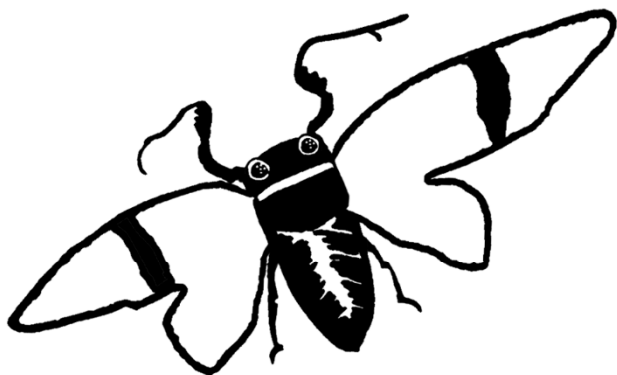


LICADA



SEX-SONGS

CAT DOSSETT, EDITOR

A HAWK & WHIPPOORWILL POETRY CHAPBOOK

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## From the editor...

Here in New England, as I write in this tail end of April, the days are growing warmer and longer. As animals awaken from their winter slumber, the air fills with song: of dogs, of children, of birds and bugs.

What better herald for summer than the sound of cicadas? Symbols of mortality and passion, their mysterious mating rituals and life cycle have lured the attention of poets across the world. Sap-eaters, decade-sleepers, with quivering tymbal and camouflaged body—food for some, metaphors for others. As humidity reaches its peak and the school year looms, cicada sex-songs quiver on.

Presented in the pages that follow is a bouquet of poetry from writers from New England to New Zealand, dedicated to those annual songs of cicadas, sensual, sirenic, incessant, buzzing...

- CLD



**Tiffany Belieu**

# Call Me

stained glass diamond wing  
golden pulse of trees, cicada  
summer soundtrack steady  
hum of our tin-can telephone  
hearts wait up every night  
receive your sweet gossamer buzz

.. / . \_ . . / . . \_

**Zachary Bos**

## *Cicadetta montana*

... has not been heard in Britain since the year 2000. (The call of *C. montana* sounds to an unaided human ear like a sustained static hiss, with irregular lulls.) So, autonomous drones have been deployed across the pastures, heath and woods of the New Forest to seek the source of any cicada music they detect. In the next phase, these will carry small speakers

to broadcast a recording of the insect's manic trill:  
*his son his sea his kin his success is sin, his sin.*

Anticipating that programs sometimes run foul, the programmers have prepared for a fraction of drones to glitch before long and abandon their assignments. Instead they will spend their days errant & insouciant — clinging to the crumpled bark of ancient maple trees,

their diode eyes turning on fleshless gimbals with dreams of British wilds where electricity never shone. For this contingency, the programmers shall release acoustically sensitive mechanical nightjars & shrieks. With no snug nests to tempt them away from work, unresting they will track the song of the idle drones, listening days and nights for *his sin, his sin, his sin.*

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*Originally published in the Spring 2019 issue of Dappled Things.*

**Magdalene Farren**

## Orchestra

Declan shoots baskets and his pants  
swish as he moves,  
let me know where he is as I lay  
on the warm concrete,  
hands clasped behind my head  
so my knuckles hurt a bit.

I do not hear him the first time he says it,  
over the swish and slide of his pants.  
But he stops, sneakers squeak  
and then says it again and this time  
I will pretend to have not heard him  
because the bug orchestra  
started playing my favorite song.

The one that comes on, clockwork,  
when the backyard fence slices into the sun  
like a wheel of cheese.

In the next ten minutes he will abandon the ball,  
let it roll into the flowers he planted  
and come lay next to me.  
His white t-shirt  
makes him look like the afternoon sun  
tan and warm.

We listen to the bug orchestra play the sun to bed,

the screech of the violin and cello as  
the cicadas warm their lonely legs.

There is a way that the evening sun  
makes every poem about a friend seem  
like I am wrapping up a bit of our world  
and giving it to them.

In case I become an empty body,  
a cicada skeleton, you will have  
this sour song and the scratch of warm  
concrete on your shoulders.

**Diana Adams**

## How I Met You

The thorax slides  
onto my tongue,

down windpipes.

Cicadas are delicious, he says,  
breaking the hillside spell.

I caught him in an elevator  
glowing in my periphery.

I tilt in; his scarab tattoo.  
Have you ever been to Egypt?

*lies are architectural*

Sure, I've been there, somehow?  
& I will eat insects

He aligns each crisp specimen  
with ceremonial airs

while bats above  
bear witnesses

**Tianna Grosch**

## Summer's Night Serenade

Join me on the  
front porch swing  
wooden creak beneath  
the weight of us two  
together.

Hoots  
in the trees,  
cricket-cicada  
serenade;  
fireflies & stars  
flickering  
candlelight—  
every night  
spent by your side  
a dream come true.



**Emma-Louise Adams**

## A tryst in Athol, Massachusetts

state once of revolution  
and harbor of pollution  
here quieted, humdrum

and yet, more hum than drum  
abuzz beneath the numb  
with sweet cicada-song

we dared not speak too long  
where we did not belong  
'til cicadas drowned us out

they sang 'round our hideout  
where all we spoke about  
was hidden, too, by sound

a murmur all around  
so we would not be found  
small bugs conceal our lust

entangled in the dust  
betraying parents' trust  
in the eve-light glow

who on this earth would know  
that the cicadas helped us so  
we owe to them our love

**Nina Murray**

## Cicadas respond to Billy Collins

*The word cicada, for example, stops me in my tracks. I just can't go on.*  
- Billy Collins, introducing *Best American Poetry 2006*

but, Billy, that's what we are, don't you see:  
minds in thrall to the want of poetry  
that you said could be found  
in the daily scour  
of casual communing  
well-worn consolations  
commutes  
the indifferent blessings of sun and the rain  
but with all our acts as preordained  
as you remembering car keys  
the coffee that starts your day  
what else could we make but  
this—our obedient  
    martial sawing

**Robert Murphy**

## Cicada Sex Magick

Certain occult workers use sex to gaze  
into higher planes, the body's  
machinery fired toward the afterlife.  
Experts say cicadas die after mating  
simply because their life cycle has expired,  
as if that's an explanation. In search of sense  
beyond, we ascribe the occult to everything.  
The knowledge of what lies elsewhere,  
imparted at that deafening moment,  
begins to destroy the insectoid body—slowly  
sapping its dew-slick wings, its chiming tymbals.  
The cicada is the sorcerer adept. This is the rite:  
a dark working brews for years, is finally unleashed  
in a moment of perfect chaos, and, stammering,  
consumes a small world as sacrifice. This,  
this is the rite.

**Erik Kennedy**

## Brood X

*(The Great Eastern Brood of Cicadas, Princeton, 2004)*

It was in a cicada summer,  
when I still thought I knew  
who I was going to be  
and who would love me.

Grad school and I were in  
a violent relationship. I put ice in things  
to cool them down, to numb them.  
Outside, the surfaces heaved with sound.

Monday was reading. Tuesday was reading.  
Wednesday was reading and the pub.  
Thursday was reading and the pub.  
There were billions of cicadas

in the trees of New Jersey alone  
singing their emotional mnemonics  
about turning seventeen, like the billions  
of sonneteers I had to read then:

Barnabe Barnes, Bartholomew Griffin,  
Thomas Lodge. I've forgotten  
everything. The males of the species make noises  
with membranous organs on their bellies

called tymbals. Male cicadas, I mean.  
Friday, Saturday, and Sunday  
were the pub and maybe reading.  
Leaving behind an exoskeleton is convenient.

It was as hot and green a June  
as I had ever seen—  
hotter and greener now that I've decided  
it was full of meaning.

**Marnie Heenan**

## Shell on a Branch

In the trail-head clearing  
I stand, peering at Orion.

Cicada, stuck to birch,  
your silhouette pierces starlight.

Is this the rest you seek  
after nights of singing and mating?

Of all creatures you may be timeliest.  
Who knows if you are only hull?

# Contributors

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## CRITICAL PRAISE

(FOR CICADAS)

"THE CICADAS SANG LOUDER AND YET LOUDER. / THE SUN  
DID NOT RISE, IT OVERFLOWED." - RAY BRADBURY

"SWARM OF NOCTURNAL INTELLIGENCE. / CICADAS UNCEASING  
IN THE CONFECTIONERY AIR." - JORIE GRAHAM

"THE HOLLERS OF THE WHIPPOORWILL, THE CLICKING OF  
CICADAS' CASTANETS." - CIARAN CARSON

"ONLY THE DRY CICADAS ARE AWAKE / AND SCRAPING  
UNREMITTINGLY REPEAT / A SOUND WHICH IS THE  
VERY SOUL OF HEAT. " - FRANCES DARWIN CORNFORD



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