

Poetry South

2022



Poetry South

Issue 14 2022

 The W logo consists of a large, stylized, black serif letter 'W'. The top left of the 'W' has the word 'The' in a small, black, sans-serif font. A small trademark symbol (TM) is located at the bottom right of the 'W'.

Mississippi University
for Women
FOUNDED 1884 COEDUCATIONAL SINCE 1982

Poetry South

Editor Kendall Dunkelberg

Assistant Editors Tony Hughes
Brooke Sandlin
Gina Vinson

Contributing Editors Angela Ball
Carolyn Elkins
Ted Haddin
Jianqing Zheng

Poetry South is an international journal of poetry published annually by Mississippi University for Women. The views expressed herein, except for editorials, are those of the writers, not the editors or Mississippi University for Women.

Poetry South considers submissions year round. Submissions received after the annual deadline of July 15 will be considered for the following year, with reading beginning in January. No previously published material will be accepted. *Poetry South* is not responsible for unsolicited submissions and their loss. Submissions are accepted through Submittable: poetrysouth.submittable.com.

Subscription rates are \$10 for one year, \$18 for two years; the foreign rate is \$20 for one year, \$38 for two years. All rights revert to the authors after publication. We request *Poetry South* be credited with initial publication. Queries or other correspondence may be emailed to: poetrysouth01@gmail.com. Queries and subscriptions sent by mail may be addressed to: *Poetry South*, MFA Creative Writing, 1100 College St., W-1634, Columbus MS 39701.

ISSN 1947-4075 (Print)
ISSN 2476-0749 (Online)

Copyright © 2022 Mississippi University for Women

Indexed by EBSCOHost/Literary Reference Center

Member CLMP

CONTENTS

Angi Macri	6	Magnetic Compass
	7	Star Compass
Meghan Sterling	8	In the Fire
Melissa Ridley Elmes	9	This Risky Business of Mortal Being
Xinyi Jiang	10	江南 South of Yangtze
Carol V. Davis	11	Before the World to Come
Gaylord Brewer	12	The Dead Rise Up
	13	Given
Joanne Durham	14	What the Salt Meant
Zoe Boyer	15	Thirst
Wendy M. Thompson	16	How to Clean, Cut, and Eat a Heart
Heather Jessen	18	Nature Makes the Top Five List of How to Cope
Ruth Dickey	19	Mother's Day hymn for motherless daughters
Emma DePanise	20	Consumption
	21	Anti-Aubade
Marchiano	22	We, Fugitives, You and I
Sarath Reddy	26	Diaspora
	27	Undertow
Ace Boggess	28	"How Do We Live Somewhere That No Longer Exists?"
Claire Scott	29	Love Comes in Many Shapes Including Blue Skies and Palm Trees
Samantha Joslin	30	I Am Too Unholy
Rebecca MLH	32	Winter Sky
Timothy Fox	33	outside gospel texas
John Moessner	34	Kitchen Table at Sunset
	35	The Unseen Work of Rivers
Carson Colenbaugh	36	Anti-Ode to Nandina
	37	The Dinner Bell
Jane Blanchard	38	Betwixt and Between
Aubrey Fannin	41	The Spring Burn
Jianqing Zheng	42	Standing Hunger
	43	Girl by the Fireplace
Robert Stewart	44	The Work
Jeff McRae	45	The Summer My Sister Channeled the Spirit World
Kathleen Kimball-Baker	46	Secrets and Arrowheads

Jesse Breite	48	Leaving Arkansas, 6AM	Nicole Farmer	89	Betty Makes a Five Layer Cake with A Blowtorch
	49	At the Window			
Jim Murphy	50	Nobody's Fault but Mine (Trad.)	George Drew	90	But Emiko Didn't Say Sayonara
	51	Time's Curls and Purposes	Jacqueline Knirschild	92	Habitat
Jonathan Travelstead	52	A Motorcycle Salesman Looks Back	Nick Conrad	93	Trailside Revelation; Not
Douglas K. Currier	53	A Note to August	William Joel	94	Sonnet on meditation
Ellen June Wright	54	Malcolm X, I Lost Him Twice		95	Sonnet at the diner
	55	I Marveled When Obama Sang Amazing Grace	Stephanie Sushko	96	"Our Mother Who Art"
Shoshauna Shy	56	Domestic Insurgents Scale Capitol, January 6, 2021	Helga Kidder	99	Rhododendron Blooming at Christmas
Marcel Joseph Ikhenoba	57	Remember	Yael Veitz	100	Today I brought you home
Erin Wilson	58	Relics	January Pearson	101	For Starfish
	60	Five Days	Marisa Lin	102	keffiyeh
Merridawn Duckler	61	Where you are born	Paul Tanner	104	for once
Sara Moore Wagner	62	Vacation	Trent Busch	105	The Goodly Fere
James Scruton	63	Late Fireworks	Remi Recchia	106	The Men at Home
Mandy Moe Pwint Tu	64	Abecedarian Without Our Last Name	Candice Kelsey	108	But I Apologized
	65	Duplex	Moshe Wolf	110	The Secret Life of Books
Jessica Dionne	66	Ars Poetica	Contributors	111	
	67	ROYGBIV, Florida			
Rhienna Renée Guedry	68	Florida From Above			
Clint Bowman	69	Invasives			
George Freek	70	A Poem About Nothing			
Matthew Duffus	71	Blossoms			
Peter Sturtevant	72	Hermit Thrush			
Aliyah Warwick	73	Garden Bed			
Matt Prater	74	A Blanket of Candles			
	75	Alone in a House Where Every Chair Was Once Full			
Emma Wynn	76	Things We Lost to the Flood			
	77	There Are No Words for What We Do			
Bill Brymer	78	The Good Barber			
Tess Liegeois	79	Things to forget			
Sara Son	80	A Poem Before Your Death			
Amanda Coyne	82	A Poem for the End of the World			
Lydia Buzzard	84	When It Finally Happens			
Annette C. Boehm	85	Small Animal Soft Tissue			
Seb Detling	86	Wedding Photographs			
Andrew Cox	87	Hot Springs and the Pink Bathroom			
Kristine Iredale	88	Inside the Boots			

Angi Macri

MAGNETIC COMPASS

In the days of old return,
hummingbirds derive from stone.

They come again
across the gulf, green
darker than celadon.

A sultan keeps a ruby
on his throat. The lover
draws ribbons
through the pine.

When earth became corrupt,
the girl abandoned earth,
justice becoming
a star pattern,

and hummingbirds
fly under the gulf of her body.

STAR COMPASS

Iron ore arrives at the melting point,
flame's hottest part
balancing, not solid or liquid
but night sky, so black as to be blue. Indigo
and all that blood
of an island
crushed to one point
pours iron.
So the bird moves under the name
the woman gave him, bluebird, not indigo bunting,
neither knowing any different,
not her in her backyard pleasure
and not him in summer
down the woman's road, brought

by a star's angle in migration. He had adjusted course
even as the star made its paces,
flying due north
and, back where he was born, he had molted,
becoming the night all over, sky
not solid or liquid but flame in ore,
a measure, a step taken together.

Meghan Sterling

IN THE FIRE

What's wild in me is what's wild in you,
although my wild may live nearer the surface at times,

how I have downed a glass of red dragon wine in the afternoon
and am sweat-soaked from stoking and bathing in the dark fire

of the hearth,

how I have lived alone before and tasted
the roots of loneliness like salt in my teeth,

ate the bitter pear straight from the tree,
its flesh scraping my tongue like stone

broken against stone,

how I have roped myself in sorrow
to the dark, ridden it bare until morning cracked us apart,

wept into fields dotted with the delicate red beads of wild strawberries
like the blood of ancient and royal birds,

and how

I have been the bird flying too near the dragon's mouth,
and I have been burned,
and how that pain drives me to show myself to you,
wild and aching with flight,

my jeweled and flaming wings.

Melissa Ridley Elmes

THIS RISKY BUSINESS OF MORTAL BEING

To be mortal is to risk simply in the being.
Staying alive brings a risk of dying; yet,
if one does not fight to stay alive, one dies
by default. The fight for survival is a risk,
not to fight is a risk.
Giving birth is a risk.
Driving a car is a risk.
Walking alone at night is a risk.
Taking an Uber is a risk.
Taking a plane or a train or a boat is a risk.
Meetings are a risk, and so is not meeting.
Falling in love is a risk; leaving a bad
relationship is a risk, and so is living alone.
Eating and drinking pose risks; even sleeping
brings a measure of risk with the doing.
Being out in public is a risk, and so is solitude.
There is no human action or reaction or interaction
that does not bring risk—
and how marvelous we are merely in tackling
the mundane effort to exist, the greatest risks
taken daily, like breathing and a beating heart.

Xinyi Jiang

江南 SOUTH OF YANGTZE

They say below the paradise
above, there's a heaven on earth:
two-crop paddy,
white pearl rice,
thick hairy mitten crabs,
fat fish full of fine bones,
slender hills,
jade green,
bamboo shoots
to suck the juice of melting
belly pork,
tea trees' tender tips,
fragrance between the teeth.

In those water towns of black bricks,
arch bridges,
upturned eaves,
ridge beasts,
men hold the oil-paper brollies,
wave their soft hands,
silk hankies,
at their duck-egg faced,
willow-waist betrothed
by a moon window,
waiting for

Vaticas to yellow,
mold to grow,
larvae to hatch
letters to crumble,
rouges to smudge,
fishtails to crawl,
sweet powder to sour
dust,
until their hearts,
like unattended meat this time of the year,
stink to high heaven,
even a stray dog won't touch.

Carol V. Davis

BEFORE THE WORLD TO COME

What is it like when the soul leaves the body?

A hovering
A pause between the flicker of wings
as when the white moth begins to free itself from a chrysalis,
crawling at first, then hanging as its folded wings dry
After my mother gave birth to a stillborn and before
the child was whisked away, did she cradle it with song?
She wanted no pity, not then, nor through the miscarriages that followed
Each toughened her, building a cocoon
neither her husband nor children (who came later) could pierce
When my father lay dying, there was a moment of stillness,
the world to come beckoning
the soul not convinced it was time
The nurse lay her head to his chest but the beating
was the pacemaker and as we watched
the soul already had departed on its journey

Gaylord Brewer

THE DEAD RISE UP

The dead rise singing
through my hair, fingertips,

lips and earlobes,
nostrils, pores, skin.

This is their year, their day,
and they are sovereign

in despair, born again
by longing,

joyous as they fade.
The dead rise, tendrils of voice

in the tender light.
Join the song, if you desire.

Listen. It goes like this:

GIVEN

Given the choice, would you
embrace the banal beauty
of water murmuring contentedly

over stone, brittle leaves
of oak applauding wind,
the conceit that each felled leaf,

its shadow self
on the creek bed,
contained an undeniable truth,

sit until anger cooled,
all complaint stuttered
into silence and even forgiveness

seemed absurdly possible?
Would you weigh the white sun
on one shoulder, on the other

the vast and inviting blue,
divine the future
by the weather in your hands?

Would you, choice given,
free yourself, now, before
nothing remains to be cherished

or blamed, loved or destroyed—
that is, would you live
this first of each passing

and precious day allowed you?

Joanne Durham

WHAT THE SALT MEANT

“That night when the angels came to Lot, [his wife was] going to all her neighbors and saying to them, give me salt, because we have guests...Therefore ‘she became a pillar of salt.’”
—Bereishit Rabbah.51:5

Her sin, after all, was not
that her rheumy eyes travelled back,
swollen with hope that her daughters’
singed shadows might rise from the blaze
of collapsing skyline. It was that Lot’s wife
warned her neighbors. She would become

the woman who watched the whip burn
across another’s back, then spread
the word one dark night to slip
inside the barn, hide breathless
beneath the hay while the slave catchers
followed a false scent. The woman

who witnessed yellow stars
sewn on neighbors’ jackets
and went to borrow a cup of sugar,
perhaps a bit of salt, whispering
what she had heard in town about
the coming cattle cars. The woman

who typed government reports
no one imagined
she understood, then waited
near the factory gate at closing time,
la migra viene, don’t go
to work tomorrow. It wasn’t

what she chose to face
that raised the angels’ outrage,
fearing the flames would heat
her mind and melt
her heart. What the salt meant
to silence was her voice.

Zoe Boyer

THIRST

Midday dusk and
a low croak of thunder;

everything in this place
aches for it,

every jaundiced blade of grass,
every rasping throat.

But we are not delivered,
no silver spill of storm

rousing creek-rush,
not a single bead of rain

anointing chapped earth,
summoning steam’s hiss

from blacktop griddles
like whispered prayer.

Drought prevails, low lid of
steel-wool clouds growing vaporous

beneath the sun’s dogged gaze;
that unblinking eye of kiln-heat

and bleached light blithely damning
us to perpetual swelter, searing

each last lick of green and spit
from what heedless life remains.

Wendy M. Thompson

HOW TO CLEAN, CUT, AND EAT A HEART

No one ever taught me how to clean and cut and cook a heart.

I grew up in the urban flatlands between hills filled with rich white folks and a bay filled with rich white folks' yachts. I never paid attention in my

high school biology and anatomy classes. Who could remember that the heart is divided into four chambers? That the left ventricle is the bigger of

the two? That the left and right atria sit on top of each ventricle? That the large artery at the top is the aorta and the other is the pulmonary aside from

the other veins that have names that no one can even recall? "How are these all connected?" my anatomy teacher asked the class over and over. Horny,

hungry, and trying to survive the last years in our father's houses, we colored in the color sheets:

muscle (|||)
tendon {√}
skeletal work [=]
bone ::

Yellows and greens
and blues and browns
and grays. Purple shading
around the veins.

Sharpen the pencil to a fine point that immediately broke when pressed into the paper. That was years ago.

How are these all connected?

Here I am now holding the knife. You don't even tell me where to cut first. I position the blade, smooth rather than serrated.

How are these all connected?

You tell me to first rinse the heart under cold water before submerging the organ and squeezing it to pump out any remaining blood. I hesitate when

I pull it out of the sink and you take the knife and carefully but quickly trim all excess fat from the arteries. I stand useless as you pull the heart open

and loosen something that was once so compact in the chest. You cut along the main arteries, severing fat and excess tissue, chopping through

and removing the valve before the chambers are exposed. "Trim here," you say. "Trim here," you demonstrate. But I'm not even listening anymore.

Ten years was a long time. We grew into a family with two children, a home. I finally got my yard and planted a garden. We developed a rhythm together,

began to smell the same, our bodies and moods synching up like insect stages to seasons; our memories fusing into one long memory: how we met,

where we traveled, how we loved. Now I watch as you cut the heart, a red beefy meat on the counter, into thin entrée-size strips going against the grain

and I barely feel the gap in my chest after you denied what I found in our daughter's diary, that entry written in childish script with all its misspellings

describing what you did to her on a Sunday afternoon when I was out with a friend. There was no way to put it back inside once it was cut out. No

way to suture the wound that now sat open, cut, washed, disassembled in our kitchen.

How are these all connected?

You tried to blame her for being too exposed, too knowing. You called her a liar. You didn't even wash the sheets in our bed afterwards. "Now it's

ready to grill with olive oil, a little minced shallot, lemon juice, and oregano," you say. "Just act like everything is normal," I hear as you serve

the thing I loved you and her with with garnish. We sit in silence and watch you eat my heart, fully hungry, as though you've grown up eating entrails

all your life. "Exquisite," you say, holding the fork to my mouth.

Heather Jessen

NATURE MAKES THE TOP FIVE LIST OF HOW TO COPE

She's lived through too many hurricanes, leaky roofs, rashes, blizzards, insect bites for this to be her truth; but she tries: wanders into the woods following, then losing, then finding every permutation of trails, blazed. Movement helps—continual, trackable forward motion—until her mistake of studying bees with their dedicated flower-to-flower-to-flower: essential for this ecosystem, but not any one particular bee. Maybe four people need particular her, not counting herself. Realistically, two of them will be dead within a decade. She focuses on bark: the smooth, the grooved, the lucky trunks carved with certitude or hope, passion and desire, the plus signs adding up to true love 4ever, cozy within the confines of knifed hearts. If she bored into their cores, how many rings would tell of droughts, pestilence, fire? All the while offering shade, a nook, a branch to roost; all the while transforming pollutants, filtering air. All she ever wanted: love that leaves its indelible mark, without harm, without halting her—the growing, the greening, the scraggle or splendor—each season distinct with here I go again, anew.

Ruth Dickey

MOTHER'S DAY HYMN FOR MOTHERLESS DAUGHTERS

When our mothers die, my friend says to me, *we must learn to mother ourselves*. Must learn to stroke our own hair,

sing ourselves softest songs, to sleep and to wake. Must sew our own costumes, bake our own cakes: hum the dark.

We must say to ourselves, *proud, love, yes*, even words our mothers did not or could not say, must tell ourselves

stories: read them, and dream them, and sing them, eating *once upon a time* for dinner, our glasses filled to brimming.

We must make dinner. We abide by our edges, making bowls of ourselves, must be brocade and cotton, must both tear

and mend. We copy recipes in our own handwriting, on index cards and scraps of paper. We must learn

to worry straight our own tangles, strand by strand, learn to clutch the velvet of days, worn cloth-thin

and lusterless, shush our own edges. On the woozy edge of sleep, we stand alone before the blue lip,

make bowls of ourselves and circle the rims so our hollowness sings, reach fragile hands, weaving

nests of fingers, imagine our mothers' fingers reaching back, both sturdy and gnarled. We hold our own hands.

Emma DePanise

CONSUMPTION

Spread raspberry jam on your lips and call
it a morning. Search online for another
bedspread, for a coffee table that feels
like your own. What you thought was
the morning is artificial light. Do the dishes
in the dark, doze off and dream of daffodil
picking. Turn the faucet on enough
to drip. Write these words with an orange
pen: *radio*, *harvest*. Drop the same object
twice: a phone on linoleum or a purple hair clip
under the couch. Notice apples holding
the weight of a bowl. Write *clementine*. Write
orchid. The scent you wash your hands with
is one you've engineered yourself. The opposite
of clean is covered. It's too cold outside to expose
any skin here. Tie a scarf around your shaking voice,
words warm and silent. Tie a scarf around
your shaking. Meet me at the breakfast table to watch
the birds. If you could, I think you'd feed me
the worst parts of myself. Each grain grinding
between teeth. Brew the morning
tea. Write *we're both hungry*.

ANTI-AUBADE

I'm awake again, watching the gaps
of my blinds turn blue and there is
the hand of my first boyfriend,
touching me underneath the green
peacoat he covered my lap
with in the backseat. His hands
never off. They don't belong
here like the growling garbage
truck I wish I could hush
but here are his fingers, the sun rising
and covering me and getting all over
everything.

Marchiano

WE, FUGITIVES, YOU AND I

I.

You were not beside me then
winding down Pigeon River
toward Black Mountain

when the apparition of a
heron congealed from
mist and swept low over

the empty passenger-side mirror.
No, you were not with me
then. We know, you

and I, of apparitions
and specters. We are
exorcists—our pasts

littered with them like
cigarette butts crowding
a gas-pump trashbin.

We learned
long ago
these cannot be overcome.
We take to our roads.

II.

We, you and I, are
half-formed things—
less forgotten, less

ill-crafted, than pondered
over—stripped of
excess—each detail

necessitated. We
are not baroque. One
could say Rodin

fashioned us. You
speak of your thighs
shaped by marathon

after marathon into figures
best adorning an attic
amphora. I speak

to myself of your hands—
how they hold a fork or form
a question. I recall them well.
How they would answer to this heron.

III.

One could say
the road is our staff
paper. We

improvise upon it. I
peel through towns faster than
Coltrane's modal flights. You

trample the causeways
directly underfoot: each
step paced and cadenced,

rhythmic: toward some
distant resolution:
a Miles ascension.

The last few bars: Longport,
Opelousas, Margate
City, Atchafalaya.

We know our roles, never step
on each other's toes. I
sometimes weave my arpeggios through
your steady narrative.

IV.

It is not the primary role
of beak to stave off predation,
but to build, to gather—to nurture.

I've seen, twice now on the lam,
mockingbirds at odds with scavengers.
One succumbed to a buzzard.
Two fended off a heron.

V.

We were not beside
one another during
our vilest moments:

when we struck
and were struck,
when we were dropped

and pieced back together by
careless hands and
superglue—retaining

only our functionality,
when the heron spread
his shadow above us

and speared us through,
when we spread our own
above others. We

were not together then.
One morning, though separately
awakened, we'll find our easing selves

interwoven, no
longer comprehending
You and I, or

flight or scale
or form. Then you
will sing aloud again with

no more thought to
why than why
for so many years

our winters
followed winters.
And I,

with eyes half closed,
will call to you
from the kitchen,

from across the diner booth,
from the passenger seat,
saying—you were my pedal point, you

the gold binding
together my fragments,
and O you, you
were my wanderings.

Sarath Reddy

DIASPORA

As a child I wallowed in Georgia clay,
lay on a bed of pine straw
watched clouds make their slow journeys,
boats drifting between continents

India existed in picture books, temple pyramids
quilts of rice fields, jungles, my parents' stories
of perpetual harvest, one fruit yielding to the next—
sugar cane, mango, pomegranate.

Home was mustard seeds spattering in hot oil,
Ganesha dancing on the coffee table
Lakshmi gazing from a kitchen calendar,
Baghavat Gita and Bible side by side.

My first trip to Chennai in the torpor of August,
saturated with monsoon, the hoards, dissolving faces,
droplets, stream, river, flood, struggling to breathe,
Mother tongue lapping at my ears.

I emerged, uncertain where I belonged,
where to call home, history rewritten—
a child of the diaspora returning
to find what part of me they left behind.

UNDERTOW

Our family portrait clings to a wall
freshly painted to hide history
choreographed embraces, smiles in unison
faux garden awash in artificial light.
Beneath the gloss, ghosts of words
hover over kitchen tile.

An ocean reveals its moods—
salvos in various stages of breaking
the swell, the crest falling into turbulence
wisps of white foam, the rapprochement
ceding, receding, surrendering
to salt air sting, night a salve for wounds.

Tonight the surface of the Atlantic ripples
gently, a mirror for moonlight
In swirling undertow, mollusc and piscene
emboldened by shell and scale push back
currents, escape the seaweed snag.

At daybreak, the jagged coastline
glistens with shards of brittle shells
abandoned where love once spread
like a blanket.

Ace Boggess

“HOW DO WE LIVE SOMEWHERE THAT
NO LONGER EXISTS?”

question asked by Andrea Fekete

We nested there for years as though window-walls
were eyes through which we viewed the unrelenting
everything-else & everyone-not-us.

Our friends were friends of proximity,
shadow images on Polaroids we keep inside a box.

Music we love today was music of a place,
that place, then, as also food, drinks, cigarettes.
All our favorite memories reek of smoke.
We breathed it in: the scent of home.

Time to time, we took the stage
to show we were happy enough to be ourselves,
clowning through chords, not always
in rhythm or key, but soulful, heart-filled, giddy.

There is no more joyous place than the past,
a room in a nightclub where we spent our afternoons.

One can't live in a photograph,
although one is always there.
We look at it often & wonder, *Was there more?*
Did we miss other landmarks of our day?

We've travelled far, but would go back
to any instant from that life,
a sense of belonging—we haven't felt it since.

Claire Scott

LOVE COMES IN MANY SHAPES INCLUDING
BLUE SKIES AND PALM TREES

She tosses the piece back in the pile
looking annoyed, grabs another
and tries again, almost
but not quite, although both have blue sky
and a bit of what could be a palm tree

And so we are my love
each wanting a particular shape
just this exact way, a touch on the shoulder
just this exact way, an *I'm so sorry*
it must be a perfect fit or we toss the gift away

Could desires be like soft clay
shape shifting to meet a tab or a slot
so a cup of white tea slips into
a piece shaped like a hug. a tender kiss
slides into *you are the greatest*

One piece is missing says my granddaughter
staring forlornly at the empty space
in the child's red coat
she's right of course
or could be

Samantha Joslin

I AM TOO UNHOLY

I am too unholy—
physically, like tainted
wine—to enter your
little cathedral, out in
the middle of nowhere.

The procession passes by
me, beautiful, like dead people,
with skin stretched over bone,
and I flush, and bend my head,
and write more poetry.

These words are not empty symbols;
these verses are not welcome in
your bibles. My pen conjures up
little ghosts of you doing things
you would never do—

breathing hot air into my mouth,
forearm rolling, hand unfurling the verses
hidden in my body, moaning softly
against my shoulder, bowing so I
can kiss your forehead, where
the thoughts are.

Sometimes these lies are so profoundly pretty
that I forget to be embarrassed, and
embarrassment is such an unpoetic
emotion, while unrequited love is so
beautiful, and fragile, like
stained glass,

and fits naturally in these strict,
broken lines, where emotion must flourish
and gush and bloom like high tide,
but only within its tight boundaries,
which only make the thing

—the poem, the love—more beautiful,
because it's all so hopelessly inadequate,
like the names we invent for the
untethered and desolate sea.

Rebecca MLH

WINTER SKY

Descending to the west
the moon is but a single, pale eyelash
on the rosy cheek of the horizon.
One blinking star, a planet I guess,
at the ether's edge.
My whole body is a prayer.
My words are the black trees, the upward pull
just beneath my eyebrows.
If I pray hard enough
I'll lift right up, dissolve
top down,
my toes the last thing
to touch the earth.

Timothy Fox

OUTSIDE GOSPEL TEXAS

the bodies lie in the grass on a summer's night
fallen over or fainted from preacher man's touch

the electric organ plays *are you washed in the blood*

overhead the neon cross beams a beacon to a thousand moths

selling popcorn for a quarter i tiptoe over
the lame the blind and the near to dying

John Moessner

KITCHEN TABLE AT SUNSET

*Therefore, the world should not be thought
of as a succession of presents.*

Carlo Rovelli, The Order of Time

I finally convince you to join me
while I read, and you sit in the second-hand
church pew lining the back kitchen wall,
so perfect for the span of the black round table
where I am learning about the history of time
and entropy and how heat is always present
when the future changes to the past, bodies
transferring momentum, potential,
attention, and during these seemingly quick
ten pages you stare at the declining sun
through the open window above the sink
as you shift in the unforgiving geometry
of the pew. Then, standing to kiss my head
and walk up to bed, you place your warm hand
on my shoulder, giving me something
that I did not notice until you were gone
and the sky had turned black
in the dissipating heat of the day.

THE UNSEEN WORK OF RIVERS

I cannot see the barge, but I can see its lights
and the crests of its wake the light touches.

In the same way, I cannot see the river
but the floating moon, flowing in place,

and the cutout the river carves through the bluffs.
And there's a gull perched on the riverbank

waiting for a slight tremor on the surface
of night, its stillness refusing any explanation.

Carson Colenbaugh

ANTI-ODE TO NANDINA

Hartwell Reservoir, Clemson, SC

We exist beyond our means—the slow creep of our waste sweeps
Across wet acreage: soda cans, bottles, evidence of a certain rot.
Along the cobble beach spotted in foam floats and seat cushions,
Swarms of diesel boaters discard their slick vinyl monstrosities;

The clay foundations of every stretching sweetgum are eroded,
Lying bare and revealing hardened arteries of xylem and dry sap;
An empty vial of whiskey clunks perfect time against the veins
Of aluminum and nylon running spackled along the rocky shore.

On the dark path back to the car lot, rogue plantings of escaped
Ornamentals rage beneath the dense canopy of ivy and mimosa.
Nandina domestica—vast garbage colonies of voracious stems:
Once fruits for songbirds, now mature and future noxious seeds.

The glossy leaves are bipinnate, waxy burgundy and indicative
Of the memory of a home site or the consequence of the wind;
They infest the understory: choking out orchids, praying on light,
Grifting nutrients, guiding woodlands into thick red monotony.

In ten million years, future breakers of stone will find yet another
Fossil of *Nandina* in the clay land which was once this Carolina,
Identify it, sigh, and throw it into the growing pile with the rest
Of the rubble to be made into rocky roads, gravel, more concrete.

THE DINNER BELL

Hartwell Dam, Hartwell, GA

“WHEN HORN SOUNDS BEWARE OF
RAPID RISE IN WATER LEVEL”

Three vultures, motionless atop the dam scaffolding, look down
At the bridge as it straddles the plum stretch of the lengthy river.
High water waiting upstream gets sucked down through turbines,
And the fat lake rushes out from the base in tumbling cataracts:

Yellow the color of pollen and thick turmeric, rotting fish bones
Are regurgitated and soak in the rocky pools, simmering broth.
Two boys run out of the water shivering: the huddled buzzards
Are not frightened by the whining blast of the incessant horn,

They are called in to the new flesh—they nip and pick off ribs,
The brains of fish, wipe their beaks clean and stretch to return;
They rise on air with wings howling, perch tall against the pipes
And file those fresh living bodies away for their future reference.

One does a clown walk over to the others: they shuffle their slim
Shoulders and sit, waiting in ecstasy, and they always look down.

Jane Blanchard

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

Jekyll and Saint Simon's Islands

The *Golden Ray* leaves Colonel's Island in
The dead of night, slips past the *Emerald Ace*,
Turns, tries to maintain balance, turns again,
Tips over portside, then remains in place.

Most of the seasoned crew are rescued soon,
But four from South Korea have to wait
Too long in hellish holds for opportune
Extraction that, thank God, comes not too late.

Since oil begins to seep into the Sound,
Attention rightly shifts to fuel aboard;
With many lives and livelihoods around,
The threat of damage cannot be ignored.

Assorted booms and sprays are soon deployed,
Shores, waters, lots of wildlife analyzed,
Developments reported, work zones buoyed,
Specific salvage strategies devised.

Nearby the channel narrows to one lane,
Most traffic moving in or out at night;
Nonlocal interest begins to wane
Though islanders still monitor the site.

While fuel-oil tanks are emptied over weeks,
A rock drop helps to stabilize the ship;
When civic leaders speak about techniques,
The pilot's name is twice allowed to slip.

Then chains and anchors are affixed to hold
The carrier of several thousand cars,
A shoe-box ship which never should have rolled
To rest within the Sound beneath the stars.

Both rudder and propeller are removed.
(*The Brunswick News* quotes Unified Command.)
Those dumped, another contractor approved,
A barrier is slowly built as planned.

A suit is filed about who should do what;
The judge lets work continue nonetheless.
A loading platform, plus two cranes, soon jut
Into the sky so salvage can progress.

Containers full of riprap are let go
To settle near the bow and stern in arcs
Which counteract the current's constant tow
Well-known to jellies, porpoises, and sharks.

These pass as eighty pilings, two by two,
Are driven all around the *Golden Ray*,
Then bracketed, an engineering coup
For holding netting, its designers say.

Eight sets of hefty lifting lugs arrive,
Are raised and welded to the starboard hull.
Meanwhile, most Georgians shelter to survive
A virus almost unavoidable.

When some employed on site test positive,
The latest schedule breaks from such a strain;
All worry since the project must outlive
COVID-19 and any hurricane.

Officials order workers to be housed and
Provided meals beyond contagion's reach;
The massive salvage crane VB-10,000
Is brought to wait off Fernandina Beach.

Once tugs escort it to the *Golden Ray*,
Tenacious engineers face challenges—
Perhaps “unprecedented”—day by day:
If only rhetoric could fix what is.

The cutting of the bow takes weeks, not hours,
With vessels—skimmers, trawlers—on patrol;
A helicopter flies around what towers
Above the capsized ship no longer whole.

The severed bow is hoisted in the air,
Then set upon a barge, the *Julie B*,
Tugged next to Mayor's Point in Brunswick where
This section is made ready for the sea.

Procedures at the wreck are modified;
Equipment is replaced and/or repaired;
Pollutants—liquids, solids—enter tide
Before the second cut is even dared.

That happens, as do five more, each in turn,
Or not, since section seven proves a do;
An unnamed, numbered barge hauls off the stern;
The *Julie B* returns for section two.

It seems the choice of chain instead of cable
Has made the operation slow indeed.
A spokesman, though, repeatedly is able
To mention safety matters more than speed.

When some technician's torch ignites a fire
That blows through all the middle sections left,
The spokesman notes such trouble may transpire
As any monstrous ship is being cleft.

A leaking fuel line later needs a plug,
The damage to environs quite severe.
A fisherman smiles for a shutterbug,
One bumper caught and landed at the pier.

At last reports say why the ship was wrecked:
Too little ballast for the cargo stored.
Lax standards meant wrong figures went unchecked;
A door left open, in the water poured.

Once barges carry what remains away
And scavengers find bits and globules lost,
The salvors get to say hip hip hooray:
The owners and insurers count the cost.

Aubrey Fannin

THE SPRING BURN

Certain smells take you back
Faster than a new box of Crayola

Park grill smoke tinged with repellent camping out in humid summer memories
Hickory steeped goodness pouring out of a crossroads pork shack

Comforting billows rolling up over your sweatshirt from a pile of burning
Maple leaves
Puffs of wisdom rising from your uncle's bowl of sweet Cavendish

Clouds of Marlborough pleasantly out of reach up in those Friday night lights
Red Oak chimney smoke that makes damp December air smell like snow

But the Spring Burn is different; it is an older haint
It goes back to great-grandmother's cabin—and much further

It is a day of work that takes the whole of the family
Work rewarded with a plate of turnip greens, black-eyed peas, and cornbread

It is a fire that sews more than it rends
It consumes last year's garden; rattling okra stalks and bean vines

Dry leaves, juicy weeds, rotten logs, tender saplings too
Making incense from green honeysuckle and scorched vernal earth

Shepherd this fury to the edge of your civilization
And it will keep the wild things from taking back what is theirs

Jianqing Zheng

STANDING HUNGER

*Dorothea Lange's White Angel Breadline,
San Francisco, 1933*

In the breadline outside White Angel,
a soup kitchen established
by Lois Jordan,

a wealthy widow who has fed
more than a million
hungry mouths

in three years, this old man
in an old fedora
stands aloof

from others. He leans pensively
on the wooden fence,
hands clasped,

and circled in his arms
is an empty tin can
waiting to be

filled with soup. What
will tomorrow be?
As depressing

as the lead sky hanging
overhead? Is there
a forecast of it?

GIRL BY THE FIREPLACE

*Dorothea Lange's Resettled Farm Child from Taos Junction
to Bosque Farms Project, New Mexico, December 1935*

When drought turns plains
to dust blown up
into mountains of clouds
to blacken the sky
and bury wherever
they besiege,

the Taos Junction refugees
lose their homeland
and resettle for a new life
on Bosque Farms, but
hunger and poverty
follow like dark shadows.

See, in this dwelling,
a skinny girl sits
on the rustic bench
by the rusty iron bed
with her right hand
supporting her face.

She leans forward,
looking down at the soot-
stained fireplace,
as if contemplating
the essential need
for the warmth of life.

The sun shines in,
pouring some light
on her hair, her back
and the hearth.
In a trance she looks
like a wounded angel.

Robert Stewart

THE WORK

Out of four hens, we get one
egg a day
 so far,
varied once by a double yolk,

otherwise the division of labor
suggests a union coop,
 as on Sunday,
Silver lays; Monday, Mary—

barred rocks—then the buff
Orpingtons Tuesday, Wednesday,
 almost the rotation
deserves a factory whistle

for production of brown shells
in pine shavings this January,
 clocked in
for a seven-day work week;

so one hen could rotate out
a week each month—one
 in the hole
as on my old street crew,

unseen by passersby who
honk to say everyone
 knows the union
divides up work: one

to dig, one to throw dirt
into the truck bed,
 one with a clipboard
or leaning on a longhandle.

No matter what deals get made
in coop or clutch, work
 gets done
by one alone in the dark.

Jeff McRae

THE SUMMER MY SISTER CHANNELED THE SPIRIT WORLD

She wrote behind a closed door at night
secrets and wisdom, page after page—a new
voice inhabiting her, face under deep water,
long sentences forecasting who would love her,
why, and why they did not love her yet.
Her hand slanted the other way as though
she were half-turned, listening to someone
outside a window, behind a door. When
young and newly moved to the farm
she received an old unbroken pony
that threw her in the yard, threw her
in the field. I threw bales in the meadow
and loft while she laid-out on the roof,
painting her toenails, applying lotion
under the wild July sunshine bouncing
off the shingles. We workers circled
the table for food and she appeared,
silent in shades. Sixteen, listening
to Foreigner, she sipped sweet tea, angry
at the fields and fences, the mountains
all around, the scent of manure in our clothes
and hair. She snapped open her Walkman,
flipping the tape in rhythm with sighs
filled with a woe I didn't understand—
windy language about needing friends
nearby, loving boys, parties in town.
I watered the calves at night, steam
rising from the stalls, the barn ringing
with the sound of cold chains. Then she
was gone to college, purchased a futon
and spider plants for her purple room
in the basement apartment, bouncing
major to major, field to field—how to tape
an ankle sprain, sketch a nude from life,
and beneath garish lights cut open a cadaver
to see everything that makes the body live
and nothing that makes it human.

Kathleen Kimball-Baker

SECRETS AND ARROWHEADS

When lakes go dry, my Mama B told me
the year I was nine, they sometimes give away
their secrets, and that's when new islands come up.

That summer my Mama and Daddy sent me to her in Texas,
and everything was so hot, so parched, the reservoir had to be spilled
a little each day so folks could still wash and flush.

One day, after lunch, we waited for W. C., husband number three,
to tip back his napping chair and snore, then we pressed the door
gentle-like till the cool insides of the hushed mobile home sucked it shut.

Down to the motorboat we fled, two jailbirds on a caper,
speeding into the wet blue wind as Mama B laughed
her tinkling-glass laugh like she had no man troubles at all.

She whipped that boat around left and right so fast
it churned waves into white foam and misted the tight
curls of her permanent like a hairnet of diamonds.

When we reached the edge of the new nub of land,
she eased the boat ashore, careful not to scrape
the whirly blades or later W.C. would make a fuss.

All afternoon, bent over like her bobby pins,
we picked through pebbles on the edges of that new
island, hunting for angles of flint the color of caramels,

and each time I spied one, something inside me rose up like sin,
greedy for more. I crammed the pockets of my shorts
full, each arrowhead chipped to a dangerous point.

And even though she kept steps ahead of me
on that beach, she never found a single one. I had
better eyes, she had said. But that wasn't it at all.

I couldn't find a hint of her in my Daddy, didn't
understand how he could turn out so hard and mean
with a Mama like her and his own daddy long gone.

And that got me to thinking that maybe

the best parts of her were like arrows tipped with fire
and sharp enough to pass straight through my Daddy,
so for as long as I lived, I could keep her in this world, wild.

Jesse Breite

LEAVING ARKANSAS, 6AM

A golden disc sears through the sky—
the way skin can flash
and blind knowing eyes.

What mysteries lie obscene
beneath the trembling arms
of hickory and pine?

Here where men trade for King James
and rifle, where whiskey performs
its secret ministry.

The night breeze, wrestled
from coyotes, sings of power
and shame,

of unweeded gardens, truck stops,
electric-wired crosses,
burn-piles eating broken glass
and rust, palimpsest
county and line, spectral billboard.

I can smell fuel well-burned,
the speckled swamp. I can see
snakes half-given to water,
to warm pyramids of light.

A field-line of trees rises and spits
green tongues—
neural fires along the dirty husk.

The land advances, ripples
into a spine of hills, mountains.
Some weight pulls the earth-skin
taut, holds it in place.

What came from the loam,
hotter than the devil's hooves?
None is forgiven of roots.
The blood is tasteless on our lips.
The sharp-eyed king
renders what's needed, then he flies.

AT THE WINDOW

After time died, we watched the rain.
My son kept his hands on the ledge
staring through the glass. Each drop struck.
The ivy's amphibious heads nodded,
agreed that something was happening.
The water fell so fast we could hardly
see the colors it gathered, each one
a small planet of mirrors, my son
at the window, his mind the width
of oceans. The water stalked among us,
the trees, and we watched it make blue
silhouettes of everything we knew.
My son stood at the window, never
turning his head. I opened the glass
mouth, and we held forth our palms.
Liquid feathers brushed and gilded
our bolt knuckles, and when our limbs
were covered, we moved our arms into
the light—gems streamed across our skin.
Sheer horses fell through the canopy.
And we laughed as prophets might.

Jim Murphy

NOBODY'S FAULT BUT MINE (TRAD.)

And then there was Blind Willie Johnson,
burned by the sun or burned by his stepmother,
in a moment dropped into darkness, delivered
with a Bible and a creaking cigar box guitar
on to other things—flat fees instead of royalties,
preaching in the House of Prayer, the house
fire that left him living in its ruins, deadly sick
and exposed, denied a bed, then lowered into
a lost grave. They put a plaque up in his honor.

And then there was Nina Simone, sounding
the acoustics of the hall and altering her sound
in accordance, like putting a handful of diamonds
on a scale to dim or burnish their disloyal shine.
Their weight was glossed to perfection, her voice
up in the rafters, down in the highball glasses,
everywhere possible for it to be. And the song
gathered death around it. And she pivoted again
to meet those blues with courage and in pain.

And then there was the black and white child
prodigy James Page, reborn in a satin jacket,
garlanded in the poppies that had worked into
his soul, mystified, flanged and dragging hard
on a half burnt cigarette while his injured singer
delivered from a wheelchair. The song was done
an injury then, drug sick, spread thin as faith
in a contract with the devil. They left the church
but kept the hell. It was anonymous and long ago.

TIME'S CURLS AND PURPOSES

For Gunnar Pittman, 2015–2019

This is the sandy, brushed-almond dawn.
Here are rays in distant treetops, blinking

slowly awake from their dreams. Water
moves beside the boats, clear and sweet as

summer everlasting. Here are blue spruce
and white pine. Here are bubbling, iridescent

fish, and all the red wings blazing. Here are
strong arms and scratchy beards of fathers,

the joy-lit eyes of mothers, the gentle kiss
of sisters. Here we are together. Today is

a place we have believed in, worked hard
and bartered for, almost all our lives. We

didn't know it when you found us, opened
your blue, sure eyes on this world, and all

but told us *Buckle in! We're going all the way.*
Today we know the lesson. Here and now

within the stillness, as our watches drop far
away, we see miles are made of inch-stones,

every one, in all directions, here and now.
You laugh behind your wheel and drive,

windspeed in your curls, thrill of water
in your eyes. We join you in your courage.

Gunnar, bold warrior, we're all with you now.

Jonathan Travelstead

A MOTORCYCLE SALESMAN LOOKS BACK

for Philip Levine

Gone are our grandfathers' Knucklehead engines, death rattles
leaking from slashed tailpipes. Gone, too, is friction's

golden age. Epoch of hub & greased axle. Splines
& sprocket teeth, chained smooth as the piston's

wearisome slap. Machines are passing from our lives.
The new models, enlightened, shed the instrument cluster's

messy angles & syntax. Gone, our father's hardware.
Gas tank, cherry red. The garage mechanic's Pythagorean

nightmare of Metric & Standard sockets. Forget Thoreau.
St. Steve Jobs III would beam at this simpler living.

Take any gleaming hog before this one. Unfasten its cowling.
Peer inside at the horror of wet tines & pinions.

Then tell me you prefer a musket to a laser beam.

Douglas K. Currier

A NOTE TO AUGUST

Should I make it this year, and I'll try,
I'll be happy to see you, my sad end
to summer, my prelude to fall.

The colors turn earlier and earlier,
and the school children in their new
clothes and school supplies.

Should I catch you, see you before I leave,
please don't mention winter, that lout
—all boring bluster and heavy breathing

—or spring—we're on the outs I'm afraid,
all that promise, that posturing, that tacky
green, and false hope.

I hope to see you though; we could sit one
afternoon and reminisce as the sun slinks off
a bit earlier for a prior engagement.

Ellen June Wright

MALCOLM X, I LOST HIM TWICE

after Eve Arnold's 1962 photo

My favorite photo of X hung on the wall
of my classroom across from the picture
of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

the right arm and left arm of the civil rights movement
hung high for the children to muse at
if they tired of listening to me.

Then one day it was gone. Maybe someone loved
Malcolm and his fedora more than I and took him
or maybe someone feared what children

might see in him, and disappeared him like history.
I miss Malcolm twice taken—gone
more than twenty years. I think of the children

who never saw him watching over them as they learned
how to navigate literature, how to navigate school
how to navigate this future Malcolm feared for us.

I MARVELED WHEN OBAMA SANG AMAZING GRACE

*In memory of Reverend Clementa Pinckney
and his slain parishioners.*

What else can one do when nine are murdered
in the midst of mid-week prayers?

What can one do but sing when nine are slain
having prayed and worshipped with their

executioner: a broken young man with a twisted
notion of whiteness and manhood and justice.

What else can one do when nine are cut down by bullets
in church: the faithful few who remember God

is not just for Sundays but is with us always
even when we bow our heads in prayer

before those who wish to do us harm?
What else is there to do but sing Amazing Grace

and blindly grope for God who foresaw the hour
of their deaths? I keep hearing Obama singing

Amazing Grace, first a whisper then bright enough
to illuminate a sanctuary.

Shoshauna Shy

DOMESTIC INSURGENTS SCALE CAPITOL, JANUARY 6, 2021

At the age of 93, James Bolin, former private in the 14th Missouri Cavalry, secretly married his teenage caretaker Helen Viola Jackson in 1936. He intended for this to allow her an escape from poverty, because after his death, she would be eligible for his pension.

Sure, I bore his name but never bore
his children; never wore a bridal gown
nor even told my parents I was a wife
while sleeping under their roof,
this secret all my own until 2017 when

I got a star on the Missouri Walk
of Fame, the Daughters of Union Veterans
proclaiming me the Last Living Civil War
Soldier's Widow, placing their trembling
pale hands on mine to touch way back
to the bloody wounds of 1865.
As if my tongue had nestled with that
of a man who took orders from Ulysses Grant;
that I slept beside him whom slept in
Chickamauga foxholes when, no,

my tongue never touched his although
it touched the same pot of porridge,
the same pan of cornbread he chewed.
That much I swear to for those years
I cooked in his kitchen, lugged water
buckets, laundered his corduroys.
That as a teen I breathed the same air
he did was deemed enough for them.

So, I smiled for the photographs;
saved every card of reverence; died
at the age of 101, our nation's last link
to that soul-crushing chapter in U.S. history.
Never guessing we would enter another
weeks later.

Marcel Joseph Ikhenoba

REMEMBER

Remembered 1940s, season of holocaust
Six million irons, disjoined from their ores
Were forged in bottomless pits of anvils.

Tensed, stale wind of discord swivel
On the creeks of Dachau, Auschwitz, Treblinka
And other shores of darkness.

Not four thousand micrographic scrolls
Of antique Pharaoh hieroglyphics could symbolize
the petrifying carrions gluttoned by black vultures.

Two rivers parted by mountainous fiend
in no time of twilight
Laid eyes into the seas.

Two branches glued to tree trunks
Would in bit of an eyelid
See those white balloons.

The mocking bird is set among the pigeons
And doors of golden rainbows
crept in the fogs.

Everywhere, the white dove's skull
is at the bottom of the picture
While the frogs and wasps play their lyres.

But, the wild hyacinths grew among Linden
The lion; among hummingbirds
With every twist, Lynxes eyes.

Erin Wilson

RELICS

i.

I've tried to teach you the few tricks I know about keeping sane
and finding beauty to redeem human chaos.

It was autumn when I carried it with a stick
and buried it under debris beneath the smallest oak tree

at the treeline of mostly evergreens and aspens.

I felt a little like a thief hiding jewels from
more dastardly opportunists. I was quick about my work.

ii.

First bright day near equinox, when the snow had pulled back,
I cut across the souging grasses and decomposed fronds

that would pulse once more with life in a matter of weeks
after their preordained period of dormancy.

I needed to know it was still there,

at the centre of wildness, and worse, at the heart of our own remains
(pickup trucks had backed in to unload architectural dross and yard waste).

When I knelt, everything else disappeared.

My hands, as they pulled back dry leaves and spent foliage,
felt busy, as though preparing tinder for a fire.

When one half of the jawbone became exposed, when I took it in,
its row of teeth so smartly made, as tight as kernels on a cob of corn,

I lay back on my heels.

Then I dipped my fingers again, as though into water,
and waded the leaf rot carefully, until my hands lighted upon

the half-mandible's sibling, the other long, cold, sharp bone.

I lifted it, but not quite clear of the leaf debris,
not wanting to separate it from the work that still needed to occur.

For a panged moment I was bashful or embarrassed.
The bone had perfected whiteness,

while a clinging smutch of fur hung grizzled, unkempt.

But I made myself fully take it in
before I buried it again, tenderly, with leaves and soil.

I sat up, and slowly I breathed.
The air became strict and mineral cold around me.

Then I swallowed and it became amber
as I leaned forward to unearth the bulk of the skull.

iii.

Later, you wrote and asked, "What was the skull's condition?"

I had had a drink, not a celebratory one, but a sober one
to mark the occasion; I was still a little shaky.

Of course my response seemed over the top.
Yet was true.

Erin Wilson

FIVE DAYS

Day One

The snow fell
and the traffic diminished

and the wind blew.

Day Two

The snow fell
and blanketed the evergreens

and the wind blew.

Day Three

The snow stopped
and the wind blew

and the trees on the forest's edge bowed, naked again.

Day Four

I stood at the window
and sipped tea.

Day Five

I strapped on my snowshoes
and entered the forest
where no wind could penetrate.

The trees bore witness silently,
their white shoulders slouching.

I stood amongst trees
where sounds could not come or go.

I became the lowing of cattle.

Merridawn Duckler

WHERE YOU ARE BORN

may make all the difference,
when you think about it.
Ten miles to the left or right
and pow, you are not you.

I was very nearly born
on the long, wide bridge
between the house and the hospital.
I'm sure my mother was talking

the entire time, as the vehicle,
either a car yearning to speed or an
ambulance accustomed to speed,
crossed and I sloshed

along, near air
which I hadn't experienced yet.
Would it taste of rain, of blue?
I had not witnessed color, except in dreams.

Suspension did not
frighten me, that I know.
The only option
unavailable was staying put.

Then I arrived, under a fast siren.
Daffodils received the news in lemon light.
As for that bridge, waves below, light
above, that I am still going across.

Sara Moore Wagner

VACATION

At the Carolina coastline, the sea
laps up to the sand in great gulps.
I want to burst
on this beach, be remade,
as Osiris. Instead, I put my children
to bed sticky with salt,
with bits of shell hidden in the follicles
of their hair. In the morning, the radios
are all playing some tired country
song about the ocean, about girls
in the ocean. When I stand
up to adjust my top, a man stops
to say hello. I want to know the right
words to heal this country on the edge
of this country—*look out*, I say,
over that big ocean is another world.
Remember all those ships
on this very shoreline, cutting through
it as birthday cake, not sharp,
not craggy, not a pumice stone, sweet
cake. On the other side of the ocean
is not another world. Look out.
We are born from both the sea
and the sand, trace our American
heritage to the Appalachian Mountains
of Ohio, that great melting pit of loss,
which still, in the tired hills contain
fossils of the sea, were made from sea.
Make our lineage coastline: there is here
and there is there, that great blue
which is somehow warmer than the air
above it. The man tells me predator
fish wait just beyond the sandbar.
Hello fish, hello sky, hello America, you
crowded beach of pushy people covered
in sunscreen, taking up more space,
claiming a spot early, playing your music
so loud it drowns out the sound of the gulls
crying mine mine mine mine mine.

James Scruton

LATE FIREWORKS

Someone always has a few left over,
neighborhood shrieks and pops
just after dark far into each July.

Tonight above the houses, sizzling arcs
of blue and white, red stars
I'll see later with my eyes closed.

Maybe it's something else they're celebrating,
a birthday or anniversary—perhaps Bastille Day,
the colors and the timing almost right.

We're used to fireworks for so much else,
after a home run or on New Year's Eve.
A guy at work once told me how his family

lit sticks of dynamite every Christmas,
blew holes in hillsides on his grandpa's farm
before heading off to church.

For years, he said, the holidays meant
snowfall and the scent of gunpowder,
tinsel framing the rattled windows.

At my open window now I listen for the hiss
of one last fuse, another crackling rat-a-tat.
I look—east, as it happens—for one more light in the sky.

Mandy Moe Pwint Tu

ABECEDARIAN WITHOUT OUR LAST NAME

All I knew was once he was.
Before he died, he babbled moonsong.
Called a coppice of cardinals who sang him away.

Dad died mid-year. Hard of days and hard of healing, he was
evergreen in his mind. Never mind roses, orange blossoms,
frangipanis: he loved the leaves, sprouting with streaks of color.
Gave the ground, always, to the uprooting of the flowering variety.
He'd forget to answer when my mother asked where the flowers went.

I remembered for him. Most days. Memory plays silly
jokes on me. Joke's on me, whose clover
kisses peel off decaying skin. Ask him, beg
linger, demand the leaving. How bewildering
my longing. How fraying. A daughter should
never need to impress an ocean on her lineage.

Over my father are mangrove branches. Bending, they
play each dirge we never knew, will never know.
Quietly, each passing year begs a question no one asks. I am
resigned. Decide on dwindling. Dad's name:
Selwyn—poised for oblivion. I claim no

violence. I forge from each giving absence.
When he was alive, I knew all he knew:
X-rays for my hands, democracy, silver vases overflowing.
Yearling, I yearned for his shadow. His smile moved
zephyrs to my side. All I know: once, we were.

DUPLEX

Tonight, I decide I am quitting poetry.
Once, I wrote a poem. It became a practice.

Once I wrote a poem which became a practice
like mist rolling in from the Great Smoky Mountains.

Like mist settling on this smoky mountain,
I dipped my hand in a ginkgo tree.

Snow-tipped, the leaves on the ginkgo tree
are whispers of a past I used to claim.

These whispers of a past I dare not claim—
My father was a stone in my mother's mouth.

I drowned, skin and bone, and bled at the mouth.
I'm always mistaking love for kindness.

Here. Take this love and call it kindness.
Tonight, I'm quitting. What lasts is poetry.

Jessica Dionne

ARS POETICA

After Carmen Giménez Smith

I'm bruising I'm bettered I'm overdone I'm becoming I'm all
ears I'm all teeth I'm resistant to being reduced
to my qualities but I keep doing it I'm covered in citrus I'm panther and lore
I love things that have wings I have wings I'm hungry I'm equal
parts costume and confusion I'm sun-wrecked cheeks I'm desiring
to be fed on I live in a lodestar I get lost I'm both balm
and blister I'm waiting I'm part-time I'm overworked I'm poverty-
line rider I've never had lessons I'm rusty I'm not
a majority I'm major and might I'm freckling and fickle I'm still making
up my mind I'm asking for forgiveness I mean it
I'm all in I'm all adage and no surrender I'm thinking of staying
in bed all day I'm lazy I need sleep I'm a dreamer I'm odd I'm awed
I'm rain-bowed and rot

ROYGBIV, FLORIDA

I.

A flushing of the cheeks like roadside anise.
Two rusted bicycles, aslant on a cypress.
Where did all the Florida panthers go?
Here, hiding in an abandoned BP.
Four motels painted like Cinderella's castle.
A handful of broken shells, all culled from Sanibel.
And the hard-mapped lines of 75, dividing.

II.

It's balmy in Destin, and
I can't wait to trace
bright days on our skin,
spin the last olive in a bright bowl
it's better here,
heat-thick

*tonight I'm wearing a red dress
a triangle of orange in the hollow of his cheek
lemon trees, and just below,
and glasses of raw, green, local wine
in this blue light
to swell up like roots in the rain.*

III.

I can't forget the red tide of an algae bloom,
spinning, intercoastal, toward a sunset globe.
The yellow café in Key West where I was bright and blushing,
or the grasses that gripped our ankles, tripped us up to bruising
as the heavy blueberries we spread on our toast, sweet-rot and busted.
How the summer was a violet violence—blooming.

Rhienna Renée Guedry

FLORIDA FROM ABOVE

Is full of holes, a patchwork
of textures where bridges lay
out like strands of wire, the
land itself a kind of gauze without
the heaviness of drink: green suspension,
the land like a picnic blanket, by which
I mean a temporary place to rest your legs.

There's no good answer to the
question, *is that where your family still lives?*
The sizzle of asphalt was dire, there was
never enough ice, and my haunches
were ill prepared for the burn of
car seats. Still, I expected the place
you left without saying goodbye
to be something less severe—
and that was my second mistake.

Clint Bowman

INVASIVES

The
kudzu is
turning the woods
into a world of
grim reapers. The oaks are
suffocating
beneath their cloaks
and I'm not
quick enough to save them all.
I'm already too late for the
pines left hanging in their
nooses of english ivy and
hemlocks completely
skinned by the woolly adelgid.
As if nature weren't
harsh enough, I just regurgitated
a beer can from the creek
and a plastic bag from
the mouth of a briar patch.
It's impossible to
leave no
trace, but
if a blue jay
can make a nest out
of styrofoam and cigarette cartons,
I can try my best to loosen the rope around this world's neck.

George Freek

A POEM ABOUT NOTHING

After Su Tung Pg

Leaves fall in two and threes.
Where do they go,
these newly dead leaves?
I walk the lake's edge.
I watch a crow
as it circles overhead.
Waves break against stones.
It's as if I can
hear them moan.
I gaze at nothing.
It's what my mind sees.
The crow lands in a tree,
and stares at me.
He seems unperturbed.
He's an unknown.
He means nothing to me,
I simply walk home.

Matthew Duffus

BLOSSOMS

Cherry blossoms float
from branches as if
they control
the fall.

Pyramids of pink and white,
soon to fade.

My daughter dances
among them as she did
at half her age, when she

gathered and tossed
them in the air,
on the breeze.

They'd collect
in ringlets
she no longer has,
envy of playground

moms. Now, she tries
a wind-mill kick,
lunging forward,

not bruising a petal.

Peter Sturtevant

HERMIT THRUSH

her song everywhere
at once thrills
then disappears
embroidering a sunken lane
the one we walk
to Harriman's
or where it used to be

a farm through woods
a simple clearing
and trees reach up
from cellar holes

what's left
of lives once lived
here marked by lichen blocks
where waves of wind
still rise and fall
on thrush song
through spruce
dissolving
as it sounds

Aliyah Warwick

GARDEN BED

In hot July sun we are at it—
hands plunge, coaxing coarse

cucumber vines to open yellow-throated
blossoms, moaning mouths.

You spray the hose, release writhing
earthworms while I stroke and pull

free one engorged, glistening
squash after another.

On all fours, I rip frilly kale petticoats,
a green striptease. You unravel

ropes, impale earth, spread long zucchini
leaf legs for light bondage.

In the garden bed you ripple
into the musky gold sun, caress

vascular tissues with calloused
fingers. I orbit then surrender,

twining around you,
sticky, prickly.

Matt Prater

A BLANKET OF CANDLES

I come up to a deer in the night
taking its time with a bruised apple.
This is what we all want, isn't it—
time and saunter, almost privacy.

Even God, perhaps,
dreamed up sleep (and sex)
so as not to encounter
prayers at every hour.

One more click
of the beads in pretense
and Jesus will untie a goat from a fence
just to break up this needless chatter.

Please don't misunderstand me.
This isn't a longing for disconnection
from the Presence which never
ends, which didn't begin.

It's just that there is something
to be said for winter,
burrows, snowfall, marriage...
marriage, with its pregnant silence.

ALONE IN A HOUSE WHERE EVERY CHAIR WAS ONCE FULL

Do you not ever walk into a certain room
at a certain hour and go oh, yes, there I was
this entire time, hiding in a fruitcake at a dead aunt's party—
(if I were a snake I would have tempted myself, etc.)?

There is a tea tray on the cabinet, an oil lamp,
a Christmas fern in a wicker basket. Jell-O molds.
Neon plastic. Loaves wrapped in foil.
Paisley ties and paisley ascots.

Two men who otherwise barely get along
are outside sharing cigarettes. One tells the other
the names of the stars. This must have been
thirty years ago. I was almost not born.

The lamp was already an heirloom back then,
its living memory almost gone. The fern was a wrap
for some gift: maybe a ceramic, maybe this unlit candle.

Emma Wynn

THINGS WE LOST TO THE FLOOD

Alternate uses for pencils
—their flat shafts reeling in the tissue-thin
black tentacles of mix tapes.
The mix tape. Frilled notebook-paper messages
passed forward in Health class,
“i’s” dotted with hearts like
slips of light in our pockets. Then washed
to pulp in our jeans. Little white pebbles
we could hold in our palm.

Consulting oracles—older brothers
who knew the first names of drummers
and where to buy that beer
that tasted of rye, the smart route
to Philadelphia. Rarely knowing where we were
or how long it would take to get there,
maps like sails flapping dangerously.
How easy it was to wash up on strange shores,
wander into strange bars
into local disputes over the way home.

THERE ARE NO WORDS FOR WHAT WE DO

At Perkins School for the Blind
teachers slapped with rulers
the girl rocking gently with a secret smile,
one heel tucked up
under her skirts.

There’s always someone
ready to spoil a girl’s fun—
sad Jesus with a lamb,
Sylvester Graham and his bread of abstention
crumbling to dust on the tongue.

So we learn to grow so small.
Under a blanket in the back seat,
sunlight a wash through closed lids
trickles of knee-pit sweat
sticking the leather,
the last puzzle piece
slotted in at last.

All the strays
are coming home.
God’s city slowly out of the clouds
like a silver ship,
the day’s film rewinding—
a cup shattering itself whole.

Just a girl’s body,
humming
a brighter chord
down the bones.

Bill Brymer

THE GOOD BARBER

We were watching Wheel
when the barber came,
when the barber came
to cut her hair, my sister's hair,
thinned and patched,
scalp afire
from the atom's kiss.

Gently, gently the barber
worked, the scissors snipped,
the razor whirred.
She cried a little,
he bit his lip, but this
barber was good,
he kept on and on.

And when the barber
was finally done,
he held up the mirror
to that gleaming egg,
the slick bald dome
in which cancer nursed.
She cried again
but thanked him still,
he touched her shoulder
as a father would.

He refused to take
bills thrust his way,
the barber wouldn't,
no matter that we pled.
It's how people do,
the barber said,
then closed the door
and went away.

Tess Liegeois

THINGS TO FORGET

A slick jungle gym dripping with the after-storm
Char on the Banyan tree from a lightning strike

Your empty boat shoes at the base of the stairs
tongues lolling in their open mouths
like two suffocated fish
The smell of cigarettes and Listerine
you've spit into a paper towel so mom
won't know you're smoking Marlboros
in the car when you drive me home
The piping on the package burns
red as a vein
pulsing like thrombosis
in your pocket
A single sheet across your bachelor's bed
Dips in the springs from the weight of your knees
molding to you like sarcophagi—a modern Tut

discovered in his tomb when the phone rang unanswered
too many times
You died in a thunderstorm
maybe startled by a thunderclap
The landlord found you on the bedroom carpet
sheet thrown off like molted snakeskin
Thereafter, I flee north
where there aren't as many thunderstorms
and snow blankets cover wooden playgrounds
reminding me of nothing
because I've never seen such things before.

Sara Son

A POEM BEFORE YOUR DEATH

I know you will come back
in flowers, to haunt me. That one day,

on a sidewalk dappled with cherry blossoms,
I stood at your side as a photo was taken.

The moment preserved, like fermented
radish. With time, turning sour.

With time, retaining its salt. With time,
becoming again and again a new thing.

Reflections of our faces took form
on a slick black film, in a secret

compartment. I fastened time
around my waist, wading through days

until the prints developed, ready
for us to retrieve at the drugstore.

Back then I knew how to hold the wait.
How to sit with myself, without.

I know, I know this.
A cloud never dries.

That it returns
as the rain, or as the barley tea

you brew in scalding water over a gas range.
My better self understands you

will persist in every breath
of wind that catches me between two mirrors,

as the hand—*yours*—resting
on my shaking knee.

But I've yet to outgrow the child heart
that still cowers

beneath your dining table when a guest
knocks at the door. On knees, you'd part

the tablecloth as if lifting a veil. I'll learn
to forgive you for leaving me

with this kindness—which will, like then,
walk away from the frame,

in movements of forgetting, only
to occur to me in poems.

Amanda Coyne

A POEM FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

Time is slipping away. I keep finding it,
already peeled
open and eaten; the rind scattered
in fragrant pieces
on the floor. It's Thursday, but I could have
sworn
it was Tuesday. It can't be September
already,
but it's October now.
That sort of thing.

I'm weepy in
the world
these days. Things
keep choking me
up. When I was young, I almost
never cried. Now, a picture of an oil painting
in an
email newsletter makes me misty. The world is so
beautiful but
this is probably the end.

We're holding her hand in the
hospital room and her breathing is shallow.
We know this is
goodbye. We also know
this is murder, but we're not supposed to
say that.
It's too earnest and it is
not cool at all to be earnest. So, yeah, time
is slipping
away and the world is ending and I'm crying
looking out
the window at the river that keeps rising and
flooding into the street and I'm thinking about the juice
I'll never taste again because someone
else already ate the fruit and also that
someone else was me. I didn't think to save
any for later.

We just leave the sandbags
out all the time now.

And I care so much and not at all. Like,
I'm crying looking at nature out
the window, but I'm also,
simultaneously,
shopping for leather blazers on my phone
because I saw
someone wearing one and now I need one
too.
I'm divided up
and addicted and I cannot stop too long
even for the end of the world.

Lydia Buzzard

WHEN IT FINALLY HAPPENS

They will stop asking. The unknown number calls will cease. I will wake up and feel it finished, the search, the hairpin teetering pleasantries, the secretly ciphered silence. No one will ask who my jewelry comes from, which family called on my birthday. I will finally look back on all of it with more sweet than bitter; stolen opportunities more desperate love than jealous snatch; watch vindictive sick day laughter morph to miserable, mutual amusement. I will remember only days I was called the correct name. Never-cut, skin-sinking nails will be plum-painted, hindsight beauties and I will finally be able to say why I have nowhere to be on the second Sunday of May

Annette C. Boehm

SMALL ANIMAL SOFT TISSUE

Teeth

They rise like white mountains from your smooth, tight gums.
You sink them into rubber, cardboard, my hand, my breast.

Matryoshka

If they opened me up, you'd be there, wooden, or fossilized.
And if they cracked you open, they'd find me.

Feral

You cry like a cat in heat, dive-bomb me like a bird protecting what I got out of the car to see, by headlights, stunned.

Seb Detling

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHS

My youngest half-sibling
 posing in front of a wall of windows in her childhood home
 with the golden-hour's sunbeams on her wedding gown.

My birthmother,
 touching silk-covered buttons for the mother-daughter photograph.
 Then in a group photo with the grandmother who gave me away,

all three look at the camera. The mother's eyes are green,
 the daughter's brown. The grandmother's are Swedish blue
 with specks of hazel, like the eyes I try to love in my own reflection.

Andrew Cox

HOT SPRINGS AND THE PINK BATHROOM

The pink bathroom returns from sailing around the world Mirrors
return from cracks in Artic ice where she looks for instructions to pluck
eyebrows Then comes the time to draw them back according to spec
She does not know yet she is the president's mother It's out there like
an earthquake in the ocean And what about the youngest son He lacks
the wherewithal to steer the boat in which he is about to go under The
German Shepard named King follows the two boys everywhere her
youngest and his friend escorted by a dog sent from the place where
words go to collect themselves on a razor blade And the gray streak on
her pompadour requires her two sons and the friend to never forget her
Buick convertible that served as a rocket ship her bets on the horses as
if they would fill in the blank her three husbands and how she knew
salvation would come disguised as the word it her surfing on the tidal
wave one year after her oldest became president Hot Springs says here
it comes again the pink bathroom the pink kindness that drips from
her eyes here it comes again the pink

Kristine Iredale

INSIDE THE BOOTS

Let's look beyond the Daffodil Parade, shall we?
To the boots on the ground. Those aren't
just boots on the ground. Maybe they belong to the girl
you played floor hockey against in high school
gym class, the shy one who hid in the library
dreaming of a world outside those walls. The
absence of a person is just as loud as
what is not said in a poem. I know that much.
And I know a Humvee sitting in the sun for too long
will burn bare flesh. I know to check inside
my boots before putting them on, and I know
every part to my rifle because chances are
if children aren't playing in the streets on a Monday
when they usually are . . . well, then we're in
for some trouble. And I know, I know too
that NVG's only work in the presence of moonlight,
how to walk around in the dark without a flashlight,
how to stick an IV into someone's arm, and I know nothing
is for certain.

Nicole Farmer

BETTY MAKES A FIVE LAYER CAKE WITH A BLOWTORCH

Fingers in the fudge, butter knife held between her teeth, flame thrower
gripped firmly, my artist friend attacks her baking the way she hurls
herself at a blank canvas—all coiled energy and vision and a little
violence thrown in for good measure—as the layers take shape but must
be HOT to be frosted and her Louisiana skin is glowing, because that is
all a southern belle is allowed, but the chocolatey cascading curls are
definitely sweating profusely; later this creation will startle starving
eyes and slide down newly betrothed gullets, along with their adoring
onlookers who want to eat art.

George Drew

BUT EMIKO DIDN'T SAY SAYONARA

1

Emiko die, her sister in Kyoto said,
and when I asked her when, the silence
was a swarm of locusts in my ear,
so *thank you* was all I said and hung up,
her *hai* a crisp and cursory goodbye.

After, rummaging through my memories
and old photographs, there she was—Emiko,
standing beside my father, her Asian face
a lotus blossom, his impassive, a military tuck
in Air Force blue, each a newly-minted strand
of double helix labeled husband and wife.

Emiko was dead, but the faded album pages
of memory kept turning, and there she was:

Emiko, playing the slots in Reno
Emiko, wielding chopsticks like a weapon
Emiko, bowling her first two-hundred game
Emiko, squatting in a rutted road to pee
Emiko, cackling when she out-pokered my father
Emiko, dropping to her knees at his funeral
Emiko, *baka yarō*-ing me for thirty years.

Emiko die, her sister in Kyoto said,
but Emiko didn't say sayonara to me
and that night I dreamed lotus blossoms
drifting out to sea, the words we spoke
when last we talked petals shawling the shore:

I love you, mama-san, I said, to which,
I know, she said. That was all. It was enough.

2

(Last Words to Emiko)

Like you, Mama-San, I'm white-haired.
Like you, I'm addicted to incandescence.
Like you, I'm early winter in July.
And I love winter, Mama-San, like you.

Like us, Mama-San, the great blue heron
under a great white pine staring
back at me staring at it, two pale
shadows staring for a long, long time.

Jacqueline Knirschild

HABITAT

In the early morning, the corners of five comforters,
some old, some new, lime green, bright blue,
swirl around his body, curled like a nautilus shell,
the blankets and pillows mounded, weaved like a nest
and I'm the mother bird kissing his cheeks and head

as he sleeps, he rubs his feet together like a fly
that rubs its legs, cleaning the bristles and organs,
and maybe when the fly sleeps on the undersides
of leaves, twigs, and branches, it dreams
that it is a boy, and the boy is a fly, or maybe,
he is a grasshopper chirping that life-giving song.

I run my fingers along the constellations on his back
and he awakes, rolling over to face me, and I whisper,
I love you, and without a word, he lifts his wing
of comforters, stretches out long like a log,
releasing that musky, earthy melatonin fog
and I slide beneath, into that warm underbelly
ecosystem of a fallen tree, the moist moss

of his chest, hairs curling like birch bark,
lines on his face like rings inside a resting trunk,
eyelashes translucent as termite legs, millions
of pores and spores, lobes soft as lamb's ear,
mushrooms and bacteria, sweat and pheromones,
life persisting in all the sleepy cracks and crevices,
and the two squishy, shiny, beautiful slugs
of his lips that open to me and the sweetness within.

Nick Conrad

TRAILSIDE REVELATION; NOT

Blades of sunlight slice here, there,
through the forest gloom, setting
some random bush alight,
transforming an oak briefly
into a towering flame,
landing just now on that spot
up ahead on the trail, gone of course
by the time I get there, having
moved on to embellish
some prim rose, to spotlight a dead limb
dangling from an aspen,
each glimpsed moment just that,
a thing gone before fully
comprehended, and each
moment after the same,
a brief blindness as eyes
re-adjust to a world more shadow
than not, where each step is not
so much forward or back; is something
less sure, like a step in the dark.

William Joel

SONNET ON MEDITATION

*“Soon silence will have passed into legend.
Man has turned his back on silence.”
—Jean Arp*

And what’s the matter with just being? Who
said one can’t simply be? Is there a rule,
that somewhere’s written, stating that it’s true?
And what if I should choose to sit where cool
and gentle breezes dwell? Should I retreat
to warmer climates, just to satisfy
some arbitrary law, to suffer heat
and cloying air, a stark and cloudless sky?
I do not need to always be engaged
in motion, moving to and fro. I find
that sitting still brings joys no fool or sage
could ever hope to know; a peace of mind
that takes me to a truer place, to con-
template the inner miracle of one.

SONNET AT THE DINER

Today, I’m simply waiting, held in place,
just watching, not observing, not aware
a quartet sits across from me; each face
a varnished instrument; their graying hair
the strings they play with practiced ease. I hear
each voice weave in and out, without a break
between the beats of dishes. Waitress, near,
with pots of rosin, dark and bitter, takes
her cue and fills/refills each cup, again,
again, her theme a brief motif that adds
a counterpoint to news repeated. Then
the players reach the section where the sad
and joyful yield; they leave a modest sum
to pay the bill, their morning session done.

Stephanie Sushko

“OUR MOTHER WHO ART”

My holy image
is a resin reproduction
of the hallowed Mother clothed in Easter-lily yellow
which peers from the corner kitsch shop
under curse of bead curtain
price tag in no currency
wooden frame in gold.

I don't praise in irony;
she's noble, has a story
she just can't tell it, for as they say,
“It's been told a thousand times.”

Can a hand hold
itself?

Can a
page press down its thin-licked edge?
Can a woman be both bug and amber?
Can she be all and still be
something more?
Can she know what has passed the pall of knowing?

And yet here she is
closest to a smile as you've ever seen her
and for this she must be praised, or blessed;
as she will tell you
the two are not the same
and a choice
or revelation
must be made.

She has found favour because she gives it
and in this I maintain her purity, because think:
you would never buy her, nor would you touch her
you have not seen her in years, and then that once
when her jelled-wax form left you in terror at your desire to feel
and in this perpetual space between your fingers and her body
which without your knowledge she has maintained
throughout the ages
she gives you each time a treatise, an accord,
a decree of:

*Go forth, sleep, eat, be fruitful, or don't
I would never give injunction
I have not made the world, drowned it, clothed myself in mystery
I am a dryness which holds the nectar inside
testing the limits of my own tension
as the man who stands outside
beating his head against the glass.*

You don't know if she is the same in each place—Moscow, Patras,
Saint Grenadine—the glazed gown bloating in and out of smoke,
spices, sea
hands in a fumbling ecstasy of forestall
beckon
reveal
eyes aimed steadily for the answer between yes and no
signed in scrawl such that no name is ever truly
burdened or redeemed by the vision

only nearly:
as I nearly know what comes or what has gone
as I nearly glimpse the bubbled skin of what I claim and deny
as I have nearly now spoken so she
nearly breaks her vow when the white safety lights
beat cold against her robes
when the door has been locked three times against the last wandering
tribes
and the smothered incense floats to the ceiling like the breath of
something
which lived only to die
whose conception strained immediately towards
a long soft
internalized dissolving

when you have overlooked her always but now find yourself
out too late in a storm or in silence
pressing your hand to the heat-stained pane and seeing the
sterile glare as cold spring sunshine
feeling that with the right faith you might break her open and sniff
the dregs of sweetness from her heart as from an empty plastic egg
take something from yourself small as
a seed and leave it in the brimming hollow of her belly
praying that she guards it as she did God's, saying,
as she did to Him:

*You are more real
I am on all sides surrounded, tucked in by everything that forms me
you walk, talk, float in dimensions
which to me are like prophecy;
give me the kernel of that other place to push out
as though from soil, to birth from this nowhere that somewhere
from which you gaze
to reassemble your consuming flesh
from this thin world
hanging on a nail.*

But the one at which you're looking, after hours, after
the day's old redemption
won't say these things because she is not the One.
She is not the child who bowed under an ancient pronouncement
chosen, singular
the face of mercy and the mouth of sacred sighs;
on that One I have no right to cast
even the lightest word.
She whom I name is many
though she mostly looks the same
eyes
nose
lips
transposing
as though formed from one union

but the throat
the throat is different always
angled, twisting, revolving so rapidly
it appears still
a departure seen only on inspection if you

take her off the wall
run your fingers down the backside
browned and peeling
feel the snapping vertebrae
knife-sharp
the deformities of a different pregnancy, the tiny fists of words
grasping some internal fulcrum
executing a turn that the gaze won't betray
saying, in as many silences as tongues,
*There is something that I know,
and it is not
what you think.*

Helga Kidder

RHODODENDRON BLOOMING AT CHRISTMAS

A soft rain sang in the clothesline
as your winter buds opened
like children to a warm bath.
Wrens, too, gathered sticks and fluff
building nests.

Yesterday I grocery-shopped
in sandals and short sleeves
while the Salvation Army lady shook her bell,
asked for coats for the needy.

Has the world turned upside down
without my knowing?
I continue to adapt
to the weather but wear scarves of thought,
that we need to change
our ways of using earth
as a disposal.

Like light curves in and lingers,
I want to return to the days of no news
beyond this town.

I want to hear the rustle
of pages between my fingers, listen
to the radio's twist and shout
as each note quivers my skin,
listen to the rain hieroglyphing
the roof's yellow pollen.

While the dishwasher swooshes and snarls,
I rake penitence
through my brain like a shag carpet,
remember a 70's winter solstice
buried in snow and ice.

Yael Veitz

TODAY I BROUGHT YOU HOME

Today I brought you home, but not enough of you
your ashes waiting for their place
under the nectarine tree
that flowered when you died

It has no flowers now, no fruit—
only echoes of your voice at night
your plaintiveness

Today I brought you home, but only part of you
still image, two dimensional
on canvas for my wall
your eyes moon-round and beckoning

When I first brought you home, I brought in all of you
tiny, trembling, watching out behind you
unsure if you should run
until you knew our welcome wouldn't curdle
and the shock of bathwater turned to towels
and warm arms

When I first brought you home, you thought of running
until you knew you didn't have to.

January Pearson

FOR STARFISH

whose limbs bloom like perennials.
For the opah's silver scales, all the fish sequined
in resilience. For taproots knotted deep in the earth,
anchoring hickories. For rivers and streams,
every blue rivulet guiding rain to the ocean.
For the warmth that gleams the surface, returning
water droplets to clouds. For a ladybug's crimson helmet
and a beetle's black shield. For sepals circling
camellia buds. For the honeycomb's latticework.
Thank you for the cell wall sealing in its intelligence.
For skin that grows over a wound, bones written
with the wisdom to mend. For the doctor's skilled hands,
repairing what's been shattered.
For the seventy-year old woman who sleeps
in the hospital chair overnight, spoons sweet potatoes
to her husband, reads him the news
as they wait for results.

Marisa Lin

KEFFIYEH

The keffiyeh spans my body
like the distance between me

and your moon. Once, in front of
a mirror, you arranged the scarf

upon my shoulders, to see if I liked it.
You asked me, an American, if I was

pro-Palestine, a grim kind of joke
to one familiar with the desert's deceit,

the way it clings to blood, its dry splash.
The day you left, the black one was curled up

like a cat upon the shelf; when I wore it,
its tangled strings seemed to melt into my dark,

unruly hair. I liked that I couldn't tell
the difference between the two. Later,

at the Toi Market, I would buy one checkered
white-and-black, for Palestine—and to

remind me of your games, the juxta-
position of light and dark, how starkly

together they displayed their opposite
natures. We need both to survive, you

could have said, and I would have agreed.
But that night, as you gazed at me, your words

spoke a different proposition: how beautiful
you are. Still, I refused to kiss you. Still,

South Sudan held an unsteady peace
and so I prayed for you, wore

the scarf every winter until I feared
your scent would disappear.

Sometimes, I finger its braided strands
as it wrinkles its torso around my neck,

as if it were a road
to somewhere.

Paul Tanner

FOR ONCE

well? she says
as she puts her basket down on the counter.

well what? I ask.

aren't you going to apologise to me? she says.
for having to wait in the queue for so long?

why would I apologise to her?
she's the one who's made the queue—
her, and everyone else who's queued up.

and hello—
I am the only reason the queue isn't even longer.
she should be apologising to me.

sorry, I say
as I scan and bag her stuff

thinking: I can't possibly get any lower
than this.

no you're not! she says. you're not sorry at all!

and I am shocked
to be serving
for once
a customer
who is actually
right.

Trent Busch

THE GOODLY FERE

Surely you did not think
at first, *miglior fabbro*,
to be stood in circus cage,
too hot for audience,
to be broken not as
an act but an old man.

Surely there was whimsy
in those first broadcasts, when
you had yet to learn there's
no humor in tyranny,
though authorities had proven
that in Pennsylvania.

No one denies you were
a traitor, if being
so is to be both mad
and unpatriotic;
you committed the same
crimes against poetry.

Still, if pardoned, you will
be forgiven only
when there is an end to
tyranny, when sun no
longer spills its many
mad dances among us.

We who are slow to learn
must be broken, too, our
impatient speech silenced,
even though at first we
had thought to be as you
were once, unleashed and free.

Remi Recchia

THE MEN AT HOME

The men at home have fishing nets. Newport cancer dangles from their lips. They rise early & park trucks first in line at the organic foods store. In the dust bowl circa 2022, the farmers are rich. Noise is the most accepted

form of masculinity. If you're a man, you have to shout. Soft voice? Shout with your dick.

The men at home marry young. If he's twenty, he's got a child. If he's seventeen, he's got three. They make sure to keep their sperm count healthy.

My own pants hang loose around my waist like a failed jailor. The seams have nothing to guard.

The men at home buy women dinner & get angry if they don't like it.
The men at home take women to bed & get angry if they like it.

His orgasm is the most important offering on Sunday.

After church, the men at home go to IHOP, sometimes with their wives. They place big orders. I assume they tip.

I grow a beard as quick as I can, cross days off the calendar while my new hormones seep out of my pores. I punch a wall when my prescription is delayed. I order the essential oils man kit online & tell no one. My beard grows thick & bushy like a mountain man's—I don't recognize myself in the mirror.

The men at home must wear sunscreen. Their rough faces never burn as much as I'd expect. Do their wives rub it into them in the early morning? Do they rise together, make love, & kiss each other's skin with white chemicals? Protection against the sun is the strongest love.

It's a fool's errand, I know, to try to blend in. But still I mold my ready fists into yard gloves from Dick's Sporting Goods & browse lawnmowers at John Deere. My small hands will surely drop the handle,

but that's the point, isn't it? To cut something down until it's thin & barren. To leave like it never existed.

Candice Kelsey

BUT I APOLOGIZED

this morning
before the sun rose.
In the darkness of contrition, I
admitted it.
I was wrong.

He told me
you need to think more—

More thinking is necessary,
apparently. *I have to*
start using
my head more. While

we backed out of the driveway
and ventured toward
our morning,

like the tires in endless rotation,
or the sun in tandem with the earth:
one of them orbiting
(or is it *revolving*)
the other. I can't
remember
which

this morning. I can't
think
straight. Even though I know
that is exactly what
I am supposed to do—

Later tonight I'll look toward the night
sky and envy the patterns
of constellations, so perfect
there's no need for apology.

Unlike me, whose astronomy
centers on

sorry
sorry
sorry.

THE SECRET LIFE OF BOOKS

In the small downtown store by the river, the books are tired. They wait and wait. Nothing happens. No one comes by anymore, not even to browse. At night after the store closes, the books do what books do. The mystery books hide in shadows. The sci-fi imagine a better place far from their shelf. The bird books yearn to fly. The cookbooks get giddy and exchange recipes like baseball card collectors. The children's section cry for the first hour then run amuck. The self-help huddle together. The YA ignore it all. The biggest book with all the facts and figures sits upright on the shelf pondering the world outside. It wants to be a poet. The big book is writing an epic poem. It uses only numbers about the light outside the glass. The big book begins with the moon's electric ache.

CONTRIBUTORS

JANE BLANCHARD lives and writes in Georgia (USA). Her work has recently appeared in *Arion*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *Tar River Poetry*. Her latest collection is *Never Enough Already* (2021).

ANNETTE C. BOEHM (she / her) is a queer poet from Germany. She serves as a poetry reader for *Memorious*, a *Journal of New Verse and Fiction*. She is the author of *The Knowledge Weapon* and two chapbooks, "E.D. Liberations" and "the five parts of love: confabulating sappho", available from Dancing Girl Press. A second full-length collection of poems, *The Apidictor Tapes*, was published with New Rivers Press in 2022.

ACE BOGCESS is author of six books of poetry, most recently *Escape Envy* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2021). His poems have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Rhino*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble.

CLINT BOWMAN is a writer from Black Mountain, North Carolina. During the day, Clint works as a Recreation Coordinator, leading hikes and other outdoor programs. In the evening, Clint co-facilitates the Dark City Poets Society—a free poetry group offered through the local library. More of Clint's work can be found in *Mud Season Review*, *California Quarterly*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *Main Street Rag*.

ZOE BOYER was raised in Chicago on the shore of Lake Michigan and now lives among the pines in Prescott, Arizona, where she recently completed her master's degree in creative writing. Her work has appeared in such publications as *The New York Times*, *Canary Literary Magazine*, and *High Desert Journal*.

JESSE BREITE's recent poetry has appeared in *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Fourteen Hills*, and *Rhino*. His chapbook is *The Knife Collector* (FutureCycle, 2013). He is also librettist for Atlanta composer Michael Kurth's choral scores. Jesse teaches high school in Asheville, North Carolina, where he lives with his wife and two kids. More at jessebreite.com.

GAYLORD BREWER is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he founded and for 20+ years edited the journal *Poems & Plays*. The most recent of his 16 books of poetry, fiction, criticism, and cookery are two collections of poems, *The Feral Condition* (Negative Capability, 2018) and *Worship the Pig* (Red Hen, 2020).

BILL BRYMER is a writer and photographer in Louisville, Ky. His work has recently appeared in *Yearling*, *Pegasus*, and *Barely South Review*.

TRENT BUSCH's recent books of poetry, *not one bit of this is your fault* (2019), *Plumb Level and Square* (2020), *West Virginians* (2021), and *Through the*

Cracks (2022) were published by cyberwit.net. His poems have appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *Poetry*, *The Nation*, *Threepenny Review*, *North American Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Northwest Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *American Scholar*, *Shenandoah*, *Boston Review*, and *Hudson Review*. His poem “Edges of Roads” was the 2016 First Place winner of the Margaret Reid Poetry Prize.

LYDIA BUZZARD is a medical student, ongoing GameCube user, and former Google Glasshole raised in Western KY. Her work has appeared in *Overheard Magazine* and *Rejection Letters*. She resides in Madison, WI, with her dog and a sense of permanent, frosty dread. Visit her on Twitter @lydiabuzzard.

CARSON COLENBAUGH is an undergraduate student of horticulture and forestry at Clemson University. His poems have been published in *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel* and *Canary*. He attended the Bread Loaf and Sewanee Writers’ Conferences in 2021.

NICK CONRAD’s poems continue to appear in national and international journals, most recently *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Aquifer: The Florida Review Online*, *Cider Press Review*, *Concho River Review*, *The Literary Bohemian* (CZ), *The MacGuffin*, *Magma* (UK), *Noctua Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Orbis* (UK), *Stand* (UK), *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and *Visions-International*. His first book, *Lake Erie Blues*, appeared in 2020 from Urban Farmhouse Press as part of their Crossroads Poetry Series. His podcast episode for the series All Write in Sin City aired 8/29/21.

ANDREW COX is the author of *The Equation That Explains Everything*, (BlazeVOX [Books] 2010), the chapbooks, *This False Compare* (2River View, 2020) and *Fortune Cookies* (2River View, 2009) and the hypertext chapbook, *Company X* (Word Virtual, 2000). He edits UCity Review

AMANDA COYNE is a writer and English teacher in Wilmington, North Carolina.

DOUGLAS K CURRIER holds an MFA in Poetry from the University of Pittsburgh and writes poetry in English and Spanish. Now retired, he spent his entire teaching career in community colleges in New York and Vermont. He has published in several journals: *The Café Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Comstock Review*, and others in North and South America. He lives with his wife in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

CAROL V. DAVIS is the author of *Below Zero* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2023), *Because I Cannot Leave This Body* (Truman State Univ. Press, 2017), and *Between Storms* (TSUP, 2012). She won the 2007 T. S. Eliot Prize for *Into the Arms of Pushkin: Poems of St. Petersburg*. Her poetry has been read on National Public Radio, the Library of Congress and Radio Russia. Twice a Fulbright scholar in Russia, she taught in Siberia, winter 2018 and teaches at Santa Monica College and Antioch University Los Angeles. She traveled back to Siberia in April 2022 on a Fulbright Specialist grant.

EMMA DEPANISE is a poet originally from the Eastern shore of Maryland. Her poems have recently appeared in journals such as *Poetry Northwest*, *The*

Minnesota Review, *The Los Angeles Review*, *New York Quarterly* and *The National Poetry Review*. She is a winner of a 2019 AWP Intro Journals Award and the 2018 winner of the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry from Nimrod International Journal. An editor of *The Shore Poetry*, she has an MFA from Purdue University and is a current PhD student at the University of Missouri.

SEB DETLING was given up for adoption in a small Southern town and raised in Memphis. She’s earned MA’s in Spanish at Florida State University and Creative Writing at the University of South Alabama, respectively. She teaches at Spring Hill College and lives with her family along the Gulf Coast.

RUTH DICKEY’s first book, *Mud Blooms* (Harbor Mountain Press), was selected for the MURA Award and awarded a 2019 Silver Nautilus. An ardent fan of dogs and coffee, Ruth lives in Brooklyn and her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Cave Wall*, *Kestrel*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Gulf Coast*, *StorySouth*, *SWIMM*, and *Rhino*. More at www.ruthdickey.com

JESSICA DIONNE is a PhD student at GSU and the production editor of *New South*. She received her MFA from NC State, and an MA from UNCC. Her chapbook *Second-Hand Love Stories* is forthcoming from Fjords Press. She was the runner-up in *Meridian*’s 2021 Editors’ Prize, and a finalist in *Arts and Letters*’ 2020 Poetry Prize, *Iron Horse Literary Magazine*’s 2020 contest, and *Narrative*’s 2019 30 Below contest. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Birdcoat Quarterly*, *Waccamaw*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Raleigh Review*, *SWWIM*, *Rust + Moth*, *Banshee* (IE), and *Mascara Literary Review* (AU).

GEORGE DREW is the author of nine poetry collections, including *Pastoral Habits: New and Selected Poems* and *The View from Jackass Hill*, winner of the 2010 X.J. Kennedy Poetry Prize, both from Texas Review Press, *Fancy’s Orphan*, Tiger Bark Press, and most recently *Drumming Armageddon*, Madville Publishing, 2020. Drew also has published a chapbook, *So Many Bones: Poems of Russia*. He has a new chapbook coming out titled *Hog: A Delta Memoir*, Bass Clef Books, and a book of essays titled *Just Like Oz*, Madville Press. His biography appears in *Mississippi Poets: A Literary Guide*, U. of Mississippi Press, edited by Catherine Savage Brosman.

MERRIDAWN DUCKLER is the author of *Interstate* (dancing girl press) and *Idiom* (Washburn Prize, Harbor Review.) New work in *Seneca Review*, *Women’s Review of Books*, *Interim*, *Posit*, *Plume*. Winner of the 2021 Beullah Rose Poetry Contest from *Smartish Pace*. Fellowships/awards include Yaddo, Southampton Poetry Conference, Poets on the Coast. She’s an editor at *Narrative* and at the philosophy journal *Evental Aesthetics*.

MATTHEW DUFFUS is the author of the poetry chapbook *Problems of the Soul and Otherwise*, as well as two full-length works of fiction. He lives in rural North Carolina and online at matthewduffus.com and on twitter @DuffusMatthew.

JOANNE DURHAM is a retired educator lucky to live on the North Carolina coast. Her poetry book, *To Drink from a Wider Bowl*, winner of Evening Street Press’ Sinclair Prize, was published in Spring 2022. Her chapbook, *On Shifting Shoals*, (Kelsay Books), is also forthcoming. She was a finalist

for the NC Poetry Society's Poet Laureate Award and *Ruminate Magazine's* Broadside Prize, and won Press 53's Prime Summer Challenge. Her poems appear in *Poetry East*, *Third Wednesday*, *Gyroscope*, *Kosmos Quarterly*, *Rise-Up Review*, *Juniper*, and other journals. Please visit joannedurham.com for more about her background and poetry.

AUBREY FANNIN is native to rural North Alabama. He lives on a small farm in New Market, AL with his wife, indelible daughter, and three well-named cats. He is an amateur winemaker and brewer and enjoys tending his herd of muscadine vines. A graduate of the geography program at the University of North Alabama, Aubrey has worked as a cartographer, project manager, and IT professional for 23 years. He is a regular contributor of poetry to WLRH's Sundial Writers Corner.

NICOLE FARMER is a writer and teacher living in Asheville, NC. Her poems have been published in *The Closed Eye Open*, *The Sheepshead Review*, *The Roadrunner Review*, *East by Northeast Lit. Review*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *West Trade Review*, *The Great Smokies Review*, *Kakalak Review*, *86 Logic*, *Wingless Dreamer* and others. Her play *50 JOBS* was produced in Los Angeles. Nicole has been awarded the First Prize in Prose Poetry from the *Bacopa Literary Review*, which appeared in Sept. 2021. Way back in the 90's she graduated from The Juilliard School of Drama. You can find her dancing barefoot in her driveway on the full moon at midnight.

TIMOTHY FOX is originally from Texas. He received a Houston Press Theatre Award for his play *The Whale; or, Moby-Dick* and a Vault Festival Spirit Award for his play *The Witch's Mark*. His writing has appeared in, among others, *Westchester Review*, *Gordon Square Review*, *Passengers Journal* and is forthcoming in *New Writing Scotland*. He lives in London. timothy-fox.com

GEORGE FREEK's poetry has recently appeared in *Acumen*, *The Lake*, *The Whimsical Poet*, *The Literary Yard*, *Triggerfish*, and *Torrid Literature*.

RHIENNA RENÉE GUEDRY (she/they) is a writer, illustrator, and producer whose favorite geographic locations all have something to do with their proximity to water. Her work has appeared in *Muzzle*, *Gigantic Sequins*, *Empty Mirror*, *HAD*, *Oyster River Pages*, and elsewhere. Rhienna is currently working on her first novel. Learn more about her at rhienna.com or [@cajunsparke](https://twitter.com/cajunsparke) on Twitter.

MARCEL JOSEPH IKHENOBIA owns both B.sc and M.sc in degrees Biochemistry from University of Nigeria, Nsukka and University of Lagos respectively. He first published his poems "Weathering World" in year 2020. He is a passionate writer, a poet, essayist, novelist, playwright and biochemist.

KRISTINE IREDALE is an Iraq War veteran. She deployed to Iraq with her identical twin sister in 2008 as part of the Washington State Army National Guard. Her interests besides poetry include baking, psychology and traveling. Kristine's poems have been published in Eastern Washington University's student literary magazine *Northwest Boulevard* and The Veteran's Writing Project quarterly publication *O-Dark-Thirty* among others. She loves baseball, tattoos, and massages. Kristine currently lives in Edmonds, Washington.

HEATHER JESSEN is a 2021 finalist for the *Ruminate* broadside prize and the *Atlanta Review* poetry contest. She has an MFA in writing for children from Simmons University and an MA in social work from the University of Chicago. A former resident of Australia, she currently lives in Connecticut.

XINYI JIANG was born in China's Qingdao and studied in Nanjing University and Fudan University. She now lives in Scotland.

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

SAMANTHA JOSLIN is an English major studying at The University of Kansas. She is a new poet who finds tremendous inspiration in the great works of Elizabeth Bishop and John Keats. Her work is often narrative, conversational, and romantic, with heaps of sensual undertone.

CANDICE KELSEY teaches writing in the South. Her poetry appears in *Poets Reading the News* and *Poet Lore* among other journals, and her first collection, *Still I am Pushing*, explores mother-daughter relationships as well as toxic body messages. She won the 2019 Two Sisters Writing's Contest and was recently nominated for both a Best of the Net and a Pushcart. Find her at candicemkelsey.com

HELGA KIDDER resides in the hills of Tennessee with her husband. She is co-founder of the Chattanooga Writers Guild and leads a poetry group. Her poems have been published in *Conestoga Zen*, *Artemis Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, and others. She has five collections of poetry, *Wild Plums*, *Luckier than the Stars*, *Blackberry Winter*, *Loving the Dead* which won the 2021 Blue Light Press Book Award, and *Learning Curve*.

KATHLEEN KIMBALL-BAKER is a Texas transplant, writer, and editor living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A three-time finalist in Minnesota's Loft Literary Center Mentor Series, she received an honorable mention for her 2012 essay on becoming a dog sledder. Her poems have been published in *Welter*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Tiny Seed Journal*, *Lines & Stars*, *Mockingheart Review*, and *Red Wolf Journal*.

JACQUELINE KNIRNSCHILD is originally from Northeast Ohio, but she is currently traveling around the world. Right now, she is in Melbourne, Australia, and her next destination will be Thailand. She holds a B.A. in English from the University of Mississippi, and her poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Poetry South*, *Full House Literary* and *Product Magazine*. She also has essays and literary criticism published in *Ninth Letter*, *Full Stop*, and *The Cleveland Review of Books*; and journalism published in *Hakai*, *Number: Inc*, *Burnaway*, and *The Key Reporter*. Find her on Twitter [@JacqKnirn](https://twitter.com/JacqKnirn).

TESS LIEGEOIS is an attorney and aspiring writer working out of Brooklyn, New York. She grew up along the coast of southwest Florida before moving to New Jersey for high school and Atlanta for college where she received a

Bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in English and creative writing. She now works as a full-time litigator, but spends any available free time writing and editing. Her work has appeared in the *Emory Pulse*, *Write City Review*, and *Eunoia Review*.

A daughter of Chinese immigrants and an immigrant herself, **MARISA LIN** (she/her) grew up in Rochester, Minnesota. Marisa began writing poems during her senior year at Stanford University, where she graduated with a BA in Economics. Marisa is an alumna of the 2021 Community of Writers Poetry Workshop.

ANGIE MACRI is the author of *Sunset Cue* (Bordighera), winner of the Lauria/Frasca Poetry Prize, and *Underwater Panther* (Southeast Missouri State University), winner of the Cowles Poetry Book Prize. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she lives in Hot Springs and teaches at Hendrix College.

MARCHIANO is a former soldier, failing poet, future revolutionary.

A Best New Poets nominee, **JEFF MCRÆ** has had poems appear in *Massachusetts Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Salamander*, *Rattle*, and many other journals with recent poems appearing or forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*, *Mudfish*, *The Common*, *I-70 Review*, *Permafrost*, and *Rattle*. He lives in Vermont with his family where he drums and washboards in the Bennington Traditional Jazz Band and works in an elementary school.

REBECCA MLH lives in Apex, NC with her husband, two dogs, cat, and horse on a little piece of land in the woods. Her poetry and essays focus on the transformative simplicity of nature, and she is currently putting the finishing touches on her first novel prior to seeking representation.

JOHN MOESSNER's debut poetry collection, *Harmonia*, will be published by Stephen F. Austin State University Press in April 2023. He received his MFA from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. You can find his poems in *Commonweal*, *North American Review*, and *Poet Lore*. He works as an editorial assistant for a medical research journal in Kansas City.

SARA MOORE WAGNER is the winner of the 2021 *Cider Press Review* Editors Prize for her book *Swan Wife* (2022), and the 2020 Driftwood Press Manuscript Prize for *Hillbilly Madonna* (2022), and the author of two chapbooks, *Tumbling After* (Red Bird chapbooks, 2022) and *Hooked Through* (2017). She is also a 2022 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award recipient, a 2021 National Poetry Series Finalist, and the recipient of a 2019 Sustainable Arts Foundation award. Her poetry has appeared in many journals and anthologies including *Sixth Finch*, *Waxwing*, *Nimrod*, *Rhino*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and *The Cincinnati Review*, among others. Find her at saramoorewagner.com

JIM MURPHY is a Professor of English in Creative Writing at the University of Montevallo. His chapbook, *The Memphis Sun* (Kent State UP), won the Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Award. He is also the author of two full-length poetry collections, *Heaven Overland* (Kennesaw State UP) and *The Uniform House* (Negative Capability Press). His poems have appeared in or are forthcoming

from *Brooklyn Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Southern Review*, *TriQuarterly* and other journals. He has also translated a chapbook of poems from Spanish, *Amazonia*, by Colombian-American poet Juan Carlos Galeano.

JANUARY PEARSON's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Tahoma Literary Review*, *2River*, *Rust + Moth*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The Cape Rock Review*, and other publications. She was named a finalist in *The Best of the Net 2020 Anthology*.

MATT PRATER is a writer from Saltville, VA. His work has appeared in *Spillway*, *Poet Lore*, and *The Moth*, among other publications.

REMI RECCHIA is a trans poet and essayist from Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is a PhD candidate in English-Creative Writing at Oklahoma State University. He currently serves as an associate editor for the *Cimarron Review* and Reviews Editor for *Gasher*. A four-time Pushcart Prize nominee, Remi's work has appeared or will soon appear in *Best New Poets 2021*, *World Literature Today*, *Columbia Online Journal*, *Harpur Palate*, and *Juked*, among others. He holds an MFA in poetry from Bowling Green State University. Remi is the author of *Quicksand/Stargazing* (Cooper Dillon Books, 2021) and *Sober* (Red Bird Chapbooks, 2022).

SARATH REDDY enjoys writing poetry which explores the world beneath the superficial layers of experience, searching for deeper meaning in his experiences as an Indian-American, as a physician, and as a father. Sarath's poetry has been published in *JAMA* and *Off the Coast*. His work is forthcoming in *Poetry East*, *Hunger Mountain*, and *Please See Me*. He lives in Brookline, Massachusetts.

MELISSA RIDLEY ELMES is a Virginia native currently living in Missouri in an apartment that delightfully approximates a hobbit hole. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in *Haven*, *Star*Line*, *Eye to the Telescope*, *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *In Parentheses*, *Gyroscope*, and various other print and web venues, and her first collection of poems, *Arthurian Things*, was published by Dark Myth Publications in 2020.

CLAIRE SCOTT is an award winning poet who has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. Her work has appeared in the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Enizagam*, and *Healing Muse* among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called* and *Until I Couldn't*. She is the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.

JAMES SCRUTON is the author, most recently, of the chapbooks *The Rules* (Green Linden Press) and *Crossing the Days* (Prolific Press), both published in 2019. He is currently Professor of English and Associate Academic Dean at Bethel University in McKenzie, Tennessee.

SHOSHAUNA SHY is the founder of Woodrow Hall Editions and the Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf program. Her poems have recently been published in *86*

Logic, Letters One anthology by *Library Love Letters*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Bacopa Literary Review*, *The New Verse News*, *I-70 Review*, *Fictional Café* and the *Lowestoft Chronicle*. Author of five collections, she is the recipient of two Outstanding Achievement Awards from the Wisconsin Library Association, and was a finalist for the Tom Howard/Margaret Reid poetry prize sponsored by Winning Writers.

SARA SON is a writer from Queens. She holds a BA from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Cream City Review*, and elsewhere. She was a POC Fellowship Finalist from *The Forge* in 2018. She tweets at @saramjson.

MEGHAN STERLING (she, her, hers) lives in Maine. Her work is forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Rhino Poetry*, *Nelle*, and many others. *These Few Seeds* (Terrapin Books, 2021) was an Eric Hoffer Grand Prize Finalist. *Self-Portrait with Ghosts of the Diaspora* (Harbor Editions), *Comfort the Mourners* (Everybody Press) and *View from a Borrowed Field* (Lily Poetry Review's Paul Nemser Book Prize) are all forthcoming in 2023.

ROBERT STEWART's latest book of poems is *Working Class* (Stephen F. Austin State University, 2018); his latest book of essays is *The Narrow Gate: Writing, Art & Values* (Serving House Books, 2014).

PETER STURTEVANT (he/him) is a life coach, consultant, teacher and writer who lives and works in Washington DC and Brooklin, Maine. Peter holds a BA in religion, an MA in English and an MALS in counseling philosophy. He can be fleetingly found on Twitter @sturtevant_jr

STEPHANIE SUSHKO is a writer living in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, and a Masters student in English at McMaster University. She has won local awards for both poetry and fiction, and has previously had work published in *Literary Orphans*, *Ripples in Space*, and *Cleaning up Glitter* journals.

PAUL TANNER has been earning minimum wage, and writing about it, for too long. His star sign is Libido. His cat knows your sins.

WENDY M. THOMPSON is an Assistant Professor of African American Studies at San José State University. Her creative work has appeared in *Palaver*; *the Santa Fe Writer's Project*, *Rappahannock Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, and *Waccamaw Journal*. She is the coeditor of *Sparked: George Floyd, Racism, and the Progressive Illusion*.

JONATHAN TRAVELSTEAD served in the Air Force for six years as a firefighter and currently works as a full-time firefighter. Since finishing his MFA in Poetry at Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, he turns a lathe and apprentices for a jewelry-smith. His first collection *How We Bury Our Dead* by Cobalt Press was released in March, 2015, and *Conflict Tours* (Cobalt Press) was released in 2017.

MANDY MOE PWINT TU is a writer and a poet from Yangon, Myanmar. Her work has appeared in *Longleaf Review*, *West Trestle Review*, *perhappened mag*, and elsewhere. She is pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing (Poetry) at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and is a Thomas J. Watson

Fellow. She is the author of two chapbooks, *Monsoon Daughter* (Thirty West Publishing House, 2022) and *Unsprung* (Newfound, 2022). Find her on Twitter @mandrigall.

Yael Veitz is a New York-based poet. Her works, which have appeared in *Coffin Bell* and *Thirty West*, among others, reflect her geographically diverse background, her work in mental health, and, occasionally, her love for her cats. Her debut chapbook, *Wilder Centuries* was published by Fifth Wheel Press in 2022.

ALIYAH WARWICK is a student in Maharishi International University's MFA in Creative Writing program. She enjoys dabbling in dance, puppetry, Dungeons & Dragons, and languages like Italian and Swedish. You can find an essay she wrote about her experience learning Italian in *Zenith Literary Magazine*. Her poetry will be featured in the forthcoming anthology, *Conestoga Zen*, Issue 2.

ERIN WILSON's poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *december magazine*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Verse Daily*, *Reed Magazine*, and in numerous other publications. Her first collection is *At Home with Disquiet*; her second, *Blue*, is forthcoming (Circling Rivers). She lives in a small town on Robinson-Huron Treaty territory in Northern Ontario, Canada.

MOSHE WOLF is the author of *The Floating Door* (Glass Lyre Press). Silverman co-edited *Bloomsbury's Anthology of Contemporary Jewish American Poetry*, *New Voices: Contemporary Writers Confronting the Holocaust*, and *101 Jewish Poems for the Third Millennium*.

ELLEN JUNE WRIGHT was born in England and currently lives in New Jersey. She has consulted on guides for three PBS poetry series. Her work was selected as *The Missouri Review's* Poem of the Week in June 2021, and she recently received five 2021 Pushcart Prize nominations.

EMMA WYNN (she/they) received her M.T.S. from Harvard Divinity School and teaches Philosophy & Religion and LGBTQ U.S. History. Her poetry has appeared in *Sky Island Journal* (which nominated her poem for the Pushcart Prize), *West Trade Review*, *peculiar magazine*, *apricity press*, and *The Raw Art Review*. Her first chapbook, *Help Me to Fall*, was a winner of the 2019 Moonstone Arts Center chapbook contest.

JIANQING ZHENG is the author of *A Way of Looking* and editor of *Conversations with Dana Gioia*, *Sonia Sanchez's Poetic Spirit through Haiku*, and five other books. He is professor of English at Mississippi Valley State University, where he serves as editor of *Valley Voices*.

Poetry South is published annually by the low-residency MFA program in creative writing at Mississippi University for Women, offering online workshops in poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, drama, translation, and new media, along with literature, forms, and professional classes and two types of residencies.

www.muw.edu/mfacreativewriting

We wish to thank the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Languages, Literature, and Philosophy, as well as Ted Haddin, Bill Spencer, and Carolyn Elkins for their support. We also thank Jianqing Zheng for his help and advice, and for creating our first seven excellent issues. We strive to continue the legacy. Cover photograph: “Winter Trees.”

www.poetrysouth.com

Twitter and Instagram: @Poetry_South; Facebook: @PoetrySouth

Visit our sister publication:

PONDER REVIEW [PR]

A journal of fiction, flash fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, short plays, art, and new media. *Ponder Review* seeks writing that challenges us, shifts our view, ignites our imagination, sparks conversations, and lingers with us long after our eyes leave the page.

www.ponderreview.com

@PonderReview

