



Library podcast

Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series, #395

00:00:01 Peggy

Good evening and welcome to reading number 395 of the It's About Time Writers' Reading Series. I am delighted tonight to welcome the 2022 Jack Straw Writers, three of them anyway, fresh from some of them fresh from an appearance in Bellingham. I believe this is the 5th or 6th year that we have hosted Jack Straw Writers as a crossover event, and one that is always delightful and gives me an opportunity to meet new people and I hope encourage the people who read tonight, and also those who've come to hear them read, to come back and be regulars the second Thursday of every month. For the time being, we're still online, which I admit may not be a bad thing during the winter months, and we will explore returning to the live events at the Ballard branch of the library in the spring. So welcome. Tonight, our first reader is going to be Ally Ng. Ally Ang is a gaysian poet living on occupied Duwamish and Coast Salish lands known as Seattle. Ally's work has appeared in "Nepantla: An Anthology Dedicated to Queer Poets of Color", The Journal, Foglifter, Palette Poetry, and elsewhere, and their work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Bettering American Poetry. They are the co-editor of an anthology of Southeast Asian art and writing titled "All the Oils: On Friendship, Sex, and Other Warmths" (Ginger Bug Press 2021) and they are an editor for Game Over Books. Ally received their MFA from the University of Washington and they currently work at Hugo House, a Seattle-based literary arts nonprofit. Welcome, Ally.

00:02:05 Ally

Hi, everyone. Thanks so much for being here. And thanks for having me. This is my cat, Gomez. He likes to be involved. When I'm on Zoom, I'm going to read mostly older poems and then maybe like one or two newer ones, so hope you like them. Buckle up. I'm going to start by reading a poem called Invocation.

00:02:33 Ally

"Let the moon wobble, let the basal plant flower let the poets discombobulate let the verbs noun let the nouns verbs let the grief howl let the emails unread. Let the land speak, let the oceans revenge let the people free let the people free."

00:03:00 Ally

Okay, this one is called Antiode to Girlhood.

00:03:07 Ally

"Before I was a girl, I was an accusation, a bad omen. A piece of gum stuck to the bottom of my mother's boot. As hard as her body tried to scrape me off, I would not budge. Like any good daughter, I learned the art of swallowing. My humiliation lowered my gaze in reverence of older girls eavesdropped on their bathroom, whisperings drunk off the second hand thrill of their first tentative touches. Kept my hair long and my fingernails trimmed, waited faithfully for God to reach their divine hand between my legs and make something happen. But all that came to me was a lack of breasts and a burgeoning mustache. O girlhood. I shapeshifted my way into denim skirts and AOL chat rooms searching for you. Glittery blue shadow coating my eyelids and bleach stinging my upper lip. In line for the drugstore checkout, I snuck glances at glossy magazine covers, memorizing headlines like Scripture 50 Things He Hates About Your Body, then tallying my body's failures in front of the mirror. Night after night, I placed a tampon under my pillow in the hopes that someday I too, might bleed. O girlhood. Each grueling excision, each pang of hunger gawing at my insides. It was all in your name."

00:04:39 Ally

This next poem is super new. Like, I just finished it an hour ago, so it's not really finished. So it's an experiment. So, I don't know, take it with a grain of salt. It kind of doesn't have a title yet, so yeah.

00:04:57 Ally

"I want nothing more than to devour the things I find beautiful, to sink my teeth into my beloved sty, to lick the color off a painting, to open up my legs and swallow the universe. Yesterday, the moon was so bright and luminous, my fingers itched to pluck it from the sky and break it apart, scooping the meat from its rind into my gullet. I am not only moved by beauty, I want to gorge myself on it. And is that not a form of devotion? To admire a thing so deeply you will stop at nothing to consume it? Or is that just pretense for destruction? Am I no better than any other man who confuses prayer with prey? I'll admit I am a greedy creature whose desire has outgrown my body and taken on a life and a pulse and a mouth of its own, wet and wanting. I see myself reflected in my lover's eyes, so shiny and adored. And I cannot stifle the urge to reach into the deep pools of their pupils and peel away my mirrored skin to reveal the sinew beneath. I long for more than to possess beauty. I want to dissect it, masticate it, unhinge my jaw and gulp it down whole. And after I have stripped beauty, bear, laid it down like a lover at my feet and subsumed it, what will govern me then?"

00:06:31 Ally

Okay, this next poem is an ecrastic poem called Self Portrait with Cropped Hair, after a Frida Kahlo color poem of the Same name. Sorry, painting of the same name. So, yeah, I love that painting. Selfportrait with cropped hair.

00:06:55 Ally

"This time you must meet my unwavering gaze. Watch as I unmarry each strand from my scalp, the scissors, a phantom limb in my grip, metal as sharp as grief. Don't turn away. As a girl, I was told that a woman's hair is her crowning glory. But this kingdom of territin lies dead at my feet, casualties of a vengeful god. My beauty, you used to call me taming my unruly pearls with your fingers held in your eyes like an insect pinned to a frame. I never felt smaller than I did in your touch. My body contorted into the shape of your wanting this is how I demand to be seen dressed in my finest suit and shiniest

high heels neither beautiful nor yours and when they say what a pity she was so pretty once, the dark strands on the ground will rise and reply."

00:08:01 Ally

Okay, I have a couple more poems. I don't know, I feel like in person readings I do like between poem banter, but honestly, it feels a little weird. So let's see, what should I banter about? What are you all going to be for Halloween? Drop it in the chat. Tell me what you're going to be for Halloween. My partner and I are going to be Morticia and Gomez Adams. Anyway, that was enough banter. I'll read the next poem. It's called cherry blossoms.

00:08:36 Ally

"After the most recent mass shooting, I leave my apartment for the first time in six days to buy myself flowers at Trader Joe's. In my absence, the cherry blossoms have already begun spilling their cotton candy guts onto the sidewalk. I've learned the shooter's face against my will. It is white and unremarkable. Last spring I missed the blooms entirely, too fearful of the virus to risk a nonessential walk to the park less than a mile away. By now my fear has calcified into a pebble, rattling around in my boot, rubbing my soul's raw. On my way to the store, I scroll past photos of the victims, avoiding their eyes, the dread of recognition tightening my throat. He is everywhere, standing in line to buy coffee, watching his dog piss on a daffodil. Behind me in the frozen food aisle, I capture him in my periphery, I take inventory of my body which parts are weapon and which are liability. My keys stay vigilant between my knuckles. Bouquets of out of season sunflowers rest in metal buckets by the automatic doors. Their stems drooping beneath the weight of their stubborn yellow heads. I purchase as many as I can carry, clutching them to my chest. At the crosswalk, a man stares at me until I shrank his hatred and desire sharpen to a single deadly point. He flashes an acidic grin and the cherry blossoms shiver. Soon the branches will be undressed once again, their soft pink garments crushed beneath a sea of careless feet."

00:10:31 Ally

Okay, sorry that all those poems were bummers, but actually I'm not sorry, because sometimes life is a bummer. But you know, this last poem is less of a bummer, and it's called Ode to My Father's accent.

00:10:45 Ally

"The way the letter R rumbles from the cavern of his throat through the top of his teeth. Gently a passing freight train or a faraway thunderstorm. The alchemy of his language eavesdropped becomes ear dropped and flirting becomes floating. The way he says my mother's name soft, sculpted, solid syllables ringing clear like notes from a gamelan. The way I train my tongue to imitate his words, clumsy and labored in my imposter mouth, the way the plumber shakes my father's hand and says, I'll call you Bill instead. The way my teachers refuse his gaze as they asked me to translate his English into my own. The way he used to rub my back on sleepless nights. His hands cracked into tectonic plates. The same hands that sold churros from a cart on the boardwalk, scrubbed grime out of a movie star's kitchen sink, loaded boxes of frozen food into an 18 wheeler truck by moonlight. The same hands that never learned how to use chopsticks. The way he has to ask for a fork when we go

to our favorite noodle house. The way the waiter says, how spicy do you want your food? And my father replies, make me cry. The way my father does not speak while he eats, bent over the bowl in reverence. The way he taught me that long noodles signify a long life and to cut them is bad luck, so we slurp them up so loudly the whole room stops to look."

00:12:28 Ally

Thank you.

00:12:34 Peggy

That was delightful. I find I probably banter less too in between, and the closed captions are really going to cut down on my banter. I loved hearing your work and I felt especially when you read your brand new poem. I saw that moon last night and so when you wrote, you know, that the moon so bright and moonness that you wanted to scoop its meat, I was like you gave words to what I realized I was feeling like last night and it made me feel so connected because it was that mood. So the immediacy of your work is so stunning for me today. So thank you. Please come back another time. Feel free to read more. Alright, I did forget to mention to people that if anyone wants to open mic tonight, just let me know in the chat or give me a little wave. Our next person, Katharine Strange specializes in questioning received wisdom with a wink and a smirk. She writes personal essays, short stories, novels, and now, memoir! Her work has appeared in The Seattle Times, The Stranger, OC87 Diaries, Literary Yard, ScaryMommy, and anthology "The Pandemic Midlife Crisis: Gen X Women on the Brink." She was a 2021 Mainstage Storyteller for The Moth. Formerly she wrote a column for Fundamentally Free, a blog for Exvangelicals and heretics. She lives in south Seattle with her family and is represented by Savannah Brooks of Jennifer DeChiara Literary Agency. As a rule, she never turns down champagne. And I don't think I've ever stumbled so many times on a bio. Your alliteration is already stunning.

00:14:39 Katharine

I made it complicated on purpose.

00:14:42 Peggy

Well, bravo. Let's hear you.

00:14:46 Katharine

Thank you, Peggy. When I was 22, I quit my dream job throughout my antidepressants, married my college boyfriend, and followed him to the UK in hopes about running my mental illness. My Jack Straw Project is a snarky little memoir about that time. This is what I have for you, tonight is an excerpt from my second chapter, which took place at a small Christian liberal arts college, and I want to offer a content warning before I start that there's some talk of attempted suicide.

00:15:20 Katharine

"Ryan entered my life just as I began to reckon with my mental illness. Falling in love with him was easy. It was squeezing the edges of a deck of cards, letting them bow and burst into the air. It was kings and queens, parts diamonds and spades, raining like confetti, and through the shower of

playing cards, meeting his eyes. I was only 19, but my freshman year had aged me considerably. I had been eager to leave my parents, ready to lay down my burdensome role as household intermediary, but my relief had not been uncomplicated. Every week, my mother disappeared further into the phone line. She went from being the person speaking next to me to a disembodied voice, and finally, a series of long silences. My calls always seemed to find her cooking pot and pan rattled, jarred my train of thought. As the minutes on my phone card ticked down, I tried to gather information from my father and teenage brothers as to how she really was. I prodded for details about her activity level, her mood. Three weeks before they dropped me off of college, she had fallen down the stairs and broken her collar bone. Afterwards, she was in constant pain, sometimes bed bound, her nightspan occupied by a small army of orange pill bottles. First the opioids, then pills to manage opioid side effects, then sleeping medication. The image of my mother, pale and propped up on pillows, cast a pallor over that year. Instead of freedom, the miles between us meant frustration and helplessness. I could only pray, and when she still didn't recover, playing myself into school. A budding theater major, I auditioned for everything, even the spring production of Antigony, though it was the sort of play exclusively loved by theater professors, ancient Greek tragedy where everything remotely interesting happens offstage. I agreed to lead the chorus, which was to be sung. I'd been all Northwest as an alto, but didn't know the sort of hurdles this production would involve. None of the other chorus members had choir experience, and the melodies were anything but intuitive, inspired by the early medieval period, filled with dissonant, clashing harmonies, lacking a time signature, and acapella to boot. But this was just the kind of allconsuming task I needed to stave off about a crippling depression. I shut myself inside a practice room for hours, plunking out each vocal line on the piano, recording it, then taking the tapes to the library to be copied. I researched how to conduct in free time and designed a special vocal warmup. I became a 19 yearold music director, believing that through sheer force of will, I could bend this unskilled group to a smooth performance, sure that once the professors noticed how hard I was working, I would be rewarded with more and better roles. But the director, a young professor undergoing tenure application seemed to hold me personally responsible for the production's failures. I would leave rehearsal utterly dejected the other chorus members joining me in my dorm room for a session of communal postrehearsal despair. In theater, the only certainty is that, ready or not, opening night will come between my failure to care for my mother. None of the men in my family were remotely helpful. She often reminded me in my failures as a chorus leader, I was growing increasingly distraught. One rehearsal, I stood posed on stage, overwhelmed with dread when the director's voice boomed from the dark auditorium. Sharp and irritable. Someone had missed their cue. I looked around and, like a nightmare, saw the rest of the cast staring at me. Something in me cracked. My throat thickening with sobs, I ran from the stage and into the night. For as long as I can remember, I have struggled to steer myself between the poles of depression and anxiety. I fastidiously analyzed the good times believing that the answer to my struggles lay in the fine details. What have I eaten? How much have I slept? How would I handle my homework and social obligations? My family thought I was neurotically rigid. They teased me from my lists and schedules never knowing how frantically I was working to hold myself together. But the catastrophes of my freshman year eroded the power of these daily rituals. It would be many years before I received a diagnosis that made sense of it all. But at the time, I feared I was crazy. I spent the weekend staring at my dorm rooms center block wall listening to Ben Folds'carrie and Kathy Unrepeat contemplating my similarities with the title character wondering whether my path, too, was faded to dead end. In

suicide, instead of apologizing, the director cast a monologue about baseball. This was meant to rouse us, I supposed. It would only serve to remind me of abouts of paternal rage I'd endured as a child each ending without apology or acknowledgement. My father smiling in the kitchen the next morning as if nothing had happened. I wasn't worth the discomfort of apologizing, or else there was nothing to apologize for. This was, in fact, the treatment I deserved. My depression spiraled in all the typical ways. I stopped sleeping or bathing or going to class. Truly a red flag for an uptight teacher's pet such as myself. But the only person who seemed to notice was a friend from the chorus, a girl we called Bangs. We ate dinner together. When we remembered to eat, she, too, was depressed. She, too, dealt with it through a caustic sense of humor. We began to joke about committing suicide all the ways, funny or dramatic or mundane, that we could do it. Death by banana peels. Death by launching oneself off Cinderella's castle in Disneyland. Another freshman girl from the theater program had recently attempted to overdose on antidepressants. When I heard the news, I assumed it was a mistake. Would that even work? Also, she had called nine one afterwards, so probably it was a mistake. Plus, if she had truly wanted to die, why hadn't she ever brought it up with me, a casual friend, the university deemed her a liability risk, and she was shipped home. I never saw her again. Her example taught me to be resolute. There would be no second thoughts, no accidental discovery, no journey home. I told Banks my plan. If things ever got too bad, I would overdose on sleeping pills. They were easy to buy. It would be painless, I assumed. Bank's methods of choice were always bloodier, a knife, a gun. But what about the mess? I asked her once. You feel bad for whoever has to clean it up. One night, Bang showed up to the cafeteria freshly showered and less dead eyed than usual over buffet spaghetti. She told me about her first appointment at the student counseling center. They could help me too, she insisted. I peered through a greasy curtain of unwashed hair and replied that I didn't need to go because obviously I was handling things on my own just fine. There was something terrifying about the student counseling center. I became obsessed with the idea that someone would see me entering the portable building and know that I was crazy. Half disguised in my roommate's hoodie, I smuggled myself inside. The receptionist handed me a clipboard with Beck's Depression inventory question nine, please answer the following zero I don't have any thoughts of killing myself. One I have thoughts of killing myself, but I would not carry them out. Two I would like to kill myself. Three I would kill myself if I had the chance. I paused. Did they mean at this moment or generally? Certainly all of the options had flitted through my mind at some point in the previous month. But then the logistics of answering number three could get me sent home or institutionalized. I didn't feel like I wanted to kill myself in that exact moment, even though the student counseling center seemed to be playing the same enya song on repeat, I circled option one and turned in the questionnaire. The receptionist immediately checked my answer, then disappeared into another room. A tiny blonde woman with trendy glasses appeared, inviting me into her office. In a gentle tone, she said, I noticed you indicated that you've been thinking about suicide, so I need to know, are you going to kill yourself? It was embarrassing to be asked. I'd have much rather done a surprise suicide than have had to talk about it. The shame of it made me dissociate. Floating above my body, I watched myself answer. I don't think so. The me on the ceiling judged that this was a good answer. This is what the counselor wanted to hear. You don't think so? She prodded, and I burst into tears. Angry at myself even as I did so. It would be a few weeks before there was an opening in the schedule. In the meantime, she gave me a business card for the national suicide hotline. The flimsiest of life rafts. The grand Seattle winter began to brighten. I started seeing the tiny therapist once a

week. I cried a lot, then apologized for crying, and then when the therapist told me not to apologize, apologized again. It seems like these tears go way back, she brooded, as I pretended I didn't know what she meant. Resignation settled over the cast and thanks to therapy, me as well. This production was going to be a disaster. And that was that. We moved to full cast rehearsals and then full cast and crew. The more people who became involved, the less the director focused on me, which was a huge relief. He had recruited Ryan, an electrical engineering major, to take on the role of Teresius, the blind prophet, my floor mate and fellow choruser. Christina had developed a crush on him. Being a good friend, I decided to set them up. I began making a point of chatting with Ryan between scenes. I teased him for his allweather flip flops. So Seattle, while trying to conceal the fact that I was staring at his feet, his toenails were perfect rectangles. I had never seen a man with such feet. One night, he showed up to rehearsal with an Lshaped hair on the knee of his khakis. Where did you get that shaming fences? I asked. Oh, sorry. Did you get dressed in the back of a hay rick? Knowing that I work in the costume shop, he brought the pants back the following Saturday for me to fix. Quote since it was bothering you so much, I sized him up, trying to figure out how to turn this to my advantage. My proposal during our lunch break, we as Christina, would head to my dorm room, I would mend the pants, and then we hit the cafeteria for lunch, where I would cover at least slink away. But back at the door, there was an urgent message from Christina's modeling agent, so she told us to go on ahead. It was the first sunny day in weeks. The campuses meticulously maintained planters were bursting with bright flowers. The air was fragrant with honeysuckle, and above our heads, neat, pale buds dotted bare branches. Ryan had always been attractive, his body a stack of right angles. But since he'd grown a beard for the play, his boyish face had cut up with a solid squareness of his body. Then again, the fact that he was an electrical engineering major meant he would certainly be an awkward and boring lunch companion. I patterned myself a bohemian allah, mulan, rouge and Rent, determined to make art, even if I had to sink into the depths of poverty to do so. This made me noble and brave. While Ryan's choice to pursue theater as a hobby was anything but. I was annoyed that Christina had ditched me with this person, whom I had already determined to have nothing in common with. Seven months into life at Christian College, I was used to the sloppy earnestness of classmates who'd been raised in a world without irony. I set out to prove that Ryan was one of them. Setting my tray down across from his and high on my own quirkiness, I asked him who he thought would win in a fight between a robot, a ninja, and a pirate. Confusion flashed across his face. I was right. I knew it. But then he said, well, the first thing you have to consider our skills. Now, assuming this is not some sort of superfighting robot. I shook my head. And not armed with special weaponry, no. He nodded. Then I would rank them pretty evenly matched. Skills wise, the robot seems like it would probably be quite strong, also impervious to pain. Then again, robots run on programs. They lack the flexibility to improvise. Pirates are skilled, swashbucklers tea aloud. They could be quite effective with sword play. Also on tactics, like jumping into the reading. Is this fight taking place on board of Pirateship? Of course, I replied. He nodded again, wiping his mouth and his napkin. But pirates, as we know, are easily distracted by rumbling and quenching and treasure. Indeed. Which brings us to ninjas. Ninjas have training with Katanas. What? You know, ninja swords. Ah. I nodded. They are very stealthy, but I think what steals the deal is that they are disciplined. They aren't distractible like pirates, but neither are they rigid in their thinking, like the robot. I think the ninja wins. Correct, I said, though I had not anticipated a right or wrong answer when I'd asked. I enjoyed my lunch with Ryan in a way I hadn't enjoyed anything in weeks. Soon enough, I found myself looking

forward to our short exchanges in the green room. Instead of leaving rehearsal to cry in my dorm, I rounded up to Cast for coffee or ice cream expeditions. Christina skipped these outings to hang out on our brother floor, and I took this as a sign that she had moved on. Intrusive thoughts of my mother's deterioration were replaced by replays of my latest interaction with Ryan, with picturing the lines of his forearms, imagining his deep voice in the throes of passion. I wanted him so much, but I knew it was a selfish sort of wanting. Even at 19, I suspected that the way I lurched from one obsessive relationship to another was not entirely healthy. But losing myself in another person felt better than being alone. One Saturday, after an evening performance, a group of us were hanging out in his apartment. There was always a certain physicality to group hangs at Christian College. Everyone was so desperate to touch each other, but wary of anything which could be construed as lustful. Exhibit A the decision that we should move Ryan's coffee table and have matches of Indian leg wrestling. It was all the sweaty floor writhing of sex. With none of the release, Ryan seemed to be easily the feeling of his Musculate thigh against mine was almost too much. Thoroughly flustered, I bumped my head on the coffee table, then dramatically demanded he'd stare into my eyes to make sure I didn't have a concussion. He obliged me. His eyes were green. I noticed golden coronas ringing the irises. Images burst to mind the Pacific churning volcanic cliffs, sunbeams piercing the marine layer, rockets trailing by reignition. What had started as a joke became something more intense, until finally he said in a husky voice, I think you're fine. I nodded, turning my head. The cast and crew peeled off, until at last it was just Ryan, me, and another almost couple. A pack of cards came out. Perhaps Ryan was trying to teach us euchre. Any time there are four people idle in a room, he appears like a magical bag of bond, proclaiming that the rules of you are actually quite simple. The cards were mine to shuffle. Feeling mischievous, I squeezed the deck, sending them scattering into the air. Ryan's eyes met mine through the hail of cards, a look that both thrilled and unnerved me. My work here is done, I proclaimed, grabbing my jean jacket. But he was still staring at me. Oh, I asked, did you want me to clean those up? Yes, he replied in a kind of stern daddy tone that made me want to follow him to the ends of the earth. We cleaned up the cards together, and I left. When he called me up three days later to ask me on an honest-to-god date, there were many reasons to say no. But in the end, my selfishness went out. I wanted to be with him, no matter what havoc it wreaked on our lives."

00:30:38 Katharine

Thank you.

00:30:41 Peggy

Because sometimes when I'm facilitating this, it's hard for me to listen as well. But in that case, not hard at all, because I just was able to forget anything else and just listen to the story. You had me as the mom rattling, always cooking when you call the minutes dwindling. I love those details. So bravo. I hope you just keep roaring away on this memoir. Okay, this brings us Jory Mickelson is a queer, non-binary writer who was raised by two visual artists. They received their BA in English from Western Washington University and their MFA in poetry from the University of Idaho. Their work can be found in Court Green, Painted Bride Quarterly, Jubilat, Sixth Finch, Ninth Letter, Diode, and The Rumpus. They are currently working on poems that explore the intersection of visual art, queerness, erasure, gender, and history. Their first book, "Wilderness//Kingdom" (2019) was the inaugural winner of

Floating Bridge Press' Evergreen Award Tour and the 2020 High Plains Book Award winner in poetry. They received fellowships from the Port Townsend Writers Conference, Lambda Literary Foundation, Winter Tangerine, and the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico.

00:32:19 Jory

Thank you. It's great to be here tonight. Thanks for hosting us, Peggy. It's always great to hear Katharine and Ally's work. Michael Schmelzer, who is the president of Floating Bridge Press and the curator for the series Floating Bridge, published my first book and so I put it in the chat. You can order directly from them anytime. I can help promote Floating Bridge and Michael. I do my best. So tonight I'm like, oh, where's the paper? I'm actually reading from the screen. I'm going to read you several poems, and because I'm OCD, I have now started the timer so I can keep track of how long that I am talking to you.

00:33:06 Jory

"Andy Warhol dreams of the Seven of Cups, which of course, as important, means he is arguing about directions. I mean, directing a film in which the screen only shows a man's face. What the camera can't convey scent of burnt coffee, recently peeled orange garbage, sweat, damp plaster sticking to the brick behind the subject's head. Can a camera reveal the actor's mind across 36 minutes of film? His boredom, his pleasure, his remembering moonlight hanging in the treetops of the park. The audience imagines a breeze among the leaves, the raw light across his face in shadow. His visit revealing the skull beneath. The Seven of Cups warns between choice and illusion. Return to the dream where Andy argues with himself, recurrently a loop, repeating a clip, replayed the film like tinny speakers through department store variations on a theme. War hall begins to question Warhall. Who's the watcher who turns away, who is seen in Haracha alfum. The title in Arabic carries several meanings, but one of which is when a camera's film is literally burned by the sun. Every Egyptian hieroglyph gives you sidee, every Persian relief sidee. But smiling. But an Akkadian never deems to look at you at all. A glance beneath their dignity, their eyes on some king in symmetrically crinkled robes and perfectly tasseled hair, stiff as the smocks of dozens of ceramic motive statuettes. The sumerian eyes enlarged because their eyes were watching God. Until we carted the devotees to some white wall museum where they look upon the lookers, praying their dusty prayers to climatecontrolled absence. Our prayers too will go unseen or be lost beyond our time. Like the photographic crypt in Lebanon Studio Shahrazad, where amid the hundreds of thousands of negatives, sometimes an image will emerge of friends, of lovers or something in between. Same gendered couples playing marriage behind the photographer screen, unable to be taken into the afternoon's harsh light, the small town streets where, if exposed, all is ruined."

00:36:01 Jory

The next poem. J.C. Lindecker was an illustrator who came before Norman Rockwell, whom Norman Rockwell stole all of the good stuff from. J.C. Lindecker. They both illustrated the cover of the Saturday Evening Post. This is JC. Lindeker 1938- he's also responsible for the illustrations for the arrow shirt man.

00:36:27 Jory

"Grape leaf poached egg ashes from my cigarette we see in memory how to preserve how you humb begin at the begin bumping your hips to the beat wrapped in your blood green cannon towel how do I paint that swing where you and the clarinet size and the steam I've fallen under your western star jade dish red tulip greased pocket square you ought to be in pictures so I put you there appearing year after year in trenchcoat in tweed dial tone. Grill cream bill from Knox headers on 40th won't you be my little angel? I can be your girl we'll go to the Golden West. Forgive me for what I will not mention forgive me because instead of kindness I made you famous instead."

00:37:37 Jory

So this poem is called Verso Enunciation. And Verso is literally the back of the painting. So if we imagine all the famous enunciation scenes we've seen in paintings, this might be on the back versus the enunciation.

00:37:52 Jory

"We lived in a world mostly unlike the world we didn't know the names of any growing thing. Amid the marble pillars and the porticoes and the obelisk of the angels ruffling wings in the ruins of the oligarchs harvesting their alpha and omega of greed, the angels come to tell us something like Hallelujah. But we have no music to compare it to. Something like holy, holy. But we look out to the building's window instead into the blue we call moonlight when we mean to say wound. In a previous version of this poem I wrote an angel is just an animal with wings. I wrote an icon is just a flatness climbing its way to heaven. But now I believe whatever image you take within you deeply can mend. You over time will bend even God's messenger down to the empty earth to teach us the names of each insignificant green. Bless its red flowering mouths that open for anyone. In this version we refuse the offered suffering. Content with the difficulties we've managed to gather for ourselves and leave the worthy to their ascent and leave the remorseful to their repentance. We say let God get up from their creaking wooden throne and stagger themselves into the broken world and teach us to sing and to mend and to mend while we sing here in the dusk and mud. Grendel's, mother no Grendel's other. Grendel's other. You've been sold a crock as shit about these feeding machines. When my son was weaned, I cut lopped, sheared them off, took a brand and cauterized the wound. I knew I was the boy's father, the thrones king. We all do what is necessary. I use the oldest spell all witches know changed my shape, my sex, though it took me to the outmost edges of my craft. We know history is the worst kind of rapist who violates all we've laid to rest. How some pious prick unmanned me, scratched letters in a book restored what I gladly gave away to keep my kingdom, called me Grendel's mother. The M two ugly Peaks I'd carve off again. This time I take my blade, decide I will unmanned the world instead, one warrior at a time, in the dark. Let them fear me. Sweet is the blood wherever it comes from star, it seems all I want is to remember as if this year has nothing to offer. And maybe it has nothing I want to look too closely at. Where once there was grass, there is only sand, but no water to carry it. It's stunning how fire cleans, or should I say scours the world bear despite the ash, despite the ember, despite the field that's now only expanse. Did I tell you I once fucked a man? Full moon May beneath a black hawthorne. The flower stink peddling our sweat and thrust. We were determined to remember our goodbye. It was there and there is nothing now. It was right there, where you can't see him or me. I can't explain the patience of the soil and of stars, how they seem to outlast all our taking and resisting by turn what we give them. Some day no one will

know what I'm talking about. Not even him who's been married a decade to a man I know nothing of, not even me, who, I am ashamed to say, carved a star into that trunk. And when I passed the tree, I thumb the scar and call it star work. But now the star set free the field and the tree all air and nothing and nothing again. Dialogue jonathan to David what is shameful about this? Nakedness I have given you every weapon. My armor adorn me in nothing but your gaze. My love sheath my killing sword. Lay aside the arrows, lay aside the deadly bow ornament me with kisses because your mouth bring your mouth near because Nashach means to bring two mouths together as well as to dress oneself for war."

00:43:28 Jory

This poem, Chicago, is actually about kind of a riot between labor activists and union organizers that happened in Heron, Illinois. And that's the background that inspired the painting, that the poem veers wildly away from Chicago.

00:43:53 Jory

"It's June. I lay on my stomach amid the graves. The early rain has washed the sky to a clarity of blue we rarely see. I am remembering how we used to race when we were young, yelling let's see how fast we can run between here and Chicago. A word we use to mean almost anything we didn't know the meaning of. Like when we'd pretend we were miners crawling beneath the earth, flat on our stomachs, with the weight of mountains suspended above our backs, our head lamp stemming, giving the last of our strength to escape the mines collapse. We're almost there. You'd say keep crawling. We're almost to Chicago. But in 22 there was no safety when the strike breakers were taken into the woods outside Heron by the Union miners. We are always looking for a hero in our stories, a way to make beautiful all of our violence. Now I turn over in the grass and read the names carved into the granite monument above my head. Sometimes I wonder if they can hear me as I lie parallel to the earth. We thinking our thoughts and unthoughts together in the early light. Some days I hope they never hear me when in shame I wonder how did my life become my life? How little resistance was in me when I gave myself over to brutality? What is the difference between me and the crowd of spectators gathered cheering and Heron cemetery who watched the men be roped together? What is the difference between me and those who beat and shot? The men rope together, begging for their lives? I am not sure I have an answer. Those alive at the end had their throats cut by a Union man with a pocket knife. The blood washing the grass in the cemetery read. Those who witnessed the massacre dispersed and slowly went home. Those left alive did not speak of it again. In the Columbus Museum of Art, paul Cadmus's painting hangs in silence through the morning and afternoon light. The pigment doesn't have a word to say. The dying men, like Christ, are pictured in almost quit release. But here there will be no rising. Those buried men around me have been still for more than a century. Their desires and troubles fled. I wouldn't call it rest. All our story is our only repetitions, like light coming and going, each day indifferent, each day a variation on the same, never reaching what we call Chicago, never knowing what this really means."

00:46:54 Jory

All right, now I'm going to lighten things up a little bit. That's too much.

00:47:01 Jory

"There's a photograph of three women together dressed as men from and. It was hidden away and discovered about 20 years ago. Ladies with an attitude performing what we might call flamboyant masculinity, but within a private sphere. Permissive impermeability trousers, cigarettes, alcohol flare. Alice scowling as if to say what of it? I dare. And let's not mention the second. Julia's aggressive umbrella handle springing up between her cross legs. It's 1800 and waiting. Secret self referential staged the dream of a world held close, then hidden away."

00:47:58 Jory

I'll read one last poem. It's a draft, so bear with me.

00:48:06 Jory

"Every unhappy family sorry. Every unhappy manifesto is unhappy in its own way. Let my father be a man who loved me wholly, which means he loved me. Some stories we tell ourselves when we need to sleep, and some we tell when we need to stay awake. Both of them may be true. This is the duplicity. But did he love me? This is what I am attempting to discover. I used to tell myself I had a happy childhood because I survived it until I was outside the story. I couldn't tell it differently. But how is this related at all to art? It isn't. And it is how one travels. Know how I traveled from character across the years to become the teller of my story. So let me begin. My father was an artist whose addiction painted across the surface of all our lives. 30 years later, I am still finding his paint in the seams. How long have I kept pairs of Khakis despite the stain of ink around the pockets? Or a shirt whose button I've convinced myself will finally return? We all have our fancy ways of saying disrepair, impasse, hopeless case. My father said he wasn't hurting anyone with his drinking. This gave me years of material to drink about. Andre Lord says the erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. Have I felt erotic about my father? About the long tongue of whiskey pushing down my throat until I didn't care? Once my father attempted to apologize, said I am sorry you feel that way, but I don't control your feelings. The audience, when I read this, keeps asking if my work is autobiography. And it is. I just don't know who I'm writing about. Each incident I reveal becomes facsimile when retold 1000 perfect silkscreen prints of Elvis with small variations. Does this make me the artist or only the assistant in the studio endlessly reproducing the same grief with minor discrepancies? Andre lord again. Within the celebration of the erotic, my work becomes a conscious decision. So I decide to keep on writing. Sometimes a thing is not true because it happened, but true because I made it. I decided to write the next poem, convinced I will never discover the answers about art or family or anything. But I do believe in the power of making and in witness to that making. So maybe you are the artist, the one who makes the making possible. That you in fact are the one who has written this. Can you see it? How the page has loved you the whole time and I am not really here at all."

00:51:24 Jory

Thank you.

00:51:26 Peggy

I think you've bent and twisted my mind. Remind me again. I got the manifesto part. What was the title of that last one?

00:51:38 Jory

It's a play. I think it's Tolstoy who says, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Every family happy is the same, identical. But this is every unhappy family crossed out manifesto is unhappy in its own way.

00:51:54 Peggy

Got it. Yeah, I was following that for part of the way. Thank you. One of the ones that stuck in my mind is Bend, even God's messenger down to the earth. So it's been quite our messenger tonight. Thank you. Let's see. I don't think we have any open mic readers tonight. But what I do want to call out is Sylvia. I realized you are going to be reading with Kathleen Flanaganin. Speaking of Jack Straw, curators and participants on October 20 at Third Place Books. Is that at the Lake Forest Park?

00:52:44 Sylvia

At the Ravenna Store.

00:52:46 Peggy

At the Ravenna store? Anybody else reading that night or is it the two of you?

00:52:51 Sylvia

It's just the two of us. Both of our books were kind of pandemic orphans because they came out in the pandemic and we weren't able to have in person readings so this is kind of the first in person reading that I will have been doing with my book risking it and she's maybe her first or second with Post Romantic her last book so anyway. I would love to see any of you there if you happen to be around the area.

00:53:23 Peggy

I regret I won't be there but I'm happy to spread the word tonight. That makes me realize we have an anthology of It's About Time which some of you may have heard of So Dear Writer. Which was an anthology of writer's craft talk and it was a bit of a pandemic orphan as well because it was released in December 2019 and so we had one live event at Elliott Bay and then we had grand plans but because of course we would have been taking it to the in person reading next month our reading is on November 10. I believe, yes. Another opportunity to be together even if in person I believe it's Veterans Day in the library would have been closed so it's a bonus reading. If you will and it's going to be featuring some members of the Ballard Writers Collective so I'm looking forward to that. It'll be shorter pieces distributed throughout with people who as I say, once member of the Ballard Writers Collective always so even though that now includes people who have decamped to New Jersey and Oregon this has been a lovely occasion. I'm now going to stop the recording but you're welcome to stay and chat. Hope to see you again next month.