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O:JA&L 2024 PAMPHLET SERIES

*A Writer's Portfolio*

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# ONCE IS ENOUGH



PETER AUSTIN

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BUTTONHOOK PRESS

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PETER AUSTIN

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## A MATTER OF MONTHS

BALZAC, from oversea,  
Received a letter, autographed, 'L'Étrangère',  
Faulting the cynical misogyny  
In his latest work, analysed with care.  
Whoever could she be,

Who wrote so well and knew  
Enough to rate his novel against those  
That came before yet, oddly, left no clue,  
No single detail by which he might nose  
Out, 'Who, Madame, *are* you?'

In time, she wrote again,  
This time appending, 'Countess Eveline  
Hánska', and an address in the Ukraine,  
After which, several letters passed between  
The two, each in a vein

More intimate and fond  
Than the one before. *Would they ever meet?*  
Mused he (who was sure that, of *tout le monde*,  
She was the finest); then, one day, the feat  
As if a fairy's wand

Had waved, achieved fruition,  
When she and her ossified husband came  
To *gai Paris*, where she made it her mission  
To find him. They set each other aflame,  
Though one in her position

Could only wait and pray  
For widowhood, which, when it came to pass  
Freed the couple to marry. From that day,  
It was but a matter of months, alas,  
Till Balzac passed away.

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[Honoré de Balzac, a caffeine-addicted workaholic, died in 1850, aged 51, from gangrene associated with heart-failure.]

## A CHILD

DARNELL wanted a child;  
Alma, who owned a thoroughbred, did not.  
*Bo* was her son; she'd gentled him from wild,  
Rode him contentedly around their lot:  
Could she be reconciled

To chucking up her food,  
To carrying a ton of extra weight  
And crazy fluctuations in her mood  
As prelude to an everlasting state  
Of abject servitude?

Her mother took *his* part:  
'When baby's born, you'll change your mind: I did,'  
Though Alma knew she'd hankered from the start  
To drop an offspring slicker than a squid  
And lose to it her heart.

Worried he might secede,  
Seek out a younger *her* without a horse,  
She bit her lip and kowtowed to his need.  
He was pleased as *Polichinelle*, of course,  
At what they had 'agreed'....

It's due in just a week.  
The bedroom's painted blue, and in it waits  
A rocking horse Darnell made, while the freak  
Who once was Alma thinks of smashing plates  
And suffocates a shriek.

## ONCE IS ENOUGH

*[Inspired by a Graham Greene short story.]*

ONE CHILLY DAY in spring  
They sat beside each other in a park,  
Unspeaking, till a pigeon's broken wing  
(A passing lout had kicked it for a lark)  
Prevailed on him to wring

Its neck. With forehead creased,  
He said, 'I should have spared you.' 'From its pain?  
You did. It was too late to stop the beast  
Who mauled it,' she replied. He shook his cane:  
'Our parks were once policed!'

They settled down to chat  
Like old friends, till the sun went down. Said he,  
Rising, 'I don't like leaving unchewed fat.  
What about dinner? Would you honour me?'  
'Yes, thank you; I'd like that.'

Under the pool of light,  
He saw the wedding ring, observed her twist  
It. 'Married?' 'Yes; and you?' 'She's out tonight.  
I'm for it, if she smells our little tryst.'  
'I'd rather run than fight.'

'And I, but where...?' They chose  
Two *gateaux*, and the coffee pot came by.  
He paid the bill; she thanked him, then they rose.  
'May I escort...?' 'Please, no. You've seen love die;  
Once is enough, God knows.'

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## GEORGES AND MARY

*[With thanks to John Weiner for the idea]*

GEORGES CLEMENCEAU (young, bold,  
Fiercely republican) railed at the reign  
Of Napoleon the Third, until told  
That he'd better make himself scarce on pain  
Of punishment. He holed

Up in the U.S., where  
He taught French, at a private girls' school, to  
One Mary Plummer, who'd found herself there  
Thanks to a rich uncle. They swiftly drew  
Each to each, in the flare

Of passion were wedded,  
Mary bearing a girl within the year....  
France now being (mercifully!) headed  
For a third republic, the way was clear,  
So, the three readied

Themselves and then set sail.  
Arriving, he plunged into politics,  
Leaving her at home, in maternal jail,  
While he indulged in 'love affairs' for kicks,  
But when she tipped the scale

By luring into bed  
Her daughter's tutor, with little delay  
Back to the States in steerage she was sped  
For going so egregiously astray:  
What, pray, was in her head?

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[He is remembered for his leading role in the Paris Peace Conference that ended World War One and negotiating The Treaty of Versailles that followed. When returning U.S. troops visited her at her Wisconsin home, they were shown a shrine in one room filled with accounts and pictures of his achievements.]

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## HER OUTRAGED CRY

KATHERINE MANSFIELD was born  
In New Zealand, to a nice nelly pair  
Who viewed her open-mindedness with scorn,  
Driving her to decamp to England, where  
Broader beliefs were worn.

Here, she shed all restraint:  
After a brief, unconsummated marriage  
(Rashly embarked upon – she was *enceinte*  
With somebody's child), she had a miscarriage  
And (certainly no saint!)

Picked up an STD  
Which refused to be dealt with in a hurry  
And left her as weak as a drunken bee.  
Then, she encountered John Middleton Murry  
(A leftist lit crit, he,

Who was her tenant first,  
Later her husband.) He admired her fiction,  
Eagerly helping to assuage her thirst  
For fame. Then phthisis found her – an affliction  
That killed all whom it cursed

Till mycin drugs came by,  
Two decades later. Seeking better air,  
She headed south, determined not to die,  
But a hemorrhage caught her unaware,  
Drowning her outraged cry.

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[Celebrated short story writer Katherine Mansfield died on January 9, 1923, aged 34. A “nice nelly” is someone who exhibits excessive prudishness.

Phthisis is a synonym of tuberculosis.]

## ABOUT THE WRITER:

**PETER AUSTIN** is a retired Professor of English who spends his time writing stage plays for young people and poetry for adults. Of his second collection of verse, X. J. Kennedy (winner of the Robert Frost award for lifetime contribution to poetry) wrote: 'Austin must be one of the best living exponents of the fine old art of rhyming and scanning in English'.

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ERIK HARPER KLOSS

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PAMELYN CASTO

Author of *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker (A Portable Workshop)*.

We listen with sympathy and fascination to this series of intimate colloquies that Klass has created in his captivating narrative on several notable Polish poets of the interwar years (1919–1938). Feelings matter here—the relationships between the lovers. The expansive descriptions of tiny things matter here. The internal monologues of the individual poets matter here—their musings on the condition of the world around them. But it is the blending of all these things in Klass's precise proportions that matters most. His many thoughtfully nuanced ingredients in this literary recipe are the result of exhaustive research, and his efforts provide his readers with the ultimate experience of the vibrant Polish poetic community of the first half of the twentieth century.

VERA FALENKO

2017 graduate of the Moscow Aviation Institute and contributing editor and translator at *Open: Journal of Arts & Letters*

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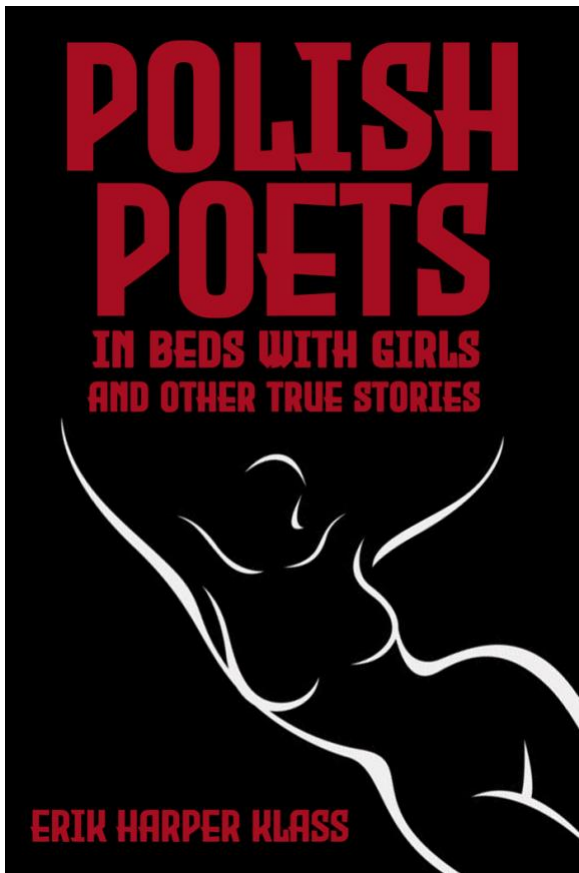
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Klass offers a dense, thoroughly researched story laden with symbolism, which seems, above all, to be saying this: art *exists*. This work *is*. Art stands (sometimes literally) above what changes and what doesn't, outlives giants, and imbues repetitive, sometimes hopeless lives with color. For anybody who finds that meaning important, *Polish Poets* is a work worth taking in. . . . [It is] a multi-layered, provocative, and well-told story about art for art's sake, language for language's sake, and meaning-making itself.

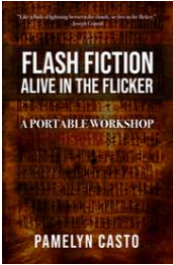
RACHEL CUSTER

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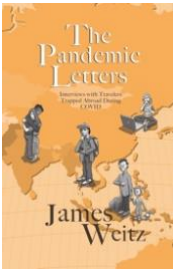
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