

**The Raw Art Review**  
*A Journal of Storm and Urge*  
**Winter 2019**



**The Raw Art Review:  
A Journal of Storm and Urge**

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**COVER ART:**

***Chess Player Suddenly Distracted*  
by Dave Sims 9”x16” Digital Mixed Media  
(Winner of the RAR Winter Cover Art Contest)**

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## THE POTATO

The potato is afraid of light and movement. It would like to stay hidden forever, fattening slowly in its soft cocoon of soil. Its life is a life of sleep—do not begrudge it this simple existence. It is kin to stone in shape and nature, but softness betrays it. If a worm, seeking moisture, tunnels through, the potato, uneasy, says nothing. Its eyes are scars, they do not shift or lift their lids to note the damage; they do not try to understand. This misshapen lantern dangling from roots has no wish to illuminate anything at all. It is no use unearthing the potato before its time. The vegetable goes slowly. It does not tremble at the pressure of feet aboveground. It does not pray picturing the spade or the farmer's rough, indifferent gloves. Rain falls, sun shines—the potato does not miss these things. Sweetness pours in through its stem, smoothing, straightening the brown paper of its skin.

*by Dara Elerath*  
*(Poem is the Winner of the RAR Francis Ponge Prize)*

## HOW AND WHEN TO USE AN ERASER

If you've made a mistake while writing a letter to an absent lover, you may consider the advantages of an eraser. It offers the chance to begin anew or to amend those proclamations of undying devotion. The motion of your hand traveling back and forth across the page is a meditation on the disappearance of your partner. Erasure is a simple skill to master. Practice in your diary by erasing all mention of your lover's name, making space for another. Understand this: the philosopher who discovered the eraser also discovered oxygen. See how the heated rubber peels back the dark spines of the letters to reveal a field of emptiness, how the page opens like a mouth taking air at the end of a kiss. Watch the words turn to crumbs, reminding you of ashes; yet, no ceremony is required to dispose of them. A little residue is always left by the pressure of an eraser. Use the back of your hand to remove it. Tip the paper over the wastebasket. Brush firmly, with quick, deliberate strokes.

*by Dara Elerath*

## THE BUTTON

Always, it had lived close to my chest, stitched to the front of my woolen coat, though I rarely noticed it. The button was carved from bone, yet the edges were limned in silver—luminous as the Japanese daggers my father had owned. The first time I touched the button I felt how cold and smooth it was, I saw how it shone slightly like the eye of a caught fish or my dog's claws as he pawed into dark earth hunting up the carcass of a mouse. Once, I folded my palm around the button and recalled the porcelain knob on my mother's dresser; when I opened the dresser drawer I discovered photos of my father before he left us. *Find me*, were words I imagined the button would cry if it fell from my coat, for I knew its task was to clasp the edges of my jacket, to gather threads of warmth across my chest. It was a simple thing, yet, one night, I dreamed of my mother stitching the button deftly onto the coat. I saw her small, red fingers, how they labored to pull the thread, like sinew, taut. Then I knew I would honor the button. I woke and grasped it as if grasping the hand of my lost father, of my small mother. *I will not let it go*, I said to myself, yet I did not know then how the edges of the button would leave their impression upon my palm. Sometimes, I longed to turn the button like a door knob, I imagined opening it to see the head of my father bobbing in shadow: *papa*, I would say, and he would look towards me, the brown, lacquered hairs of his beard still the same as when he'd left; he would be dressed in his frayed pea coat with its anchor-emblazoned buttons. His mouth would open to speak and his hand would reach towards me. I could see him clearly, his eyes like black coals wincing in a furnace, there in the darkness that gathered behind the button.

*by Dara Elerath*



**Backyard Familiar #5**

*By Mason Bondi*

*(Runner-up RAR Winter Cover Art Contest)*

## **The Dim Boy**

After “The Freaks at Spurgin Road Field,” by Richard Hugo

1.

The dim boy is at Spurgin Road Field again. Etan has tickets again.

2.

The dim boy does not clap. Etan brings his four left fingers quickly and with practiced precision to a cupped right palm. Etan is performatively punctuating the unseen verse of the world. Etan occasions cuts and em-dashes and undiscovered punctuation where it is lacking, where time would otherwise flow crooked.

3.

The dim boy does not clap because the others clap. Etan brings his hands together because he is watching the legation of flies between him and the only dandelion in the outfield. Etan sees that now they are quietly dancing in a new, difficult pattern, which Etan celebrates with a sound they can feel.

4.

The dim boy does not look at the diamond. Etan sees an imbroglio of broken images and irresolute meanings. Etan is aware of the mound, the hats, the sandy crackle of peanut shells under his feet, the pitch count, the dark scuffing in the on-deck circle, the time, the wind, the pinstripes, the incandescent bulbs pixeling the scoreboard, the 324 cents on his person, and the umpire’s warm mask. Etan thinks that it is all dazzling and uncanny in its synchronicity. Etan sometimes has to move his slim fingers like this to keep his balance among the glittering smithereens.

5.

The dim boy does not speak. Etan flutes a guttural sound, which the man next to him despairingly notes God, it's like it's coming from my own hindbrain and then what a fucking waste of tickets. Etan has his own vowel. Etan's own vowel must come before and after a genuine smile. Etan cannot stop smiling at the variousness of the clouds and at the frosted, syrupy memory of Dippin' Dots.

6.

The dim boy does not drink Pepsi. Etan drank his favorite thing at home one hour before the top of the first. Etan had tomato juice, five glasses half full.

7.

The dim boy does not seek to be understood. Etan has many things to express, but doubts that the hooting, cheering crowd of freaks at Spurgin Road Field would comprehend. Etan in this moment would rather feel the excited bleachers thrum in cahoots with the pinch runner's red cleats.

8.

The dim boy does not have a brother. Etan has a sister too beautiful to be prom queen. Etan will note, long from now, that she left home with a boy and did not come back for several baseball seasons.

9.

The dim boy is at Spurgin Road Field Again. Etan has eyes brighter than the helmet lights of a cosmonaut.

*by Logo Wei  
(First runner-up for the RAR Francis Ponge Prize)*





**Mother's Rain**

*by J. Ray Paradiso*

*(Runner-up RAR Winter Cover Art Contest)*

## SMALL GEORGE

My mother said not to play near the old well, but she didn't say a thing about playing in it. We were all there, even Big George, on the blistering summer day that Small George fell into the well, never to be seen again, like Alice-down-the-rabbit-hole, minus enchantment. In the heat of the moment, we made a blood-brother pact to deny our part in his death, and to this day our parents believe that Small George wandered off from the group and, unobserved, fell headlong into the deep well. The lollipop trees were in full bloom that day; their heady fragrance made us delirious, we decided to see how far we could put our heads down the well without lifting our feet off the ground. Small George was the shortest, so we turned a blind eye to his feet, as long as his head went down there. He was crying that day, we made him fill his mouth with pebbles and drop them into the well one by one, while we listened long and hard to them plopping into the water. It was an initiation ritual, we had all done it at one time or another. Immediately we knew he hadn't survived his fall. In subsequent years when the lollipop blossom gave off the first scent of summer, I would walk to the well. One year Big George was ahead of me, standing there alone. I stood next to him. *What are you doing here*, I asked. *I don't know*, he shrugged, *it seems like the most peaceful place to be.*

*by Clare Chu*  
*(Runner-up RAR Francis Ponge Prize)*

## NASTURTIUMS

You can plant, grow and care for Nasturtiums in the meanest soil, they are not choosy. Although that doesn't matter one iota if you are a three-star *Michelin* chef that has a lace of petals delivered daily, fresh, and on ice. It doesn't matter that it is the easiest flower to grow from seed, nor that the seeds are large and can be held by nimble fingers. This makes them a fitting first plant for children who will revel in their saffron, rose and crimson colors, who will with urgency, pull their mothers down to the soil to smell a single flower. That has grown up almost overnight, that has a subtle fragrance which will never clash with chilled pineapple parfait drizzled with warm mango coulis. And the worldly *bon vivants* who love to eat in the 'Top 100 Restaurants In The World' will hardly notice that petals on their forks will melt in their mouths with a sweetness and a spicy radish-like after-kick. Because unlike the child who listened to her flower growing, they did not listen to their deadpan waiter serving dessert. They did not hear the small whispers of the heart. And the child's mother, who thankfully saw sense in a seventies world, called her Rose after another sweet, edible flower (noting that it had thorns for protection). Rather than Nasturtium because who could ever spell it correctly and who wants to be saddled with the nickname Nasty at school? She crouched down with her only child and said *try it, you can eat it*, not understanding Rose at all when she softly replied

*Mother, I can't eat this flower that I have grown myself.*

*by Clare Chu*

## **SHEEP**

This morning I made a decision to leave my mundane job in the billing department to become a shepherd. Not that there was much call for shepherds at all, but someone had to be accountable for the sheep that were suddenly appearing on the freeway overpass. Each day as I drove to work, I would see one more sheep peering over the barrier, as though wondering where the cars were going. Sometimes at night, I lay awake counting sheep. My mother taught me to do that when I couldn't sleep. It didn't help. There seemed to be more sheep than numbers when I was a child. Far better to gaze through the skylight, at the stars, until my eyes closed. I always thought that was why I trained to be an accountant, because I felt satisfied in the safety of balancing numbers, instead of counting sheep. Later in life, I am drawn to be with sheep more and more. Now they've started appearing, I feel called to care for them, to tend to the growing flock.

*by Clare Chu*



**The Alpha Wolf**  
by Alexis Avlamis

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There are two distinct shapes created by a skein of migratory geese. The first shape is created in the blue it moves towards: it is too big to see the beginning of, but the V of birds forms its end. The second shape is created by all the sky the geese are leaving: it begins at the narrowest point—behind the leader, and the two birds which lag, respectively, to his left and right—and continues, endlessly, outwards. It is no coincidence that the skein itself, resembling the mathematical symbol, moves towards the space it signifies is less than X, and away from the space it signifies is greater than X. For years, I have studied how to position myself correctly in universe. This means that I am always standing in the direction that the birds are flying towards, so that when they pass by overhead, I remain greater, in an endless space.

*by Mathew Weitman*  
*(Runner-up RAR Francis Ponge Prize)*

## The Oak Tree

He liked to think about the tree. It was big oak that, when seen from the street, stood just to the left of the house. The tree was probably sexually mature. There were acorns underneath it sometimes. And the house itself was white; or maybe brown.

The leaves of the oak were the kind that looked like a stack of w's and, in autumn, seem to fall before having a chance to change colors. And a family lived in the house. He only noticed.

At night, he liked to think about the oak tree. He would make a pot of tea, and watch tv, and think about the oak tree. And then he would go to sleep. And he would have dreams that he couldn't remember when he woke up in the morning.

Most days he went to work. And the oak tree was far away. He didn't bring up the tree in conversations, even though he had so many conversations. Somehow, it never came up even though the tree was big, and interesting, and far away; and even though there was nothing about it that separated it from another oak tree, other than its existence as an individual oak tree.

One night he made a pot of tea for himself and watched tv and thought about the oak tree. He decided to go see it, and so he walked for a very long time. When he finally saw the tree, it was the same color as the house except for certain windows where the lights inside were turned on. And the sky had one thick cloud in it that was big enough to blanket everything else that was up there. He walked closer to the tree, and for the first time he put his hand on the bark of one of its many sides. A light from the porch turned on with his motion. He left his

hand there for a little while, and then hung it again from his arm. The whole night was making the same noise.

On a different night, while he was watching tv and drinking from a pot of tea, he started to think about the oak tree. He got up from whatever it was he was sitting on and turned off the soccer game or episode of Cheers that played loudly on the tv before the screen turned black and quiet. Then he walked outside where he walked for a long time until he stood in front of the tree. And he noticed that this time the tree was the same color as the house even in the windows. He walked past the tree and towards the house where a light on the porch turned on with his decision. It changed the color of the house and one of the sides of the tree. He walked up the two or five steps of the porch where he heard his footsteps for the first time since before the lawn. He saw that the light came from a bulb in a glass fixture on the right side of the house. He put his hand under the fixture and unscrewed the bulb. It felt warm in his hand as he walked away from the house. He stood in the street and looked at the tree. It was again the same color as the house.

*by Mathew Weitman*



## The Infinity Theorem

I'm not sure if I pity my alternate selves.

For one thing, if the doomed fates of the selves that must inhabit at least a few of the disparate dimensions of reality left me dejected in this one, I am fairly certain that my lamentations would occupy the entirety of my time. And yet, while the possible outcomes of my possible actions are infinite, I am slightly troubled by the thought of a dimension in which I do occupy the entirety of my time pitying the fates of my alternate selves.

I think what troubles me most is the uncertainty I have that alternate dimensions must, by necessity, remain parallel. If there is in fact an infinite number of other dimensions—in which every possibility imaginable (and unimaginable) must exist—does this not necessitate the existence of universes where alternate timelines overlap? Consider perpendicular, or diagonal timelines—timelines spiraling through others in a perfection that would make Fibonacci salivate.

In some of these dimensions, my selves would drift into other realities—idly, seamlessly. In others, they (me? us?) might be violently refracted—blasted like shrapnel from the dramatic collision of timelines; or some chronologic Charybdis sucks the poor souls in.

Maybe these overlaps exist quietly—as invisible intersections, or ley-lines. And who can say how long these intersections exist? It could be that alternate timelines, like everything else in the known universe, are drifting farther, and farther, apart from each other. I'm not sure if I should pity—or envy—the

selves that are destined to wander unknowingly into these fleeting rifts.

From these speculations, we can postulate the existence of a self that would be able to navigate these overlaps—and use them as portals. This being might be able to circumvent death, persecution, or boredom: with his immense knowledge of interdimensional doorways, he would be able to travel with ease. As I am not yet an expert on interdimensional topography, I cannot speak further on the task of mapping the interdimensional planes and possible sites (transient or not) of worm holes.

Alongside this sage, we can also postulate the existence of an extradimensional Mister Magoo; that is, a being with interdimensional myopia, who wanders through, or rather stumbles into and out of, various dimensions ignorantly—but successfully, all the same. In this scenario, it would seem that the distance of his travels is contingent upon the parallelism of respective realities, and/or the degree of his interdimensional-myopia. In other words, do the realities he enters and exits vary so slightly that he cannot notice? Or, is his myopia so great that he cannot know?

Of course, these postulations and suppositions denote the existence of the doomed wanderers as well. Those unfortunate souls, who have stumbled into an alternate plane and cannot find their way back. Some are locked away as madmen; others die of an acute inability to breathe the alternate compounds of air. My extradimensional corpse: prodded in the Roswell of a different earth.

*by Mathew Weitman*



## **Cheili**

*by Kevin Healey*

## **Absent Monuments**

Yesterday I heard something that sounded like rocks being unloaded from a dump truck. I stepped outside to take a look. Just across the road, a man was digging in a vegetable patch with a sharp stick instead of a shovel. The laundry hanging on the line had turned mostly to rags long ago. A woman appeared in the doorway, wiping her hands on her apron. We watched as foxes and wolves trotted into town to play with the children. That's why I need to consult those people who survived by eating weeds and even talk proudly about it. We could hear laughter. And then, just as suddenly, we couldn't hear it anymore.

*by Howie Good  
(Runner-up RAR Francis Ponge Prize)*

## **Fire Burns Upward**

We see and smell the smoke all day. I'm scared to breathe in. The pathetic noises we make are those that would struggle up from an orchestra of broken instruments. Within a week, a month, a year, strangers will move into our houses. They'll try on our clothes, put on our jewelry. They'll replace the photographs on the walls and tabletops with their own. Hundreds can be doing this at one time. Thousands! The only evidence that we might have once existed will be the shoe that someone lost while fleeing.

*by Howie Good*

## **Museum of Lost Things**

A security guard reclines on a chair by the door, pink sneakers, legs crossed. Someone walks in and breaks something and then walks out again. By the time the cops arrive, people are crying, shoving, tripping, trying to leave, scrambling everywhere. "Stay far away from the area. The area is not safe," a voice repeats over the PA system. "Stay away." I see smoke. I see the history of my country becoming ashes. How does anyone sleep at night or get through the day? The police have dogs. They even have helicopters. Oh that sound! The inmate orchestra plays selections from Brahms while firefighters unspool their hose.

*by Howie Good*



## **Monk Sand Painting**

*by Dave Sims*



## **Getting Away from It All**

*by Dave Sims*

## The Animal Communicator

We have no hope and yet  
we live in longing...  
—Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*

### I. The Animal Communicator Lets in the Day

As a small flock of maybe fifteen or twenty shrikes  
sweeps into and rests among the slick branches  
of her Orcas Island backyard pear tree,  
her shoulders sag.

### II. The Animal Communicator Discourses with a Startled Mountain Lion in the Pasayten Wilderness Just North and East of Sunny Pass

*Nothing animal is foreign to me*, he murmurs. Still,  
she does not drop the clover and lupine she  
picked along the path that afternoon;  
instead holds them across her  
right breast.

### III. The Animal Communicator Speaks for Herself

*Sometimes, after I was born, I wake up in this dream  
where I am stalking myself to take back  
and bury all the words I ever  
spoke or sang.*

### IV. The Animal Communicator Spills the Word Death

*Animals see death differently than we do*, she says.  
We think of the camp cat that, in 1949 in Bella  
Vista, my brother Skip and I pulled  
entirely apart.

### V. The Animal Communicator Gets Down and Dirty

*Now you're really going to get it*, she says,  
as she puts on her headphones  
and flips *Start* and *Loud*  
on Béla Bartók.

### VI. The Animal Communicator Gets Lost in a Rainforest on Bataan



A delegation of walking sticks, golden-fronted leafbirds,  
lizards, leaches, lemurs, moreporks, fig wasps, boars,  
shrews, tarsiers, vespertilionids, palm civets, anoas,  
and gray-crowned scimitar-babblers finds the Animal  
Communicator and leads her back deeper into  
the center of their own wild moistness.

VII. The Animal Communicator as Sensuoust

Hail had broken scores of panes above the Frontenac  
hothouse that weeknight. Before we entered to  
exhume the orchids, she stripped to the waist  
to catch on her belly and arms and areolae  
the mixture of green pollen  
and bitter snowflakes.

VIII. The Animal Communicator Daydreams of Sex

Toothless and densely furred, an anteater quivers  
tucked inside a dream of roe tricked  
from within a coveted nest  
in the Brazilian backlands  
of the Pantanal.

IX. The Animal Communicator Loses Hope

Three lazy, white-cheeked cormorants circle up  
into the cumulus over Hat Island  
to feed their dry eyes  
on vapor.

X. The Animal Communicator Plays God

She lifts her titanium ultralight off well before  
dawn and flies side-to-side then end-to-end  
above the Grand Canyon until she hits  
the first brilliant blue.

*by R. J. Keeler*

("The Animal Communicator" was first published by *The Poetry Society's* Waltham Forest Poetry Competition.)

(Runner-up RAR Francis Ponge Prize)



**Bonne Bay**  
*by Leah Dockrill*

## Ashes

She didn't know it then, but there was a specific way that she was supposed to scatter the ashes. She had her father's in a cylinder and her mother's in a plastic bag and she couldn't hold both at the same time, they were so heavy. She figured they must have cremated the bodies in the coffins. Someone told her later that you were supposed to dig small furrows in the ground and array the ashes in rows, like crops, before covering them up with soil, because otherwise the ashes will disperse over the ground and solidify into a white film when it rains. She and her brother and sister emptied both parents all at once and they were amazed and terrified by the size of the mushroom cloud that formed. The ashes were less like ashes than they were plaster or concrete. It was a still day by the beach and she and her brother and sister ate salad rolls and fruitcake and talked about how happy their parents had been there, of all places. On the way back to the car they could still feel the grit in their hair and between their teeth. I think I just swallowed a tiny piece of Dad, she remembers someone saying.

*by Oliver Mestitz*  
*(Runner-up RAR Francis Ponge Prize)*

## **The new dog**

She was happy the morning she bought the new dog. She covered the passenger seat with towels and filled a box with shredded newspaper and visited the kennel's website one last time, for directions.

On the drive, she listened again and again to the song that would give the new dog its name. The new dog chewed a corner of the box with its eyes fixed upwards. She brushed the hair from her shirt and felt its warmth and quickness fading.

With tears in her eyes, she followed the same road home.

*by Oliver Mestitz*

## A Dying Plant

A friend came to stay on the futon for three nights because he and his partner were having another argument.

He told me of Nietzsche's idea that difficulty is a dying plant; you either have to nurture and water the plant every day to bring it back to health, or dig it up and get a new plant. He and his partner had been neglecting the plant for years. Instead of getting a new plant, they'd gotten into the habit of watering the old plant only when it there was nothing else to do, which there never was.

Words will not bring the plant back to life, he told me.

The next day, he went home to pick up some clothes and he told his partner what he'd told me, that their difficulty was a dying plant.

I want to water the plant! she said.

*by Oliver Mestitz*



**The Infinite**  
*by Michelle Brooks*

## **Jungle Rope**

When the chandelier breaks from the ceiling, you don't think twice about your next step, which is an immediate clutch of the heart or a jolt from the seat, and if the fixture is entirely separated from the drywall and on the floor, a move for the broom to sweep the brass and glass into a dust pan over and over again. The shards, fine as an icy lake, roll over and under the bristle and you pray for not a one to pierce his foot when he will wander through the room shoeless and sockless because he kicked them off by the sofa. It's a catch here and there, you know, because on one hand, why did the chandelier launch from its hole, and on the other, ever so briefly it was joy the moment you swung from one chair to the next relishing the freedom granted when you were not tethered to the same floor he was.

*by Renee Bailey*  
*(Runner-up RAR Francis Ponge Prize)*



**September Moon**  
*by George Goebel*



## The Migratory Habits of Dreams in Late Autumn

During the first cycle you may visit your childhood home  
and they will all be there as though still alive  
and there may be steaming pots  
on the stove and your mother will turn to you and smile  
and you will sit in a chair too big for you  
while your dog settles his head in your lap

during your second cycle you dream of leaves  
that have loosed themselves and drift and tumble  
in quiet descent and with each you  
give them the names of those who have passed  
and whisper sweet prayers as your rake  
gathers great drifts of them to a burn pile,  
their smoky incense carried up to intersect  
with a flock of birds

and in the final cycle  
your breathing will slow and lengthen  
as your breast heaves and settles  
again ever slower and someone will read to you  
as you feel the press of their weight on the bed  
they will read soft words from a children's book  
word by word by word  
and pages will rustle like leaves  
and there will be no need of anything  
—all is said and done—  
and you will be loosed  
to rise and fall at the same time  
as the earth recedes  
you drift higher and are carried South  
while a snow accumulates and whitens  
everything below

*by Gary Beaumier*

## **Bone and Memory**

One of the last soldiers  
of the Great War  
-little more than  
bone and memory-  
prays to his late wife-  
because his  
God was a casualty  
of the trenches.

He yet feels the sweep  
of her hand  
on his shoulders  
when,  
between dreams,  
she checked for him  
in their bed  
to assure herself  
that he really  
returned to her

...and she settled him  
from night terrors  
gathering him to her body  
*The screams of artillery shells*  
*And dying men*

(Men hold so stoic a pose  
until they shatter  
completely)

His milky eyes  
and damaged ears  
have let his mind  
mingle the past and present  
so that to him  
she is still beside him  
while his lips move  
to beseech her  
with a lovers catechism.

“Give me the mercy  
of your touch  
the solace of your breath  
into my breath  
the caress of your voice  
that I may dwell  
In the safety that is you”

Finally a nurse  
presses a straw to his lips  
as 11:11  
marches across  
the face of the clock.

Soon the war will be over.

*by Gary Beaumier*

## Your Red Hair

I hear people often die  
with the television blaring  
maybe half way through  
the 10 PM news  
like when you were about to be born  
and the man on Channel 6  
led a group through exercises  
as I tried to read a biography  
of Georgia O'Keeffe  
and I thought  
*how does this happen—this program that seems to trivialize your birth?*  
and I don't recall one word from  
that book  
but when I saw you the very first time  
and the nurse told me your hair was red  
I was carried on some updraft of purity  
and I forgot about the man doing leg lifts  
and the artist who painted  
flowers so big  
they could almost contain  
all my joy

*by Gary Beaumier*

## **Failure to Thrive**

This road is remembered  
like a young river,  
switchbacks and oxbows,  
and your bare feet on the dash  
while you nursed a Pabst,  
tranced by the wood and  
field whirring by,  
as my battered car  
swayed through another bend  
and chased a sundown up one more hill  
until we climbed a lookout tower  
and you sat on the rail  
one hundred feet up.  
I should have known then  
that one day you'd let yourself fall.

Now this old river runs pretty straight  
and in the half light of a winter's eve  
a lone doe crosses the ice.  
I think she means to remind me of something,  
but I'm long practiced in the art of forgetting.

*by Gary Beaumier*



**Defender of The Herd**  
*by Pieter Lefferts*

## Laniakea

“Everyone finds someone who will say it for them. That is your task, go forth. Have it said to you and say it for someone else. You’re special kid, just not in the pretty way that you think.”

Anthony read from the letter maybe two or three times a day. It slowed his heart when it beat parabolic. There was something left in the words, but David was in fact dead.

Laniakea, meaning immense heaven, was the supercluster of galaxies within which He and formerly David resided. In addition to the Milky Way, there were another hundred thousand galaxies, each containing a hundred billion planets. Planet Earth, weighed down by an immense heaven. Anthony in his room, weighed down by memories that rotated slow and fast, thoughts that raced at bedtime and floated through his soul by seasons. Dirty snowballs that came round uninvited but destined to return and return.

David had a casual base of his palm on the steering wheel and smiled as he looked at Anthony, the two driving to the observatory. The sun was setting, the air conditioner did not work, the road was uneven and rocky, little blue dots of liquid broke past the plastic ring of the mouth of the Gatorade they passed back and forth.

Any decent telescope is a time machine and an awfully charming liar. We are as old as the empty space we can move our outstretched hands through.

David responded to texts less and less, and then died of respiratory failure from acute opioid intoxication. Anthony became cold, distant, and lonely.

The bottom of the letter read: “In your orbit, always. See you soon - David.”

*by Matt Gulley*



**on the road again**  
*by Marcel Herms*



## Dust

This is my dream: Near the house, she feeds on sugar and bits of brown bread. Hunched on the floor, she eats despite the ants on the chair, and now it is my turn. The words come easily: not knowing, not remembering, uncomprehending. The waves: furling, curling, carving, pulling, twisting. My bones: arc along the curve, hollow, bevel, ring, aching, bone, my bone, a bone of salt, water bone, a lever for movement, dense bone, long bone, marrow. My blood: says crystal, says shard, says sharp, says grit. It says slow. It says sludge.

We worked under the house in a hole filled with water. The blocks were heavy, and the house groaned, and my dad's hands were bloody.

Another dream: I asked to be shown the future, and there was boar's fur, thick, wiry, grey and white. The third dream: I asked for a story and heard snuffling, rooting, clawing, through thick mud.

Dead as a doornail, I repeated. Flog a dead horse, I recited. Why was there so much dust?

*by Holly Willis*

## There Is Sitting in the House

there is sitting in the house;  
there is standing on the road;  
there is wading in the cove;  
there is climbing on the big rock;  
there is the sunlight, the moon, the whisper of birds, the  
gloating of crows;  
there is scattered light, the  
    hum hum hum of the forest;  
there is the pile of rocks, a grave;  
the quieting of time and the slowing of breath;  
there is wind fussing through  
    leaves;  
there is a storm and the toppling of trees;  
there is forever in a rock, my hand aging around it;  
there is the tide immutable;  
there is the sky clear as sound;  
there is death and lupine and lily of the valley  
    reminding and remembering;  
there is sound as hollow as a cage;  
there is the remainder and the ghosts;  
there is history and time coddled by ferns and roots;  
there is a deer pointing one hoof into green moss and  
    the owl at the corner turn;  
and sandy grit;  
nothing; and nothing.

*by Holly Willis*



**Untitled**  
*by Anne Cecile*

## **The Star and the Heron**

The woman lived a thousand miles away  
from her family. She wrote letters to  
them often, and posted the replies  
on the back of her bedroom mirror.

Out on the balcony she sees a flash of white-  
it is a heron out on the water,  
searching for signs of life.

In the vast purple sky a white star bursts into flames.

Taking her chances, the woman makes a wish against  
the dark night. Then there is nothing,  
only the sound of the heron calling to its wife  
and children on the far side of the island,  
telling them he will not be home for supper.

*by Apryl Fox*

## Evidence

We tracked in  
muddy footprints

once inside  
we unpacked our pockets

trash and mess left all around

our greasy fingers wiped themselves on silk pillows,  
our ragged nails tore up leather couches  
we left prints on pure white walls and flat screen  
televisions

We left  
Evidence

*by Aviel Prager*

## Resistance

Actually, habibi, I'm going to have to pass on the rent-a-mob recruitment drive, though rumor has it that your busses are amply air conditioned. And just to be perfectly clear, I really don't appreciate being disturbed during my lunch hour while engrossed in my shawarma, whose seasoned lamb, by the way, is to die for, unlike the half-baked aims of your professional rioters en route to the border. For all your talk of "martyrdom", I don't see you personally joining the polluting tire-burners, molotov cocktail throwers, slingers, or knife-wielders who form what those reliably useful idiots of the global media will tonight term peaceful protesters. Why might that be? Look, I enjoy the occasional rage fest as much as anyone, but I can think of a thousand and one better ways to while away a warm afternoon than enlisting in your zombie brigade frothing at the mouth for Yahud blood. Backgammon, for one. You any good? Plus, the football match starts soon. It's Italy's year. Who cares if you can pay cash in Israeli shekels instead of Iranian rials? The irony of that aside, walla, I'd much rather savor this delectable couscous with harissa and postpone my virgin harem for another time, shukran. Pass the tahini, would you? Send my regards to the rabid hooligans on the frontline; no doubt few things are as cathartic as pyromania. Personally, though, I prefer by far getting my kicks from soothing backrubs in the hammam, the music of Cheb Khaled wafting gently in the background. Lovely way to unwind. Listen, you get any tours going to Abu Dhabi or Dubai and, yalla, I'm your man. Hey, is it true your sister Fatima is single again? Someone told me she and Umar finally broke up. Whatever, just asking. No, no, for a friend. Yeah. All right. Fine. Aleikum Salaam.

*by Brandon Marlon*



**Backyard Familiar #4**

*by Mason Bondi*

## Early Morning Drive

All at once, the smell of fresh dead skunk  
permeates the car, so I do the right thing,  
and reach back and pinch closed my daughter's nose.  
Even though, she is too young to associate any particular smell  
I feel as instinctual as the mother bird.  
I am a lioness fending off hyenas, a musk ox amidst a pack of wolves.  
Little baby girl, giggles, twists away, for her it is some sort of game.  
No honey, I want to tell her, this smell is insidious, this smell  
Is acrid, you don't want to smell this, but she has no concept yet  
of even smell itself, so I giggle back, giggle  
until the tears come running down my cheek, until the oncoming headlights blur,  
until the skunk is giggling too.  
I am one again. My father is in the front seat  
tapping his fingers to the beat of "Radar Love."  
I grasp my corduroy lovey tighter. I suck on my paci. The trees are golden in the Autumn light.  
There is no longer smell.  
There is no longer smell at all.

*by Brett Thompson*



## **Fido**

On occasion, the famished dog devoured rotten avocados  
from the blue rubbish bin, slurping them down greedily,  
green, brownish sludge flecked across his grey chin.  
Brains were a treat, if you could source them.  
These days, China had a market on brains  
and his master was without any, so what  
could one dog do? Some nights, he dreamed  
in monochromatic colors of former lives,  
his back left leg twitching, as he warged  
Into old-world wolves, splitting the skulls of roe  
deer and bushy squirrels, flitting his long tongue  
into the recesses for more brains, their nutty essence.  
Look, he is dreaming of running, look  
“how cute”, the humans around him would  
remark to each other as they flicked  
through their Facebook streams and tweeted  
hate filled missives, as they watched the big game  
yelling obscenities at the screen, filaments of Lays  
Barbecue Potato Chips pockmarking their shirtless,  
hairy bellies as they slugged down light beer  
or calorie free tea colored sodas as the men  
on the screen crashed into each other  
over and over again in the dimming light  
like two rutting antelopes, two bull elephants,  
two healthy dogs scrapping over a small, meaningless bone.

*by Brett Thompson*

## WRITING WITH A TODDLER

Biting your little lower lip,  
you scoot, left leg extended,  
brow scrunched, chasing after  
the ball I threw  
because you reclined housecat-styled  
on my journal  
when I was in mid-thought.

You come back to the couch ballless  
but just as determined to climb  
on the couch next to me  
murmuring and horning  
grasping until you make it.

As you walk across the sectional,  
you stop to read these words  
but they look nothing  
like an old lady rabbit  
telling a baby rabbit  
to quit saying good night  
or a group of snugglesauri.

You climb down again  
to find your next mission,  
your next game,  
until you see me  
scribble words again.

*by Casanova Green*

## **Blubber**

I am gaining pounds by the dozen.  
Just yesterday I scarfed down a beluga whale,  
desperate to have her wisdom swimming  
around within my paunchy stomach.  
She guides me toward the water, towards  
Rosemary Beach (a mere hour away driving),  
desperate to float again.

I am afraid to shower because I don't want  
to look at myself,  
I sit on my bed soaking wet for hours in a towel  
staring at my wall and trying to hear  
her voice echo within me.  
Maybe if I listen close enough her wails  
will become decipherable,  
for now they just tell me what I already know.

I pass by a mirror plastered onto the back  
of a door everyday at around 1:50 pm.  
Today I see an x-ray of myself  
peering back at me, whale in stomach.  
She points her fin up towards  
my hollowed out face of bones bones  
bones where all that remains are my bleak red  
nightmare eyes (flashlights in the woods)  
and she bellows a sonar gargle  
that I will try to interpret for the rest of my life.

*by Casey Epstein-Gross*



**Orphan Road**  
*by Henry Stanton*

## **METAMORPHOSIS**

Ascending in rhythmic fabulation  
as we consumed heady leaves of  
life eternal.

Elongating while shedding layers  
as we came in and then slipped out,  
wrapping ourselves in velveteen blankets,  
spinning ceaselessly into a freeing frenzy.

Would we be an amorphous mess,  
with one wrong step to the left, or to the right,  
a bit off balance on a luminous night?

Would I be nothing but a 'pillar  
of tiny wings trapped in human form,  
disintegrating slowly, never to achieve  
a higher state?

They say it takes about 50,000 cells  
to turn into a butterfly.  
You do realize, you found me at 50.

*by Effie Pasagiannis*

## **If We Could Only Slow It Down (A Villanelle)**

If we could only slow it down  
we could dissect the moment into halves  
head to the skies like deer, arms to the ground

We could break apart the mortar's sound  
all to a full stop living off-script,  
if we could only slow it down

Who will be taking off his own crown?  
Let's be done with the vestiges of time,  
head to the skies like deer, arms to the ground

To breathe as if we are no longer bound  
by two masters, we thought we had a choice,  
if we could only slow it down

Not needing to turn those clocks around  
we could release the debts of history,  
head to the skies like deer, arms to the ground

Blood no more remains to be found,  
red is a color painted on canvas,  
if we could only slow it down,  
head to the skies like deer, arms to the ground

*by Effie Pasagiannis*

## **The Apathetic Children**

In a Blue Box  
I will drift silently  
again tonight,  
and tomorrow morning  
and tomorrow afternoon,  
and so on and so on,  
like so many among the thistle of land  
and the kelp of the high seas

My name is Georgi,  
a boy from Russia with gypsy eyes  
you will never get to see  
as I lie in my semi-coffin,  
a protest of body,  
apathetic syndrome they call it in Sweden,  
I give you my life force as  
my parents await for your final yes or no

My name is also Cristina,  
a toddler from Guatemala,  
I am too young to speak,  
I cry instead  
behind a wire fence in a Walmart,  
they try to shush me,  
they say this is not an orchestra,  
and yet the first lady is on her way  
to sing a song about  
summer camps in Disneyland,  
a song I won't understand.

*by Effie Pasagiannis*



**the hand that feeds**  
*by Marcel Herms*



## **I had a conversation with the moon last night**

It was three am, and we were still up talking- laughing at inappropriate jokes with tired voices and sleep blending into the whites of our eyes like paint being mixed before an artist creates her masterpiece.  
By the window, I sat, staring at the moon and its perfect figure, so round and complex with ridges only where meant to be.  
My mind was searching like a lost child for an answer to my happiness, my mind was searching for a reason to be unhappy, but each time it would fail then try again.  
By the fifth time searching, I finally realized that this was what it was like to be ok. This was how it felt to be living for more than sleep at night and empty rooms.  
This is what it feels like when the stars are aligned, and everything is still.  
Tonight the moon asked me how I was feeling and for the first time in forever I said I was doing quite alright.

*by Elissa Cranshaw*

## The Red Earth

It's nice to visit the town you grew up in.  
A granny next door still remembers the Primus stove here;  
Swarthy Oksana holds a cigarette in her mouth;  
a greyhound dances on pine cones,  
as well as a family of manipulative gulls...  
It's nice to live in the town  
where people have no idea of  
hefty houses or vast avenues,  
or different names for aubergines,  
but can easily tell a milky cap from a milky russula.  
Where they cure sour-cream-white tourists' depression  
by prolonged sea-bathing.  
It used to be nice on the island  
when you were nineteen.  
(It's not an island, I know, it has a neck  
if you look from the outside; it had Cahors wine,  
the Vorontsov Palace, waterfalls, and columns.)  
It's nice to stay in the town you are shackled to.  
Here, the trees raised you like a snowdrop flower  
out of the red earth  
and bloody dogwood berries;  
the sun bloomed over your head;  
autumn nursed and cradled you.  
It's nice to visit the town you've dumped.

*by Evgenia Jen Baranova*



**Ignition**  
*by Alexis Avlamis*

## Haunted House

On Saturdays, my father treated us  
to a model kit  
from the hobby section of the  
local store.

My brothers always went for cars  
or planes.  
I went for the monsters,  
This time, Frankenstein's—

its body parts formed of  
plastic and glue—  
the whole deal shrouded in  
glossy enamel.

This time my choice  
came back to haunt me.

*Unable to endure the aspect  
of the being . . .  
unable to compose my mind to sleep*

My howling spooked every room  
in the house  
and my mother's grumbling  
chased Dad and the monster  
down the long, dark hall.

Strangers still hear  
the echoes.

*by Frank William Finney*

## Driving

I'm driving through America with the new app,  
drunk on cheap gas. The screen shows  
things that are not really there: broken down  
cars that have moved on, accidents cleared away.  
I'd like a diachronic driving app: major  
snarls from last week, crises of yester  
millennium. The birth of the Model T.  
The deer that grazed here, one sunset, before  
writing, that was seen by no person, not  
a driving app, a deriving app  
since any road must have started  
with the turn of a single leaf, passage  
for beetle then beaver. The first  
idiot to set foot. Not history  
exactly but causation, I think  
I'd like to see it, just as long as I'm not  
driving, but when I check I find I am.

*by Giles Goodland*

**end**

i dreamed last night that he walked up to me in an unnamed restaurant. took a seat at the table and looked me in the eye and said,

let's talk about your clothes.

years ago i might have listened. might have felt fingers curling around my conscience. might have shifted in my seat, tugged my shirt up a centimeter. but this time i stared through him,

your words will not shape my life again.

and i led him to the exit. i felt the years of shame and repairing and losing those who once held me so close and i thought my gaze might scorch him where he stood, in the frame of a door i was closing.

*by Haley Hulett*



**Blues Pianist**  
*by Dave Sims*

## RO-SHAM-BO

On again, then off—phosphorus  
emits a curious glow, barnacles  
open, shut. Anemones bloom  
with the rise and fall of the sea  
—our own armistice-linked  
hearts tamed in this violet hour.  
Briefly—a still sea, liminal space,  
tentative peace—salt and sand  
observe an intertidal ceasefire—  
evening at the water’s edge.

Sunset magic holds until darkness,  
tides’ turn. I am again ocean—  
vast, frigid, deep. You—treacherous  
coast. I break against your impassive  
body. Daily we play this zero-sum  
game: shifting influence vying  
for mastery over dishes, domestic  
affairs, marriage beds—easy blame.

Indebted to moonrise—I am driven  
against willful margins—shatter  
to salt and foam. But, I will return,  
erode you slowly—shoreline unraveled  
—consumed by unrelenting swells.

*by Christine Darragh*





**Thunderhead**  
*by George Goebel*

## Not-Me

Chris did a lot of daydreaming during classes after he returned to school. When his science teacher talked about bodily functions and showed pictures of internal body parts, he blanched pale then froze with fear. He was certain his classmates were staring at him but he dared not look at them. He imagined they were silently laughing at him. He was alone with a burden of shame.

But, who could he blame? He had lost control of his bodily functions. Only small children and babies do that. If only he had stood up to her. If only he had told the overbearing teacher he needed relief. But he wanted to be the good boy, the obedient one who minded adults and cared about what they needed. He did not want to be like his big brother, breaking rules, being cruel and aggressive. He wanted to stay out of the way, to ensure he wasn't a nuisance.

He had been cowardly, not returning for several weeks to face his classmates. He feigned illness and his doctors complied. But somehow he screwed up enough courage to walk through the big doors again, down the crowded halls and into the too bright classrooms. He wanted to be unseen. How should he act now? How could he act now? Who could he be now? His old self, the happy, spontaneous, full-of-life self was gone.

Before, he was always raising his hand proudly answering questions and making humorous comments. He had felt confident, a regular guy. But now, he sat in silence, scrunched down like a smashed toad, never raising his hand to answer questions.

“What are the parts of the digestive system?” Miss Bright asked. Chris did not hear the answer or know who gave it. He went inside himself, fleeing from the classroom. He saw himself running down the hallway to the boys room, hunkering up to the urinal, then pissing all over the walls with pleasure.

“What is the term used to describe the movement of food through our digestive system,” was her next question. Chris’ shameful self reappeared into the room when he heard the loud laughter in response to David’s answer, “paralysis”. He wanted to punch this big lout who had kept smiling at him while he had sat with his head on his desk hiding from everyone. And he dared not to make himself obvious now. This was not who he was now. He had to hide himself somehow. How could he be now? He was shame now.

Mrs. Simpson smiled at him, “Welcome back Chris. We missed you. I hope you’re feeling better.” Chris turned pale, then flushed. Mrs. Simpson began reading to the class: “Pip sat quietly as Mrs. Havisham looked at him with a discerning stare, as if she could see into his soul”. Chris reacted to this passage with overwhelming anxiety which took him to a safer place, a place only he knew, a place no one could invade:

*Sitting by the spring, he watched the clear water flow, the water spiders floating in peace, a wren’s friendly song and the minnows mouthing the green moss.*

He returned to the room when he heard Ms. Simpson’s soothing voice again, “We can all identify with Pip and his struggles to become who he was meant to be.”

“Are we meant to be someone?” Chris thought. “Who am I meant to be, now. Now that who I was is gone?”

He had always been fearful of showing aggression. He did not want to be like his older brother who was mean to him. Chance was big and strong and aggressive and became the captain of the football team. But Chris’ role was to be compliant and compassionate.

“Be mother’s helper,” she had said. His job was to take care of her. Lying on the sofa, she cried a desperate wail, “Oh, oh, my heart’s beating,” and held both hands over her heart, breathing heavily. He was frightened. It was his job to save her, make her feel better, make sure she was happy. He ran to his sister.

“Mother’s heart is beating.”

“It’s supposed to beat,” his sister replied as if she didn’t care.

He was supposed to take care of his heartless teacher’s needs like he was supposed to take care of his mother’s beating heart. He hadn’t the voice to tell the oppressor he needed relief. That’s not who he was.

*by J. Grant*

## The Salt Lick

Choose me  
like I chose you all those years  
ago, like we chose to spend that weekend  
at the bottom of a lake that dried up  
fourteen thousand years ago past  
somewhere between Utah and Nevada, Mountain  
and Pacific, temples  
and brothels, God  
and the ungodly. We drove since dawn  
just to see the salt flats and then,  
afterward,  
after the Boise police searched the car  
and found a fixed blade instead of weed, after  
the disappointing diners and the ice cream  
shaped like baked potatoes. After the porn-soaked  
hotel room with mirrors on the ceiling we tucked  
down into a truck stop cantina—heavy  
horses with feedbags, one chile relleno  
after another. I felt the heat in my throat  
and the slick on my lips, but I just kept tasting  
the salt of when I'd pretended I didn't notice  
you taking photo after photo on the flats. Me, barefoot,  
bending and licking  
the brittle white salt from some prehistoric lake.

*by Jessica Mehta*

## I WANTED TO BE SAD

& instead drew a diagram  
of a birthday kiss: a chipped gap,

the Beartooths & chapped lips  
all plainly labeled. Help me,

I've fallen. Hold me, little  
three full decades of some fine

someone. Little muddy pond woman.  
Yes, we're odd systems of difference.

I'm under other ozone, pushing forks  
into your favorite bad chorus,

exposing its most tender note &  
eating peanut butter, wanting

to write that same one someone  
a love poem: guardrails

zipped our narrow timezones  
open. World, roll over.

Play dead for just a moment.

*by Joseph Johnson*



**After the Storm**  
*by J. Ray Paradiso*

## La Cravate

Forever transported, the day I learned my dad had died. Even though he was ill & anyway, isn't death always expected. Still, grief is a stun gun—front & center between the eyes. I fly into a cloud in the air. My mother & sister pick me up on land. (My sister and I had been estranged, but silver threads now tie us back together, like the lining of some unseen coat, vast as the sky, or those ties that bind—the way that old hymn says.)

In the car, there is unexpected talk of Charon carrying souls across the Styx. My sister, driving, cranes her neck to look at me. My mother—tiny passenger, knot of desperation in her throat. In their home, his presence everywhere: shoes & jazz, pills to fix him, the last necktie he wore. I take that tie when I leave, without asking my mother. I have to have it: striped diagonal lines. Silk in dark colors. Nothing more.

(I have to say, if this poem were a sonnet, there would be something tying all of these verses together, in an effort at dressing them up, right here.)

*by Julia Knowlton*



## Postcards from Paris

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I bring my pain here, to feel it. To walk on smooth, apple-sized cobblestones. How they soothe. And the food, and the *chocolat chaud*. Music everywhere: jazz and solo cello and rap. But don't get me wrong. The same suffering is here: heartbroken people never getting what they need. It's just that at dusk, in the dark pink air, the swallows tell each other once again what they know. Then the toy boat vendor packs up his cart in the Jardin du Luxembourg. Footsteps across grass. There is no better color than everyone falling silent. Wish everyone were here.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I remain too afraid to descend into the Catacombs. Who can fathom the dark and damp? I hear that people arranged skulls into a huge heart shape, kept in place by stacks of tibias. (This was hundreds of years ago.) Cavernous palette of grey and white; holes for eyes. Holes never stop watching: beggar, thief, prostitute, prince. I think I'll wait a while for shades and bones. Better to stroll up here, near the Seine and toll of bells, to taste a hint of ash in fresh air. I might walk in a garden so large. Or send this, and wish you were here. Now the rose beginning of rain.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

All I want is to find my place on a green velvet bench inside *La Contrescarpe*, then slowly make my way toward the Pont Royal. That sweep of stone over the river, like a gown. Scent of Normandy butter in the air. People wide-eyed. It is so crucial to save up enough to fly.

*by Julia Knowlton*

## Revenge for the Bench

My shady path with the shaggy cracks  
Full of overpriced grass  
And the warm wooden bench  
And the unlikely sidewalks

That bench was *mine*  
Upon which to bud my ears  
My mind to wander  
Repetitive melody  
And pen meander

But I bleed into a tree trunk  
The first time I see him  
Slowly  
So as not to excite the eye  
Just like prey  
Then peek  
Just to be sure

Because I refuse to seep  
Into tree bark  
For no good reason

Tree bark that should otherwise be pulp  
Pulp that should otherwise be paper  
Paper I should bleed bright red revenge upon

Despairing as I am  
For a ghosted crumb of validation  
To un-skin-crawl  
This as-old-as-papyrus violation

So vile an excuse for a human  
His face will pretend so well to be wounded  
For the whole wide world

But sharp triumph  
Like the anvil that anchors you in the muck

While you drown in dirty water

Just for me  
Whenever there is a convenient  
Lack of on-looking  
*You know you wanted it*

In the tile-cracked shower  
And everywhere else on this fracturing planet  
Where the concept of fight or flight  
Is an insult to all of us who freeze

I think I see him everywhere  
And then I DO see him everywhere  
I can never fully inhale anymore  
But this time I speak

*by Lauren Frausto*

## Escapism

My most merciful slave driver survival mechanism  
Where I am unobjectionably objectified to perfection  
Humbly unaware of all that I am

I'm concerned that I am Mother fucking Teresa  
In blood red lingerie made all the worse with lace  
Baking a cake  
And eating it with bliss dripping all over my face

Anything to opt out of the doubt!  
This thirsty lack of trust in my gut  
The everlasting never enough  
While I glance askance at a God that mocks,  
"But I thought you said that you liked it rough."

*by Lauren Frausto*

## The Circle

Life's capability to come closest to a tactical infinity. Owning a circle. Finding finiteness. The circle outlines an act of certainty so important it cannot be undone.

Example, see: Wedding rings, and the circles of the corpus that are captured in coitus, and the deepest of fire pits, and the lick of mouths with painted lips.

All of these circles: they take shape—no beginning, no end.

I stare down at my wedding ring, and the one below it, with its heartbreakingly shiny, stone gleaming at me. A glory of life's most simple riches.

Love.

Representing the promise I made, the unending oath. Spinning the ring on my finger, the silver moves in on itself until the cycle completes and begins again, the metal smooth, round, unbroken, seemingly and simply just swallowing any bumps it may hit.

Like an Ourboursous, this circle, is is a metalically forged oath of promise: it never ends.

Here, I see our circle reach for the horizon, and then return home and then reach back again.

Roundly so it spans the earth, and I see it touch the horizon line, called a boundary circle by sailors.

And these are, or seem to be the things that matter most. The circle is always a thing that protects, and entraps. It beholds, seizes, and ensnares. The duende is done once you enter.

Deep in the pit, she was mired in flesh, which we all know too well—trenching in and out, digging at the rim, nails clawed and clinging ring deep in.

*by Addison Dean*

Ouroboros:

“Word”: a unit of speech used to form verbal or written narrative.

Origin of “Word”: Verbum (Latin),

Woord (Dutch),

Wort (Germanic)

Logos (God; see; the  
word of man).

“To Love” (noun, verb); related to or  
meaning an intense feeling for  
someone or some thing.

Origin of “Love”: Old English,  
Germanic, rooted in the Words: To Leave.

“To Leave” (verb);  
meaning to depart from someone or  
something.

Origin of “To Leave”: Old english,  
rooted in the words; Permission, and  
To Love.

*by Addison Dean*



**Maria**

*by Kevin Healey*

## LENORE

Call me Lenore. It's more fitting than the name my parents pressed upon me, in haste, after my mother's thirty-six hours of labor and my father's subsequent proposal.

They met when my father got into what Grandmother termed a "scrape" at a public house, as Saturday's eve submitted to Sunday. My mother (the would-be chanteuse), ordered her Goliath of a brother home, thus preventing my father from having a second shoulder dislocated. My father was duly, if not inordinately, grateful. They "stepped out" (perhaps with more deceit than stepping involved) until their mutual disdain superseded the novelty of their acquaintance. My mother, finding herself (one uncomfortable Wednesday) on the wrong end of the saint-and-sinner pendulum while bringing forth my unwanted self, accepted him with, "Well, needs must." Thus cementing, until one decease or another, our mutually unsympathetic triumvirate.

While my mother entertained at the decrepit café by warbling murder ballads in her faulty contralto, my father lurched from pub to work and back again, with the occasional bare-knuckle bout in between. I spent my earliest seasons buried in their twinned unhappiness, clawing my way toward the light and air, from beneath the stifling soil in which I had taken root.

Predictably I discovered books, and found solace among forgotten volumes: the ancients, the classics, and – later – horror-romances on moldering shelves. Heathcliff waltzing with Catherine's corpse never failed to steal my breath. I mentioned that scene to my parents: my mother blanched; my father blasted my reading "sacrilegious garbage". I found few sympathetic souls at the neighborhood school, and invented my own quaint companions, to pass the hours.

I was relieved rather than gratified to obtain a university scholarship, hoping *there* my predilections for macabre poetry and the obscure arts might prove less uncongenial than at home. I enrolled in a course called "The



Philosophy of Literature” or “The Literature of Philosophy” – it doesn’t matter – what *was* important was a dark-haired, almost tubercular young man turning to me during a discussion on heuristics for distilling the principles of exceptional moral writers and asked, without preamble, “Do you think a marriage of true minds can fuse two souls?”

Shakespeare. Metaphysics. Love.

Jane Eyre face-to-face with the specter could not have been more taken aback; my only response was, “If they were two fine minds – two pure spirits – and two twin souls – then yes.”

“And if one died?” he demanded.

“The other’s heart would soon cease to beat.”

Some slight flush illuminated his porcelain cheek. “Yes – united in catastrophe.”

“Edgar!” the professor snapped; this interruption was a little death. He spoke no more. His gaze seemed to lay far beyond – an ancient savant piercing clouded mortal mysteries. I did not disturb him. But I discovered him also in my chemistry class; through the sulfurous and ammoniac haze, his burning-steel eyes found mine. I held up test tubes, murmured, “Imagine if these toxins ate through the glass...the floor...everything...and we simply – dissolved...”

He nodded. “An elegant end.”

We walked through the fading willows despite the autumnal chill, and meandered through the graveyard, spotting cenotaphs of doomed young lovers and veiled suicides. We nestled within a yew’s rotting branches, where we traded visions of our eventual ends over a stale bun. I saw immoderation in his palm as he handed me my crust, but could not educe whether the lines shaded toward a zenith, or a nadir.

In the literature course he was the first to respond to the professor’s polemics, drawing examples of the principled man from a breathtaking array of sources – luminous mythologies and the gnostics, the ancient Greeks and the Ramayana; the wise Chinese and the humblest of the Grimm

Brothers' stories...there was no single thread, but rather a tessellation – a multidimensional masterpiece in prose. Despite my classmates' base cynicism and cavalier sneers, I intuited that this Edgar had been touched with more than the usual share of the divine.

The tutor sniped, “Dare anyone *else* venture an opinion?” I pitied his pedestrian jealousy.

“Do you think Hades and Persephone had a true marriage, in the end?” I asked, later that afternoon. We were lying in sandy twin hollows at the lake's edge, dressed in melancholy monochrome; it was a clammy, cloudy day, and the wind conjured dirges through the reeds.

He pondered the question; he mussed his hair as if the motion would conduct critical voltage. “I think it was probably cordial,” he said. “But ultimately unequal. He must have adored her – but she never sought to be Queen of the Dead.”

“No,” I mused. “Perhaps not. But she may have found some surcease of her sorrows, in knowing she brought comfort to the damned.”

He extracted a flask – absorbed a bolt so quickly I barely registered it – and replied, “She beguiled him. He would have given anything – *all* – to prevent her from leaving.” We pricked our fingers with his knife, mingling our scarlet blood, pledging to honor one another. Always.

In those better moments, I was his rare and radiant maiden.

So as autumn faded into bleak December, I was lost and found in equal measure; enrapt in a previously unfelt mortal thrill. We met in the library vault during those icy weeks, away from the madding holiday décor and raving gaiety. A flash of flask. We read Byron's elegy to his sleeping beloved, and Edgar mused, “Every night has been a torment since I met you.”

The cold corners of my lips lifted a little.

He recited some of his works for me; the sublime

infused with a dazzling hint of lunacy; it gave his pieces an esoteric and paradoxical air, an inverted consciousness...

And I – equally immoderate – brought him to meet my parents, who, in their implausible schemes to line their pockets, had stationed us a hair’s breadth from the breadline. They offered a beggar’s banquet: a stringy rooster, limp vegetables. The company was just as unpalatable; my parents alternately beetled their brows and failed to stifle their cawing laughter.

I caught just two words of their rare companionate interchange: “...mad puppy!”

Edgar’s genius was to them as impenetrable as a bust of Pallas in a museum – a gleaming artefact whose solemn derivation eluded them; derision was their refuge. I left them to their ungainly Sunday manners as he and I, in stately jet plumage, strode into the twilight, heeding their prattle as little as we might that of a murder of crows. “We could go to my house,” he muttered; but as my other option was going home, I accepted. The flash flared against the night.

His house was an ugly box, with pretensions to the grandeur of a spent age. The cleaning-woman went about her business with clockwork inevitability. I looked my question.

“My parents are dead,” he said.

“I’m sorry.”

“My mother hanged herself. My father wasted his life – and our accounts – in drink.”

I was chary of repeating myself, so I simply looked up – at those hypnotic eyes beneath a magnificent marble brow...I marveled at this fantastic man –

He said, “These weeks have been a dream.”

*That* was the very word; for where else but in the mists of slumber can a desolate creature hope to find her match, her absent balm, a fit for the ragged edges of her soul?

“There is only one thing missing,” he said. “I know

we will explore every crevice and horizon of the sublime –” He touched my cheek, and I shivered – “but how can we aspire to union, if we leave the darkness untouched? I don’t want only a half-life with you...”

We launched the smallest of experiments. He pinched me, painfully. I slapped him, equally. He twisted my arm behind me and sank his teeth into the flesh of my neck, and I cried out, *yes*. “The housekeeper will hear,” he would warn – and then, again, the flash. The spell was broken; we descended to the library. He provided pen and paper; we set down our weary hearts.

And so a hoary January went; we shared no classes, and seemed to orbit distantly... continually at apogee. His flask emptied and refilled; our explorations of the *obscure face* of our two-headed coin grew darker. His insults, wrought with precise fire, cut deeper than a blade: in the space of a single breath, I devolved from seraph to succubus. In this half-universe, I was a leaf, a thin page on which he set down explosive exaltation or incurable damnation.

I began another literature course – one centered on the divine, and my dashing professor tended the fires of Dante and Milton as a devout vestal. I produced an essay on the theme of duality – pretentious – trite – and true. He asked me to stay after class, called me a *rara avis*.

Edgar scorned my meretricious heart, warmed by a “hackneyed” sentiment from “an unctuous peacock” – and I, summoned once more back to reality, turned to follow. We walked beneath the darkling clouds and blighted trees; I shook out the accordion pleats of my cheap umbrella, but the wicked wind reversed and rent it: it was a raven with a broken wing. The miserable rain soaked through my coat, weighing down the heavy velvet folds of my dress.

We arrived at his house – we spotted the cleaning lady napping in the library – and, without a word, we moved together as if entranced...mounting to the attic, with its raw rafters.

And there, forming a teardrop in the center of the

room, was a noose. I set my chin just inside, perching on my toes, on the edge of the last precipice. “I love you,” he said.

Our eyes met.

“That which does not kill us, makes us stronger,” he said, and pressed his lips to mine. I was soaring, then suffocating; I was aloft with the angels; I was exploding out of this world and hurtling into the next –

*I am a rare bird, I thought, I want to fly.* And I extricated myself from the snare: “No!”

“No?” he sneered – scornful, and perhaps insane...

“No.” I tasted the word; it had a faint earthy tang – sharp, bitter...strong. “No, I won’t.”

He reached for me – thinking of conciliation? or murder? – but, bending only to retrieve my damaged umbrella as a last-resort weapon, I flew from that house, forever.

Far enough away, I – feeling my warm blood coursing through my veins – shook off my drenched coat and black dress, revealing the scarlet slip beneath. I was an aeriël danseuse, tracing a romantic Viennese waltz in the street...just my umbrella and I. And I vowed, then and there: “I shall be beholden to his madness –

– nevermore!”

*by Linda McMullen*



**Backyard Familiar #5**  
*by Mason Bondi*

## The Question

Weeks after the ceremony,  
she enters the storage room  
where he stands, head bent  
toward tiny rails,

model trains lined up for travel.  
Plastic cows pose on pine boards,  
wait for lime green grass,  
sprinkles of glittered dirt.

Moving between boxes  
of unopened wedding gifts,  
she asks about his plans for the day,  
turns to see a three foot plank fly

past her head. His cold eyes stare  
as wood slams  
against cardboard,  
shatters glass.

She shivers  
in the after draft of air,  
backs out the door,  
doesn't wait for an answer.

*by Linda Wimberly*

## The Perseids

The Perseids will be  
Visible tonight  
If your sky is  
As clear as mine--  
They'll look like  
The sparklers  
We played with  
As kids running in  
Zigzag streaks  
Across the backyard  
Each one of us  
A comet---  
If your sky  
Is as clear as mine  
You'll hear children's  
Voices curling to  
The Doppler effect  
As each one shoots  
Toward outer darkness--  
If your  
Sky is as clear  
As mine  
You may even see  
That fleeting face  
Halfwit with mischief  
And sulfur  
As I see yours  
Aged nine or ten  
When like the sons  
And daughters of  
Father Perseus we  
Too were immortal  
In the slow myth of  
The summer night

*by Luke Powers*



## **Baby Snake**

Jackie called me  
Downstairs  
To the garage  
Quick  
There's a snake  
I slip on shoes  
And arm myself  
Grabbing the lone  
Crutch that's been  
Leaning in a kitchen  
Corner for no  
Discernible reason  
A nice one  
Titanium silver  
With thick foam  
Padding  
As close to a  
Snake stick as  
I'll get  
Jackie is trapped  
In a fascination  
The little fellow  
Is less than  
A foot long  
No wider than  
A pencil  
I urge him to  
Freedom  
With my  
Instrument  
But he turns  
Curls back  
On himself  
And hisses  
With his tiny  
Black tongue  
He's too small  
But still fearsome

I keep nudging  
But his suppleness  
Resists simplicity  
As we angle toward  
The aggregate driveway--  
With the heat and  
Sunlight he's anxious  
To avoid  
I push too hard  
"Don't kill him!"  
Jackie insists.  
Meanwhile he's  
Wrapping around  
The head of my crutch  
I'm no Woodman  
Of the World but  
With his brown splotchy  
Back and diamond head  
He looks like a rattler  
To me  
A baby, I figure,  
Too little for a rattle  
Jackie doesn't believe me:  
"Don't smush him!"  
He's hissing like a devil  
Rearing up  
Spitting  
He'd be a real bastard  
If he were full grown  
I shake him  
off the crutch  
And sweep him  
Toward the tall grass  
Of the neighbors lawn  
Now I'll have to  
Think twice  
Every time I  
Mow the yard  
Or trim hedges

Because he's  
Growing out there  
Getting big on  
Field mice small birds  
Whatever he can  
Strike with his venom  
And swallow whole  
I could have killed him  
Too easily  
But you can't  
Kill everything you fear  
I hang my crutch  
On a hook  
In the garage  
In anticipation  
Of our  
Next encounter.

*by Luke Powers*

## Nature

Some motherfucking  
Woodpecker won't  
Shut up  
It's 5 a.m.  
And he's been at it  
For at least a couple hours  
Tap-tap-tapping  
Like a morbid thought scratching  
Against the inside of my skull  
I'm a live-and-let-live guy  
Normally--  
But right now I want to  
Go to work on the woods  
Behind the house  
That I've let run riot  
In some Taoist fantasy  
The ground dominated  
By low scrub and creeping  
Vines slung like razor wire  
From trunk to limb  
Withered like last witnesses  
The Trees dying or dead  
Like the one Mr. Pecker  
Has got nose into  
Scrounging for termites  
I'd take my tree trimmer  
With its curved and jagged blade,  
I use my hacksaw, whatever's handy,  
Even the rusty woodhandled ax  
Hanging on a nail in the garage  
Like a crucified thief  
Waiting finally for action  
I will whirl dervishly  
Swinging like Ming the Merciless  
Hacking, lopping, clearing . . .  
I don't want to kill  
The little bastard  
I just want him to move on

Maybe to a tree  
A dozen houses down  
So that tap-tap-tapping  
Will dissolve in the cover  
Of blessed white noise  
Courtesy my beautiful box fan  
Will I regret it?  
Am I a bad person?  
Will innocent trees suffer  
For the actions of one  
Demonical creature?  
Yes, yes, yes  
But right now I'm ready  
To kneecap Wordsworth  
And chase Thoreau screaming  
Into the scum of Walden pond  
He wants to face  
"The essential facts of life"?  
I'll go King Kong  
On his skinny white ass--  
That'll show him.

*by Luke Powers*



**Jazz Bistro**  
*by Michelle Brooks*

## The Wedding

A few years ago Colin took Rachel to the wedding of his first college girlfriend, Juliet Levin. The wedding took place outside Boston and the ceremony was very nice but there was one thing that irritated him and that was when the maid of honor gave her speech about Juliet and how she had met her husband Raymond (Ray) Lin in college, she didn't mention Colin in connection with Juliet, even indirectly as in "Juliet had a few boyfriends before she met Ray, but Ray was *the one*, you could tell right away." Instead, the maid of honor said that Juliet met Ray at the beginning of college and fell in love with him and that was that—they had some tests to their relationship and whatnot but they held intact all four years. It was as though the maid of honor, Kristin Chen, had excised Colin from the history of Juliet's life. Which was not entirely accurate. Colin and Juliet had dated the fall of their freshman year—in many respects they had developed together during that impressionable time. Actually, Juliet had gone through as many as four phases of personality and career-orientation, which is normal for young people who are still malleable and learning what is most essential to know about themselves. When they first started dating, Juliet was religious, almost devout. She was technically Presbyterian but she didn't know much about it. So instead she went to a "high church" style Episcopal church where you had to genuflect—she liked it so much she stayed for the social hour right after the service and made friends with a few young men who behaved and dressed like missionaries. By sophomore year, she discovered she was agnostic and officially switched her major from English to Biology. Before that, Juliet had wanted to major in English and gave every indication of becoming an English professor, one who would wear loose-fitting, autumnal-colored clothes with clashing floral and animal-skin patterns. This particular phase—the phase of being interested in Chaucer and Beowulf and Montaigne's essays—lasted only one semester. By spring, Juliet was already doubling up on science classes and keeping meticulous color-coded notecards with lithographic renderings of organic and inorganic compounds—she memorized every card. A third phase involved championing women's rights

through small scale activism including protests and marches which Colin still occasionally learned about since Juliet included him in her email chains even after they broke up. They were still friends throughout college—they just didn't speak for the five months right after their breakup. In those five months, Juliet hooked up with a pot-head named Orion and yearned to go on a road trip through South America. Her last phase of college was a sudden interest in the sports that Ray played. On fall afternoons, she could be seen tossing a baseball or softball or frisbee on the quad. At 7 or 8 o'clock she could be seen heading to the gym with Ray and his dormmates for a game of basketball. After they graduated, she studied to be a psychiatrist and Colin was certain she went through even more phases, one of which was penning long emails to him about the need for "balance" and "mental health" vis a vis a significant other. Nevertheless at the wedding, Colin was left out of Juliet's life, though it was perfectly understandable that no one would mention the names of Juliet's and Ray's ex-boyfriends and ex-girlfriends at the celebration of their nuptials. But afterward, Colin was disoriented and (unusually for him) depressed. He shook hands with Ray. Juliet complimented Rachel on her dress. When they got back to their hotel it wasn't late. Colin drank a Sprite in a glass with ice and watched the movie *Memento* on TV with commercial breaks while Rachel read a paperback book she'd bought at Penn Station and he fell asleep with the dull sense that he'd accomplished a task.

*by Will Clattenburg*



## **In the Harriet Tubman Home**

With twenty-first century aplomb  
and baby girl in arms, I approach  
a White model sewing machine  
that glows like a worn altar  
and gaze out a window through  
the loose bunting of pale green sun.  
Across ungroomed grounds  
chain gangs of summer shuffle  
through glad eruptions of tiger lilies.  
Savaged orange safety mesh  
and steel poles angled like black bones  
cordon off the archeological dig  
where Syracuse University,  
our guide Christine says, is scavenging  
for God knows what.

A blond boy in our group swings  
his forearm cast like a ragged messenger  
bearing the gift of heaviness.  
Rank-and-file sinners,  
we board the pale blue shuttle bus  
to our final comeuppance  
as the driver commiserates  
with the boy's scruffy dad  
over the dangers of skateboards  
then describes the blackout fits  
a teenage Harriet entered  
when she said the voice of God  
told her where and when to go.

On the way to the Seward Mansion,  
the hoarse intercom asks  
if there are any questions.  
Can you have a memory of something  
you never experienced?  
Why else the chiseled conviction  
that my child and I worshipped  
in the solid pews of the A. M. E. Zion Church

and wandered the misty hummocks  
of Fort Hill? From the muddy shell  
of a giant turtle did we watch  
Sky Woman plummet and give birth  
to twin sons, Sapling and Flint?  
When will we harbor our fugitive woes  
and from the museums of our homes summon  
those who come to hear what God knows?

*by Matthew James Babcock*

## **adolescence**

this tree blooms  
branch by branch  
each bud, chatoyant like  
a drop, balanced upon an eyelash  
but falling  
is inevitable.

*by Mela Bust*

## **red earth**

I dreamt of a prairie where the rain  
burned our skin  
nectar dripped from my nipples  
the blood to feed me was  
the same as the dirt in my teeth  
red earth where  
bare feet failed us  
and we fell.  
when the dawn pried my eyes open  
my body found yours and then  
the dream was just a taste in my mouth  
replaced with desperate air from  
your lungs,  
reassurance that we are still  
alive.

*by Mela Bust*

## **sadness**

you were all soft lines  
I remember you would walk the beach,  
bare feet tickling the sand  
you were free with words  
home to a smile  
now you are sharp edges  
a kingdom of blood  
a place where a wound can fester  
until the flies pour forth

*by Mela Bust*



**Inlet Reflections**  
*by Pieter Lefferts*

## **Philistia**

Her skateboard moldered into pulp for a reason  
in a broken month at the end of Cadillacs.  
Then Grandma came along and blew up the whole universe.  
Try my wedding ring on through a bucket of gulls.

*by Miles Mattix*

## **Frontman**

A tight denim pleasure to the emergency room  
must have bilged all my belongings in the air  
between a remedial alphabet  
the cats licked off the floor to cook at me  
down a side aisle, sour in the valley of slobs.  
The cherries of the choke just jellied on the report card  
my gullet cord suspended down a flat tire roar.

*by Miles Mattix*

## Vacancy

The day I got into the white van  
in the parking lot of the mental hospital  
with the man I sometimes  
saw in the store,  
I climbed into the passenger seat,  
he took me to the train station.

Two miles,  
tinted windows, an empty  
windowless back.

He did what he said.  
I didn't have shell out for a taxi,  
got to my train in time,  
sat on the blue seat still intact.

Often, I did this.  
Get into cars with men.  
Walk around the neighborhood  
half naked all night  
hoping for a bite.

Loneliness is a peculiar feeling.  
Giving every inch of myself to the world,  
waiting to be caught in a snare,  
hoping someone would touch  
anything at all.

Safely get where I'm going.

Return to my empty room,  
knowing even the worst  
felt they could do better.

*by Nina Robins*

## Quiet Car

I'm in the quiet car,  
commuters tired and pre coffee,  
haven't finished sleeping,

so when the retching  
began it was audible.  
At first no one getting up to change cars,

eyes zooming in on screens,  
books, Kindles,  
as the projectile vomiting echoed.

Finally two people left, some stared  
at the occupied light,  
10 minutes passed, 20,

not knowing if death was in the car,  
some incurable disease.  
Finally a woman the color

of the walls emerged,  
stumbling into the next car.

And then silence. Heartbeats.  
Back to the screens.

A woman purging her life into a train toilet  
forgotten in the announcement for  
Grand Central.

Memory erased  
as the noises of our days  
were waiting on the stairs.

*by Nina Robins*





**Re-imagining Gulliver's' Travels**  
*by Alexis Avlamis*

## **Rec**

My son now jumps into the town pool  
with shouts of "Iraqi torpedo incoming"  
but at least he's learning to swim.

We live in a town so blue that my husband gets looks  
when he parks his truck within fifty yards of the store.  
My own theory is that tolerance adjusts to its own limitations.

At dinner we spend hours bringing conversations to a culmination  
that we could have predicted by noon  
and then hang rags of wife-beaters on upturned buckets  
because we alone know how little we care.

*by Paul Reynolds*

## Showing Light

Then the pounding began. Stalks of millet in mortars shed their husks under the long pestles raised and hammered down by women in all the quarters of the village. Without words, the rhythms said to one another, Good Morning. Good Morning. Good Morning. Until, obsessively, I couldn't stop repeating good morning good morning good morning. The millet cobs removed from the mortar, the dried grain was pounded into flour, cooked in water, and swelled into paste that was swallowed without chewing. But I couldn't eat it any longer. The porridge would go into my lungs. I would drown in Africa of millet porridge.

I'd been flying on auto-pilot, neither fully aloft nor solidly on the ground. The higher I got, the harder I fell each night. If it showed on the outside, no one noticed. Inside, I followed the motions of everyday life, unconscious and uncaring. I wanted to talk in English. I needed to be steered back onto the track I'd jumped,

Conversations with sculptors and blacksmiths filled my days. I slept little and dreamed of falling and burning, and of drowning, of Arnold. Bouts of malaria meant low-grade fever, dehydration, a persistent sweat, kidney pain, and paranoia about the world around me with on and off delirium. Had I actually seen a man's face looking in from outside my second-story window?

One morning I awoke thinking I should steal some fire and boil away the water filling my room. My room on the second floor of a mud-brick structure had a small window in the mud wall overlooking the plateau before the cliff. I had to sear the algae and evaporate the moisture so I wouldn't drown in my sleep. It hadn't rained, really rained, in many months. The irony of a second-story drowning in a drought didn't entirely escape me, yet my thoughts, when I was lucid enough to worry about them, appeared to me quite reasonable.

I sat one night in my room and watched mildew crawl up the blue-painted mud walls. It left brown stains in its wake, and I would have sworn I smelled its musty odor. When its advance toward the ceiling stopped, a line snaked around the circumference of the room, a loopy sine wave of algae high on all four walls. The wave encircled the room a foot short of the ceiling, and I was having trouble breathing, as if I were underwater, the surface above me choppy, the swells pushing me around on the sea floor of my hay mattress. I was drowning. I looked down at my notebook and wrote over and over the word “drowning,” experimenting each time with the letter g, widening the loop while pulling the corners of my mouth back, letting the loop hang open while I let my jaw drop.

I had expected to spend evenings with my notebooks, pouring over the bones of interviews, filling in spaces among the nouns, coaxing penetrating insights from between the lines. Instead, my evenings filled with fear and anxiety, my dark nights with claustrophobia and brackish water.

The mornings opened with women, always women. From my window, I watched them go to their small gardens beyond the village perimeter. I saw them walk from their compound walls, slip past one another, the only sound that of babies demanding a nipple. These women came and went before dawn. They squatted in the fields and then visited the granaries.

After two days of not using my morning wash water, of not coming out of my room, one of the children knocked at my door.

“Madame Rachelle?”

“Oui?” Yes. “Je suis là.” I’m here, I said. But I wasn’t. Not fully.

“Ça va?” Are you alright?

“J’écris.” I am writing.

That wasn't her question and my answer was a lie. I lay on my bed in a state of panic and hadn't written a word in a week. How quickly it happened, this spiral downward that gained momentum and careened unstoppably. At home this would have invited intervention. I had no one to intervene, and it took another week before some profound survival impulse, a self-preservation gnawing inside my chest, pulled me up, packed my things, and propelled me down from my room into the open space where the women cleaned soil off onions and children played with sticks. I left my bags at the foot of the steps and walked toward the charcoal smell of the cooking fire.

"Bonjour Maman," Good morning mother, I said to the senior among them. "Tous mes mamans," All my mothers, I added.

They must have noted my sweat, my flushed cheeks, and understood. "My voyage here has finished." I mopped my upper lip, my neck, and I smiled at them. "Thank you from my heart." I held my hand over my chest, then handed an envelope with an extra week's rent to the woman who always took charge. The brood of youngsters curious for I rarely sat with the women.

My demeanor was enabled by a lifetime of successful play-acting. My innards could have been twisted into a knot complicated enough to baffle a sailor, but my outwards would show, "Hey, it's nothing." That ruse made possible a ride out of Sanga – it took only half a day at the campement to find a way back to Bandiagara. A driver had a seat vacant. I grabbed at the chance and, by night, I was drinking mineral water in the Bandiagara campement courtyard. Except for the hum of flying insects, I was relieved to be out in the open, to breathe. I was on the threshold of a way home.

After two days of paying for a room in Bandiagara and no cars driving through, I was fevered and hallucinating, sweating, waiting, feeling the skin on my face itch, my whole

body damp and itching. The third morning I woke early after a night of loud dreams. I peered up at the thatch roof and saw millions of insects, looked at the walls and could see through them to the outside. A mouse ran along the floor. It stopped, looked at me lying under the mosquito net, and it said, “Good Morning, Good Morning, Good Morning.” Or maybe what I heard was the sound of women pounding millet. I couldn’t tell. My African French wouldn’t come out right. I stalked around in a rage and couldn’t talk. I was angry with the heat and humidity, with the oncoming rains. I wanted to turn on a tap and drink water without adding iodine. I wanted to stop taking ineffective Malaria medicine. I wanted the deep cut in my leg and my scabbed mosquito bites to heal. I wanted my scalp clean and to scrub my feet and wear shoes other than rubber flip-flops. I wanted something, and maybe not even these things, maybe something else.

A Malienne, an elegant young woman, wife of the proprietor, floated around the campement in a brown gauzy sheath with a five-foot-long green American dollar bill printed diagonally across her body, front and back. At first, I laughed. But later, it, too, made me furious, for the image grew more and more perverse – the almighty dollar. Was this what mattered? I had to get out.

The next morning, seeing her vehicle, I followed an Aid worker out of the campement into the open square under the Mulberry tree.

“Please,” I begged. My jaw clenched against the tooth-chatter of malaria. My head ached and my gut shivered and my back dripped sweat. “I’m going to die here.” I was beyond embarrassment. I looked pitiable, desperate.

“Wish I could,” Becky said. “But I can’t. Insurance.”

She had driven into Bandiagara in a small pickup truck, a French Non-Governmental Organization logo on the door.

“No,” I said. “You don’t understand.”

“Everybody needs a ride.”

My skin was tinged blue from months of handling indigo as well as wood and metal. I whispered through broken breaths, “I don’t want to die here.” I looked into Becky’s green eyes. From malaria-fevered lungs a sob of air escaped my throat and I dropped to my knees. “I’m begging you.” I looked up to her face. “Everything I have,” I said. “You can have it. I beg you.” My tears came fast and my moans grew uncontrolled and I lowered my forehead to the ground. I don’t know how long I bowed like that.

Then, her hand on my back. “I have business here today.”

I rolled to my side in the dirt and curled up. My voice was small. “I beg you.” I lay on my side in the dirt.

She shook her head and looked down at me. “I’m leaving tomorrow at sunrise. Sunrise,” Becky said. “And you’ll have to ride in the truck bed.”

I lifted my head and moved to embrace her legs, but she backed away. “Tomorrow. Here. And not one word to anyone.”

I lay there for another moment. Then sat and glanced around. Several children stared. The crazy woman with rocks in her pockets crouched on her perch and she nodded when our eyes caught. My panic eased. I wouldn’t drown.

That night I took an extra dose of Chloroquine for the malaria and four Advil. I stuffed my clothes into my duffle and sat convulsing with fever in the blackness of my room. Mice ran by outside. I stayed up and stared past the door I’d left open and lost track of time. When the horizon showed light. I dragged my duffel to the pickup truck and waited.

Becky was not allowed to carry anyone unauthorized in the cab, so I rode in the bed made myself invisible. I lay on the corrugated steel, not feeling the discomfort, looking at the

hazy blue sky, overwhelmed by the denseness of hot, moist air in spite of the breeze created at fifty miles per hour.

She didn't stop and by the time we arrived in Bamako, I was burned from the sun and blinded by glare. I was dizzy and shaken, and my crisp skin stung, but these sensations were inconsequential compared to the terror I'd felt earlier and the relief I breathed at being again in Bamako.

I hoisted my sixty-pound bag onto a crimson shoulder and moved my feet toward the Grand Hotel, the "grand" part of the hotel a grim hyperbole. The bar overcharged, the beds were hammock-like, the pool unusable, and amenities fluctuated depending on who staffed the place, but I was certain they'd have a room. A bathroom, sheets, a window.

*by Rachel Hoffman*





**Sometimes the Hardest Thing is Learning how to  
Walk Away**  
*by Dave Sims*

## **Raid**

Like Navy SEALs dropping down, quick as a SWAT team all in black, seven crows take tactical positions across a COSTCO parking lot. A lookout paces on the roof.

The others hop between abandoned shopping carts, loud and earnest as kids on playground gear, but shoppers do not respond to caws that punctuate pedestrian conversations.

Two birds harvest dog-food nuggets trailed from a broken bag. One picks through peanut shells tossed beside a trashcan. Another pecks a carton of discarded chicken bones.

Trading places, the sentinel claims the trashcan. Nearby, a toddler in a stroller screeches “Birdies!” Abruptly airborne, barking signals, the unmarked squadron forms, bearing east toward Taco John’s.

*Raymond Byrnes*

## Blue

On certain beaches, glass is common, and often the pieces are sharp. But sometimes the glass nuggets are smooth and we dub them “sea glass”. And, sometimes these randomly shaped gems of the ocean are smooth and *blue*. If you are a lucky and observant beach walker, you might find this elusive blue glass, and when you do, it makes your heart skip a beat for a moment as you spy it nestled there in the hot sand.

I find one. Its blueness makes me ponder the question of its origin. It is not a piece of a common brown beer bottle left behind on the rocks by some underage drinkers, hanging out at the beach, attempting through drink to find the wonder that is already there. No, the origin of this glass intrigues; perhaps it once held a votive candle at a shrine. Or, it was part of a margarita glass that was purchased in Cancun and accidentally dropped into the sea by sailboat revelers. Or, it may have once been the lip of a vase that held flowers at the funeral of a child.

I pick it up. I am compelled to caress the surface, gently, with the sensitive edge of my smallest finger, skimming to let the clinging grains fall. The precious blue treasure cradled in my palm is now mine. I have claimed it so.

I hold it up to the light, not to admire its color. There is something else. I recognize a strange desire to discover a crack so I can see inside. This sea glass is a survivor of

events unknown, yet it exhibits a kind of perfection. A million abrasive caresses have sanded its surface and managed to trap its light inside.

I name it “Blue”. What else? I take it home, content in the thought that I have ended its arduous journey. It now rests peacefully on the window sill next to my bed. Drifting into slumber, a smile curls my lips as I admire its simple beauty, the contours that had an infinitesimal chance of coming to be.

Sometimes I carry it in a soft sweater pocket, furtive fingers clasped around the warm blue glass as I go about my day.

*by Josephine Pino*

## Sitka Spruce

The mass of the Sitka spruce impresses, but it also disguises a splayed fatigue, a desperation, the strain of an incessant vertical push upward. Making itself from air must be exhausting, with the relentless birthing of one circle around the last, silver bark stretched to tearing.

In a quest for light, the Sitka spews branches from nodes a human lifetime above ground while it stands patient with moss coating the girth of its trunk, torturously dripping.

A billion razor-thin needles collaborate and the rough skin encourages seepage so that arrested rain can journey to the busy roots even as they strain under the mass of a tree that flaunts biceps, hulking extensions that hold aloft even more dendritic branches, always seeking more light and more rain.

Nearby trees lie horizontal, tragic remnants of ripping decapitation, a particularly horrible way to die for a living organism with potentially endless growth. The entire forest keens in grief for the fallen spruce. Blue jays wail and bobcats lick the jagged wounds and the worms are drawn to the sound of its suffering.

More hubris-driven tragedy awaits for those who delivered seed too close to the brink. Tender roots hang exposed over headlands. The Sitka wants too much. It risks life itself in order to lean over the edge, for it covets the sensual spray from the sea and the exhalations of whales.

It envies those creatures not tethered to earth. It wishes the wind through its naked roots could whistle like the birds and moan like the filial calls of the sleek bodies gliding past, gleaming youngsters leaping over waves, and the sea lions audible in the surf, laughing.

*by Josephine Pino*

## **Gerber Daisies**

Gerber daisies make me smile when I see their bright little faces full of spunk as they peek out from terra cotta pots at the local garden store. The rainbow of Gerber daisies reminds me of the happy styles of the bell-bottomed 70s, though these flowers own the colors with greater confidence, each with its pale underside revealing the effort and discipline needed to put forth this vibrant display with no expectation of trophy or praise. Extravagance for the joy of it.

*by Josephine Pino*



**noli me tangere**  
*by Marcel Herms*

## Searching for the Gossamer Garment

I took up the cello because my grandmother had played it so well. Its bigness, curvilinear body, and rich wood tones gave it an appeal that drew me to take lessons and haul its large shape in my car, ill equipped for that purpose to a distant city at scheduled times to learn the basics. I had a natural bow stroke probably from my study of dance but keeping appointed hours of instruction proved impossible no matter how comforting the feeling of holding the cello and bow in my arms. Eventually, my good intentions gave way to common sense that this was not the time in my life to learn the cello not the right time to chase a faint memory of a grandmother who died before I was four years old. Not the time to pack a giant musical instrument into my car once a week to feed a dream that would have to wait for now. For months, I looked longingly at the cased cello sitting in the corner of the parlor and heard its music in my head and felt the vibration of bow on string in memory till the case got dusty and I moved on to the demands of my life, the elements that competed for the time I tried to steal for my quest of cello, my pursuit of the grandmother who I had heard so much about from my mother who loved her dearly and who never really got over her abrupt passing. Sometimes, the right

moment may never come for a dream, or the dream may not be the right one to pursue but I think my grandmother's spirit knows that I tried this to connect with her in the only way I knew how when I was about the same age as when my mother lost her and shortly, after I lost my own mother. The cello was a search for both women in the ethers of the invisible, in the sounds of music unseen, cloaked in the gossamer garment, that hides dreams, memories, sounds and souls.

*by Elizabeth Buttimer*



## Touching the Rusted Chain

The oldest grave in our churchyard, once whitewashed, now, flecked dove grey and dark by time or weather, holds a place of prominence among all the monuments. It bears no name or date or words of endearment or identity. It sits as if twisted by earthquake gaping open and tilted by errant roots from distant oaks. The earth looks torqued at its base and one can reach a small hand into the crevice deep toward the coffin and the chain that wraps around it like a water moccasin. What now lies below the surface of the earth, below the fescue and dandelions, below the rows that separate one grave from another? As a child, late one night, I reached my hand into the crevice, down into the hole through the no-man's-land between the living and the dead, touched the chain and thought I could almost reach the casket.

I often wonder who lies buried there and what made their life memorable to those who knew its occupant. I assume this grave was for a much beloved wife, whose husband had it constructed by a craftsman to give this rectangle a domed shape, featuring headstone and large surround that made the grave sit like a diamond in an elevated setting. To top it all off, the grave was embedded with seashells that went the entire expanse of the memorial. Large cupped shells turned rib-side up. The years had stolen some shells through breakage. So the incomplete ones were just a thin outline of a shell, no longer the shell itself. Just as the memory of this occupant faded to only an outline of who or what she was. Her memory still full with some and faint with others, like the shell decoration.

When constructed, before 1900, seashells were rare in my hometown. Even when I was a child, seashells were uncommon and highly prized, so those shells must have been a testimony of love and of sacrifice to obtain them and set them into the monument. Seashells, according to legend, contain the soul everlasting. Perhaps, their connection to water attaches a symbolism of baptism and crossing over to

the afterlife. Many believe that they keep evil out and the spirit in. I can't say what motivated the craftsman or mourner to cover the gravestone with shells but it was unique and those shells over a hundred years old still speak mystery to those who reach their hand inside an open grave at midnight.

*by Elizabeth Buttimer*

I wish to be buried like a cedar tree,

to burrow into the soil's warmth  
and have my roots caressed by the folds  
of the universe,

to have the flesh of my skin debark,  
torn free and gaping  
in donation  
to the dogs of the earth,

to open wide my quaking lips,  
cracked and wanting at the seams,  
and be filled  
by the sweat of the sky's deliverance,

to be deafened by the bite of the wind

and refuse to break

-- *Bask in me, for I have bled to give you shade*

*by Amber Lee Carnahan*



**2<sup>nd</sup> Genesis**  
*by Henry Stanton*

## Where I Turn Bad

I start thinking of flammable material, the kind  
we buy cheap from India  
but then I remember my grandfather's story  
about a chapel carved out of salt. White steeple, white  
door, white people. We've been here way too long.  
So when the light changes, I speed  
until you and I glide  
over the freshly laid road, the smooth road  
we fucked into existence, only you  
are not in the car and the white line that splits  
the road in half reminds me of how  
we cannot live without salt. But this all has to do  
with the road. I light a cigarette, change  
the subject, only I do not have cigarettes  
and don't smoke. The road is black  
like someone else's lungs. The cilia grow  
hard, like art, from the tar. Sculptures, scars, bread. The road.  
The turn I made at the light is illegal. But it's the one  
that brought me  
to you. I'm illegal not because I'm too young  
or because I'm a virgin in some country  
where virginity is collateral for land, or wine,  
or salt, a country in which you are not a king or a pirate  
washed ashore a beach whose shells tongue your ear  
when you're not listening.  
You don't kiss me because of this,  
only you do and I like it and I kiss you back, which is  
how  
we get the road. The smooth one. A story  
about our lips and our legs entwining like jelly forms.  
My tongue licks your salt  
like a deer. *Shhh*. I'd be hunted and stoned to death  
should they hear, as this culture is not one  
in which this would happen, but one in which a woman  
can be arrested for carrying too many  
vibrators on a Texas highway. Good thing  
I took the one out of the glove box. Pass the bread. Here, I offer  
you  
my wrist, soft as yours, see, curved as a doe,  
trust me. Though you have and I've broken it.  
Not the wrist. The trust. But  
you know what I mean. In the distance, September  
burns maples into rubies and gold.  
If you follow  
my wrist to my finger, you will see me  
pointing in a different direction toward a sky  
tossing and turning in diamonds.  
This is the way

I am going.  
Hold out your thumb  
before I change my mind, before the road turns.

*by Michelle Bonczek*

## Burial Grounds

Whoever finds us will think we were a small, stupid people.  
Not small like Lucy with her pygmy horses and elephants, not small  
like our cousin Ardipithicus Ramidus, Ardi for short,

whose bones surfaced near a lake in the Middle Awash, her hands  
the same size as ours today despite her four-foot frame. Large hands  
already predicting a future of Supermarket Sweeps, Supersize fries, Big

Oil, the Great Depressions. Hands shaped to take everything they want from the  
world

or raise men who will take everything they want from the world: hartebeests, river dolphins,  
songbirds, bumblebees, gold, the simpler things that make us human

like starlight and sleep. Not small like Lucy or Ardi. Not small like my own hands  
or my mother's who wears a size four wedding band and engagement ring.  
Not small like my birth control pill. But rather, like the kid in elementary school

constantly spitting on children's shoes, the kid whose underpaid teachers say  
he's old enough to know where and where not to spit. Like this kid's father  
who smacks his son's head with his fist whenever he gets smart, this kid's feeble

vocabulary growing like a spider's web, catching quick, monosyllabic words  
dad uses when he strikes mom. His father's words spider-egg sticky and growing  
in this boy's mouth. Whoever finds us will find what doesn't decompose or easily

disappear. Things that leave traces, things that reproduce and resonate no matter  
how much time and generations of man or ice pass. Mercury, radon, what we can't stop  
ourselves from using—Styrofoam take-out boxes, batteries, cheap light bulbs,  
and missiles—always so much to save. What fragments will remain

of our megachurches and temples? Wafer and paper, missal and kneeler, white collar,  
stained glass? Or, perhaps, a group of women and their broken vessels buried in lava  
four miles from a village where men waiting for water chewed khat and played cards?

Dig deeper: nuclear waste buried in containers of denial, bones of men who died mining for coal  
and salt. Giant lizards with feathers, ivory teeth, iron claw. All around  
them

the earth pulsed, glaciers grew and receded, mountains sharpened like knives and  
dulled

like knives. What body will the earth randomly preserve that gives a slice of our long  
story to those asking to hear it again? Grave after grave of women, man hung on a plus sign  
around her neck, tiny diamond ring glittering like fairy dust on her small,  
left hand

*. by Michelle Bonczek*



**Fire and Brimstone**  
*by Martha Nance*





## **The Mad Captain Morning Watch**

The tug rumbles  
grumbles  
bucks a little  
at the whitecaps in San Pablo  
that nudge the port side  
like calves looking for milk.  
Fog is streaming  
the gap where the river  
is supposed to be.  
No rain in sight,  
hot in the valleys  
hot by the capitol  
and summer is on the go.  
I left beauty behind;  
I left it with her when  
I closed the door to let her sleep.  
That was the hard me.  
A confession. I really  
don't leave anyone behind  
they ride in the determined  
leaky-valved  
thunder of my heart.

*by Travis Stephens*



**Inundated**  
*by Martha Nance*

**Matthew James Babcock** - Idahoan. Writer. Failed breakdancer. Books: *Points of Reference* (Folded Word); *Strange Terrain* (Mad Hat); *Heterodoxologies* (Educe Press); *Future Perfect* (forthcoming, Ferry Street Books, 2018); *Four Tales of Troubled Love* (forthcoming, Harvard Square Editions). Have also donated unicycles to the disadvantaged.

**Renée Bailey** is from Lima, Ohio. Currently, she's a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi. Renée's work appears in *Gingerbread House*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and others. She was a semi-finalist in the *Conium Review's* 2017 Flash Fiction Contest. In January 2019, she attended the *Tin House* Winter Workshop.

**Evgenia Jen Baranova** is an author from Russia. Her most recent poems have appeared "Persephone's Daughters", "The Raw Art Review", "Meow Meow Pow Pow Lit

**Gary Beaumier** - In his later years Gary Beaumier has become something of a beachcomber and has self diagnosed with "compulsive walking disorder." On a number of occasions he has cobbled together wooden sailboats. He is a finalist and semi finalist for the Luminaire Award for several of his poems and was recently nominated for Best of the Net Award for his poem Rio Grande. He has been poems published in *Flumes Winter 2017*, *Third Wednesday*, *Chaleur Magazine*, *The Piltdown Review*, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *The Internet Void*, an upcoming issue of *The Raw Art Review* and a recording in *Lit Tapes* as well as *Swimming With Elephants*, *The Gyara Journal*, *Beautiful Cadaver*, *Remembered Arts Journal* and *High Shelf Press*. He taught poetry in a women's prison.

**Mela Blust** is a moonchild, and has always had an affinity for the darkness. She has been writing poetry since she was a

child. Her work has appeared in *The Magnolia Review*, *Isacoustic*, *Rust+Moth*, *Anti Heroin Chic*, and more, and is forthcoming in *Rhythm & Bones Lit*, *The Nassau Review*, and *The Bitter Oleander*, among others

**Mason Bondi** is a California based painter working in a studio in San Rafael. His work explores the familiar people in his life in familiar places. Mason overlays these images with what he sees within the individual - expressing these feelings via color and form.

**Raymond Byrnes** Recent poems by Raymond Byrnes have appeared in *catheXis northwest press*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *All Roads Will Lead You Home*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Panoply*, *Typishly*, *Waters Deep: A Great Lakes Poetry Anthology* and elsewhere. He lives in Virginia.

**Amber Lee Carnahan** is a graduate from Hope College with Bachelor of Art degrees in English and Computer Science and is pursuing a Masters of Library And Information Science with a digital content management specialization from Wayne State University. She currently works as a Substitute Librarian at Howell Carnegie District Library. In her free time, she enjoys experimenting with new poetry forms and playing weekly dungeons and dragons sessions with her friends.

**Anne Cecile** was born in 1987 in Lavelanet, France. She demonstrated a natural interest in art and other manual activities during her childhood, and in 2000 she entered her first drawing and painting class. She learnt classical rules of compositions, anatomy, and harmony of colors along with different techniques such as drawing, pastel, china ink and oil painting. This first classical study of art would be the foundation for the artistic development to come.

Anne Cecile enrolled in a business school in 2006 while studying clay sculpture in the evening. She later graduated with a Master in Business Administration. In 2012, she went to New York City where she graduated with a Master in Art History.

In 2013 Anne Cecile stayed at the Fundación Pablo Atchugarry in Uruguay where she learnt how to cut marble. Following this experience marble becomes her main material. In 2015, she decides to entirely dedicate her life to her artistic practice and open her studio in the Pyrenean Mountains in France

**Clare Chu** was raised in Malta and England, and has adopted Los Angeles as her home. She is an art curator, dealer, lecturer and writer who has authored and published twelve books and numerous academic articles on Asian art. This year she was a participant in San Miguel Poetry Week. Her poetry is featured in a continuing collaboration with Hong Kong-based calligraphic and landscape painter Hugh Moss, in which poet and artist challenge and expand traditional media boundaries. Her poetry is published, or is forthcoming, in *The Comstock Review*, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Rue Scribe* and *2River View*.

**Will Clattenburg** has an MFA in Creative Writing from New Mexico State University. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Platform Review*, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *Litro Online*, *Garfield Lake Review*, *Digging Through the Fat*, and *Typishly*. As a white/Hispanic human, Will rejects labels & categories, and sympathizes with everyone who finds it difficult to fit in.

**Elissa Cranshaw** - With 16 years of living I have experienced only a mere portion of life but within those 16 years I have found a passion that called my name and I ran to it... running at a faster pace than my little legs could carry me I discovered

poetry and the world within it too. I am Elizabeth Cranshaw and I am a poet.

**Leah Dockrill** was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia . Canada. She obtained her early education there and went on to earn education and law degrees at Dalhousie University, Halifax, and a library science degree at the University of Alberta, Edmonton.

With little formal training in art, she has developed a thirty-year art practice that includes painting, collage, and digital art. Leah's art has been exhibited in Canada and the U.S. in commercial galleries and public institutions.

She has won numerous awards, including *the Gold Artist Award*, *ArtAscent: Journal of Art & Literature*, *Issue 32, August, 2018* and her art images have been published in [www.understoreymagazine.ca](http://www.understoreymagazine.ca) [www.estheticapostle.com](http://www.estheticapostle.com) [www.nunum.ca](http://www.nunum.ca) [www.highshelfpress.com](http://www.highshelfpress.com)

Leah has been an elected member of the Society of Canadian Artists since 2000. Leah and her husband live in Toronto, Canada.

**Dara Elerath** received her MFA in poetry from the Institute of American Indian Arts. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The American Poetry Review*, *AGNI*, *Poet Lore*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Superstition Review*, and elsewhere. Her critical writing has appeared in *Tupelo Quarterly*. She lives, writes and designs in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**Casey Epstein-Gross** is a writer and student from Tallahassee, Florida. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Chaleur Magazine*, *Up North Lit*, and *Rare Byrd Review*.

**Michelle Bonczek Evory** is the author of *The Ghosts of Lost Animals*, winner of the 2018 Barry Spacks Poetry Prize (Gunpower P) and *Naming the Unnamable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* (Open SUNY Textbooks). Her poetry has been featured in the *Best New Poets* Anthology and in many journals and magazines, including *Crazyhorse*, *cream city review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Orion Magazine*, *The Progressive*, *Wasafiri: The Magazine of International Contemporary Writing*, and *Water~Stone Review*. In 2015, she and her husband poet Rob Evory were the inaugural Artists in Residence at Gettysburg National Military Park. She currently teaches English and humanities in Kalamazoo, MI, and mentors poets at The Poet's Billow ([thepoetsbillow.org](http://thepoetsbillow.org)).

**Frank William Finney** was born in Massachusetts and educated at the University of Massachusetts and Simmons University (formerly Simmons College). His work has appeared in numerous publications including *Ardent*, *The Journal of Poetry in the Ars*, (USA), *Orbis*, *Poetry Nottingham* (UK), *Paris/Atlantic* (France), *Offerte Speciale* (Italy), *The Nation* (Thailand), and *The Best of the Vine Leaves Literary Journal* (Australia). He currently lives in Bangkok, Thailand, where he teaches literature at Thammasat University.

**Apryl Fox** has been published previously in *Strange Horizons*, *Offcourse Magazine*, *Dark Animus*, *Snow Monkey*, *Whistling Shade*, *Not Very Quiet*, and many others. She was recently published in *Three Line Poetry and Dragon Poet Review* and currently resides in Michigan.

**George Goebel** a native of Catonsville, Maryland, graduated from The Maryland Institute College of Art in 1975 with a Diploma in Fine Art. He has been in numerous group shows up and down the east coast. He has also had seven one man shows. His paintings have appeared in national publications such as *The Artist's Magazine*, *American Artist Magazine*,



The North Light Book of Acrylic Painting Techniques and National Geographic Magazine. He is represented by Isalos Gallery in Stonington Maine, The Quinones Gallery, Fulton Maryland and he has selected works in Dowling Walsh Gallery, Rockland, Maine. He is co-owner of Staub Art Studio in Catonsville where he teaches art and runs their in-house picture frame shop.

**Howie Good, Ph.D.**, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of *The Loser's Guide to Street Fighting*, winner of the 2017 Lorien Prize from Thoughtcrime Press, and *Dangerous Acts Starring Unstable Elements*, winner of the 2015 Press Americana Prize for Poetry. His latest books are *I Am Not a Robot* from Tolsun Books and *A Room at the Heartbreak Hotel* from Analog Submission Press, both published in 2018.

**J Grant** is a retired social worker, recently graduated from New Directions, a program for promoting the development of writing skills for psychoanalysts, sponsored by the Washington/Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis. His essays have been published in *Ruminate*, *The Wayne Literary Review* and *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*. A creative nonfiction piece was recognized as "notable" by *Memoir Magazine* and a fiction story was published by *Founder's Favorites*. He lives and writes in Asheville, NC.

**Casanova Green** is a writer, singer/songwriter, educator, pastor, and traveling minister and worship leader. He is a 2010 graduate of Ohio Northern University with a BA in Language Arts Education with minor in voice and received a MFA in Creative Writing at the Etowah Valley Low-Residency MFA Program at Reinhardt University in Waleska, GA in 2018. He released his first album, *A Worshiper Mentality*, in January 2016. Casanova is a member of the Southern Collective Experience and has been published several publications

including *The Blue Mountain Review*. He has done extensive ministry work since the age of nine and serves as the Lead Pastor of True Vision Christian Community in Lancaster, OH where he and his family reside.

**Matt Gulley** is 31 years old. He attended Wayne State University and lives in Detroit. His first short play *Witchdrawal* was staged at *The Robin Theatre in Lansing Michigan* in 2017. He tweets @gulleyofone & @selfawareroomba

**Kevin Healey** is a singer-songwriter and Associate Professor of Communication at the University of New Hampshire, where he teaches and writes about ethics and digital culture. Recently he has been teaching students to use arts-based research methods as a form of contemplative practice. Kevin's essays and poetry appear in *Salon*, *Huffington Post*, *The Revealer*, *Meat for Tea*, and *Typishly*. His LP *Tendrils* was released in the summer of 2018.

**Marcel Herms** is a self-taught artist. His work is about freedom in the first place. There's a strong link with music. Just like music his art is about autonomy, licentiousness, passion, color and rhythm. When he paints he uses everything he can get his hands on: acrylic paint, oil paint, ink, pencils, crayons, spraycans etc. Sometimes he mixes the paint with sand, sawdust or pieces of paper. He paints on canvas and paper and sometimes other materials like wood. He works in different sizes: from very small to real big and he doesn't limit himself to one medium. He draws, he paints, he makes 3-dimensional objects and artist books (and audio art).

His work was printed in many (inter-)national publications and he designed a lot of book-, record- and CD-covers. He

collaborated with many different, authors, poets, visual artists and audio artists from around the world.

**Haley Hulett** works in marketing by day and is a writer by night. Her weaknesses are many, and include drinking too much coffee and buying more books than she'll ever be able to read

**Joseph Johnson** teaches in New Meadows, Idaho. He received his MFA from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and his work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Big Big Wednesday*; *Forklift, Ohio*; *Chicago Review*; *Pangyrus*; *Yalobusha Review*; and elsewhere.

**Robert J. Keeler** - Born St. Paul, Minnesota. Lived in jungles of Colombia, S.A., up to age twelve. Duke, BS Mathematics NCSU, MS Computer Science UNC, MBA UCLA, Certificate in Poetry UW. Honorman, U.S. Naval Submarine School. “SS” (Submarine Service) qualified. Vietnam Service Medal. Honorable Discharge. Member IEEE, AAAS, AAP. The Boeing Company.

**Julia Caroline Knowlton** holds a BA degree in English/French from Duke, MA & PhD degrees in French Literature from UNC-Chapel Hill, and an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University. A Professor of French at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, she is the author of a scholarly book, a memoir, and a poetry chapbook. Her accomplishments include an *Academy of American Poets College Prize*, a *Pushcart Prize nomination*, and a fellowship from Antioch . She is currently focused on polishing and publishing her first full-length book of poems. Her author www site is: <http://juliacarolineknowlton.agnesscott.org/>

**Pieter Lefferts**: Painter. Writer. Musician. Teacher. Healer. ~ Artist. Pieter’s on a path to fulfill his soul’s puppeteering of

his earth walk. Current and ongoing projects include a series of pastels from his river trip through the Grand Canyon, trips to New York's Adirondacks and 'TOTALITY', a developing body of work sourced from the solar eclipse of 2017, which he experienced at 10,000 feet under the Wyoming sky. His scope for the project is as wide as that sky yet set within the premise of a defined totality. An initiate of the Pachakuti Mesa Tradition of Cross Cultural and Andean Shamanism since 2014, his rigorous apprenticeship has opened him to deeper notions of self-expression and service as artist and healer. His methods are intuitive, grounded through formal artistic training at the Art Students League of New York and life lived outdoors. In April of 2010, Pieter established Northlight Art Center, located in Amenia, NY, as a venue for aspiring artists to study in a professional atelier environment. He is a master teaching artist whose knowledge of techniques and materials, coupled with his wit and wisdom, are encouragement for students of all backgrounds to pursue their personal discovery through making art. Posting on Instagram and PieterLeffertsArtist on Facebook. Follow The Further Adventures of Paqo Piet at:<https://heartofthehealer.org/the-further-adventures-of-paqo-piet-episode-1/>

**Sophia Luna** is currently a first year student at Bard College in upstate New York, where she plans to study Written Arts. She spends most of her time reading and being inspired by poets such as Lyn Hejinian, Amiri Baraka, and Harryette Mullen. She has had a handful of her poems published online and in literary journals, and is excited to continue sharing her words.

**Brandon Marlon** is a writer from Ottawa, Canada. He received his B.A. in Drama & English from the University of Toronto and his M.A. in English from the University of Victoria. His poetry was awarded the Harry Hoyt Lacey Prize

in Poetry, and his writing has been published in 300 publications in 30 countries. [www.brandonmarlon.com](http://www.brandonmarlon.com)

**Miles Mattix's** poetry has appeared in *Badlands Literary Review* and *The Anti-Languorous Project*. He and his family live in Bellingham, WA, where he works the graveyard shift at a nonprofit housing facility.

**Linda McMullen** is a wife, mother, diplomat, and homesick Wisconsinite. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Chaleur*, *Burningword*, *Typishly*, *Panoply*, *Open: Journal of Arts and Letters*, *Allegory*, *The Write Launch*, *Palaver*, *Curating Alexandria*, *SunLit*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Five:2:One*, *Every Day Fiction*, *the Anti-Languorous Project*, *the Dime Show Review*, *The Remembered Arts Journal*, *Weasel Press*, *Dragon Poet Review*, and *Scribble*.

**Jessica Mehta** is a Cherokee poet and author of over one dozen books. She's a poetry editor at Airlie Press and Bending Genres Literary Review, as well as the creative writing editor for the peer-reviewed journal *Exclamation*. Jessica is currently a Halcyon Arts Lab fellow in Washington DC where she is working on a project that blends poetry with virtual reality. Find out more at [www.jessicamehta.com](http://www.jessicamehta.com)

**Oliver Mestitz** makes music as The Finks

**Martha Nance** is a physician in Minnesota whose iPhone has taken a fancy to the water fountain outside her building, fascinated with the infinite variety of lines and colors and textures and ideas that appear when the sun strikes its burbling water. She has been pleasantly surprised to find that others find the resulting photographic art to be interesting, too!

**J. Ray Paradiso** - A confessed outsider, Chicago's J. Ray Paradiso is a recovering academic in the process of refreshing himself as an EXperimental writer and street photographer. His work has appeared in dozens of publications including *Big Pond Rumors*, *Storgy* and *Typishly*. Equipped with graduate

cRaZy quilt degrees in both Business Administration and Philosophy, he labors to fill temporal-spatial, psycho-social holes and, on good days, to enjoy the flow. All of his work is dedicated to his true love, sweet muse and body guard: Suzi Skoski Wosker Doski.

**Effie Pasagiannis** is a first generation Greek-American lawyer, writer and curator based in New York City. Effie's poetry has been featured in *Snapdragon Journal*, *the Write Launch*, *Platform Review*, *Anti-Heroine Chic Magazine* and the inaugural print publication of *Pen + Brush*, a 125-year nonprofit supporting female writers and artists. Effie has appeared as a featured poet at *the Bowery Poetry Club*, *Arlo Hotels*, *The Assemblage* and *Pen + Brush*. She is currently working on a chapbook of villanelles as well as a collection of short stories with female protagonists at a crossroads of choice. One of these short stories was recently featured in the September 2018 issue of *The Feminine Collective*. Effie also self-publishes articles on Thrive Global and Medium and is the host of a podcast with over 20,000 listeners on healing and thriving after narcissistic abuse. As a curator, Effie brings together writers and other artists to collaborate and showcase their work in soul-nourishing spaces. She is an avid proponent of personal transformation and an advocate for educational, criminal justice, immigration and environmental reform.

**Josephine Pino** has deep roots in Albuquerque, New Mexico and has lived in diverse places. She has been a mission-driven educator for over 20 years and currently teaches Biology at Portland Community College in Oregon. She is a late bloomer as a poet and is currently enjoying the discovery that science, education and poetry can play nicely together and that in fact they help each other thrive. Her poems have appeared in *El Portal* and *Cathexis NW* with additional work forthcoming in *Curating Alexandria*.

**Paul Reyns** - Paul is a poet from New Hampshire who enjoys skiing."

**Nina Belén Robins** is a poet and supermarket employee. She is author of the books of poems, “Supermarket Diaries” “A Bed with my Name on It” and “T. Gondii”. She lives with her husband and cats and can be found at [ninabelenrobins.com](http://ninabelenrobins.com).

**Christy Sheffield Sanford** lives and works in North Florida near the Atlantic Ocean. She has won a NEA in Poetry and holds a MA from Antioch University in Creative Writing and Interarts. Her video animations "Julia Child's Legs," "Poe's Purloined Molars" and "Nadine's Shoulders in Moonlight" have been published by Carbon Culture, Atticus Review and Amp. She won the 2016 Bacopa Literary Review Cover competition. She has recently had digital art films accepted by A Room of Her Own and Open: Journal of Arts and Letters. Other images are forthcoming in Sheepshead Review and High Shelf Press.

**Dave Sims** After 30+ years of teaching in colleges, universities, military bases, and prisons from Alaska to Louisiana, Dave Sims retired to the mountains of central Pennsylvania where he now dwells and creates. His most recent comix appear in *Gigantic Sequins*, *The Nashville Review*, *Talking Writing*, and *Freeze Ray*. He can be reached at [tincansims@gmail.com](mailto:tincansims@gmail.com).

**Lillian Smith (Addison Dean)** is a contributing writer for *The Mighty Site* where her articles have been read by over 200,000 readers and republished on numerous sites such as MSN as well as Yahoo. She also has a blog called [addisondeanwrites.com](http://addisondeanwrites.com) where she spreads awareness about health and stigma around chronic health issues and disability. She has been published for her poetry in *The Eastern Iowa Review*. She also works as a reader and poetry editor for *Helen: A Literary Magazine*

**Henry Stanton's** fiction, poetry and paintings appear in *2River*, *The A3 Review*, *Alien Buddha Press*, *Avatar*, *The Baltimore City Paper*, *The Baltimore Sun Magazine*, *High Shelf Press*, *Kestrel*, *North of Oxford*, *Outlaw Poetry*, *The Paragon Press*, *PCC Inscape*, *Pindeldyboz*, *Rusty Truck*, *Salt & Syntax*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *The William and Mary Review*, *Word Riot*, *The Write Launch* and *Yellow Mama*, among other publications. His poetry was selected for the *A3 Review Poetry Prize* and was shortlisted for the *Eyewear 9th Fortnight Prize for Poetry*. His fiction received an Honorable Mention acceptance for the *Salt & Syntax Fiction Contest* and was selected as a finalist for the *Pen 2 Paper Annual Writing Contest*. A selection of Henry Stanton's paintings are currently on show at Tryst Gallery in Leesburg VA and can be viewed at the following website [www.brightportfal.com](http://www.brightportfal.com). A selection of Henry Stanton's published fiction and poetry can be located for reading in the library at [www.brightportfal.com](http://www.brightportfal.com).

**Travis Stephens** earned a degree at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. A sea captain, he now resides with his family in California. Recent credits include: *STONEBOAT REVIEW*, *CROSSWINDS POETRY JOURNAL*, *SOUTHWORD*, *HAVIK*, *APEIRON REVIEW*, *THE FINGER*, *NIGHT PICNIC JOURNAL*, *PENNSYLVANIA ENGLISH* and *GRAVITAS POETRY*. Online his was a Poem of the Week for Silver Needle Press and poems have appeared in *INK & VOICES*, *RUE SCRIBE*, *SHEILA-NA-GIG*, *OPEN: JOURNAL OF ARTS & LETTERS*, *THE SCRIBLERUS ARTS JOURNAL*, *HCE REVIEW* and *DEAD MULE SCHOOL OF SOUTHERN LITERATURE*.

**Brett Thompson** has been writing poetry since his graduate days at the University of New Hampshire where he earned a M.A. in English Writing with a concentration in poetry. He has been published in various journals, including *HCE Review*, *The Charles Carter*, *District Lit*, *The Literary Nest*,



*Cobalt Review and Ink in Thirds*. He teaches and lives in New Hampshire with his wife and two young daughters, who both love owls and anything purple.

**Logo Wei** and spouse live in the upper Midwest with their pucky quadruped. He has worked with patients, students and that enduring homelessness. Logo bakes, bikes and writes as solacing means of existence. Logo's poetry has appeared or will appear in *Pedestal Magazine, Ink & Voices, Parhelion, Panoply*, and others

**Holly Willis** is a writer whose work moves across arts journalism, creative nonfiction, poetry and academic prose. She has published two books about cinema, edited two collections of essays related to new media, and contributed to a variety of magazines and journals. Her creative nonfiction has appeared in diverse venues, including *The Normal School, carte blanche and River Teeth*. She is interested in writing that explores the interstices.

**Linda Wimberly** is a writer, artist and musician from Marietta, GA. Her poetry has appeared in *Gyroscope Review, Lunch Ticket, Stone River Sky: An Anthology of Georgia Poems, Kalliope* and others and a short story appeared in *Cricket*. She is a self-taught, abstract artist who works in acrylic, oil and mixed media. Her painting, *Inside the Dream*, appeared in *Critical Pass Review* and the painting *Jazz Flavors* was the cover art for and appeared in *Inscape*. (lindawimberly.com)