Afternoon Discoveries: October 19, 2026

Literary Fiction & Poetry

AMONG THE LETTERS
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An aunt in Tangshan complains about her fourth nanny in five years, and a niece from California arrives with her hair dyed crow black. A son tries to help his father in from the car before an early eightieth birthday dinner, while a girl on a Queens platform counts subway stops like prayer. Today's shelf holds literary fiction and poetry from small journals and independent magazines, with new voices beside a few older classics. The back shelf offers an Irish

autumn, a Dublin window, and a Canadian noon. Each piece rewards a slow and attentive afternoon.

All links in today's edition were checked against the linked publication, magazine, or publisher page on October 19, 2026.

Featured Discovery

Hawthorn - Victoria J. Sun

Victoria J. Sun opens in deep autumn, when Rumei's eighty-year-old aunt calls to accuse yet another nanny of pocketing valuables. Rumei handles it, as she handles everything, while her sister Ruzhen sends a nineteen-year-old daughter from UCLA to Tangshan for winter break. The girl is Holly on paper and Heihei to the family, and she arrives with hair dyed a heavy black. Sun lets an old funeral and a long estrangement surface through a spare room and a hand on a sleeping head. It is a patient, quietly devastating story about sisters and the distances families keep.

Read "Hawthorn" at Waxwing

The Discovery Desk

Only Me - Matthew Thorburn

Matthew Thorburn's poem begins beside a parked car, where a son is unsure how to hold his father's arm and his mother is already calling from inside. The family is celebrating an eightieth birthday a week early at an Olive Garden in Lansing, with salad, shrimp, and chocolate lasagna cake. Memory arrives in a rush of snowmobiles, fried smelt during Lent, a Cherry Coke, and a van trip to the 1982 World's Fair. Thorburn, an only child, asks who will keep these moments once he is their sole witness. It is tender, funny, and hard to forget.

Read "Only Me" at Rattle

Rabbit - Jonathan Aprea

Jonathan Aprea's narrator has spent weeks in his room eating apples and pizza and staring at water stains on the ceiling. An invitation slipped under his door, for a party themed on The Matrix, nudges him back toward other people. Before that he worked beside the Easter Bunny at a fading upstate mall, a seventeen-year-old named Paul whose pockmarked cheeks made him think of geological time. Aprea writes loneliness with odd precision and unexpected humour, then lets the story turn toward guilt and tenderness. The final visit with Paul is strange, sad, and quietly forgiving.

Read "Rabbit" at Joyland

Between Stops - Faust B

Faust B, a Muslim American poet from Queens, moves between a bodega, a subway platform, and Friday prayer in this poem from Arc

Poetry Magazine. A father teaches his daughter the stops on the line, and she repeats Parsons, Sutphin, Briarwood, and Kew like times tables or prayer. When the train stalls in a tunnel, someone's phone plays Quranic recitation and the whole car listens. The poem keeps asking whether knowing matters more than being present when someone else learns. It was shortlisted for Arc's 2026 Poem of the Year, and its patient attention to small lessons explains why.

Read "Between Stops" at Arc Poetry Magazine

Night Hike - Suzanne Langlois

Suzanne Langlois begins near midnight on a trail that never seems shorter, with a moth the size of a sparrow brushing her cheek. Her headlamp throws stumps and boulders forward, then lets the dark swallow them again. Memory takes her back to night hikes with her father, who forbade flashlights so she would keep her night vision. A single slap from years before sits beside those smooth, moonlit trails, unresolved. This short prose poem from the Autumn 2026 issue of Rust + Moth turns a walk in the woods into a question that can no longer be asked.

Read "Night Hike" at Rust + Moth

Thank you for spending some time with this afternoon's edition. Below this point are six more stories and poems, three essays and conversations about poetry, and three special recommendations from the back shelf.

Special Recommendations can be found near the bottom of the article.

More From the Discovery Desk

WeChat Reply - Lei Ya, translated by Todd Foley

Lei Ya's story is one long message composed late at night after a date in a dim bar. The narrator studies the woman's compact mirror, her fresh lipstick, and her fluent talk about art, and decides he only met her socially constructed self. On WeChat, he argues, he could sense someone far more real. Todd Foley's translation keeps every turn of this fussy, self-regarding logic alive, so the reader enjoys the narrator and doubts him at once. Lei Ya, a Beijing filmmaker born in 1993, first published the story in the Chinese journal Harvest.

Read "WeChat Reply" at Joyland

The Ministry of Loneliness - Luisa Muradyan

Luisa Muradyan's prose poem opens with an elementary school placement test that sorts children into their futures. A best friend who builds robots out of potatoes is meant for engineering, while the speaker is called to the Ministry of Loneliness. Her parents saw it coming, worried she would end up like an aunt buried under a pile of metaphorical cats. Muradyan turns this bureaucracy into a factory where painful memories ride a conveyor belt toward the incinerator. The poem is funny and grim at once, and its final image of scattered ashes stays with you.

Read "The Ministry of Loneliness" at Waxwing

Water Birth - JoAnn Balingit

JoAnn Balingit writes from the room where her daughter is giving birth in a bathtub of City of Newark water. The poem runs without punctuation, carried by breath, chanting, and the speaker's quiet coaching to breathe through the nose. Everyone in the room obeys, except perhaps Matthew, who is pale and crying. Balingit, Delaware's poet laureate from 2008 to 2015, lets mother and grandmother blur into one long line of bodies. The poem ends with a newborn's first sound and a sense of the future arriving from very old water.

Read "Water Birth" at Split This Rock

Shinto Shrine in Yamagata, Japan - Richard Newman

Richard Newman's short poem visits a Shinto shrine in Yamagata, where the speaker bows, claps, and no longer knows what to ask of the gods. A limping grandmother points to a sign explaining that the gods have left for another shrine. Wind applauds through thousand-ringed cypress and cloud-piercing pine, and the speaker offers compliments to absent gods. Newman calls the form a chanterelle, his own loosened variation on the triolet, first tried after mushroom hunting in Missouri. The result is wry, graceful, and a small lesson in how repetition can carry doubt.

Read "Shinto Shrine in Yamagata, Japan" at Rattle

O'Bannon Creek - Amy Riddell

Amy Riddell's poem announces that it has a rope swing in it, tied to a sprawling oak over moving water. An older sister runs barefoot with her high school friends while the younger one calls for them to wait. Riddell writes in a careful conditional, imagining the leap, the red hair brushed

back, and the head popping up from brown water. Fear of the current keeps the speaker at the edge, and the poem lets that hesitation become its own story. It is a vivid summer memory that reads beautifully in autumn light.

Read “O’Bannon Creek” at Rust + Moth

Apotheosis: Drought - Ashley Hajimirsadeghi

Ashley Hajimirsadeghi, an Iranian American writer from Baltimore, begins this poem with a mother who steals seeds from the birds. Even spare breadcrumbs are scarce, and seagulls in midwinter pick at restaurant dumpsters and faded parking lots. The speaker wishes she had left footprints in the mud after every storm, as evidence she was once here. Rivers, spirits, fish, and constellations gather in the lines as the drought presses on. The poem ends with prayers spat onto cracked earth, a stark and memorable image of wanting more than survival.

Read “Apotheosis: Drought” at Split This Rock

Beyond the First Shelf

It Is Good To Let Ideas Move - Jayne Marshall

Jayne Marshall first met Anne Carson’s Autobiography of Red on a reading list for a creative writing master’s, after ticking the fiction box

on her application. This piece for The Madrid Review folds Carson's brief, bracing replies into Marshall's reflection on what the verse novel taught her. Carson gently turns one question back on its asker and speaks of Spain's pulse and presentness. She also explains how her collaborations with Robert Currie pair his spatial mind with her grammatical one. It is a lively look at a Canadian poet who moves easily between forms.

Read "It Is Good To Let Ideas Move" at The Madrid Review

Where Nature Assuages Grief: Renée M. Sgroi's In a Tension of Leaves and Binding - Carolyne Van Der Meer

Carolyne Van Der Meer reviews Renée M. Sgroi's poetry collection In a Tension of Leaves and Binding, published by Guernica Editions in Gananoque, Ontario. She read the book during the twelve days after her mother's stroke, and the review is honest about that weight. Van Der Meer traces how Sgroi binds leaves to book pages and mothers to daughters. She pays special attention to the starling poems of the visitations series, which move among Latin, English, and Italian. It is a warm, thoughtful review that shows how poems can accompany grief.

Read "Where Nature Assuages Grief" at Arc Poetry Magazine

Between Languages, Places and Words: Julie Sheridan's 'Umbellifire' - James Hartley

James Hartley talks with Julie Sheridan, a Glasgow-born poet who has lived in Barcelona since 2011, about her debut collection Umbellifire. The poems span decades, from her twenties to her return to poetry in her forties, so this debut is hardly a beginning. Sheridan taught herself

Spanish at nine with a pocket dictionary after falling for Gloria Estefan's songs. She describes Catalonia and Spain as the treble clef and Scotland as the root note. Her thoughts on writing as play rather than obligation will encourage anyone returning to the page.

Read "Between Languages, Places and Words" at The Madrid Review

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Special Recommendations

The Wild Swans at Coole - W. B. Yeats

W. B. Yeats opens this poem with trees in their autumn beauty and fifty-nine swans on the water under an October twilight. Nineteen autumns have passed since the speaker first counted them, and his heart is sore with everything that has changed. The swans remain unwearied, paddling in cold companionable streams with hearts that have not grown old. Yeats closes with a quiet fear of waking one day to find them gone. It is a perfect poem for a mid-October afternoon and a fine companion to any long walk.

Read "The Wild Swans at Coole" at the Academy of American Poets

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Eveline - James Joyce

James Joyce's Eveline sits at a window watching evening invade the avenue, with the odour of dusty cretonne in the curtains. She is past

nineteen, works at the Stores, and keeps house for a father whose temper frightens her. A sailor named Frank has offered her a new life in Buenos Aires, and the boat leaves that night. Joyce builds the story from dust, promises, and a remembered street organ, then brings everything to the North Wall quay. Published in Dubliners in 1914, it remains one of fiction's most exact portraits of a person unable to move.

Read "Eveline" at Wikisource

Heat - Archibald Lampman

Archibald Lampman published "Heat" in 1888 in Among the Millet, his first collection, printed in Ottawa. The poem watches a hay cart crawl up a white road while the wagoner slouches along in its dust. Cows wait in the elm shade, a thrush slides through its thin revolving tune, and crickets sound from the droughty ground. Lampman then turns the stillness inward, finding that the full furnace of noon makes his thoughts keen and clear. It is a Canadian classic worth carrying into the colder months ahead.

Read "Heat" at Representative Poetry Online

Thank you for spending part of your day among the letters with us.

Today's pages move between kitchens, subway cars, shrines, and forest trails at night, yet many of them circle the same quiet question. Who keeps a memory once the other witnesses are gone? A son at a birthday dinner, a sister at a bedside, and a girl counting stops each answer in their own way. The poets and storytellers here found their answers in small gestures, and we hope you find a few of your own.

I hope one of today's pieces gives you somewhere worth staying for a while.

Take care!