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Foreword

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Foreword

“I believe I have encountered
the mightiest inspiration
you are the streetlight in every poem”

—“The Drill” by Yang Chia-hsien,
translated by Tina Shan

We are all looking for light and inspiration in some way, shape or form. This year’s issue offers a multitude of voices to lead us in that direction. The voices speak of glaciers dancing and steeplejacks plunging from rooftops. They describe squawking and braying over rosy dreams, winds wheeling and galloping on the rim of a shield, and a trek across the Alps. These high-intensity moments are balanced by quiet, contemplative observations: the dry sound of yellow leaves following horse hooves, the silhouettes of rice fish, a forest of endless white birch trees.

As these jumbled references demonstrate, reading poetry requires the deliberate choice to slow down. Crammed up against each other, the sounds and images don’t have enough room to breathe, to signify, to let their meaning ripple out into calmness. We invite you, therefore, to take some time off the clock, turn off your phone, and leaf through the poems and commentaries assembled here. The world (and your electronic devices) will still be there when you get back.

These translations, above and beyond attesting to the power of the written word to express and illuminate, demonstrate the critical need to do so. All human beings share that need. Whether writing of the loss of a child as a blossom fallen from the sky, the love of a dog who knows your lifelines, or pervasive post-nasal drip, these authors and their translators tell a single story of shared human experience: tragic, warm, and occasionally surprising.

We hope that these poems will provide you with matter for reflection and that they will offer some kind of inspiration in the way that they illustrate the quirks and complexities of life and language.

Molly Lynde-Recchia, Editor-in-Chief