poets inevitably write about nature, but for some reason the way Field Bell does it hits differently. She is an observer, an ethereal thing that is part of and not part of the scene.

In keeping with the title, the color blue does run through the collection: time spent by the Aegean, the blue waters of the Pacific, and the blue sky. Field Bell uses the word blue to describe landscape and scenery and, in the final poem of the collection, her connection to the art of Georgia O'Keeffe. This culminating poem, "O'Keeffe Country", goes beyond the ekphrastic to capture a woman becoming herself.

Field Bell examines what identity means to her and the idea of what a woman should be. At the end of the book, questions haven't been answered so much as Field Bell has created new ones for herself and her reader. All That Blue is a thoughtful autobiographical gathering of pieces held together like a tapestry, but one that is unraveling. The threads are used to make something even more beautiful.



Allison Field Bell *is a multi-genre writer from California. She is the author of two forthcoming collections: Bodies of Other Women (fiction) and All That Blue (poetry). She is also the author of three chapbooks, Stitch (forthcoming), Without Woman or Body, and Edge of the Sea. Find her online here.*

Rachel Turney, *Ed.D. is an educator and artist located in Denver, Colorado. Rachel is on staff at Bare Back Magazine and is a reader for The Los Angeles Review. She runs the popular online reading series Poetry (in Brief). Her debut book Record Player Life (the b-side) is available with The Poetry Lighthouse. Find her on instagram @turneytalks.*

Windfall

IRISH NATURE POEMS TO INSPIRE AND CONNECT

Edited by JANE CLARKE

Illustrated by JANE CARKILL



Foreword by Olivia O'Leary

Includes poems by

SEAMUS HEANEY, EAVAN BOLAND,
PATRICK KAVANAGH, NUALA NÍ DHOMHNAILL

Book Review

Windfall: Irish Nature Poems to Inspire and Connect, Edited by Jane Clarke

Maddison O'Donnell

Nature writes poetry all around us, every day, just by existing – much to the delight and wonder of those of us fortunate enough to observe it. In *Windfall: Irish Nature Poems to Inspire and Connect,* editor Jane Clarke curates a time-spanning collection of human attempts to capture the poetry inherent in the landscape, flora, and fauna of Ireland. An anthology thoughtfully illustrated by the delicate watercolours of Jane Carkill, Ireland's landscape is portrayed through ink and paint as an awe-inspiring and beautiful, but fraught land – inherently connected to the spiritual while also existing both physically and metaphorically as a victim of human contestation and devaluation. Through it all, Clarke's selected poems invite the reader to observe, with great gentleness, the complexities of the land laid bare.

Clarke organises the collection by separating poems into undulating sections representative of traversing the Irish landscape. Readers begin grounded in "Woods and Trees," then venture through sky, sea, and earth before landing, quite aptly, with "The Land." Though the sections are thematically organised, there is significant overlap between individual poems and sections, furthermore acknowledging the vastness and interplay of nature pushing at the bounds of human attempts to sort and categorise.

Central to the anthology is a triumvirate of language, spirituality, and wonder. Poets wrestle with myriad mysteries of a nature both known and unknown through multiplicity of language (English, Irish, and "Earthen") and reckon with the duality of an environment simultaneously nurtured and threatened. In doing so, the poems themselves, through Clarke's thoughtful curation, deliver a clear message: the attempts of the poet need always be to observe and hypothesise – never to define and conquer – a nature that speaks its own language.

This poetic humility lends itself beautifully to capturing some of the most elusive parts of Irish nature. The majority of poets presented in Windfall acknowledge nature's place as something inherently spiritual and divine – sometimes acting as a folkloric "thin space" between the living and the dead. Animals are messengers for departed souls. Rain and grass touch everything on either side of the veil. Tree roots and vines reach deep from their earthy bed to some unknown beyond. For poets like Nick Laird, author of "Night Sky in Tyrone," Ireland's garden birds "provide the eyes the dead look out of," whereas in "Calling To Me Through the Woods," Shirley McClure scours a forest in search of a departed loved one, only to surrender their soul to the earth:

> But you are in hiding
> fastened with the moss, maybe,
> to the river wall,
> upstanding with the heron
> or endurance swimming
> with the wisest salmon
> back bravely to the dark Atlantic salt.

If nature is truly the "thin place," however, it sits closer to the oft-mentioned Heaven, which is either directly or indirectly referenced in the majority of the poems within *Windfall*. Verse rife with words like "miracle," "spirit," "holy," "genesis," and "soul"

peppers each themed section, oscillating between the figurative and the literal. For instance, in Catherine Phil MacCarthy's "The Bat," nature quite literally occupies the space between the human and the divine: a bat interrupts a Mass to tarry in the mystical space between the gathered congregation and the heavens beyond. Most intriguingly, MacCarthy characterises the bat as a creature ignoring the mores to which we mortals bind ourselves:

> Flew high as the rafters,
> creature of the night skies,
> tiny claws quivered past
> solemn readings from Isaiah,
> the Gospel of St Mark?
> Chose this occasion
> to run amok,
> …
> break all the rules,
> eerily, to dance?

MacCarthy's work asserts there is no containing the wonders of nature; it, like the divine, is never fully known to us. Similarly, in the more metaphorical "Staring Out the Window Three Weeks after His Death," Paul Durcan traces the dying of a loved one: "I saw that his soul was a hare which was poised / In the long grass of his body, ears pricked." Comfortingly, the hare springs forth from the departed's body after death and continues "popping up out of nowhere, sitting still" contributing, like MacCarthy, a sense of wonder and whimsy at nature having invaded the space between the human and the otherworldly.

The subtext sprinkled through these poetic references of nature's invasion into human spaces and proclivities, of course, is the dire reciprocal: that humans have invaded nature and pose a threat to its omniscient phenomena, even though we consider it our physical and spiritual home. John Hewitt asserts this uncomfortable truth in "The

"to sniff the ground / without the threat of that old monster, man." It is a bittersweet note contended with even through the final poem presented in *Windfall*. Francis Ledwidge's "Home" briefly calls the reader back from the brink of despair in a tender reminder that nature finds a way to prosper, even when things seem irreparably doomed: "This is a song a robin sang / This morning on a broken tree, / It was about the little fields / That call across the world to me."

Nature, it seems, can conquer all. We can try to capture the language of nature – our efforts are not in vain. Jane Clarke's compilation does so beautifully, but it also invites us to extend beyond the poetry and the page. The poems in conversation with one another prove that writing, however lovely and valiant, cannot ever fully capture nature's mystery and magic as much as it can induce readers to venture out and listen to the language of the earth itself, with poetry as a guiding companion. After all, as many of the poets in *Windfall* attest, it is nature itself that is the supreme poet. It knows and holds more than we can possibly comprehend. And, as I write this review accompanied by the clever chattering of a tiny Goldcrest hopping between the branches of a rain-bathed tree outside my window, I'm inclined to agree.



Jane Clarke *is the author of three poetry collections, The River (2015), When the Tree Falls (2019), and A Change in the Air (2023), published by Bloodaxe Books. Jane's fourth collection, Coracle, will be published by Bloodaxe Books in October 2026. Her poetry reflects the interdependence of people, place, and nature while exploring loss and change, both personal and cultural. She grew up on a farm in Co. Roscommon and now lives with her wife in the uplands of Co. Wicklow.*

Maddison O'Donnell *is a writer of dark fiction and poetry based in Cork, Ireland. She is the grand prize winner of the 2024 International Dark Poets Prize. Her work has appeared in The Wild Umbrella, NECKSNAP Magazine, Salmon Creek Journal, Abyss Literary Magazine, and elsewhere. In addition to her role as Fiction & Poetry Editor for Abhartach Magazine, she reads poetry for The Turning Leaf Journal.*

"How To" Guide

Writing a Book Review for The Turning Leaflets

Perhaps we've convinced you it's time to try your hand at writing book reviews. Maybe you don't know where to start. or, maybe you've been writing book reviews already and would like some instruction to consider. The following is a mash-up of advice given to

First, and most importantly, book reviewers should assume that their readers is unfamiliar with the book. Reviewers should take it as their job to acquaint readers with the book, its contents and its value, to help them decide whether or not they wish to read it.

Since these reviews are brief (650 words) they cannot comment on everything. Reviews usually contain a mix of summary and evaluation. And if they are to be convincing, they must support their opinion by quotations (at least one), examples, and specific references to the text so that readers may think and feel the way the reviewer thinks and feels.

Book reviews tend to get "stuffy" quickly, so don't be afraid to insert yourself within the review. The most persuasive reviews are ones that create scenes around them. When the reviewer shows how they're changed by a book, I'm more persuaded to want to read it (and experience that change for myself).

We're interested in all kinds of titles, although we gravitate towards books that were published by indie presses or self-published. We're not interested in publishing negative reviews. If the book is not to your taste, consider instead who the book is for and how it will be experienced by that audience and write the review accordingly. If there's nothing redeeming in the work, this isn't the book for us.

Common Book Review Structure:

1. An opening that engages the reader and names the author and the title, gives the reader some idea of the nature and scope of the author's work, and establishes the tone of the review.

2. A summary of the book (typically no longer than a paragraph).

3. A paragraph or two on the theme, purpose, idea, or vision embodied in the book, perhaps within the context of the current Leaflet's theme.

4. A concluding paragraph in which the reviewer delivers their final insight and suggestion towards what meaning a reader might find within the book.

Want to be part of
the next Leaflet?
Submissions for craft essays
and book reviews are open!
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