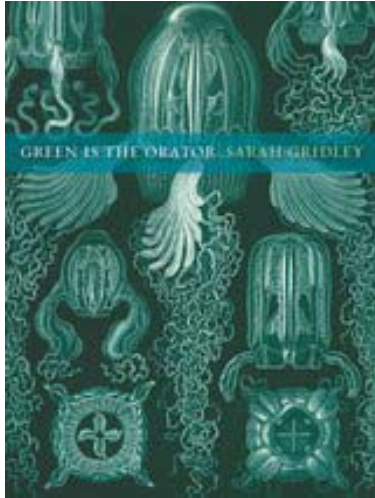


**Featured Fellow:** Sarah Gridley  
**Poet**



2010 - Cleveland

### **Why have you chosen Cuyahoga County as a place to live and work?**

I moved to Cleveland in 2006 thanks to a job opening (visiting poet) in the English Department at Case Western Reserve University. I grew up in Cleveland but had spent my adult years, up until this point, living and working in other parts of the country: Montana, Maine, Massachusetts. So it was employment that brought me here initially—an opportunity I felt I couldn't refuse. To be honest, I don't think it would have occurred to me to move back to my hometown had I not had this particular incentive. That said, I have learned in my four years being home how much there is to appreciate in Cleveland and surrounding Cuyahoga County. This is a dynamic and rewarding place to live. I have been inspired by especially by the forms of collaboration this area offers. I work in the University Circle area, and I am constantly amazed by the quality of programs and lectures on offer around me. I like the partnerships I see among institutions like The Cleveland Museum of Natural History, The Cleveland Botanical Gardens, The Cleveland Foundation, and Green City Blue Lake. It's inspiring to see people using creative and intellectual "capital" to attend to this region's sociological, economic, and ecological

challenges. I feel very committed to the objective of "greening" Cleveland—not as something separate from our economic renewal efforts, but as something bound up in them, holistically, toward the goal of shared urban health and vitality. I think we need an ethics of care that doesn't compartmentalize, but thinks across disciplines, drawing on various kinds of expertise and skills. That to me is what is most exciting about living here: the opportunity to connect with people—writers, scientists, musicians, film makers, health care professionals, educators, etc.—who care about their home and want to see it thrive.

### **What is your favorite place, event, or "hidden gem" in Cuyahoga County?**

This is a hard one to select, but I think I'd have to say its recreational parks. By that I mean not just the Metroparks and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, which are in fact not-so-hidden gems, but places near me like Forest Hill Park, Cumberland Park, and Cain Park. My neighbor introduced me to the special combination of open meadows and woodland trails in Forest Hill Park. With its gigantic oaks and beeches, this is, for me, one of the most beautiful places I know in this area. P.S. the East Cleveland Parks Association needs help (donor and volunteer) in its caretaking initiatives!

### **Who or what has influenced you locally and elsewhere?**

I am influenced by a very wide spread of sources. I guess you could say I am most inspired by synchronicities—i.e. when separate influences become energetic confluences. Currently I am especially interested in the confluence of ecology, theology, feminism, visual arts, music, and poetics. In my daily life, I feel the influence of people who provide striking examples of kind behavior. I would like to rescue that world from its Pollyanna, saccharine associations. Kindness to me is both fierce and radical: in its active extension from compassion, it is at the very root of environmental and social conscience. By kindness I mean a sense of connection and interrelation, a sense of shared destiny that is all-inclusive. That kind of kindness isn't to be underestimated. I really believe we are all capable of this kind of awareness, in our words and in our

deeds. People who model this to me are nothing short of “awesome” influences. You can feel this sort of kindness in poems, in friends, in leaders; you can recognize it in something as simple as a heartfelt greeting or thank you in the course of our daily errands and preoccupations. It’s about being present not only to your own life, but to the lives of others as well. And not just “others” in the human context; I mean others in the more-than-human context, too.

### **How do you generate new ideas?**

For me, reading and writing are completely symbiotic activities. Without reading, I would be a disaster. Also, I love good conversations. My friendships, my family, my students and colleagues, are all very important to me in this context. Last and by no means least, I seek out the nonverbal but powerfully expressive world of nature. There are so very many ideas racing through and across the internet these days, I find it critical to push back with periodic spaces of quiet: i.e. conscious “separation” from that kind of information.

### **What is the hardest part about creating?**

I tell my students that editing is the hardest and best part of creating. That is the insight that took me a very long time to form, and I am still only beginning to understand it! By “editing” I mean the ongoing negotiation with “negative space”: the unsaid and the unsayable.

### **What is the best moment you have had creating or presenting your work?**

I always feel profound gratitude when someone “gets” something out of my work. That is an ambiguous verb, and I do use it in its widest, most ambiguous sense. I had a variety of jobs before getting my teaching job at Case, and I often find myself missing some of the more concretely productive work I did: i.e. picking apples, making sandwiches, weeding perennial and kitchen garden beds, helping people locate or check out library books, etc. The value of these forms of labor was a lot more immediate and palpable than that of writing poetry and teaching others to write poetry. In my extreme moments of doubt, poetry can feel cut off from the world of clear and direct effects. It can feel too self-indulgent,

too self-circuited. I am always surprised and moved when my attempts to “make” something verbal out of experience (the verbal being, for whatever reason, my primary orientation to the world) actually open spaces for connection. I feel those moments of wonder all the time in my encounters with student work, and I love it when my own work is capable of giving that sensation to other people.

### **How has the Creative Workforce Fellowship affected your career as an artist or your art work?**

It is first and foremost a lesson in humility. People always say that when they win prizes or awards—that they feel honored and humbled by the recognition—but it’s true. To have one’s work valued in this way is empowering, of course, but it is also a reminder of how much we owe in return, of how deeply fortunate we are to work in the ways we work, with the support and the freedom to do so. The Fellowship has also made me think about what it means to be a “returned” native and now resident of Cuyahoga County. I wrote my second book, *Green is the Orator*, while living here, and I am proud to think that it was inspired in large part by the life I lead here. I am ready to start a new writing project now, and the Creative Workforce Fellowship feels like a double movement: a ratification of coming home, and an open horizon into my future here.

\*\*\*

For more information about Sarah, please visit <http://www.case.edu/artsci/engl/Gridley/gridleyindex.htm>

---

For more information about the Creative Workforce Fellowship or the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture, please visit [www.cpacbiz.org](http://www.cpacbiz.org) or contact (216) 575-0331 or [info@cpacbiz.org](mailto:info@cpacbiz.org).

CWF is a program  
operated by

Generously funded by