

Q and A

Kenneth M. Cale

Nostalghia

(Petrichor Press, 2026)

Q and A—Version (9) Magazine

1. What are the context and background of this collection of poems?

In 2025, I submitted some work to *Petrichor*; and Seth Copeland, its editor, wrote back and asked me if I'd be interested in doing a chapbook for them. I've always liked that journal, so I was up for doing that, especially as I'd built up a large number of near finished visual poems while I'd been working on my collaborative novel, *Oberon's Zoetrope*.

One of those poems was an ekphrastic piece based on Tarkovsky's 1983 film, *Nostalghia*, a hushed, surreal fugue which drifts in and out of themes of alienation and exile, longing and belief, as well as the taunts and solace of memory. Coming off working on *Oberon*, which was heavily influenced by the Chernobyl disaster, the haunted, displaced world of *Nostalghia*, almost *post-postapocalyptic* in feel, seemed a logical next place for me to inhabit creatively.

Tarkovsky's circumstances making *Nostalghia* were on my mind as I worked on this chapbook as much as the movie itself. He was dogged by censorship and interference from the Soviet authorities, and would go into exile shortly after it was released. This got me thinking about the fate of artists in the near future if we continue along the current trajectory towards techno-authoritarianism. If there are restrictions placed on what artists can and can't say, I'd imagine that Tarkovsky's style and approach might become more popular or influential with future artists as his works show paths around such censoring. This led to the conceit of these visual poems being a gallery of works by anonymous artists inspired by illicit screenings of *Nostalghia*. Because of revised or omitted history, I imagined these artists wouldn't know much about Tarkovsky or the circumstances around the movie, mistakenly believing it to be made in an era of increased freedoms, thereby developing a misplaced nostalgia for *Nostalghia*. Lapsing into misplaced nostalgia is easy to do when the world around you looks bleak. And that's something we have to guard against in our own time.

2. What are some elements of your writing process that were involved in its creation?

My writing process doesn't really change from project to project. It has two distinct elements to it. There are the collages which are done digitally, and these are very meditative and improvised and completed (usually!) pretty quickly. The poems take longer: I work with a pen and notebook and handwrite the drafts until I'm happy with them. I don't work on collages with the poems in mind nor write the poems with the collages in mind. It's only later I pair the poems and collages to see if any interesting reverberations occur.

3. What approach informed your revising of this work and readying it for publication?

As I mentioned earlier, I already had a lot of material, so pulling together *Nostalghia* was less a process of writing and revision and more one of curation - appropriately enough given the chapbook's gallery conceit! I was sifting through my files and notebooks looking for works which fit with the title poem thematically or tonally, and they weren't always easy to identify. In hindsight, some of the poems seem like obvious inclusions - "This Cellophane Night," for example - but sometimes you see a poem in a certain light, and it's hard to recontextualize it. The sequencing of the poems became an important part of the creative process in that respect. For a long time, "Daughters of the Postdemocratic Phallacy" was an untitled collage which I liked, but didn't know what to do with; however, once I put it next to "Last Ikon / Lost Ikon", I saw its potential as an allusion to *The Handmaid's Tale*, and it helped me visualize this post-digital, authoritarian land where history and liberty were fading into the kinds of fog you see in Tarkovsky's movies, but the candles of resistance were being lit. This led to some of the ideas outlined in the Prologue. From there the book came together quite quickly.

4. What are some of the key traits that distinguish this collection of poems from your previous writings?

For each collection, I impose a set of soft constraints on myself, and that distinguishes each collection from the previous one. With *Greater Vegas...*, people commented on the cut-up poetry, the cinema references, and the colorful, glitchy futuristic look. So, in *Oberon's Zoetrope* there were black and white collages based on pre-20th century images, no movie references, and it was largely fiction. For *Nostalghia*, I decided to let a little color back in, but use a limited palette for the visual poems, opting for red, silver, and black as I was influenced by the tones of Soviet propaganda art. As *Nostalghia* is a quiet film where what's seen carries a lot of weight, I was keen for this chapbook to lean more on visual images than text. Also, given the theme of censorship, I wanted to obscure and distort what words there were in *Nostalghia* more than in previous works. There's a Susan Howe thing here of cutting and pasting lines of poetry over one another to create the effect of self-censoring. This kind of textual distortion is something I'd done on a number of pieces, but this is the first time they feature in a book.

5. What do you hope to see resonate with readers in this poetry collection?

I'm quite selfish in that I create these works simply to satisfy myself. Beyond that, all reactions and resonances are valid. I love to hear people's take on my works - especially

when they see something in it which I hadn't intended or considered. So, if there's a hope beyond readers simply enjoying the book, it would be that *Nostalgia* is generative in some way, creating a dialogue or inspiring other works, either for myself or others. To that end, I always encourage other writers to sample and/or remix my works if they feel so inclined.