

Poetry South

2020



Poetry South

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Poetry South

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Contributing &
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Ted Haddin
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Faiz Ahmad

A FABLE

its heart beating against
the plastered wall,

the tail-less lizard
from its vantage point

beyond good and evil,
sticking out its tongue &

casting a disparaging eye
across the length of an

old library copy of
Utilitarianism lying open

upon the study table and
without the perspective

of a history brought to
completion, one would

imagine Mill feeling
terribly insulted yet

so unable to declare the
lizard's half-mocking

irreverence as immoral
any time soon

CROWS

the tense graveyard soil
folded many times

like the skin of clammy
foreheads straining

hard to remember one
right password

beneath the grim faced
crows donning

their military uniforms
marching round and

round along the same
route as if patrolling an

invisible border in air

Gerburg Garmann

A FEATHER FOR A LIFELINE

Send me a feather for a lifeline
or legs with good instinct for prey

Send me Apollinaire's headwound
or Picasso's black sweat

Matisse's decoupages,
perhaps one of the dancers (he can spare one)

A sharp knife to open the circle
or a window with a pulse

Send me a dress hiding a harp
or white wings to fan the city

A purple pony
or a dark horse

Or a feather
for a lifeline

Carl Boon

THE COURTHOUSE STEPS

We used to sit on the courthouse steps
and watch the men in suits
who make the laws come down
in search of lunch and the occasional
blonde who wore a skirt askance.
We thought they were lucky—
those Americans who didn't fear
the flag, the cops, the President.
They got seats at Dee's Diner
even when the diner was full
and got sausage and hashbrowns
even in the afternoon. We believed
they kissed the waitresses in secret
and gave them dollars and called them
Honeybun and Toot-a-Loot and no,
we would never be like them.
We'd never get behind the wheel
of a Cadillac or an Oldsmobile
and never smoke cigars at sunset.
Still, we mostly liked ourselves—
our minor sins and our indifference,
our brown and black skin and jazz-
talk down to the sidewalk, bum-heaven,
bum-alley. They had Mickey Mantle,
but we had Ernie Banks. They had
Bart Starr, but we had Gale Sayers
racing through the Packers defensive line
to find us all the way down here
in Montgomery waiting for him.

Carl Boon

WE CAME TO AMERICA

We came to America
expecting our questions
to be answered & found instead
rows of commas
& some we took to be
outstretched arms & some
the twisted thoraces
of butterflies. But we trudged on

through the cemeteries
of western New York
& south through Pennsylvania's
coal fields where little girls
in their ancestors' clothes
trudged gravel path
to gravel path in search of
dignity & persimmon trees.

As nightfall—silent & precise—
began to move on us,
we saw the Ohio River
at a distance, queenly,
circumspect, & so we thought
this is what America means.
The lights of Pittsburgh
shone brownly in the trees.

Arm in arm we witnessed
the Midwest as one, one black boy
in Aurora, Illinois
setting his hands on fire,
one Iowa pastor in prayer, one
salesman in Kansas
killing himself for silver,
& we thought how strange

America, how tragic, lovely,
and mysterious. Its potency
frightened us & its whimsy

theatrical & fierce. But we vowed
never to leave, to stand aside
as it transformed into another.
It gave us, somehow,
what it could not give itself.

Ronda Piszcz Broatch

THIS IS THE WAY I LEARN THE TRUTH
READ THE TRUTH FINALLY SEE THE TRUTH

and when the truth tased is body
cam-ed is multiple tased and resists
no more when the truth isn't

breathing check his pulse still isn't
breathing check his radial pulse isn't
breathing when the truth is pronounced

dead in the pulse of police lights when CPR
didn't take the tased body of truth lies
on wet pavement dead and officers shake

their heads when the ambulance
comes takes truth away in the rain
when the truth gets choked smart-phoned

implored ignored recorded and shared
the truth later sped to the morgue
quicker released on the internet

this is the way the truth's revealed
this is the video of George Floyd's death
this is the knee, and this is the neck

this is the ram that rammed the door
that opened the house where Breonna
slept this is the truth these are the bullet

holes the bullet points these are the facts
wrapped up in an empty report and who
checked *no* in the box on the report

next to the words *forced entry*? knock no knock
in the order in the stats in the files stashed away
in the numbers never truly revealed never written

correctly filled in truthfully and the truth
looks amazed when the covers rip from its body
and this is the muddy truth the bloody truth

and the truth's in the dark in the house
and the truth's now on the streets ablaze
and this is the way I learn that life

isn't how I thought was never how I thought
it was the truth I can walk out and not
be shot I can jog on the streets and not

be detained can walk and be free and breathe
though my lungs fill asthmatic the truth
that isn't your truth as I now see it revealed

this is the way I learn the truth
this is the way my world breaks down
my world's revised I get informed

this little truth goes to YouTube
this little truth goes to Twitter
this little truth throws off its protection

this little truth gets out its phone
says my we got a lot of work to do
before we can go home

Ronda Piszcz Broatch

TRUTH (BE TOLD)

Javier Ambler

And when the truth gets tased and the truth has a heart condition the truth gets tased and the truth gets tased again and the truth doesn't respond when asked to sit up and the truth can't move and the truth can only lie on the ground and when the police try to pry open its eyes with a thumb and a forefinger the truth stares blankly back and the truth is glazed and the whites of the truth's eyes are bloodshot and the truth doesn't respond when slapped in the face and the truth doesn't wake up wake up wake up when slapped in the face and the truth has no pulse in its neck and the truth has no radial pulse and the truth can't seem to be cardio pulmonary resuscitated and the truth is truth is dead before the ambulance comes and the officer shakes his head to the other officer who fired his taser so many times the truth just up and died even though the truth was knocked to the ground and the truth didn't resist and the truth was caught on body cam and the truth had congestive heart failure and the truth is still dead and it's now 2020 and the truth is the truth's apparently not yet clear enough

Craig Finlay

ONE SMALL THING I KNOW ABOUT ELIJAH MCCLAIN

Elijah McClain liked to play his violin for kittens
at the animal shelter in Aurora, Colorado.
Meaning, he was the type of person who,
when he met a defenseless life,
tried to give it some beauty or kindness.
Meaning, he was definitely not the same type of person
as those he met while walking home from the store
one August night, harming or bothering no one.
Not the type of person who would choke a gentle,
thin young man, while two others helped,
or would continue to do so after he told them
he could not breathe, and after he told them
they were beautiful, and after he told them
he was so sorry, but what they were doing
really hurt. I know very little about Elijah.
I certainly don't want to speak for him.
But a few months ago I found a dog
abandoned at a gas station. She had no front teeth.
She was gently approaching people with a slow,
submissive wag of her tail. She had no collar,
no chip, no one responded to the photo I posted
on Facebook. And I didn't know Elijah McClain
but based on this small thing I do know,
I think he would have played the violin for her, too.

Theodore Haddin

AMERICA

(2019)

Everybody wears masks,
some sit in silent rows
of small expensive seats.
Others from the other side
swear something needs
to be done.
A troll steals light from the air,
words don't carry their meanings,
lies go for truth.
Nothing is what it was.
Everything is something it isn't.
Confusion divides, while
wars lurk in the untruth.
A world slowly turns
toward a burning sun.
No one knows how hot
a world can be. Look
to Mars, we say, deserts
can be a great place to live.
We slowly learn how they
are made.

GLIMPSES OF WALDEN

Piled up behind a concrete truck,
traffic all around,
waiting on the light
that can't be seen,
of all that hurries past
one second flashes a pond and a park
thoughts of Walden
its water a mirror
eyelash-shadows flowing
across ancient ripples
of sun and water,
the instant of this glimpse
so old beside a sterile building
yet all wildness lives in this:
cars cough, trucks rumble,
tires hiss, as I turn for a moment
seen, glass of my car catches pond
and grass in the sky, says blue, says green.

Theodore Haddin

HEART OF THE VIOLIN

(For Horst Kloss)

When you open a violin
you can tell what its heart
 is like,
what the master will find as he
questions the distempered part.
The top comes off slow
and painstakingly,
you can see the basebar inside,
how it goes up and down
for the G and D, and just over,
for the soundpost's A and E.
Nothing comes from it now,
but edges are smoothed,
then clips are attached,
looking like the form
of a woman's body, both top
and back. Adjusting the neck
is key to all the rest. For
the heart is nothing you can
see, hidden deep in the old
wood's keep. But after this,
when work is complete,
down to the last tap to test
its tone, you will hear the
violin's voice for the first time
in the sound of the heart's beat.

LISTENING

Sometimes things settle in a house
that hasn't moved anything for months.
Silence can be broken by a crack or a
crunch when no one is looking or
actually listening. In the dark things
suddenly speak from the past, a click—
something like a scratch. What was
peaceful before can be broken,
what wasn't, becomes remembered,
awakened again for no reason. And
looking even carefully can't reveal
its source. The force of fright stays
beyond silence and scours the empty
space beyond the awakened heart
that thought it once was healed.

Joshua Jones

MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

The source of this abundant world is not a source,
nor is it abundant. It is not your father. It cannot
comfort you nor hurt you. It is not in control.

It is not free from control. It does not smooth
the disheveled hair of the little girl dying
in the detention center. Never could it return

her corpse home. Impossible to think it could unlock
any door. It is not power, nor does it respect power.
Our systems have failed to predict its behavior.

It has no bottom, no top, no middle, no beginning,
no end. You cannot erect barriers across it.
No machine could stretch it beyond its breaking

point nor roll it to gold's airy thinness. Nothing
could exhaust it nor refresh it nor mop its sweat.
It has no needs nor surpluses. It cannot be shot.

It cannot be protected. It never fires first,
and its blood can never darken the pavement.
It will never be indicted or acquitted. It will

never make you feel safe. Never has it preserved
a person or nation from suffering. It cannot be
called by its proper name, nor can it be defamed.

It will not make you a liar, nor could it ever
tell you the truth. It cannot forsake you
for the squalor of some other world. It cares

for nothing and does not know where you are.
You cannot approach it, run from it, or locate it.
Its maps lead nowhere, and its paths lie hidden in snow.

Elidio La Torre Lagares

THE EARTH OF THINGS

the bridge is lightning
above us where the wheels
of cars press the pavement
and my skull serene blunt
*sopor y medio*¹ and a poem
 [angel's milk]

in the shadows beneath the noise
purges my ribcage the stars
within grind their light
against the blood of words
the earth of things dissolves
after a passerine shriek
comforts city lethargy

the eyes float white bouncing
in the smoke public buses
heading to the last stop of Eden
like we way too late to be legends
*chiva loca*² strikes deaf
and sadness is the t e m p l e
we build on skin and wood
until the morning sun
shaves street yellow

until the morning sun
shaves street yellow

loose : my hands : prowling

¹ stupor and a half

² party bus or a lethal mixture of heroin and fentanyl sold on the streets of San Juan

Anthony Lee Hamilton

ON A WIRE IN THE WIND

Caught in the wind
on a wire
fence

stretched between
two
posts

along the border
between
two deserts—

one of emptiness
—
one of desolation:

a pint of ice cream
& its opposite,
the spoon;

the unnamed
constellation
in the vague shape
of an empty canvas tote bag,
slack in a corner
of the living
room floor;

the pet bird flown;
& its empty home;

the convertible
we should have rented,

you & me,

for a drive down the coast,
though we had nowhere
to go

but more
& further
but we never got there
did we?

& there are the leaves
& there is the phone call
& the hairbrush
& it's all held together

by the hair itself

in a knot
on a wire
in the wind.

Stephanie Tobia

SALERNO, ITALY 1892

I am the color of tobacco
 hand rolled in cigars off the Amalfi Coast
I am a single bedroom stucco villa
 balcony facing the seaport
I am the low instep of navy leather dress shoes
 that walk Piazzetta Barracano

Grandma tells us a story about bisnonno Sam
 who sees bisnonna Raphaella on the boat
Runs across the dock without luggage
 for his love at first sight

I am the wooden bench
 Sam sits on in Parco Pinocchio
I am the silver lira
 thrown into Fontana del Tenna
I am the Lilium Martagon
 folded in his pocket from Il Giardino della Minerva

Sam can't live in Italy with out Raphaella
 he jumps on the boat leaving
Salerno with her and they risk
 sinking to the bottom of the Atlantic

like a set of two prong skeleton keys

Catherine-Esther Cowie

ON THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

St. Lucia, 1979

We danced, peopled the darkness, waiting for our colors to rise.

We questioned who we were—the island, scuffled over seven times,
or the French and the English

who fought over this tall body of green.

We sifted the sea for another telling
but the god of the pathway had drowned.

We tongued the stars right out of the blue-black sky,
seamed our eyelids shut with sand.

Still, we could not remember.

We dreamt of the first people here—hunting agouti and iguana,
eating yams, cassava and hot pepper, reading the skies,

their skin red with roucou, nose jeweled with bone and shell
—now catalogued into history books.

We begged Iouanalao, *Burn us into the insides of your thighs.*

We woke to the early morning melody of a cutlass tearing through the bush,
the scent of lemon grass,

and across the Atlantic, the Chief Minister talked with his dark hands,
dark lips, *Convince us*, he told the Colonial Secretary, *why do we need a master?*

We swarmed the hills, ripped the light out from between the Pitons,
sewed in our yellow and blue.

Catherine-Esther Cowie

CATHERINE

1

St. Lucia, 1848

When slavery ended,

Catherine

mashed up her name,

became

Catiche,

discarding the sound

of breeze

rifling through the cane,

discarding the sound

of massa (master)

between

her thighs.

February 20, 2018

Dear Catiche,

These days I wear my blood-hemmed name,
I prefer Esther but you can call me Catherine.
Write Catherine-Esther on every application,
every journal cover, every poem.
I will not untie the sound
of my mother from my name. I've fallen in love
with her voice, *doux-doux darling stay sweet.*
I love to watch her on Sunday afternoons
sprawled on the couch,
her white legs peeking from her skirts.
What if I tell you I wear my name like my hair,
the way it screams of a different sun, of makola blue,
of the great odoum, I will not knife the French and English
out of my tongue, this heirloom, cruel and sweet.
I have ancestors, slave owners,
who were laid to rest two hundred years ago,
and now they roll, roll, roll
because I've been sewn into their line.

Susan O'Dell Underwood

I STAND HERE FRYING OKRA

Not in my grandmother's skillet,
but sizzling in my new-millennial non-stick.
And not on her re-wired, cantankerous electric eye,
but on my stainless dual-fuel Jenn-Air,
in corn oil tempered with fine imported olive oil.
I didn't traipse like she did downhill to a garden
toting a dented bucket and a half-rusty knife,
or reach high on stalks for living furry pods.
This okra cost three dollars a pound, organic,
laid cleanly cool like newborn gods in baskets
within my fingers' reach.

Standing at my kitchen counter under daylight-balanced light,
I slice lengths two-by-two with my Japanese ceramic knife
against my bamboo cutting board, swipe the angular circles
into a clean-white porcelain dish.
Not at all the way she did, sitting
in the languorous dim afternoon at her kitchen table,
elbows to the sides of her old stainless bowl,
okra *ping-pinging* as she cut in mid-air
with a paring knife against the callus on her thumb.

She wouldn't have known what to do
now they've stopped milling Three Rivers meal.
It's left to me to make-do with Martha White,
okra tumbled through my fingers, coated pale
and set to rest while hot oil puddles up its shimmer.

When the dusted rounds hit grease, they send up
memory's own pheromone, hay-green late summer.
Years after she is gone, I follow her best secret:
settle on the lid to steam. Be patient.
But I can hardly wait
before I crank the flame to blue and with my spatula
at the ready, shake the pan as if it's popcorn.
The crisp, raw green sings tender gold, edges toward brown.
When there's no resisting—when I think for half a second
she might yet show up to catch me—
I pinch into the pan and blow

on one morsel, tossing palm to palm.
Palm to palm. Then the savor of childhood
bright and vivid as her voice.
Each bite will taste exactly like her okra did,
out of the old, nearly-lost salt-comfort,
robust as a living pulse on my tongue.

Clinnesha D. Sibley

THIS IS HOW I DO THE DISHES

Now that everyone's needs are met, I think I will finally enjoy that cup of breakfast tea and raw honey.

Although it is nighttime now, I will clutch my cup with the dull hands I employ to prep raw chicken and scrub burn from pans.

The dull hands I use to slice mangos, peel grapefruit, and cut gala apples.

The dull hands I use to grip the steering wheel the moment I become numb to the routine of driving and sort of zone out.

I will hold onto my cup with the dull hands that put out fires and juggle responsibilities of home, work, art form, and community.

Hands that massage the emotional and physiological needs of everyone.

In a moment, I will take these chafed, dull hands that resemble sandpaper, clasp them, and ask God to give me strength to shoulder and fold the load of life and laundry.

It is with my dull hands that I will sullenly wash and load the final dish before laying hands on myself, ushering Grace back in.

The kitchen sink is my vulnerable place.

NAVIGATING HER

Contrary to popular belief, she did not *wake up like this*.

She is still wading in her destiny, swimming fiercely toward manifestation.

Often rowing through towering walls of water (also known as tears).

She doesn't always *wake up like this*.

Not feeling like a merchant ship bringing food from afar.

Not always anchored, most often she is coasting.

And sometimes, she wakes up like

an armada— surveying the damage from a harrowing war of words—

But she learns how to sail safely in the storm without drowning in emotions.

Sometimes, she wakes up a lifeboat. Having saved children from monster nightmares and bed-wetting mishaps.

On to work, where in the absence of her, everything falls to the lowest layer of the ocean.

And then there are the raft mornings when all she can do is cherish the basics...

Like the warmth of coffee on her tongue— she sips while going eight miles over the speed limit, full force toward her treasure.

Driven by powerful mother currents and sister winds.

Watching constantly for pink waves, stress signals, and lighthouses.

A boat becomes a ship when it carries other boats.

R L Swihart

NEW MATH

For the thousandth time I return to the lagoon, not thinking
to add anything to it but with the untethered hope
that it would add something to me

*

At the corner I review the sign, copy the images
(without paper) of the Least and Forster's
tern

*

Near the lifeguard station, a "throwing star" of two terns
passes overhead. I think *Least* but can't really tell.
They retreat to a far corner of the lagoon. I hear
a piercing cry

*

The lone swimmer (gray sky, dark water, white wake),
beyond my hearing but within sight, silently
splashes (without a pronoun) and pivots
at the pontoon bridge

*

Low tide. Smooth wet sand. The vehicle tracks first
struggle to find their bearing then cleanly
traverse the length of the beach

Whitney Rio-Ross

AFTER THE DIVORCE

We'll see by morning if anything is left
to burn—crisped wedding invitations
circling hand-written cards offering
forgotten advice, fogged memory
boxes cracked to shards, scattering
to kindle half-sewn scarves, needles
placed aside to make something new.
We drink to the end—one bottle of wine,
two breaths smoke dewing eyes.
Promises unkeep themselves as
years slither skyward, everything better
in ember glow. Even ash sparkles.

*

In ember glow, even ash sparkled.
Years slithered skyward—everything. Better
promises unkept themselves as
two breaths. Smoke dewed eyes.
We drank to the end, one bottle of wine
placed aside to make something new,
to kindle. Half-sewn scarves, needles,
boxes cracked to shards scattered
forgotten advice. Fogged memory
circled. Hand-written cards offered
to burn crisped wedding invitations.
We saw by morning nothing was left.

Trina Gaynon

TWILIGHT

The end of the day is
bittersweet linen in March,
a rustle dampened on Tuesday,
pungent with lemons in the present,
saturated murmurs of aquamarine,
wooly sunshine in my heart,
a crooked drawl in my imagination,
a velvety lap of contentment,
a hazy thud of longed for rain,
a gingery sanctuary, the cat snoring,
an unsettled hush or pumpkin butter.

SLOW DAWN

Her tired heart sleeps through the night,
no longer wakes at intervals.
Dreams broken by changes in light
accompany the moon that crawls
at a wintry pace, in sight
long after sunshine brightens walls.
Her fragmented mind wins its fight;
chaos defeated, quiet falls.

Cassondra Windwalker

A HARD LIFE'S WORK

light pools in a leaf
above my head, but I do not fear
its fall: not fire but golden oil
spills into my hair,
fills my palms

I am not mistress but well-missed
and as a bought beloved,
I must pay for my patronage
with calloused hands and bloodied heels –

I fear the thorns
but still hope to wear them
dread the nails
but long for the taste of iron
if it means you too are anointed
with me: every keeper of slaves
is kept by slavery,
every bearer of hatred
is borne to the same hated grave,
but we too, if we share the lash,
may break it in the end:

feed me honey
I have brought you a pitcher of milk.
let all the leaves fall.

SONG FOR THE UNFOUND

in the upside-down of the up-above,
birdsong condensates in twilight
like the sea under the sun,
melody ascending the midnight stairs
as if the darkness will never come:

for a while it seems the birds are right,
their hopeful trills and drowsy staccatos
keeping stars and other, less noble, nightwalkers
at bay – but the dark will have her way
in the end – she will bundle up
birdsong into baskets and send it back,
she will sew celestial buttons bright
into the fabric of the night and fasten it
securely against the pale flesh of the sun,
she will call out the eaters and the creepers
and let them have their way.

for now, I hope your bones are content
to believe what the birds believe,
that you rest easy in the twilight of in-between,
that you take the flowers of this brief season
as the due of your out-of-due-season grave.
I hope you rise in shining drops of song
and lend some sign of your departure,
that we the left-behind may make meat
of your wretched eater yet.

Ellen Sazzman

OUTSIDE OUR CASA'S BEDROOM

Mexico City

on the terrace there is the shush of water,
silvery gurgling from a small fountain
set into a niche of cobbled wall,
droplets splashing from a frog's jaded eyes
down into the blue-tiled pool,

tears recycled in an endless rippling,
trickling a thin stream of comfort at 3:00 a.m.
when I awaken from dreams
of left-on faucets, your peeing in the baño,
my urge to pee, a sea's pulse resounding

around the shell of my ear, and I rise
to toss a peso into the font's whispering well
and wish for another of yesterday's
anointed moments, coins cast into the sun,
my sterile sacrifice to the rain god

whose pyramid we climbed, and envisioned
the serpentine canal concealed beneath
its body of rock, littered with bones
and ancient blood, miscarrying ruined
civilizations, one reign rushing into another.

Beth Oast Williams

THE HUM IS ENOUGH

Because you build life rafts
with your eyes, I survive.

Because you wade into water
without any shoes, your light
bright as infinity's wick,

I do not drown.

I would run to you
if my whole life went wrong.

You hold me so right,
I feel I can float
like a flame high above its candle.

You tug on my heart like our yarn
is one sweater.
I am tethered to your breath.

I would run to you
if my whole life went wrong,

climb a rope-spun ladder to reach the sun.

Touch your lips to the rim
of this empty bottle
I am, and blow. The hum

is enough to shake
my hull, enough to land
a wrecked body ashore.

Audrey Hall

OPHELIA'S SOLILOQUY IN FLOWERS

This is the swing my father built,
hanging from the branches of a willow,
as familiar as his arms once were.

I have busied my hands with the language
of flowers, speaking in the accent
of easily snapped stalks. Here, a hydrangea:

for heartlessness. See how its petals dissipate
when shaken. Their blue is not the blue
of the nearby creek, or even the sky,

but something I recognize from inside.
Here in my hands, too, is a wood anemone:
forsaken, mourning with cat's-eye yellow pollen.

I have crushed a poinsettia to my breast,
December's flower, Christ's blood,
the petals heavy as vellum,

one of which has caught in my dress
and hangs like a bib. My cry mutes itself
in sprouts of cyclamen and white ivy-sprigs:

a formula for my place in the narrative,
where I must exit. I hold the dried white roses.
In a moment, I will give them life again.

George Drew

LIKE DEFT SESTINAS AND NIMBLE VILLANELLES

Like deft sestinas and nimble villanelles,
 they say love poems are difficult,
harder than good Kentucky pumpkin pies
 or light and fluffy biscuits, harder than ribs
so special their recipe is a family secret,
 like those my stepfather used to make.
Love poems, they say, are as hard to write
 as saying “I love you” is for men
to other men, to their sons, their sons to them,
 the way my father couldn’t to me or me to him.
But you, my love, are a woman, not a man.
 So here it is, a love poem that’s more
Kentucky pumpkin pie or biscuits or ribs
 and less a deft sestina or nimble villanelle.

PANTOMIME

I.

in these almost autumn nights
grief is my doppelgänger
a mocking shadow smiling in the wings
carrying a bitter cup

grief is my doppelgänger
wearing the face of love
carrying a bitter cup
with an invitation to oblivion

wearing the face of love
you stalk my dreams
with an invitation to oblivion
but i won't be a slave to calculation

you stalk my dreams
a mocking shadow smiling in the wings
but i won't be a slave to calculation
in these almost autumn nights

II.

i turn my face to the wall
watch the dumbshow projected in the streetlight
shining through sheer curtains
flutter in the serenade of nonexistence

watch the dumbshow projected in the streetlight
leaves still prisoned to branches
flutter in the serenade of nonexistence
the sigh of an indifferent wind

leaves still prisoned to branches
a pavane of anxious heartbeats
the sigh of an indifferent wind
the oratorio of coming winter

a pavane of anxious heartbeats
shining through sheer curtains
the oratorio of coming winter
i turn my face to the wall

Mayuri Singh

TO CONTAIN WHAT IS UNCONTAINABLE

i found you in your car again
at a standstill, watching
the streetlights change hues.
each passenger contained in a hearse
moving to an unknown destination.
we listen to the rain tap against the glass.
our words punctuate the silence
between us like Quindar tones.
i know i must adjust to the absence
of your voice soon.
my hand moves to the crank
i stick my head outside, chin tilted,
hands cupped, tongue out like a dog.
i wanted to taste the negative space.
to touch something devoid
of history, eternally cyclical,
sanctified. when i look back
you cannot tell what i was trying to capture.
all i have to show is my wet palms.
my heart lines are aqueducts
burdened by stigmata.
it is a shame
that even the most wondrous
celestial forms contain dark matter.
you lay my hand on your chest
as if our combined faith could heal
the death sentence determined by science
and i forget to wipe the rain off my face.

Stephen Ground

TO THE BOBS AND JACKS THAT EXIST, EXISTED,
DON'T, OR WON'T

we pound the road with
heartbeat feet

pushed from a womb that
never owned me

shackled by sinew & flesh
to bones I think I owe

a pint of blood
a quart of soul

though admitting the need
for a sky between

sets me free like the
absence of fear

a north country bard
with tales to unroll

a world to repair in the
eyes of its ears

a faithful search for
humming harps

guitars strummed like
stringed starlings

because we must

drawn further from the
wound of a womb

with hopes to be saved from
endless cycles of death

to sense pulsing
road underfoot

sweet air of
planes untapped

sprawling beyond
powdered noses

pointed south

Sebastian Santiago

REMINISCING IN A PARKED CAR WITH MY MOTHER

As my mother pulled up to our old red brick town-house in Warren, MI she released a sigh of grief

while resting
her head on the steering wheel.

*This is where we lived when your father left me for
Kim.*

I remember the man living next door.

I remember
my mother bringing him soup for fear his
sickness would grow worse.

I remember
the layers of sweaters he wore, and his frail
demeanor as he lay daily on his couch—

soup from days past grown cold all around him.

I remember
that despite being maybe six or seven, under-
standing that
AIDS
is a sickness one can catch.

I remember
his meager grin as he reached with his
lank hands to shake mine.

I remember the day the flames claimed him,

the day
the smoke crept through the vents and
my sitter swept me from home to then rest

on the steps across the street as the men in blue
and yellow suits tried to save him.

As

we drove back to my mother's in Lake Orion,
I sat in the passenger seat,
 believing he'd made a choice that day, that
it wasn't the cigarette on the couch on which they
 blamed the blaze.

But rather,
his choice to rise up from that couch,
 to shut the door of his townhouse behind him,

and step into the *lovely light*.

Brittany J. Barron

I WONDER IF THE WOMEN IN MY MOTHER'S FAMILY
ARE CURSED

when I look at a portrait of the first daughter,
Mary, and her first husband, Boyd.

Her hands fold in her lap,
and he wraps his arm
around her shoulder. Sinking,

he sinks, practiced in his posture.
Sinking, she sinks
into her white blouse.

He's twice her age.
He wears James Dean's grin.
They're newlyweds.

I too have sat on that porch.
Granny's bulbous plants
coil. Their green vines

shroud the earth.
Heirloom tomato seeds sit
to the side, waiting to be planted.

Before there was a porch,
there was a field,
where my grandfather struck the dirt.

Grandfather who would make Granny
a young widow. And before my grandfather,
there was a serpent who asked a girl
a question that charged the air.

In the photo, Mary could be looking at me.
She could be telling me my future.
I have known a man's touch:
its paradise, its undertow.

WHAT I WOULD TELL JENNY

1976. Gainesville, Georgia. Jenny Cain's husband returned home from work to find his wife missing. She did not leave a note.

I've heard about you, Jenny.
Your sister, my granny, drops your name
in conversations. It drips, like honeysuckle in July.

I remember Granny standing behind me
as I stumbled over the black piano keys.
I confused the flats and sharps.
She'd run her fingers through my hair,
worry with tangles. She'd tell me,
I thought you were Jenny.

Jenny who once watched Marjorie
wear pearls to Sunday meetings,
department-store sweaters,
curlers to bed.

Jenny with the reputation.
*Something must be wrong with her. She's mad
to leave her children and husband, her family.*

But you were never the Sunday girl.

You know, Marjorie believes you call her now and then.
Jenny, is that you? You don't have to speak. I forgive you.

But you never asked for Granny's forgiveness
or your family's.

The hours you stood in check-out lines.
The minutes deciding white or red
roses to display.
The seconds it took to reach the door
and run.

Clare M. Bercot Zwerling

1945

I dream of you
lines of you in
dirt and ditches
still
comprehensible or beyond, like

Broken bone
china oddly laid
on lonely tables miles
long abandoned,
no longer gathering memories.

Still you speak-
voices, echoes, sighs across
even the still air and
cruel vacuum of the open fields
and barbarous wired fences.

Our meager hands
our largest dreams
cannot hold
enough
of you.

Holly Threm Goslin

FIREFLIES

flickers of light,
pinpricks on the canvas
of a dying day;
too early yet to be confused
with the flashing eyes of raccoons
scuttling up towering oaks

once, excitement lay in tracking
and trapping insects in mason jars:
screwing tight the phenomenon
in gilded cage and
poking holes in the lid until release—
if there ever was one

now, wonder lies in tracking
a sparkle here and a wink there;
in the subtle color variations as
fireflies cut swaths across the fresh, open air
dazzling at dusk
in their naked, unabashed freedom

Jessica Fischhoff

UNDERWATER

It was skin that sunk me,
sin that caught me,
swept me unexpected
tangled, unearthed,

stitched my parted legs together
vein by vein to pair the blood-shades
for precision, bejeweled me in scales,
anchored me in the undertow.

What is air, but a need?
How calm the waters must have been
before you knew that what you
wanted would run before it ruined you.

To feed me like a fish
stalking your hand, to reach for me
when I am tired of the treading

and know that even these fins
fanned and unfurled
aren't weightless.

Raina Joines

EMBERS

The moon a spark struck
for a glowing fire
a wayward spark flying
ancients said the dead
do not see the sun
even in their dreams
but they do not dream
or else we are their dreams
walking the counterworld
chased in silver light
like figures on prized armor
our raised bodies flattened
by a flurry of hard blows
they strain to see us fall
they look away when we arrive
bathed in borrowed glory
like the moon in her high flight

Kristin Entler

BEHIND DOORS

Once, when you repeated your father's sermon,
I felt my throat sting with whiskey
at his words: *them gays*

the same night rose-petal secrets
silk off each other's tongues. I know we can't,
but tell me: where do we go? What would happen

if I kiss you? He said it would
be the final sin
that shifts his God

out of hiding to confront us. I vote
we find out: what do your A-line pleats
feel like between my fingertips?

Are your panties cotton or silk?
When is the last time you shaved?
And son of a bitch.

How do you not get lost
beneath all that fabric?

EVOLVING

I. Lover as Sea Turtle

You must keep yourself afloat, strain
the muscles of your neck to touch oxygen
again. How tired you must get of breaking
waves with the tip of your nose, only to dive
back down. Your lizard lungs hold tight
to air, savor the paradox of living in the ocean.

The moon's reflection is the only thing that feels
safe, the light distorting and stretching across
the waves to call you home. I'm told that saltwater
heals. Underwater, the world hushes, muffles
to a manageable quiet. You dive deeper
to rest, letting the current carry you with it.

II. Lover as Secret

TMZ blares in the middle of the night as we're both
stuck awake in this hotel room. We listen to snoring
in the bed next to us, exchange hushed laughs
at their synchronized inhales and exhales. My fingertips
strain to touch the remote, scoot it toward me. I give
up and find you instead. We tangle our hands beneath the covers.

There's too much noise in our silence, no space
between us – this lie we're hiding from
just a bed away. We braid hair, change
the channel, untwist sheet from duvet, tap
out a Morse code on each other's skin;
backs, knuckles, thighs. *This is enough.*

Jianqing Zheng

AVALON MY HOMETOWN

Under the old brown fedora
Mississippi John Hurt's face

looked as historical as his
weatherworn shotgun house

in Valley, Mississippi. Standing
in front of Stinson's Store,

he gently thumbed the
alternating bass lines. His index

and middle fingers picked
a melody lilting as guilelessly

as the Yalobusha River
flowing through the cotton fields.

He lowered his head
until his hat shaded his eyes,

but his folkish voice
warped the locals around him

like bees hanging around
a honeycomb—Avalon Blues,

which flew out of his amazing hands
to Memphis, New York, DC,

Newport, and other places,
landed back home at last.

MISSISSIPPI DELTA

is a vast land of cotton, corn, soybeans
and fishponds where visitors catch

a feeling of emptiness and flatness.
A Russian Fulbright TA becomes silent

right after she passes Yazoo City,
a job candidate from New York

mumbles why there isn't much traffic
on Highway 82. A student from LA

utters as if in her dream that
this is a place where birds won't

lay eggs. But she lays herself here.
A Chicagoan complains the sun here

is a fireball burning and rolling
overhead and mosquitoes are

as big as garden spiders. They
wear and eat Delta as well—

cotton jeans, cornbread, catfish,
and vegetable oil made from soybeans.

Can't imagine what Delta would be if
its flatness reflects no lonely view

of the blue sky and the red sunset,
blues doesn't sprout from the fields, and

life is no longer as quiet as a basking turtle
on a log above the swamp covered with algae.

Jianqing Zheng

ONCE

After Eudora Welty's picture "Window Shopping"
from One Time, One Place

She stands in front of the shop window
with her right hand on her hip and her left
touching her chin. I begin to wonder
what is displayed in the window which
attracts the woman to stop for a look.

A beautiful hat, a new style dress or
a pair of leather shoes for Sunday church?

Forty-five years ago I was sent down
to the countryside for reeducation.
One day I got the college admission letter.
Happy as the next-door barking dog,
I biked all the way to the county store.

I put my savings in the shop assistant's hand
for a blue jacket. I wanted to look fresh at college.

I never regretted being out of pocket.
I worked like a donkey in the fields. Reeducated
for three years, I picked the local dialect,
my hands callused, feet toughened
like horseshoes, and skin browned like mud.

I look understandingly at the woman
window-shopping her dream.

JC Reilly

MUDBUGGIN'

Already a handful of shabby men and a lady
in an impossibly wide sunhat
check their traps in the crawfish pool
off the side of Old Highway One
when Junior and I hop out of the truck
with our gear. We set down our chairs
and I pull out a book, while you scramble
to the edge of the water and at my nod,
wade in with your stick and bucket.
Slowly you read the water, scanning
for likely stones to lift and find that twitchy
brown yellow crustacean you love to eat
any way it's prepared. You spy one you like,
slip the bucket behind it and tap your stick.
As if on cue, the creature swims backward
into the bucket, and you hold your prize
up for me to see. *I got one, Mama, I got one!*
You find another and another after that,
but the process is painstaking, ten minutes
between each one. Glancing at the other fishers,
you envy the traps, I think, but keep at your task,
stone bucket stick, stone bucket stick.
We'll be here all morning, me reading,
you catching—though you'll let them go
like you always do. It's a good thing
I've got a pound of tails from the store
in the freezer to make tonight's étouffé.
I don't tell you that, though. Just smile
as another mudbug wins your lottery.

Susan M. Craig

OUR FATHER'S FEET

Our father's feet were born of southern rivers—
Sunflower, Tennessee, Mississippi.

His feet were post-World-War jubilation, Scottish jigs,
poems by Robert Service with a practiced lilt.

They were ibeams & trusses, prefab metal sheeting,
engineers of fine houses & schools,

churches, hospital additions. Bold mechanical
rulers, pens clipped in shirt pockets.

His feet were rough-&-ready as the Bering Sea,
bold as zinnias in his summer garden.

His feet, undaunted, ascended Machu Pichu & Kilimanjaro,
climbed the gold spiral stairway to claim the finest loge

at the Moscow opera, two crystal glasses
full of Stolichnaya.

When he burned off his soles in the lake cabin grease fire,
we youngsters huddled in the back of the wagon

as our mother raced like a wild horse for town.
The only sound his low moan, steady as the hum of a motor.

All that summer we cavorted as his feet grew new bottoms,
sturdy as Chickamauga's TVA dam.

In the days when our mother began her undiagnosed decline,
he'd come home from work weary, have us tug

the damp socks from his toes, then lie back with a sigh
in his leather recliner.

We didn't know what to make of the silence, his feet unmoving,
wilted socks like little children. We would tiptoe

just past the TV with news barely buzzing, his eyes closed
for moments. His feet—flopped like moths succumbed in light.

Emma DePanise

FIELD NOTES, CATOCTIN MOUNTAINS

When the copperhead coiled, I thought
of your jeans, the way you would cross
first your legs and then your ankles, twisting
further into yourself. To slither is to slide

like the way you would slip out of bed without
speaking, like the car down the arch
of the overpass last winter, like how discarded
balloons slink back into the sky. To shed

is to slough is to leave
a part of yourself. How I swept
your nail clippings under

the sink. When the copperhead
coiled, I thought of a roll of film, held
to my bedroom window, so little
smiles could climb the leaves in sepia.

Emma DePanise

FOUNTAIN ELEGY ENDING IN AUBADE WITH LINES FROM
LARRY LEVIS

I can't hear the train slurring the wind and last month's sidewalk
voices into the other half of this night's conversation. I can't hear

that old incessant falling—the fountain whose whirs
meant I was close to you. I want the rain to keep

against the windowpane or stop. I want the rain to shake
this out of me, *out of history*. And shake the coins

*

out of a girl I heard about once
who tripped on a brick and fell
into the town's fountain. Her cotton
barely escaped her mother's astonished
fingertips. I watched
as the first person threw
a penny, as it wove itself
into her hair, as pennies pinned
her shoulders to stone,
as a penny plugged
her ear, as pennies filled
her lungs and replaced
her air. *And when I tried
to imagine it, all I could see was the sun
squirming across a bronze heap, only her
breath in my pockets. What else
did they bury that brought me
here? She was there, she was
there. And tonight, you are*

*

either thinking or avoiding thinking. You are refusing to grasp
any star but this star as an oak zoetropes the past

into your palm. Unclench your jaw. Admit there is no one
next to you. Not even *the slur of water receding*. Let the record slip

*

back into its sleeve. At breakfast, my mother
will fill a shovel's severed head
with one cup of water, nestle
it near her rosemary. I'll watch
the sun flicker the water unbroken, *not falling*
or doing anything. I'll watch the shovel long

to break the soil as it learns carving an emptiness
can be simpler than holding still. Soon—sunrise,

your voice up my spine and we'll both
watch these birds refuse to land.

Nadia Arioli

ON “POINT OF INTERSECTION” BY KAY SAGE

I will bake bread,
and share it with you,
because when you were a kid,
you felt like a ghost in your house.
Is it any wonder you could float?

At night, while the heavy ones slept,
you glided through the kitchen
in socks and pajama bottoms,
stood on furniture, and took
because you could. You said

you only saw the backs of things,
then—like seeing the pages
but not the spine, or the ear part
but not the disc.

I don't know what's on the other side.
My heart is more Mobius than Euclid.
But I know what it means for two lines
to have a point of intersection.
If the plane is flat, one flash then separation.

But if on a curve, a twist of paper,
one will come back always, but
sea-changed, and on the back,
on the back of things.

I don't know if it's odd
or even this time or if it's me
or you that's upside down now,
but digestion works from all angles.
And you baked bread
and will share it with me.

Rebecca Ruth Gould

WOMAN, FRAMED

Watching you watch
the woman framed
by her mirror

Reminds me of our love:
limned by international borders,
constrained by foreign laws,
barricaded by alien wars.

You lift the camera.
I spy her in the pixallated lens:
her shoulders unburdened
her waist wrapped in silk.
All she sees is herself.

Like us: wrapped in each other.
Trying to block the invading armies,
keeping the world out.
Silences between us magnify
until I spy the parapets you have built
around our imagined fortress.

You wanted to keep our love small
& invisible.
Manageable, under control.
You wanted to frame me
in your mirror,
to keep our castle impregnable,
to prevent it from tumbling down.

I wanted to explode.

Rebecca Ruth Gould

ICE FISHING

Between emptiness
& the consciousness of it
sits a great big
gapingness,

a big hole
between knowing
& being,
seeing yourself
& the reflection
of seeing.

The hole is so big
I sometimes wonder
how speech can be contained in it.

It is like the saw, hacking
off the roundness
of a frozen lake.

My father used to propose
ice-fishing in the days
when I was too young to resist.

I thought that life
floated beneath
those numbing depths.

When we drilled
through each layer of ice,
we crashed against another layer
of frigid nothingness.

BATHING IN ST. PETERSBURG

I scrubbed your back &
rubbed you with birch branches
until your skin shed
layers on my hands.

We bathed each other.
You were a stranger to me.
The sulfur scorched us
clean as newborn babes.

We touched with the tender touch
of strangers who will never meet again
but who recognize in each others'
hands a fleeting epiphany.

John Belk

GOOD ENDINGS

we are drawn to good endings—
remarkable tension of longing
& closure, the duck's barren feet.
how skin piques like wildfowl
on a clear still lake when near one
we love—mounds of good flesh
continuing. we are a gentle breeze
from ruffling away, all goosedown
& hands laced to hold near the other
in our floating. we cling to the face of
the earth, afraid, & the wind blows.
we fly. the surface of the water prattles
then settles under holy clamor of
wings—anatidae seraphs moving to
separate, hovered on the skin of lake,
ephemeral & splitting open, creating
the whole damned world.

THE FANCY

homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto

See now the hawthornes & hackberries,
pink-fruited sumacs settlers used to
make shrub or switchel or sour ginger
tea. The flesh of a quince—anointed
skin of our mothers—lures us past
the safety of the meadow, beyond
the still-quiet woods where monsters
turn & dark things fear to go. Here,
the soil refuses water. Even the devil
does not want you. We hold hands before
saying goodbye: *hinc illae lacrimae*. Three
leagues out in the desert & all that is
left at the end of this world is a crowd,
a fight, a last temptation, the stifled cries
of a child & all this to happen again
& again. Still,

what brave joys await us—
what shining dangerous tomorrows ;

Patrick Theron Erickson

COVER-UP

The kind of restless
relentless snow
that burrowing
buries a landscape
burdens and leaves it
featureless

leaves the flora and fauna
as unknowing and unknown
as the rest of us

and the tracks each leaves
as distinctive
as the way forward
is faceless

our footfalls muffled
and quickly covered

Given a fresh foot
and our best foot forward
and no foothold

whiteout conditions
prevail

Even our cries
go unheard.

Mary Hennessy

AS LONG AS NEVER

It was an uncertain spring.
Virginia Woolf

Early morning arrives in an envelope
along with passion fruit seeds.

Mother Google says the seeds (they look
like tiny hand grenades)

are hard to germinate. Says, it can take as long
as a month or never.

The wind stirs a kind of anarchy in the Lenten roses
and blueberry bushes.

Among the un-bloomed plants an urgency
at the looming impossibility of being

this or that. Bees slow to get out of bed worry
you, Husband. Like us,

honeybees are drawn to water and like us in it over
their heads. A few mockingbirds birds linger

on the leafless brugmansia, as if on barstools waiting
for the next round.

After a Vegas wedding we planted
a rose cutting from Tombstone

under the arbor. First light reveals a cat-catastrophe,
a shattering, constellations of feathers everywhere.

The little dipper moves as we reach for it.
The thing that lasts is not ours.

Douglas Nordfors

THE EARTH

Because the earth can't ever be
one thing, both fossil and rock,
living my life isn't living through
my erosion. But I'm still growing

into every other notch on one
half of my bones. I'm still searching
for every other erased caress on
my skin. Last night, I saw, on

the small screen, a young actress
I couldn't have cared less about,
who radiated hopeless crushes
and tenderness crashing over

the biologically imperative world.
But she and her image were worth
watching. Her face itself was
a small screen, as well as

a reflecting pool that one of us,
no, that neither one of us, desired
to sink, or send rippling away
with a breath of windswept wind.

James Butler

AT HANGING ROCK

The edge of the world is
all around
us, buried in each
ridge of rock:
gray and specked with lichen

like a slow disease.
It all seems impermeable,
with each
leaf bursting out into
the open air and

gleaming with the
soft glow of elevation.
Does it
all crumble? Under the
guiding masters,

time or geology,
what is the logic
of rock? Small puddles
in the crevasses
settle slowly, and breed flies.

Katherine Fallon

PLACEMENT

I

Gone my Southern mother
(every awareness a *reckoning*),
my Midwestern father (*roof*

like the hoof of a horse),
my queen bed shoved like a shim
into a dormer window's made space.

On stage, I had to work to lose them,
to convince anyone listening
that I came from no one, nowhere.

II

For me it is only the words *umbrella*,
lawyer, and *eight* that give me away,

but when my sister went away to college
in Massachusetts, she got Southern, at last,

and fast. She came to value her vowels,
fragile things in cotton batting, opening

a floodgate of origin, of placement,
of all we swore, for years, we could

escape, eschew, erase.

AIKEN, SC, 2002: PAUL, WAFFLE HOUSE

Love letters gone unanswered elsewhere,
he was momentarily present. He was also a he,

and I flouted the rawness he left after kissing me,
hard as punishment, in the sterile fluorescence

of the filthy diner. That burn took the place
of other, lower burns and was grief as well as

privilege. My hand found his back pocket
precisely because it was allowed and a way

to touch without touching, thin denim a veil
between us. No one looked twice, if at all,

as though the world had been expecting us
all along. As though a door'd been flung open

onto a roomful of strangers who wouldn't be
strangers for long. Otherworldly: seeing how

light could shine so brightly on two as blessing,
when all I knew was risk; learning what it's like

to close somatic gaps as naturally as static clings.
He was the last of his kind for me, a short-lived

flower I whacked off at the root. Afterward,
I went back to my flaming shadows.

Robin Gow

GREEN THURSDAY ALMOST ELEGY

nice to see so many ribs
in one place. last time i saw a bouquet
it was made of dogwood branches
& the flowers were near dead, browning
at the edges. what are we supposed to do
with the knowledge that trees have their toes planted
in the earth. almost no bugs will survive
if we continue to be mean to them.
who is your favorite day of the week?
mine is thursday because it suggests
everything will be over soon.
all thursdays are green. there is a store
called "tuesday morning" full of wild trinkets
& i once went on a date there.
i bought him a stuffed whale.
back at his house the stuffed whale
became a full huge whale.
it broke the bathtub we tried to keep her in. eventually
she grew wings & headed for the beach.
i saw a video of wildwood & no one
was wearing face masks. people are dying
like dogwood. there is a warped whisk
in the utensil drawer & i can't wait
to use it on you. there was a grizzly bear
in my sock so i asked him to exit.
we drove to the poconos & he told me stories
of his youth when gas was less than
a dollar a gallon. he asked
how long i plan to stay alive
& i told him i'm trying i'm trying.
my grandmother lived to be like 90
& i wonder how much of it she enjoyed.
i don't think my life is about feeling happy.
happiness is all about forgetting.
i don't want to forget anything that's why
i keep detailed notes of the number of arms
on every single tree i meet. we will lose track
if i am not dedicated. in this town everyone has
a bow & arrow aimed at a fake deer.

the fake deer will one day be granted hearts
& just as they come alive a hunter will
impale them on their own front lawn.
people practice shooting the air around here.
i do it too but i don't use a real gun,
i just make one with my finger
& i put it to my head &
confetti comes out my other ear.
just a party trick. no worries.
glitter confetti. we will have to vacuum it up.

Wynne Hungerford

HIGHWAY, TN

My father says it will be clear enough
to see Mars tonight. Then silence, but I want
to hear something more than the flocks
of engines humming around us, passing by.

We're going the minimum speed limit
so he can see the Black-Eyed Susans
along the roadside. They look hung-over,
tangled with weeds. There are many

ways to open a lid: hot water, the friction
of a T-shirt, a bang against the counter,
but I don't care how it happens. The road
retreats grayly behind us and answer this:

are we moving beyond ourselves?
There's always more ahead. Like flowers
whose unnumbered seasons are filled with
the re-blooming of a single life, so much

time to repair and re-aim. I know the idea of
migration is to end up somewhere, and where
are we sleeping tonight? I still make excuses
for why I never saw my parents kiss. It's simple.

The had nothing to prove. And It's easy
to mistake passing hotel signs for neon planets,
since I've only left the earth in dreams.
This sky hasn't said a word in miles.

THE PURPLE ONION, NC

Before the night I watched my mother slow dance in the glow of a neon Blue Moon sign, there was nothing. She swayed with a man she'd love for one more year, while I listened to a jazz band in the corner, gold-flashing instruments, the brush of a snare drum. I was sixteen when I first saw my mother kiss a man. He wasn't my father, but doctors found a brain tumor years later, shaved his head before surgery, and I later wondered about the shape of his skull. But just then the process of neon: electrons ionization photons: meant nothing compared to light cast from electric beer signs holding my gaze in the way of arms my mother's footsteps whispering with each weight shift into the ear of the floor, the earth, all the men of her life sitting around me my barstool in conversation with all of their barstools. None of us moved for a long time, not even the ghost of her father who put away vodka at jazz tempo, grave-soil on his shirt collar. The grandfather still wearing a blood-soaked surgeon smock from his war posting in Africa. The first husband smelling of his current wife's smoke, her face tattooed on his shoulder. The boyfriend whose family owned Hot Spot gas stations. The friend with facial paralysis. The brother in a hospital gown. Nobody seems to move when someone else moves like you wish you could. Even her second husband, my father, sat and asked the bartender if he believed microwaves caused cancer. The men I know act like the ones I don't, immobile. But the one night my mother chose differently, she danced as if she were alone, moved in and out of the Blue Moon's light, which means that kiss had nothing to do with me, except it had everything to do with why I'm like this, why I watched *Cheers* then daydreamed of Sam Malone in pre-algebra. Didn't even realize his girlfriends were all the same, wrong girl. Even if the easier choice is the wrong one, we continually return to that safe spot, except I know things will change because my mother's future husband walked into the bar as the night wound down, smelling of grass, and covered in dirt and oil from mending things his entire life.

Hiram Larew

PRETTY BOY FLOYD

Erase everything that's known about him
His place of birth, middle name, even how he died
 in a spray of bullets
Ignore all of that
It makes no difference
He hardly made a difference
Except his name my goodness

No matter what you think about him
 there's his nickname
Somehow it brings to mind farmers
 Especially beet or wheat farmers in dust
Farmers that shook their heads at that name
 or wiped their nose and grinned

A name so outside the Midwest and yet
 so from it –
 a comet streaking black skies
 or a blue-ribbon jar of pickles
Floyd -- meaning a mechanic or post office clerk
But also Pretty Boy -- meaning a curl of cigarette smoke
 or the shiny brass clasps of suspenders
 or a French postcard

Nothing that went wrong with him counts much now
But just like with Bonnie Prince Charles
We want to see his picture
And when we finally do
 framed by a different world
 we whisper *my goodness* to ourselves.

Ace Boggess

HOW TO MAKE A DRUG DEAL

Find a friend who has a friend
existing in a circle of shadows
as if surrounded by arc lamps
on the plaza. It's all about
friends of friends, trusting strangers.
Stop by the bar to pick up
your friend's friend: drag queen,
post-show. She takes your back seat
wearing your cologne—you
recognize it, applied with force,
like spice & lilies & sex.
Say yes & no to the right questions.
Say you'd prefer pills, will settle for blow.

Long night of ache & want, &
you drive your friend &
your friend's friend to a trailer
in the bad part of town,
wait in the car while she struts &
hip-shakes up a portable flight of stairs
then inside with all your cash
while you worry if you'll see her again,
debate whether to change your life &
answer no & no & no, although
the future comes for you with knives.

Will Justice Drake

COMMANDO

That old Commando
was a damn good chicken.
We named him that thinking

how he'd eye the trees
for that chicken hawk
while the others squawked

out in the open, then
dart from the storm shelter,
the others helter-skelter,

while the raptor descended
on one or two
of the chicks. The whole brood

was gone directly, but the cock
shot to the porch stairs,
to the kitchen, to the window where

he watched between Tabasco
bottles and an aloe plant.
His comb lay slant

across his head, a beret,
like the one I saw
blown off at Guam,

swept from the ship deck
to the water just before
they dropped the bay door

and dumped the people out.
I saw a woman's wide
mouth, black inside.

She wept and looked West.
I'd seen the face
before as a bomber traced

green village lines
and engulfed the land in blooms
brighter than the farmers grew

there. I spent the next
twenty years fighting
fires in Tulsa and biting

my tongue about the war.
But I wanted to swallow
anything fire could follow.

I took out the tomatoes
for peppers at the station
chili competition

and spent that night
gulping overproof
in the kitchen till the roof

of my mouth burned raw.
Nothing I did would melt
my flesh. Nothing felt

like remembering my children
as ash. The last day
I saw Commando, he lay

in the dust and ate rocks.
The hawk screeched to the ground
and made its talons a crown.

Kat Bodrie

HOUSE PARTY

Sitting on the rusted empty propane tank
in the balmy climate of your flannel-lined coat,
I ask you why you hate your father.
It's not like the answer matters,
only that the city lights mimic stars
and new friends collect sticks and desert scrub
to warm the oncoming night.

They will look for you in the gorge
next year, send a search party
into the canyon, come up empty.

Now, you relate your parents' disappointment
at the West Point drop-out, the computer whiz
chasing dreams. Who are they anyway
to say who you are or what you can be?
You're a desert creature carving lines
at the sides of highways, speeding through
the dry landscape in your pickup truck.

They'll find it parked at the bridge
rest stop, phone in the cup holder,
water bottle lying some feet away.

David van den Berg

MIDNIGHT GOSPEL

listen.

mudcats sing of the upside-down where the damned fry in cast-iron. pa taught me to dry chicken livers and slip ‘em onto hooks and said we had do-minion over the creeping things of the land and the things of the sea and the things of the sky and when brother winged a doe we called her tripod and every three-legged white tail we crossed was forever spared.

quail tell that the sun is naught but the barrel of a 20 gauge and the righteous spend their lives in the dirt but the vainglorious cross its face in flight just to fall in thunder. ma taught me to train the dogs with iron hand and when the doctor fed my black-and-white bitch poison she called to say the soul was eternal and the dark beyond is filled with love and whether we’re in heaven or hell depends on if you’ll take it.

but the owl told me he’s not scared of nothing ‘cause his big eyes saw that our spirit lives in our shadow and grows longer with each hurt we cause ‘till our shadow is big as a peacock’s tail and when we die it weighs us down so we struggle to take flight and spend the rest of time creepin’ underfoot until the things that have do-minion over us wake from their long sleep and swallow us whole. and i’d doubt him but i know better since seeing the veil in a mirror at the wake of april last.

CREOSOTE

The biggest barn in Gates County, Carolina:
century-old creosote goliath: still strong: still
in use: still. I've driven by dozens of times
dreaming of peaceful trespassing: the white
and brown spotted goats jumping off the doghouse,
the dead John Deere and the cinderblock wall
of the broken kiln. No exits off Highway 13
except cut-out u-turns blackened by skidmarks.
Like a breath, I clear 100,000 miles
past the abandoned house and Dan's bankrupt
gas station at Corner High. Speedometer frozen,
heater moaning, radio cracking, I keep going,
pushing, hoping. Creosote darkens
and preserves wood, causes cancer in shaved
rodents so it goes away like tobacco fields
and goals of youth and beauty of back
country roads still in use: still strong: still.

Marcia L. Hurlow

ON OLD SILVER BEACH WITH JANE

As a child, Jane once asked her father for a penny
to toss in a fountain. He smiled. "Here's a nickel
to make your wish five times more likely." She asks

for the ocean's salt smell and gull calls, long marsh grass,
dune shrubs. Now fifteen years retired on Cape Cod, she
must return inland, check into a Kansas hospital.

Standing on the beach, Jane watches the nickel-colored
waves arrive and retreat, breathes deeply. "My friends say
they'll return to the Cape," Jane muses. "They forget
or they die. I will return." She opens her purse.

Chiron Alston

IF I CAN SEE IT

Would you believe my ache if it had color—
the rusty coat of a three-legged fox, hobbling
from a wolf trap?

Or, a cream, two-year, cotton
ball me, crawling up his lap for a nap?

Would you believe desiccant yellow high school
hangovers? Purple teen-tongues under the bleachers?
Cinnamon fingers in each other's jeans?

How about a gun metal gray park bench? His tawny,
hollow-log voice, sounding his plan to kill us all
and himself?

Would it have been okay if after
I had said to him, *Daddy, I am umber today?*

John C. Mannone

LANGUAGE OF PINK

When morning blushes over the horizon, my sleep soon evaporates into magenta. And you, in the flamingo dawn, where chiffon clouds neon a seashell-pink, will shimmer my passion.

Then shades of azalea to hot poppy, the heat of day brightens the fire pinks, and you, my French rose. There's a song in my eyes; an orchid's caress on our lips.

When evening falls on the soft serenade of your smile—damask with terra rose hues—the river rouge of my heart will tumble in the turbulence of your lavender embrace.

John Miller

WALTER ANDERSON CHECKS OUT FROM WHITFIELD
MENTAL HOSPITAL

After too many dawns listening
to the mourning doves chant:
your joy is dead, your joy is dead,
it was finally time to go. So, as if
to apologize for his cartoon escape
down a ladder of knotted bedsheets
tossed from an upstairs window

he left a gift: a mural to break up
the asylum's brute, red brick façade:
a swirling flight of frigate birds
or else pelicans, soaring and diving
in spirals of life – birds on the wing –
drawn with however many bars
of Ivory it took to wash away gravity.

On his slow climb down, he paused
at just the right heights to breathe
life under their wings. One man, taking
his liberty and leaving an archetype:
imaginary birds with more freedom
than anyone dared call their own.

Allyson Whipple

NOTES FROM CPR AND WILDERNESS FIRST AID
TRAINING

In Texas, everything's got teeth
or thorns or guns. Even in cities.

If you go into your attic during a flood,
you have climbed into your own coffin.

The stress of adjusting to even a one-hour time
change can trigger a heart attack.

Once someone needs CPR, they are clinically dead.
You can't make their situation worse, only better.

The AED is programmed to be smarter than any user,
which is less terrifying than Alexa laughing at its owners.

Many women experience at least one heart attack before receiving
treatment because the pain is not as bad as menstrual cramps.

If your skin seals up too soon, the inner
wound will never heal properly.

The most effective way to prevent mosquito-borne infection
is to spray yourself with poison. Repeatedly.

Blisters are inevitable. Thirst unavoidable.
Take a breath. Document everything.

Robert Parham

RESPONDEZ, S'IL VOUS PLAÎT

The boy in the back of the bus
Was not the boy in the back of the class,
Although the seeming silences within which
Each appeared to live seemed to us the same.

I am certain, now, each of us seemed the same
To him, and him: less curious, but more verbal,
Our words clattering about like balls on a billiard
Table intent on nothing but motion--because

We, the chatty folks, set them about their business for which
There was no purpose. The boy in the back of the class wrote
Science fiction stories, day after day, answered the teacher
With "Huh?" if anything, then went on into the future.

The boy on the bus must have wondered (I imagined)
What the emergency handle would do should he pull it,
Ready to jump out at low speed (no boy with a bag
Of money and a parachute, no clues to leave for others).

But if you think you can figure this out better than I have,
Write to P. O. Box, Clarksburg, Maryland. Leave the date
You were there and should the date exist within the times
Those boys and I and others were—I shall respond.

Clayton Adam Clark

FALL

Cumulonimbi, offspring of two air masses
uniting mismatched densities, rained and pushed
over a sycamore in the park. Trees that big
demand an aftermath—their heft severed

from an intimacy with the sun, they crush
a home or the mottled trunk occludes
the boulevard. An elderly woman stopped
to take in the wreckage with me then asked,

What day is it? I told her, *Tuesday*,
and she nodded then shallow-dragged on
her cigarette and I wondered how dense
her bones could be, the audacity of the body

to hold upright long after our insides
begin to turn. I used to feel an urge
toward legacy, but V & E plodded about
that tree long enough it must've been Godot,

the sycamore unearthed so little dirt
I wish we'd seen it fall. Last I saw of her,
the woman was lingering in traffic,
cars honking then speeding around her.

It's probably only bones and offspring
that persist, the latter often best at keeping blood
out of the street. Not V nor E would
go it alone, but with enough rope for two

they might have swung tethered till curtain
or toppled the tree. I saw the sedan stop
for her—a man lowered his window and she nodded
then got in—but I can't say if he took her home.

Grace Wagner

REWILDING

Let's reintroduce the megafauna,
find a substitute for the mammoths,
giant ground sloths, and sabre-toothed
cats. Let us fill the canopies
with new species to replace the ones
we killed. Call it "Frankenstein ecology."
Let's fill the plains of North America,
bring back the elephants—proxies
for the mammoths we butchered
so many millennia ago. Imagine
this. An elephant transplanted
to the Great Plains—body heavy
with memories of that African savanna
now lumbering through bluestem
and Indian grass, surrounded on all sides
by wildflowers—milkweed, primrose,
poppy-mallow. Trees rise up
out of the grasslands
like gnarled fingers pointing
out the sky. A prairie chicken stalks
insects in the undergrowth
as critically endangered whooping cranes
roost in a chinquapin tree.
What will they think of their new neighbors?
Watch as a leopard drags a white-tailed deer
up the branches of the old post-oak
behind my grandma's prairie house
as she cooks up her famous apple pie,
brown sugar boiling through crust.
The blood of the deer drips slowly down the trunk
as the grandkids play in the front yard.

Devon Balwit

EX-EXECUTOR

After my parents disinherit me because
my poor housekeeping suggests a future
squandering of their empire, I sweep the floor.

I do not pull the furniture from the walls,
but swish the broom beneath, snagging
sufficient dog hair and dust to demonstrate

effort. I scrub my toilet under the rim
but do not bleach the mildewed ceiling.
I wash clothes but do not iron, add

groceries to the fridge in neatish rows,
pulling the older bottles frontwards,
but without swabbing drips. I imagine

how my parents would have it done,
the felt-slippered maid four times weekly
for them alone, restoring

the mute chrome, the hospital corners.
Perhaps they dream of cryogenics,
bodies frozen in situ to await resurrection.

Or of a different child, who would give
each object its due coveting, continuing
the accretion, more of everything

to pass on, in reef-like calcification,
to heirs lodged within it like lampreys.
Relieved of such encumbrance, I am glad.

Katherine Wolfe

LETTER TO MY GRANDDAUGHTER

Remember the time you jumped
on your bike as my car turned
down your street? You rode
beside me until I reached your
driveway. Then you opened my
door for a hug and asked me to
watch you do a double somersault
on your new trampoline. You missed
the first one but kept trying over
and over again until you made it.
Your friend Riley, who had been
taking gymnastics since she was four,
came over to join you. Graceful as a
swan, she turned her somersaults perfectly.
You followed her lead until rain spoiled
your fun and you came inside.
We cooked bowtie pasta and broccoli
with alfredo sauce, drank sweet tea,
you, me, and Riley. Afterwards,
I sat on the sofa while you entertained
lip-synching a YouTube video, a parody,
Do you wanna build a wall?
Riley kept dancing in front of you,
behind you, around you until you
collided and fell down laughing.
You were ten. Now you are thirteen.
How much you and the world have
changed in the years between.

Lisa Rhoades

GOD AT THE LAKE

God at the lake honks like a goose
like all of them thwacking the surface, lifting to flight
or lazing one-legged on the floating dock
preening the feathers across their backs, shaking
their heads, tucking their bills to their breasts. God
the heron watches, feet in brown sand
as God the minnow flits
shadow to shadow. God the teenage lifeguard says
its not a bad first job, spading over moats and gullies
God the toddler made before this tantrum—
too tired to nap, too desperate to stay—
God tips over the canvas tote bag and cries.
God the sand fly burrows and burrows
and doesn't sting or bite.
God the red-eared slider suns on the stump
ignoring the kayaker,
the kayak hissing through the water grasses
God being water
and the kayak, too.
God the sunny nibbles at the worm
which is also God and so suffers this attention.
God the lure, the hook, the floater, the sinker,
and the boy learning to cast a line,
God aiming toward God,
the tilting buoy in the center of the lake.

Amber Shockley

BABY DOLL

Father, have I told you how soft
my body is? And softer by the year.
How it gives, folds. My seams rip,
my substance falls out. Stained
and torn, I seem to walk, but
I'm tugged by a string, tied
to whoever bends their finger.

Across from you, I black my eyes
like buttons, stitch my mouth
so words won't out. Yarn-haired,
cotton-stuffed, I never cried or drank
or wet. My porcelain mother's eyes
used to blink when you shook her.

That was enough to dull a girl down,
make her knots and thread and rags.

CENTRIPETAL

I want a heavy arm around my
waist like a lap bar on a roller coaster.
Don't let me be thrown. No,
let me be thrown. I think I need
to be flipped over, my hair hanging
like a dark flag, and a rhythm
like the track's clicks.
Chances are, I'm already upside
down. The top of the universe
has yet to be determined.
An unsettled dog is barking
loud into the night,
the yow-yow-yow's
reverberating off a wall,
the echo is a lonely shadow
that curls around and around.

Jon Young

EARLY SUNDAY

Surely the morning
is laid out before me
because you brought it here.
It is the sun's obedience.
The mist on the waters, too,
is guided by your breath
and every barking bird lets loose
the notes given him.
The tall reeds sway gently,
tired dancers entranced
by the tune of all creation
in its waking and the sun
so slowly r i s i n g.
Shy fish kiss
the flat surface, unwilling
to disturb the gray mist
drifting and spinning,
no doubt stirred as I
by what you are saying.

Weston Morrow

REVELATION

A slumping of the shoulders,
the body tilts
toward the grave.

We prevent death
one day at a time, one step
and then the next.

I walk the same path
my father made, and his dad,
before him, wore prints in the grass

so we wouldn't lose our way.
The earth asks
only to be put back together

when you leave. A little sun,
a little shade. The light falling
on a small patch of lawn.

Weston Morrow

THICKET

The trees, leafless,
crack in wind—

the bones of the valley,
fractured, drip

marrow through the mulch.
Pulp fills

the ground's open mouth,
trees

the jagged teeth
of the forest.

In the field
that runs its border, wild

horses
chomp a nonexistent bit.

They spit
with joy to be alive, flying

through the field tonight.
The mice

lift their little snouts and sniff
the sky.

Is this
what it's like to be alive?—

to step
almost accidentally

through the branches,
and the moon

stooping like a lover
to kiss you on each cheek.

I am terrified
of too much open space.

I take
a step into the meadow.

The world
takes on your face.

Brendan Walsh

THE FOX THE FOX THE FOX

crackling fall night dark as a closed mouth
we make fire drink stolen beers the woods
breathe-yes-breathe on our pale necks

from the deepsick forest the strained bark
like a woman calling for help my friend says
again it bellows from the riverbed or the creek

bangs between pines and the largest oaks
like a kid crying like a movie dinosaur
we'd seen them in the silver mornings their red

flamboyant upon the grass our moms
counted them because that is what moms do
but tonight this horror rising from their soft

faces those scavenger tongues and teeth
the fox the fox the fox screams and we cower
in the air which grows wide and heavy and still

CONTRIBUTORS

Faiz Ahmad is a final-year student pursuing his Bachelors-Masters in Biological Sciences, IIT Madras, India. He believes in poetry as the ground of bewilderment, of amazement at simply ‘being.’ His poems have been published in *Storm Cellar*, *Salamander*, *Modern Haiku*, *Anima* and others.

CHIRON ALSTON is a research administrator for Oregon State University. He is the father of two daughters and lives in the Portland area with his wife. Chiron has an MFA in writing from OSU - Cascades Low-residency Program. Other poems have appeared in *TIMBER*, *Hole In The Head*, and *Ramblr*.

NADIA ARIOLI (née Wolnisty) is the founder and editor in chief of *Thimble Literary Magazine*. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Spry*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *Apogee*, *Penn Review*, *McNeese Review*, *Gyroscope*, *Bateau Press*, *SOFTBLOW*, and others. They have chapbooks from Cringe-Worthy Poetry Collective, Dancing Girl Press, and a full-length from Spartan.

DEVON BALWIT sets her hand to the plough in the Pacific Northwest. Her poems can be found in *The Worcester Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Rattle*, *Apt* (long form issue), *Tar River Poetry*, *Sugar House Review*, *Poetry South*, *saltfront*, and *Grist* among others.

BRITTANY J. BARRON was born and raised in Flowery Branch, Georgia, and graduated with her MFA in Creative Writing at Georgia College, where she served as co-Assistant Poetry Editor of the national journal, *Arts & Letters*, and taught freshman composition. Her poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming in *Still*, a journal dedicated to publishing Southern-Appalachian writers; *The Examined Life Journal*; and *Not Your Mother's Breast Milk*. In fall 2019, she began Florida State University's PhD program in Literature, Media, and Culture.

JOHN BELK is an Assistant Professor of English at Southern Utah University where he directs the Writing Program. His poetry has recently appeared in *Sugar House Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Madison Review*, *Salt Hill*, *Kestrel*, *Worcester Review*, *Sport Literate*, *Poetry South*, and *Arkansas Review* among others. His chapbook “The Weathering of Igneous Rockforms in High-Altitude Riparian Environments” is forthcoming from Cathexis Northwest Press. His scholarship can be found in *Rhetoric Review*, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *Composition Forum*, and edited anthologies.

CLARE M. BERCOT ZWERLING is a newish poet with three poems published to date in *glassworks*, *Halcyon Days*, and *Night Waves*, and forthcoming poetry publications in *The Oakland Review* and *Coffin Bell Journal*. A recent retiree and transplant from Deep South Texas, she resides on the Mendocino coast, and enjoys the support and stimulation of a vibrant artistic community.

KAT BODRIE's prose and poetry have appeared in *Waymark: Voices of the Valley*, *West Texas Literary Review*, *Rat's Ass Review*, and other publications. She lives in North Carolina. Learn more at katbodrie.com

ACE BOGGESS is author of five books of poetry, most recently *Misadventure* (Cyberwit, 2020) and *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So* (Unsolicited Press, 2018), as well as two novels, including *States of Mercy* (Alien Buddha Press, 2019). His writing appears in *Notre Dame Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *River Styx*, *Rhino*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

CARL BOON is the author of the full-length collection *Places & Names: Poems* (The Nasiona Press, 2019). His poems have appeared in many journals and magazines, including *Prairie Schooner*, *Posit*, and *The Maine Review*. He received his Ph.D. in Twentieth-Century American Literature from Ohio University in 2007, and currently lives in Izmir, Turkey, where he teaches courses in American culture and literature at Dokuz Eylül University.

Poet and photographer, **RONDA PISZK BROATCH** is the author of *Lake of Fallen Constellations*, (MoonPath Press, 2015). Ronda is the recipient of an Artist Trust GAP Grant, and her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart prize. Her journal publications include *Blackbird*, *Diagram*, *Sycamore Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Palette Poetry*, and Public Radio KUOW's *All Things Considered*, among others.

JAMES BUTLER is a writer, poet, and playwright living in Raleigh, North Carolina. He holds a bachelor's degree in English and creative writing from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as well as a Master's degree in English from Villanova University. His film writing has appeared in *Bright Wall/Dark Room* and *Bright Lights Film Journal*, and his poetry has appeared in *Into the Void*. His short plays have been produced by festivals and programs in Dublin, Ireland, and Carrboro, NC.

CLAYTON ADAM CLARK lives in St. Louis, his hometown, where he works as a public health research scientist and volunteers for *River Styx* magazine. His debut poetry collection, *A Finitude of Skin*, won the Moon City Poetry Award and was published by Moon City Press in 2018. His poems have recently appeared in *Poetry Daily*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and elsewhere. He earned the MFA at Ohio State University and is currently studying clinical mental health counseling at University of Missouri–St. Louis.

CATHERINE-ESTHER COWIE is from St. Lucia and has lived in Canada and the US. She is a graduate of the 2017 Callaloo Writing Workshop, and a 2020 graduate of the Pacific University MFA program. Her writing has appeared in the *Penn Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Forklift Ohio*, *Flock Literary Journal*, *Moka Magazine*, *Potomac Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Portland Review*.

SUSAN M. CRAIG is a lifelong writer and artist living in Columbia, South Carolina. Her work has appeared in journals and magazines including *Jasper*; *Fall Lines*; *Mom Egg Review*; *Kakalak*; and others. She finds solace in silence and nature, and in the intriguing accidental “still lifes” she comes upon on her city walks. She routinely photographs chairs and oddities discarded by the curb, each with its own story. She cherishes words.

EMMA DePANISE's poems are forthcoming or have appeared recently in journals such as the *minnesota review*, *Passages North*, *The National Poetry Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Poet Lore*, *Quarterly West* and elsewhere. She is a winner of a 2019 AWP Intro Journals Award and the 2018 winner of the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry, and is an M.F.A. candidate at Purdue University, an associate poetry editor for *Sycamore Review* and an editor for *The Shore Poetry*, an online poetry journal.

RC DeWINTER, a superannuated poetry debutante, writes in several genres with a focus on poetry. Her only claim to fame is a decent Twitter following.

WILL JUSTICE DRAKE lives in Alabama, where he teaches English and coaches soccer. He was a finalist for the 2016 NC State Poetry Contest, judged by Yusef Komunyakaa. His poems, essays, and articles have appeared in *Raleigh Review*, *New York Daily News*, *Negative Capability*, *Bellum*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, *UMobile Magazine*, and *The Cullman Tribune*. He received his MFA from North Carolina State University.

GEORGE DREW is the author of seven poetry collections, most recently *Pastoral Habits: New and Selected Poems*, *Down & Dirty* and *The View From Jackass Hill*, winner of the 2010 X.J. Kennedy Poetry Prize, all from Texas Review Press. His eighth, *Fancy's Orphan*, appeared in 2017, Tiger Bark Press, and his ninth, *Drumming Armageddon*, appeared in Fall 2020, Madville Publishing. George's biography will appear in *Mississippi Poets: A Literary Guide*, U. of Mississippi Press, edited by Catherine Savage Brosman.

KRISTIN ENTLER is a disabled queer poet who grew up in rural Alabama. She is working on her M.A. in English from The University of Alabama at Birmingham and works on staff for *Birmingham Poetry Review* and *NELLE*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in publications such as *Anomaly Literary Journal*, *Mudfish*, and *GulfStream Literary Magazine* among others. When not working on her thesis, she is probably trying to train her service dog-to-be, Azzie.

PATRICK THERON ERICKSON, a resident of Garland, Texas, a Tree City, just south of Duck Creek, is a retired parish pastor put out to pasture himself. His work has appeared in *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *The Main Street Rag*, among other publications, and more recently in *The Oddville Press*, *Vox Poetica*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine* and *Futures Trading*.

KATHERINE FALLON's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Colorado Review*, *Juked*, *Meridian*, *Foundry*, and others, and included in *Best New Poets 2019*. Her chapbook, *The Toothmakers' Daughters*, is available through Finishing Line Press. She shares domestic space with two cats and her favorite human, who helps her zip her dresses.

CRAIG FINLAY is a poet and librarian currently living in rural Oklahoma. His poems have appeared or will be appearing in numerous publications, most recently, *The Ilanot Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Levee Magazine*, and *After Happy Hour Review*. His debut collection, *The Very Small Mammoths of Wrangel Island*, is forthcoming from Urban Farmhouse Press

JESSICA FISCHOFF is the Editor and Owner of *[PANK]*, Editor and Owner of *American Poetry Journal*, author of the little book of poems, *The Desperate Measure of Undoing* (Across the Margin, 2019) and Editor of the upcoming *Pittsburgh Anthology* (Dostoyevsky Wannabe, 2020). Her thoughts on editing appear in *Best American Poetry* and *The Kenyon Review*. Her writing appears in *Diode Poetry Journal*, *Fjords Review*, *The Southampton Review*, *Yemassee*, and *Prelude*.

GERBURG GARMANN, a native of Germany, is a professor of German and French at the University of Indianapolis. Her scholarly publications appear in French, English, and German in international journals. Her poetry and paintings have appeared in various magazines and anthologies around the world. As a poet and a painter, she published a poetry/painting collection titled *Unterwegs, im Kopf* (Mind Travels). She is currently working on another poetry/painting collection which is as of yet untitled.

TRINA GAYNON's poems appear *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*, *Awake in the World*, *The Great Gatsby Anthology*, *The San Diego Poetry Annual*, *Saint Peter's B-list: Contemporary Poems Inspired by the Saints*, *Obsession: Sestinas for the 21st Century*, *A Ritual to Read Together: Poems in Conversation with William Stafford*, *Phoenix Rising from the Ashes: Anthology of Sonnets of the Early Third Millennium*, *Bombshells: War Stories and Poems by Women on the Homefront*, *Knocking at the Door: Poems about Approaching the Other*, and several WriteGirl anthologies, as well as numerous journals including *Natural Bridge*, *Reed* and the final issue of *Runes*. Her chapbook *An Alphabet of Romance* is available from Finishing Line Press.

HOLLY THREM GOSLIN teaches literature and composition at a community college in northcentral Arkansas. In her spare time, Holly indulges in '90s nostalgia, binge-watching Netflix, and fostering rescue animals. Holly lives in the southern U.S. with her husband and dogs; recent works include poems published in *riverSedge* and the *Cave Region Review*.

REBECCA RUTH GOULD is the author of the poetry collection *Cityscapes* (Alien Buddha Press, 2019) and the award-winning monograph *Writers & Rebels* (Yale University Press). She has translated many books from Persian and Georgian, including *After Tomorrow the Days Disappear: Ghazals and Other Poems of Hasan Sijzi of Delhi* (Northwestern University Press, 2016) and *The Death of Bagrat Zakharych and other Stories* by Vazha-Pshavela (Paper & Ink, 2019). A Pushcart Prize nominee, she was a finalist for the Luminaire Award for Best Poetry (2017) and for Lunch Ticket's Gabo Prize (2017).

ROBIN GOW is the author of *Our Lady of Perpetual Degeneracy* (Tolsun Books 2020) and the chapbook *Honeysuckle* (Finishing Line Press 2019). Their poetry has recently been published in *Poetry*, *New Delta Review*, and *Roanoke Review*. They is a graduate student and professor at Adelphi University pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing. They is the Editor at Large for *Village of Crickets* and Social Media Coordinator for *Oyster River Pages*.

STEPHEN GROUND graduated from York University, then moved to a remote, isolated community in Saskatchewan's far north. He's since returned south

and co-founded Pearson House Films. His work has appeared in *Lucky Jefferson*, *From Whispers to Roars*, *Back Patio Press*, *Red Rock Review* (forthcoming), and elsewhere. Find more at stephenground.com.

THEODORE HADDIN is Professor Emeritus from University of Alabama in Birmingham and is the author of two collections of poetry, *The River and the Road* and *By a Doorway, in the Garden*, with a third pending. He continues to perform on the violin and write and review poetry.

AUDREY HALL is a recent graduate from the University of Florida's MFA program. Her work is published in *Crab Creek Review* and forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review*.

ANTHONY LEE HAMILTON is an emerging writer, living in New York's Hudson Valley. His work attempts to resolve the psychological competition between intra-personal presence and sociopolitical awareness. His poetry has appeared in *Chronogram* and *Stonethrow Review*.

A nurse most of her adult life, **MARY HENNESSY** returned to school late and fell in with a community of generous, word-crazed people. Her poems have appeared in many journals including: *Coal City Review*, *San Pedro Review*, *Jabberwocky*, *The Lascaux Review* and *Kakalak*, as well as *What Matters*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, and others. One was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and included in the play *Deployed*. One rode the R-bus line in Raleigh.

WYNNE HUNGERFORD's work has appeared in *Epoch*, *Blackbird*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *American Literary Review*, *The Normal School*, *The Boiler*, and *SmokeLong Quarterly*, among other places. She received her MFA from the University of Florida.

After teaching for 36 years in Kentucky, **MARCIA L. HURLOW** recently retired to Kansas. Last year she received the Al Smith Fellowship in Poetry from the Kentucky Arts Council for the second time. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Chicago Review*, *Zone 3*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Poetry Northwest* and *Stand*, among others.

RAINA JOINES has received residencies from Blue Mountain Center, the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences, and the Lillian E. Smith Center. Her work may be found in *Chattahoochee Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *I-70 Review*, and *Grist: A Journal of the Literary Arts*. She lives in Denton, TX.

JOSHUA JONES received his MFA from UMass Boston and is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Texas. His poems and essays have appeared in *Image*, *Southwest Review*, and *Salamander*, among other journals. He's the current reviews editor at *The American Literary Review*.

ELIDIO LA TORRE LAGARES holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Texas-El Paso. His work has appeared in *Revista Centro Journal* (City University of New York), *Azahares* (University of Arkansas-Fort Smith), *Sargasso* (University of Puerto Rico), *The Acentos Review*, *Nagari*, *Malpais Review*, *New Limestone Review*, *High Shelf*, and *The American Poetry Journal*. In 2019, he published his first collection of poems,

«*Wonderful Wasteland and other natural disasters*», as part of the New Voices Poetry & Prose of the University Press of Kentucky.

HIRAM LAREW's poems have appeared widely in print and online journals and have been nominated for four Pushcarts. His fourth collection, *Undone*, was issued in 2018 by FootHills Publishing. His Poetry X Hunger (PoetryXHunger.com) initiative is bringing poets and poetry to the anti-hunger cause. On Facebook at Hiram Larew, Poet.

JOHN C. MANNONE has poems appearing/accepted in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Le Menteur*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Poetry South*, *Baltimore Review*, 2020 *Antarctic Poetry Exhibition*, and others. His poetry won the Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest (2020). He was awarded a Jean Ritchie Fellowship (2017) in Appalachian literature and served as celebrity judge for the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (2018). His latest collection, *Flux Lines: The Intersection of Science, Love, and Poetry*, is forthcoming from Linnet's Wings Press (2020). He edits poetry for *Abyss & Apex* and other journals. A retired physics professor, he lives near Knoxville, Tennessee.

Hailing from Eugene Walter's Kingdom of Monkeys, **JOHN MILLER** was sent so frequently to look up words during supper as a kid, he toted a dictionary to the table. A Pushcart nominee, Miller's poems have appeared in *Rockvale Review*, *Kindred*, *Heroin Chic*, and elsewhere. Paper Nautilus published his chapbook, *Heat Lightning*, in 2017.

WESTON MORROW is a poet and former print journalist. He is assistant poetry editor for *Crab Creek Review* and a reader for *Ninth Letter*. His recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Lake Effect*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Diode Editions*, and elsewhere. He can be found on Twitter @WMorrow and at www.westonmorrow.com.

DOUGLAS NORDFORS is a native of Seattle, and currently lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. He holds a BA from Columbia University (1986) and an MFA in poetry from The University of Virginia (1991). Since 1987, he has published poems in journals such as *The Iowa Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Poet Lore*, and recent work has appeared in *Burnside Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *Matter*, *Chariton Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Potomac Review*, *Canada Quarterly*, *2River*, *BODY Literature*, and others. His two books of poetry are *Auras* (2008), and *The Fate Motif* (2013), both published by Plain View Press.

ROBERT PARHAM retired to the North Georgia mountains a few years ago after a career in academe and editing (including the *Southern Poetry Review*). His recent work appears in the *Southern Review* and the *American Journal of Poetry*.

DL PRAVDA is not a farmer. Serving seven typewriters, nine guitars and a sandy camera with a failing zoom, he tries to preserve the remains of nature and rurality. The winner of the 2019 Dogfish Head Prize for his book, *Normal They Napalm the Cottonfields*, he has recently published poems in *Poetry*

Breakfast, Bottom Shelf Whiskey, Poetry Quarterly, and The Meadow. DL Pravda is not a farmer yet.

JC REILLY writes across genres to keep things interesting. *What Magick May Not Alter*, her Southern Gothic novel-in-verse, came out this spring from Madville Publishing, and she has work published or forthcoming in the *Journal of Compressed Literary Arts*, *Ponder Review*, *Waterwheel Review*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, and *Fearsome Critters*. When she's not writing or serving as the Managing Editor of Atlanta Review, she plays tennis, crochets, or practices her Italian (badly). Follow her @Aishatonu on Twitter or @jc.reilly on Instagram.

LISA RHOADES is the author of *The Long Grass* (Saint Julian Press, 2020) and *Strange Gravity* (Bright Hill Press, 2004). Recently poems have appeared at *Barrow Street*, *Poetry East*, *Prime Number*, *Saranac Review*, *South Carolina Review*, and *SweetLit*. A pediatric nurse, she lives on Staten Island. Find her online at: amazon.com/author/lisarhoades and lisarhoades.com.

WHITNEY RIO-ROSS is the author of the poetry chapbook *Birthmarks* (Resource Publications). Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *America Magazine*, *So to Speak*, *3Elements Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and elsewhere. She teaches English at Trevecca University in Nashville, TN, where she lives with her husband.

SEBASTIAN SANTIAGO is originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico, but grew up just outside of Detroit, MI. He attained his English degree from Central Michigan University where the focus of his studies was creative writing with a concentration in poetry. Sebastian was recently living in Prague teaching English, but has since moved back to the US where his focus is on attaining his MFA in creative writing. He has work featured, or forthcoming, in *Poet Lore*, *The Emerson Review*, *Scoundrel Time*, *Peauxdunque Review*, *The Westchester Review* and *West Trade Review*, among others.

ELLEN SAZZMAN has recently been published in *Ekphrastic Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Sow's Ear*, *Lilith*, *Beltway Quarterly*, *Southward*, *Dash*, *Miramar*, *Common Ground*, and *CALYX*, among others. She was a winner of the A3 Review 2020 hospital-themed contest, received an honorable mention in the 2019 Allen Ginsberg poetry contest, was shortlisted for the 2018 O'Donoghue Poetry Prize, and was awarded first place in Poetica's 2016 Anna Rosenberg poetry competition. She was also a 2012 Pushcart Prize nominee by *Bloodroot Literary Magazine* and a 2010 Split This Rock finalist. She is a writer living in Maryland.

AMBER SHOCKLEY was born and raised in South Carolina. She earned her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte in 2013. She has published poems in print and online journals, including *Rattle*, *Barrelhouse* (online) and *Gargoyle Magazine*. She serves as an assistant poetry editor for *Atticus Review*. Her chapbook, *A Brief Catalog of Common People*, is available from Main Street Rag.

CLINNESHA D. SIBLEY, named as one of twenty-four “change-makers” across the United States by the National Arts Strategies Creative Communities Fellow Program in 2017, is the Literary Arts Instructor at Mississippi School of the Arts and a published author of plays, poetry, monologues and essays. She is the 2020 AIM Award recipient for outstanding achievement in arts education in the Creative Writing. Other awards include the Holland New Voices Award, Mississippi Theatre Association Playwriting Award, Kentucky Women’s Writer Conference National Playwriting Prize Finalist, and an Arkansas Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship.

MAYURI SINGH is an Indian-American woman from Saint Augustine pursuing her undergraduate degree in Finance at the University of North Florida. Mayuri enjoys tutoring statistics and playing with her Yorkie, Sheru. She has an interest in examining the relationship between chaos and ourselves.

R L SWIHART was born in Michigan and currently lives in Long Beach, CA. His poems have appeared in various online and print journals, including *The Denver Quarterly*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Cordite*, and *Quadrant Magazine*. *Matman & Testudo*, his second book of poetry, was released in June 2018.

STEPHANIE TOBIA earned her MFA in Poetry and Poetry in Translation from Drew University. Publications have appeared in *Pleiades Magazine*, *The Atticus Review*, *Dime Show Review* and the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*. She founded a poetry healing group for senior citizens and is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Medical Humanities.

SUSAN O’DELL UNDERWOOD directs the creative writing program at Carson-Newman University near Knoxville, Tennessee. Besides two chapbooks, she has a full collection of poetry, *The Book of Awe* (Iris, 2018). Her poems are published and forthcoming in a variety of publications, including *Crab Orchard Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Cutthroat*, and the anthology *A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia*.

DAVID VAN DEN BERG grew up hunting and fishing in the swamps of Florida. He is the Founder of *Prometheus Dreaming* (@prometheusdreamingmag), an online arts magazine. His poetry appears in Cathexis Northwest Press, *The Blue Mountain Review*, *Waxing and Waning*, *Castabout Arts and Literature*, *From Whispers to Roars*, and Forbidden Peaks Press. His chapbook *Love Letters from an Arsonist* was a finalist in the 2020 Kallisto Gaia Press’ Contemporary Chapbook Prize. You can find him on instagram @ohnonotthatguygoddamnit

GRACE WAGNER is a queer, nonbinary poet living with a disability in Houston, TX where they teach at the University of Houston. Their work can be found or is upcoming in *The Offing*, *Salmagundi Magazine*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Palette Poetry*, *Hayden’s Ferry Review*, and elsewhere. They were recently awarded an Academy of American Poets Award. For more, visit gracewagnerpoet.com.

BRENDAN WALSH has lived and taught in South Korea, Laos, and South Florida. His work appears in *Rattle*, *Glass Poetry*, *Indianapolis Review*, *American Literary Review*, and other journals. He is the winner of *America*

Magazine's 2020 Foley Poetry Prize, and the author of five books, including *Go* (Aldrich Press), *Buddha vs. Bonobo* (Sutra Press), and *fort lauderdale* (Grey Book Press). He's online at www.brendanwalshpoetry.com.

ALLYSON WHIPPLE believes that writing, walking, meditation, and rest have the capacity to heal at the individual and the collective level. She has made it her mission to help people integrate these practices in a practical way. Allyson teaches technical communication at Austin Community College and is the author of two chapbooks: *Come Into the World Like That* (2016) and *We're Smaller Than We Think We Are* (2013). She holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Texas at El Paso.

BETH OAST WILLIAMS is a student with the Muse Writers Center in Norfolk, Virginia. Her poetry has appeared or is upcoming in *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Into the Void*, *West Texas Literary Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Glass Mountain*, *The Bookends Review*, and *Willard and Maple*, among others. She was nominated for the 2019 Pushcart Prize in poetry, received second place in the 2019 Poetry Matters Project and was a semi-finalist for Poet's Billow's 2018 Atlantis Award. Her first chapbook, *Riding Horses in the Harbor*, has been accepted for publication by Finishing Line Press.

Born and raised in Oklahoma, **CASSONDRA WINDWALKER** is a poet, essayist, and novelist presently writing full-time from the southern Alaskan coast.

KATHERINE WOLFE lives in Goldsboro, North Carolina. She is a retired librarian and a member of the Goldsboro Writers Group. Published works include the memoir *Savannah on My Mind*, written with Bettye Clary Toomey and poetry in the *Lyricist*, *Renaissance*, *Shoal*, *Pinesong*, *Flying South* 2017, 2018, 2019 and the Winston Salem Writers series *Poetry in Plain Sight*. Her chapbook *Time That Has Gone* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2018.

JON YOUNG is the assistant pastor of a small church in Nashville, TN where he is happily surrounded by interesting people, breweries, and coffee shops.

JIANQING ZHENG is author of *Enforced Rustication in the Chinese Cultural Revolution* and editor of the forthcoming book, *Conversations with Dana Gioia*.

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