Three Poems

Wendy Burk
The University of Arizona Poetry Center

Julie Swarstad Johnson
The University of Arizona Poetry Center

Sarah Kortemeier
The University of Arizona Poetry Center
DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.27.05

Follow this and additional works at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure

Part of the Poetry Commons
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License.

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.27.05
Available at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol27/iss1/8
Three Poems

Wendy Burk, Julie Swarstad Johnson, and Sarah Kortemeier

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA POETRY CENTER

These three works of visual art and poetry emerged from our professional experience as librarians and poets at The University of Arizona Poetry Center, a special collection of contemporary poetry housed in a public university. Frequently described as a “living archive,” the Poetry Center’s library houses both open stacks designed for browsing and closed stacks containing archival collections related to contemporary poetry. Our collections, building, and everyday work, as seen through the alternate lens of our identities as writers and artists, comprise the subjects of our collaborative assemblages. We began by generating a list of questions that became the titles of the three pieces. Based on our questions, we each wrote a poem that incorporated fragments of language found on the spines of books and in archival documents. Finally, we rendered the poems as visual assemblages incorporating found objects, photographs of public and hidden spaces in our building, and repurposed archival and office materials. The pieces progressed via a series of exchanges, so that each assemblage includes work by every collaborator. Specific authorship is relinquished in favor of collective achievement, reflecting the collaborative and sometimes hidden nature of the librarian’s and archivist’s work.
Is the Archive Alive?

Your battles are over. What befell
has been slipped into folders, boxed, and measured.
Your ink so flat, fruitful,
still desires to unfold —

I am sorry
I don’t remember
I have found great comfort
I regret
I have been terror-stricken

— an apology or an argument.

What do we reach for now, but words?

With them, with their aid
we finish each other’s sentences
and we finish the sentences of the dead.
How Do We See What Is Hidden?

Let the edges blur.
A triangular way in.
Perhaps there is no way in.
Consider the edges.
A dark click.
Look up.
There is a bright shelf in the ceiling,
call it thought.
Stop thinking of time as a fever,
or even as a bloom.
Let time be a wild root.
Or a monster’s careful
and ongoing notes in the dust under the bed.
Or a wrecked armada.
Freelance there.
In a waiting space.
In the huge haiku
of a single, testing breath.
How do we see what is hidden?

Let the edges blur.
A triangular way in.

Consider the edges.
A dark click.
Look up.
"There is a bright shelf in the ceiling.
Call it thought."

Stop thinking of time as a form,
or even as a bloom.
Let time be a will not.

Original cataloging

Tango was aware
The attribution was part of a reason?
Any significant a...  

Can we make up dots
Country or a

Pine's for many
100 for customary
It is no idea to ask
A 425 for others
Color name

Freelance there.
In a wishing space.
In the huge hush
Of a single, testing breath.
How Do We Love the Past and the Present?

The brightest go first. Light
can illuminate, or it can bleach
all the color from a book’s spine,
so we keep the rarest things
safe in cooled darkness.
Two gardens rival each other
from either side of the glass
and both need attention, although
neither demands it: one could ignore
the bamboo as easily as the books,
and both might do just fine or wither.
In my wallet, I keep a plan
for an orderly apocalypse,
reminding me who to call
if the waters rise or fire falls
from a wire in the ceiling. Who
can I call to tell that the air
is burning out there, the hottest
October on record in a year hot
with hatred? I affirm that this
is a radical act of love: to look
you in the eye and say good morning,
to bring you what you ask for
out of the cooled darkness
where it rests. This is what light
can do: a whole lot of damage,
but how could we see to read
all these words without it?
How Do We Love the Past and the Present?

The brightest light. Light can illuminate, or it can bleach all the color from a book's spine, so we keep the recent things safe in cooled darkness.

Two gardens rival each other from either side of the glass and both need attention. Although neither demands it, one could ignore the lamps as easily as the books, and both might do just fine or wither.

In my wallet, I keep a jump for an orderly spotlight, a blip of light that can be thrown off my face if the waters rise or fire falls from a wire in the ceiling. Who can I call to tell that the air is burning out there, the hottest October on record in a year but with haste? I affirm that this is a radical act of love: to look you in the eye and say good morning, to bring you what you ask for out of the cooled darkness where it rests. This is what light can do a whole lot of damage, but how could we see to read all these words without it?
Wendy Burk is the Library Director of The University of Arizona Poetry Center. Her publications include a book of poetry, Tree Talks: Southern Arizona (Delete Press, 2016). She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing and an M.A. in Information Resources and Library Science, both from The University of Arizona. Contact: wlburk@email.arizona.edu.

Julie Swarstad Johnson works as a Library Specialist at The University of Arizona Poetry Center. She is the author of a poetry chapbook, Jumping the Pit (Finishing Line Press, 2015). She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from The Pennsylvania State University.

Sarah Kortemeier is the Instruction and Outreach Librarian at The University of Arizona Poetry Center. Her poetry has appeared in Ploughshares, Alaska Quarterly Review, The Feminist Wire, Sentence, Fairy Tale Review, and others. She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing: Poetry and an M.A. in Library and Information Science, both from The University of Arizona.