“Tongue twister” brought us wordplay, inventive forms, and a few surprises. Recently featured in a Sigh Press Ampersand Interview, Kevin McFadden takes us on a journey through language in the poems selected for this issue. We also hear from Stephen Morison, Jr, whose midnight tweets we welcome, Jeff Shapiro who brings us a conjugation riff that’s downright contagious, and Shelley Martin on two words we’re still scratching our heads over. The visuals in this issue—an orchestra of line and shape—interpret Dante in an exciting calligraphic collaboration led by Monica Dengo. You’ll find our contributors’ bios at the end of the journal with links (copy and paste these into your browser) to further learn about their work.

We’re hosting another Open Mic on March 29 at 7pm at St Mark’s Cultural Association in Florence. We hope you’ll come to share your writing and discover a vibrant, creative community, and to raise a glass with us as we reach our third year at The Sigh Press!

Be on the lookout for our interview with Kamin Mohammadi in the next Ampersand and remember to visit thesighpress.com for our Summer Issue theme and deadline, and our Facebook page where we post at least three times a week.

Lyall Harris & Mundy Walsh
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QUESTION MARK
A QUESTION, The Sigh Press
Keep your eye on the shells.
Don’t think of the old inhabitants
long since skedaddled, looted, or shucked—
they never twirled this purposefully, they
never scraped to make a buck.

Yes, yes, one guess.

Sore luck, try again?

Now, what do you take me for? My word!
Then take it from me (on the order
of receiving, reception, and receipt)
the slip you’ll soon be given seals the deal
once deceiving and deception find their seat.
Up my sleeve or under your hat, it’s a whole
lotta nada, no? I leave you with that.
INSECT, FRIENDSHIP

Not so much the fly in the ointment,
nor the fly in a humorist’s soup.
Not the fly on the wall. Not the buzzer
beater Dickinson imagined she’d detected
when she died. Nor is this the proverbial fly
trapped in amber—too tragic a creature,
beguiled by an ancient circus bark,
some iferous con, his sucker pitch.
I could go on, but why? It’s just the fly
all afternoon keeping me company—
if you could call her that—no awareness
in those tempus fugit eye-eye-eyes that today
I’m central casting for the characters on this screen.
A part, I can see, she was born to play.
INDEPENDENCE, INC! Ignorant in incendiaryism, I ignite it inadvertently, impiously instigate interest in its idle idioms’ impregnability, its inevitably idealized imperial ice-cream.

Injurious, infuriating! Illustrious, industrious, ill-fitted immigrant Ilium!


Inexplicably intoxicated illusion! Imbecilic, I intone innocently (if infallible Innocent III interdicted, I intend it).

Innumerable interpretations! Innocuous interpolations! Illiterate illustrations! Instinctively investigate its indigenous interrelated incidents, its interruptive infighting, its impaired impact, its insufferable if inseparable insider institutions. I impart important, importunate, intimate implications (interchangeably). Immediately identify in. Its imports are imperturbable.
Its id is immeasurable! Its I is inviolate. It integrates indefinite identities incrementally.

Its intact Indo-European is impressive if inscrutable. Its illegible intelligence inconsistently intensifies its inquiries. It ingratiates itself ignominiously if input is idiosyncratic. Impunity, immunity. It involves itself, impresses itself, impoverishes itself, imprisons itself. It inaugurates its inauthentic incarnations into incarcerations. It invariably invites interrogations into its imprecations. Its intellectual iconolatry is interesting: ideas ingeniously inlaid, inwardly irreligious, inordinately imbricated, impossibly intricate. Ideals insomuch (Isaiah). Idols inasmuch (Ibid).

It’s inherently inhibited if imposturous. It is insensate inside. Inarticulate. Inarguably, its immediacy is immense. Its introspection is infinitesimal, its inertia is intuitive, its instant is infinite, its insignificance is imminent. Impertinently, I’m incubating it. Infidel! Inimical inbreeding!

Its indomitable itch is intense, inconvenient if inferring its inferiority. It is immature—is it immutable? Iffy. It is if it is, it isn’t if it isn’t.

Impartial impasse impending, incorporation is its inmost iniquity. Infusion is its infotainment. Innovation is its incredible interpreter. It impels its imperative impertinence. Its ilk is invisible, indistinguishable in indigo, I intimated. It impales its indefatigable impatience.
It is its intrinsically insane inquisition into ideation and impulse. I
impetuously implore its individual individuals … “Interdependence, Inc!” I
interject. Interglacial indifference. Interloping interlocutor, indulge its
inundating inducements. It is insatiable. It is inalienable. It is intractable. It
is implied. It is I.
Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jul 2, 1322
Recitation is on for Thursday evening as per usual. Tix avail from usual outlets. Elsinore theatre. Again show not for young children.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jul 20, 1322
Much thanx to Jutland Times critic Christian Henning who liked the show

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Sept 15, 1322
Strangest thing is how the story begins to change Not in delivery but where mind goes in the monos Into the mazelike spirit of the Prince

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Oct 2, 1322
Bad review in the Stockholm FOLKBADET. Bad enough that they didnt like my performance but to accuse me of mistruths Haters gonna hate

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Oct 3, 1322
Asking the simple questions these day the Prince never asked
Never believe the Swedes out there beyond the mists Spinning fake news Always spinning fake Swedish news

No truth to the rumors that Fortinbras is estranged from his uncle in Trondheim. The regime is like a well-calked boat around here, no leaks.

The castle is full of ghosts, haints Wandering the parapets and corridors while the ocean rumbles

After last show saw the Queen and Claudius in youthful bodies Ghosts like butterflies fluttering for warmth w King Hamlet away at the Polack Wars

No truth to rumor that Brunhilde is torn between love for Prince Fortinbras and loyalty to her brother, Cleve, Old Norways favorite general

Time is a garden waiting for spring to see what new truth arrives

Performance is on for Thursday evening as per usual. Tix avail from usual outlets. Elsinore theatre. Show not for young children.
Prince has decreed there will be no more performances. It is most retrograde to his desires that I should leave the castle.

Nor shall there be more tweets about ghosts

A princess is born! A beautiful princess is born!

I am tasked with the resurrection of the puppet theater in the nursery. Children of the castle may assemble Friday mornings for performances.

She is her father's daughter. Her favorite plays are about hunting. Also the one about the giant talking fish.

Come one come all to the Friday morning performance of Warrior Circe. Favorite play of the Princess. Tix available from the usual outlets.

Come one come all to the Sat afternoon performance of Dido. Princess fav of season. Tix available from the usual outlets.
Horatio @HoratioAbel – July 22, 1336
In honor of the visiting Baron Bjorn of Alsno a command performance
Friday of the old play: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. No puppets. Tix avail
usu places.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jan 12, 1337
No truth to the fake news of sick Princess in tower room refusing food
Gave command performance yesterday She was full of empathy

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jun 21, 1337
Scandalous. Princess would never disobey fathers command. Princess
never disobeys.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Oct 13, 1337
and original play. Sure to entertain. Some puppets. Good for all ages.
Saturday.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Feb 14, 1337
Swedish gunboats arrive!

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Feb 14, 1337
Princess to be wed! Sailing to her new home. I stay. Baron reassures. Has
plenty entertainments in Alsno.
Horatio @HoratioAbel – Apr 15, 1341
Norway is dead! Long live the King! Prince Fortinbras to be crowned King Will pack up the castle and relocate to Trondheim.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – May 20, 1341
I will stay and continue to entertain the staff at Elsinore.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Oct 19, 1341
The ghosts speak in whispers beneath the curling winds. Winter is coming.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Mar 21, 1343
War is declared! Warships in the Straits We watch from the parapets.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jun 4, 1343
The Swedish invaders are here! The Princess returns! The Princess returns!

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jun 4, 1343
She asks for the old play. You mean the Perfect Wedding? I ask. No, the ghosts, she says. The arras. Tell about your old friend Hamlet.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jun 15, 1343
She no longer cries to watch the play. She nods as if in agreement. The majestic Princess. The Baron sleeps through Mousetrap.
Horatio @HoratioAbel – Sept 14, 1343
At Princess command a new play will be conceived. What of your life Horatio? she asks. What of your childhood?

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Oct 16, 1343
Fortinbras is dead in Trondheim. A rictus seized him during supper. His face collapsed in his soup. Long live the Swedish king!

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Oct 31, 1343
Our sweet Princess will be crowned Queen with her Lord. Where is the little girl I once knew?

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jan 7, 1344

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jan 13, 1344
Ghosts o young Hamlet and Rosencrantz on the parapets after show. Fresh and smiling like day in the carriage long ago. Before return to Denmark.

Horatio @HoratioAbel – Jan 14, 1344
Were you really young once? sweet Queen asks. Were you really so carefree and gay? wise Horatio?
Queens asks for her next play. She asks for Fortinbras: Conquering Prince. But The cold is in my lungs. Who will tell his story?

And what of my play? the sweet Queen asks. Breathing is a chore. I pray you do not need one, I tell her. I pray you rule without drama.

The Queen is with child! They wheel me to the theater to oversea the puppet theaters repair. She stands beside me. The grown Queen.

Ah, these Danish winds? Ghosts lovers heroes villains ghosts. Let there be no more arrases.

Not to be? The time for questions is past. The mists thicken.

Who’s there? The first line was always also the last. Who’s there?
“Where’s your lei, Lou?”
“I, um, mislaid my lei at the luau, Lori.”
“Lying lech. You wooed Lulu on the Li-Lo in the low-lying lea.”
“Unlikely. Lulu likes Len.”
“Then you lured Lola.”
“LOL. Anyways, Lars says Lola’s a lousy lay.”
“Lowlife,” Lori laughed lifelessly.
“I love you,” lowed Lou, lulling Lori.
Lewd Lou lied: he had lain with Elaine.
My friends and I sit around the glass table in our kitchen, staring at the many postcards we’ve arranged beneath the glass. Symbols of cultural endeavor and exploration.

“He started talking to me and then he probably saw that I was so hit and thought it was dub,” Z says in her strong Brooklyn accent, only made thicker with enthusiasm. I look to my other friends for clarification.

“Okay, what does ‘hit’ mean?” I ask finally.

She looks at me as if I’m crazy, “Hit? Hit! Ratchet! Ugly!”

“Ooohhhh!” the rest of us all say in unison. “But that’s not true!” I complain, pretending to understand what dub means.

Our other roommate K walks out of her bedroom and comes into the kitchen groaning. “Did you see what stupid thing our president said?” she asks, rolling her eyes.

I don’t know whether to laugh or cry as I pull the article up on my phone. Definitely both hit and dub.
Cat got your tongue?
TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS: What word has your attention these days?

* 

MONICA DENG, MARINA SGUDDI, MASSIMO FACCI, KIT SUTHERLAND, PETRA CASOTTO, EDI SOLIVO, CATERINA GIANNOTTI, MARIA GRAZIA COLONNELLO, DEANNA FAVRE, ANNALISA FERMO, ELEONORA PETROLATI, RENATA MENGUCCI, MARIA GABRIELLA PIANIZZOLA, PATRICIA SILVA, PAOLA ZOFOFOLI, DARIA SORRENTINO, SARA VENERI, ALESSANDRA BARISON, ROSOLINO GANCI, RICCARDA BIANCO, PETRA MARKHAUSER, ANNA CLAUDIA DI BELARDINO, ANNA BRUNETTI, MARIA PIA MONTAGNA, PAOLO VALZANIA: Guided by calligrapher/artist Monica Dengo, our group of 24 calligraphers becomes part of Writing the DIVINE COMEDY...in the Languages of the World. Launched by the Italian Cultural Institute of Cairo, this international project envisages a graphic and calligraphic transcription of the first 21 lines of Dante’s Divine Comedy into the world’s myriad languages. At work are master calligraphers from many countries, as well as translators of the Divine Comedy and other Dante enthusiasts.

Each book contains three of Dante’s first 21 lines, chosen because they succinctly furnish the general concept of Dante’s work: illumination after a time of confusion. The legible and “illegible” alphabets symbolize the many accents found in spoken Italian—regional accents as well as those of people who come from different cultures and who have made Italy their home. The work consists of 21 books, executed entirely by hand, designed to be hung side by side.
The project is supported by the network of Italian cultural institutes around the world and similar institutes in other nations. The Italian Cultural Institute of Cairo is assembling the graphic and calligraphic works with an aim to exhibit them locally and, subsequently, in interested venues worldwide.

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ASEMIC

KEVIN MCFADDEN is the author of *Hardscrabble* and has recently published an illustrated cycle of poems, *City of Dante*, with artist Jeff Pike. Winner of the George Garrett Award for poetry from the Fellowship of Southern Writers and a New Writers Award from the Great Lakes Colleges Association, his poems appear in journals including *American Letters & Commentary, Fence, Kenyon Review, Ploughshares*, and *Poetry*. A letterpress printer, he’s currently at work on *Speaking in Faces*, a collaborative specimen book/artist’s book documenting the largest publicly accessible collection of moveable type in Virginia.

HTTPS://WWW.POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG/POEMS-AND-POETS/POETS/DETAIL/KEVIN-MCFADDEN
HTTP://WWW.ARCHIPELAGO.ORG/VOL10-34/MCFADDEN.HTM

SPECIMEN
STEPHEN MORISON, JR believes that the ending never really satisfies, which may be why he’s okay with *La La Land*. Married to his true love, he has, possibly, the most incredible daughter ever born (🔗). They have lived in Connecticut, China, Jordan and Italy, which is where Steve is writing this. He is enthralled by the mystery of what happens next.

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THIS WEEK, his favorite word is **MOIETY**, but he has a longer relationship with susurrus and, no doubt, he will soon return to her.

JEFF SHAPIRO, a New England native and author of *Renato’s Luck*, has made the countryside near Siena his home for more than two decades now along with his wife, Italian singer Valeria Indice. He writes, sings, teaches and, on rare occasions, indulges in ludic bits of word-riffing like the one offered in this issue.

THE WORD that’s kept me dreaming lately is **ILLUMINED**, especially as James Joyce used it in his story “Two Gallants”: *The streets, shuttered for the repose of Sunday, swarmed with a gaily coloured crowd. Like illumined pearls the lamps shone from the summits of their tall poles upon the living texture below which, changing shape and hue unceasingly, sent up into the warm grey evening air an unchanging unceasing murmur. I’m in awe of Joyce’s choice of illumined over the more common illuminated—the plosive...*
of which would have blown apart the soft mumbling mood of the neighboring syllables. Who more than Joyce to appreciate the way the music of words matters at least as much as their meaning?

SHELLEY MARTIN, Canadian born, grew up in South Florida. She currently attends New York University and is attempting to learn Italian during her junior year in Florence. She enjoys art, film, bad television, and reading.

ALLEGEDLY