

THE O:JA&L 2023 PAMPHLET SERIES  
A WRITER'S PORTFOLIO

---

ONCE THERE WAS A WAY

*Poems*



STEVE MYERS

---

BUTTONHOOK PRESS

# ONCE THERE WAS A WAY

Copyright © 2023 by BUTTONHOOK PRESS  
An imprint of OPEN: *Journal of Arts & Letters* (O:JA&L)

All rights reserved on behalf of OJAL Art Incorporated, O:JA&L./BHP/HBP and Steve Myers.  
Publishing since 2017 as OPEN: *Journal of Arts & Letters* (O:JA&L) and its imprint Buttonhook Press,  
OJAL Art Incorporated is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation registered in California.



## Buttonhook Press

An imprint of OPEN: *Journal of Arts & Letters* (O:JA&L)

SUPPORTING WRITERS AND ARTISTS WORLDWIDE

Set in Garamond and PERPETUA TITLING  
And formatted in CreateSpace.

Made available online and/or printed in the USA and elsewhere as a novelty  
and commemorative document celebrating the publication of Steve Myers's poetry pamphlet.

Cover Image: [\*Portrait of a Woman \(With Cactus\)\*](#) by [Frederick Carl Frieseke \(1874-1939\)](#).  
Oil on canvas. 36.3 x 29 inches. 1930. [Public domain](#).

## PROLOGUE:

**B**lood-born from the womb, vision-fuzzed, we aspire  
to radiance as all things seeded aspire to radiance.\*

Memory, e.g.

Thirty years this sweetgum, widescreen  
in our front window, hallowing the lawn, limbs  
fissioning with orange and yellow pentagrams  
through 5 a.m. November's semi-gloom.

What name's  
lovelier than *liquidamber*, sweetgum's sexier moniker?  
Thirty years! Window, sweetgum, South Mountain  
background, moon-shine, these lines.

\*The opening couplet in "Prologue" is a riff on lines by Charles Wright.

THIN BRUSHWASH, FINE LINE

Dawn's dark prequel. Moon-wane over the mountain,  
one silver sliver short of the night before,  
slender arc  
from night's arc-light gone, coin laid to a grindstone.

*Pay that no mind*—Ralph Jones, the old farm foreman.  
He was from Missouri—really  
from Missouri—  
too busy strong-arming some willful bull in a circle,  
hand clamped to the nose-ring,  
to worry over cycles,  
diurnal turnings, the difference between less and loss,  
or his wife's Jesus.

*Lookit Musial*, he'd say, waving  
a Camel at the RCA, *you kin see it in his eye, that boy*  
(Stan, 41, summer '62, hit .330)—*near out of his mind*  
*when he gits that way*

as the liner, a laser,  
short-hops the fence in right, Schoendienst full throttle,  
turning toward home.

Sum of the Gospel according  
to Jonesy: Behold The Man, The Beautiful Servant.

As the ancient Chinese poet put it: *No-mind is nowhere*  
*to be found. We need not seek the home of No-mind.*

I'll buy that. I mean the farm, fixed form of home gone

ephemeral, everything after a handful of change, nothing  
beyond, as in this painting by Ch'i Pai-Shih:

the seven vertical lines  
flush right—wavery willows; the vectors happily slashing  
the air in the middle—swallows; down front and center,  
a huge-hipped cow from the hind-end,

the Show-Me

Ontology: There is joy; weeping; no getting around it  
(and nowhere *Forever*, never you mind).



though forget the Top Ten—  
the Chapel; Christ  
lifeless, lying across Mary's lap; the queer-eye motley  
rocked by the Pontifical Swiss Guard, etc. If you go  
go to Jesus  
in Sta. Maria Sopra Minerva, *The Risen Christ*—marble, *contrapasso*,  
impressively ripped, with cumbersome *crucis* and alpenstock.

Each time I wanted to say to Him *Listen: when the light clicks off,  
lay down the cross; take up your walking stick and walk.*

## THE HARVEST

At last night's dinner with Bethlehem friends, seeing him  
turn and spin, his wife in his arms rocking with him to the tune  
of *Harvest Moon*,

I thought of the Taoist painter's pseudonym,  
"Fisherman of Mists and Rivers." Each spring, that thin green  
lacewing color on the trees, you could find him swaying  
to the mixed polyphonies

of Penn's Creek or the Loyalsock, in time  
for the rise of the Green Drake, the Blue Winged Olive, staying  
later than anyone—then, as the empties

of Rolling Rock lined up,  
writing a poem about it, he who'd drummed a three-score cadence  
of season, stream, and poem.

What's home to him, the Ash Alley  
half-double of memory shuttered now, lamps dimmed way down?  
The beat in the bloodstream, this ingathering of arms,  
long love's  
full fruitage, shine on, shine on.



## ONCE THERE WAS A WAY

Low-slung background sound streaming from Sirius  
radio, piano vamp, then vocal: "...sleep, pretty darling  
do not cry, and I will sing..."

as yesterday's lullaby  
afternoon in the meeting room, down the long, reflecting  
table, when she turned

to the four across from her,  
all early twenties, their masks half-moons, all signing  
with the semaphore of flashing eyes—

*tell us.* A story  
of piecework, sleeplessness. Night sweats. Bad bargains.  
Of sweet voices and hard partings, choices made to land  
her here, *bogar*, her words

island-inflected—Dominican?—  
till among us a slow drift toward drowsing, as if  
becalmed, afloat on golden waters somewhere between  
*sueño* and *oración*

and she on the pier of a far harbor,  
singing with a tenderness not meant for us, my ear, fallible  
with distance and the years, catching wisps and fragment  
of what's possibly

*Duérmete mi niño*, as I lean shoreward,  
my old man's near-certainty seeing no end to her loneliness.

November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5 p.m. South as the crow flies, the Pleiades  
flicker on.

You glitter-eyed sisters, no end to yours.



last wore this flannel shirt. I hear Erykah singing  
“Time’s a Wastin’.”

Isn’t every straitened body a  
sundial,  
gnomon throwing its thin, brushwash shadow  
across the lawn? Grayscale Dayspring, doesn’t everything  
aspire to radiance?

Here comes the sun.

ONCE THERE WAS A WAY

## ABOUT THE WRITER:

STEVE MYERS has published a full-length collection, *Memory's Dog*, and two chapbooks. A Pushcart Prize winner, he has published sections of his Pennsylvania poem sequence in places such as *Callaloo*, *Juxtapose*, *Kestrel*, *Penn Review*, *Permafrost*, *The Southern Review*, *Stone Canoe*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *Valley Voices*. He is a director of the MFA in Creative Writing and Publishing program at DeSales University.

THE BUTTONHOOK PRESS PAMPHLET SERIES

2023

**Occasions for Listening**

Experimental Poetry by Spencer Silverthorne

From the new O:JA&L imprint HOT BUTTON PRESS

**Perseus with the Head of Medusa**

Editorial opinion from Contributing Editor Mick McGrath

From the new O:JA&L imprint HOT BUTTON PRESS

**Democrats Be Trippin'**

Editorial opinion from Contributing Editor Mick McGrath

2022

**A Balloon Called "Young America"**

Poetry by Jennifer Clark

**The Fiddler**

Poetry by Tim Hunt

**High Fashion**

A Collaboration:

Poetry by Adjei Agyei-Baah & Photography by Jerome Berglund

**Chester River Reverie**

Poetry by Priscilla Long

**Salton Sea**

A short story by Mike Murray

**Family Photo of America**

Poetry by Lynn Potts

**War and Riff**

Haibun by Keith Polette

**The Curve of the Open Page**

Poetry by Bruce Bond

**Bareness**

Poetry by Jacob Laba

**Murder in the House:**

**The “Nutshells” of Francis Glessner Lee**

Poetry by Jessica Purdy

**Poems for Families**

Poetry by Kirby Olson

**Mogollon Rim**

Poetry by Allisa Cherry

**Hanno**

Poetry by John-Michael Bloomquist

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

Poetry and art by Arturo Desimone

2021

**Salt**

Poetry by Amanda Leal

**Deer in Fog at Twilight Near Squalicum Lake Road**

Poetry by Richard Widerkehr

**Democracy has Lifted Up Its Voice**

Poetry by Mike Puican

**2YC Review: The Works**

Poetry and creative prose by members of the Two-Year College Caucus at AWP

**Promises**

Poetry by Ellis Elliott

**Home**

Poetry by Amanda Leal

**Study of Burkas**

A poem by Dana Sonnenschein

**The Open Window**

Flash vignettes by O.G. Rose

**Light in the Cathedral: Russian/English Poems**

Poetry in two languages by Andrey Gritsman

ONCE THERE WAS A WAY

2020

**Safe Spaces: A Pretty Lie**

Editorials on Issues of Poetic Practice by Poetry Editor  
Rachel Custer

**Against Art as a Radical Subjectivity**

Editorials on Issues of Poetic Practice by Poetry Editor  
Rachel Custer

**Special Edition: Experimental Discourse**

...are serious offenses, and...

A closet drama in two acts by Anthony Hamilton

**How to Love a Headstone**

Poetry by Sloane Asakura

**The Last of the Gallants**

Poetry by Atar Hadari

MORE TITLES IN PRESS

OJAL Art Incorporated, publishing since 2017 as *OPEN: JOURNAL OF ARTS & LETTERS* (O:JA&L) and its imprints Buttonhook Press and HOT BUTTON PRESS *Contemporary Issues*, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation supporting writers and artists worldwide.

BECOME AN O:JA&L MEMBER  
THROUGH PATREON.



PATREON



STEVE MYERS

---

Forthcoming from O:JA&L's Buttonhook Press

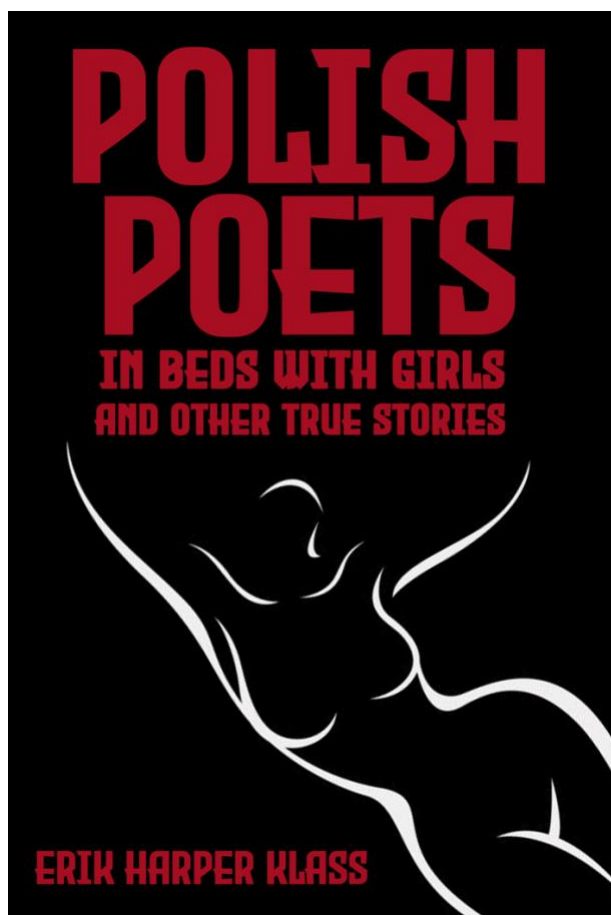
Fall 2023

POLISH POETS IN BEDS WITH GIRLS

*And Other True Stories*

A NOVELLA OF THE INTERWAR YEARS 1919-1939

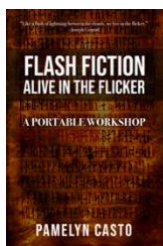
*Erik Harper Klass*



ONCE THERE WAS A WAY

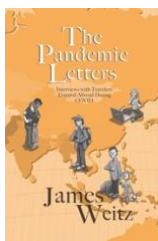
BUTTONHOOK PRESS TITLES ON AMAZON

*available now*



Pamelyn Casto

**Flash Fiction:**  
*Alive in the Flicker A Portable Workshop*



James Weitz

**The Pandemic Letters:**  
*Interviews with Travelers  
Trapped Abroad During COVID*



**BUTTONHOOK PRESS**  
AN IMPRINT OF OPEN: JOURNAL OF ARTS & LETTERS

*Supporting artists and writers worldwide*

## 2023 PAMPHLET SERIES

\$7.50 (USA)

\$10.50 (Canada)