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O:JA&L 2024 PAMPHLET SERIES  
*A Writer's Portfolio*

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# CALIFORNIA SUMMER



MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

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BUTTONHOOK PRESS

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MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

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**Cover Image:** [\*Summer\*](#) by [Nikolai Bogdanov-Belsky \(1868-1945\)](#). Oil on canvas. 65 x 46.1 inches. 1911. [Public domain](#).

## GHOST I AM

Here is a private hut  
staring at me,  
twigs & branches  
over the top—  
naked & alone.  
I respond to an old 60s doo-wop  
song: In the Still of the Night  
Fred Parris and The Satins.

Storms are written in narratives,  
old ears closed to a full hearing.  
I'm but a shelter cringing.  
In age, nightmare pre-warned redemption.  
Let's call it the Jesus factor,  
not LGBT symbols in Biden's world.  
I lost my way close to the end.  
Here is this shelter in heaven  
poetry imagined spaces  
prematurely still not all the words fit,  
in childhood in abuse  
lack of reason for bruises  
rough hills, carp that didn't bite,  
and Schwinn bike rides  
flat tires, chains fall off, spokes collapse—  
this thunder, those storms.

Find me a thumbnail  
image of myself in centuries of dust.  
Stand weakened by nature  
of change glossed over, sealed.  
Archives.  
Old men, like a luxurious battery,  
die hard, but with years, they  
too, fade away.

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

## CALIFORNIA SUMMER

C  
oastal warm breeze  
off Santa Monica, California  
the sun turns salt  
shaker upside down  
and it rains white smog, a humid mist.  
No thunder, no lightening,  
nothing else to do  
except for sashay  
forward into liquid  
and swim  
into eternal days  
like this.

## FOUR LEAF CLOVER

I found your life smiling  
inside a four-leaf clover.  
Here you hibernate in sin.  
You were dancing in the orange fields of the sun.  
You lock into your history, your past, withdrawal,  
taste honeycomb, then cow salt lick.  
All your life, you have danced in your soft shoes.  
Find free lottery tickets in the pockets of poor men and strangers.  
Numbers rhyme like winners, but they are just losers.  
Positive numbers tug like gray blankets, poor horses coming in 1st.  
Private angry walls; desperate is the night.  
You control intellect, josser men.  
You take them in, push them out,  
circle them with silliness.  
Everything turns indigo blue in grief.  
I hear your voice, fragmented words in thunder.  
An actress buried in degrees of lousy weather and blindness.  
I leave you alone, wander the prairie path by myself.  
Pray for wildflowers, the simple types. No one cares.  
Purple colors, false colors, hibiscus on guard,  
lilacs are freedom seekers, now no howls in death.  
You are the cookie crumble of my dreams.  
Three marriages in the past.  
I hear you knocking my walls down, heaven stars creating dreams.  
Once beautiful in the rainbow sun, my face, even snow  
now cast in banners, blank, fire, and flames.  
I cycle a self-absorbed nest of words.

## CASKET OF LOVE

This moon, clinging to a cloudless sky,  
offers the light by which we love.  
In this park, grass knees high, tickling bare feet,  
offers the place we pass pleasant smiles.  
Sir Winston Churchill would have  
saluted the stately manner this fog lifts,  
marching in time across this pond  
layering its ghostly body over us  
cuddled by the water's edge,  
as if we are burdened by this sealed  
casket called love.  
Frogs in the marsh, crickets beneath the crocuses  
trumpet the last farewell.  
A flock of Canadian geese flies overhead  
in military V formation.  
Yet how lively your lips tremble  
against my skin in a manner no  
sane soldier dare deny.

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

## ABOUT THE WRITER:

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. Today he is a poet in the greater Chicagoland area, Illinois. He has 300 YouTube poetry videos. Michael Lee Johnson is an internationally published poet in 45 countries, a song lyricist, has several published poetry books, has been nominated for seven Pushcart Prize awards, and six Best of the Net nominations. He is editor-in-chief of 3 poetry anthologies, all available on Amazon, and has several poetry books and chapbooks. He has over 453 published poems. Michael is the administrator of six Facebook Poetry groups and a member of the **Illinois State Poetry Society**.

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

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Hanno

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Poem scrawled on a maize-sheaf for her (last offering)

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[The Fiddler](#)

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A Balloon Called [YOUNG AMERICA](#)

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High Fashion

Featured Collaboration

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[Old Barn OR How Things Go On](#)

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[Nothing To Be Sorry For](#)

Poetry by Lynn Cohen



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[Small Lantern](#)

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& Bea Bauer

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Haiku (Americana) by Ron Scully

[Night Train](#)

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[The Aquarian Foundation](#)

Poetry (Americana) by Jeffrey Gray

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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

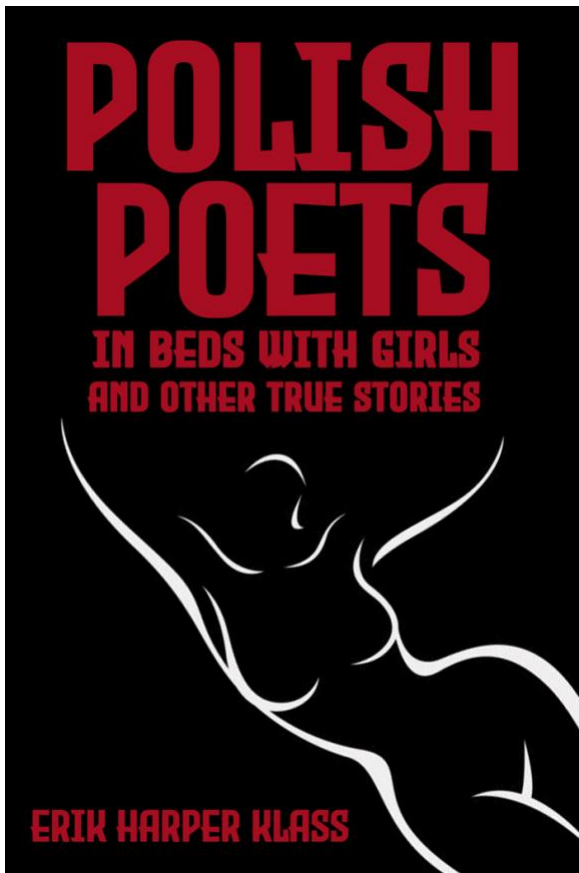
2017 graduate of the Moscow Aviation Institute and contributing editor and translator at *Open: Journal of Arts & Letters*

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

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

NEA Fellow (2019) and the author of *Flatback Sally Country*



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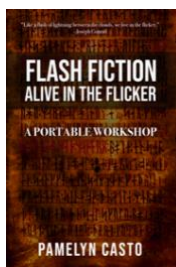
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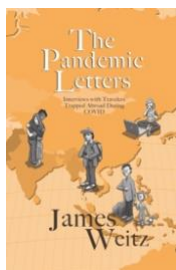
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