

# Poetry South

2024





# Poetry South

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for Women

# Poetry South

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Natalie Marino

## NOCTURNE

At nightfall  
the sea is an invitation  
written in blue.

At nightfall  
the sea is all past  
and no present,

a dark well full  
of ink.

A single boat  
is far away,

somehow  
staying afloat

even as it wavers  
like a dream

needing a steady piece  
of land  
to return to.

Its sail still stands  
at the horizon's edge

against a fading sky  
threatening demise.

Imagining day lilies  
starting to grow  
on the coast

I remember  
I have always depended  
on luck to get home.



MELA BLUST

WHY ARE PEOPLE DRAWN TO THE OCEAN

my mother asks  
as she pours salt into salt  
sending the drops home: burial at sea

i touch her arm:  
latin now for: *come*  
an understanding we've reached

all other words carry so much weight,  
the coffins of wet speech,  
weighty with potential

she turns and walks toward the boardwalk  
i drive in silence and we're both  
replaying the services for the man who laced our lives together

what would we be without him  
what will we be  
now

corporeal, with an arm to touch  
able to be summoned  
and all either of us can hold of him now is ashes.

and although we rarely speak of how the choice was made

i know now  
that we don't bury the body for the body,  
but for the digging.

Claude Wilkinson

HEAVY ROSES, VOULANGIS, FRANCE

*after a photograph by Edward Steichen*

A sepia metaphor  
and memorial  
to wilting humanity  
just before Steichen  
had to flee Europe,  
before the world  
would first come to blows,  
this perfect mound  
of at least ten elegant,  
solarized blossoms  
signal an end  
to open-air cafés,  
strolls along  
the Champs-Élysées.

Constellations against  
their dark, foreboding  
background, inerrant white  
petals are curled in an elegy  
doubling their mass  
of sadness, as if  
they're still wondering  
how on earth to break  
some people's hearts,  
and amazed at what  
art can't do.

Seeing it over a century  
since—when we're again  
over the precipice of conflict—  
now hanging for kids  
simply killing an hour,  
for couples on their  
awkward first dates  
who indeed may one day  
be lovers, it's hard  
to imagine that such  
a burden of beauty  
couldn't forge swords  
into plowshares and spears  
into pruning hooks.

Katherine Gekker

ON THE AVENUE OF THE DEAD

—*Teotihuacán*

When I can stand again, one man gentles  
    straw from my hair,  
another brushes grit from my jacket.

I'm disappearing in this place  
where everyone disappeared.  
    (Who were they?)

They keep calling — *where are you?*  
    (Between one plane & another.)  
    (My life — a sieve.)

Dark. My world.  
    No. Not that.  
                    Something else —

    (Between one *place* & another.)

Memory's receding moraines —  
    No. That's not possible.  
        (Is it?)

    (Near the Sun Temple?)

Do I sleep for a moment —  
against the hard stones?

Then I'm on my hands & knees,  
    violently sick.  
Then I lie down again. Face the sky.

Finally I come back —  
to myself?  
    this world?

But they're so far away —  
    No. (*I'm* far away.)

    No. Not that.  
                    Something else —

Terry Ann Thaxton

## BIRD ISLAND DURING THE PLAGUE

Locked inside our houses those years, I'd climb into my car each morning to escape the caretaking routine of my days—stroke-surviving partner and adult autistic son. My dog, Sky, rode shotgun with her snout wanting out the window. We stopped at the abandoned shopping mall parking lot for her first-of-the-day relief and run. After the mall, we drove, windows open, across the long bridge over Lake Jesup—the lake with 100 alligators per square mile—all the way to Sanford, then turned around to drive home.

Each afternoon fish crows—little black razors—fly against the blue and white of the sky. I know where the fish crows go to escape, to roost, to think: Bird Island, a five-acre island in the middle of Lake Jesup first occupied by the Timucua people, later camouflaged as a lookout for US military fighting against the Timucua, and later owned by a family from the north. Now, abandoned by people, more than 500 species of birds and other wildlife call the island their escape from the cackling of tourists.

When my partner and I were first dating, he'd pointed out the fish crows those afternoons as we lay on an oversized towel spread on pine needles, that soft bed in Florida woods.

Sometimes while driving on the bridge during the plague, I tried to see the island, hoping to glimpse dark wings flapping—to confirm them roosting or hear them heckling at our lives, laughing about how I could not get very far from someone calling my name for help.

We sit on the back porch, my partner in his chaotic mind and me in mine, waiting for the fish crows to reopen the sky, complaining about their day in the big city, laughing at us for being stuck on the ground. They'll come from the southwest and head northeast toward their private island. Most days, I'd like to be on an island surrounded by acres and acres of alligators. Where no one, not even my partner or son, could hear my complaints.

Rocío Iglesias McKenzie

BETWEEN THE PUSH TO ASSIMILATE AND  
THE PULL TO PRESERVE

The first time I flew on an airplane I left my entire world behind  
I lifted one foot off the island and the other stayed firmly planted in my  
roots

One foot in the cabin, the other still wiggling its toes in a tide pool  
evading chitons and little crabs

Half of me was still reciting state-sanctioned poetry with my classmates,  
giggling while we came to a consensus over whether lunch was more  
fish or fish bone,

when the other half was in the sky, wondering if I could see them from  
my iron perch,

For a moment I was the pelican and I was the herring.

I was not allowed to say goodbye and so I did not know it was goodbye,  
I did not know the half of me in the tide pool would grow smaller and  
smaller,

Demur into a hermit crab I'd sometimes feel at the nape of my neck or  
up my arm,

For years I would slap at it like a mosquito, tried to squash the part that  
othered me;

The part that guilted me for not writing to my abuela more,

For arguing with my mother about practicing my Spanish,

The part of me that grew facial hair where the white girls didn't

The part of me that unrelentingly refuses to assimilate.

Michael Goodfellow

PETRICHOR

Maps said they were places  
but they were just water  
far from shore, sky  
not even bird-tunnelled.  
Grounds, shoals.  
Names like towns.

It was only backward that names held.  
Grass pink orchid  
so lurid that image failed,  
island switchbacked  
by rocky fingers,  
wind parchmented  
in an older script.  
Places where land could be smelled.

A porpoise unfurled, churning  
more like an accident  
than something alive  
or held in glass, dorsal fin taut,  
its words loose:  
dolphin, buoy, mammalled with flesh  
or like something that died.

Matted seaweed caught with lumber, hairless,  
cold and whitened with salt  
or other times as if packed with clay.  
Organed, it drifted—  
tided, collapsed and bladdered.

Light halved and tensed,  
its angles blackened and sedged,  
sea lit up with dumped filings,  
plugged with shrapnel  
like any war.

The bottom was a record of cold  
and the movement of stone,  
torn animals,  
the fat broken down  
frayed and tattered.  
They said even that could be soil.

Mike Bove

## A BIRDWATCHER'S GUIDE TO RURAL BACKROADS

My mother gave me a map I couldn't read  
then died in the sunroom like a tiny bird.

There was no way she could live  
not her own, distinctly hers, no road

I wanted to travel. The smallest birds struck  
her window, too close to the feeders, maybe

too much reflected blue. It must be quick to go  
like that: instant snap, some last flashing

glimpse of a space beyond the glass.  
Do we all fly that way, too proud for a map

until it's just stiff clarity and a false promise  
of sky? I thought so, until she called me

to the bed and sang regrets. With her head  
pressed to my shoulder I held on, staring

through the window to the place the road  
dissolved in burning russet glow. Her last

autumn. Her last tears. Her last everything.  
A hundred times she drove me on that road

past blackbirds in the cornfield. Maps endure  
even when we don't know where they lead,

and when she was curled, still and featherless,  
close to the end, I looked out her window

in the sunroom. She wept into me while  
I watched the road, finches leaping

from the willow. With her closing breaths  
she mapped their final flight.

Peter Grandbois

CROW DISCOVERS THE LAKE WITHIN

And looks away, startled  
Still, it grows inside his body  
The water dark and deep  
Rocks streaked with heat  
Pitting the center, moonlight  
Yawning over a single arthritic  
Tree breaking the surface  
He smells the rain before  
The sky cracks open  
And breath clots the air  
And the crow he was  
Flies like a strange wind  
Across the sandy shore  
Past the Great Horned Owl  
Prowling at dusk  
To a time before sadness  
Overflows within him  
Before his body becomes  
Another wrecked country  
To a place where he wings  
Words into water songs  
Where the end of each  
Expects a larger story



## CROW DREAMS HE'S A MAN

With one eye and one ear and  
somehow only half a face  
but let's follow his breath any-  
way against all odds to see  
if we can still find rapture or  
a close approximation—  
but look he has no arms and  
his legs too are missing and  
he caws, "Mira, soy lo peor  
de todos." And we say no  
what is missing is inside us  
and he laughs and laughs and  
says what language are you  
whispering and we don't know  
we honestly don't have a clue  
so we slip into each other  
until we are no longer  
what we were and crow laughs  
again because we are whole  
and we ask was there ever  
anything before but he can't  
answer because now his beak  
is missing too

Moriah Hampton

## ON A MISSING PAGE

*With thanks to Talin Tahajian for her editorial suggestions*

On December 27, 1923, *Conejos*  
an American freight steamship  
sank in the Black Sea  
Gustave Eiffel died  
and in a small city  
45 miles northeast  
of Cherokee Nation, OK  
Mrs. Rosa E. Trexler  
an otherwise forgettable  
wealthy Indian woman  
was shot and killed  
by her husband.

I read about my second great-grandmother  
in a clipping from the *St. Joseph News-Press Gazette*  
a moment I've long postponed.  
My laptop screen  
flickers in the darkness  
as I sit alone  
at my desk  
in a whisper-quiet apartment  
about 1315 miles northeast  
of that small city  
and about 1035 miles northeast  
of Cherokee County GA  
the place my ancestors once  
called ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵ.

On this spot  
google maps marks  
with a red balloon  
I've lived ignorant of the details  
of her death for the last  
10 years.  
The Upper Hudson Valley  
surrounds me  
almost 2000 square miles of land  
stewarded by the Mohicans and Mohawks  
for thousands of years  
prior to my arrival.

In this region  
I have not roamed  
but stuck to a charted course:  
driving to my job, to get coffee  
to the grocery store, to the park  
in warmer months, occasionally  
to the flower shop  
or home improvement store, my existence radiating  
5 mere miles in any direction. Occasionally I travel farther  
quickly returning  
as if guided by a white-gloved hand.

Is this the price of age—  
to live restricted  
by circumstance?  
Not fate  
it's my second-great grandmother  
who knows about fate.  
Then again years ago  
someone commanded  
*Stay in your place*  
seconds passing before I  
could press my feet into  
the ground and walk away.

Whether in a territory  
or nearby  
I now realize  
any room can be a site of death.  
When my second-great grandmother  
looked at the bare walls and shelves  
in that hotel room  
did she feel herself more keenly?  
Nearly 50 miles from home  
tribe and land  
did she ask what remained of herself  
and what she would leave behind?

I like to think  
when her husband  
pulled his 6-shooter  
she grabbed it by the barrel and placed its muzzle to her  
temple saying, You won't *ፍጥረኛል* anything  
*else from me, not in this life.*

Annalee Fairley

## BLUE RIDGE MEDICINE

What can this mountain keep from you  
that you would not willingly give away,  
all of this noise for the quiet of the oaks,  
all of this grief for a bed of rock.

Give this mountain your pain.  
Lay your palms against its cold face.  
Its older than you ever hope to be and stronger  
than the legs you drag around.

On the Blue Ridge Parkway, this mountain  
christened Sharp Top but there's nothing sharp  
about it. It is the softest thing in your life,  
a cradle for a mind that rages,

a hot iron to erase the wrinkles of your  
roughest thoughts. And still, somehow it brings hope  
to the now emptied surface of your chest.  
I hope this mountain breaks you down

as it pushes the loose boulders off the cliffs  
of its boundary because the only way  
you can survive this life is to rebuild everything  
that time has taken away.

## PINE KIDS

I've been to Disney World only once when I was six-years-old with all eight of my siblings. Even though we couldn't afford it, and none of us knew the weight of the money lost living in my father's mind. We went, and we all hated it. We were children of the pine forest in the backwoods of Mississippi with no knowledge of crowds, of hot asphalt, of loud noises, of flashy lights, of the chorus of screams in delight at the swooping rides. All of it pulsing against our temples, stress headaches emerging from behind our eyes faster than the joy we might have received with our first taste of cotton candy. It wasn't until years later the night of our father's funeral that our mom told us why he spent money on such an extravagance. When he took my brother, Jordan, on his 13th birthday to get a milkshake. My brother's eyes became bulges of wonder and awe, astounded that something could taste so good, and my brother asked, "Dad, what is this called?" My father's spirit broke with his son's ignorance. Because we couldn't afford milkshakes, soda at the fountain, trips to exotic places, and even new clothes became luxuries that only the older ones knew the smell of. So, dad took us all to Disney World, and we all hated the pulsing heat of pavement, the clacking cars of coasters, the never-ending lines, and it's too late to smile in the grave of my father who took his own life, to give it back to him, to say *thank you. Thank you. Thank you.*

Sean Reynolds

## THE GREAT VOWEL SHIFT

There is a growing consensus  
that we were on the phone  
when the Great Vowel Shift  
was invented in my jaw.  
Not by me, but men  
like me.

Five men, in fact,  
so much like me  
we could have been homophones  
in the same sentence of city sidewalk.

Nothing more than a slight separation of soft palate  
could tell the difference  
    between a man on a walk  
    and the five men walking toward him,  
and pronounce *him* the same as *victim*.

It was the night before Halloween  
and I was going south down Sheridan Rd  
when I called you to say  
how red the moon was.  
And I was in the middle ages of gazing  
when men said hello to me  
like a tongue touching five teeth.

Loss of consciousness  
was just a shift of weight,  
a brief dilution of spinal fluid  
entailing my submission.

From hair to there,  
I was him, as in *limp*,  
with my right hand landing near my soul  
and the sound of men's laughter around me like a hug.

From where it landed  
the phone could barely describe  
how my scream began in a  
*hey* who was lopped then held  
long and loose-throated—

like a loan word from the loon—  
with a trill of flooded nasals  
that bled into the tone of your voice on the other line  
asking what happened.

With a phrase of five beats  
they answered that my jaw had grown three parts  
to form its bite,  
and the wind whistled through none of them.

In my face was the fact  
that, deep down, the loon  
had always been different from birds  
because its bones are not hollow.

A flash of stars concussed the night sky  
as the hatchling of my vision took flight  
from its orbit  
and dove deep into the other side of breathing.

Before I even emerged  
the men drained a marsh of nerves  
behind my diaphragm  
with a reach of their hand.

Stripped of habitat, my lungs  
became a suction of mud  
clinging at their shoes  
as if I wanted them not to run away.

For blocks they carried me with them,  
or, no, they left me lying  
just so on a stranger's lawn:  
the perfect articulation of five points of view.

And at some level  
of dry leaves  
you were still a voice on a phone  
asking hello to the heavens.

And in the bathroom mirror of the moon  
I watched the unfolding recession of my face  
learn to say *hi* like I was he.

John Dorroh

TEXAS FLATLINE: DESERT COMPROMISED WITH  
TECHNOLOGY'S GRIP A-Go-Go

after watching True Stories  
I know how the Texas desert feels  
as it rolls itself up into silent windstorms  
and flattens out into mall-laden cities.

It's not enough to know how to dance  
and depreciate as time passes by like white  
paint on a wall, rising forever up.

The children who march through  
backyards of developing neighborhoods,  
their goat on a rope leading the way.

The lazy lady who never gets out of bed  
because she doesn't have to, eating from  
a robot's hand, rubs her elbow 24/7.

The country bachelor who never gives up  
on lassoing matrimony, receiving confidence  
from an altar in a suburban bedroom.

The couple in love, walking into open field  
where big sky fills with calculated clouds,  
butterflies filling their stomachs.

Dallas suburbs before they morphed into chaos  
Figure-8 freeways, ramping up business  
for silicon chips and rayon microfibers.

Before anyone knew what had happened  
the clutch of urbanization working backward  
from the tumbleweed into the heart of the city.



Carson Elliot

WHAT I WANT TO SAY WHEN YOU SAY THE SOUTH  
IS A LOST CAUSE

I want to tell you about the Waffle House waitress with pink hair who calls me baby :: how there are lighthouses in the rural dark to guide you home :: I want to tell you about the steps of the capitol after Roe died :: how the streets were flooded with the righteous anger of our disgust :: I want to tell you of the tornado path :: the hands that cleared the rubble when it all went wrong :: I want to tell you of the shining churches on each corner :: how they spend their money to politic at the pulpit for a lifetime of wrongs :: I want to tell you what a peach tastes like in the sun :: I want to tell you how the hum of the air hits just right in June :: I want to tell you that a gun is not a promise :: I want to tell you how this town contains a universe folding into itself :: I want to tell you how a person can be both bitter hard and tender soft in the same moment :: I want to tell you the meaning behind a prayer :: I want to tell you that I have heard the lullaby of despair and it is felt strongest under the I-65 bridge :: I want to tell you that everyone can be an artist if given only money and time :: I want to tell you about how blue the sky is in December :: I want to tell you that the world does not look so dark depending on where you stand :: I want to tell you that I think the future lives in the throat of a mockingbird :: I want you to hear it sing.

Ace Boggess

## DOESN'T SURPRISE ME

The handyman arrived early,  
which surprised me, &  
fixed the problem in the pipes  
without much effort,  
which surprised me.  
The repair revealed other flaws,  
which didn't surprise me,  
this old house like a Russian novel  
with every triumph, tryst, &  
joyous breath followed by one  
or many deaths, &  
I, as reader, can't guess  
what's next, although it will be bad.

A new furnace leaves a hole in the wall  
through which toxic CO2 escapes.  
A new roof sparks a short  
in the wiring beneath.  
Fix the alarm, phone lines go down.  
It's a daily struggle  
to maintain what time destroys,  
as with my body that bends  
toward snapping like a thick  
corroded string on a red guitar.

## THE FLATWOODS MONSTER MUSEUM

—*Sutton, West Virginia*

We want to hear about aliens,  
jaundiced light, confused sightings,  
fire at night, or maybe an owl  
with eyes like glass bowls upside-  
down, twin lenses protecting flames.  
Instead, the young hostess tells us  
the shop's cat, ashen & affectionate,  
ripped apart a wild baby rabbit &  
almost a second if she hadn't intervened.  
She protects the wounded survivor  
in a carrier tied to her waist.

We wander around for a few minutes,  
marvel at sketches, skim an article  
or two, buy tees & tchotchkes  
to celebrate that we see monsters  
everywhere, harbor others in us.  
I stop to pet the shop's cat on my way out.  
He reacts kindly, pleased.

WE PLAY GOD

I

My soul baby played massa  
Whipped laughter's tears  
Outta group—an actor—  
Past life playing God we  
Laugh at power, bled, bruised,  
Broke silence in thin air  
To make sense of your cruelty  
We laugh

II

When Tar kissed kids  
Feathered their sun  
Raisin' Black chain  
Gained servants. System  
Numbers—a new modern  
Slave—replay value God  
Never quits. Another  
Spin, cycle wet washed, rinsed  
Repeat. Never dry, clean, or faded  
Enough

III

We played in God mode  
Put in cheat codes, glitch  
To fuck up the game. It  
Ain't fun when it ain't fair  
I like the invincible me  
The untouchable soul  
Immortalized in code that  
Boy cold. Only on his system  
In house, where all stats maxed  
Out. Come into the real world  
Watch what happens

#### IV

My Nietzsche was a  
Niche for disaster.  
Like after [..], or after  
[...], or after grandma.  
A niche for ditching  
You solemn niche  
For living and dying  
For survival—time  
Limits and invisible  
Clocks—awaiting a  
final mute tick

#### V

They said he was a thug,  
Gangster juvenile,  
A super predator,  
Or an A-B student, a  
Model Citizen, the future.  
Either way,  
A person was killed, and they  
Played God with his afterlife  
Because of his color. When  
Did we play with God and  
His image?  
All the Time

Glen Waters

## WHACHU KNO' GOOD BLUES

Grandma used to ask whatchu kno' good  
Grandma used to ask whatchu kno' good  
I know pot roast stew and pork  
Chopped, smothered in hand work  
Cornbread boiled in hot water  
With sweet tea and peas for starters

Grandma used to ask whatchu kno' good  
Grandma used to ask whatchu kno' good  
I know hugs, kisses, and cuddles  
Ears to listen when I stuttered  
I know un-conditional love  
With heads down praying above

Grandma used to ask whatchu kno' good  
Grandma used to ask whatchu kno' good  
I know that Grandma don't ask  
Whatchu kno' good anymore

*That's all that I kno'*

Philip Jason

## A QUIET ADVENTURE

every labyrinth wraps around the throat  
of something. And so when one thing  
rhymes with another, it is a miracle.  
and though the iris of the eyes  
may seem like a marble cut from black stone  
it is much more like a cup of water I gave  
to a woman I once met in a dream.  
And even if we are just a series of distances  
woven together by atomic forces,  
when i really think about how large  
and empty the universe is,  
i feel close to everyone.

MIST OVER MEADOW

My shona atmiya was dead once—my dida’s side:  
“I don’t want to see the century,” he told my baba.  
At 99, he refused clocks—there was tea and grapes.  
I remember tossing sugar cubes in my small mouth.  
Mango and kiwi presented by a servant in red sari—  
my first love, perhaps: aphrodisiacs—pierced nose  
and jingled anklet. At home—Louisiana, a summer  
Lafayette deluge: one magnolia petal floated down  
the river road, and he was gone, I heard and carried  
sandbags to the back porch door, looking for ripples.  
The ashes of a burning Ganges, again he was alive,  
perhaps to his scorn. Dawn—looking beyond a mist  
over meadow, I saw his wide eyes under dazed sun.  
A bird: under a flap of the wing—his twilit presence,  
holding a cane. Even narrowed ghosts age in worlds  
where time petrifies in hollowed stomachs, swirled.  
A throat full of starlings and beaks—a gentle wave  
of the hand as he walked: hunched over with a bent  
back. “Shona,” he spoke—a voice full of dew drops:  
golden fields. A palm against my cheek and cradled  
on his lap—a spirit of skin. My burnt black chicory  
coffee tasted like coconut water, munching pralines  
glazed—Cajun breakfasts: scents of papaya; gelled  
hair—thinned. Corn grits and Indian tongues: was I  
the specter, I wondered, drifting toward a confusing  
horizon, pink—a rooster’s call and skunk’s perfume.  
Another winged flap and there was no bird: a ghost  
knows not its own existence unless its papered hand  
touches what it felt one century ago, a mother’s wrist.



## BAYOU BENGALI RECIPE

Khichuri: let's make it Cajun—  
add red cayenne beans and rice,  
simmered in Mississippi River  
delta. Let silt and marsh mound  
before breaking it apart—hands  
and nails to separate tributaries;  
a spit to keep the Ganges hint  
—from sipped waters a million  
years ago, ancestral tongues  
on a Sunday evening. Memories  
are a must—closed eyes, raised  
head to monsoon and hurricane.

Oh, needed, sweetened sugar  
cane as a light twist, to a stirring  
past—an awakening stemming  
from green peas and tomatoes,  
lemon juice and ghee and a cup  
of cinnamon. Dal—lunar moong,  
a bitten carrot from a hare. Please,  
understand, all cooked in a zydeco  
accordion—and accordingly, sitar  
moaned and plucked from fingers  
of an auntie, dressed in sari; a rattle  
of anklets upon taps of a pelican's  
beak, eyes of swamp green moss.

Jianqing Zheng

## A TOUCH OF LIGHT

*after Eudora Welty's photograph "Home by Dark," 1936*

Driving on the road  
through the fields to Grenada,  
Eudora feels more

like a vagabond  
in the middle of nowhere.  
Loneliness shimmers

like twilight changing  
from pink to purple and gray.  
Just at this moment,

there comes a horse-drawn  
wagon. A middle-aged man  
and two teenage boys

are sitting on it.  
They must have a full day out  
in town. As they pass,

she pulls up to snap  
a shot. The man casts a smile,  
so does Eudora.

As they fade into  
dusk, she grabs a few more shots,  
wanting to catch a

sense of time and place  
that connects or touches the hearts.  
On her way to town,

the full moon rises  
above the horizon while  
the sky turns blue-black.

David Cazden

## THINGS I KEEP NEAR

I keep a notebook by the bed—  
its pages like empty fields  
strung with green wires  
where I hope words alight,  
flown out of sleep.  
But the grasses blow empty,  
the book's never opened.  
Beside it on the nightstand  
is an antique jar—a gift  
from my grandmother  
which still holds  
her evaporated tears,  
grown diamond-hard  
as grit in my eyes  
when I wake, dried and old.  
And in a pillowcase  
under your head,  
I hid a lock of your hair  
that spilled in my hands  
in a trove of black coins  
when we met.  
Tonight's our October  
anniversary—  
The Halloween moon  
shines toothy side down  
in the grass, the air's  
spiced with orange rinds  
and nutmeg and clove  
from your skin. Again I lie down  
in the dark cloud of your hair  
like taking a midnight train  
into November's distances—  
through cold grasses and thin rains,  
sloping valleys and curled-up hills,  
its whistle ringing  
in a night full of dreams.

ANTI-CONFESSIONAL

*after Raye Hendrix*

when the text slips through my fingers  
I already regret it  
you text back too quickly 'hi'  
and I am the petrified stump of a tree  
that we once carved our initials into, polished pinky  
latched to polished pinky  
'the sky' I tap into the screen delete  
'not much,' and I can't remember  
when I started lying  
to you delete  
'I saw that you got married,  
I checked my mailbox a hundred times  
before I believed that I hadn't been invited  
remembered a time we were thirteen  
and vowed to become tragic  
that came true, I guess didn't it?'  
delete delete  
the tip of my thumb feels raw with remorse,  
wonder 'if we'd sealed our promise in blood  
instead of the fragility of two fingers coiled around one  
another'  
delete  
'do you remember when you said you'd never marry,  
when did we start lying to each other?' delete  
'do you remember when you said  
you'd never marry? I was holding out hope' delete  
'do you remember when you said you loved—' delete  
'what's his name?' delete  
'do you remember the tree?  
the pinkies? that decades old promise?'  
and my hand hovers but I delete  
'I heard last week that it flooded up there,  
that it never floods up there, I fought briefly  
with the idea that god was punishing you'  
delete  
'do you still believe in god? I don't until  
I remember being thirteen whispering into the nape of your neck,  
you said you'd never marry because he said



George Freek

## I WATCH THE RIVER FLOW

It's time to part ways.  
My home again becomes  
an alien place for me.  
As you disappear  
into the darkening night,  
weeds choke the flowers  
in my garden,  
but I have no interest  
in planting new seeds.  
Drops of rain stain  
the window. Beyond it,  
the wind howls mercilessly.  
The river still flows,  
twisting like a snake,  
but only to be swallowed  
in the end  
by an all-embracing sea.

## THE BLUE RIVER ON A DARK NIGHT

When the fading sun passes away,  
the moon and the stars  
will light the night,  
but sleep doesn't come.  
My children are grown.  
My wife is gone  
with a thousand yesterdays.  
I stare into the darkness  
as if it were a page  
of hieroglyphics.  
A hawk circles the sky,  
as a dim moon lights his way.  
He's my only companion,  
but I won't be unhappy  
if he doesn't stay.

For three weeks, flowers,  
before spring's green rush  
sputters in high desert heat.

Bees run riot, stumble bud to  
bud in nectar-drunk ecstasy,  
pin legs fat with smears of pollen.

One bumbling bee sprawls  
head down in a tulip's satin  
throat, sugar-sated and spent.

What more could you want  
than to consume and be  
consumed with such lust,

to let beauty lead you,  
called toward sweetness with  
single-minded devotion,

lace wings gracing petals,  
legs anointing each anther—  
a benediction that next year

will again bring bloom,  
bring feast—your own  
wind-borne body giving rise

to what nourishes, to the home  
where your wild flight ends in  
a geometry of hive and honey,

nature's arithmetic having solved  
for a life in which pleasure and  
purpose are one and the same.



Rachel Aguirre

A WEEKEND IN SOUTH PADRE

Remember the prick of a baby crab  
on the brown soft of your foot? Bone white, big  
as a bottle cap, she clung till I tugged  
her off. The wind-licked umbrella  
we lost, the mustard hull  
of our Liquid Thrillz rental, the hour spent  
plumbing raw prawns. At nights,  
our bikinis drying on the back deck,  
the black water muttering  
through the window while you smoothed  
aloe roses onto my neck—remember?  
The ribs of a beached  
whale, the seagulls who gorged  
on a fresh shortfin pup,  
the bachata in the kitchen.  
Remember my plump  
bottom lip between your teeth,  
my figure in your rearview mirror,  
the unfinished fish on your plate.

Christopher Honey

*THE CREATURES OF PROMETHEUS* IN GULFPORT, FLORIDA

I.:The Intracoastal

Spring began sweating out our sex, it swallowed  
Our lust like handfuls of dry sand; in winter  
We withered and the salty mangrove trees  
Choked on the silt, silt dredged by memory  
When the salinity changed; children died,  
We carved the headstones out of cypress knees:  
'Suck out the poison,' writ with knives on wood.

II.:Archaeology

There were, then, rattlesnakes, water moccasins  
And alligators, but nothing ever harmed me,  
Time, excepted. I remembered governors,  
But lovers, they eluded anamnesis.  
Paper, flesh disintegrates and there  
Is nothing left to record memory on.  
Desires broke up the tides and flooded the  
Low, flat lands where I was born, houses that raised  
Me, teaching their soft, humid floors and pale  
Pastels that chipped from cabinets and covered  
The cans of hurricane supplies with fine  
Powder and all these things were taken from me.  
A combination: 'mal' weather, changes in  
Our history; old markers torn down, new  
Markings erected in their place, then books  
Collected, burnt, reconstructed, recompiled.

### III.:Decay

My childhood filled with mangroves wrestling with  
salt water, same salt water, the same mangroves.  
I grew up strong, but stretched thin, brittle inside.  
Our hurricanes move past me, disappear.  
Even sand can wither, grains, grains rotting from  
Inside, sand birthed from painful, thin Gulf waters  
Dead seagull smell for miles, fish bellies open  
into the sticky sun, the sea is tainted  
Through to its core. Red tide swallowed the sickness,  
The harvest's lungs while we, we dreamed of salvage.  
There is still time to reach the living body.  
Light fades for hours. The air is hot all night.

Clarissa Leung

## LOBSTER FIVE WAYS

I.

ballpoint tip eyes  
look too soft to  
belong to the king of  
the crustaceans.  
claws flex against  
rubber bands.  
its mermaid tail  
clicks against  
the metal sink.  
the lobster's movements  
become delicate  
with understanding.  
it's more prepared  
to let go than  
i will ever be.

II.

the oily smell marinates  
through the house.  
*keep the doors shut*  
*and windows open,*  
my grandmother instructs.  
i pace around  
the tv room,  
admiring the  
framed family photos.  
i see my grandfather's eyes  
set in my brother's face,  
and i forget  
about the lobster and  
my knotty stomach.

III.

lobster fruit salad.  
*that's childhood,*  
my grandparents gush.

IV.

*i also think lobster salad's weird,*  
mom says.  
*that's why i hate visiting hong kong.*  
*it's an array of nodding*  
*to family friend aunties*  
*speaking cantonese,*  
*while swallowing*  
*so-called delicacies*  
*down like advil.*

V.

lobsters  
skitter along  
the sea floor.  
blinded with hunger,  
they consume  
without consideration—  
the dead, the injured,  
each other.  
the rats of the ocean  
have become the  
flashiest birthday dinner.  
the tide of opinion  
ebbs with me,  
the moon pulls  
other traditions  
back to shore.

Amy Meckler

“A SUBSTANCE FOUND IN YOUNG SPINAL FLUID  
HELPS OLD MICE REMEMBER”

—*National Public Radio headline, May 16, 2022*

First the prick of light, born wet, then rubber gloves  
between my thighs, no mother's tongue  
to lick me dry.

---

Through the cage door above, hands one hundred times  
my size decided my days, my mate, my daylight. That moment  
I figured out there was a door.

---

The rubber hand a claw-dozer, then an airship, then an island  
that's all valley. There the pinches and prods, the sharps and shine.  
I learned when to close my eyes.

---

Rubber hands with pens. The *click click*  
that signaled a value  
worth writing down.

---

I could only scratch letters in my shred,  
which quickly filled back in. The scratching no one heard and the words  
no one read.

---

That moment  
I figured out—  
not a mate, a mirror.

---

One orange light by the wall hole left on. (What's that called,  
like a door, but in a wall instead of on the ceiling?) When that hole  
opened  
always a gust of breath that smelled like ink.

---

What I ate. The speed of the drips I drank.  
They wrote it all down. They called us “specimens,”  
and we let them.

---

The first time they left the noise box on,  
there was music all night. That's how  
I learned to dance.

---

*I think this place is full  
of spies. I think  
they're on to me.*

---

Someone  
should write that  
on a pad.

---

One of the mouths on the head of a rubber hand said,  
"Of the 30 specimens, it's predicted 22.8  
will display significant gains."

---

That's how I knew  
they'd split us into pieces  
and make us into fractions.

---

*Didn't anybody, didn't anybody tell you?  
Didn't anybody tell you  
how to gracefully disappear in a room?*

---

That moment I glimpsed my mother being carried out, head down,  
tail pale. You'd think that would be something  
one couldn't help but recall. But

---

not until the prick and surge of serum could I remember.  
It was getting cold. Late  
June through early September.

Soon Jones

## LIVE PREY

Your father asks if you want to visit  
the pet shop with the funny parrot

chirping by the cash register.  
A group of other small children

crowds the corridors between tanks  
and metal wire cages, beholden

to the man with a small white mouse  
cradled in his gloved hands

as he crows about the next feeding  
and dares you to watch.

He approaches the vivarium  
and everyone knows what's coming next.

When the mouse first lands, it runs  
back and forth, back and forth,

then all at once, the mouse stops  
and vibrates in the corner,

spying the brown and black cottonmouth  
leisurely sliding down from plastic branches.

You were born in the year of the snake,  
the first sign you'd one day be cast out of heaven,

your steady roots entangled deep in the earth  
and all its creeping horrors,

so while the other kids yowl  
you huddle against the glass.

The mouse was never  
getting out of this alive,



but what stings is watching it surrender  
so quickly. Later, your mother

begging for release  
from the pain in her bones,

so drugged she can't speak,  
can't hold your hand anymore.

Unflinching, you witness  
as all that life  
is swallowed whole.

Soon Jones

KENTUCKY DAYDREAMS

my father first met my mother  
down an earthen path  
on the edges of songtan  
we moved states every few years  
after her death, running to  
wherever he thought he could build  
a church and prosper, propelled by  
his new wife, white, yes,  
with a white son of her own  
and the only one who didn't match  
was me

but it's those brisk kentucky nights i think of  
when i tell stories from my childhood,  
of hide-and-seek with the neighbor kids  
the luminescence of fireflies  
smeared across our foreheads,  
our cheeks, where i watched  
meteor showers alone on the roof  
and slept in the hammock outside  
when the fighting downstairs  
was too loud for dreaming

the fields beside our house were spun  
into hay every autumn, and behind us  
the deep wood full of caves where I could hide  
and be my mother's child again  
imagining that the roots of the cedars  
spread all the way to her grave in wawbeek  
and that the water from the creeks i waded in  
would find their way to the oceans  
turn to steam  
cradle us both in the clouds  
and fall again  
on the mountains of korea

Danielle Lemay

## THE LAST STRAW

Learning the car would be repossessed,  
my mother dressed us in our Sunday best—

me at five in a summer dress, little brother  
in tan trousers and matching vest,  
to visit a building so tall it made clouds cry.  
Forty-two years later, I find the hand-written receipt:

*June 7, 1979*

*Received from Mrs. Weiss  
a 1975 Chevy Monza for partial  
balance owed First National Bank.*

The note didn't say Mrs. Weiss didn't know  
of the loan, didn't say the car was all we owned.

What I remember of that day is the back seat  
of the bank-man's Lincoln Continental  
like a plush white couch and my mother,  
nervous, holding up my brother's dirty shoes

above the pristine seat all the way  
to the airport. I'll never know  
what she left behind. One brown  
paper bag of toys made it, a suitcase

of clothes, a cream-colored make-up case,  
and the three of us aboard a plane,  
our past sinking in the distance.  
I held my breath at the dark window

until a line of blue lights appeared,  
as if they knew the way.

## WHY WE HAVE GOD

Because Aleta's mom tripped on the concrete steps of the Methodist church after shaking Preacher Bob's hand and thanking him for his sermon. Her ankle gave and she fell to her knees, a tall woman with no-nonsense hair crumpling, frozen like our stained glass John the Baptist, hope and practicality leaking out of her. It was her birthday. Now this. Dianne's mom knelt and took her hand, raised palms to the sky like they'd done during the creed to say, *We are here, fill us*, and prayed for God to lift her friend, so softly only He could hear. Fifteen, I cringed. In the pew I'd jiggled my restless knee until Aleta's mom stilled me with her bony fingers while my mother proctored my salvation from her seat in the choir. During silent prayer I'd bowed my head but kept my eyes open, admiring Dianne's fingernails in her lap, wishing mine would grow like that, rounded and feminine. Succumbing to God for an hour was a small price to pay for Wednesday night youth group—kickball and trips to Six Flags, screaming extra loud to make the cute boys laugh and ride the Shock Wave with me again. God gusted through the sieve of my soul, a micromanager who'd demand the credit for my success but never the blame for my failures. When you fall, you get up. Even after a 20-point game, a home run, I didn't feel like His chosen instrument, lit by His spirit. But you had to invite Him to the party, however small. So I prayed with superstition—for bonus points on my chemistry test, to win my next race, for my dog to live another day. I hedged my unworthy bets, hoping to close the Devil-sized loopholes in the other six days of the week, while the mountainous mothers rose up, faith cupped like hallowed rain, shadowing their wobbly Mohammeds, catching each sparrow that sang from our doubting mouths.

Shane Seely

THE NUMBER BEFORE INFINITY

She wants to know the number just before  
infinity. She guesses: *is it nine*  
*thousand, Dad?* No, I say, and then remind  
her of nine thousand one, and two, three, four—  
She cries. I say: infinity is more  
idea than amount. Had we the time,  
we'd count up everything, and then we'd find  
where numbers end. And there would be a door

through which we'd pass, and on the other side  
we'd find fresh liberty from all the ways  
we're counted and accounted for: the days  
we've lived and what we've made of them, what stone  
we weigh—numbers that will fade when we are gone.  
What's left is just a field, forever wide.

Wendy M. Thompson

WHAT YOUR MAMA CALLS FATE, YOUR DADDY  
CALLS A TRAGEDY

There is only the end now.  
The way you used to glance at me—  
we held that gaze together.  
The way you noticed a bruise on my leg—  
I savored your singular attention.  
It was only a few sweet weeks  
of everyday phone calls and  
evening FaceTime chats,  
your body unraveling uncomfortably in bed  
next to mine.  
You had spent a decade in prison,  
so you learned to sleep like a knife on its edge.  
I spooned you, still,  
like a mismatched utensil in the drawer:  
dutifully,  
collectively,  
our parts never fully fitting together.  
We tried.  
Oh, \_\_\_\_\_, we tried.  
Until our bodies rejected the transplanted other.  
Our language, spoken in two broken dialects—  
me, the chirp-chattering of a grapple full of morning birds,  
you, a lonesome ship sifting through the dark night fog—  
became the predawn suicide attack of two northern clans at war.  
Our scars, born in Oakland between 1977 and 1981,  
fully parallel and in the same shape of our trembling street corner  
and “don’t you leave this porch” hearts,  
animated my tenderest pigeon feather fears,  
fed your proud, stubborn, quivering boyhood chest.  
Our grown ass black lifespan of vulnerability  
could have made us fraternal twins.  
But also, in so many ways, revealed  
that we were never really meant,  
couldn’t ever afford,  
were deathly afraid  
to be  
  
together.

Gina Ferrara

## IN FURLONGS OR MILES

A fusion of yolks and whites  
on a seething griddle,

my father's car, the exact color  
of eggs scrambled in haste,

when he taught me  
the trinity of clutch, shift, and gas,

by sluggish November sunlight,  
at the racetrack, horses whinnying,

ears upright, exclamatory,  
sweaty after their early runs, strides

breaking into regal gallops towards finality and infinity,  
manes dark, unbraided streams,

heads and necks above the Triumph,  
compact, roof detached or attached like a mood.

In furlongs or miles,  
I wanted to race what was bred to run,

to line the car alongside the starting gate  
cobalt, holding thoroughbreds, fractious,

hooves, legs, ready to bolt then accelerate,  
leaving turf and dust to patina the past.

Anne Champion

## ECHO AND NARCISSUS

The ancient mythology warned  
the dangers of loving a man in love  
with himself. Echo assisted Zeus' infidelity  
and was cursed to never speak her mind again,  
doomed to waste away for a man  
who wasted away for himself.

Even all the prince charming tales warned  
that people hate the naive girls with beauty  
and innocence. They're hexed and hunted.

But they also lied, promised those girls  
ended up rescued, happy, loved.

The truth is only her bones remain.  
She can only repeat the last words  
those who can't love her say.



Kara Lewis

## I DON'T LIKE THAT YOU KNOW I'M FROM KANSAS

because now I drive through and hear how the names of towns sounded in your mouth, how you bit each syllable of *Salina* and *Tonganoxie* like gas station licorice on a road trip. As the air conditioner breathes, I remember you asking, *Does it get very hot there?* I don't like that you know I had the hottest room in my parents' house, the one right above the garage, with light pink curtains you can see from the driveway. How you watched me wave my arms over my head like stalks of wheat in the wind, a football game tradition I've never forgotten. How you know geometry was my least favorite subject. You can picture me pressing a protractor's edge into my skin, asking questions about *circumference* until both the word and the world no longer seemed real. You told me you'd teach me how to draw a perfect circle and pulled the napkin out from under your wine glass. I liked that you always carried a fine point pen, but I don't anymore. You shouldn't know that I slept on the bathroom floor with a sleeping bag and a sound machine every time I was sick. I woke my mom when I threw up, like the sight of her eyes opening in the dark could cure me. Once I woke you and you placed a Tums right on my tongue, chalky and slow to dissolve. I don't like that I wanted to eat one every day after, the same way I used to savor Flintstones vitamins until my bones became bionic and unbreakable. Until artificial grape started tasting better than the real thing.

DEBTS 1977

That summer we lived with my mother's parents,  
father between jobs, family between states,  
I learned the new streets by bike, where the bully  
lived and which neighbor let me climb her oak trees  
to see all the way to Bushkill Creek.

I learned the green going brown beanfields,  
walking stick for whacking down morning webs  
and sword-fighting cornstalks in July's twilight,  
how groundhog holes held arrowheads  
or quartz stones the tractor's tread unhid.

I also learned to disappear from sleeping  
in the dining room in a fold-away-bed, ignoring  
the slow heavings of the house, what he said to her,  
the shuffling of my grandparents in their small  
kitchen, arranging bread and eggs for breakfast,

laundry collected in corners like regrets, trying to hide  
our luggage and boxes narrowing the halls, the space  
between loss and need like a tightening in the chest.  
Learning how in moments of want or moments of quiet  
we can make small room for love and other debts.

Ellen June Wright

AMERICAN HISTORY 101, PART B

*After Kerry James Marshall*

We had them, three martyrs on black velvet  
    hanging on our front-room walls or on glossy-  
paper church fans on hot summer days.  
    We wanted to remember what we lost.

I was a girl staring at the faces  
    of two white men and a black man  
not understanding hope  
    had been driven down into the earth

with a pile driver. Its loss,  
    a heavy mechanical sound  
like a locomotive coming down the tracks.  
    All those spirits broken.

Jack is gone and Robert is gone and Martin  
    is gone. Who would champion the cause  
of the forgotten: the factory worker,  
    the sanitation worker, the cooks in kitchens

or maids changing sheets—invisible masses?  
    I was a child. I didn't really know  
what absence meant, or how three deaths  
    could derail the world.

NOT ELSEWHERE

*after Adrienne Rich*

this is the place where the old road  
breaks off into shadows  
near a house now abandoned  
its people vanished into  
other stories

this is not a fairy story in a children's  
book, some Grimm tale from  
an ancient path  
populated by figments

this is not a foreign poem  
of somewhere else :  
no Japanese kamikazes  
no Gulag jailor's jangling keys  
no Mengele-like camp doctors  
extricating gold from teeth  
no Maoists raising red flags

this is not somewhere else  
but a country (my country  
'tis of thee) moving toward  
the edge of dread and its own truth  
an ugly visage in its own mirror

yes, there is an elsewhere :  
do you hear the sounds of drones  
flying over other people's countries  
do you hear the sounds of bombs  
and gun-shots ringing out of other  
people's countries  
detonations of all sorts

did you know we sprayed other people's fields  
with napalm with agent orange—elsewhere  
our own people too : those boys we sent  
did you know we sent our own children  
into the elsewhere with spent uranium  
bullets dangling by their sides

did you know we left radio-active tanks  
    behind in some farmer's field—elsewhere  
    for his children to climb on  
did you know that wedding that school  
    that village was elsewhere when  
    our play-station drone dropped its load

all those elsewheres are about who we are :

not just the march of Armenians to Aleppo  
not just depopulation of Palestinian houses  
not just Uighurs herded into education camps  
    and out to slave-labor  
not just Hutus killing Tutsis  
    and Tutsis killing Hutus  
not just men raping women: Me Too  
    policemen killing black men  
    protesters of all kinds brandishing weapons  
        weaponizing cars vandalizing shops  
        killing cops  
not just ICE separating families at the border  
not just Russian soldiers  
    kidnapping Ukrainian children  
not just Israelis displacing Palestinians  
    nor Hamas resistance rebelling with bombs  
    nor Israelis retaliating with more bombs  
        and people—real people—having nowhere to go

we should talk to the trees—ask them what  
    they have seen : the harvests ravaged  
        the rats and flies are coming  
        they know a carcass when they smell one  
            bruised fruit and rot underfoot  
        a stench in our backyard  
can we even look at ourselves

and the earth is burning  
    cracking drowning

Not elsewhere.

Audrey Fatone

ALEX FRANCO, 21, A TRANS MAN WHO “LIT UP ANY ROOM” ~~FOUND DEAD~~ WAS MURDERED IN THE UTAH DESERT

Alex, you weren't supposed to be soil yet  
it wasn't your time, I did not know you  
but of course at the same time I have loved you  
for years and you are as regular to me  
as a Wednesday but also  
you are as beautiful to me as the red rock desert

I know the canyon, the sand that gets stuck  
in my shoes holds you now, they do  
the desert was always for us, I think the creator  
made it for us to get to be us

I think the ravens and the jackrabbits  
and the lizards and the sagebrush  
and the yucca and the biocrust  
but especially the biocrust  
are our ancestors  
I think the desert must be  
a pride party before  
they ever needed pride parties

when I walk upon the earth  
sand stuck in the cracks of my lips  
or underneath my nails  
please know that I'm holding you too

Angie Macri

## WHERE THERE'S SMOKE, THERE'S FIRE

Because smoke hung between the three trees  
in the playground, the children had indoor recess.  
No one could find the fire. Parents said  
it must be controlled burning around the city,  
but morning, afternoon, each bus rider kept an eye

out the window and reported no black ground  
in the forests, nothing out of the usual.  
To pass the time, they played stories of ghosts  
of children killed dead, but this upset  
the teachers. No children have ever died

here. So they switched to dinosaurs walking  
in clouds of pollen too heavy for heaven,  
earthquakes, volcanoes. When they didn't think  
the children were looking, administration explored  
the perimeter of the schoolyard with their hands

over their mouths, looking for ash or lava  
while the bottom of their shoes melted  
if they left the pavement. The children practiced  
for the upcoming musical full of candymen  
and the sun coming out tomorrow, sung by orphans.

Their teacher showed them how to hold  
the final note by slipping in a breath of air  
so that the song seemed to last forever.  
They stole a look out the windows  
where smoke hung in the chains of the swings.

## THE MOWER

*in which I meditate about*

how, in the early 1970s, Daddy hired a man to mow our yard;

how Daddy prided himself for hiring a black man, though he used a different word;

how I hated that word when Daddy spoke it;

how because the man who mowed was a dark-skinned man in my Southern hometown white as sun-bleached bone, he was a curiosity;

how even I, a pre-teen girl who had no experiences that fed hatred, felt my heart race when the man's truck pulled into our driveway;

how I watched the man mow from my bedroom window as I remained hidden behind screen and curtain sheers;

how because we didn't have air conditioning the window was open and I could smell the freshly cut grass, feel the breeze that slid across the man's body;

how the man gleamed in the sun, sweat sparkling on his skin like diamonds;

how he seemed happy, whistling as he pushed the mower, his melody lost in the motor's menacing mechanical growl;

how, afterwards, Daddy handed him a few dollar bills as the two of them stood apart in the front yard so people driving down our busy street could see;

how I asked Daddy if I could try cutting the grass and he snapped that girls didn't mow, but I kept at him until he taught me how to pull the starter rope;

how I came to understand the pleasure of mowing, of breathing sunshine, of beholding bees lift from clover, of moving back and forth in fleeting bliss;



how I came to know that black man's solitude, his peace in the hour  
spent mowing our yard, his pride in a job done well;

how, in this moment as I push this mower across my yard, I thank him  
for those gifts;

how I feel such shame that I don't recall his name but only the color of  
his skin.

Heidi VanderVelde

## WHAT NEIGHBORS DON'T TALK ABOUT

My neighbors found Thomas Green  
where my street flows into theirs:  
Lee Road 188,  
an ashen stream of pavement  
holding back kudzu and pine  
the only road here  
not named for where someone lived,  
now the road where someone died.

Did my neighbors find him from  
a circle of turkey vultures  
a walk in their woods  
an incessant bark  
of their otherwise obedient dog?

I knew  
when 188 was lined  
with white Fords  
too nondescript  
too clean  
too unremarkable  
that someone was looking  
for some body.

He was in a country alleyway,  
an empty column  
between pines  
where three men had walked  
the boy into darkness.

My black car passed,  
my baby boy rested in the back,  
and it hurt to know the way  
someone else's baby boy rested  
in the back  
of another black car.

Andie Brynn Weaver

## BOTELER FIRE

*Clay County, North Carolina, 2016*

It could be the modern-day Pompeii,  
or the beginnings of it. We drive  
through winding wooded paths,

past Cold Branch and Hot House Roads,  
enter the highway from Aunt Weese Lane.  
The smoke through the trees

holds our gaze, and the helicopter  
follows us from Georgia to North Carolina.  
Wildfires—thirteen at once near Franklin,

the Nantahala burning.  
We pass a church sign: Pray for Rain.  
As the Chicks sing Cowboy,

Take Me Away, we slide to the shoulder—  
when we find a flat spot, that is—and stand  
tip-toed to see the clouds of smoke

weave in and out of hollows, pillars billowing  
opaque from the crest. Up the residential streets,  
people emerge: from metal trailer doors

with diamond-shaped windows,  
from chipped white clapboard houses,  
onto sagging wood porches, onto concrete

steps painted thick green. Front-deck lunches  
and gatherings go on: a boy sits in time out  
on the roots of a tree near the road, dogs pace behind

chain-link fences, an old woman with a curved back  
waters her flowers in a brown tartan skirt.  
And we all hover and buzz, watch the helicopter

sink its hose to the canopy and release.

Michael Montlack

## WHEN A TEACHER DIES

*for Ms. Ellen First*

You still detect her chalk in your fingertips,  
the blackboard wiped clean decades ago.

Discovering her daily, arms still folded,  
cheerfully daring you: *That the best ya got?*

Her dangling mismatched earrings hypnotic,  
cheerfully daring you: *Question things!* Even her.

*Who says they have to match?* Yeah, she's here.  
In the integrity of your paragraphs. In the way

you refuse to speak baby talk to friends' kids.  
Her insisting we were buckets. *Carry yourself!*

Her arms too full, she said, with things to fill us.  
How we feasted. Flourished. Her arms folded,

cheerfully daring us: *Quit yer complaining!*  
Test over. How we begged for more time.

## A FAMILY OF NOMADIC OBJECTS

The chickens tell us about ourselves  
in the way they zigzag a yard,  
perpetually hunting for something,  
their spastic trajectories as random  
and collective as snowflakes.

The same way wildflowers kidnap  
the landscape, a blurry sweep of color  
and flutter, a paradise too lazy to yawn—  
still, can't a certainty be skimmed  
from their lack of designation?

Makes you wonder why one species  
could need so many dictionaries.

Every autumn the plane tree sheds,  
its leaves scattering where they may.

And the planet remains naked of borders  
from space. Look up, wherever you are.  
Describe the sky in whatever language you like.  
Just remember it's an optical illusion  
we forget we share.

Clara Collins

## IN THE LOCKER ROOM

In the mirrored row of sinks, I was sleek  
as a pool's surface before a foot  
or finger breaks its bluish skin.  
The naked women interrupted

my silent self-appraisal  
with their bodies: barefoot, often old,  
plodding over tile past  
my reflection. I watched them

as if I watched myself, seeing  
the C shaped smiling scar  
one woman bore on the left side  
of her wrinkled chest;

its shine was shocking—unlike any skin  
I knew. Her other breast hung low  
over her belly's loose swell, swung  
as she tread unconcerned

with my flat child's chest, wrapped  
in a purple racing suit  
so I might plunge through water  
like a bolt of light. I pinched

the thimble-full of fat  
in my armpit's crease, considered  
the thick folds of her torso  
falling flesh on flesh. I was pristine,

weightless as a shaft of sun  
as she wrung water  
from her hair so it pooled  
where she stepped, darkening

the grout. Her brow raised softly in seeing me  
looking, a single dimple stitched  
the side of her face, sunk in  
among smile lines. I ran

back to my duffle bag, indifferent  
aging blurry in the corners  
of my eyes. I peeled  
my swimsuit down to make a bundle

I could step beyond,  
and dressed slowly, surveying  
the pillar of my obedient body  
from above. I wrapped my arms

across my naked chest, submerged  
my fear of the ruin  
she didn't hide,  
of how she regarded me

with the kinship  
of this particular frailty,  
which I might share in,  
if I am that lucky.

Lane Falcon

AFFLICTION

Sometimes a current moves through him laterally,

lifts the left arm to enter through the palm  
and arrest the limb.

Some silver ball of light pings off his bones  
then out through the other side.

The neurologist says *abnormal*  
and I dog-ear

deep into the night watching videos of children seizing  
then drive to work the next morning, my vision shaking

*When does the bad news end?*



## RUMPELSTILTSKIN

I have been praying for a sign,  
I have been hammering my meat-thunk hands  
into the blue, the keys rebounding off the wall  
where they're nailed. I've been nailing my dreams,  
satchels of clouds, to the wall's boards.  
Hope is the house I live in, and die in,  
the mice by their tails, the red eyes gleaming  
hatred, the shrieking  
dying decapitated entrails of hope, the slipping  
onto and falling over,  
the slog of the dust, the crap shoot,  
the heel slick, sliding down,  
the breaking of bones on the stairs.  
I have been hoping and strained,  
and the cotton-candy webs  
you think you can walk through—  
they stick to you.

William L. Ramsey

## PROPHECIES ON MY DAUGHTER'S THIRD BIRTHDAY

三岁看到八十：“*San sui kàn dào bāshí*”

“By three you can see to eighty,” or so the Chinese saying goes. It’s a rough translation, and I am not Chinese. But I can see a little. Not all the way to eighty, no, but well beyond law school. Far enough to know you pass the bar. You are sitting at a dockside café, in fact, a lounge, no, coastal winery when you receive that news. Your friends order an appetizer of fresh shrimp to celebrate. Who are you with? No, your boyfriend is too busy vacuuming the rear passenger side carpets of cars and waxing cars and buffing the bumpers of cars at the local carwash to make this spur of the moment trip to Key West, no, California. You’re with Noel, no, Noelle, the Nobel astrophysicist and (it is a little harder to see faces on the far side of the table) Martinique, the Afro-Caribbean astronaut-in-training. It is Noelle, as it happens, who suddenly blurts out in the blush of the moment that you could do better than a washer of cars. No, of course you disagree with her. You are a big hearted, open-minded person, in full support of the struggles of the proletariat. It serves to plant a seed, nevertheless, that leads you down the line to recognize the full extent of his selfishness and pride. You are not cruel about it when the time comes (though you would be within your rights). Later still, anyway, you become a partner at a prominent firm focused on environmental advocacy, no, immigration law like your Mom, except you make more money. Well, you soon agree (while rolling your eyes) to serve as the mentor for the newly hired son of a senator with presidential aspirations. Not being Chinese, I can’t see which one, father or son, becomes your running mate.

## WATCHING THE ECLIPSE WITH HYPATIA

Distracted by the memory of my last  
distraction, a shoe-colored leaf  
the width of a lace  
descends on the laces  
of my leaf-colored shoe, and I lose my place.

Who can read in this light anyway?  
It dangles over the cove  
as if suspended  
in a web of shade, freshly  
peeled by cricket legs, a little rhubarb scented.

But that's not sufficiently scientific.  
So her hand continues to drift across  
my field of vision,  
even after I put down my book,  
demonstrating the laws of planetary motion.

Have I missed a key concept? Why is  
the glow of this eclipse unusual?  
Is it not the sort of light  
that always makes  
a cat's ears move? The kind of light

that, should it reach a dark corner,  
is likely to be stung and wrapped up  
in a web for something  
to see by later? A fish  
jumps a few yards out from the dock, breaking

the sun's rim into wayward cinders,  
and this light too presents new problems.  
When I turn however  
and see how brightly it has braided  
her black hair, I forget what to ask forever.

Farah Art Griffin

## WIND AND THE BROWN LEAF

gust of air  
glides through  
your eyelashes  
onto the skin  
below your eye—  
pirouetting  
away your  
tear

threads of warm  
with touches  
of cold  
climb the wall  
of your cheek—  
greeting  
your second  
tear

*wind appearing to know me*

brown leaf  
ambles to you—  
blanketing  
your left  
knee

*leaf appearing to know me*

your eye  
sinks into  
a white  
note

to decant the last bottle of wine  
my father made flawlessly  
aged let it breathe inhale  
the honeyed bouquet opening  
of an ending nothing left to do  
but raise a glass toast his photo  
on the wall smiling in his chef's hat  
I pour supple sweetness fermented  
in his root cellar perfect climate  
where we sat together tasting  
his wines stories of his eight brothers  
hard farm life backbreaking  
coal mines his brother with  
black lung too many accidents  
to count time to remember  
his effort measuring each day  
acidity sugar temperature  
alcohol level specific gravity  
every detail charted by hand  
in a notebook I keep how he added  
this or that his passion manifest  
unmeasurable time to sip  
this treasured vino I couldn't  
bring myself to open till now  
terroir from vintner to winemaker  
slips across my tongue  
almond notes raspberries  
hints of pepper flicker of plum.

Jason Gordy Walker

## NATURAL CURE

A yellow butterfly rides the breeze,  
rests on an elephant ear.

A cricket jumps from leaf to leaf,  
plops in the grass.

Ants carry crumbs across a twig-bridge,  
hurry into dark earth.

Sunlight overtakes the sky's blue region,  
evens the score.

I wait for eternity's strange laughter,  
watch a robin dip.

Holly Day

## LUNG TISSUES

geraniums start small and are  
easily inhaled, take root  
in the soft flesh  
between joints.

if kept warm enough  
they can overwinter in most parts  
of the body, grow comfortably dormant  
wait for spring.

in summer, their thin  
stiff limbs  
crumpled flowers and  
paper-dry leaves  
keep me from sleeping  
rustle in my dreams.

Phil Keller

## CURTIS POND

Autumn's first leaves float  
in the shallows by the shore  
where the water is still warm.  
This was your favorite swimming spot  
in that last, hot summer  
when the desperate treatments stopped  
and peace became the sacrament of water.  
Eleven falls have passed since then.  
My body nurses random pains.  
Out beyond the swimming raft,  
where the depths begin,  
the pond is turning over  
as the frigid bottom water,  
held down by summer's heat,  
pushes slowly up.  
A month will bring a killing frost.  
Snow will glisten on the fishing shacks  
where anglers bait their hooks  
and pray for large-mouth bass.  
At night the ice will creak  
beneath the weight of ghost ice skaters  
carving figure eights in the lace veil.  
Their songs grow louder every year.  
One day the veil will tear and I'll plunge through  
gasping like a fish that drowns in air.



Will Reger

## THE WALMART SPARROWS

They carry no cash, nor sell anything,  
but I go looking for them as if I am  
looking out downtown for people I know:  
sparrows nesting above the sporting goods.  
Halfway down a shiny tile aisle,  
I see one perched in women's under clothing,  
clinging to a plus size panty poster,  
but she takes off in a mad flutter, away.  
Could she open a window or work the door  
she might escape this box store caliphate.  
Outside, planets circle, and wars rage.  
Sun and moon change places in the sky.  
Who can tell these birds where to live?  
Or explain property plainly enough?

NORTHERN LIGHTS

Actually, the corpses that I planted in my garden  
aren't doing well at all. Could be the corpse-seed  
was bad, sold by a bad company, promising abundance  
with shiny catalogs blooming with corpse-flowers.  
Could be I stored them wrong, they got too hot, too wet, too old.

Yes, I've watered them, yes I've laid on the compost,  
coming out every morning full of hope, waiting  
to see fingers break through the black earth,  
tender pink asparagus.

And yes, if you must know, I do lie awake at night  
thinking of the foxes with their nails, the worms with their teeth,  
but waiting still for one, just one of them I planted,  
to tap the window and turn toward the night sky  
and whisper "come."

And it would be the night we saw the Northern Lights,  
and I would say: let us walk to the hilltop, the wind in our bones,  
watch the sky where rods of neon dance and flicker,  
beyond the graves, beyond the garden, beyond the landfill,  
beyond the radio tower.

We could listen for songs in the night.  
St. Elmo's Fire. With or without you. Hysteria.  
Every breath you take.

And I would say, it's hardly fair that I'm the one  
doing all the remembering for all of us

And no, I would say, I have not changed my life.

Richard Schiffman

DIE BEFORE YOU DIE

Old beech trunk lain out on the brown  
black gurney of the earth under the rotunda  
of the sky like a monarch in state.  
Rot gut log veined with moss and twined  
with creeping tendrils, dead now  
for decades, stripped of the last of the bark.

I pinch the rust-colored pulp of it  
crushing it to putty, and pause to consider  
the final shapelessness of things—  
the once-stiff fibers dissolved,  
effaced the rigid rings  
that proved the passage of the years.

But what of it? Even the bones that wear  
my flesh will soon enough be clay.  
A swift kick, and the old snag  
calves like a glacier. Wee creatures—  
weevils, centipedes—  
scurry out, suddenly exposed.

Immediately I regret it—  
only a fool would harass death.  
Death, so harmless and hospitable,  
like a caravanserai in the desert,  
offering meals and a bed  
and shelter from a world of storms.

Benjamin Nash

## ON SUNDAY

I think our lives end like a transformer  
blowing up in white sparks. A hawk  
sits on this one. Below is a red and  
white pony already in the shade. On  
Sunday is when we think about life  
and death. A red truck is hauling oil  
on this country road. A cornfield  
stretches out near a brown river  
flowing under a red rusted railroad  
bridge. It is going to be a hot day.  
We might also go up like a loblolly  
pine tree in a brush fire lit by a match.  
I read from a diary of a woman that  
survived the pandemic 100 years ago.  
She talked about taking walks on  
Sunday and looking at the flowers.  
She wrote about eating persimmons  
when they were ripe. Little white  
churches are waiting. Most people  
are just thankful that they are still alive.

LAST WORDS

Though I'm dying no more tonight  
than any other, who's to say  
I'll have time enough when the time  
comes to say what needs to be said?  
And what good's even been left for me?  
*I must go in; the fog is rising*  
was taken by the one who heard a fly  
buzz, and, well, there's no topping that.

Though I'm not dying tonight,  
I do sense my own fog rising, too,  
chill and damp around my ankles  
and maybe tickling at my calves.  
How long can I afford to wait  
to begin? Knees? Waist? Chest?  
Chin? When the black carriage  
comes, should I whisper them  
then to the driver as I climb in?

Mary Salisbury

## I'M AFRAID

At the river's edge, the dead fade into the forest.  
The blue sky holds no room for grief.

One summer passes like another—  
It's a kite in a windstorm.

In a book I read, one widow said—  
Don't expect it to get any better.

I have enough stones in my pocket,  
not enough to sink me.

Daffodils nod their yellow  
and pull me back.

Krystle May Statler

GRIEF ANTICS

*after Lucille Clifton's "oh antic God"*

return to me  
my brother  
only being  
thirty last  
seen unread  
in my face  
book inbox  
he's dead-  
aged by five  
i can barely  
recall his laugh  
the drag  
of his cologne  
though  
on blue moons  
he makes it  
back home  
in my dreams:  
stubborn  
as a brother  
without apology  
ready to tell  
a joke and  
keep going,

Rachel Becker

## CHRISTMAS, RICHMOND, VA

Ice downed the lines.

Without light or heat, we huddled around  
an orange metal fireplace, orange  
like the clementines we'd found  
in the toes of our stockings that morning,  
the only nod to a holiday that wasn't ours.  
We were cold.

My mother said to ask if Holly's lights were on,  
and could I go there, where she sat with her family  
around a farmhouse table eating warm rolls.

On the phone I tripped over the question.  
*You can't come over*, she said.  
*I'm spending Christmas with my family*,  
in a voice as bright and berried as her name.



Cindy Milwe

## ALL I EVER HEARD

was the loud engine  
of my father's Corvette  
revving up the hill of our

shrub-lined driveway,  
his loafers shuffling  
through the kitchen door

and the metal screen  
flapping closed. How fast,  
how slow? How high

or low? Three shots  
or not? Some nights  
I wished he would just

not have come home  
at all. I could have  
listened for the crickets.

I could have heard  
the night's cicadas.

Rachel Hinton

## THE HOUSE WE GREW UP IN

The house is a witch  
You must know that the  
house is a witch  
and a butcher  
The house  
is a trial by knife  
You know the house  
is not a place it is nothing like a place  
It is improbable  
to all its beings  
It is responsible It  
grinds its people in its mind  
It thinks people  
as they, thinking, try to fumigate with garlic  
It deletes rooms from  
its mind  
The television suffers it privately  
For being real estate it sure is sunlight  
For being sunlight it sure depreciates  
This is the kind of  
guy it is  
There is  
stuff in the spines of its worms  
and it  
keeps me in pain all night  
It can  
halasana knees over shoulders, collapsible  
It is a compliance officer  
a feeling glinting just above  
the day  
Fucking hold on I need to buy cigarettes for it  
It balances  
multiple complex and concurrently running projects  
simultaneously  
efficiently staples  
gods to the wall  
The house is petty  
and confident  
Were you to be so great  
in it that could

slide you down its blades  
The two toxins  
found in the people  
extracted from the public bus  
also turned up in it  
When asked about their symptoms they said  
it was a feeling like snowflakes  
melting on the face

PASTORAL

On the steps of the sun-scarred porch,  
a cauterized wind sweeps past me,  
  
enters my home, where I follow it,  
watch it stumble into the kitchen,  
  
touch the charred stove-grates,  
the scratched and faded cupboards,  
  
a sink full of dirty, dirty dishes.  
Like my father after dinner, it slumbers  
  
into our living room, and on the couch,  
as it inhales the scent of summer  
  
and stale potpourri, it sighs with relief,  
ready, it seems, to retire from helping  
  
the sun scythe its heat upon our house,  
from no longer fevering those neighboring  
  
fields filled with faceless field workers  
who've lost their right to time, who hinge  
  
their hips and spines as they attempt  
to hit their daily quotas. The wind yawns,  
  
takes the shape of an older body,  
and I feel it bumping against the crayoned  
  
floral wallpaper, feel it slipping from room  
to room, still unsure what it should do,  
  
until it decides to wander past my nightgowned  
mother setting plates on the table, past  
  
the screen door's torn mesh stitched  
with crooked nails and staples, and out

into a family of stray mutts crossing  
like nomads between our porch and yard,

where it settles near the footprints my father,  
home from work, constellates on the ground.

I think of how he too has grown older  
with the climate, how the drought has aged him,

turned his already brown skin into a relic,  
and I wonder if he'll survive another summer,

if the landscape will ever regain an impression  
of normalcy, and if I, as I step back from all

of this, can allow myself to be swallowed  
by the scorched and endless horizon,

by the line of green tractors always droning  
in the distance, by that growing gust of wind

grazing my face, tossing, like confetti,  
earth's leftover pollen.

Becka Mara McKay

POEM AGAINST METAPHOR

A wolf licked my hand  
in the Imperial Hotel. My whole life  
I wanted to be

this close to a wolf (believing, as a child,  
I could wake up wolf  
if I wished hard enough) yet when it happened

my fear surprised me,  
my foolishness in seeking eye contact.  
She returned my gaze

as she tasted my skin. One lick and then  
she barked—a wolf bark  
with teeth enough to speak her wildness

to all the guests  
in the hotel, more wildness than I thought  
I'd find in Italy,

where I'd seen a hundred wolves in mosaic  
and fresco and coin  
but forgotten they might live here still, leashed

in hotel lobbies.  
The family who owns the Imperial  
treats all visitors

with the warmest impatience. The father  
keeps a small and angry  
parrot, who rides his shirt while he makes drinks

or steams the milk  
for cappuccinos. The children—a son  
who runs the kitchen

and a daughter who does everything else—  
are called Fabio  
and Fabiola, as though only one saint

proved a worthy  
namesake. The stillness following the wolf's  
announcement lasted

long enough for someone to recite  
the proper folktale  
as a benediction for her presence,

or as confession  
of our ignorance: we did not know what  
*honored guest* could mean.

But the silence only made more silence,  
then someone gasped.  
Every gasp is a goodbye to what passes

for a normal life  
before the shock disrupts the pattern  
of our breathing.

Adam D. Weeks

## INCIDENTAL PRAYER

*After Molly Brodak*

Dear time, how can I keep loving  
what's in front of me? Faith

is a beautiful thing until you undress  
it, until you wake up

and put on your glasses.  
I've said that if love really is

a block of melting ice in your hands  
and you've got nowhere to set it,

then goddamn drop it. I've said  
a lot of things. Life is not

so metaphorical but I try—love is  
the ice cube we pass between our teeth.

It isn't the baptism but the shed behind  
the pool where the pastor holds my body.

Where tongues are nothing but tools  
for creation. Not everything needs to be

a poem but I need to say this. I'm afraid  
of what's too beautiful, that I'll be

thirst, slurping love like a puddle  
up off the cold linoleum. I'm scared

that time changes everything,  
that melted ice isn't ice, it's water.

I'm afraid you could pick me  
up and pour me into your favorite glass

and still not like the shape I take.  
What I need is a river, water to hold



me, slipping till it spills into sea.  
I want so badly to believe in an ocean

where I'm always floating in warm, calm  
waves. I want to say anything is religious

if you worship it. Water can be wine.  
Ice can melt and freeze again.

Adam D. Weeks

YOU TELL ME TO LET THE LIGHT IN

and I swear I'm trying. I'm cracking all over, spilling out

all bright yellow yolk. Eggs in the morning, strawberry  
jam on gluten-free bread because mom hasn't had it in years.

Walking up the hill to see Gloria-Jean because her legs won't have it.

They're doing what the doctor calls *weeping*. Letting light in—  
spending evenings sipping goldenrod off the porch as the sun settles.

Learning new names for hurting—tired, trying, getting there.

There are different types of light but only if you use it.  
There are different shapes of loving.

There's telling you about the cardinal we saw on the walk over,

painting the red flash into the most beautiful sunset  
you've ever missed. Or there's cracking

the door, opening the blinds to evening gloam, and letting you see.

Shoshauna Shy

GIVEN UP / NOT GIVING UP

*All those years making a tight circle  
to some doorbell ringing  
—John Gallaher*

In a brick duplex on Klickitat Street  
in Portland as I brush my hair.  
At a stately Colonial in Cleveland  
where I'm flipping pancakes.  
In a farmhouse on a dirt road  
in Nova Scotia.  
I am on a weekend jaunt—I am at a business  
conference—I am visiting someone's aunt  
allowing Google Maps to signal another app  
to track me, one of my antenna arcing away  
from the clatter of kitchen conversation for  
a footfall on the porch, an unexpected knock  
just after the cupcakes are served  
on a wooden platter.  
Believing in serendipity, I also ride trolleys  
to the French Quarter in New Orleans  
and scan all the female faces of a specific  
age bracket and when standing in line  
at La Guardia, study the incoming passengers.  
First it's the limber red-haired ladies under 40,  
then as I go gray, it's the more creased women  
with longer skirts and shorter heels.  
Surely she is looking for me, too—has been—from  
school playgrounds to city Christmas concerts  
to commuter trains out of the Chicago Loop,  
Haunted—this mother of mine—by what she did  
that day we first met.

Sam G. Candler

## WILDERNESS WOODS

This turn in the woods, along these old ruts,  
Looks empty like wilderness to you,  
Just another stand of trees in the shade,  
Large live oaks and scrambling scrubs,  
Great shafts of longleaf pines over there,  
And here palmetto bushes  
Flashing out swords.

But every time I take this turn,  
I am ten years old,  
Riding in the back of the old garbage truck,  
And George is hauling trash to the dump.  
I see pigs waiting in the shadows for fresh food.  
I see the .22 rifle beside me, in case  
We see the exceptional fine hog.

I see the rattlesnake lying under the limbs,  
And the cottonmouth down in the swamp,  
Jesse's secret garden out beyond the last turn,  
Where the real vegetables grow.  
I see old houses along the bluff  
Where postmasters and boatmen lived,  
Over an artesian well.

I see so many people still roaming these woods,  
Their bodies long gone and their shades still here.

## A TANGLED FISHING LINE

A sharp osprey eyes me from across the cove.  
He is sitting. As still as a monk.  
I long to contemplate him, too,  
Practicing attentive patience and precision.  
But I am sitting cross-legged on the dock  
With a child's tangled fishing line again in my fingers  
And it's a doozy this time, its tiny filaments  
Looping wildly through themselves over and over  
Finally defying even the strength of a fine fisherman's knot.  
I could be pondering these billowing clouds again,  
Great knots and shades and shines of cumulus.  
I could be gazing at the waves and praying  
With their rhythmmed breathing.  
But it's practicing the untangling of knots for me.

FORETOLD

Soon everyone  
and everything  
that belongs  
together will be  
together. Him  
and Her. Them  
and Them.  
Fallen fledgling,  
nest. Button and cuff.  
Ask me why  
and I will  
raise my chin  
in the direction  
of far away,  
the place  
that giants  
came from  
not long ago  
but tomorrow.  
You know them  
in your sleep,  
you the feathers  
of their wings,  
you their wishes  
prayed from  
leathered lips  
with all the hope  
of a child.  
Blisters, whiskers,  
smoggy breath,  
hearts of princes  
and stags.  
You are here,  
at the clearing,  
the gleam between  
the this  
and the that,  
where everything  
you ever thought  
horrible  
turns human.

## CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

**RACHEL AGUIRRE** is a freelance writer and editor from San Antonio, Texas. She is an English graduate and has a healthy obsession with Isabel Allende, Mary Oliver, and Elizabeth Bishop. In her free time, you can find her curled up with a good book and a mug of Mexican hot chocolate.

**RACHEL BECKER** teaches English and Creative Writing in Newton, MA. Her poems most recently appear or are forthcoming in *Barely South Review*, *Maudlin House*, *Tusculum Review*, and *RHINO*. She lives in Boston but grew up in Richmond, VA.

**MELA BLUST** is an award nominated poet whose work has appeared in literary journals such as *The Sierra Nevada Review*, *Rust & Moth*, *The Bitter Oleander*, and more. Mela has written three books of poetry with a fourth on the way, edits for *Barren Magazine*, and can be followed on twitter at @melablust.

**ACE BOGGESE** is author of six books of poetry, most recently *Escape Envy*. His writing has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Harvard Review*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble. His seventh collection, *Tell Us How to Live*, is forthcoming in 2024 from Fernwood Press.

**MIKE BOVE** is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *EYE*. He serves as a 2024 Writer-in-Residence at Acadia National Park and is Associate Editor for *Hole in the Head Review*. Mike is Professor of English at Southern Maine Community College and lives with his family in Portland, Maine where he was born and raised. [www.mikebove.com](http://www.mikebove.com)

**ZOE BOYER** was raised in Evanston, Illinois on the shore of Lake Michigan, and completed her MA in creative writing among the ponderosa pines in Prescott, Arizona. Her work has appeared in such publications as *The New York Times*, *The Hopper*, *Poetry South*, *Kelp Journal*, *Plainsongs*, *About Place*, and *West Trade Review*, and has been nominated for *Best of the Net*.

**REBECCA BRATTEN WEISS** is an editor and journalist residing in rural Ohio. Her creative work has appeared in numerous publications, and in three chapbook collections. She has also published extensively on topics relating to religion, politics, gender issues, and culture.

**SAM G. CANDLER** is an Episcopal priest, currently dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip, in Atlanta. Raised on a farm in Coweta County, Georgia, he was nurtured on the Georgia coast, on the waters of Ontario, and in Atlanta. He also plays jazz piano, which was his vocation before becoming a priest. His essays and articles are in various ecclesiastical publications, and his poetry has appeared in *Atlanta Review* and in *The Mendicant*.

**DAVID CAZDEN's** poetry has appeared in *Passages North*, *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *Kestrel*, *Barely South Review*, *Still: The Journal*, *The Louisville Review*,

*Fugue Journal*, *The McNeese Review*, *The New Republic*, and elsewhere. His third collection of poetry, *Kentucky Pathways*, will be published by Bainbridge Island Press at the end of 2024.

**ANNE CHAMPION** is the author of *She Saints & Holy Profanities*, *The Good Girl is Always a Ghost*, *Book of Levitations*, *Reluctant Mistress*, and *The Dark Length Home*. Her work appears in *Verse Daily*, *diode*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Salamander*, *New South*, *Redivider*, *PANK Magazine*, and elsewhere. She was a 2009 Academy of American Poets Prize recipient, a 2016 Best of the Net winner, and a Barbara Deming Memorial Grant recipient.

**RACHEL CHRISTILLES** is a writer and ex-jock who runs, bikes, and birdwatches near San Antonio, Texas. Her poetry has appeared in *River Styx*, *LUMINA Online*, and *Reed Magazine's* first standalone poetry chapbook *Bone Ink*, published in 2021. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

**GRANT CLAUSER's** sixth poetry book, *Temporary Shelters*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press. His poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Greensboro Review*, *Kenyon Review* and other journals. He's an editor for a news media company and teaches poetry at Rosemont College.

**CLARA COLLINS** lives in Portland, Oregon, where she was born and raised. She has an MFA in poetry from The University of Oregon, and her work is concerned with experiences of girl- and womanhood, specifically those often viewed as private, unattractive, or shameful. Her poetry is forthcoming in the Summer 2024 issue of *Qu*.

**DAUN DAEMON's** fiction has appeared in *Flock*, *The Dead Mule School*, *Quagmire*, and *Delmarva Review* among others. She has published poems in many journals, including *Deep South Magazine*, *Third Wednesday*, *Typehouse Literary Review*, *Into the Void*, and *Amsterdam Quarterly*. Her memoir in poetry, *A Prayer for Forgiving My Parents*, was published in July 2023. She teaches scientific communication at NC State University and lives in Raleigh with her husband and three cats. More at [daundaemon.com](http://daundaemon.com).

**PAT DANEMAN's** poetry is widely published, most recently in *Mid-American Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Potomac Review*, and *Poet's Touchstone*. Her full-length collection, *After All*, was first runner up for the 2019 Thorpe-Menn Award and a finalist for the Hefner Heitz Kansas Book Award. She is author of a chapbook, *Where the World Begins* and co-librettist of the oratorio, *We, the Unknown*, premiered by the Heartland Men's Chorus. She lives in Candia, NH. [patdaneman.com](http://patdaneman.com)

**SHOME DASGUPTA** is the author of *The Seagull And The Urn*, and most recently, the novels *The Muu-Antiques* and *Tentacles Numbing*, a prose collection *Histories Of Memories*, a short story collection *Atchafalaya Darling*, and the poetry collections *Cajun South Brown Folk*, and *Iron Oxide*. His writing has appeared in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *New Orleans Review*, *The Emerson Review*, *Jabberwock Review*, *American Book Review*, *Arkansas Review*, *Magma Poetry*, and elsewhere. He is the series editor of *The Wigleaf*



*Top 50*. He lives in Lafayette, LA and can be found at [shomedome.com](http://shomedome.com) and @laughingyeti.

**HOLLY DAY's** poetry has recently appeared in *Analog SF*, *Cardinal Sins*, and *New Plains Review*, and her published books include *Music Theory for Dummies* and *Music Composition for Dummies*. She currently teaches classes at The Loft Literary Center in Minnesota, Hugo House in Washington, and The Muse Writers Center in Virginia.

**JOHN DORROH** has never fallen into an active volcano nor has he caught a hummingbird. However, he did manage to bake bread with Austrian monks & drink a healthy portion of their beer. Five of his poems were nominated for *Best of the Net*. Others have appeared in over 100 journals, including *Feral*, *North of Oxford*, *River Heron*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *El Portal*. He had two chapbooks published in 2022.

**CARSON ELLIOT** (they/them) is a poet and educator living in Middle Tennessee after growing up in Northeast Ohio. They are the author of the chapbook *Celestial Bodies: A Year of Transgender Love Letters*. Their work focuses on the intersections of transness, spirituality, and questions of belonging. Their work can be found in publications such as *Ouch! Collective*, *Third Iris*, *Fifth Wheel Press*, *Stirring*, and *South Broadway Press* among others.

**ANNALEE FAIRLEY** is a writer who now lives in the Inland Northwest. Her most recent publications have been in *The Black Fork Review*, *Hellbender Mag*, *Chapter House Journal*, and the *Good Life Review*. She has been awarded the Gager Fellowship for her work in poetry and fiction. She is currently pursuing an MFA at Eastern Washington University.

**LANE FALCON's** poems have been published in *American Poetry Journal*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Harbor Review*, *The Journal*, *Mayday Magazine*, *New York Quarterly*, *Passengers Journal*, *Poet Lore*, *Qu*, *Rhino*, *Rust & Moth*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Sheila-na-gig*, *Swim Everyday*, *Tar River Poetry*, *WWPH Writes*, and more. Her manuscript "Deep, Blue Odds" was selected as a finalist for the 2023 Black Lawrence Press Hudson Prize and the 2022 Lightscatter Press prize, and semi-finalist for the 2022 Tupelo Press Berkshire Prize and the Inaugural Laura Boss Narrative Poetry Prize. She lives in Alexandria, VA with her two children and dog.

**AUDREY FATONE** is queer woman who currently resides in Raleigh, NC where she is in graduate school for Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management. Her poetry is written as a thank you to the natural world for its unconditional love. Her work has also been featured in *Unearthed* magazine and *Boreal Zine*.

**GINA FERRARA** lives in New Orleans. *Amiss*, her most recent collection was published by Dos Madres Press in 2023. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming for publication in *Tar River Poetry*, *The Delta Poetry Review*, and *The Southern Review*. She is an Associate Professor of English and Delgado Community College and is also editor of the New Orleans Poetry Journal Press.

**GEORGE FREEK's** poem "Enigmatic Variations" was recently nominated for Best of Net. His poem "Night Thoughts" was also nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

**KATHERINE GEKKER** is the author of *In Search of Warm Breathing Things*. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Rappahannock Review* and *CALYX*. She serves as Assistant Poetry Editor for *Delmarva Review*. Two collections of Gekker's poems have been set to music by composers Eric Ewazen and Carson Cooman. Gekker was born in Washington, DC. She founded a commercial printing company in 1974 and sold it 31 years later.

**MICHAEL GOODFELLOW** is the author of the poetry collections *Naturalism, An Annotated Bibliography* and *Folklore of Lunenburg County*, both published by Gaspereau Press. His poems have appeared in the *Literary Review of Canada, The Dalhousie Review, CV2, Prairie Fire*, and elsewhere, and his writing is supported by grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia. He lives in Nova Scotia.

**PETER GRANDBOIS** is the author of fourteen books, the most recent of which is *Domestic Bestiary*. His plays have been performed in St. Louis, Columbus, Los Angeles, and New York. He is poetry editor at *Boulevard* and teaches at Denison University in Ohio. You can find him at [petergrandbois.com](http://petergrandbois.com).

**SHANE SEELY** is the author of three books of poems, most recently *The First Echo*. He teaches in and directs the MFA program at University of Missouri-St. Louis.

**FARAH ART GRIFFIN** is a recipient of the Altman Writers of Color Scholarship from the Hudson Valley Writers Center. Her work is forthcoming or has appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry, Constellations, Storm Cellar, The Perch, The New Verse News, Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Haiku Invitational, North Dakota Human Rights Arts Festival*, and elsewhere. She holds a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of South Carolina and an EdM in Arts in Education from Harvard University.

**MORIAH HAMPTON** teaches in the Writing and Critical Inquiry Program at SUNY-Albany. Her fiction, poetry, photography, and photopoetry have appeared in *The Coachella Review, Ponder Review, The Hamilton Stone Review, Brief Wilderness*, and elsewhere.

**CORDELIA HANEMANN**, writer and artist, currently co-hosts Summer Poets, a poetry critique group in Raleigh, NC. Professor emerita in English, she conducts occasional poetry workshops and is active with youth poetry in the North Carolina Poetry Society. She is also a botanical illustrator and lover of all things botanical. She has published in numerous journals including, *Atlanta Review, Laurel Review, and California Quarterly* and others; in several anthologies including best-selling *Poems for the Ukraine* and her chapbook. Her poems have been performed by the Strand Project, featured in select journals, won awards and been nominated for Pushcarts. She is now working on a novel about her Cajun roots.

**RACHEL HINTON's** debut poetry collection, *Hospice Plastics*, won the Cowles Poetry Prize and was published by Southeast Missouri State University Press in October 2021. Rachel's poems have previously appeared in *The Boiler, Cimarron Review, Midway Journal, The Hunger, Salamander*, and others.

**CHRISTOPHER HONEY** is an MFA candidate at the University of Saint Thomas. His poetry, essays, and articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *The Rumpus*, *Decadent Review*, *Delmarva Review*, *Building Trades News*, and *Montgomery Living Magazine*. He lives in Washington, DC with his wife and daughter.

**PHILIP JASON**'s stories can be found in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Pinch*, *Mid-American Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *J Journal*; his poetry in *Spillway*, *Lake Effect*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Palette*, and *Indianapolis Review*. He is the author of the novel *Window Eyes*. He has collections of poetry forthcoming from Fernwood Press and Shanti Arts Press. Please visit [philipjason.com](http://philipjason.com).

**SOON JONES** is a Korean lesbian writer and poet originating from the rural countryside of the American South. Their work has been published in *The Good Life Review*, *Westerly*, *Juke Joint*, *Moon City Review*, among others. They are currently pursuing an MFA in Poetry at Oklahoma State University, and, they can be found at [soonjones.com](http://soonjones.com).

**PHIL KELLER** grew up in Texas and has family members throughout the South. He has published poems in *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Ireland*, *The Madison Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and other journals. He has three grown children and lives with his wife, Hope Charkins, in Montpelier, Vermont, about five miles from Curtis Pond.

**DANIELLE LEMAY** (she/her) is a poet and a scientist in central California. She thought she left rural Florida, but the South never leaves you. She was *Boulevard's* Emerging Poets Contest Winner in 2022. Her poetry has also appeared in *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, *On the Seawall*, *SWWIM Every Day*, and many other journals. Read more at [DanielleLemay.com](http://DanielleLemay.com).

**CLARISSA LEUNG** is currently a high school student in Pennsylvania.

**KARA LEWIS** is a writer based in Minneapolis. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Permafrost*, *The Pinch*, *I-70 Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Stirring*, *Snarl*, and elsewhere. Her work was also featured in *Stained: An Anthology of Writing About Menstruation* and has been nominated for a Best of the Net Award.

**ANGIE MACRI** is the author of *Sunset Cue*, winner of the Lauria/Frasca Poetry Prize, and *Underwater Panther*, winner of the Cowles Poetry Book Prize. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she lives in Hot Springs.

**NATALIE MARINO** is a poet and physician. Her work appears in *The Night Heron Barks*, *Pleiades*, *Rust + Moth*, *Salt Hill*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *West Trestle Review*, and elsewhere. She is the author of the chapbook *Under Memories of Stars*. She lives in California. You can find her online at [nataliemarino.com](http://nataliemarino.com) or on Instagram [@natalie\\_marino](https://www.instagram.com/natalie_marino).

**BECKA MARA MCKAY** is a poet and translator. She directs the Creative Writing MFA at Florida Atlantic University, where she serves as faculty advisor to *Swamp Ape Review*. Her newest book of poems is *The Little Book of No Consolation*. You can find her recent work in *Witnest*, *december*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *Permafrost*.

**ROCÍO IGLESIAS MCKENZIE** is a queer Cuban-American poet and lawyer. Born in Cuba and raised in Miami, her work explores queer family, political oppression, immigration, loss, return, and diaspora. Her work has appeared in various print and electronic publications and can most recently be found in *As It Ought To Be Magazine* and *Voices from the Fire*. She lives, breathes, and works in Minneapolis, MN.

**AMY MECKLER** received her MFA in poetry from Hunter College in 2001. Her first book, *What All the Sleeping is For*, won the 2002 Defined Providence Poetry Book Award and was published that year. Her poems have appeared in *Alyss*, *Atlanta Review*, *Margie*, *Lyric*, *Rattapallax*, *Cider Press Review*, *Whiskey Island*, and other journals. She has taught creative writing at Hunter College and works as a Sign Language interpreter in New York City.

**CINDY MILWE** has been published in many journals and magazines, including *5 AM*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, *Poet Lore*, *The William and Mary Review*, *Flyway*, *Talking River Review*, and *The Georgetown Review* as well as three anthologies: *Another City: Writing from Los Angeles*; *Changing Harm to Harmony: The Bullies and Bystanders Project*; and *Rumors, Secrets & Lies*. Her first full-length collection, *Salvage*, was published by Finishing Line Press in January 2022.

**MICHAEL MONTLACK** is author of two poetry collections and editor of the Lambda Finalist essay anthology *My Diva: 65 Gay Men on the Women Who Inspire Them*. His poems recently appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *December*, *Poet Lore*, *Cincinnati Review*, and *phoebe*. His prose has appeared in *The Rumpus*, *Huffington Post*, and *Advocate.com*. In 2022 his poem won the Saints & Sinners Poetry Award (for LGBTQ writers).

**BENJAMIN NASH** has *Sun* available at Finishing Line Press. He has had poems published in *Pembroke Magazine*, *Louisiana Literature*, *2River*, *Kestrel*, and other publications.

**BLEAH PATTERSON** (she/her) is a southern, queer writer born and raised in Texas. A current MFA candidate and writing professor. She is a Pushcart nominee and her various genres of work are featured or forthcoming in *The Brazos River Review*, *Write or Die*, *The Texas Review*, *Across the Margins*, *Queerlings*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Beaver Magazine*, and elsewhere.

**WILLIAM L. RAMSEY** (he/him) is a Professor at Lander University in South Carolina. His poems have appeared over the last thirty-eight years in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Poetry East*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The South Carolina Review*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. He is the author of two books of historical scholarship and one book of poetry, *Dilemmas*, which is available from Clemson University Press.

**WILL REGER**'s work has recently appeared in *Glacial Hills Review*, *Pacific Poetry Review*, *Euphony Journal*, and *Spirit Magazine*. He has published four collections of poetry since 2019. Also, in 2019-21 he served as the Inaugural Poet Laureate for the city of Urbana, IL. He holds a PhD in Russian History. He has taught university classes for 30 years.

**SEAN REYNOLDS** is a poet and translator living in Minnesota. He received his doctorate in poetics from SUNY Buffalo. His translation of the Swiss poet Gustave Roud's collection *Air of Solitude* was published by Seagull Books. His poetry has appeared in *Nimrod International Journal* (as a finalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry), *Shearsman*, *River Heron Review*, and *Little Red Leaves* among other journals. His essays on poetic translation have appeared in *Journal of Modern Literature*, *Postmodern Culture*, *postmedieval*, *Cahiers de Lexicologie*, and the 2022 book *Postmodern Poetry and Queer Medievalisms*.

**ESTEBAN RODRÍGUEZ** is the author of eight poetry collections, most recently *Lotería*, and the essay collection *Before the Earth Devours Us*. He currently lives in south Texas.

**MARY SALISBURY**'s poetry has been published in *Calyx*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and other journals. Two chapbooks, *Come What May* and *Scarlet Rain Boots*, were published by Finishing Line Press. An Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship recipient, Mary earned her MFA in Writing from Pacific University. Her fiction has been published in *The Whitefish Review* and *Cutthroat*. Salisbury's story collection, *Side Effects of Wanting*, was published by Main Street Rag.

**RICHARD SCHIFFMAN** is an environmental reporter, poet and author of two biographies based in New York City. In addition to *Poetry South*, his poems have appeared on the BBC and on NPR as well as in the *Alaska Quarterly*, *New Ohio Review*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Times*, *Writer's Almanac*, *This American Life in Poetry*, *Verse Daily*, and other publications. His first poetry collection *What the Dust Doesn't Know* was published in 2017 by Salmon Poetry.

**SHANE SEELY** is the author of three books of poems, most recently *The First Echo*. He teaches in and directs the MFA program at University of Missouri-St. Louis.

**SHOSHAUNA SHY** has five poetry collections, and her poems have recently been published by *Black Coffee Review*, *Creative Wisconsin*, *San Pedro River Review*, and *Cerasus Magazine*. Her poem "This Is You in the Sundance Catalogue" was longlisted for the Fish Publishing Poetry Prize 2022, and in 2023, her poem "Not Wanting to Meet My Birth Mother" was a finalist in the annual contest of Naugatuck River Review.

**KRYSTLE MAY STATLER** (she/her) is a Black-multiracial artist living in Portland, OR and is the author of *Prayer for Relief*. Her poems are featured in *Epiphany Magazine*, *Fugue*, *Sixfold*, *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, *Poetry From Instructions*, *poetry.onl*, *1455's Movable Type*, and *Cultural Weekly*.

**TERRY ANN THAXTON** has published three poetry collections: *Mud Song*, *Getaway Girl*, and *The Terrible Wife*, as well as a textbook, *Creative Writing in the Community: A Guide*. Two of her poetry books have been awarded a Florida Book Award. She's published essays and poetry in *New Letters*, *The Missouri Review*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *CALYX*, *Gulf Coast*, and other journals. She teaches creative writing at the University of Central Florida.

**WENDY M. THOMPSON** is an Associate Professor of African American Studies at San José State University. Her creative work has most recently appeared in *Juked*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora*. Her first poetry book, *Black California Gold*, is forthcoming from Bucknell University Press.

**HEIDI VANDERVELDE** is a board-certified pediatrician residing in Auburn, Alabama. She has a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and Writing from University of South Florida and a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine. Heidi is also a graduate of the University of Florida at Jacksonville Pediatrics Residency. She is studying fiction in Warren Wilson's MFA Program for Writers. She is published in *The Thread*.

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**CAROL WAS** grew up in the heart of Detroit, studied at Wayne State University, taught school, camp counseled intellectually disabled children in the summers, prepared bones at Cranbrook Institute of Science, and is the former Poetry Editor for *The MacGuffin*. Her poetry has appeared in such journals as *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Natural Bridge*, among others. She's been nominated for Pushcart and Best New Poets. Carol writes and walks miles every day.

**GLEN WATERS** (He/him) is a University of Iowa Writers' Workshop graduate. He was born in Dallas, Texas, and graduated from Georgetown University with English Honors, receiving the Emilia Ferrara Award for Best Creative Writing Thesis. Glen's work can be found in Stephen F. Austin's *Journal of Multicultural Affairs*. Currently, he serves as a council member of Iowa City Poetry and is the editor of *Black Poetry Review*. Glen teaches creative writing at the University of Iowa.

**ANDIE BRYNN WEAVER** is a queer writer born and raised in rural Georgia and currently living in Charlottesville, Virginia. Their work can be found in *The Rumen*, *Rock & Sling*, and elsewhere. When they are not writing, they are studying to become an archivist and trying to convince their cat to be less nefarious in case the neighbors get suspicious.

**ADAM D. WEEKS** has a BA in Creative Writing from Salisbury University and is currently a second-grade teacher in Baltimore City. He won the 2022 *Third Wednesday Poetry Contest*, has been a Pushcart Prize nominee, and has poetry published or forthcoming in *Fugue*, *Poet Lore*, *Sugar House Review*, *Sweet: A Literary Confection*, *Sycamore Review*, *Thrush*, and elsewhere.

**CLAUDE WILKINSON** is a critic, essayist, painter, and poet. His book, *Reading the Earth*, won the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award. Other honors for his



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**ELLEN JUNE WRIGHT** is an American poet with British and Caribbean roots. Her work has been published in *Plume*, *Tar River*, *Missouri Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Gulf Stream*, *Solstice*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Leon Literary Review*, *North American Review*, *Prelude*, and *Gulf Coast*, and is forthcoming in the *Cimarron Review*. She's a Cave Canem and Hurston/Wright alumna and a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee.

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**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.

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