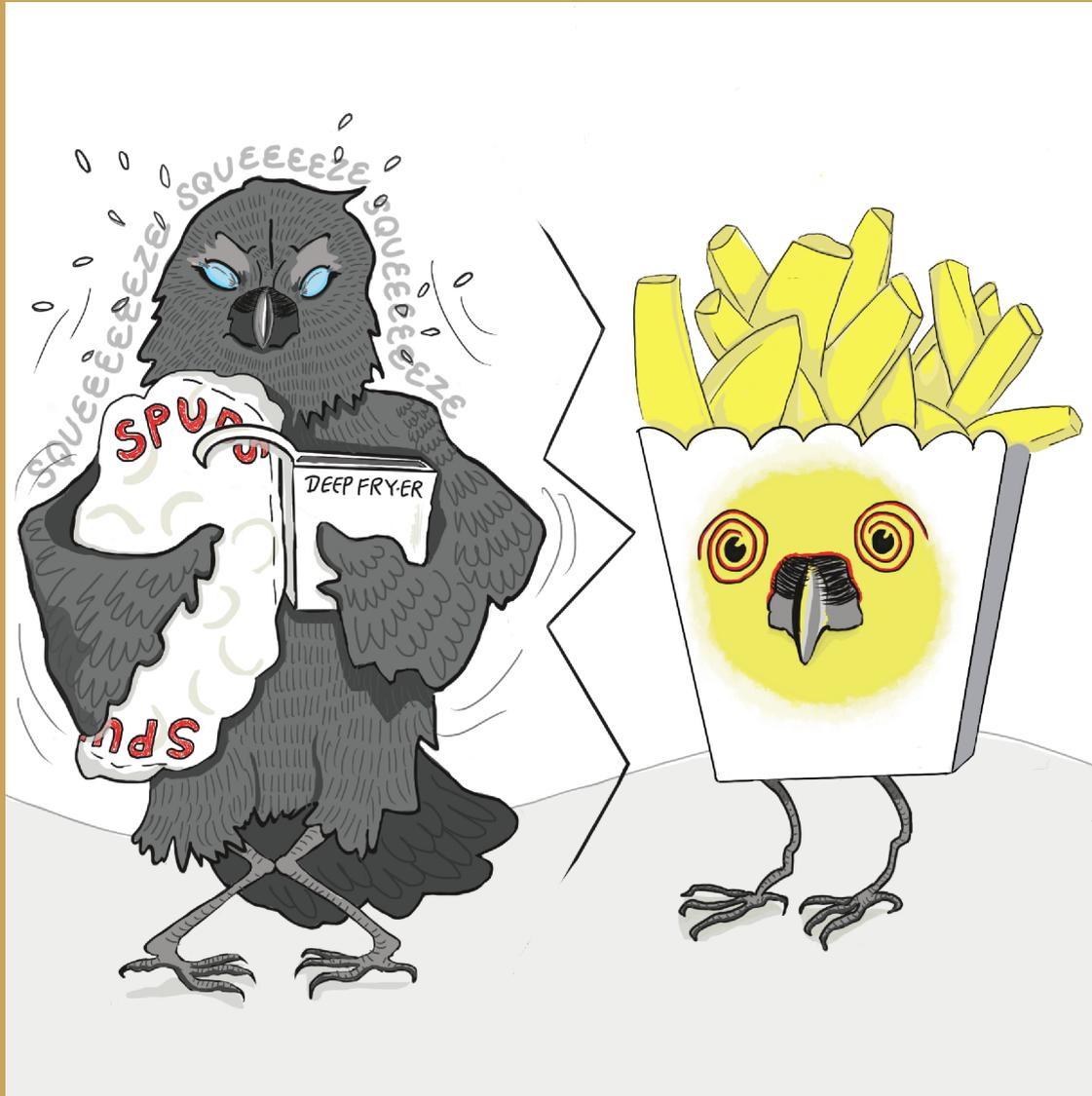


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NorthWord

A LITERARY JOURNAL OF CANADA'S NORTH





AMALGAMATION by Liana Wheeldon

**NORTHERN CANADA
COLLECTIVE SOCIETY FOR
WRITERS STATEMENT**

OF PURPOSE:

To publish and support the work
of writers in northern Canada.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS *NorthWord* Volume 5, Issue 1

DEADLINE October 30, 2021 **THEME** *Attachment*

GUEST EDITOR *Hope Moffatt*

*We're always looking for prose (3000 words or fewer, fiction or nonfiction),
poetry (50 lines maximum), excerpts from current projects, and visual art.*

PLEASE SUBMIT AS A MICROSOFT WORD OR IMAGE ATTACHMENT TO:

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COMMUNITY REPORT

BY KIRAN MALIK-KHAN PR Director

NORTHWORD VIRTUALLY LAUNCHES ISSUE 23 WITH "SOLSTICE" AND SOULFUL POETRY

Who says you can't have a beautiful afternoon of poetry virtually? Well, nobody in a COVID world. And, we were delighted to have word lovers converge for just such an afternoon of beautiful poetry and prose as *NorthWord's* Issue 23 "Solstice," was virtually launched on April 17, 2021.

Guest edited by Florence Weber; the stunning beadwork cover art was created by local artist Treasure Cooper. She designed the cover exclusively for *NorthWord*. Both ladies commented on their inspiration.

"Solstice is always a magical time of the year for me when the seasons change quickly. I love it and it's part of who I am. While editing the magazine I learned that not a lot of people have the same experience, and that was really cool. They go inwards to be creative. And the changing seasons effect people emotionally too. There were so many beautiful words, it was difficult to choose, but I enjoyed it," explained Weber.

For Treasure Cooper, creating the cover was an "honour."

"It's the biggest piece I've ever done so it was quite challenging. I tried to give her movement by adding the tassels. I added swirls to the sun—so you feel the heat coming off of the cover," she shared.

Dawn Booth, President of the Northern Collective Society of Writers (NCCSW), publishers of *NorthWord* was delighted with the event.

"We were happy to have had so many guests join us for our launch and have them share their words in celebration of National Poetry Month. *NorthWord* continues to prove how needed its platform is for our community as it unites lovers of the literary arts and creates a space for them to express themselves; their pain, their joy and everything beautiful in between."

Jane Jacques, Managing Editor, NCCSW agreed.

"We were delighted by the response to the launch for Issue 23 of *NorthWord*! People gathered to listen to one another's work,

share their own, and support the literary arts community in Fort McMurray. It's been a challenge for *NorthWord* to retain its audience and continue publication throughout the pandemic, so we were especially pleased to see our loyal friends and contributors there. When we resume face-to-face launch events, we'll be even happier to celebrate *NorthWord* with them in person!"

The call for submissions for *NorthWord* Issue 25, "Attachment," is already out with a deadline of October 30, 2021, at midnight. Issue 25 will be guest edited by Hope Moffatt.

Short stories or excerpts from current projects, fiction, or non-fiction (3000 words maximum), verse of no more than 50 lines, along with anything original and inventive can be submitted to the editors at northword@hushmail.com.

Due to COVID closures limited copies of *NorthWord* Magazine are available free of charge at Mitchell's Café, Keyano College, the Urban Market, and a few selected locations around Fort McMurray.

For real time updates, visit our website at www.northwordmagazine.com, like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/northword and follow us on Twitter: [@NorthWordYMM](https://twitter.com/NorthWordYMM).



Issue #23: Solstice digital launch event.



EDITORIAL

AMALGAMATION

\ ə-,mal-gə-'mā-shən \

The action or process of uniting or merging two or more things; bringing multiple things together. Or in literature—a consolidation of two or more entities into a single entity. This can be a consolidation of people, places, iconic items and even narratives. Amalgamation is a craft technique used by many writers when writing fictional elements that draw from real life experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic (and the various civil rights movements that continue to arise within it) has created numerous sectarian divides across the world. We have maskers and anti-maskers, left-wing and right wing, BIPOC and Caucasians; with new movements gaining traction every day. And outside of these movements, the pandemic itself has forced so many of us apart in the name of physical distancing, asking the world to do their part in keeping one another safe by staying as far apart from each other as possible.

Though we've had to live through a time where the world has felt quite segregated, we also know that there is an unparalleled strength in bringing ourselves together and working towards common goals. If the world wasn't ready for us to come together in person, I wanted to motivate an attempt to embrace this "coming together" through creativity and the arts with this issue's Amalgamation theme.

And unsurprisingly, the artists have stepped up to the challenge beautifully. I think you'll find that this issue proudly supports artists with great ideas which go against the norm. These artists didn't diminish their vision in fear that their audience might not relate to or understand their message. There are a number of beautiful vulnerabilities shared through their words, truths uncovered behind their rhymes, and none of them shied away from sharing fresh, new and innovative ideas through their work. But then again, I wouldn't expect anything less from artists born of such innovative and boundless communities as those that call Wood Buffalo and region "home."

Luay Eljamal | ISSUE TWENTY-FOUR EDITOR

BOOMTOWN CITY

RYAN MCCANN

The melting of two pods
Remember laying sods
20 bucks cash
All we wanting was ass
23 years old fresh out the shower
Bar lights stiff drinks we felt power
Running through our veins
Years later came the pain
Of our personal decisions
amalgamation is the word
But I still want to be heard
We had big dreams
To merge as dealers and sell to the fiends
2004 boom town busy city
Hookers on a waiting list they cost 350
An hour got to fulfill my desire
Good coke strong g but in the end I was a liar
To myself I must confess
My life was like a game of chess
I was losing to an old man
A journeyman of the clan
The devil the red I'd be better off dead
In the end my addiction needs to be fed



CHOICE

SCOTT MELLER

I tell you this; there is a monster in all of us.
There is an angel, too.

It is not about your position in spacetime,
it is not about the wealth you have hoarded away from the world,
it is not even about the devotion you profess.
All it comes down to is your choices, and how you act upon them.
If you want to know peace and love, you must choose it.
We are all just a product of the choices we make and the amalgam of experiences that they have brought to us.

Choose wisely.

FOR DAWN

KIRAN MALIK-KHAN

“Write,” she said
“Right,” I said
Write of words of the heart
Write that flows through the soul
Write to be whole again –
My friend in words
My sister in poetry
Right you are –
As I write – and try
To be whole again.

IN BOREAL FOREST

LUKE SAWCZAK

We were driving up north
To a cottage in boreal forest
Two families

We were going to survive
Minus ninety at night

When we were younger
We built a fire in the stove
Fought for a place on the bench

I don't think any fire
Would have been enough this time
We could have burned the whole place down

And laughed our last laugh
At two a.m. holding hands

We're listening to the high stakes, low odds
Driving onward through the snow

Windows smashed out to breathe by
Hands too numb to steer
Feet too numb to brake

Two families
Inevitable
Deeper and darker

THE FOURTH

HANNA FRIDHED

Anhata
the place I meet you
apart in reality
but never truly
unhurt and unheld
unstruck

Anahata
someplace outside us
the physical peeled
energy free flowing
unleashed and unfettered
undying

Anahata
without our wounded egos
I touch your fingertip
with mine
undivided and undone
irreplaceable

THE LYSSA AMALGAMATION

VERONICA WOOD

The irony was found in how humanity, which had dominion over the Earth, imposed civilization onto nature until its original state was indistinguishable; Soteria, unexpectedly, was not to accept such actions, engulfing all present human life into its essence in what is now known as the Lyssa Amalgamation.

A Historical Consideration of Cosmological Interactions (2089), by A. Shavhi

Being his third outing this week, Carlo was finding little detail to take note of for the laboratory. His eyes flitted up to see the observation craft in the sky, recording the terraforming process. This was a minor distraction from his general muse while driving; the majestic presence of Jupiter, so large it could be seen anywhere on the surface of the moon. Reaching for his water canteen, Carlo noticed the solemn expression of the truck driver. The driver's focus lay in front of them, at the pathway created by the truck plowing through Soteria's crust. Soteria was a curious moon, jokingly called the Watermelon moon; its crust was a gray-green colour, yet its upper mantle, just underneath the ground, was a deep crimson.

Their mission was to transform Soteria, the closest livable satellite, into a sustainable hub for civilization; when the terraforming was complete, it would look nothing like it had when its existence had been confirmed 40 years ago. This was good news, and Carlo was more than proud to play a part in the making of history. It was bothersome that the driver seemed consumed with discontent. Checking first the driver's name tag, Carlo asked, "Something wrong.. Aastik?"

"Oh, nothing really." Aastik replied, his expression loosening.

Carlo probed. "Well, this is the first planet proven to have a surface and temperature comparable to Earth's. Sounds pretty remarkable, true?"

"The way I take it, this isn't right."

"Not right? What makes you say that?" Carlo took a moment to breathe at the preposterous opinion. Aastik cleared his throat and explained, "Man was made to be on Earth. We were born there, and I believe we are meant to die there." Carlo felt his stomach sink. Many had protested in the announcement made to emigrate a colony to Soteria. Many religious groups, including the more modern Alien Creationist cult, had insisted that doing such would be against divine (or extra-terrestrial) will by leaving planet Earth.

As if reading his mind, Aastik added, "No, I do not follow Alien Creation theory, I actually--" The

truck halted, interrupting Aastik's comment and jolting the two forward. Carlo peered over the dash to see a decent sized boulder obstructing their pathway. Aastik grunted, mumbling, "Better get the Crackard..." From behind the seat, he pulled out the long, slender, gun like tool designed for such occasions.

Once outside, Aastik placed the nozzle of the tool onto the rock. Carlo watched him pull the trigger, shooting a strong vibration into the rock, which subsequently broke into medium sized chunks. It dawned on Carlo that study of these rock formations may be important for future situations, and he quickly spoke into his recording monitor, "October 3, 2062, Start: How do boulders form during crust removal?" With that, the device automatically transferred the clip back to the observation craft's database.

Aastik brought himself back into his seat, shaking the debris from his dark, graying curls. "Thank heavens that doesn't happen too often," he said, blinking dust from his eyes. At the mention of "heavens" Carlo jumped to take control of the conversation. The religious undertones made him uneasy. "Yes, I agree, we need to keep on schedule the best we can. Imagine, it is so empowering that this work will save countless lives!" Aastik shrugged, murmuring, "I suppose so."

Shifting his gaze out the window again, Carlo mused over Earth's current state. Hunger; drought; famine; pandemics, all constantly engaged with Earth, retreating from one area to only resurface at another. Many efforts had been made to stifle human reproduction, but had failed. Man was too efficient a species, and Earth was more than over-encumbered.

Though he had failed to revive the discussion, Carlo felt compelled to ask, "If you're so against all this, why are you even here?"

Aastik's eyes remained fixed ahead as he replied, "You know what it is like. Are you telling me you left a stable job to come do this? We were starving." Carlo nodded,

deciding he should probably drop it. Aastik was right; he hadn't had a proper job in a long time, and there was a reason he had avoided marriage like the plague. Aastik continued, "Yet, in the end, we are blessed. The insurance policy alone this job offers is wonderful!" The tone of his voice was a lot more cheerful, and Carlo nodded again, content leaving it off at that note.

Suddenly, the truck jostled forward and stopped. Aastik sighed, reaching for the Crackard. Carlo noted an odd tremor in the ground that was uncharacteristic of past stoppages. Instead of making a note of it immediately, Carlo asked, "Hey, how about I try it? I could use the fresh air." Aastik, who had begun to climb out, handed it to Carlo over the seat. As he got out, Carlo spoke his memo. "Uncharacteristic tremor during stoppage."

Once his feet were planted on the ground, Carlo frowned as he felt it rumble again. An "earthquake", which would be the best way to describe the ground's movement, was impossible on Soteria. There existed no tectonic plates beneath the surface; without these, there could be no quakes. "Unless we caused some sort of anomalous fault line to form..." He muttered to himself.

"Ah, Carlo, I think we should get back in the truck."

The panic in Aastik's voice was startling. "Why?"

"Look at the ground."

Carlo looked downward, and was astonished to see that it did in fact look like a fault line. Cautiously, he paused, not taking another step. After a few moments, it seemed that the tremors had abated. He called, "Let's just get this rock dealt with!"

However, once they were in front of the plow, they found no rock. In that split second, Carlo noticed that the front passenger tire had been caught in the fault. Aastik was saying, "I wonder--" when he was abruptly cut off by the sudden opening of the ground, as if it was swallowing the two whole.

Carlo felt himself dropping down an endless pit, the sky

above growing farther away. To reason, or react, was out of the question; it had all happened so fast, there was nothing to do but accept the momentum, downward. Eventually Carlo's body was forced to turn over. It had appeared dark in the tunnel, yet, below there was an entity, or perhaps, a habitat, of lights. Greens and reds danced like an aurora in a sea of blue essence.

Carlo pushed his face around to look behind him, and a surge of confused terror came over him as he faced the impending presence of the cosmos. Rocks seemed to fall in from all around, and the starry skies choked with cold, numbing his toes. When turned towards the light, however, there was warmth, and this Carlo succumbed as he closed his eyes, embracing what was to come.

No doubt those on the surface could not imagine the inexplicable process of the planet consuming itself, as if flipping from the inside out. What is left to us is the pondering of how Lyssa, the new satellite, formed, as if melding with the human presence on its late surface made something new. Regardless, the only response is to humbly accept that, if humanity was given Earth, surely they could not have been so prideful as to assume authority over the cosmos as well?

*A Historical Consideration of Cosmological Interactions
(2089), by A. Shavhi*



GIRLS OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

ANNE BALDO

the summer we are seventeen we are like the velveteen rabbit,
waiting for a boy to love us enough to make us real. we are pure
imitation, knock off
perfume on wrists, prismatic with our glitter body sprays,
the catchy sweetness of a mouthful
of vanilla. our lockers & our bedroom walls slick
with pages ripped from teen magazines: how to get a hotter body and
how i got him to notice me, articles about pop stars & purity rings.
we share platform sandals, butterfly clips, eyeshadow
palettes in purple, blue, robotic glint of Y2K silver
all along the lid, the lips. at night we slip
on kitten heels, denim miniskirts, cropped pink fur
coats, drink stolen gin in washroom stalls, hoop earrings
shining through flat-ironed hair, hoping waterfalls
comes on when we are in the car, on our way home
as we drive down by the river, date boys
who work at chryslers, temporary part time.
britney spears gets on the radio to tell us all
she is still a virgin. it was that important to us.



WHO ARE YOU?

SCOTT MELLER

I don't pretend to know
the mechanism
by which we begin to
understand ourselves.
I only know that
we wake up each day and
choose the mundane or the sublime.
It's uphill from there.

Either you embrace the divinity
within you and
within the world around you,
or you hide from it
in the motions you make
telling yourself a story of control,
and deception.

Those actions (or deceptions)
inform the makeup of your experience.
Those things that you amalgamate
into your perception of yourself.
Those things that throw you off
of the discovery of who you really are.

Who you really are is not that which you embrace,
but that which you embody,
and you will spend the totality of your existence trying to excavate that from the
stories you tell yourself.

THERE'S MORE TO SILENCE

HANNA FRIDHED

Stories
built together
We are words within
sentences
Our spaces in-between
holds truths only
we dare speak
alone

TAMARINDO

DOROTHY BENTLEY

?who can work in the heat
 tostados and tacos de pescado
 with pescado y lima soothing toasted lips
 free limes and mangoes in the jungle
 outside the gated courtyard locked by day
 open at night
 who takes the sow grunting for her piglets
 in the muck by the ocean
 waves swallow shoreline prints
 cockroaches scurry behind black fixtures
 electrical panel sparks roof tiles
 alarms screech
 helmet-less motorcyclist prostrated
 blocking east and west traffic to
 Haucus pineapple-rice take-out at Bellis Soda
 old men sip sweet Fanta
 stained plastic chairs scrape
 broken linoleum
 dirt blows
 rain stops
 it will not rain for many months
 |molasses rises sweet
 off hot Treacle roads

bats buzz our heads poolside
 we were cooling our feet
 we were drinking iced wine and beer
 we were swimming naked
 we were looking at Cassiopeia
 we were in the wrong place in the sky
 amalgamation of two worlds

breathing night air
 we were cooling our bodies
 we were watching petals falling
 we were showering outside
 we were finding geckos and frogs
 spiders and other insects we couldn't name
 we were running across hot gravel
 we were slamming the wide wooden door
 we were dancing on the beach
 out-held hands
 at the sinking cooked yolk

?who can work in the heat
 we were watching the sails curl
 early morning ocean swim, hands sand-gritty
 heavy coconut cream spread along
 hot skin for poolside

THROUGH THE LEMON TREES

DOROTHY BENTLEY

The howler monkeys are crossing, he said
they stopped the car and took the
baby out of his car seat to
look and point and listen
a family in the canopy
with a baby

The father monkey bellowed
freight train of the tropics
terrifying the jungle
the songbirds flew in a startled spray
the vultures sulked away
sweeping wing-beats sent
the iguanas and frogs
for cover

His echo answered back
from the cavern exciting
the father further who
escalated his bowling howls
short yips and longer yaps
a Morse code for scam or
he will tear your limb from
gangly limb in the blazing
Costa Rican heat

His baby clutching mama
who helplessly peers at the intruders
before swinging branch to branch
easily hidden from sight

The father returns to the backseat
with his baby while the mother drives
off-road doing her best to cut a new
path through the lemon trees

KALANI

DOROTHY BENTLEY

Kalani muchacho
play under the lemon tree
toucans and macaws chant
iguanas beat their tails in the jungle
turtles hatch and crawl to the ocean

Kalani muchacho
play under the almond tree
palm trees drop their coconuts
the termites drill a maze
the jaguar cools his belly
in the crocodile canal
the howler monkeys bark like dogs
as their family plays tag in the canopy

Kalani muchacho
aprender a amar en Español e Ingles
learn to love in Spanish and English



SYMPHONY IN THE SKY

SORINA DOICULESCU

Morning dew is touching my feet between the succulent spring grass and my warm toes.

It feels cool, but subtle.

A sweet scent of cherry tree is assailing my nostrils.

A tiny white flower touched my cheek.

The east brings zephyr, god of soft gentle breeze.

He is carrying a flock of white milky clouds across the sky.

They look like foam in a frappe drink.

In my left hand I carry my violin.

I felt the urge to disturb the quiet sound of morning with a melody of strings.

The first few notes resonate long in to the air.

Few birds start chirping alongside, announcing the beginning of a new day.

A splash of red colour is released in the horizon and a line of hot blood transforms the atmosphere into a mystic sensation.

Out there, my violin sounds are gliding upwards in to the sky, uniting with the finches and robins singing above us.

I close my eyes to hear the sound of nature intensify in to a fusion with my violin.

I felt a hot powerful light piercing through my skin.

In my astonishment, the god of the sky reveals himself to me.

With his fiery eye gazing upon myself, like the gates of heaven have opened.

This alluring amalgam of sound, colour and form forge the shape of a beautiful symphony in the sky.

AMALGAMATION

KIRAN MALIK-KHAN

Where grief meets joy again –

I await

that

Amalgamation



A VERY GOOD ACTOR

LUKE SAWCZAK

We went to receive the pizza
for our small band of TAs,
crossing campus in the cold,
at times your hand around
my elbow, but not all the time.
Sometimes your stick was enough,
along with your memory.
You were probably jovial as always.
You said described video was less informative
than just the dialogue, when delivered well.

For some reason we needed to pay cash
You had me operate the ATM,
I think, express withdrawal,
except your fingers knew your PIN.
I gave you the bills, you thumbed through them.
You asked me to throw out the receipt.
Then, walking along, you changed your mind
and asked to throw it out yourself.

I'll always remember your astonishment
as your hand, expecting smooth and flat,
touched bouldery topography,
a little chestnut I'd already crumpled up.
We laughed together at the surprise
of innocence.

We brought the pizza back, we ate and marked.
I loved the fringes where I got to play.
I never minded if it went till it got dark,
or we resigned ourselves to adding one more day.

You told the students once that they could buy an A,
the going rate a million bucks, of course.
I use that line sometimes in my own classes.
They're learning software, so a loan would be approved.

You told me if you could start again from scratch,
you would write. You'd write *Twilight*. I laughed,
but couldn't tell how serious you were. Now
you're married to a poet. You told me once
you were a very good actor.



A CLASSIC CREATION

DAWN BOOTH

Ring in the cymbals, bring
in the brass. The sounds of
silken violin strings shiver the
music aficionados placed

in the mezzanine;
inside the cathedral where
one hundred permanents
equal one masterpiece.

And there you are; out in
front of an entire ensemble
with your soprano sounds
in a concerto written for you

to show off your luscious and
expressive mastery. Your vibrating
reed with its cluster of tones
pouring from fast to slow.

They all feel it with much
emotion; the solo and its coming
together to morph one complete
classic ensemble..

AMALGAMATION?

OWEN ERSKINE

Now we Attempt
Amalgamation
For a nation
Built by greed
Assimilation
Raped & Pillaged
From Invasion
Stolen slaves
Segregation
We must decide
For all creation
Are we humans
Or a corporation



MARGINALIA

Getting better all the time?

A column by DOUGLAS ABEL

Amalgamation. Coming, or bringing, together. Combining disparate parts into a larger whole. Unifying. Joining. Bonding. It's a good thing, right?

Certainly common-sense ideas and folk wisdom would tell us so. We say that in union there is strength. That the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That two heads are better than one. United we stand, divided we fall. Strength or safety in numbers. Indeed, the motto of the self-proclaimed greatest nation in the world is "*E pluribus, unum*," out of many, one.

The progress of 'civilization' since its inception several millennia ago seems built on the idea that growth and amalgamation are both inevitable and beneficent. Amalgamation is the process of progress.

But is bigger necessarily better? Does the 'greater' that the sum of parts produces mean anything more than an increase in size? And is such an increase in size automatically a 'good thing'?

Amalgamation is not simply a bringing together. It is also a transformation. The parts are not merely combined; they are changed in the process of amalgamation. The resultant larger entity has qualities that the disparate parts may not have possessed; on the other hand, it will lack qualities that those parts had before the bringing together. In the process of amalgamation, the original parts may become unrecognizable, or may, in fact, cease to exist as such.

Hegel defined this 'process' clearly in his definition of the dialectic. He described how idea one, the thesis, comes into contact and conflict with idea two, the antithesis. The result of their conflict is a third idea, the synthesis, which is not just some kind of hybrid, the 'two-together,' but something new. And in the dialectical process, both thesis and antithesis disappear as independent entities.

Amalgamation can mean an annihilation of what has been.

Even if the parts involved in an amalgamation/transformation do not disappear completely, they may be changed permanently; indeed, they will almost inevitably be so altered. Both psychological studies and our own experience tell us that a crowd, in action and spirit and emotion, is not the same as the individuals in it. But our experience also teaches us that, even if the crowd, or mob, eventually breaks up, the people who formed a part of it are not emotionally the same as they were before the combination. Similarly, when smaller states, or principalities, or kingdoms are amalgamated to form a larger, more powerful nation-state—Germany, France, Canada, the U.S.A.—the pieces that were brought together cease to be what they were before. If that nation-state were then to fall apart, the divided elements would be unrecognizable.

The transformation of the parts that amalgamation brings is usually irreversible. You can't go home again. Nor can you return to Square 1; Square 1 is now Square 1A—if you can locate it at all.

I was living in Ontario when, in 1974, a political and economic amalgamation of various long-established communities west of Toronto created the weird city of Mississauga, whose 'downtown' now consists of a labyrinthine sprawl of brand-new high-rises and big-box malls. The combination no doubt created real gains in efficiency, political clout, effective planning, elimination of duplication, economies of scale. But at the same time, villages and towns that had often existed for a century and a half—Clarkson, Lorne Park, Port Credit, Cooksville, Streetsville, Erin Mills—simply ceased to be. Each of these places had a living history; that shared stories became mere tales from the past, written and ready to be forgotten. Place names that had meaning, that spoke of shared experience, a sense of belonging, and a local voice, became nothing more than isolated street signs, names on a few shops, or labels on old maps.

There may be "safety in numbers," a joy in joining a larger whole. But there is often, perhaps always, sadness as well. Amalgamation may mean gain. It will also mean loss.

What can the present COVID pandemic teach us about combination and separation? During this crisis we have, in many painful ways, been de-amalgamated. We have been thrust apart, unjoined, disconnected. Certainly we have found new ways to relate, to amalgamate, from outdoor, distanced gatherings to Zoom weddings—and funerals. Electronic connections have replaced physical closeness.

In this process, as in any such transformation, we have all changed. We dream of getting back to normal. But "back" to "normal" will not be back to where we were before March 12, 2020. That particular normal can never be retrieved.

Perhaps we have suffered physical losses and have been transformed by that pain. Perhaps we have re-evaluated relationships, and become clearer as to which are really important, and which are trivial. But how will our coming together take shape, once the pandemic is over?

Certainly we long to replace Facebook with true "face time," where we gaze into unpixelated eyes, and hear undigitized voices, with no latent lag. At the same time, we will now, instinctively and automatically be able to measure six feet or two meters. We will strive for more intimacy, more real contact, more simple face-to-face activity. But perhaps, even as we strive to get closer again, we will also, instinctively, fear proximity more. We may keep our distance in order to avoid further experience of loss. We may do so without even thinking about it, guided by a new spatial reflex. Will being once again surrounded by others make us joyous, or terrified?

We long to be out in the world again. Yet it may be more difficult to trust the world, individually or in groups. The world has taught all of us that it can always inflict disasters, randomly and cruelly, and that no 'preparation' is guaranteed to be enough. Will we always be glancing beside and behind now, alert to threat?

Coming together is transformative and such change can be painful. It is easy to mouth the slogan, "No pain, no gain." But the real pain is not lessened by reciting words. Our post-COVID re-joining will not be a re-joining of the same people, in the same way. Those people do not exist anymore. In real terms, the clock does not turn back.

Perhaps the way we feel at this moment, as we move through transformation is best stated by Andrew Undershaft in Shaw's *Major Barbara*:

"You have learnt something. That always feels at first as if you had lost something."¹

1 G. B. Shaw, *Major Barbara*, Act III. Project Gutenberg E-Book #3790, 2009.

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When not enjoying the Birchwood Trails in Wood Buffalo,

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DAWN BOOTH is an award-winning community journalist, communications expert, storyteller and poet. With 20 years of experience in the print media field, the Humber College journalism graduate has worked as a newspaper and magazine editor in the Wood Buffalo region for over a decade. As an ambassador for literature, Dawn is the President of the Northern Canada Collective Society of Writers and Literary Arts Director for Arts Council Wood Buffalo. She resides in Fort McMurray, Alberta, with her husband of 10 years and three children.

SORINA DOICULESCU was born and raised into an artistic family in Europe. In her early age, after passing her second grade, she began writing poetry and prose while she was doing her homework. With a Bachelor's degree in Design and Visual Art, now she is a dedicated artist in the Wood Buffalo community.

AMBREEN EHTISHAM is a mixed media artist who brings resin to life, designer of 2020 Buffy Awards and the Canadian Ambassador for world renowned resin brand, Mrs. Colorberry. Her work has generated attention both locally and internationally with over 14,000 dedicated followers on her social media accounts.

Tip toeing thru the poplars with his tongue in his cheek. **OWEN ERSKINE** is a Chef, Dad and Born 'n Bred Northerner. Working to find words to express thought and feeling.

HANNA FRIDHED is a Swedish theatre and literary artist who is rediscovering her love for the written word after a long hiatus. This is the first time her poetry is published in English.

MEGHAN GASS-CARTY was born in New Brunswick, where she will always consider home. She moved to Fort McMurray, Alberta in 2010, where she resides with her husband and two young children. Meghan

teaches high school English. She finds refuge in writing, reading and being outdoors with her family.

KIRAN MALIK-KHAN is the Communications Manager for the Fort McMurray Public School Division. She is a freelance journalist and loves telling community stories. As well, she is a strong advocate for inclusion, diversity, women's rights, and multiculturalism. She has two beautiful boys, Sheheryar and Shahzaib.

RYAN MCCANN writes, "I am 38 years old living in Fort McMurray with my wife, two kids, and dog. I have a passion for writing, and I am currently working at putting together a novel about my life, living in Northern Alberta."

Originally from Drumheller, Alberta, **SCOTT MELLER** has now called Fort McMurray home for more than 20 years. Scott is a proud Champion of the arts with his colleagues at Arts Council Wood Buffalo, and an ever seeking student of new, interesting, and fulfilling artistic practice. When not championing arts, or learning new expression, Scott can be found spending time with his wife, Natasha, and daughters, Emelia and Evelyn, enjoying every nuance the world has to offer, and pursuing happiness.

LUKE SAWCZAK is a teacher and emerging writer living near Toronto. His writing has appeared or is slated to appear in various magazines across Canada, the US, and the UK, and he has a creative nonfiction collection published by Life Rattle Press. In his spare time he composes for the piano & codes small web applets.

RUSSELL THOMAS is a full-time artist working out of Birdsong Studio 2.0 on historic Elma Street in Okotoks. He spent almost 25 years in Fort McMurray working in marketing and communication roles with the OK Radio Group, Keyano College and United Way. Russell may live in southern Alberta, but a big part of his heart will always be in Wood Buffalo.

Artist **LIANA WHEELDON** has called Nistawâyâw Wood Buffalo home since 2009. Her work is inspired by the natural beauty of the region and the creatures that inhabit it - particularly the abundant, intelligent ravens. Liana often features these magnificent creatures in her fine art and creates drawings under the brand Ravenous Comics to celebrate their playfulness and obsession with fast food. Follow the antics of Joe Raven & Friends on social media: @Ravenous.Comics on Instagram or Ravenous Comics on Facebook.

VERONICA WOOD is preparing to embark upon the vast territory of education as a music teacher. She is intrigued in combining faith and science fiction in writing, though at times some casual guitar play takes precedence.

SUNSET OF FLAMES

MEGHAN GASS-CARTY

Fear is the colour of a sunset.
Five years to the day, it smoulders in my soul.
The smoke danced
On the day the sun sang a sinister lie.

A full tank of fuel: a precaution.
The view on the hill screamed the truth.
Pack up sister; had you even the time to unpack?
The day the beast jumped the river.

Wandering aimlessly; what should I take?
Back before the baby is born.
My sister unwavering; my protector
The day my husband jumped in while rolling out.

Not enough food or water,
But the towels are in the dryer.
The paralyzed mind is pitiless.
The day we were trapped and she would've been born too soon.

Flames to the right; traffic to the left.
Why are they going north?
There's only one way out.
The day it rained ash and they all remained brave.

I can't breathe; I can't fill my lungs.
But if we did with smoke, would it forestall burning alive?
Which is worse? It's their first time visiting.
The day I didn't know if they'd make it home.

North wasn't the plan;
Proactive turned to mandatory in minutes.
You can stay, but there's no food.
The day he was Wolverine with arms weighted with water.

Heading south, into the sunset of flames.
A lonely hotel wrapped in fire, scalded into memory.
Back and forth on the wrong side of the highway,
The day we drove all night as our boys were a still life of peace.

Safety is the arms of kindred spirits: pure love.
The grace of humanity in the days that followed;
All of you: forever emblazoned in our hearts.
The day of which I would change very little; it changed me.

A healthy baby girl born in New Brunswick;
The image of gratitude, but I still can't breathe.
Ridden with anxiety, stolen joy.
The day that tried to rob my spirit but instead, left me whole.

The gift of lost time, reclaimed
Precious, undivided family moments.
The image of that baby girl, safe in all of their arms.
That day gifted me eyes to light up for them.

Returning was entering my hell and meeting fresh growth.
How can we embrace the sunrise
Without shaking hands with the dead of night?
At the day's end, this is one that never will



MEGHAN AND LAILA by Russell Thomas

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pres•tige

/pre'stēZH,pre'stēj/

noun

widespread respect and admiration felt for someone or something on the basis of a perception of their achievements or quality.



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