

**Contributor Series: Jason Harris on  
“How to Talk About Love at a Time Like This”**

“How to Talk About Love at a Time Like This” is a poem written while taking Caryl Pagel’s craft and theory poetry course called *Ecopoetics, Connection, Compost, Deep Time, Unconformity, & Heat*. For sixteen weeks we read several pieces of work that intersected the given topics in the course name. The underlying study of the course was a study of the Anthropocene, the current geological age regarded as the moment human activity became the largest influence on earth’s climate, environment, and ecosystems.

The week’s prompt when “How to Talk About Love...” was written was “lake poem.” Going into the poem, I had been thinking about several things: the climate of American politics, the negative impact of the algae bloom in our Great Lakes (Lake Erie, Huron, Michigan, Ontario, and Superior), how to resist in an age sullied with capitalism, nationalism, fascism, and the inevitable end of the earth, of ecosystems as we know them. One radical belief that I have is that love, compassion and sympathy are ways to resist the slow, catastrophic destruction of our public and private lives.

Hanif Abdurraqib, American poet from Columbus, Ohio, has written and published a set of poems entitled “How Can Black People Write About Flowers at a Time Like This.” The rhetorical work the title does is breath-taking and led me to consider the ways in which we, as poets and citizens of the 21st century, can remain sympathetic and sensitive enough to consider flowers at a time like this, when our world is on fire. In the final stanza of one of the “How Can Black People Write About Flowers at a Time Like This” poems published by *The Collagist*, the speaker ends by saying: “all I have been trying to say is this:/ may even the residue of our love find a curve of wind to dance an echo into.” The image of love dancing an echo of itself into wind moved me so much that it encouraged me to consider love more deeply as an act of resistance, which is why many of the poems I have written under the “How to Talk About Love...” title grapple with political, economic, and ecological disasters, and pin them against the wall with sympathy, compassion and love.

Another poet who inspired this poem, as it was the first of which I wrote myself into, is George Oppen, who passed away in 1984. His poem, “The Forms of Love” helped set the scene and tone of “How to Talk About Love...”. Oppen’s speaker opens the poem by saying: “Parked in the fields/ All night/ So many years ago,/ We saw/ A lake beside us”. The short, choppy lines jolt the reader with a shock of awareness and forces them to consider a reality we often ignore: we are not separate from the lake or [insert any living organism we ignore] and the lake is not separate from us.



**Jason Harris** is a poet and NEOMFA candidate. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Winter Tangerine*, *TRACK//FOUR*, *OCCULUM*, *Longleaf Review*, *Wildness Journal*, *Peach Magazine*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *The Gordon Square Review*, and others. He is the Co-Editor-in-Chief of *BARNHOUSE Journal*, a contributor for *Watermelanin Magazine*, and lives in Cleveland, OH. He can be found on social media @j\_harriswrites