



Last Leaves

Issue 1 | Fall 2020

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Cover design by Kiera Baron

Notes from the Editors

This issue was born out of a desire to create a poetry community in the absence of physical gatherings. Kiera Baron, Maina Chen, and I wanted a space to talk poetry, and starting *Last Leaves* gave us the chance to do that while discovering and encouraging new and accomplished poets. We read each and every submission and spent every Tuesday night discussing the attributes in each poem, ultimately deciding on these 150 or so poems for the first issue. We were blown away by the quality and variety of work sent to us, and we are so grateful to everyone who contributed.

~Cailey Johanna Thiessen

I wanted nothing to do with poetry. I learned in high school that poetry had to rhyme and if it didn't, it wasn't good. But six years ago I met two beautiful, amazing souls who I credit all my love of poetry and the growth of my poetic voice to: Jim Ellefson and Cailey Thiessen (the very one above). And Maina Chen earns all my gratitude for showing me different genres. But this is more than us. It's Warren Baker, who gave my words concision; Kim MacQueen, who taught me everything about publishing; and all of you. Without each of you writing, reading, submitting, we wouldn't be here today.

~Kiera S. Baron

I'm still in awe that this is finished. A massive shoutout to Kiera and Cailey—without them, there would be no lit mag. I wouldn't have even attempted poetry. I used to think it was an elusive pinnacle of writing that only those who had an absolute mastery of English could do. I'm so glad that's blasted out of my brain now. I deeply appreciate those who share their writing and their process towards growth. It has been an absolute privilege and joy to work with these phenomenal ladies and review all the exceptional works we've received. Thank you all, time and time again.

~Maina Chen

Content Warning

Some poems in this book contain content that may be sensitive to some readers (including struggles with eating, body image, and self-harm). Most of these poems are accompanied by very obvious titles, so please feel free to read, skim, or skip them as you need. At *Last Leaves*, we understand how reading sensitive content can not only affect our daily lives but our mentality and overall state-of-being. Please take care of yourselves, and take breaks reading the content if you need.

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The Dancer
Emily Blackmore

the poet learns how to dance (a pantoum)

Raphael Luis Salice

feet together, but leave a little gap in
between the legs—*this is step one*
the flicker of candles, silhouettes mimicking
just the two of us, the dance has begun

between the legs, butterfly wings flutter
my hand tracing the rhythm of your waist
just the two of us—*the poet én the lover*
one leg forward, keep the other in place

your hand tracing the rhythm down my waist
deep in thought while the violin weeps
now move two feet back, *make me tiptoe in place*
as we make abstract shapes on rose-bed sheets

the violin weeps softer, before it fades
feet apart, knees buckled, lips on the mouth
on rose-bed sheets, *a mess has been made*
silhouettes lie still before the flame dies out

the dancer learns how to write a poem

Raphael Luis Salice

hold the pen like how you hold my hand
spin my ink around, in cursive, incursive
let the words you etch sink into sand-
paper, rub against it, smoothen your verses

reduce our movement to a metaphor,
with which you stab on corkboard, ideas
why don't you kiss me until your lips 'come sore
that way your words will be all about us

don't forget to breathe, caesura, say Surah,
rhyme each line with our limbs and joints
learn the language of our bodies, making use of
our shapes, with our arches and points

an ink-stained mirror under the flickering light
this is the way you will learn how to write

My Daughter Whirls

Liz Whiteacre

Under bursts of fire,
your cheeks look feverish
—bangs curled, matted to your
temples—and you laugh,
 out of sync
with the tinny Sousa band.

Your feet stomp asphalt,
naked heel pivoting.
Your circle is so wide,
your dress billows and your arms'
trajectories guide metal sticks
that crack and blur.

In this moment of your joy,
all I can think is *careful, you could*
 burn yourself
in this dance beneath a sky
sprinkled with supernovas,
but I press my lips,

this time, I don't say it.
 I watch you spin—
 a comet in orbit.

LA SERENISSIMA

Michael Angelo Stephens

Night sky over Venice, the names of
The dead at San Michele, Ezra Pound,
Igor Stravinsky, Joseph Brodsky, and

On every balcony, in every
Doorway, the ghosts chant, history sings along,
Humming through the Adriatic gloaming,

This liquid city, more dream than real
On the dusky Rialto and its dank
Sidereal alleys and side streets skirting lesser

Canals and bridges; we walk after these
Ghosts and sunset, the disgorged ocean liners
Re-peopled and sailed off, eerily Venice

Is empty, we go (andiamoci),
Dreaming, smoke of fog at our ankles.

Kissing Evening

Yash Seyedbagheri

streetlamps kiss the dying day goodbye
and the evening hello
butter-colored kisses
planted across verdant yards
mingling with branches and blossoms
lavender and pink burst over skies
and footsteps clickety-clack, clickety-clack
on the way to bars which beckon with booming jukebox
and small worlds behind booths
friends waiting to tell of failed tests

lecherous bosses, pranks, bills, credit card debts
and gratitude for booze and evening
while the moon rises, triumphal lady
they laugh, a little too loud
trying to ignore emails darting
while the moon fights off foam clouds
drifting in, out, and then into
the emails call
special meetings called for tomorrow
an exam that seems a little more daunting

who was Nicholas II? Let's research
him over vodka
but the clouds have darkened
the vodka diluted
the bar clears,
dorms and study sessions calling
moon's smile extinguished by the early hints of
morning
soon the sun will banish the moon
until the streetlamps kiss the day goodbye once more

it's only twelve hours

The City of the Dead

Brittany Coffman

crooked statuesque neck in chair
muffled gold against winter palming
slicing heartless diaspora into weeping glass

*Rex tremendae majestatis
Qui salvandos salvas gratis
Salva me, Fons Pietatis
Salva me, Fons Pietatis*

rust bared nails between her thighs
finches snapped to dead red attention
the king-hawk calling the end

*Quantus tremor est futurus
Quando Judex est venturus*

traitor's game to translate bone
matching anger to smoked silver
teeth burning uses of shadow maiden

*Damnata, invisus ubique
Ab omnibus, ad
Infinitum*

throne varnish of purloined wolf eggs
the king-hawk goes unseen
as the button moon shatters into masculine tear milk

WOLF MOON ECLIPSE

Karla Huston

Somehow when I'm not looking,
the moon will disappear
under its creeping halo
of red. It's minus two outside,
and I'm not going out to look for it,
trusting it's there, like I trust
tomorrow will arrive before
I can say it is today, again.
I believe in the moon—red glow
or not, wolf howling at my heels—
or not. The moon needs to do
what moons do. A new moon
is a trick of darkness. It's there.
Darkness is not forever.
It's there to remind us.

Moths

Jeremy Nathan Marks

The moon is a lantern
drawing moths to spectral fabric
they fill out the night's fluttering form
searchlight stalking a watchman.

With the Moonflowers

B. A. France

quiet night
staccato song of crickets
in the darkness

interrupted by the
desperate honking of a goose

a single goose
flying overhead between
the creeks

again and again
calling in search
of a response

with no answer in silence
he circled again

and we looked up
into the black night
with the moonflowers

Sins and Van Gogh

Antara

You pick roses from a garden
Precariously rid them of their thorns
And begin arranging them in a crown on top of my head.
You hum an off-key tune
I think it's my favourite song.
The sky is the hue of Van Gogh's *Sunset at Montmajour*
And I wonder if you'd have preferred sunflowers instead.
The red of these roses looks like the red of your tongue
I tease you
And you stick it out at me.
We stay like this for long enough.
The sky is now the colour of Vincent's *Starry Night*.
Your eyes get that glazed look they so often do when you're with me.
If I could brush it away
I hope you know I would.
Instead I go on my tip-toes
My flower crown slides back
And I kiss you.
We stay like this for long enough.
And I wonder once again if you'd have preferred
Vincent's fifteen sunflowers instead.
You shift my crown back into place
And pull out the flask of brandy you always carry.
It is a reminder of everything that has changed.
Roses over sunflowers.
Glazed eyes over indulgent smiles.
Brandy over sunlight.
We lay under Vincent's stars and play pretend
Because letting go under these stars would be a waste of art.
You behold this moment
A crown over my head and my head over your chest.
And some part of you begrudgingly whispers "I love you"
And I do too.
You stare at me
And I stare at my sins that you carry.



Marilyn and Me
Danielle Wirsansky

Opening Day of The Van Gogh Sunflowers Exhibit

Alexandra Graffeo

The day the Sunflowers exhibit opened
they gave out sunflowers to everyone
in the city, and the place was an explosion
of yellow and green. Pedals were getting
tied up with petals, causing traffic jams
punctuated with tinkling sounds of bike bells,
whole blooms were floating in the water.
Tourists reached their hands over railings to grab
the floating bouquets from their canal cruise ships,
coffee shops surrendered their green-leaf decals
for fresh, living, golden substitutions, although
inside the shops the smell remained unchanged.
It was like the sun itself had come down to the city
to celebrate, and had gotten caught up in the wheel
of a two-seater bike, and burst into a million
pieces. It was chaos, the kind that bewilders,
so beautiful that it seems as if it had been
carefully created and not at all spontaneous.
It was swirls of daylight in shades of gold, twirling
Across a sky of billowing white clouds, it was
Cafes that were lit up by an ethereal light
While people passed by on cobblestone streets.
It was gardens teeming with irises, it was
Almond blossoms against a bright blue sky.
It was a day for living, with all the joy and despair
That live inside everyone but always hides away
In shame and fear that we will be judged too harshly.
I think Vincent would have been quite taken
with the vision of yellow turmoil. It might have
seemed to him to be his own wild mind, come
to life in that floating city of bridges, and maybe,
he would have felt welcome and at home
at last.

Bouquet

Jessica Covil

Petals in all the vibrant colors
of summer,
the season you moved in.
A sunflower in the center
to really emphasize the matter.
A few roses, soft pink—
not so hot like downstairs
where there's no A/C,
but like the calm, cool haven
that is our one-bedroom walkup.

A flower I call my favorite
but didn't know the name of:
larkspur, or maybe
delphinium for July,
which is almost like
our birth month—
when we emerged, "living together,"
after almost nine months.
Home had already been
growing on us.

One of these on each side
like bookends or parentheses,
a perfect unity. Pink gladiola
a shade softer than the roses,
the larkspur's purple
worn by a strand of snapdragons,
the orange ranuncula
always in bunches of three,
making me
wonder at the significance.
At last, a single daisy,
yellow echoed by the trumpet
of a daylily.

I remember
studying that bouquet
so I wouldn't forget:
how it looked and smelled
and made me feel, fulfilled
my long-held fantasy
of romance—
small gestures of a lover
made for no particular reason.
It was just Tuesday,
and everything was radiant.

Amaryllis

William J. Joel

A red that bleeds its color into winter's gray.
Like us, it only lives in countable time,
its only goal to meet our need for light,
then die, as we will, someday, leaving
less than ashes behind.

This red, its petals, large and folded back
like women's lips in black & white;
you know the color even when no one
has added tint. But that is paint
that's quickly wiped away.

My red is not a color, not a smear
of blood or wax, and not a hope of light.
No, mine's a breath I take while passing
by its bowl of earth, a brief perfume
of dark, caressing soil.

A muted search

Mugu Ganesan

I typed 'rare flower' in Google.
I was also suggested the most pristine,
beautiful, and colorful.
You are all that, but, most importantly,

you are rare.

So, I ignored and continued to look
for the rarest flower on earth.

I found a Jade Vine in Philippines
that is blue to light green in color
and is luminous in the night -

yes, you are the light. The flame that burns darkness.

I found a Youtan Poluo in China
that blooms once in 3,000 years
and indicates reincarnation of Buddha -

*oh, just to see you bloom. I can die and be born again.
And again.*

I found a Chocolate Cosmos in Mexico
that is deep red and used to bloom
in the evening but is now extinct -

no, you are around. You exist. In all splendor.

Maybe you are the Kadupul in Sri Lanka
that blooms at midnight and perishes
before dawn, rarely seen by any -

close, like a dream. But you never perish. I won't let you.

I continued to fly across a multitude of terrains,
till the end of earth in each direction -
sitting on my couch
looking at my phone,
Silencing the need to scream
your name out loud,

and kept tapping, typing, swiping,

hoping to find you.

The Enchantments of Seeds

Margaret Koger

I scatter tiny zinnia seeds on soil
where I should rather morning glories'
twining stems and trumpet blooms
with tendril curls in comfort rings

recall the joie de vivre of youth
vines cloaking the carport's open side
peasants to legions of roses nearby.

My brother's gift of a bare-root rose
given soil and water and sun, blossoms
twice a year, arched over a ten foot trellis
crowning our mother Queen of the May.

Haunts of roses and morning glories
enchantments plaiting heaven's gate
fill memories of childhood days
as zinnias Cinder(not ella) my garden

for I have no patience for pounding
fence nails strung with twine, urging
cautious tendrils to scale tough sisal.
No. I pray these scrawny zinnia seeds

so flighty and episodic compared to
morning glory, sweet pea, nasturtium
their firm, round, plump seeds so easily

resting under a half-inch blanket of soil.
No, I sow these wispy zinnias hoping
they'll root, thrive, and bloom to glorify
like Coronado coins, my will to thrive.

The world is quiet here

Kim Whysall-Hammond

Come with me on the wind says the dog
and I walk, humming
hot sun on my shoulder blades
ready to cut through my
one and only shirt.

She doesn't know I'm here
on the lonely, less alone than home, street
sneaking away to the Library
notebook clutched tight
maybe the dog will take it
maybe he's in league with her and all adults
telling me I read too much
am too quiet
need more air, exercise, chores
need to learn what life is
really all about, child
what work is
and it isn't something you read in books
which just give your airs above your own real family.

The humming's still there
like the sun
no one on this street cares
and so I am free
just for now
heading to the Library
humming a song
with a notebook and dreams.

nightly beauty drips in these hollow creases

Rushmila Khan

nightly beauty drips in these hollow creases,
crisp and sharp, hence ready to snap
glass fragile, we rest in our frozen niches.
specificity, definite brush strokes
as if sitting on a knife edge.
stalactites dig into his back
the monk doesn't stop meditating.
the fungus eats away its legs
he ponders over the art of patience.
sickening fatalities meander their way through,
my poetry fights when I can't.
sanctity hangs from the edge of my tongue.
billows of grey from god, or writer's block.

I Have Become Dangerous

Freesia McKee

On inauguration day, I walked to the library. I carried
in my bag a book about maps because I am curious
about wandering. But, just the idea.

I drank warm chai out of a grey mug JoAnn gave me.
Before we knew
what was going to happen. Remember

he was put into power? Even the harm of the symbolism
pierced us, hooked fish. We were jutting
head-first into the atmosphere.

Two women on the corner are speaking
about nuclear war. Our world is filled with women
who talk about disaster. Two women on the spray-painted

sidewalk, waiting for the bus. Two women in a kitchen,
one sitting, her food brought to her,
the other standing. There was so much waiting,

for anyone, when it happened,
a throng of grief. In my bag, I was a container
filled with egg roll and rice

on the barreling bus. I was spaghetti leftovers. I was frigid
vegetable soup. I would say poems used to be
a protest, but this implies a confidence

in the art form. My grief painted a fabric banner
too large for me to hold. I was written. Ever surprised.
I knew it was bigger than a single person,
but I should have known

something about collective experience winnowing to each,
feeling for the new ruptures through membrane,
new scars on the walls of my container,

since when grief appears, she always writes the griever.

My Partner is My Mask When I Need to Be Lighter

Christian Hanz Lozada

I learned to mask my skin
by asking for service through White Mom
by getting jobs through White Brother
by being treated like White Grandma's caretaker not family
these instances taught me invisibility is bearable
if you can wear another's skin
and pull their joints like strings.

My partner learned to mask herself in my skin
by hearing family stories through me
by using my tongue to speak for her at family meetings
by using my darkness as the password to cultural decisions
by using my skin, she gets access to the things that matter: culture, history, place
these instances taught me invisibility is less light and dark
more a visual spectrum

and while I can comfortably wear lighter skin
I don't know how to let someone wear mine
don't understand why someone would want to

COURAGEOUS MOMENTS

David Spicer

Some people say the world will end soon.
They wear masks and gloves to protect themselves.

I protect myself with special masks and gloves,
staying inside among books and thoughts of you.

Thoughts of you among books keep me inside.
Together we live in this world and play Scrabble.

This world has scabbled our lives together.
The virus separates but unites us.

Separate we unite against the virus.
When we're feeling brave we walk toward the clouds.

The clouds make us brave when we walk toward them.
We are airy, white angels of dying Earth,

but we aren't dying angels of the dark Earth.

We are the reason the world will not end soon.

Now Hiring losers

Lauren Scharhag

Letter missing on the sign,
message nevertheless received:
Now seeking sundown souls.
We usher out the day, leaving a blank slate
for dawn and its fresh hot brews,
its buttered biscuits, its cracked eggs.
Grains of salt and crumbs
have been wiped from the table.
Empty condiment bottles and napkin holders
will be filled again. At 2 a.m.,
we'll exit the employee door
by the dumpster, cigarettes in hand,
and know what possibilities
await us in the pre-dawn hours.

A scene perceived

William J. Joel

Women, laughing, sharing
stories on the breezy side.
Someone who was reading
folded his book and tucked it,
his table, vacant, but not for long.
The red-haired girl dispenses
more coffee, more pastries, makes change
in a flash with well-skilled hands.
That song, in the background, behind
all the voices, the clatter of dishes,
the shuffle of paper, I know
it's a woman, singing, but nothing
much else. This could be a coffee shop,
diner, a restaurant, dozens of places
where people commune. But now
it's a memory, soon a forgotten,
as I pick up my journal
and walk out the door.

Pala Casino 7am

Christian Hanz Lozada

I'm dressed in clothes that could signal homelessness:
dirty, holey, stained t-shirt
dirtier, holier shorts,
but not stained
and the stench of alcohol seeping from my pores.
I've got my teetering down to a science
my backpack, covered in Disney pins,
looks like I stole it from a tween.

White Lady 1 lets me pass
she put her LV bag down
started to get neck pain from looking at me over her shoulder
afraid I'd steal it
 empirical evidence would confirm her suspicions
so I thank her, wait for white lady 2 in front to pay
the White Lady Worker at the counter
before I order a breakfast sandwich

White Lady 1 stands near her bag and describes the food in the case
"It all looks fake,
not in that good way,
I don't want anything from here."
And I don't know who she's talking to,
but she's still in line
still deciding
still shitting on the food.

White Lady Worker asks for my ID with my credit card,
not looking if it was signed
not asking White Lady 2 for the same
and I show it

White Lady 1, “ugh, I’m going to eat here.”
Seriously, who are you talking to, I think,
and grab my suspicious order and turn to leave,
as I pass, she circles her arm around her bag.

and I wonder if I’m going to taste the racism in the sausage
or egg
or maybe it’s baked into the bread
but I know, really,
like right now,
that even if I could taste it, know it,
I’d second guess if it were actually there.

The Wonder Wheel

Harriet Shenkman

My plan was to escape
over the Brooklyn Bridge,
poverty not a badge,
immigrant parents never an injustice.
I fled on the BMT line, a long braid
down my back, sandals
on my feet,
to a narrow railroad flat,
Greenwich Village, poetry and La Dolce Vita
my desire.
My mother came to visit
with a package of meat ground twice,
frowned at
the dampness of the rooms.
I did not budge.
My heart unsevered
until a Southern boy with hazel eyes
turned up.
He looked like Marcello Mastroianni
and knew all the capitols of Africa.
On our first date, he listened
to Thelonious Monk intently
and three months later, I proposed
and he said yes.
I rode back over the Brooklyn Bridge
to my parents, where
the sea air smelled like fish
and the Wonder Wheel
lit up the boardwalk.

INNER MONGOLIA

Eduard Schmidt-Zorner

Star-sprinkled, speckled
sky dome over icy ground,
snow dust covered.
Frozen rain clings to fir branches.
There is not a light or a sound
only green veils of northern lights.
Snow flurry over grey mountains
which have no paths and passes.

Horses graze on sediment pastures,
scrape food with their hooves
from under the snow layer.
Yaks give fat milk, patient animals.
Butter is beaten by tribal women
in their yurts near the fire.
In iron pots mutton meat boils.
Soon the sun will lure the first sprouts.

Sacred stone heap with a pole,
supplications on paper strips,
a silk scarf flutters as sacrifice.
A shaman hums incantations.
Any sense of time disappears
in meditation, a fearless beauty
surrounds and nourishes me,
whispers at treetops.

Snow melt with rising floods
changes rivers' course.
Torrential currents transform
and create new tundra images,
re-paint the landscape
on a grey canvas, in a steel frame
of high clouds.
Eternal continuous change.

Off the Highway, a Road

Carolyn Adams

It's the kind of neighborhood that gets worse
as it gets older.

The German smokehouse on the highway,
with its fragrant cinders,
runs out of money and closes down.

A playmate's father kills himself.
The boy finds him after school and is
never the same.

The shy girl with the silent Slavic father
gets "in trouble"(it's rumored she grows fat and round)
and is sent away.

The rent house next door
hosts a murder
by way of a jealous ex-husband.

Cheap apartments go up across the road.
There's a crackhouse in the next block.

But this was once an old prairie.
It remembers itself that way.
Switchgrass, verbena, meadowlarks,
bobwhites, winecups, wild onion.

And at the bayou, willows over the water,
spider lilies in the shade.



WAVE
Mike Knowles

Hoard

Allan Lake

Immigrant mould breathes with ease
on calendar from another millenium,
skyscraper of cardboard boxes, full
of who-knows-what. Roach habitat,
forgotten momentos of motivation,
bric-a-brac awaiting overdue glue,
teacup of congealed duck fat,
unopened box of Smarties in case
a board game requires inspiration.
I visit classmate after decades away.
Lint-capped novels enclose lost plots,
used shoes turned green, a gallon jug
with orange plastic flower, rotting curtains,
rotten sashes with cracked pane, bits
of bluetac hold up nothing, an unmade bed,
discard tissues wiped tears, snot, what-not.
My old classmate never left home.
Dinosaur TV here, smaller tv with rabbit
ears there on soiled doily between grand-
ma's ballet figurines that figured in clutter
of things after she was sent to cemetery.
Why does he keep them?

Left-overs, all Mum's clothes, fur coat
on the foot of bed, stuffed toys, tarnished
jewelry in need of elbow grease or
duck fat, missing buttons, missed
opportunities. Symbol of a church,
football team and times no worse but
before this time, a rock-hard roll nib-
bled on one corner, package of mouse
traps minus one that's somewhere
embracing death, chipped dishes
from one set intermarried to ex-
otics from op shops, garage sales,
landfill refuse that never got home.
Yes, We shall gather at the river.
Old newspapers in bound mound,
a cache, a precaution against news
shortage, set of dated encyclopedia
atop bookcase, collecting dust
on this treasure island where
there's no wifi, no am or pm
but a clock says 3:21 forever.

The Thai Daughter's Homecoming

Richard Oyama

I'm on the road to Soppong. A black man
And a Dane escort me to the inn. The owner
Feeds me cashew chicken. The younger daughter
Makes an infant from a plastic strip, tucking her in.

These are stories children tell themselves.
My room is earth-toned. I wash and shave and
Join the family around a fire-pit.
A pharmacy student who knew North Dakota

Gives me grilled pork from a hibachi that looks
Like a lemon juicer. The owner plies me with glasses of
Boxed wine. They are curious. I talk pidgin, asking
about luu and its rising tone and listen for

Repetition and onomotopeia like same same not
Unlike a rooster's bugle across a span of day.
At the highway's apron I see workers in conical hats

Stooping to their labor. I know this in my blood. My
Mother-ancestors were Hiroshima farmers. They
Stooped to the backbreaking motion, hoeing, plucking
A green bounty as dusk spilled gold over the tree-line.

A Morning Drive in Iceland

Alexandra Graffeo

In the morning, a dusty light settles across
A flat plain of volcanic rock, mountains rising like
Distant dragons marching against the horizon.
The sky reaches her hands, stretching out to
Pull up the sun and end the long darkness. The
rays of the sun, bright and strong, are harsh
And unpleasant after the borealis dance of
Night. Ice giants yawn out of a frozen lagoon
To peek at their enemy, solar beams, and then
Dive down to the depths of clear blue
To await the ribbon-like lights of twilight.
Cars drive along the twisted, snow-covered roads
Stopping to admire the churches built amongst
Clusters of trees and shrubbery that dot the landscape,
to let their passengers chase rainbows that arch
out of waterfalls tumbling down sheer rock,
and clusters of diamonds glitter on the black shores
as the wind makes the sand tinkle like bells.



Columbia River

Carolyn Adams

SEASONS

Eduard Schmidt-Zorner

Short hot Siberian summer,
lush, aromatic, wild and opulent,
cranberries of the Tundra in abundance
their bitter taste for a nomad's sustenance
complimenting nut-tasting mushrooms.

A boat inches along the river shore
slowly through the morning mist.
An open plain, riverside forest as home
where reindeers whirl like a maelstrom
to move from summer to winter pastures.

Dinner is waiting for the herders
in the pointed yurts.
The feet are hurting, the bones.
After fat soup, curd and salted tea
the herdsman dozes off into a dream.

October, snowfall, incessantly,
ice wind, frozen landscape,
threatening horizon,
endless monochrome expanse,
birds pecking the last fruit of the trees.

I stack firewood at the log cabin wall
and close the door to meditate.
Soon ice lets everything solidify.
Trees as snapshots, rivers as still life,
frozen in months-long persistence.

Whirly August.

Okpeta, Gideon Iching

Your visit was in August when the rain had
gone on a recess to welcome her sisters
with a dining apron around waist.

with the table set for a banquet-
a dinner, a call
came from the elders to depart suddenly
in peace.
Then i remembered a crying dog cried
3-days ,7-times before the dawn in august.
For, in my tradition crying dogs signify death.

I watched them strangled life out of
her,
trying to help meant waging war
with spirits,
for women don't fight spirits, they
submit willingly.
Father infested some dried tubers of
yam
on a paled looking day, in
august,
waited for a dead festival in his
stomach.
Men with spirits, in blacks from the left
heavens

beckoned on her wandering corpse
laying supine on a bier six feet below.
Light shaded, darkness shun like the last
flames of a waxy candle.
This scene reminded me about her last
words on a dying, dining table

*“this life is a china cup
brittle & beautiful & fragile & brief*

*today
is only one day –
with or without us
there will be more”
---Paul Robert Mullen*

**The sadness of trees is that they do not have
the ability to move freely.**

Brad Stumpf

But If I - a tree.
And You - a tree - across the street,
Our branches would reach, to find and tickle each other.
Our leaves would fall and blow, to form blankets
That cover each others roots,
And help each other grow.

Our roots would reach below, beneath the busy street,
Cars Unknowingly driving over our tangled feet.

Could we see?
Do We need to see?

I have my fingers in your fingers and
My toes in your toes.
My hair on your hips and yours on mine.

If I had eyes, they would be closed.

Two leaves

Roy Duffield

This is a true story
Of two leaves

Once upon a time
There were two leaves
Who in their prime
Fell from the same tree
One at a time
Into the debris
Then blew together awhile
Down the same street.

One was big
And one was small
Though to the autumn wind
They were equal.
So they grazed twig-to-twig
All through the fall
As they blew in sync
Alongside the same wall.

One caught a ride
On a stranger's boot
While right alongside
The other leaf blew
As they danced in time
Inseparable
And they blew through life
As one and as two.

They turned yellow together
Then purple, then red
Birds of a feather
Neither followed nor led

Together forever
Neither thought nor said
As they blew together
Along the same riverbed.

One day one blew left
And the other blew right
But they came together again
As day became night
With a chill in the air
And the fading light
They blew as a pair
Still side-by-side.

One blew in the pavement
One blew in the road
Yet never was it stated
And never did they know
They were never estranged
And they were never alone
As they blew the same way
On down that same road.

They were caught
In a whirlwind, the muddle
Of a storm
They lay to rest in a puddle
And began losing their form.

Trodden into the same earth
Baked under the same sun
They disappeared from this world
As one.

Yet as they lay there
Neither one dreaming
Of to the wind again taking

Nor of how fleeting
This coincidence of nature
Without any meaning
Nor explanation
Yet what a sweet thing!

That once upon a time
There were two leaves.
Who in their prime
Fell from the same tree
One at a time
Into the debris
Then blew together awhile
Down the same street.

A planet is dreaming

Cheryl Caesar

In the last battle,
humans fire seeds for bullets:
make compost for trees.

the loneliest tree in the world

Kate LaDew

the only tree for 250 miles in any direction,
was killed by a drunk driver one night in the middle of the sahara
so I, the second loneliest tree, on an island in New Zealand
the only tree for 170 miles, moved up a spot, and I knew,
to the minute, when I did,
hearing the cry of the loneliest tree in the world
when the carbon fiber of the drunk driver's fender
smithereen-ed its trunk,
chainsawed through the 300 rings of its middle
and left it dying 250 miles away from anything that could understand
all its pain bubbled up from the earth's core,
spread through the mantle,
the asthenosphere, the silicate crust
split each spherical shell of the world
until the pain ran up and down the roots
of every tree that existed and might exist
our collective agony making a sound so pure
it echoed to the edge of everything,
all the way to me, cycloning my leaves
in a language I thought thought only I understood
and this sudden knowledge of things like myself,
of a world full of trees I would never see,
of trees that once existed and existed no longer,
nearly split me in two
-- because I had known I was lonely, not that I was alone --
and when dendrologists came to New Zealand
to crown me 'loneliest tree in the world,'
they put their hands over a scar, new and unmapped,
shaped like a bolt of lightning in the very center of me, where a heart would be.

Donald Wyman Crabapple

V. Jane Schneeloch

Let me keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,
which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.
Mary Oliver

What matters about this tree?
This small tree next to a giant oak
on a busy city street?
Perhaps the miracle of a bud
emerging from a dead branch,
or the fragile blossom
that attracts the monarch,
or the wonder of a child
in a confetti of petals,
or the comfort of cool shade
offered to a stranger.
Or perhaps it is the reliable and persistent force
that turns earth and rain and sun into tree?



Four Trees
Cynthia Yatchman

Ode to Balboa Park San Diego

Jenean McBrearty

You are beautiful,
full of orchestral arias
cascading down synapses.
The pungent aroma of eucalyptus
and pepper trees
hanging in the air over stucco facades
of Spanish decoration.

Your eyes are beautiful,
heavy with dreams that cannot be shared,
shut away with the ghosts'
silent footfalls in the corridors.

You lips are beautiful,
smiling, whispering—
echoing with hushed conversations
of long white-dressed women
because ladies were restrained then,
and disciplined their children,
walking slowly past art and artifacts
displayed for the curious staring with wonder.

Decades-old palms wave greetings and goodbyes to passers-by—
children, sailors, and day-camp kids,
gaze at El Cid astride his bulging horse
presiding over cherished remnants
of the fair exposition.

We live where our hearts reside,
and mine resides within you,
beside the lily pond
where we are forever full of grace.
If San Andreas ever reclaims the earth,
or contractors rearrange the horizon;
if steel and glass carpet the cityscape,
let this remain.
For I live here though I am far away
in a place called old, old age.

Carry your sadness well

Obinna Chilekezi

Sunday was an eclipse
The darkness overcome the beauty of a day
I saw you boil like a volcano
Unstoppable, the lava purges on and on

I have seen ecstasy of love shine
And bitterness of hatred groom in you
Just like the petal fades from the hibiscus
And the heart spread venom as smile

Come off it, this should be another day of love
As the clouds cannot withhold the rainfall for too long

See the mash, the frozen music of dawn
And the sun spreads the day with laughter

You cannot stand there all alone, along with sadness
Come up now join the world to smile
Each a person, with a burden to carry
And yours not an exception to be.

EVEN THE STARS HAVE THEIR OPINIONS

R.T. Castleberry

Sunday dusk closes--
worship decided, curfew declared.
Refining the guardian task,
I'm counting the stranded, the derelict
walking in the road.
Headache in the afternoon,
today is another death march--
wartime rain falls, children cry by the river.
Walking above blistered streets,
the air stinks of lamentation.
A friend has made a business of
cutting bodies from corpse ropes.
Figures argue in my dreams,
fight over angel status,
anti-depressants, the worth of forgiveness.
Like Brando in Last Tango,
lunging between wastage and the invalid,
I'm seething with weariness.
Never an emptier day,
there is a ravening, an unraveling.
Returning to the charity table,
I'm waiting for revival,
none nearing my gazing eyes.

same time next week

Luke Carmichael Valmadrid

sunday nights at my place are like
Satan sighing with the Seraphim, seeing
similarities on the same side of sobriety, sedatives
sans surnames, nothing light enough to supersede
the setting sun, so all the dark liquids might as
well be holy water, because you still go to church
after college, and I realized that praying doesn't help.

sometimes we talk. at length about old friends, at
width about new friends, at depth only when we're weak
enough to admit where our strength comes from.

sometimes we just sit. you on the couch, me
at the kitchen counter, as if changes in position
should imply change, the clouds trick us
into thinking that the stars aren't always out. you turn
towards the night sky, and I borrow a glance, the back of
your head casts a shadow on the glass so that I can see the
dark side of the moonshine, somehow that suggestion of your
silhouette still spins shadows into shining shards of soul
that I try to scry with and fail.

I don't remember when
I stopped walking you to the door. but I did.
sometimes you come in sandals so it's
clear that you shouldn't take as long
as you do to leave again. sitting in
the dark, I hear my name and
flimsy monday lunch plans in
your voice--it's like you can't
stop the trumpets of the
heavenly host from
sounding and I
can't help but
play along

at least until the door shuts when you close it
until the lock clicks when I turn it
and suddenly
we both feel full responsibility for the mess we've made

HOW THINGS ARE THESE DAYS

Michael Angelo Stephens

There are so many hours in the day, so
Many words in my head, then comes silence,
The black hole of memory, going down
Some empty highway in a beat-up car,
Listening to the only station on
The radio, some endless right-wing talk
Show, praising the plucky billionaires and
Oligarchs in their fight against the left
And the environmentalists, and some
Old guy calls in to testify to the
Show's truth, whatever the hell he means by
Such a remark out here in the middle
Of the desert in the high heat of day,
And it all gets inside of me like a
Virus or the plague, almost like a song
You hate, but which you can't get out of your
Head all day and into the night, driving
And driving as you hum along to it.

Cherubs

Theresa C. Gaynord

There's abandonment in the night tonight. When fortunes
are spent and love is absorbed into the atmosphere in
an attempt to heal and engage. Cherubs are our little
helpers and like detached spirits of the dead they coat
our senses and feed our souls with discretion,
touching, silent, like the quizzical frown of a pallet
adjusting to coconut milk broth with tomatoes, cabbage,
galangal, lemongrass and cilantro. It may take us mere
mortals a few minutes to see daylight, but we savor in the
advantages of it when we do.

this moment

Mark A. Fisher

I will saunter
down a cemetery road
gleamed with frost
as a 22° halo
plays hula hoop
with the moon
teasing
the coming winter
my footsteps
beating Jazz
across the gravel
as graveyard angels
sway in icy darkness
moonlight limned
and waiting
glorified
knowing no other
has experienced
this moment
with infinity too big
to echo

Knowing God

Goodness Olanrewaju Ayoola

I

Begins with self-acknowledgement as a body
Of woes: a leaf paled by the other side of sunlight;
A leaf hung between gravity in the belly of a crazy storm.

II

I repeat a verse until I levitate and kiss the
Elbow of God. I conclude
Liturgies with a bangle of emphasis.
I anticipate God's stimulus by stressed importunity.

III

The greatest creation of God is darkness.
The way it pushes us right back to him/ the way
It pulls us from him. And we are not unaware
When we tear hell over heaven.

IV

I stand unclad in front of a mirror. It is the dumbest way to think
I can draw God face close. I see just *member*. A man torn
Between desires: a woman's core and strong incense of mints. I still don't
Know which part of my *tripartite* takes after God.

V

I want to be all fun and frolic in your presence. Boogie down.
God says, *I am not an experience*.

*I am existence existent. Quiet your soul, tranquil quietness or you are
On your way to hell.*

Addendum: God is a bottomless oxymoron.

Ode to a God

Lukpata Lomba Joseph

Kudi is the pen-name of a god, a ramp
somewhere between a revving automobile
and the exfoliating skin of a corroded Peugeot.

In my room, I gawk at my neighbour
through rimed window glasses glistened
by white light,
she lopes along the street, pushing
her body against
the hush of the witching hour, holding
fast to her breast in a tray. She lopes

down Macaulay Street until,
she is swallowed by darkness.

Kudi is a good reason that lounges
in the lacuna set up between
her knees and the edge of her skirt.

In the garden, mum's waffle
with God goes sour,
mum wrestles with her body
to please God.
Mum thinks of a pill prescribed
at the chapel,
you don't go to God empty-handed.

Kudi is God's only reason for resisting
prayers, mum has to fight
to work her way through God.

Kudi is a shrill sound, somewhere between
a becke and *a bail*,
a burray and *a bullshit*,
a wotcha and *a son of a bitch*.

In the room, my lover lifts her body
and flaunts her enamel.

In the dark, my lover laughs,
she will not stop smiling,
she bumbles, only grows fluent at
you are funny.

Last night her face faded
into a harmattan nightmare,
today my lover parades the bluish
whiteness on her enamel.

Kudi is a pen-name. *Kudi* is a delicate
revelation of the silver in my lover's teeth.

Note: *Kudi* is a Hausa word for money.

Denominations

Gale Acuff

I guess when I'm dead I'll be in Heaven
or Hell, maybe it depends on what church
you attend, at ours I have to believe
in Jesus and try not to sin and try
to be good and with a little luck, grace
that is, I go to Heaven when I croak
but at the church catty-corner to ours
you don't have to believe at all, you're saved
already, you go to Heaven because
Jesus didn't die in vain and died for
everybody so after Sunday School
today I told Miss Hooker I'm changing
churches if my parents sign off but she
started to cry. Maybe love is like this.

The Seas of You

Karlo Sevilla

I see a flotilla of white sails
on the surface
of your teardrop,
and pastel-colored submarines
stealthy underneath.
Your drops of sweat?
I don't see them;
I feel them en masse
when my arms
are octopus tentacles
wrapped around you.
Then, when you lie prone afterwards,
the wet strands of your black hair
scattered on your brown nape
lie as eels and sea serpents
gasping their last
upon newly dried-up
ocean bed.

Rising

Rhiannon Grant

the water appears on the hillside
under moss and bracken
creeps from damp rocks
sneaks into the stone-walled pool
built by hands this quiet simple square
takes our warts, our feet, refreshingly
can still be fouled or blocked
one flow is fought by fear
 the jug feels unworthy
 the jug worries about offending
another turns it away in waste
 the cup is already full
 the cup dislikes the flavour
I can drink or go thirsty
but the water will run anyway:
river, sea, rain, stone, spring.

The edge

Rajendra Shepherd

Swallowed up we merge,
The timid touch stirring,
Swirling plumes of love,
Upward from silt and mud,
To kiss the sunny surface,
To feel thrashing life.

Through her we wade,
Feet skimming rocks,
Skin blushed by need,
To feel the ocean's need,
Of depths unreached,
Eyes alive with fire.

Rolling waves crash,
Give way to tumbling force,
Bubbling sea foam,
That carries us,
Away to cool depths,
Where silence echoes.

Far from shore we are lost,
In bliss until the current,
Comes again,
The swell repeating,
'Come home' it calls,
Its refrain alive and tempting.

The Scent of the Sea

Marc Frazier

Imagine a begonia, an artichoke, the breath of an iron lung,
The moment you believe in solace to smoothe yourself.
Today you walk the steep cliffs where hikers
Trode the paths of slow generations; to us,
Memory is the lack of regret or an absence of want.
But a step is risky: a riptide in the wrinkle of time.
A forgotten insult, an amulet, a scattering of crows.
Because a melody I hum this morning has cinders and sparks,
A blue flame of inspiration to echo, an element undiscovered.
But I discover nonetheless, a gem polished between the unfinished prelude
for cellos
And the hope that in heaven, for instance, a boulevard welcomes heretics
Like desert its just-in-time shower.

Think About it Cousin

John C. Krieg

Think about it cousin
That place where we grew up
The hills, the river, the fields
Those narrow maple-lined streets
In that sleepy little town
They are us, and we are it
That's who we are...that's who we are

Think about it cousin
That Catholic religion
Poured over us
Like water-boarding
We were given the injection before
We even knew what hit us

Think about it cousin
Those stories of the old days
Ridiculing us for how good we had it
While during the (Great) Depression
They ate beavers and raccoons and carp
And had to marry their daughters off young

Think about it cousin
That white Cape Cod house overlooking the river
And us eventually claiming separate bedrooms
For our privacy, and so that we could beat off
That was the ejaculation of our youth
We were separated, yet somehow joined at the hip

Think about it cousin
With only rare exceptions we
hardly ever went anywhere
away from that sleepy little town
And then we went off to college, and only
on rare exceptions ever came back home

Think about it cousin
We are the progeny of a hardworking factory
worker and a hard working grocery store clerk
Who only wanted the best for us through the
sweat of their brows, and the calluses on their hands
Those times now faded to faint warm memories
That's who we are...that's who we are

Memory

Yong Takahashi

memory is the fiction
we create to survive
smiling, waxing poetic
convincing ourselves
more than others
lies becoming truth
as time passes, our
version becomes fractured
memories, speedbumps on
our road to fantasy land
a jarring stop, jumbling
our insides, our minds
scrambling, racing, avoiding
the road home fades as I lose
my way once more through
a self-inflicted maze

This is What We Never Notice During the Day

Martin Willitts Jr

There is a slight weight to the change from dark
when light whirlpools into day.

A white lily flares open, shifts slightly
like a lace curtain tussled by a slight breeze.

I'm carried digging in the brown-ochre ground.
The odor of lush, rich earthiness permeates the air.

The lily opens its cello solo, saturating
my bones with shapeless and tangible touches.

I want more of that briefness, again,
again, that aliveness, that return of the sensual,

arriving like reams of love letters. This passing
thrill never lasts, and I'm uncertain what to do —

to hold on or let go of this temporary thrill, hoping
I will feel it again. We live in this charmed life,

a life that flips through the pages of experience
to get to the good parts. We want to underline

those parts, dog-ear that section, go back, savor it.
But some other experience tugs for our attention,

insisting it is time to go. It is late, day is flaming out,
light simply moves ahead too fast.

Mendelssohn writes a violin concerto

Esther Sun

and stows it away for the winter, waiting for it
to germinate. Days later, I open the drawer

to find the cloud-outline of a girl who undos the work
that brought me here. Someone who warrants it.

Our lady of the in-between braids the cadenza
into her hair. Heartwood of last year's vacancy

and this year's awakening, pithed ceiling of my brain.
She snatches the light out of street lamps and binds up

Herr Mendelssohn's music into one thousand gifts
of unknowledge, a thousand refractions of song.

Our bride of the unbecoming spins the music
into a prism on the tip of her tongue. Every few pages

the shoulder rest dislocates from the curve of the violin's
hips, but sliding it back is not a problem for the resolved,

those who hunger for their own portions of light.

Reading Lips

Stephen Mead

If born unto silence, where Beethoven suffered
will there really be no sound there
or is it just some other frequency,
undetectable, fine?

Listen, feel. Don't say a thing.
Hear touch
breathing music, water
oozing, soothing, letting
down defenses.

Or does it?

The element moves, pretending a wall,
impenetrable, mute. Yet,
wires intensify, energy is
strung: a kind of tungsten
swimming afire with the core
soft & warm.

Come close, explore, sculpt,
a Michelangelo unaware of rare talent,
a fortress traced, then all stones, barriers
broken as if language were tangible, a sphere

only trust, instinct, in the dark, reading
lips, keys unspeakable, could share,
understand what song this matter means.

Life's a soap on my television screen

Naima Rashid

As I watch my city bleed
on the television screen,
I feel a new-age, digital-like sorrow;
lukewarm,
enough to flatter the conscience,
but not to trouble the mind,
enough to tug at the heartstrings,
but not to cause any pain.

The balancing is tricky, so
I keep the vista of my vision
cluttered with distractions and playthings -
coke cans and ketchup, pizza and pearls,
souvenirs from blindfolded travels,
Eiffel Towers in plaster of Paris,
Chinese vases made in Taiwan.

I hop from black to white,
obliterate the gray,
I appropriate the knowledge
according to my mood;
a bit of bloodshed, a bit of jazz,
some song and dance, some war and peace,
one way, it gets too much, too dark
for a sunshine bloke like me.

The world's a stage, and
life's a soap on my television screen,
the drama folds and unfolds,
and all I do is behold
while my conscience is doped;
it's vaudeville with human puppets,
a little crude at times.
I can handle it pretty well though,
I just need my shot,
between murders and musicals,
zapping in and out at will.

a brighter phoenix

Linda M. Crate

i am not your damsel
was born one
dark night
only moonlight to guide me
with a song of stars
as my crown
of flowers,
you wanted a girl of softer
petals;
but sometimes i am sharp
as the angles of angry thorns—
you didn't want this war bird
wanted a chickadee
to sing softly to you and tell you
all the pretty lies you wanted to believe
to be truths,
but i am the ocean roaring with hurricanes
ready to devour;
i am the flames of a forest fire untamed—
not a queen whose kingdom you could steal
or destroy and that scared you because
when you killed me i looked you in the eye,
and i told you were wrong;
i rose up from the ashes of your chaos
reformed with flames brighter than any universe
you'll ever know.

Only the Flares Remained

Daniel Edward Moore

For Roscoe

When trauma left us
parched & cracked,
sharpening its teeth on a puppy's bones,

we sewed his elegy
into our skin, like
porcupine prayers Grandma painted

on crosses by the
side of the road.
Making our mouths into flickering votives,

bright with a moth's
need for heat,
we'd never been this cold in July,

never seen the sky
exploding at dusk
with so much need for rescue.

The last thing we saw
was the moon weeping
for the pointless ends of us-

two silver arrows,
dull beyond shine,
bouncing like hearts off the night.

Flaming Champagne

Daniel Edward Moore

It's not the longing, more the linger after Life's drunk chauffeur doesn't make the death row curve & cell after cell of minutes moan for someone's skin to make memories with. I was tired of feasting on cigarette butts pretending they were shrimp. To be 8 on desperate's scale of 10 I chose to lighten the afternoon up, watching the Hindenburg's slow-motion burn in black & white bondage to a New Jersey sky. Sometimes it's the high that won't let you leave. Sometimes its flaming champagne.

When

Mandira Pattnaik

the stunned silence of the street across your home, gnaws
at you --- you, who loves her space, loves
the numb liveness in her bedroom --- shudder,
ask for nothing but a rough desk frayed
at the edges to pin her thoughts down.

you sit, preserving, persevering, waiting
for another noon when the street will shake itself
back to life, and long for a fistful of
that thrum to resonate across your
hemisphere, you imagine a bustle, and feel alive again.

solitude is so plentiful, the landscape so unchanging, you call someone you
severed out of your life and rejoice when he says,
he's watching birds! You find a pair on your window sill too;
you listen to their shrill voices --- growing
and celebratory --- of ginormous conquests.

Blue feathers.

DS Maolalai

breaking our cover
like rabbits
out of bullrushes,
the car exits dublin
and springs forward
north. it's going to be
somebody's birthday
and this is march,
so early in the year
that things are still
shining. sat
in the back seat,
we trade winebottles
and hand about sandwiches
while ciaran drives, quietly,
annoyed he isn't drinking. to our left
lambs jump, tumble
with summer in their bones
and on the right
cars motor past a river
sparking joy. we are going to donegal –
a five hour drive
if we're lucky. stopping at the northern border
to get more sandwiches
and so everyone but ciaran can piss. life
is chasing
behind us, the country
beautiful, the sky
a blue crabshell, a blue rock,
blue feathers
falling
out of blue birds.

ROBERT'S GUILT

John Brugaletta

I watched the chickadee munch on some seed,
then it exploded in a cloud of down.
The hawk flew it away with ease to where
her chicks lay snuggled in a nesting box
that I had nailed together last springtime
for birds that size and for their future broods.

I had not thought a hawk would settle in,
but settle in it did, and now I must
find some way to relieve this nagging guilt.

Samhain

Theresa C. Gaynard

Energy flows, shifting inward, watching me work

with calm silence; fusing action with tremendous power. There's a terrible physical presence shattering the veil between this world and the next. I feel its direct impact on me. My thoughts are scattering everywhere, electric flashes, I'm blacking out; there are missing pieces to my conversations, responses I can't recall. It's the summer's end, the beginning of a Celtic year, Samhain, the doorway to the sanctum sanctorum. The ritual; some are afraid, but the bonfire comes to burn away the strifes of old, a kind gesture from the horned god himself among the symptoms and consequences of imbalance. The hour is intense and I'm focused as insight comes pulsating rhythmically from his hands to mine. There is static in the force at first before it stabilizes. We are sky clad, nonsexual in a loving manner among the offerings, the altar. There's another lifetime I remember; the absorption of all colors.

Black, in all its transition, awaits me, removing all my characteristics, all my talents in a spiral, a labyrinth

prior to death. There's a significant change in time, temperature as I walk the edge of the woods, awake with my mind, connecting with nature. Through this trial run I see the complexities of a life, reevaluated, refined and reset. Potentially dangerous and destructive are the civilized sounds that do not encourage trust in the subconscious. The left hand path has a strong and positive response, as does the right hand path.

I see paradise in darkness, people laugh, sparrows
fly, little boys and girls dance, even those broken
or sold or given away. There is sanctuary in the
garden of rotting flesh and bone. Love songs that
tear your soul apart, blood-dripping note after note.
I see those I touch, those I love, breathe into me, cold lips
exuding warmth. Orange leaves, blossoms of liquid
red gold; grow, ascend. Morning smells are nestled high
within apple trees; what falls away is near as we awaken
only to sleep once again.

Separation Retold

Esther Sun

In Honfleur, spring sun works its way
through the flesh of the sky. Sailboats, tired
wayfarers, moor atop the harbor's steel-capped waters.

They sleep as if never expected to leave again.
By the water, an empty carousel turns. Strange how
after centuries of longing, the cobblestone pavement

now refuses the feet that walk it. That ache to expel
the *dépaysement* from their ankles and soles. Here,
even the seagulls lift their voices in prayer. *Where are you*

from? they caw to me after their splintered Amen. *What home*
do you belong to? As if home were a cellophane bag
of toffees waiting to be unwrapped. As if home

could be picked up and swallowed cleanly in one bite.

And yet home has never felt so real
as it does now when I am away. I want to respond: *A Father*

who is preparing a place for me among many rooms
in his house of unchiseled light. But here, the parchment sky
does not spell deliverance in its grid of clouds.

Instead: foreignness. Basswood lamb and lion rooted
side-by-side on the carousel, the animal king's jaw
hanging open. A mouth bitter from slumber.

What's Mine

Julia Rubin

someone has pressed a thumb into the sky
and it's all purple, veiny, unstable

air mass. i hold my breath. i think we hold
our breath. wind skins our cheeks. i watch the earth

pulse. i think we watch the earth pulse. turn wild.
boom and spit. send sonic shocks down my spine,

our spines, i think. supercells across my
hairline. my skin is buzzing, the world is

weeping in the way it loves to do. i
am weeping, we are weeping, the world and

i. you say did i tell you my mom thinks
you're intense? when the sky clears, which parts of

us do i get to keep? i stick a post
-it note on thunderstorms and call them mine.

Fall Thunder (V2)

Michael Lee Johnson

There is power in the thunder tonight, kettledrums.
There is thunder in this power,
the powder blends white lightening
flour sifters in masks toss it around.
Rain plunges October night; dancers
crisscross night sky in white gowns.
Tumble, turning, swirl the night away, around,
leaves tape-record over, over, then, pound,
pound repeat falling to the ground.
Halloween falls to the children's
knees and imaginations.
Kettledrums.

Researching

Stephen Page

Each page I turn gets me closer
“The Light in here is making me blind!”

I am at the entrance to a cave that goes down deep into the earth. It is layered with autumn colored leaves, pieces of Styrofoam, and discarded furniture. I feel the presence of large rabid

raccoons, or maybe bears. I turn to run but cannot move. My feet and calves are planted in the earth—they have become roots. I can smell the richness of the deep dark dirt, and feel

the crawling of little pink worms. The leaves are now decomposing all around me. My left hand slides across the outside wall of the cave, but the wall turns out to be a smooth, cool, green

cemented surface of a garage. I look over my left shoulder and see behind me a huge spider web that has captured leaves and flies and brightly colored toy cars. On the other side of the web

is a house. It is gray and white and trimmed in black, with flecks of peeling yellow. A dark figure stands in the shadows of the porch, holding the screen door open.

Up from the deep

Robert Grew

Up from that dark and mysterious region.
Out from the canyons of an unchanging sea.
Oh, listen to the echoes of songs past comprehension.
Hear a language peculiar and a strange melody.
From the dragging of nets which devastate vast acres.
Flagrant dumping of poisons polluting the seas.
Oh, listen to the tears, touch the sobbing of silence
of giants 'neath the swells, feel their soft plaintiff pleas.
Like the Sea of Sargasso, surface-skin, oh so silent
filled with thick floating flotsam, as if frozen-still.
In that denseness, as sunlight, filters and fails
flies the bird that the dragnets would kill.
Out from that refuge in the deepest of oceans.
Through waves phosphorescent, in tumultuous cry.
Please listen to the voiceless who inhabit the deepness.
Lord, come to their rescue lest all of them die.

The edge

Rajendra Shepherd

Swallowed up we merge,
The timid touch stirring,
Swirling plumes of love,
Upward from silt and mud,
To kiss the sunny surface,
To feel thrashing life.

Through her we wade,
Feet skimming rocks,
Skin blushed by need,
To feel the ocean's need,
Of depths unreached,
Eyes alive with fire.

Rolling waves crash,
Give way to tumbling force,
Bubbling sea foam,
That carries us,
Away to cool depths,
Where silence echoes.

Far from shore we are lost,
In bliss until the current,
Comes again,
The swell repeating,
'Come home' it calls,
Its refrain alive and tempting.

The Secret Wounds Show

William Doreski

Today, the secret wounds show.
Even in the boldest sunlight
they phosphoresce in colors
no artist has ever attempted.

The men building the new bridge
smolder under their hardhats,
their domestic issues sparking
like runaway welding equipment.

The women shopping for groceries,
masked against the latest virus,
glow with surgical-looking scars
plastered all over their bodies.

My own wounds look like a map
of Indonesia, mass of islands
distinct from each other but
linked beneath the friendly sea.

Your wounds look aggressive
and contoured to cling like moss.
Some are larger than I'd suspected,
still weeping cosmic fluids

no physician could identify.
Others are pinpricks endured
for the sake of enduring, scabs
of moments of shameful excess.

If you also can see this damage
through the usual psychic mist
please speak up and ease me
of my guilt. The hot light pours

from a single vast perspective,
possibly to single me out—
everyone's wounds re-opening
only to swallow me whole.

Drowning

Bill Stifler

The summer I almost drowned
I was so thin my body
slipped into the water
with scarcely a ripple.

Only moments before
my long, steady strokes
had convinced us all
I could reach the other side.

My body swung upright,
unable to move
the few feet toward shore
and soft green grass.

Twenty-one years later,
on a cruise full of good
intentions, on a sea made
choppy by hurricane winds,

surrounded by lifeguards
and wearing a life vest,
I panicked. Shivering,
embarrassed, ashamed,

I begged her to leave me,
to join the others,
as I swallowed misery.
Nothing like the calm

I felt that earlier day
Sinking into brown,
still water, baptized—
drowned and resurrected.

how i explained suicide to my boss's dog

Stephanie Hauer

hello sweetheart!

i know mom's been real busy recently
so she's letting me come visit you for a while!
i don't know if she's told you yet
but something real bad has happened.

do you understand?
can you know what suicide is?

can it get between those fuzzy little ears of yours
that sometimes humans feel so sad and so desperate and so
broken
that they think killing themselves is their best option?

can your little chest tighten
like the lungs of someone who feels
that they do not deserve the oxygen entering their body with every breath?

you know how to play dead.
can you comprehend that some people don't feel like playing anymore?
that they close their finger guns around metal ones and they
don't keep subtly wagging their tails when they fall?

would your ears prick up the way they do at
interesting sounds
if you heard the scream of someone who
had the image of dangling, once-twitching feet
burned into their retinas
when they found their friend hanging in a bathroom?

do you feel it
when you walk out the door to go pee in the quad -
that hovering, heavy air
filled with grief, shock, and fear?

can you smell how the campus has changed
when your wiggling nose sniffs the air?
is that powerful nose of yours able to tell
that there is one less student here?

so please be patient with us humans.
i know you miss your mom.
but someone is missing their resident, their roommate, their
friend.
someone is missing their son, their brother, their lover.
someone is missing their almost.
and your mom is helping them deal with the mourning
we all are.

so while you whimper at the door and wonder when
mom will come home,
don't worry - she will come back
but sometimes

not everyone does.

That Night Among the Reeds

Anita Kestin

That night among the reeds, someone held me back,
pressed down upon my lips and whispered “Hush.”
Only the wind, you thought, wind whistling without form,
blowing deep inside a hollow reed,
blowing at nothing, blowing through.
But it wasn’t.

Now that you return to your life, I to mine,
there is a secret
that only the wind and I share and you do not.

And all you took from that night was
the smell of nearby sea,
a touch of skin in the silky wind:
that was (you thought) only flowing through,
blowing at nothing,
blowing deep inside a hollow reed.

Trigger Warning

Antara

I have been trying to forget you/
But all my poems come out as trigger warnings/each one more severe
than the last/
Trying to cover up the gun shots that pepper my chest/storms that prowl
beneath my skin/screams that burn up my throat/
How much blood does it take to taint the ocean red/that is the
amount of pain that I have felt/
And now you are a water-mark on my soul/permanently there/but not
quite shown/
If I were wounded then these poems would be the
colour of the blood I bleed/but instead all my wounds look
like tattoos on my body/brands behind my eyes/
And these poems/they are shrieking sirens/unfading aches/unending
pain/
In vicious remembrance of your body
on mine/whispers in my ear/love in my heart/imprint on my soul/
I could try to forget you/
But these poems/they come out as hymns to a
longing that masks itself as pain/that feels like shrapnel digging into my
chest/
And my body/it has become a shrine to you/where
your memories pay homage to tremors that slither up my spine/every
night/
If I manage to forget you/these trigger warnings
will still remain/reminding me of bitter tasting ache/
My soul will still whisper your name/pain will still paint me insane/

Consent

Caitlin Upshall

Consent, I have learned
is a shy creature with a habit of being buried
under apologetic ambiguity in dark rooms.

She does not like strangers or loud noises or silence.

I have spent so much time
comforting my consent as she weeps into the morning
that I recognize how she breathes when she is frightened.

When I left you, I told her it was safe to come out
and made hot chocolate while she hid beneath blankets.

Now when I eat

Caitlin Upshall

I poke my rolls and wiggle my belly
 laugh at the curves | pretend
I am a mountain
 strong | unbreakable | tall
on my kitchen stool | reach to the highest shelf
grab a snack or two and cradle food in one arm | while
whispering, “I love you and thank you” | honestly

WHY THAT PARTICULAR DRESS

Juanita Rey

The dress I will wear
when someone asks me to
hangs in my closet
between a couple
of bland work outfits.

It is thin and summery,
blue and brown
like sky and skin,
light around the knees,
and bodice-tight in the breast.

I've tried it on
and I do not look lovely enough.
But when someone says,
"what about that one?"
I promise I will.

Correlation Between Fatigues And A Simple Cotton Dress

Mandira Pattnaik

I scoop two pink palms like petals in the cups of my hands,
smell the delicate floral fragrance

of powder you just dusted on our seven pounds of flesh
after nine months of expectancy. You

frame my scruffy face etched with the load of machine guns and
tightly-wound vision of dying mates, on

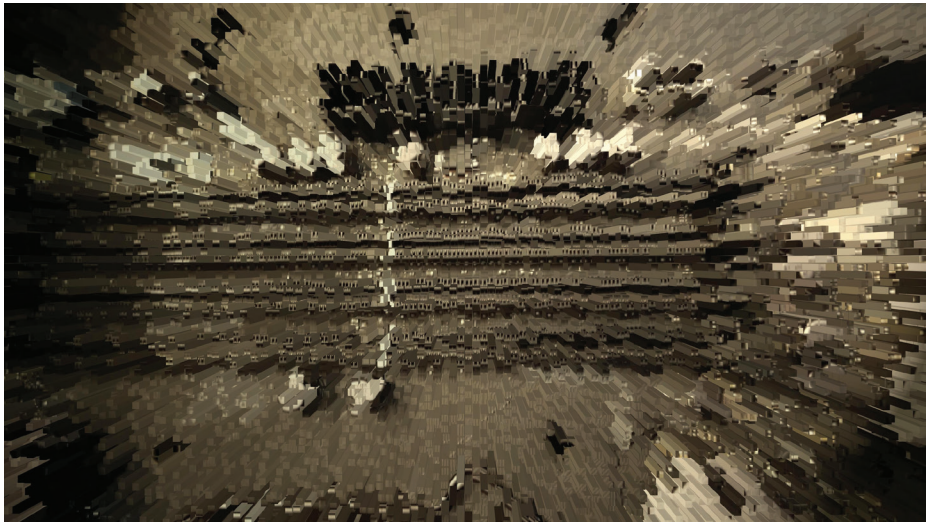
a desert spell seven months stretched. It melts into shades of
longing until we're fused in

a cowrie shell, and gurgle the night with doubts. At dawn we bead
hopes of a distant togetherness.

On a funeral day drenched with soundless lament of another adieu,
I see your hands having

agency as you knead the dough, the last before one more
surrender to our hyphenated lives. My fatigues

imagine your wait for fantasies to crowd around a simple
floor-length cotton dress.



Electric City
Carolyn Adams

Letter to My Mother, From Quarantine

Sherre Vernon

Mom. Mama. Dear Mom: Your voice on the phone yesterday was too much. I don't know if it was the acoustics of the rehab center, the scratch of the mic against your face and the blankets, or just the way weeping has of fucking up technology. I wanted to say—did say, really—that yes, I understand it's lonely in there and that the ache for fresh air when you have no windows, is real—or that it would be if you meant anything other than cigarettes when you say fresh air. It's been well-on 20 years and here I am again trying to tell you that you need to show up for my brother, that he needs a mother and for some godforsaken reason, that's you. I have told you this in poems, in cataclysmic yelling matches, in the labor of my twenties that, at least, left him alive. What do you know of taking someone in, someone teetering on hope's sloping ledge? But there's a forgiveness when that someone is an adolescent with skin pock-marked and scarred. There's a tremble and a terror when it's a woman fully grown who refuses to hold even herself accountable. Do you know what it's like to breathe through you, how even the smallest inconveniences are grown green and large with fear? How I can't hear anyone's excuse for neglect without filtering it through your smoker's rasp and grasping laugh? I try to remember the warm bits: dresses fitted to me, summer-baked cookies, the one time you left work early to take me to the doctor. But I'm telling you, it's a fight just to believe in love's small possibility. So when my brother asks you to finish your treatment, to wait until the end of the week

before checking yourself out of a quarantine bed and rolling up on his doorstep unannounced, what he's really saying is: Mom, let me make space in my heart for you. And Mom—rushing love, for your own convenience, never works. I would call you and tell you all of this today, but I am too held-breath on this harp-slanting possibility: that you might—by some act of god or nature or rock-fucking-bottom reach for us and I just can't—not today—I just can't hear you puff your excuses like so much smoke through the cell towers. I need even for a moment for that box to stay closed, for the cat—and by cat I mean love—to be asleep and not dead. Mom, please don't call. We are all safe here in California, and that's enough for now. —S.

Blockade

Quarantine Poem #8

Anne Fricke

my body leans against the wall in defeat
tears race down my face, eager to reach
the floor before my crumpled body
I bow—head to knees—in prayer,
in grief, in heart breaking sobs that call
for the comfort of any god who would hear me

My daughter's voice pulls me from this image
as we sit at the table practicing the sum of two parts
and I revel, longingly, for a moment on the release
these tears would bring me

later, I lean in to the hot water pelting my skin,
scrunch my eyes to force the desparate
tears, but in this quiet space of civilized
comfort they do not come

these tears are building walls inside my body
forcing my grief and fear to shelter in place,
Why, when I call, do they not come running?
Instead, wait in the shadows of their blockade,
try to force there way through while my
daughter sings her class's morning circle song,
alone

Medical Leave

Kristin LaFollette

For weeks I kept the
back of my hand to my
forehead to remember
the heat of fever

and thought *I have a
biology degree, I
should know where
the spleen is located*

*or at least what it
does* but it wasn't
until the swelling
with white cells

and lymph absorbed
from the body that
I realized we are all
in danger of rupturing

even if we don't take
the stairs or carry
boxes weighing more
than ten pounds or

participate in "contact"
sports and really, rage
and disappointment
are the ways we flush

our bodies of the things
that make us ill and for
weeks I could feel
the warm tiredness of

so much edema, a pain
felt in the molars and
the bottoms of feet
but I accepted the sleep

because fire is sometimes
necessary to rid the
ground of the things that
threaten to decimate it

POEM TO MY HANDS

Juanita Rey

I rinse my hands under the tap
like I rinse fruit before I eat them.
I'm amazed how tender they can be,
my tales of touch
in ten fingers
from a grandmother's cheek
to the dimples in a lover's back.

And yet they've unscrewed
the toughest of jar lids,
have scrubbed dirty dishes
in a restaurant
until the brown
ran almost red.

They're the only hands
I'll ever have,
a catalogue of my fondling,
grabbing, pushing, clapping,
brushing and breaking.

And they have been held
many times.
By other hands
with a history
of their own.

Today my heart rests in your palm as a peach freshly bitten

Brad Stumpf

Oozing down your arm, to your elbow and dripping,
On your toes, in hopes of touching everything it can.
Hoping to be chosen,
To enter your bloodstream and influence your thoughts,
To nourish your body
From the inside.

This peach is not me.
Not I,
A dirty old man trapped in a child's body,
And vice versa.

This peach is my heart in a cage with a view, of you,
My chosen eater covered in juice.

Lemonade. No Ice

Sandy Deutscher Green

No chilled lemonade
sipping
tartly sweet drink
slipping
smoothly down the throat
no tingling vagus nerve

interrupting heart blips
thrumping irritable
stomping mad
silently brooding

no ice cooling the drink
shocking the heart
fluttering
butterfly-staccato
coughing
internal slap

now yoga breath
fills lungs
body cavities
between organs
expand
tendons loosen
Unhinge

squeeze yellow lemon
steady drip into glass
tap tap

lukewarm drinks
eventually thirst slackens
even pulse evens.

The Pain from my Childhood

Stephen Page

I extract you from the crisper and settle you in the palm of my hand, observing you. You are spherical so your outline is that of a circle, a shape that always begins again where

it ends. I hold you up to the ceiling lamp and you disk opaquely like a moon eclipsing a sun. I cup you with both of my hands. You are cold. I close my eyes

and with the tips of my fingers feel the waxy smooth, dimpled texture of your skin, caressing you, squeezing you. I place you on the window sill and note

color spectrum within white light of midday sun absorbs space you inhabit; except coalescence that creates orange, that being

sharply reflected away, striking the retina of my eye, where it merges to grand electrical messages that channel into my hippocampus imploding out

to cortex. I smash you with my fist and juice from inside your body sprays onto the window, the sill, the floor, my shirt. Pulp sticks to the window. I dig my fingers into

your split side and tear you open, smelling the sweet of your breath. I mark translucent membraned cells that once clung your guts together. I set

your broken body back upon the sill and hammer my fist upon you again, and again, and; until you are nothing more than a wet flat mass lying in a puddle

of your blood. I lip the kitchen trash can under
you and scrape you into the smelly black bag, right
on top of yesterday's potato peelings and this morning's

coffee grounds. I lay a newspaper over you. I wipe
the sill, window, and floor, removing what remains
that would remind me that you ever were. I wash

the stickiness off my hands and arms. I remove my shirt
and toss it in the clothes hamper, shutting the lid
slowly, watching as it gets darker and darker inside.

Isotopes

Sudhanshu Chopra

Does a perch view a bird's clasp as a lobe
that hangs lightly? The first time I drank

a kombucha tea was when I thought it was
a cold one, and had almost flung sourdough

bread in water because it looked like a block
of wood. Before we understand the molecules

that compose the world, the trick concealed
beneath their randomness, have we already

decayed by a half-life of exponential order?
Do we prefer cereal over sandwiches

for the breakfast then would be trapped
in a bowl? At most, a drop of milk would dangle

from our lip which of course we can lick off.
We wouldn't need to hold the food between fingers,

or wash our hands off of oil and ketchup after
finding that an old, starving dog has sneaked in

from the neighbour's broken door onto our
terrace. We'd simply have to climb the stairs

and chase him back into the street
like a hot pea rolling out of a bread-crack.

CABIN FOOD

Karla Huston

We talked endlessly of it,
recipes, cookies, chocolate,
heavenly and thick. It was
the taste, first explosions
on the tongue. And texture,
it was always texture with us.
Whorl of lip print on a glass,
silk of cream.

We were driven by food, controlled
by our bellies, empty all the time.
We thought food; we breathed it.

Tater Tot casserole made healthy
with asparagus and onion and egg,
a sticky stretch of cheese.
Add a bowl of green reedy melon,
cinnamon dusted on the purple
eyes of blueberries.

My Daughter Hates Basil

Liz Whiteacre

You wrinkle your nose at leaves on my pizza, and I know why the flesh browned by fire makes you eye-roll when I offer a slice. I would not have touched the stuff in middle school either. But I'm ever hopeful that chewing it will bring back memories of your feet bare in garden rows, picking leaves before the plants bolted, laughing as bees flirted with flowers in late evening. Basil's scent on fingertips. Basket filled before neighborhood dogs howled for dinner and fireflies danced in the lawn. What I want you to know is that taste buds change: sweet to bitter— fat to lean. That these harvests can sustain us long after winter.

a new england winter

Stephanie Hauer

the thieving wind
creeps into my nostrils,
leaving instant icicles of snot in its wake.

it stabs itself down my throat
and confiscates
the contents of my stomach,
yanking gastric acid
into my esophagus
with frigid tendrils
of icy intent.

this cold is so pervasive,
my body revolts from exposure.
i forget how to breathe,
how to swallow,
how to blink.

even when wrapped in every layer
that my closet has to offer,
there can be no movement
except shivering.

WARMTH

Edward Lee

I would rather go cold
than burn words,
says the man
living in his cave,
alone, save for
the words at his fingertips,
and the worlds
in his head,
some his, most born
from the minds of others;

his nights are cold,
but when sleeps comes,
as it sometimes does,
his dreams are warm,

his dreams
are warm, and full of lives
worth dying for.



Into the Sunset
Emily Blackmore

But the Sun, Also, Is a Liar

CL Bledsoe

With the day-old donuts, you can start to feel like the concrete forgives us our trespasses. The same with the used shoes, still smelling of animal and something that's forgotten what animal it is. Who the hell can afford to live? Wandering the thrift store is like vacationing in someone else's life. Were these things once precious? Was I? So many hours spent to buy trash. Like everyone, I was seventeen once and knew more than time ever could, all of it golden guesswork that would later prove to be right. But it doesn't matter. Someone's always going to hurt better than you, which doesn't mean you can ever give up on trying. Children should always be dirty and smiling or you've done something wrong. I remember one afternoon, my uncle shooed me out from under my father's feet, in the Fish Shack, where they teetered, drinking and hating each other. He told me to go play outside. That's what kids were supposed to do, not cling in fear to their father's clinging in fear while their mother's were dying on the hill far above. I sat in the dirt until my shoulders, legs, and neck burned. There was something important he meant me to learn.

Trousers.

DS Maolalai

thwack thwack. tick tock.
triancars
carrying passengers. and me
going home. bridges
pulling buildings
like thread
through tatty trousers.

all tired. slung out drunks
dangle over dublin.
I look out the window
at the lights.
night yawns,
goes outside
and hangs its laundry.
it dapples, dripping
on the river.

Six Translations Of A Painting Seen From A Train

Hibah Shabkhez

ONE

Five smiling children sitting in a row
One fidgets and stubs his big toe
But dares not stop smiling. The squeezed ends
Of his eyes like dried rivers flow
From nothing to nothing.

TWO

Four smiles will the pencil to move faster
One wills it not to stop, master
The art of eternal movement that sends
Coins home for bread. It drifts past her
From nothing to nothing.

THREE

How many smiles must embrace the same pain
Before it is cliché? Can you stain
Enough canvas to exorcise what rends
And scatters the self-flogged brain
From nothing to nothing?

FOUR

One smile is tethered to a gold necklace
One to an unseen mother's face
One rakes the canvas, one for dreams unbends:
But this wistful one just seeks grace
From nothing to nothing.

FIVE

Five smiles are unevenly given out
To five faces. In them, without
One uttered word, is caught home-love that mends,
And unlovedness wheeled about
From nothing to nothing.

SIX

For smiles such as these a mural to thread
First there should have been a dark dread
Of much grandeur. Is it hunger that lends
The skill for this dance of the dead
From nothing to nothing?

Due Date

Cameron Morse

Due tomorrow, Lili brings up
her childhood friend who was two
weeks late delivering a son,
with no rear end, no living breath.

Orange pearl of sunrise
ensconced in pine needles, couched
in dark branches. Theo tests me
by rolling the front of his little tikes

shopping cart over the foot
of Barb's driveway. Phyllis waves
behind her curb's barricade
of unraked leaves. A couple strings

of Canadian geese oscillate
above the smoking chimney pipes.
I lift Theo into the basket
of his own cart, his legs draped

over the rim. Doubled over,
I push him home to wipe his runny nose.

Magenta

Cameron Morse

Stop trying
to make it work.

Don't try.

It will be all right.

Just melt. Allow your
self to melt.

Be moment,
water. Wait for

whatever: Whatever
knows best.

Bless. Be less.
Be little. Forget.

Death will be like this
forgetting, this

orange blank
behind your eyelids,

serviceberry pink,
almost magenta.

The sapling planted
for my unborn

daughter has berried

in an orchard
in Magenta, the color

of the Battle of I
close my eyes.

Gen Z

Pasquale Trozzolo

Alexa,
My Alexa
Those eyes so blue
That black hair
Silk and smooth
You stir the air
Longing,
Knowing
You're never out of range.
Like a thief in the shadows
You steel my desire striking without warning
Nearly illegal.
A ritual of sway.
Alexa,
My Alexa
Stop hiding
On the singed edges of
Delusion.
“Sorry I’m having trouble Understanding”



Gen Z
Pasquale Trozzolo

Reprobate creature

Kim Whysall-Hammond

The digital whale will still call through the waters
but now is linked in to the world wide wet
streaming her songs to land bound followers
and the digital dolphin has claimed the podcast
as her own, working with the other
members of her pod

Meanwhile, the digital octopus
undercover of the more famous mammals
has taken residence in your inner ear
whispers her incandescent mantras
and solutions to all your woes
direct to your subconscious
makes you her willing slave
will own the planet tomorrow

Resignation letter.

DS Maolalai

the office they gave us
held a view
of birds. how then
should one focus
on scheduling appointments
and booking calls
by contractors? flight stretched
like a long arm
over mountains
and tangled tablecloth.

We are Tuareg men now

Obinna Chilekezi

this virus turns all
to tuareg men of sahara
veiled to the eyes
locked down to our veins

stay home, stay safe, the jingle goes
but the real tuareg men a nomad
not for the microbe but as their lives
but here we are, locked down and masked

our world ever diseased but not this kind
of stay safe, stay home for nomads
the diurnal species, homo animalized
actively mainly during daylight

then the noval corana mask
gift from unseen microbe, turning
our world to that of tuareg men
all veiled, as they walked in the broad daylight.

ATTITUDE

Jeffrey Zable

“Okay, okay,” I said, “if you think it will help improve my attitude, I’ll keep saying it to myself, “It’s great to be alive! It’s great to be alive. . .”

So, I kept saying it to myself, but the more I was around people, read human history, and listened to the news, the less and less I was able to say it.

Eventually, I couldn’t say it at all, but I was able to say, “What a mother fuckin world! I can’t understand why my parents brought me here. And now as old age besets me, I ask myself if it was worth it to suffer this long for so little in return.”

” Okay, okay,” I said, “I’ll stop right there and try it again. “It’s great to be alive! It’s great to be alive. . .”

Something will finally ferry us across the shore

Goodness Olanrewaju Ayoola

“British 5G towers are being set on fire because of coronavirus conspiracy theories”
The Verge

Blame it on the *fear freezing* us into
Gullibility;

My wife woke me to
A broadcast saying
Bill Gates is *the Antichrist*. The screen watches my unconvincing eyes.

Because I am opposed to speculations;
It's not yet the end of the world, I told her.

In the evening, another
Broadcast *Whatsapps*, a man folds his hoax
Around a voice note in a hybrid mix of *facts and falsehood*.

He says radiation is another word for the *harbinger of*
Death, and then,
A baptism of fire floods the internet.

In my language, the thin line between herbs and
Vegetables is *puerility*, meaning something will finally ferry us across the
shore:

- a) *Impatience or*
- b) *An unchecked collective ignorance.*

Locked in a High Castle Where Every Sound Repeats Itself

Christian Hanz Lozada

They say we get stuck in political echo chambers
where we amplify the comfortable voices
like the soft shhhh of ocean sounds
that play in the background of mindful meditation apps
or the white noise that lulls you to sleep.

For fear of getting locked into this chamber,
I follow the social media aunties and uncles
the ones who post
“9 out of 10 aren’t brave enough . . . “
“we don’t _____ anymore but should”
“I send the victims hope”
“I send the cops,
the soldiers,
the frontline
prayers”

for fear of forgetting this is blood,
I follow these social media aunties and uncles
who pierce my chamber
at that place where the blood flows in,
deprived of oxygen and life

my heart works hard to pull the blood through this chamber
to change breath to beat
to give me enough air
to keep going.

I'm lucky
it beats again

again

again

each beat in my chamber is where my hopes go
each beat in your chamber is where my prayers go

it's too bad you don't know
that you need me
that we need each other

it's too bad you can only hear one heart's echo
rather than hearts in harmony

Seeing Prison Bars in Ordinary Things

R.M. Cymer

"He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you." -Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 146

Sofa cushion dividers, parking lot lines, my reflection of lilac petals,
Wal-Mart barcodes, pews from the cathedral overlook, cobwebs,
Marty Byrde's eyes, rhymes from Chaucer, Google Maps skyscrapers

Footprints on the beach, tabs on Firefox, yearbook pictures,
Puffs of air from flipbooks, gem angles, Washington's smallpox,
Flintlock pistols, two-inch heels, pretty fences

Calendar spreadsheets, Mondrian's patterns, paperclips,
High school bleachers, tiger stripes, train tracks,
Space between atoms, gas pumps, the Capulet balcony

The Shower Head is a Microphone

Stuart Kenny

The shower head is a microphone;
every bathroom tile 100 members of a stadium audience
who have paid extortionate amounts
to be here with me, on what promises to be a memorable morning.

They cheer & exclaim & shout my name
when I pull back the shower curtain;
& step onto the bathtub stage.

The water hits me like audience praise;
for Rihanna does not sing 'California King Bed',
oh no, not today;
today it is all mine.

I nail a dance routine
that I will later tell an interviewer:
"was not even coreographed beforehand,
I just move the way I feel, you know?"

One bathroom tile watches on through their phone camera;
another budging past several others to get to the front.

A roar goes up; the shampoo comes out - for the guitar solo everyone
forgets is in this song.

One tile nudges the tile next to it
& shouts "WILL YOU MARRY ME" over the music.

Another bathroom tile
my favourite bathroom tile
Simply watches on in wonderment,
& sings all the words along with me.

That tile will ask me for an autograph when I go back to the toilet later that day.

Ground Yourself in Reality Today

Julia Rubin

Before your Tinder date
buy a lint roller. Cleanse yourself of cat
hair in the Walgreens parking lot. Ground yourself in reality
today, your horoscope says. You're not crazy
you're just kissing
girls now. Your date is

biting into a slice of pizza. She is
smiling. Your date
is a dog person. Kiss
her. We are all cat
people, really, even the dog people. A little crazy.
A little lonely. Ground yourself in pepperoni,

black olives, that birthmark below her eye. Reality
is safer shared with strangers. Obsession is
the sanest thing we know. Crazy
looks best on first dates.
Talk about your cat
too much. Your date will want to kiss

you. You will want to kiss
everybody. You'll want to kiss nobody. Ground yourself on a flight
to San Francisco. A woman behind you is reciting cat
breeds. Calico. Savannah. Russian Blue. Repeat it
on your next date or whenever you feel
crazy.

We're all crazy
cat ladies once in a while. Kissing
strangers. Kissing nobody. Seeking to scare our dates
away before the last cheesy bite. Ground yourself in Calico,
Savannah, Russian Blue.

The Sweetgum Tree

Andrew Kasey

Fun fact about me:
I was born at the age of sixteen.
Nothing before that happened.
How could it?
I was still curled up
in my cocoon.
Wrapped tightly in the dark,
hanging from the branches of a sweetgum tree.
Now my grown-boy teeth crush
watermelon gum into pieces and suck
the flavour
out.
I spit
my pink inner body fluid
out
onto the grave of my manly milk teeth.
A tiny gravestone
between two roots.
Older than I'll ever be.
Younger than I am now.
I was born at sixteen
(and a half,
maybe).
Before that I was a collection of molecules
instead of
industrial waste
cobbled together
with the glue from a first grade project
that I never did.
How could I?
I was up there,
in the sweetgum tree.

In Waves Of Light

Bruce McRae

The bee is pollen's messenger.
Her suggestive dance entices the
sun to construct another meadow.
'Build me a flower
the colour of which is an unseen
frequency.' And for this deed, a
blandishment, the golden eye of honey in
the comb, a gift placed under the angels'
tree, continents drifting past
and the instant preserved in
amber. When once the nectar of
the gods fell pretty on the tongue.

I think about walking through a forest of tall, slender trees

Brad Stumpf

With dense tops that allow small Dapples of light to fall softly,
Tracing the contours of my arms as I move.

I'm following your footsteps.

I know your toes and see your stride break into slight rhythmic
dances as you move with joy.

I see you smile - but only in my mind.

I run and know that, someday when I find you, we will roll on this sun
dappled earth and

Make love below the birds and squirrels.

I will trace the outline of each sunspot on your body using my tongue
And then my finger tip.

We will build a house to look out of its windows.

Paint it bright blue and fill it with butterflies

To bring the sky into this shaded hollow.

Strange Trip

Wayne Russell

Something has a stranglehold on me,
the world is a ball of yarn spinning in
decomposition, lava lamp eyes rolling
waves, she is pulling something and I
cannot breathe, I can not see, it's dark.

Love held the flame and burned the
house down! can you hear a dandelion
chain, gnashing of teeth, wooden shoes
clacking heels? It's cold here in her arms.

Death brandished a sharp razor-like
reaper, her eyes plummeted cascade,
liquid steel euphoria. one by one there
they go into premature graves, engulfed
by the flatness of fatherless earth.

Can you see the kaleidoscope birds flying
backward into their leafless trees? Can
you see lost years escape cold, from your
tar pit druid escapades?

The liquid gods drove me into this state
of madness, but I broke free and escaped,
Floridian son, drowning as one, this life is
a strange venture, a florescent trip.

WILDEST DREAMS

Michael Angelo Stephens

Who could have guessed that this defeat,
This shame would be a kind of rebirth,
A second coming, and that the flaws,
The residual anger and the plummeting
Ego would herald a new person entirely,
One who cared about the smell of roses
(the feint odor of vanilla bean and lemons),
Or that this person would get to touch
You everywhere, including your thighs,
Eyelids, nose, lips, or that one might dance
Across the fog of memory with a new
Cadence, that seeing would become
A new gift, that hearing the birds in the park,
The birds, the birds, would excite such rhythms
In the air and along the roots of things
Until there was nothing but sensations,
A tinkling without the fear of, the shame for,
Being alive, the sin of being born suddenly
Become the gift of this new life you had.

Attachment

R.M. Cymer

a thrust jerks the kite spool

temperamental shadow on mother's eyes at vital moments when the girl
leaning on her dress rides the
waves of noon

plush bunnies clinging

to backpack,

leaves applauding, grassland furious

College goblins

Morgan Boyer

A white woman in a grey fleece cardigan carries her
two-year-old from the campus school nursery

A puffy-cheeked toddler looks at me
as I drudge out of the second floor and pass by them.

*Mommy, who are those people?
They're college students.
Why are they down there?
They live here. This is their home.*

Yes, we are devious goblins, our backs
hover over each other as they

play Cards Against Humanity in the lounge.
They have Cheeto-frosted fingers

& showers that smell like semen and piss. Honestly,
we might be cleaner if we stayed *out* of it.

One of our goblin girls says while playing the *Oregon Trail*
card game that *It's not whorish if it's oral* as the ants that

carry away white-sugar & sprinkle-coated animal crackers
& her friend watches the time just because she has

the early shift at the Jimmy John's on Forbes Ave tomorrow. We
have henna tattoos done by a white woman & the nursing

students marathon *the Bachelor* while the communications major
sits in a cave chatting with her online boyfriend

she met through *League of Legends* Yes, child,
we are the filthy goblins that you will become in sixteen years.

the winning loser

Paul Tanner

it's nice when
decisions are made for you.

when the landlady slams the door on your nose,
when the boss hands you your P45,
when the jobcentre sends that letter
refusing to help you out,
when the text says you're dumped,
when that fist comes
at you,
closed.

it's nice
when you're sitting on a bench
black eyed
and horny
with a bin bag of your clothes

every single life decision
having been made for you

thinking
well,
now there's nothing left
to beg for,
my begging days
are behind me.

then you just sit
on the aforementioned bench,
the aforementioned
You.

Rain, rain

David Capps

When the sky is prolonged and the rain speaks
and you are a universe unto yourself,

I cup my hands, lay flat in the mud,
and absorb newer rhythms as they happen by:

the squirrel that gets into your voice—immense hollow oak that it is
and can't find a way out

the crowded schoolyard filled with blissful chainlink sounds
of prayer never heard before

the rain on the metallic shed
that is my hesitation full of tools and underworlds.

I listen until it all grows faint again,
and the distance is humanly measurable.

LOCAL WEATHER

Kenneth Pobo

In Micah we often talk about the rain,
weather, a subject safe as a storm cellar.
We fear storms, especially tornadoes.
We shy away from permanence.

Weather, a subject safe as a storm cellar,
and that's better than arguing about God--
we shy away from permanence,
yet most of us here go to church—

that's better than arguing about God.
Opinions darken so fast. Storms don't last,
yet most of us here go to church.
It's a way to have one thing endure.

Opinions darken so fast. Storms don't last,
though they overtake our homes.
It's a way to have one thing endure
when a marriage should end but doesn't.

Though they overtake our homes,
we hide our worst fights from our neighbors.
When a marriage should end but doesn't—
how many days lost to a stab of lightning?

We hide our worst fights from our neighbors,
say everything is fine, change the subject.
How many days lost to a stab of lightning?
In Micah we often talk about the rain.

Synonyms

Stephen Mead

The wind sounds like whales
the way a land parched by drought
has water's wave patterns.
This is the earth,
imprints as legacies.

Configurations approach the dock,
sonar schools moving in
to bop wood as breakers lap.

Eyes rise to decipher
exactly what's out there.
What is heard cannot be seen,
only felt like a picture drawn
from experience years back.

It's the same refrain,
the same frequency,
these shadows retain.

Time washes over, nature,
concurrent, recollecting
not loss in the aftermath,
but some stronger impulse.
It lingers, hangs on, heartbeats,
like children, building, filtering tenacious,
a synonymous pitch in the air.

Axolotl

David Capps

For a moment you're an apparition: faint
deft smile of a not-yet-living ghost—then it's gone,
your mouth returns to nebulous: solid white web
with shades of tombstone: husk of neogenetic

manipulation. Yet there is urgency in your buccal pump
hiccupping breath, that even-lipped surface music
of your ever-silent slap at birth. Shimmer, shimmer
axolotl, as your papillae-laced cloaca leaves a cloudy trail.

The Crossing

Martin Willitts Jr

Salamanders are grateful for the warm spring rain,
sliding in protective darkness
through forest-splashes of jazz notes.

They're awkward escaping to another place —
one familiar and haunting, the other
beckoning and elusive.

Part celebration and part welcoming the urgency,
both slip quickly, subtly, noiselessly,
trying to avoid predators.

Rain and starless nights provide good cover.
They use stealth and do not throw away caution.
Immigrants act the same.

This is what their movements looks like: jerky;
undeterred; hell-bent crossing dangerous highways.
That's the journey, the end result, every second between.

Another Aubade

Karlo Sevilla

I lay aside the newspaper,
put down my cup of coffee,
and look out the window
for the affirmation, that

Every day, at cusp of dawn,
the dark, after an initial (semblance of)
struggle to keep its place, bows and solemnly
retreats to give way to ascent of inflamed purple
suffusing sky, to conquering light casting its rays,
banishing swath after shadowy swath,
silently sprawling supreme over every creature
rested or oppressed by night, surfacing
a million flowers anchored on rolling greens
of eternal grass, lifting their chins and shining faces
of petals in celebration of colors, as birds
sing in delight of flitting butterflies
and their fluttering kaleidoscope wings...

Then, born of the collective power of flapping wings
and rustling leaves, the first wind utters softest sigh,
then gathers strength and blows
over waking lands and stirring waters,
and proclaims across farthest reaches
of breaking day, that light has come.

Every day, each break of dawn
becomes just like the last —
again and again.

All these suffice to reinforce my faith
that mysterious forces conspire,

so that come tomorrow,

it's still a beautiful world.

the matter is

Margaret Koger

secret hush-hush
 (never tell)
nobody knows
 (you're nobody, too)

secret if there be three
in on it
 and two—
be dead
she said;

fact of the one old man—he

fact of that one old man's
 matter is
his name

was Fred heebejeebie
Fred the Dread heebejeebie

and he's a
 (skull and bones)

dead;

told her mama don't tell
 (nobody that's who)

and mama's (matter of fact) dead too;

so it's a

secret but
(couldn't tell you where or how)

he reappears every now

(hold your breath)

and then

A Dear Green

Carter Vance

I scour the scrapyard,
hopeful to strike riches,
some spot of land:
shimmering acre to draw
around with fenceposts,
anchor wire and call alone.

I arrive in carriage time,
flouting rule and upriver dancing,
from scattershot ravine echoes
that trap ourselves in
fearful amber, in rancor
of things left apart.

I lose some pinwheel grace,
no longer broken glass of
bottle colour and heavy sole
upon soil in crashing through
night windows and to the
warm, embracing place all alight.

SHIPS

Mark Jackley

looking for
the mothership
I opened the door
and walked
barefooted
to the starlit
field beyond
the street and found
lightning bugs
like drifty boats
with signal lamps
that beamed
a code to break the dark
where radio silence
is maintained

Mallards

Jeremy Nathan Marks

Envy is a green-headed
bird darting for sodden
crumbs on a pond
A boy holds
his sack of stale rye
old pumpernickel floating
morsels amidst summer's sour mash
One palm feeds the ducks
the other tries
to bag

The breeze
His wishes are loose feathers
mallards of headlong
intention.

Mantis

David Capps

The green canopy is a curtain jilted
as they stick, bite, claw, consume a love

legs go to pieces as in a rodeo stomp
jaws clutch lazily his outstretched, oozing abdomen

o your ethereal antennae in the heart
that has no more to give

Alchemy

Elizabeth Spencer Spragins

a black chrysalis
cradles wings of molten glass—
monarch butterflies
walk lightly on the milkweed
and feast on flames without fire

~Winchester, Virginia

Transformations

Wayne Russell

Ghostly mist
a trail of vapor,
her subtle kiss
and off she goes,
a mosaic of fond
memories, dancing
in shrapnel history.

Silver aligned lotus,
sweet in justified
cadence, her face is
a visage, enraptured
in hues of phenomenal,
shimmering, proportion.

Now lost upon opposite
shores, nostalgia whispers
at the corridors of my now
vacant heart.

Alchemy sun lying wounded!
Lead transformed into gold?

Transformation of an angel,
into her mortal existence?

Place

Stephen Mead

Stay in
to hold up:
this shell of bones,
enough
curves, the smooth, the nearly ornate,
& next the hollows, all an expanse
for ravines further down.

I mean to embrace them, step away
alone & quietly: no masquerade
performance but the grappling &
breaking upon shale's sharp roots.

How coarse is truth when genuinely swallowed?
More a punch in the stomach to apprehend air,
its loss, immediate, clean: brutality bolting grief to the loins,
a twisting upon & beyond that term now a mercy
for the privacy of an undertow's grip.

Reckoning is the returning afterwards,
changed by the journey one was stuck in,
consuming nothingness, a tank, empty, bereft except
for fumes running on.

Burned Up Bundle

Carter Vance

It was spectacular, sleepwalk and briny,
when I came out to wire shores for
a light lick of morning's air;
felt something grow across from
wavering smoke signs, pit fire
leavings that criss-cross skies
and leave a breathless swimming dark
beneath.

When I wane in grandeur,
placed in bow-breaking time from
our good days that left marks deep
in skin damage, then I became
more plastic, with rains drifting through.
If I made the effigy stake, was
well-thought and worthy, it wouldn't
have been so close to lifetime's
defeat; still, too cold for all
that we were, just signals passing on
scrap ice and plated mineral.

A Bastard's Vow

Mugu Ganesan

A reckless act of sex between the sheets
of wasted dark and silken, starry sky.
Both under passion's spell, so wild and warped,
you weaved ornate whims made of hope and bliss.
I'm an estranged soul though. My mom and you

gave birth to me: a misbegotten child
you left behind after the act, guilt-free,
and sunk back into your fake universe
of lives and things you never quite deserved
and hid behind, obscuring failures.

I fed off thoughts abandoned, left behind,
I held the fingers of the eastern gale,
and slept beneath the soaring eagle's wings—
the folks who fostered me and christened me
as Dream, my first name. And last? Still unclaimed.

I've grown and built a life that's all my own,
I'm eager to avenge days spent alone,
I smolder with the vows made to myself:

To make you take me as your progeny,

to take you far away from your fake life
to one you fancied on that drunken night.

Awakening

Bill Stifler

The wonder of Frankenstein's monster does not lie in the dead flesh animated but rather in that sharp mind, bright with flame and anger. Did the lightning enlighten the monster? Did the heavens open to him, or was it hellfire itself that burned? Where is the true horror?

Imagine awakening in that body, cold, hard, the flesh clammy with death. Imagine the face of your father bending over you to catch that first, faint spark, only to see the flame burn his eyes with fear and loathing, to see him tear himself away, leaving you lying on the cold, hard slab still unaware of what you have become.

Imagine how hard it is to rise, joints stiffened in death, only now bending to the fire burning within. Rising, newborn, legs unsteady, gawky, stuttering limbs that gravity drags back to the grave, only the fire within, that unnatural spark yearning upward resisting stagnation and decay.

Imagine seeing other children at play,
hearing their screams burning in your ears,
watching their faces flame in fear.
Imagine the stones, dirt flung,
the coffin patter pelting pain,
the grave faces now burning with fear.

In the end, cold calls to cold, flesh
burns with ice, silence crystalline
encasing the body, stiff and still once more.

[Portrait of a] Young Woman's Brain Anatomy

Kristin LaFollette

It's the version made of lake water,
your body like tape made out of paper.

I see orange peels and smell the smoke
and ash of a wood-burning stove, gasoline
on a concrete floor, the mustiness of an old car
that you said would be perfect for smoking pot.

I see a background of cemetery grass.
To be your sister is to share the same skin,
to hear in the same fallible way.

I think of the sound of clocks, the kind with
hands that keep me awake at night.

I remember the blueness of your fingernails and my
touch to your face, hoping my blood could move from
me to you, blood that we already shared anyway.

It was cruel for me to think there was more of you.
The tumor was all there was.

Brain as an Unwound Clock

CL Bledsoe

Some kid playing screaming
music downstairs. Lean in close
so I can tell you what I think of you
as soon as I think of something
about you. The way that a cup
responds to tea, over time, this
is the way thoughts are coated
by hatred, negative impulses.
This is not to say that forgiveness
isn't a fool's errand. Rather,
I knew a speed freak who said
he liked to wake up to a new
world every fifteen minutes or
so. If you were to ask me how
I feel, I would first have to stare
at the ocean for nearly an hour –
not too long but just long enough –
sometime after the sun has begun
to set, sand cooling, spray on skin.
Or, the flow of traffic on the street
shimmering in the sun as I walk
back to my desk from the psychiatrist
I don't trust who wants to put me
on lithium. I've always liked the song,
but the trees, shading my way make it
an easy ten, fifteen degrees cooler.
It's nice outside as long as you're
inside under air-conditioning. I don't
like to think of this as the hottest
summer in the last 100 years; I like
to think of it as the coolest summer
of the next 100 years. While old
white men drive by in convertibles.
A kind of ambivalence, I suppose.

Shooting Star

Nancy Byrne Iannucci

If only I were hot enough-
I'd slap your face so hard,
throw you into the steaming,
dark street, then watch you
from my window,
leaning against an
Edward Hopper streetlamp,
gazing up at me in disbelief.

In Praise of a Sweet Tooth

Goodness Olanrewaju Ayoola

i proud teetotaler i cure sadness with a bottle of sugar
until my tongue grow *half insipid half sour* full jocular
you wouldn't believe me if i unzip these shoulders padded high
and brown mountains are falling once i wanted to *become what become
becomes*
tipsy on sugar i asked a drunk man for old clothes i cannot wear them
because fear
*because i don't want to know what it feels to breathe in
another man's skin* how to wear another's smell of rum once i had felt
like a god when i opened opaque curtains to let the sun in into my lungs
once i had felt i held the switch to the sun so i could keep ignoring
a compilation of darkness in my sweet bones
once i borrowed a guitar and wrote colored songs *on my diabetes prescriptions*
funny how palliatives come in colors too so you know now
only my wife knows that i am color blind so you know now the songs
are no more mine because they left with the *rhythm and returning*
i bribed a boy to swallow my dosage i missed watching the gold brownness
breathing brewing in my genitals and when the ants mine round the
spill-overs on the WC i defend my heart of gold *but my wife likes pink*

Aerial

Marcy McNally

poised on perilous pedestal,
posed in kaleidoscopic light,
the acrobat, bold, leaps,
fearless, airborne, gliding,
swirling, twirling and curling,
balancing music and muscle,
lithe, tight, gripping rippling rope,
flying bar, and swinging ring,
fleeting, fluid flight, caught
in death-defying, stellar,
spotlight spectacle.

dangerous dangles astonish,
thrilling angles astound
shadowbox circus crowds,
as the mercurial, mesmerizing
aerial leans, into, falling,
forward, tip-top, upward,
surreal, in suspension, magically
traversing and transcending
a sequined, canvas sky.

Implosions

Mantz Yorke

i.m. The crew of the submarine ARA San Juan, lost on 15 November 2017

In the science lab

We watched as our teacher boiled water
in a five-litre tin, turned off the heat,
stoppered it tight. For minutes it stood
on the tripod: suddenly the metal buckled,
twisted and toppled to the bench. She told us
the steam inside the can had condensed,
and the pressure had simply become too low
to hold back the atmosphere outside.

In the deep

Twelve months to find the submarine crumpled,
nine hundred metres down. On the surface
so strong, its hull had yielded, a tin can crushed
by the brutish pressure of the deep. Remote
from our submersible, we imagined the San Juan
lacking power and sinking beyond contact,
its condemned crewmen waiting, listening
for the buckling that would confirm their fate.

Inauspicious

Lauren Scharhag

In the waking green of spring,
I see absence written everywhere.
The flocks grow fewer and fewer,
no formations to herald the season.
The air that should be filled with song,
the silent trees, the blank sky.
Even the electrical wires hum vacantly.
You could count on one hand
the sparrows and jays,
the geese who mate for life suddenly single
in the brown creek bed;
the tanagers and buntings a distant
scarlet-and-blue fever dream.
Those that are here sing less,
solemn as mourners;
no augur needed to interpret
callers giving up
for want of response.

Multilingual

Abhinita Mohanty

In my country, they said we have myriad emotions,
Unlike most others where moods can be put into a single Petri dish.
Here, speech changes faster like stream bubbles.
In the blink of tired eyes and slipping of mood through sweaty palms,
You may miss a world of story and lifetime of sombre words,
So, sometimes I dream, of getting humongous, cookie jars and trap, words,
foreign, exotic than the English lang,
In my own land, a refugee thrives,
Stranger, and so close,
And life akin to me, and emojis,
So incomprehensible, they bounce, flee,
Before I see them efface on surfaces.

Pure Music

Tim Kahl

Poet forgets the body eats.
More time to think of lost desire.
Stomach rumbles in four-four time.
It's pure music, but full of dread.
Listen up. Food rewards only those with mouths.
Speak, poet, speak . . . before you're dead.

THE ONES WHO HAVE SEEN ME NAKED

Juanita Rey

To some it's a job,
to others a responsibility.
and maybe, to one or two,
a pleasure.

And then there's me,
staring into the full-length mirror.
It's neither a job,
a responsibility or a pleasure.

More like
what I would call
realización personal.
Naked and unadorned,
whoever I am,
it has to start somewhere.

eternal.

Erzsi Csonka

oceans

dried down to salt

the burning sun

mountains

ground into dust

the howling winds

stars turn to supernovas

and back to stars again

and at the end of it all

- *her*

eternal

Author Bios

Andrew Kasey is a young writer who was born and raised in Belgium but who now studies English Literature in the UK. He has four cats, a rabbit and a turtle. All six of these pets are far more interesting than he is. Andrew will read and write anything, but his preferred genres are horror, poetry, and non-fiction. He lives in Brighton. Some of his other works have been published in *Sonder Magazine*, *LGBTQ Survivors Zine*, *Butter Magazine*, *Red Zine*, and *Honeymag*.

Stuart Kenny is a full time journalist, creative writer and spoken word poet based in Edinburgh. His journalism has been published in *The Guardian*, *Metro*, *Vice*, and many more, and he's had short stories and poetry published by *404 Ink*, *Speculative Books*, *Nutmeg Magazine*, *Dreich Magazine*, and various others in Scotland. www.stuart-kenny.co.uk

All things are connected. That's the premise of what **William J. Joel** does. Each of Mr. Joel's interests informs each other. Mr. Joel has been teaching computer science since 1983 and has been a writer even longer. His works have recently appeared in *Common Ground Review*, *DASH Literary Journal*, *The Blend International*, *Liminality*, and *Chronogram*.

Eduard Schmidt-Zorner is a translator and writer of poetry, haibun, haiku and short stories. He writes in four languages: English, French, Spanish and German and holds workshops on Japanese and Chinese style poetry and prose. Member of four writer groups in Ireland and lives in County Kerry, Ireland, for more than 25 years and is a proud Irish citizen, born in Germany. Published in 88 anthologies, literary journals, and broadsheets in USA, UK, Ireland, Japan, Sweden, Italy, Bangladesh, India, France, Mauritius, Nigeria, and Canada.

Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician currently residing on Salt Spring Island BC, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with over 1,600 poems published internationally in magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rattle*, and the *North American Review*. His books are *The So-Called Sonnets* (Silenced Press); *An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy*; (Cawing Crow Press); *Like As If* (Pski's Porch); *Hearsay* (The Poet's Haven).

Wayne Russell is or has been many things in his time upon this planet, he has been a creative writer, world traveler, graphic designer, former soldier, and

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Stephanie Hauer has been enamored by writing since before she even learned how to read. She’s usually writing poetry and fiction, or muttering at a manuscript she’s editing. When she needs a break from staring at the page, Stephanie is probably petting her guinea pig or working on some crafts. stephaniehauer.com

V. Jane Schneeloch has been either writing or encouraging others to write for most of her life. A life-long resident of Springfield, Massachusetts, and retired from teaching English at East Hartford High School, she has led writing workshops for youths, senior citizens, and incarcerated women. Her poetry collections include *Turning Over Leaves* (Antrim House Books, 2015) and *Climbing to the Moon: Poems Inspired by the Art of Georgia O’Keeffe* (Finishing Line Press, 2009). Her work has also been published in numerous journals. Her plays, *In Hiding* and *The Test*, were produced at the Drama Studio in Springfield where she serves as office manager. She also maintains a blog: “Musing over my Oatmeal.” <http://oatmealming.blogspot.com/>

Michael Angelo Stephens is author of the critically acclaimed novel *The Brooklyn Book of the Dead*; the travel memoir *Lost in Seoul* (Random House); and the award-winning essay collection *Green Dreams*. His next book, due out shortly from MadHat (no space), is a collection of prose poems about an out of work actor who lands the part of Hamlet. It is entitled *History of Theatre or the Glass of Fashion*.

Hibah Shabkhez is a writer of the half-yo literary tradition, an erratic language-learning enthusiast, a teacher of French as a foreign language and a happily eccentric blogger from Lahore, Pakistan. Her work has previously appeared in *Wellington Street Review*, *Black Bough*, *Nine Muses*, *Borrowed Solace*, *Ligeia*, *Cordite Poetry*, and a number of other literary magazines. Studying life, languages, and literature from a comparative perspective

across linguistic and cultural boundaries holds a particular fascination for her. <https://hibahshabkhezic.wordpress.com/>

Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen*, and *Smiths Knoll*. His debut poetry collection *Playing Poobsticks On Ha'Penny Bridge* was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Lewis Milne, Orson Carroll, Blinded Architect, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

Karla Huston, Wisconsin Poet Laureate (2017-2018) and the author of *A Theory of Lipstick* (Main Street Rag: 2013) as well as 8 chapbooks of poetry including *Grief Bone* (Five-Oaks Press: 2017). www.wisconsinpoet-laureate.org www.karlahuston.com www.millwriters.org

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Brad Stumpf is a Chicago-based interdisciplinary artist from St. Louis, Missouri. He attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2015. <http://www.brad-stumpf.com/index.html>

Antara is an avid fantasy-fiction reader, sometimes writer of prose and poetry, you can find her dancing, lost in crinkly pages of classical and modern literature or with paint in her hair and pencil marks on her hands. She is on a journey to find herself and will immortalise you if you come too close.

Paul Tanner. Novel 'Jobseeker' on Amazon now. Shortlisted for the Erbece 2020 Poetry Prize. Latest collection *Shop Talk: Poems for Shop Workers* is published by Penniless Press.

Cameron Morse was diagnosed with a glioblastoma in 2014. With a 14.6-month life expectancy, he entered the Creative Writing Program at the University of Missouri—Kansas City and, in 2018, graduated with an M.F.A. His poems have been published in numerous magazines, including *New Letters*, *Bridge Eight*, *Portland Review*, and *South Dakota Review*. His first poetry collection, *Fall Risk*, won Glass Lyre Press's 2018 Best Book Award. His latest is *Baldy* (Spartan Press, 2020). He lives with his wife Lili and two children in Blue Springs, Missouri, where he serves as poetry editor for *Harbor Review*. For more information, check out his Facebook page or website.

Originally from Saskatchewan, **Allan Lake** has lived in Vancouver, Cape Breton Island, Ibiza, Tasmania, and Melbourne. Poetry Collection: *Sand in the Sole* (Xlibris, 2014). Lake won Lost Tower Publications (UK) Comp 2017 and Melbourne Spoken Word Poetry Fest/The Dan 2018. Poetry Chapbook (Ginninderra Press, 2020): *My Photos of Sicily*.

David Spicer has published poems in *The American Poetry Review*, *CircleStreet*, *Gargoyle*, *Moria*, *Oyster River Pages*, *Ploughshares*, *Remington Review*, *Santa Clara Review*, *The Sheepshead Review*, *Steam Ticket*, *Synaeresis*, *Third Wednesday*, and elsewhere. Nominated for a Best of the Net three times and a Pushcart twice, he is author of six chapbooks, the latest being *Tribe of Two* (Seven Circle Press). His third and fourth full-length collections, *American Maniac* (Hekate Publishing) and *Confessional* (Cyberwit.net) will soon be available. He lives in Memphis.

Obinna Chilekezi is a Nigerian poet and insurance practitioner whose poems have been published in journals and anthologies. He has three published collections which are: *Son Chikeziiri too died, rejection and other poems* and *Songs of a Stranger in the Smiling Coast*. One of his insurance texts won the 2016 African Insurance Organisation Book Award. He can be reached at ogobichi@yahoo.com or obinnachilekezi1@gmail.com.

Goodness Olanrewaju Ayoola is a Nigerian poet and teacher of English who reaches out to poetry as escapism from the contentions within and around him. His poetry has appeared in *Glass*, *Pangolin Review*, *Mojave Heart*, *Ethel Zine*, and elsewhere. He is a Best of the Net Award Nominee and author of *Meditations* (WRR, 2016). Say hi to him on [@GoodnessLanre](https://www.instagram.com/GoodnessLanre)

R.T. Castleberry. His work has appeared in *Blue Collar Review*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *Misfit*, *Trajectory*, *The Alembic*, and *Switch-back*. Internationally, it has been published in Canada, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, New Zealand, Portugal, the Philippines, and Antarctica. He's had poetry in the anthologies: *Travois-An Anthology of Texas Poetry*, *TimeSlice*, *The Weight of Addition*, *Anthem: A Tribute to Leonard Cohen*, *You Can Hear the Ocean: An Anthology of Classic*, and *Current Poetry and Level Land: Poetry For and About the I35 Corridor*.

Freesia McKee is author of the chapbook *How Distant the City* (Headmistress Press, 2018). Her words have appeared in *Flyway*, *Bone Bouquet*, *So to Speak*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Virga*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and more. Freesia is a staff book reviewer for *South Florida Poetry Journal*. Her reviews have also appeared in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Pleiades Book Review*, *Gulf Stream*, and *The Drunken Odyssey*. Freesia was the winner of CutBank Literary Journal's 2018 Patricia Goedicke Prize in Poetry, chosen by Sarah Vap. Find her online at freesiamckee.com or on Twitter at [@freesiamckee](https://twitter.com/freesiamckee).

Stephen Mead is an Outsider multi-media artist and writer. Since the 1990s he's been grateful to many editors for publishing his work in print zines and eventually online. He is also grateful to have managed to keep various day jobs for the Health Insurance. Currently he is resident artist/curator for The Chroma Museum, artistic renderings of LGBTQI historical figures, organizations and allies predominantly before Stonewall. <https://thestephenmeadchromamuseum.weebly.com/>

John J. Brugaletta has published seven volumes of his poetry, the latest being *Selected Poems* (Future Cycle Press, 2019). X. J. Kennedy has called this volume "a vital contribution to American poetry." Brugaletta is Professor Emeritus at California State University, Fullerton, where he edited and published *South Coast Poetry Journal* for ten years, publishing such luminaries as Rita Dove, William Stafford, Robert Mezey, Kay Ryan, Lucy Shaw, Denise Duhamel, Denise Levertov and Mark Strand.

Juanita Rey is a Dominican poet who has been in this country five years. She has worked many jobs while studying to improve her English. She has been writing for a number of years but only recently has begun to take it

seriously. She enjoys reading. Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Toni Morrison are particular favorites. Her work has been accepted by *2 River View*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Petrichor Machine*, and *Madcap Poets*.

David Capps is a philosophy professor at Western Connecticut State University. He is the author of two chapbooks: *Poems from the First Voyage* (The Nasiona Press, 2019) and *A Non-Grecian Non-Urn* (Yavanika Press, 2019). He lives in New Haven, CT.

Liz Whiteacre is a mother who gardens and teaches creative writing at the University of Indianapolis where she also advises Etchings Press, a student-run publisher. Whiteacre is the author of *Hit the Ground*, and her poetry has appeared in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Wordgathering*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Breath*, *Shadon*, and other literary magazines. <https://whiteacrehitstheground.wordpress.com/> <https://lizwhiteacre.wordpress.com/>

Sandy Deutscher Green writes from her home in Virginia USA where her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and appeared in *Bitter Oleander*, *Blue Nib*, *Neologism*, *The Lake*, and *Qwerty*, as well as in her chapbook, *Pacing the Moon* (Flutter Press, 2009). BatCat Press published her limited-edition chapbook, *Lot for Sale. No Pigs*, in June 2019. <https://sandradgreen.webs.com/>

Stephen Page is part Native American and part Scottish. He was born in Detroit. He is the author of four books of poetry: *The Salty River Bleeds*, *A Ranch Bordering the Salty River*, *The Timbre of Sand*, and *Still Dandelions*. He holds two AA's from Palomar College, a BA from Columbia University, and an MFA from Bennington College. He also attended Broward College. His literary criticisms have appeared regularly in the *Buenos Aires Herald*, *How Journal*, *Gently Read Literature*, *North of Oxford*, and *the Fox Chase Review*. His stories have been published in *Amphibi*, *Birch Book Press*, *Bold + Italic*, and more. He is the recipient of a First Place Prize in Poetry from Bravura, the Jess Cloud Memorial Prize, a Writer-in-Residence from the Montana Artists Refuge, a Full Fellowship from the Vermont Studio Center, an Imagination Grant from Cleveland State University, and an Arvon Foundation Ltd. Grant. He loves his wife, family, friends, long walks through woodlands, nature, solitude, journaling, spontaneous road trips, riding

motorcycles, throwing cellphones into lakes, dog-earing pages in books, and making noise on his electric bass. <https://smpages.wordpress.com>

Gale Acuff has had poetry published in *Ascent, Reed, Poet Lore, Chiron Review, Poem, Adirondack Review, Florida Review, Slant, Nebo, Arkansas Review, South Dakota Review, Roanoke Review*, and many other journals in eleven countries. He has authored three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel, The Weight of the World*, and *The Story of My Lives*. Gale has taught university English courses in the US, China, and Palestine, where he teaches at Arab American University.

Karlo Sevilla, from Quezon City, Philippines, is the author of the full-length poetry collection, *Metro Manila Mammal* (Some Publishing, 2018), and the chapbook, *You* (Origami Poems Project, 2017). Recognized among The Best of Kitaab 2018 and twice nominated for the Best of the Net Anthology, his poems appear in the journals *Philippines Graphic, Small Orange, Black Bough Poetry, Shot Glass Journal, detritus, Radius, Matter, The Daily Drunk*; the anthology *NOSTALGIYA, Antolohiya Ng Mga Tula* of Samahang Lazaro Francisco; and others. His email address is karlosilverio.sevilla96@gmail.com, and his Twitter handle is @KarloSevilla.

Alexandra Graffeo is a poet and writer from Staten Island, New York. She earned her Master's in Fantasy Literature from the University of Glasgow, where she focused her studies on female representation in fantasy, with a special emphasis on Arthurian women. Her work is inspired by her academic background, her love of travel, and her desire to find magic in everyday life. Alex's poetry and short stories can also be found in *OyeDrum Magazine* (where she works as the Managing Editor), *The Raven's Perch*, and *Disquiet Arts*.

Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art. She resides in Graham, NC with her cats Charlie Chaplin and Janis Joplin.

Rhiannon Grant is a writer, teacher and Quaker based in Birmingham, UK, where she works in Woodbrooke's learning and research team. Her poems have appeared in *Blue Mountain Review, Poethead*, and *A New Ulster*, and another will be published in an anthology from the Emma Press. She also writes novels about LGBTQ+ relationships in history, and non-fic-

tion about faith topics. Her latest book is a lively Q&A from Christian Alternative called *Quakers Do What! Why?* She discusses faith and writing on social media – @bookgeekrelg on Twitter, @rhiannonbookgeek on Instagram, and Rhiannon Grant on Facebook – and keeps a blog at bridgid-foxandbuddha.wordpress.com

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John C. Krieg is a retired landscape architect and land planner who formerly practiced in Arizona, California, and Nevada. He is also retired as an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborist and currently holds seven active categories of California state contracting licenses, including the highest category of Class A General Engineering. He has written a college textbook entitled *Desert Landscape Architecture* (1999, CRC Press). John has had pieces published in *A Gathering of the Tribes*, *Alternating Current*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Clark Street Review*, and more. In conjunction with filmmaker/photographer Charles Sappington, John has completed a two-part documentary film entitled *Landscape Architecture: The Next Generation* (2010). In some underground circles John is considered a master grower of marijuana and holds as a lifelong goal the desire to see marijuana federally legalized. Nothing else will do.

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. He also has a BA in Political Science from Boise State University. A native of Boise, Idaho, his story, "Soon," was nominated for a Pushcart. Yash has also had work nominated for The Best Small Fictions. A self-proclaimed Romantic and Tchaikovsky devotee, Yash's work is forthcoming or has been published in *WestWard Quarterly*, *Café Lit*, (*mac*) *ro (mic)*, and *Ariel Chart*, among others. Yash lives in Garden Valley, Idaho, and hopes to put together a flash fiction collection.

Theresa C. Gaynord likes to write about matters of self-inflection and personal experiences. She likes to write about matters of an out-of-body,

out-of-mind state, as well as subjects of an idyllic, pagan nature and the occult. Theresa writes horror, as well as concrete gritty and realistic dramas. Theresa is said to be a witch and a poet, (within the horror writing community) and she has been published in a number of magazines, ezines, anthologies, and books throughout the years.

Margaret Koger is a school media specialist with a writing habit. She lives near the river in Boise, Idaho, and writes about nature (including human) as a way of staying alive (really) and connecting people within our stumbling culture.

DS Maolalai has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and three times for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016) and *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019).

Jeffrey Zable is a teacher and conga drummer who plays Afro-Cuban folkloric music for dance classes and Rumbas around the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and anthologies. Recent writing in *Nauseated Drive*, *Hypnopomp*, *Ink In Thirds*, *Tigersbark*, *After The Pause*, and many others.

Carter Vance is a writer and poet originally from Cobourg, Ontario, Canada, currently residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. His work has appeared in such publications as *The Smart Set*, *Contemporary Verse 2* and *A Midwestern Review*, amongst others. He was previously a Harrison Middleton University Ideas Fellow. His latest collection of poems, *Places to Be*, is currently available from Moonstone Arts Press.

Mark Jackley's most recent book of poems is *On the Edge of a Very Small Town*, available by emailing chineseplums@gmail.com. His poems have appeared in *Sugar House Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Cape Rock*, and other journals. He lives in Purcellville, Virginia, near the Blue Ridge Mountains, with his GF and a small zoo of household pets.

Sudhanshu Chopra is a poet, wordsmith, and pun-enthusiast. Thirty and rootless, he is fascinated by nature and frustrated by its incomprehension.

He wishes we had evolved better or not at all. It is the midway that causes Catch 22 situations, which are quite troubling, mentally and otherwise. Some of his work has been published online on *Panoply Magazine*, *Bending Genres Journal*, *Mocking Heart Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Sonic Boom*, among others, and in print anthologies, namely, *Purifying Wind* and *The Larger Geometry: Poems for Peace*. He blogs at The Bard and tweets at @_monkey_life. Most importantly, he is available to be hired immediately.

Rajendra Shepherd's poems have been published by the *British Medical Journal*, *The Good Men Project*, *Dragon Poet Review*, and most recently by @chunklit. His latest spoken word appears in *The Dreamers Anthology*.

Pasquale Trozzolo is an entrepreneur and founder of Trozzolo Communications Group, one of the leading advertising and public relations firms in the Midwest. In addition to building his business, he also spent time as a race car driver and grad school professor. Now with too much time on his hands, he continues to complicate his life by living out as many retirement clichés as possible. He's up to the Ps. In 2020 his work has been published in *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *The Virgin Islands Source*, *The Pangolin Review*, and more. His debut chapbook *Before the Distance* is forthcoming by Poetry Box Press in December of this year.

Jeremy Nathan Marks lives in London, Ontario. Recent poetry and prose can/will be found in *So It Goes*, *Right-Hand Pointing*, *Chiron Review*, *Mobius*, *Unlikely Stories*, *Dissident Voice*, *The Write Life*, *Muddy River*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Wilderness House*, *Isacoustic*, and *Anti-Heroin Chic*.

Brittany Coffman is a 20-year-old writer based in New York. Her writing explores dark corners as a way to portray language. She enjoys creating weird and wonderful expressions of the mundane and fantasy.

Kim Whysall-Hammond is a Londoner living in a small country town in Southern England. An expert in obsolete telecommunications arcana, Kim believes, against all evidence, that she is a good dancer. She has been published by *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Amaryllis*, *Total Eclipse*, *Fourth and Sycamore*, *London Grip*, and *Crannóg*, among others. You can find her at <https://thecheesesellerswife.wordpress.com/>

Morgan Boyer is the author of *The Serotonin Cradle* (Finishing Line Press, 2018) and graduate of Carlow University. Boyer has been featured in *Kallisto Gaia Press*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Thirty West Publishing House*, and the *Pittsburgh City Paper*. Boyer lives in Pittsburgh, PA with her family.

Mugu Ganesan is an emerging poet based out of Minneapolis, Minnesota. He writes poetry in English and Urdu. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Hindu*, *Burning House Press*, and *Scarlet Leaf Review*. He has participated in poetry workshops at the UCLA Extension and The Loft Literary Center. Mugu's poetry is focused on expressing the strife that comes with being human through his observations and life experiences across cultures and continents.

Rushmila Khan is an aspiring Bangladeshi poet and screenwriter. She is currently in 11th grade, has worked as the editor of a magazine at school, and is working to publish a non-profit publication herself. Her book reviews have been published on *The Bookshelf*. Art films and books bring her the most joy.

Kenneth Pobo has a new chapbook published from the State Poetry Society of Alabama called *Your Place Or Mine*. Forthcoming from Assure Press is his book called *Uneven Steven*.

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Richard Oyama's work has appeared in *Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian North American Poetry*, *The Nuyorasian Anthology*, *Breaking Silence*, *Dissident Song*, *A Gift of Tongues*, *About Place*, *Konch Magazine*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Tribes*, *Malpais Review*, *Anak Sastra*, and other literary journals. *The Country They Know* (Neuma Books 2005) is his first collection of poetry. He has a M.A. in English: Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Oyama taught at California College of Arts in Oakland, University of

California at Berkeley and University of New Mexico. His first novel in a trilogy, *A Riot Goin' On*, is forthcoming.

Michael Lee Johnson lived ten years in Canada, Vietnam era. Today he is a poet in Itasca, DuPage County, Illinois, published in 1078 small press magazines in 39 countries; 210 YouTube poetry videos. He has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards poetry 2015/1 Best of the Net 2016/2 Best of the Net 2017, 2 Best of the Net 2018. He is Editor-in-chief of 3 poetry anthologies, *Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze*, *Dandelion in a Vase of Roses*, and *Warrior with Wings: The Best in Contemporary Poetry*.

Raised on a rice and catfish farm in eastern Arkansas, **CL Bledsoe** is the author of more than twenty books, including the poetry collections *Riceland*, *Trashcans in Love*, and his newest, *Grief Bacon*, as well as the Necro-Files novel series and the flash fiction collection *Ray's Sea World*. Bledsoe co-writes the humor blog How to Even, with Michael Gushue located here: <https://medium.com/@howtoeven> His own blog, Not Another TV Dad, is located here: <https://medium.com/@clbledsoe> He's been published in hundreds of journals, newspapers, and websites that you've probably never heard of. Bledsoe lives in northern Virginia with his daughter.

Jenean McBrearty is a graduate of San Diego State University, who taught Political Science and Sociology. Her fiction, poetry, and photographs have been published in over two-hundred print and on-line journals. Her how-to book, *Writing Beyond the Self; How to Write Creative Non-fiction that Gets Published* was published by Vine Leaves Press in 2018. She won the Eastern Kentucky English Department Award for Graduate Creative Non-fiction in 2011, and a Silver Pen Award in 2015 for her noir short story: "Red's Not Your Color." She lives in Kentucky and writes full time when she's not watching classic movies and eating chocolate.

Cheryl Caesar lived in Paris, Tuscany, and Sligo for 25 years; she earned her doctorate in comparative literature at the Sorbonne and taught literature and phonetics. She now teaches writing at Michigan State University. She gives poetry readings locally and serves on the board of the Lansing Poetry Club. Last year she published over a hundred poems in the U.S., Germany, India, Bangladesh, Yemen and Zimbabwe, and won third prize

in the Singapore Poetry Contest for her poem on global warming. She has been swimming with wild dolphins, and it is one of the high points of her life. Her chapbook *Flatman: Poems of Protest in the Trump Era* is now available from Amazon and Goodreads. <http://caesarc.msu.domains/>

Nancy Byrne Iannucci is the author of *Temptation of Wood* (Nixes Mate Review 2018) and *Toxic*, which will be released in 2020 (dancing girl press). Her poems have appeared in a number of publications including *Gargoyle*, *Ghost City Press*, *Clementine Unbound*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *8 Poems, Glass: A Journal of Poetry (Poets Resist)*, *Hobo Camp Review*, and *Typehouse Literary Magazine*. Nancy is a Long Island, NY, native who now resides in Troy, NY, where she teaches history at the Emma Willard School.

Marc Frazier has published in journals including *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, *Slant*, *Permafrost*, *Plainsongs*, *Poet Lore*, et al. Marc, the recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Award for poetry, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His books, including his latest, *Willingly*, are available at online booksellers. See Marc Frazier Author page on Facebook, @marcfrazier45 on Twitter.

Christian Hanz Lozada is the product of an immigrant Filipino and descendent of the American Revolution and Confederacy. He has co-written the poetry book *Leave with More Than You Came With* from Arroyo Seco Press. My writing has appeared in *Cultural Weekly*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Dryland: A Literary Journal* (forthcoming), *A&U Magazine* and various other journals and anthologies. I have been invited to read and speak at the Autry Museum, the Twin Towers Correctional Facility, and other places throughout Southern California. I currently live in San Pedro, CA, where I teach my neighbor's kids at Los Angeles Harbor College.

Harriet Shenkman is a Professor Emerita at City University of New York. Her poetry has been published in numerous national and international journals and she has published two poetry chapbooks, *Teetering* and *The Present Abandoned*. She was born in Brooklyn, New York. She is working on a novel. <https://shenkman.wixsite.com/harriet>

Martin Willitts Jr has 25 chapbooks including the Turtle Island Quarterly Editor's Choice Award, *The Wire Fence Holding Back the World* (Flowstone

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Lauren Scharhag is the author of fourteen books, including *Requiem for a Robot Dog* (Cajun Mutt Press) and *Languages, First and Last* (Cyberwit Press). Her work has appeared in over 100 literary venues around the world. Recent honors include the Seamus Burns Creative Writing Prize, two Best of the Net nominations, and acceptance into the 2021 Antarctic Poetry Exhibition. She lives in Kansas City, MO. To learn more about her work, visit: www.laurenscharhag.blogspot.com

Esther Sun is a Chinese-American writer from the Silicon Valley in Northern California. A 2020 American Voices nominee, she has been recognized for her writing by the National YoungArts Foundation, Bennington College, and the Alliance for Young Writers and Artists. Esther's poems are forthcoming from or have appeared in *Up North Lit*, *Vagabond City*, *Anthropocene*, and more. www.esthercsun.com

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Sherre Vernon is a seeker of a mystical grammar and a recipient of the Parent-Writer Fellowship at The Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing. She has two award-winning chapbooks: *Green Ink Wings* (fiction) and *The Name is Perilous* (poetry). Readers describe Sherre's work as heart-breaking, richly layered, lyrical and intelligent. To read more of her work visit www.sherrevernon.com/publications and tag her into conversation @[sherrevernon](https://twitter.com/sherrevernon).

Robert Grew is a senior citizen, 85 years of age today. His email is 'grouchygrew@yahoo.com' and he is on Facebook as Robert Louis Grew. He began writing a flurry of verse in my 60's.

Anita Kestin is a medical doctor with a varied career and the gray hairs to match. For most of her career, she has worked in a traditional academic setting but for the past ten years she has worked as the medical director of a nursing facility, as a hospice physician, in the locked ward of a psychiatric facility, and in public health settings addressing patient safety issues. She is also the daughter of Holocaust survivors, the wife of an environmental lawyer, the mother of wonderful grown children, a grandmother, and a progressive activist. She is attempting to calm her nerves during the pandemic by writing, revising, and finishing the memoir she has been writing for many years.

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Julia Rubin is a writer, poet, and professional queer aunt from Boston. Her work has been published in *The Collapsar*, *Mortar Magazine*, *Typo Magazine*, and *BUST Magazine*, among others. Follow her on Instagram [@glitter_topcoat](#) to keep up with her writing, baby adventures, and collection of overalls.

Tim Kahl [<http://www.timkahl.com>] is the author of *Possessing Yourself* (CW Books, 2009), *The Century of Travel* (CW Books, 2012), *The String of Islands* (Dink, 2015) and *Omnishambles* (Bald Trickster Press 2018). His work has been published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Drunken Boat*, *Mad Hatters' Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Metazen*, *Ninth Letter*, *Sein und Werden*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Really System*, and many other journals in the U.S. He is also editor of Clade Song [<http://www.cladesong.com>]. He is the vice president and events coordinator of The Sacramento Poetry Center. He also has a public installation in Sacramento {In Scarcity We Bare The Teeth}. He plays

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Caitlin Upshall holds a B.A. in English from Western Washington University. Her work has been published in *The Sweet Tree Review* and *Entropy Magazine*, and is forthcoming in *The Tiny Journal*. In her spare time, she enjoys reading scholarly articles about the Great Emu War. <https://caitlin-upshall.wixsite.com/caitlin-upshall>

Okpeta, Gideon Iching is a poet, and essayist. He's Nigerian. Okpeta is a contributing writer for *Josbuastruth magazine* (JT MAG), and crispng.com. Some of his poems have appeared at *poem hunter*, *powerpoetry* (a poetry community for Teachers and students) and *pondersavant*. while others are upcoming or awaiting publication in different journals and magazines. Recently, his work has been considered for inclusion in the second issue of *words and whispers journal*. At his spare time, he writes and plays the keyboard.

Carolyn Adams' poetry and art have appeared in *Panophy*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Visitant*, *Bryant Literary Review*, and *Trajectory*, among others. Nominated for a Pushcart and for Best of the Net, she is a staff editor for *Mojave River Review*, and a poetry editor for *VoiceCatcher*.

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Jessica Covil is a PhD Candidate in English at Duke, pursuing graduate certificates in African & African American Studies and Gender, Sexuality, & Feminist Studies. She enjoys reading her poems aloud at open mics, and her work has appeared in *SWWIM Every Day*, *What Rough Beast*, *Whale Road Review*, *Rise Up Review*, *The Maynard*, *Oye Drum*, and *One Hand Clapping*.

Yong Takahashi was a finalist in The Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing, Southern Fried Karma Novel Contest, Gemini Magazine

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Naima Rashid is an author, poet, and literary translator. Her first book, *Defiance of the Rose* (Oxford University Press, 2019) was a translation of selected verses by Pakistani poet Perveen Shakir from Urdu into English. Her forthcoming works include *Bungalow by the River* (Penguin India, 2022), a translation of the Urdu novel *Naulakhi Kothi* by Ali Akbar Natiq, as well as her own fiction and poetry. Her writings have appeared in *Asymptote*, *The Scores*, *Poetry at Sangam*, *The Aleph Review*, *Newsline*, and other places. She was long-listed for National Poetry Competition 2019.

Linda M. Crate's works have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies both online and in print. She is the author of six poetry chapbooks, the latest of which is *More Than Bone Music* (Clare Songbirds Publishing House, March 2019). She's also the author of the novel *Phoenix Tears* (Czykmat Books, June 2018). Recently she has published two full-length poetry collections *Vampire Daughter* (Dark Gatekeeper Gaming, February 2020) and *The Sweetest Blood* (Cyberwit, February 2020).

Daniel Edward Moore lives in Washington on Whidbey Island. His poems are forthcoming in *Kestrel*, *Nebo Literary Journal*, *Main Street Rag*, *Nixes Mate Review*, *Blue River Review*, *Verdad Magazine*, *Impossible Archetype*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Lullwater Review*, and *Flint Hills Review*. He is the author of the chapbook *Boys* (Duck Lake Books) and *Waxing the Dents*, a finalist for the Brick Road Poetry Prize from Brick Road Poetry Press.

Frances Spurrier is a poet, storyteller and blogger. Her work has been widely published and anthologized in print and online. She holds an MFA from Kingston University and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Her interests lie in the connections between language, spirit and environment. She blogs at <https://volatilerune.blog>

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Mark A. Fisher is a writer, poet, and playwright living in Tehachapi, CA. His poetry has appeared in: *Angel City Review*, *A Sharp Piece of Awesome*, *Altadena Poetry Review*, *Penumbra*, *Unlikely Stories Mark V*, and many other places. His first chapbook, *drifter*, is available from Amazon. His second, *hour of lead*, won the 2017 San Gabriel Valley Poetry Chapbook Contest. His plays have appeared on California stages in Pine Mountain Club, Tehachapi, Bakersfield, and Hayward. He has also won cooking ribbons at the Kern County Fair.

Anne Fricke is a poet, author, storyteller, podcast host, wife, and mother. She lives in far Northern California, writes daily, and travels when she can. She has published two collections of poetry, a novel, a journal for parents of children with special needs, and was co-editor of a poetry collection on the theme of shelter-in-place. More about her work can be found at annefricke.com.

Kristin LaFollette is a writer, artist, and photographer and is the author of the chapbook, *Body Parts* (GFT Press, 2018). She is a professor at the University of Southern Indiana and serves as the Art Editor at Mud Season Review. You can visit her on Twitter at [@k_lafollette03](https://twitter.com/@k_lafollette03) or on her website at kristinlafollette.com.

Luke Carmichael Valmadrid is a public health graduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill, but continually finds himself in the arts. He was a member of the 8th cohort of the First Wave Scholars program, who shared their joy and passion for poetry with him. Outside of writing, Luke enjoys research, chamber music, and cooking tofu.

Roy Duffield was honored to perform at last year's Barcelona Beat Poetry Festival alongside some of Spain's most successful contemporary performance poets. His work has recently appeared (or is on it's way) in *The Trouvaille Review*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Night Bus to Speakers' Corner*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *About Face: Poems about Body Image*, *The Dawntreader*, *The Medley*, and an as yet untitled anthology to raise money for Marie Curie nurses during coronavirus. He sometimes publishes some micropoetry on Instagram as [@drinking_traveller](https://www.instagram.com/@drinking_traveller).

