

Dear Poets,

Today's teaching takeaway, Kimberly Quiogue Andrews's "The server at my local tells me all viruses arrive on this planet via comet," appears in *Sixth Finch*. Congratulations, Kim, on your recently published [*The Academic Avant-Garde: Poetry and the American University*](#) (Johns Hopkins University Press). Among its ideas: "You have to be on an edge to be cutting edge."

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How It's Put Together

Reading single-stanza poems of considerable length, I join tablature's gift to world lit, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, with my fantasy Lotto winnings that buy the high-rise I convert into World's Tallest Bookstore. Andrews's skyscraperlet consists of forty-eight lines, interlocked as such:

The server at my local tells me all viruses arrive on this planet via comet

and I think to myself *that's actually a new one to me*
but I want her to keep telling me about these streets
in the 70s, when they were tired of picking up those little
propeller things dropped by all the female trees and so
they ripped them up and planted only males. "Now
there's just *so much pollen*," she says, "with nowhere to go
and it gives everyone, even people without allergies,
allergy attacks."

The title's theory of cometary panspermia, distilled into small talk while "those little / propeller things" replaces the botany-termed [*samara*](#). Line three begins our first instance of what I call The Scotia Plaza of Cause-and-Effect, Canada's third tallest building giving ample room to track the consequences blueprinted throughout.



when they were tired of picking up those little / propeller things dropped by all the female trees and so / they ripped them up and planted only males.	"Now / there's just <i>so much pollen</i> ," she says, "with nowhere to go / and it gives everyone, even people without allergies, / allergy attacks."
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I do feel it, the tiny feathers behind my facial bones, my streaming nose, I thought maybe it was the cat, but this is helpful, now I can blame it on the tree patriarchy. It's been so damp and I don't think we're getting sick from comets.

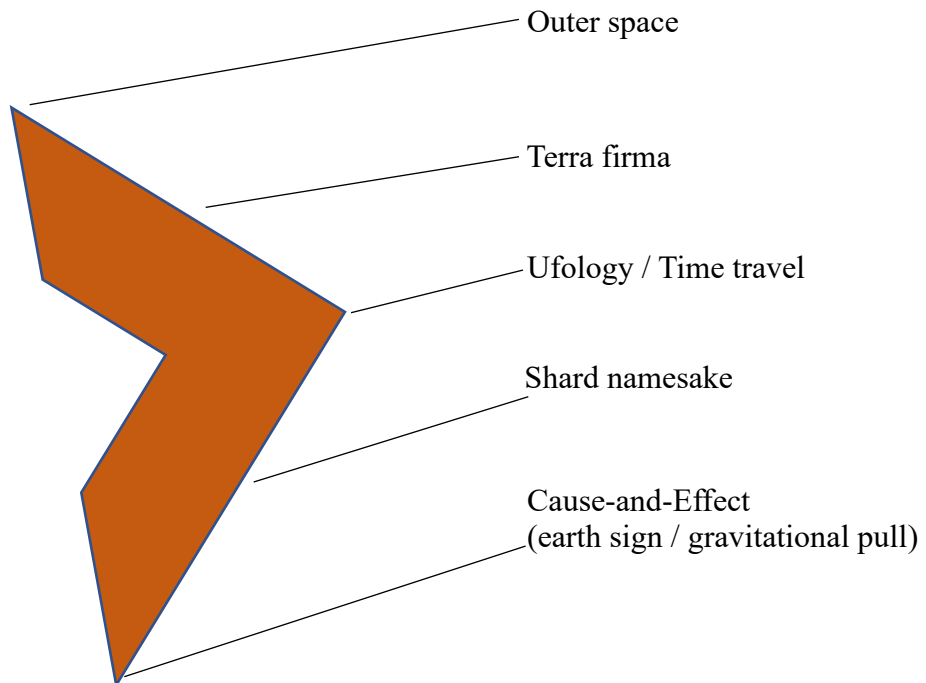
“Tiny feathers behind / my facial bones” reimagines allergy’s interspecies workings, sentence four’s opinion nullifying the title.

Reverse Scotia Plaza:



She goes on,
says that when the vibes are good at a party, that’s
the stars being just right in the sky both at the time of
the party *and* at the time of everyone’s birth at the party
or at least the ones who also feel like the vibes are good.
That circles are alien technology, that we’re this close
to knowing how to travel through time, geometrically.
I look up but it’s just cloudy. Somewhere, there’s a shard
of ice in a vacuum with my name on it. An earth sign,
I imagine myself more susceptible to gravity.

Conditional astrologies prolong *vibes*. Diagrammatically, lines 1-21 ...



The place
where I was born went out of business; my parents
met in a hospital that shut down due to poor profitability.
Here, all the obvious conclusions about markets and
suffering. Now my mother's sick as hell, but my father's
rich and she's on Medicare.

Segue to a site no-longer, *suffering* jutting into wealth. A population of four (server, speaker, mother, and father) contrasts *they, everyone, people*, and next section's *grantmaking authorities*. Takeaway: vary a sizeable poem's inhabitants between nebulous and concrete when 'floorplans' call for details past and present.

I want to write something
about the town where I grew up—I say this explicitly
to the grantmaking authorities—but it's one of those
postindustrial revival zones and what am I going to say,
that I stole a pack of cigarettes and then visited the new
vegan café? For decades, I was tethered to a 180-mile-
long cord spiked down along the Schuylkill. I swung
along it in a big arc, half of a big Saturnine ring.

Andrews's em dashes are a wallet, civic-mindedness preceding *cigarettes*. During an interview for her collection *A Brief History of Fruit*, the poet stated, "I really grew up fully in the Pennsylvania suburbs, which are non-places, places where you go to get out of somewhere else."ⁱ Arsenal-esque, *tethered* and *spiked* benefit the image of "a 180-mile- / long cord" attempting reflection: How does the *I* get out of there? Answer: it orbitally upends.

When
it broke, I was cutting up my mother's food for her,
unscrewing all the caps on the juices and such. My father
looked at me from across the glass breakfast table,
his face long gaunt from grief, and said *you're going
where?* No one actually decamps to Canada until they
do, and I did it to increase my profitability.

Caps, along with *ring* and *circles* (lines 33, 17), evokes roundness/rotation, line four's *propeller* indicative of moving forward (played against *unscrewing's* counterclockwise motion). *Profitability* is our fifth financial reference, yet Canada is deemed trajectory's backup blip, this excerpt's "glass breakfast table" a fragility pristine.

The sky is
still cloudy. There were some real jerks at this restaurant
but the server is optimistic, says she can feel the energy
rebalancing. I trace an arched figure in the air with my hand
and I end up pointing at the ground, which I guess is
to say that if you, poet, think that the comet virus thing

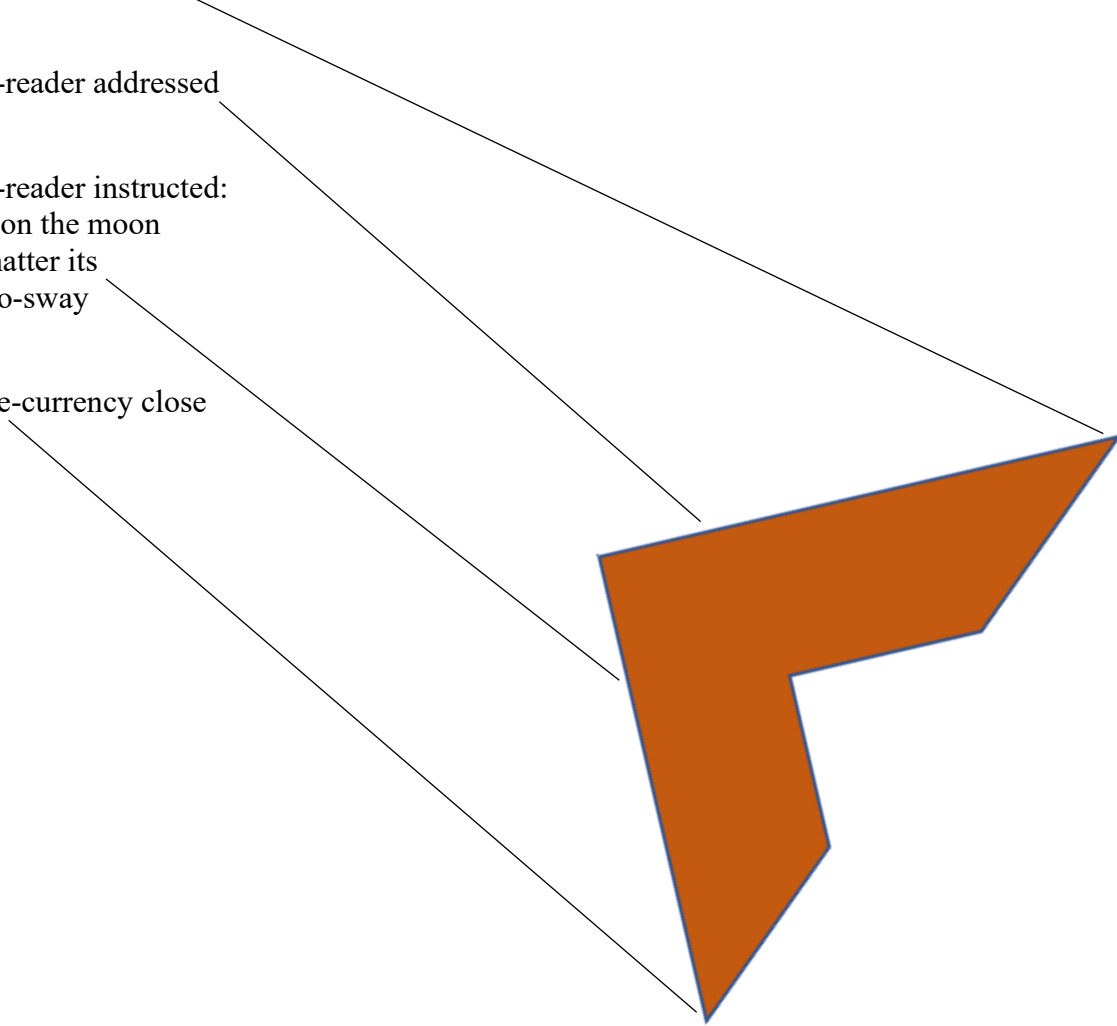
is funny, stop looking to the moon to speak your sadness
into being. It feels like truth but it's just the promise
of escape, the tug that moves the oceans but cannot
lift even our fingers, these coins of stone we carry.

Restaurant dynamics

Poet-reader addressed

Poet-reader instructed:
jettison the moon
no matter its
hydro-sway

Stone-currency close



Of Andrews's 523 words, .76% of are proper nouns.ⁱⁱ

Medicare	65,103,807 enrolled (September 2022)
Schuylkill	Potable-intended for 1.5 million
Saturn(ine)	72,400 miles in diameter
Canada	1.96% of the Earth's surface

As someone whose drafts lean on this part of speech, I appreciate how other writers sustain larger pieces. Nonspecific comets bookend the poem, enormity requiring fewer words than you think.



NYC's 56 Leonard Street: One Powerball away from Bookstore

Prompt

Go Scotian with a single stanza of fifty lines or more in which a complex theory is discussed and dismissed. Include three proper nouns, a Lottery-based spending spree, and one of these slang terms for money: *smackaroos*, *cheddar*, or *clams*. In Andrews's longer sentences, we see the following *I* + verbs:

Sentence 1 I think, I want

Sentence 3 I do, I thought, I can

Sentence 13 I want, I grew, I say, what am I going, I stole

Sentence 21 I trace, I end, I guess

How might you stretch your sentences built around cause-and-effect?

Happy Poeming,

Jon

ⁱ <https://poetry.arizona.edu/blog/interview-kimberly-quiogue-andrews>

ⁱⁱ A) <https://medicareadvocacy.org/medicare-enrollment-numbers/#:~:text=34%2C984%2C295%20are%20enrolled%20in%20Original,Advantage%20or%20other%20health%20plans.>

B) <https://a-z-animals.com/blog/how-deep-is-phillys-schuylkill-river/>

C) <https://solarsystem.nasa.gov/resources/16293/saturn-the-mighty/#:~:text=It%20is%20easy%20to%20forget,seen%20here%20at%20lower%20right.>

D) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/earth-surface-ocean-visualization-science-countries-russia-canada-china/>