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## Preface to this Special Poetry Issue: Boundaries and Borders, and their Dissolution (Vol 9.2)

Steven B. Katz  
*Emeritus-Clemson University*

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## Preface to this Special Poetry Issue: Boundaries and Borders, and their Dissolution (Vol 9.2)

Issues, crises, questions concerning boundaries and borders press on all sides. Throughout human history. In fact, one might see, as in geography, that boundaries and borders define human history—delineating populations, shifting coalitions and allegiances, the innumerable conflicts over them, the atrocities committed because of them, and the fate of the people within them, outside them, and attempting to cross them

Boundaries and borders are drawn to construct identity, but also circumscribe power, erect defenses, protect the status quo. In addition to adopting political, economic, social, ethnic, and racial “principles” of inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and borders are used to create proactive alliances and can themselves be preemptive attacks. Boundaries and borders also are demarcated boundaries of faith, borders of beliefs, perimeters of moralities, deserts of concern, and endless avarice—earthbound barriers that humanity has yet to transcend. The results are mixed: *in extremis*, boundaries and borders are national narcissisms bordering on ethnocentric megalomania, manic fears and prejudices that become conspiratorial paranoia and hate, the objects of assassinations and conflagrations, and ultimately reasons for the sufferings and the deaths of millions.

Perhaps humankind never will rise above its own limitations. (AI can be seen as another extension of us, as well as the “Other.”) We are still animals, fighting over land rather than sharing, fighting over the same cave too. It is Plato’s Cave. It’s all an illusion. But that illusion is all too real. We are sentient: we feel and inflict pain, we suffer; we expel and displace; we torture and maim; we kill. As individuals whose boundaries and borders—the very right to exist—are constantly being questioned and called into doubt. Not only out of necessity but out of sheer fear, we selfishly conceive needs and desires, band together in opposing tribes (physical and digital cliques, social groups, nations. Within these zones of existence, we further divide ourselves into classes of the same species; we pit ourselves against each other, as well as the only home we really have: the Earth. (In case you haven’t noticed, nature is fighting back.) Animals with slightly bigger brains, we plan our attacks, well in advance of the immediate instinctual moment, and so plot the means and ends of destruction.

“We all are refugees” (or will be), says the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*: immigrants, foreigners, “illegals,” aliens. If not from melting boundaries and borders swept away by wars and famine, our little heating globe will force millions on the planet to become “climate migrants,” seeking new and increasingly fewer sources of water and food and shelter. “Stateless” individuals have few protections and no rights, Agamben adds, and so are very vulnerable.

Someday in the future—if we should somehow survive—the population of the entire planet will be refugees. According to astrophysicist/cosmologist Katie Mack in *The End of Everything*, if Andromeda does not crash into the Milky Way first, the sun is set to explode in about 5 billion years, incinerating the inner planets of the solar system, including Earth, or flinging it out into the endless boundaries of space, to finally expire in a cold dark airless death. One might assume

that by then humans also will have colonized, and *some of us* inhabit, another exo-planet. G/d help them, or us, if there is intelligent life on any of them. If they are “weaker” than us, we will say: “We are pushing you out of your homes, further into your wilderness, and we will eventually inter you in invisible borders, wipe out your culture, take over your planet, and there’s nothing you can do about it.” Or if they are stronger than us, we will say: “Oh, our planet is dying. Can you please help us? Can we emigrate to your planet, live on your world, with you? We will try to learn your language, go to your schools, find any job we can, raise our families, and perhaps one day even become citizens, sharing and participating in your Alien Dream . . . . Please don’t separate us from our families, and especially our children, caging or imprisoning us or them in sprawling detention camps; or deport us to “sanctuary cities” without our knowledge or consent, not speaking your language, homeless, living on the streets, accepting charity; or worse, turn us away, back into rivers of barbed wire and blood, to the very greed and corruption and poverty and violence and death we fled.”

The poems in this special issue (Vol 9.2), invited and collected by our poetry editor, do not necessarily appear overtly political. Perhaps nothing in art does, initially, unless intended. But each poem here tackles issues of boundaries and borders in its distinct way. Art is self-conscious; art is our consciousness. Art selects boundaries and borders to create itself, and then pushes against them to make them meaningful and even beautiful, rather than devastating and cruel. The poems here reflect on and push against a variety of borders and boundaries. The poems here are about or from different countries, different genres and forms, even different media. They cross and recross lines of ancestral origin and alienation, organic constitution and trauma, ideal histories and racism, the natural world and the private self, physicality and technological augmentation, reality and delusion—the borders and the ends of life and death. The poems here (given wider margins, berth than usual) contain images like doors, windows, mirrors, reflections, lenses, touches, hugs, landscapes, languages, faces, masks, acting, stages, screens, conflicts, and more, reflecting just some of the thematic elements that bind this issue together.

The contributors are or reflect all walks of life too; short bios are included in most abstracts so that you can see that. (There also will be an omnibus [complete] version of this issue in Vol 9.3, containing the entire issue in one downloadable file, and with the contents in the order I, in distinction to this apparatus, have placed them.) To frame the contributors for a moment . . .

Crossing the boundaries of language as well as ocean are Maria Christina Fellie’s translation of two original poems by contemporary Spanish poet Antonio Colinas, reprinted by permission in the original Spanish and placed on the same page of these first-time English translations. Michael David Measel’s poem questions why we keep repeating the habit of living, why continue the stark outline of ourselves? sanae elmoudden’s poem asks the same question in poetry and dialogic prose, but in relation to the seeming futility of caring for children. Also in poetry and prose, Caitlyn Ahlberg explores the newly discovered and not well defined border during the Covid-19 Pandemic, between healer and illness. The repeated violence against women, and against children is the ostensive subject of two poems by Margaret D. Stetz. Two

poems by Roger Hecht, one of our very own poetry reviewers always hidden behind the screen of anonymity, reflect on the strange perimeters of life and image, body and death.

Continuing our framing of contributors, three meditative odes by black author, scholar, and poet, Jon Woodson, quietly ruminate on the descendance of family and the ancestral inheritance of racism in America. The selection of poems from *Coming Home in Vietnam* by Edward Tick captures his journeys to Viet Nam—long after the United States’ withdrawal from that country that haunts us still—to find new family waiting there (my review essay of this book closes out this issue). Carved out of a prose essay, the poem by William Majors explores what may be the end of a boundary, the dusk of humanities. Tuck McGeehan, artist, poet, carpenter, and lover of fishing and woods, gives us a lyrical sequence carved right out of nature. The photographs by Oregon glass artist and sculptor of paint and other materials, Kate Saunders, survey with organic and technological eye some borders and landscapes in visual poetry. And last but not least, the Irish-Oregonian digital artist and poet, Ger Killeen, has created “another reality” altogether, an AI generated interactive augmented (AR) poem with which you can experiment (brief and simple instructions are included ); given the justifiable fear concerning AI, I will point out that one of the things that makes Ger’s AI simulations of his poems different from common, commercial, or industrial AI mixes—what makes their very preternatural form a political statement of art—is that Ger creates *his own* “models,” as well as his poems, on which to “train” his AI programs, rather than let the machine search for prefab or ethically questionable web-scour.

It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with these poets and artists over the past year or more to produce this issue, and I thank them for their great effort and patience with me. I hope you, the reader, enjoy the results.

~Steven B. Katz, Poetry Editor, *Survive and Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative Medicine*