



Cathexis Northwest Press

Mar - Apr 2024

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Flow

By: Deborah Jang

Be more River, not so Tree.

Time it was to rise up,
root down, make shade,
leafy and all gusto.
Now

let go to flutter. The fleeting
season calls.

Crowns of glory — buffeted
and scattered — line water's edge
in gold. All queens pass.
We join

the river dance,
flotillas powered by last gasps
into eddies

swallowed whole.

Overtaken
in the wash, silent, slow
forsaken. Of all things
most yielding,
water is the way.

First passage to lost oceans.
Last call to mystery.
Ease out dear breath.
No more of fret.
Be more River.
Free Tree.

Self-Care

By: Ewen Glass

Only when plucking nose-hair do I think I have synaesthesia:
turmeric fireworks, or good Hungarian paprikash perhaps;
washing bottles for recycling, balsamic waves fetched by
shaking; heat; the substance of stars. I brace for a tiny death
each hair, only to be denied grace when – exposed, eyes wet
– I sneeze and my urethral sphincter contracts. For a moment
my entire body is a single fold in space. Never more abstract.
Never more corporeal.

And my partner calls me dramatic.

Humanity's Troupe, Unburdened

By: Zion Bellefonte

I put all my
transgressions on the goat
the stocky one with
feeble eyes
“G’on, git!”
It shuffled away
for a moment
like a shy interloper
and the deed was done.

Except
I felt some nipping
near my heels
ten yards along in my reunion
with humanity's troupe,
unburdened
“A goat not a mule”
the eyes said
ignorant of all duty.

Right as rust
it was
and just as happy
to follow me back
(wherever)
down any wrinkled road,
eating and un-tempted
by metaphysics.
Again, a clarion companion.

AND THE POINT IS TO LIVE EVERYTHING

Letters to a Young Poet

—Rainer Maria Rilke

By: Claire Scott

Days slipper away, sliding out from under us
almost soundlessly, like falling snow
how can today be Sunday, the thick blue-sleeved
New York Times thumped on our driveway
how can it be April when we just
put Christmas in cardboard boxes
how can I no longer reach the top shelf
where I keep my mother's favorite crystal
and why does time flow one way
something about entropy, something about disorder
the languid mystery of the unknown

Rilke says to love the questions
because you are not yet ready for answers
live in the flow, the wuwei, the Tao
of impermanence until one distant day
the questions will dissolve
a spider spinning
a sparrow soaring
being the moment, perfect in and of itself
but I worry I won't be around
that the locked rooms will never open for me
and how can wrinkles keep feathering my face

An American Dream's Night Stroll

By: Martheaus Perkins

with a blunt (a two-hander) plucked from a concrete rosebush. The Dream is in the wrong neighborhood. Backyard gardens with chicken wire fence: inky hands crisscrossed to keep miracle fruits from piercing fingernails. A spring drop forest spoons the neighborhood; its Black Locusts branch out like filleted sinew. Within the cul-de-sac city, trees impress their dying: cigarette buds shaped into bottled lightning: white bark with dark scars. The Dream is alone with a black-skinned night. Junebugs scrape The Dream's knuckles and laugh. Shoelaces *hiss* and slither in shadow pools. The blunt and hoodie keep The Dream's chest warmloved. Wormwood boards creak like keys from the boxy houses. The Dream is alone with a black-skinned night. Until. Truck lights. Chill snaps surf through The Dream's frizzy hair. The sidewalk is drowned-silent from The Dream's heaving sprint. Rounding the corner, The Dream stows away in a construction site. The Dream is alone with a black-skinned night. The Dream's lips sing on the blunt's promise. *Satilla River*, it thinks, *will rinse me*. Twelve bloodbeetles lindy hop on The Dream's throat cords; bliss bleeds its eyes. Until. Truck lights. The Dream takes off its Nikes to run. Until. Shotgun.

Truck lights whiten the neighborhood with sour smoke: tumbleweed-twirling between the unbuilt tracks of sky. The Dream winks dust on a black-skinned night. Until. Graveyard beetles rattle the block: erode the roads with needle-sharp legs. They sing an insect song: baritone and countertenor. The beetles scuttle-rush and swallow the tuck lights. The beetles singin', *Where's the damn Devil? I want a damn deal. Where's sneaky*

Satan? My souls sittin' still. The Dream feels its organs separate
like gas atoms; millions of armored husks wave-wash
The Dream's body. Until. A mouth of okra and grits: the sound of
a new basketball pinching rust of an elementary school hoop:
Cadillacs sailing on ash: whisper-thin soul-jazz dripping over
America like caramel on apples: tambourine howls, cornbread.
The Dream inhales a black-skinned night.

“Chrysalis”

By: Tierney Chapman

She asks me if stuffed animals come alive at night.
I had to think twice.

I know the magic of a dandelion

disappearing in the wind,
holding its breath in water.

Truth bends like spring wheat on high tides
constant, unrushed

carried by unseen movements
of infinite grains of sand.

I tell my daughter—be cautious of prophets.
Wise men are afraid of what they do not know.

Stay where the whales fly,
where ghost ships continue past the horizon's

where shadows of coral reefs play at night
as children, in a tickle fight with God.

Nothing is as brilliant as the sky in January
above the shore, untouched

unpurposely happy.

Certainty rides my tongue
dissolving in my daughter's faith.

To her it is unquestionable
she will live again, someday, as a mermaid.

I let the waves rush down
clearing callous sand from my throat

drowning myself in her religion.

Couplets on Accrual Basis

By: S.D. Dillon

The mind distorts memory,
Chariots hauling tombs of glass flowers.

Blood on crucifixes, the serpent at dawn,
& glass streets after the firestorm.

Barbs form a conceit
The White Horse and Ear bar, with the broken light.

Factory windows in winter.
The second color of a forest.

Lavender torches in a bleached country are grateful for the dream.
Music alone tells the story.

Charged events recede to a string of objects.
A six-foot post corroding & draped with spider webs & mold.

A monument to survival of the narrow.
The cathode blinds everyone in the lobby.

Riveted steel plates cover gaps in floorboards
& the frieze

Open into miles of space,
An accidental impluvium.

Exodus from the crown,
Behind the painted sunset.

Prophecy of a road to plutonium causes concealment
Of meltdowns.

The news scapegoats the parolees.
Journalists fear poisoning of underground waters & oceans.

Every academic risks novelty.
These instances demand conflict.

Neurons rank through the brain
Like the tendency of dopamine to form after exposure.

Nothing evokes vulgarity
Like metaphysical flatter.

Italics, the x-axis.
The ashes of saints.

Fire escape to the depths
of the salt mines.

Streetlights under wine-dusk skies.
Violent coughing, a diffuse grip.

Talking to the Breeze

By: Devon Borkowski

Tell her about how the piano shakes
Paintings and photo frames rocking— one tarnished trumpet
That tastes like a chewed penny
The child bobbing on his tiptoes
Singing country roads while his father mans the keys

Tell her that she will lean over to her lover
And make mark of his pitch
In warm yellow lamp light
The other child tucked to her side
Vibrating eager attention
While she waits her turn

Tell her there was enough to eat
On the six hour drive down
And that the sunlight smelled like recess
The temperature of skinned knees
Of running towards the cornfield
The relief that breaks down the body
On the first breath of freedom

Vestige

By: Atia Sattar

Before you were a tree,
you were ash
poured in a pit and planted anew;
you were a still body,
surrounded by loved ones, flailing
as they watched you die;
you were a cyborg,
breathing, feeding, evacuating by machine;
you were hungry,
so we flushed and filled feeding tubes, never fast enough;
you were angry—
how else does a “man” show fear or despair?;
you were crying out loud
in ways a father shouldn’t in front of his children;
you were a patient with radiation burns
ringing a bell of victory;
you were a diagnosis
confirmed the same week as my pregnancy,
our fates predicted by raging clumps of cells;
you were coughing muscles into spasm;
you were coughing;
you were inhaling and exhaling with capacious lungs;
you were swinging a golf ball onto a green,
scoring an elusive ace;
you were eating seasoned meals,
fit for a gourmand belly;
you were drinking whiskey on the rocks;
you were teaching me to make peace,
to be the bigger person;

you were an immigrant, provider, and rule-follower,
one of the good ones;
you were an immigrant,
finger-printed after 9/11;
you were joking with a US immigration officer,
softening barbed embassy fences with charisma;
you were restless, shifting countries,
but never packing your own bags
or the bags of your children;
you were telling teenage me, “life’s a bitch and then you die,”
with cutting sincerity;
you were sharing stories of a life so bold,
I wished I was your son;
you were smoking a cigarette out the driver’s seat window
while I collected ash behind you,
preparing for the future.

November Poem

By: Matt Schumacher

Some mornings, frost's gray-green grass
and the blue sky turn our dog into a wolf.
Tongue dangling. Fangs bared.
I throw the ball, and he runs
like some desperate thing
in the middle of the night.
Seems he's chasing after
something I can't see,
something far older
than both of us,
an ancestral pack sparkling
in frost and hidden in wind,
fleeing and returning to the earth
like a sea of yellow-red leaves.

The Kiss

By: Renata Santiago

I'll take a scalpel to our lips,
Ten-blade slicing through soft, pink flesh.

I'll debride the sores on my body,
Friction burns sourced in our expired passion.

I'll ask the surgeon to scythe a Y into my chest,
Excavate my heart and find the hollow spot where your body and my love once
harmonized.

I'll take the Percocet he'll prescribe me,
Only to delay the grief, only to further sabotage me of the future.

I'll auction off this handed-down body,
Watch in the mirror as I'm made someone's brand new toy.

I'll shout my agony from this shallow grave,
So when no one is left to mourn me,

My howling will permeate the earth,
Rip through the crust,
Rustle the rubber green leaves.

This jagged ache,
These nebulous boundaries of the tumor
You brought about,
This ageless sorrow,
The cacophonous,
Hiccuping breaths of our sobs,
Will someday pass.

Plaisir à crédit

By: Zane Perdue

A pack of cigarettes has been left on the steps of my building. Now, when I go out, I furtively put an old matchbook into my pocket. Yellow and orange leaves are spaced out evenly over the stone steps and the bricks of the wide sidewalk. Halloween decorations, purple lighting and black and orange rise up in the windows, and the pumpkins on every other porch feed squirrels that run around in the leafy wind. Hey, here's the pack, bright and green and white, standing upright against the brick building at the top of the steps making no secret of its presence. They are Newports. If you asked me what brand I would like to find a pack of, a solitary, ostensibly ownerless pack, I would not choose Newports: I would say the yellow Nat Shermans, or unfiltered Camels. But these Newports in this immaculate pack, so upright and in such nice contrast to our street—very nice. I reach down, open up the pack to see what's going on inside. Still about 12 or 15 in there. I take one. It has been out here for days and yet nobody has just taken the whole thing, and I think that this says something about the neighborhood, something of which I feel a little critical, as if the street were being too shy or too picky or maybe unobservant. But I find a certain forgiveness in my heart for the street as I walk down to the corner and strike a match, inhaling the minty, weird, refreshing, and stimulating mixture of this cheaper-than-cheap, free, as it were on-credit cigarette, this easy yet precarious pleasure that I try to steer mostly clear of but which I will not rudely turn away when it shows up—unbidden!—on my doorstep. Sometimes, there is a certain kind of good manners involved in taking.

Security

By: Sam Culotta

(from an essay)

long underwear from anywhere
under GI issue uniform with web belt
hooked hanging yellow flashlight
GI issued field jacket liner beneath
Field jacket itself with one lone stripe

Air Force chevrons reaching up
from circled star means Airman 3rd
for what it's worth all bundled
under GI issue parka with a hood

lined with wolverine fur stiff
bristly hairs that freeze rigid
from my breath huffing out
the small puckered opening

feet warm in Navy issued boots
with wool socks turned to mush
so I walk in a pool of myself
slop slosh but bathwater warm

sunrise slices through gray sky
sun that warms the face
that threatens to close the eyes
that sends you home disgraced

truck arrives with dayshift guys
all bright with fresh new smiles
as we walk like slow as men released
from solitary not yet sure we're free.

Two Days After Summer Solstice

By: Nadine Fiedler

11 a.m. we're walking up Powell Butte
it's steep but we're light today
I don't stop to catch my breath
it flows out to join
the wind that feathers the grasses lit
against firs and cedars, that sculpts
the clouds covering Mt. Hood
song sparrows trade territorial tunes
spotted towhees add percussion

a white-haired guy
catches up and
talks about music or something
his words
permeate my descent, I listen
but I don't I

watch my feet go downhill past
red elderberry, goatsbeard, Oregon grape
my arms lift, wave like grasses
I defy gravity step by step
air is music

A(touch)more

By: Matthew Nisinson

It's not a real thing to measure or collect or accumulate: store it away and find it gone when it's needed, when it's counted on. Where it is absent it is generally bragged about. Where it is abundant it is quietly maintained. Where it is wanted, it has to be worked at. It is work. From now on, know it needs effort. It needs tending as well as tenderness. It cannot be tendered and kept whole. The whole process is holy, and wholly an act. An action that must be verbed. Verbosity cannot bound its boundlessness. Love can twist and dodge, pass like sand through fingers that grasp firmly. It must be woven, warp and weft, warp and weft, warp-resistant, to wrap us in.

Hunting

By: George Burns

Look the other way.

What you most seek
see only out of the corner of your eye.

Though your heart is on fire
try not to let your tail twitch.

Walk over to the oak,
become interested in its moss and ants.

Laugh and say out loud:

That was the farthest thing from my mind.

Keep laughing,
hop on one leg,
and peck at mealy bugs.

When the wind stops,
go home and read the paper,
pretend not to notice
the eyes in the window,
the rhythmic twitching
of its tail.

Forget everything. Go outside and move with the wind.

You and what you hunt are dancers

and the high meadow your ballroom floor.

Though miles apart,

the two of you are riding the arcs
of great Blue Danube scallops.

I WRITE POETRY BECAUSE

By: Kashiana Singh

It makes me feel obnoxious, dares me to
Be in awe of a ubiquitous self
Eating words instead of food

Poetry keeps me out of crowded rooms
Places I no longer wish to inhabit, old music
trembles into supple beginnings

Perched at the edge of my mottled tongue
Settling, unsettling like pollen, the rat and
a wriggling night, its cadaver shrugged

Awake from beneath a weighted cover
Ritual of unlikely poems knocking on
an opaque front door

Stubbornly playing ouija, dark circles as
Perpetual as impatience, specter on watch
for pangs of editing or putrid coffee

White space and bespectacled eyes make
Decent bed partners, the landing thud of
my words drown orgasmic howls

Cities bury their faces in the thicket of my
Waist, each silvered strand of hair reclaims
calligraphed ticks of memory

Calloused fingers hold tight as the next
unlikely poem lands on wintered varnish
of my window ledge

Helsinki syndrome

By: Lina Buividavičiūtė

*I am accompanied by misfortune:
I am a little white mouse.
My sisters and my brothers –
All gray little mice.*

Ramutė Skučaitė “Balta pelytė” [Little white mouse]

I still foster revenge plans
directed at my classmates who called me
paper-loving rodent, four-eyes
chernobyl. With real scholastic happiness
I say: we are all mice, for your
information, spinning in this silly wheel,
but I was that white one, the one who still wants
revenge: I'm *snapped* from my best angles,
I create a myth of a successful fatal grey figure,
so that you'll finally see me, and beset
by remorse, you'll be gnawed by depression, cancer,
syphilis, go bald, become
impotent, go crazy with grief, forget
to sharpen your teeth and come to an end. No – it's better that
we all love one another – and finally there'd be
a merging of our souls, we'd live long happy lives,
run around in one small circle, die amicably, holding
paws, having treated ourselves to the same *ratpoisonoflife*.

Point of Contact (December)

By: Lillian Emerick Valentine

I cross the threshold of the river but only
after the river has crossed the street. Home

is where the water is highest in winter: valley marsh,
floodzone, clanging creeks. Oregon wetlands

haunted by the watercall of the American Bittern,
a brown bird that looks like a reed. My toenail

abdicates its toe on a trail near Delta Ponds. Ten minutes:
the amount of time it takes my brain to filter out

mild to medium pain. My mom and sibling have both
run on broken bone. My Eugene friends are closer

in age to my parents than to me. My parents open
up to them about their parents' homes, the disease

that's disfigured their families. "Do you need a place
to be," my friend texts me later. "maybe," I type, "haha" —

my toenail doesn't actually abdicate my toe but it hurts
like it will. "He's saving it for you," my mom says,

meaning a metal desk in the detritus of her father's barn.
He keeps an electron microscope under a mountain

porch in Thompson Falls, Montana, near the ranch
where he was raised without running water. My mom

doesn't close the door when she pees because then
she'd have to stop talking to me. "Did you know she's

living in Montana?" is the first thing my grandfather
tells people about me. His ticket out of poverty

was a full ride for physics. At Stanford, he hated
being away from the Clark Fork, the Thompson River,

Ashley Crick. I still remember when his horse left him
like the last piece of pine slipping from a coat. I miss each

river most when I'm closest to them, when they seep
grayly into my socks. I think I'm new on this path,
but the past is something that's still happening to me.

ANIMUS

By: Julie Benesh

In the dream I am handcuffed, pulled into a closet
by a man, obsessed, who gropes my breasts
as I shudder, security bursts in to arrest
me, attractive nuisance, wish-ful-filled.

It doesn't take a team of clinicians to screw
in that particular illumination. To paraphrase
a patriarch: every psychiatrist's a gynecologist's
minister, (and so on); it takes a narcissist to know one;
a persecutor (each a former victim) to recognize
their kin; every victim, scratched, reveals
the predator within.

The reigning pop queen's plane imprints
like Big Foot. Her defenders and detractors brawl
like Congress as we collectively collect/project/protect
what icons—our due—we dis- and/or-dain.

Fractured Homage: Rafael Alberti

By: Clif Mason

it was the day when the last cry of a man bloodied the wind,
when all the angels lost their lives
except for one, and he was left wounded, unable to fly.

—“The Surviving Angel” (trans. Mark Strand)

You’d call on the dead angels—

but they leave no footprints

drop no feather

You might ask forgiveness,

in the past or in anything

They care nothing

that destroy themselves

or the winds that have lost

or even for the frozen

You’ve built your life

but the dead appear

for both questions & answers.

& keep your silence.

~

you have so many questions—

in the muddy street,

like a passing dove or gull.

but they have no interest

bound & ruled by time.

for the ocean waves

on the rocks,

their sense of direction,

candelabras of the stars.

on questions,

to lack passion

You acquiesce

The angels of the dispossessed
in the mind of the Bengal tiger
The angels of the famished
sawing hardwood trees
of machine gun bullets.
sing like the waves of lakes,
of children & other swimmers.
sing like a line of stones
where nothing is healthy
of board members.
sing like icebergs calving
as part of their relentless quest
The angels of the ruined
& pampered, craven
about their loss of privilege
which is the way they view
The angels of the beggared
broadcasting the news
meant as a balm & relief

sing like radio atrophy
of corporate malfeasance.
sing like termites
with jaws like belts
The angels of the threadbare
burning skin from the bodies
The angels of the destitute
in the cemeteries of health clubs
but the stock portfolios
The angels of the distressed
in the sheets of those who married
for personal advantage in all things.
sing like the well-appointed
as they whine & cry
& market dominance,
every social interaction.
sing like random satellites
of the imminent fall of shopping malls

from the perpetual perturbation
The angels of the forsaken
of automobiles
& silence,
that refuses to grant

~

You walk all the time
bathed in & warmed
that is not light
had it been created for spirit
& the array of ever-
The lion of daylight sniffs
She is curious.
afraid of those massive paws,
She pads into the tree line
that is not this life.

~

from suffering resulting
of the impulse to acquire.
sing of the battery death
& their abrupt slide into the stillness
unechoing & vast,
them quarter.

in darkness now,
by that enchantment of light
but what light might have been
or ear & not air
varying forms.
you as you lie on the ground.
You hold your breath,
those big-toothed jaws.
& some other life

Reading from halfway
of the unrelenting bloodletting,
You are that five year old,
watching his mother be raped.
cut down his father
& mutilate their bodies.
They shoot him,
across a wall.
in a future that comes
Stragglers in the dark
holding their breath
The only decisions
are desecrations,
to be the first to decide.
& backyards are blank spaces
Not even feral cats feel safe.
the shouts of the incensed,
who've learned the pain
o
Humans believe they own

around the planet
you understand:
hiding in the rubble of his home,
The boy has already watched them
& older brother
He rushes out.
spraying his blood
What will happen
from a past no one will claim?
move warily past,
& looking down.
anyone feels free to make
& no one wants
The alleyways grow darker
in the collective memory.
Everywhere you hear
the keening of those
f surviving those they love most.

their lives trying to seize
They defend their plots
hoping to pass them down
& their children's children.
& what the children inherit
Why does no one demand

~

Somewhere in the sable night
a white pinhole opens
until a green dragonfly
& streaks on sheer wings,
through all the rooms.
becomes golden,
through a green pinhole
through the white room
Somewhere grief
speeds though a bright pinhole,
on night's green wings

the earth, & people expend
more & still more.
with their blood,
to their children
But the earth is a grave
is a grave.
different choices?

of your grief,
& grows golden,
squeezes through
speeding with bright beams
Somewhere sable night
bright beams squeeze
& speed on sheer wings
of your grief.
becomes a golden dragonfly,
& streaks

sable beams.
grows green
squeezes through
streaks through
& speeds
through sable night,
in your house of song.

through the rooms'
Somewhere a golden room
& a black dragonfly
white beams,
a sheer pinhole,
on grief's bright wings
somewhere

Breast Implant Illness

By: Laurel Rose Milburn

Is it unattractive to have no money,
a botched boob job, or worse, a natural face?
Can I always be better? Can I have blue eyes or brown?
Contacts that change. Needles in my lips, forehead, cheeks—
Implants all over like a plastic revolution.
Silicone seeps beneath encapsulated tissue,
oozing toxic sludge into my body.

My hair falls out in clumps. When I wake up in a fog
to the terror that beats a rage beneath my ribs,
I cannot breathe. I cannot twist or fully inhale without feeling
pressure like a sleep paralysis demon across my chest.
It is ambiguous who really wins, who loses. But as a woman,
why do we feel exempt after a certain age?
As if invisible, here is an invitation:

Meet me at the intersection of my eyelids.
My body, a fabric succumbing to its own decay.
Know that you too, will see the same.
In time your first wrinkle will come slipping
between cracked circadian rhythm, without applause.
The gentle sag of eyes, a chenille of skin.
Tell me, is the wisdom filling in?

Euphemisms

By: Jason Davidson

all the euphemisms in the world could not
disabuse you of this privilege and so I fasten
up my latches and wait on the bridge between
nowhere and nothing, head bowed, ankles crossed.
I am at a loss for all the words I never wrote.
Now better broken, I take a short inventory:
dunce cap, scarlet knap-sack, clip-on battle ax.
I am using my acceptance letter as a scratch pad,
and, had I turned left, then some of the questions
would, for certain, be less specific, but the rest would
still weigh down the make-shift nest: heavy, wet
feathers, and I am running out of room on the page,
soon, or someday, perhaps it will hold a place of tribute
on someone's refrigerator and when they visit after
the entire household has quit the fighting and found
their quiet in the middle of the night, they'll read my
notes, and think that someone got something, somewhere,
right, and, there, they'll know then it was a certain person
who had these thoughts and thought them long enough to write
them down, irrespective of whether or not they would be found.

on the bridge, I do my best to show them all the notes
I've written, but words are mostly useless left unread and
instead they sing to me of hallelujah but only in the key of dread.
Now, the token slayer of a few small truths, I take a short inventory:
blood-bath, blood-oath, blood-clam, blood-rite,
blood something before the other and then this and that
and I'm not listening to all their yelling and I didn't do it right.
The most important thing I learned that afternoon amidst
the shoelace massacre, the placid strangulation, the lameness,
was that I have too much forgiveness and a paralyzing fear of heights.

they fly me to Scotland on a small plane with no seatbelts and poor ventilation.
there, a woman with silver hair and spare change is distilling liquor in a cave.
the only difference between vodka and gin is that one has and the other doesn't.
the only difference between what I have written here is all the things I haven't.
I speak to the woman in a dead language that I do not know, and I explain with grace
that my mother was an accomplished addict and a wonderful alcoholic.
she asks to see all the photographs that I keep hidden in my wallet, but all she
finds are paper cranes and many notes with careful folding. No photos.
I tell her that if I hold them, I already have memorized their faces in my mind
and if I don't, then I count to the square root of twenty-three and it is as if they
never before existed.

Evening Grace

By: Wendy Insinger

My feet feel the paved and cobbled streets of downtown Manhattan stone,
Looking solid, but tender as belief.

Belief in myself. Belief in my power to be another hour
That is worth the trouble of living.

Then, a joy that comes easily and perfectly as a brilliant seagull
Streaking over the Hudson in strands of sun that peak like
Nature's sharpest knife cutting pure beauty
Across the yielding of desire for more

The flip-flop flashing sit-com colors of true life
Lodged in all the picture brains of real people just like me –
Big moist worms that gobble dirt –

Who only can believe in anything not real.
Anything, but their own navigational trajectory
Of illuminated grace.

YOU MIGHT CALL IT MERCY

By: Kai-Lilly Karpman

Your dead mothers face. Steel
in the picture frame. At last,

lunch with her is off the table.
Your shoulders used to fold

when she walked by, your blades
recalling a blow from once when

you were eight, she reiterates,
Once, and god, you were running,

with mud all over your legs, you ruined
your great-grandfather's carpet that day!

After that, you learned to hold your body
so all its soft parts were hidden.

Other days, just names.
Couldn't you do anything right?

You got fired from the corner store, you
good for nothing-pussy- mother-fucker.

You miss her dearly. Love exists on a razor
edge. Lucky for your mother, you fell

to the plush side, called it forgiveness.
You brought the pumpkin pie with you,

that she silently baked in midsummer,
the new flannel at the foot of your bed from

when your lips turned blue one winter.
When the dog died, she held you all night.

There was never much, which you never knew,
and there's something to that,

your mother would remind us. Your sister says
she could never do what you did;

changing her diapers, calling every week, enduring her
Alzheimer's rage and holding her trembling, dying hands.

You didn't measure love by metrics like *deserve*
or *kindness*. You *had* love. You doled it out,

determined and bold as a nun.
Your dead mothers face. Still

steel. The frame. Her body now
emptied of its human parts:

insults, gifts, laughter, blows, hugs
contained no longer.

At the funeral, we could all think
of at least one good story, which seemed fair.

If you had known everything,
would you have done it all the same?

What if you had known,
that for all your love,

for all your mercy,
she would never, ever change.

Tea Ain't Tea Unless It's Sweet.

By: Tifara Brown

“You hear me?”

The South Georgia sun wrung tears from my eyes
As I peered through its rays into my uncle's ancient face.

We had taken this sleepy Saturday afternoon to fish for perch and bass on the pond facing the 2-lane highway that led to the moldy double-wide castle trailer I called home. The pungent smell of chopped grass and smothered smoked turkey necks stifled my nostrils happily.

My bob was bored in the water waiting for a sign of life.
The silence stiffened in fright as he spoke again.

“Tea ain't tea unless it's sweet.”

Jesse is my cousin by blood but the years that capped his brow
Warranted a promotion of address. My aunties were clear.
He is my uncle.

“Anyone who drinks tea without sugar...somn' wrong.”

My 9-year-old arms were varnished with sweat and scratched blood-crusting mosquito bites.
The curtain of heat parted for me to drag his tobacco-piped breath and castor-oiled skin.

My uncle spoke prophecies with each word,
Measured like cornmeal and Lawry's on Sunday morning.
No recipe.
Just my senses engulfed.
A primordial knowing.

“You undastan’ me, girl?”

There need be no explanation for his dispensing of prudence.
His voice was ice water on your neck after a charge from the Dixie heat.
His presence swelled and evicted the space out of a room.
The glistening of the lake paled in the glint of his Seminole eyes.
I was seized.

“Yes sir.”

Jesse smiled at me, and my world slowed.
He was a secret and a library at once.
His feet were the roots of an oak,
Pierced with memory,
Painted mahogany bark,
Life padded in his leaves.

His calloused hand brushed mine as he took my fishing pole.
And I felt the sing-a-ling-a-due of the blues pulsing
In the juke joints where he loved
And brawled,

I could see the muted rippling of his muscles peeking out
From under his short-sleeved button-up.
His jaw was cut with scars that draped the
Bones crushed by the white men who rushed him,
The mosaic of battered knuckles throbbed
When he contested,
He was an enigma of gut and grit,
War ablaze between his teeth,
As he tore and spit it out like chicken fat,
His warmth wiped balm on the flowing tear
Of my broken heart.

His embrace was the sandy beach
Where I uncovered safety.

I pour my sweet tea libations down my throat
In his memory.

The water splashed.

“Hm. Looks like you gotcha a catch.”

Go Hawks!

MCG Stadium, Australia

By: Maranda Greenwood

Sports stadiums are like home for me, having spent 80% of my life in a jersey, mostly on the field. The billboards &

banners showcase foreign beers, their labels of familiar color make me think I am home, but I'm not. I only recognize

Foster's, which I was handed at a banquet some years ago 2 days into 21. The putrid pool projected out of my mouth

back into the bottle, and politely placed behind a plant. The stadium lines are long and winding, moving like a march

not a wait. Vendor's grills marinate the air with meat pies and snags, Go Hawks! ripples by Nikola and I on a flag carried by child

in a yellow and brown striped Jersey. A circle of people are clinking bottles and singing *We Are The Mighty Fighting Hawks*,

to the tune of *Yankee Doodle Boy*. We get separated into different lines as we approach security. My leather jacket is peppered with pins,

I removed it and my belt and place it in the bin with my phone and bag. Security smiles and asks if I'm from America.

He hands me my belt and jacket back, points to the arches above me and says they are not for metal, they are just the gates

to the game. He looks in my bag, and says no food and drink you're ok. I stand holding my belt and jacket, as people push past me,

Nikola staring at me from the other side of the gate with a look of pity. All great American past times start with reminder to run through the route

of escape. Sports games, concerts, theaters, museums, fairs, travel.
Bag check, body scan, pocket pat, x-ray and just when you think

You've removed every last piece of metal, your wedding
ring will beep, reminding you of what you could lose.

And then they wave you in,
to celebrate, or to try to survive.

Digital Diagnosis

By: Hannah Page

For Borderline Personality Disorder
they prescribe Dialectical Behavior Therapy:
dialectical meaning to hold with both hands;
to dip into both of the buckets yoked to the neck;
to exist as uncertainly as Schrödinger's cat,
because validation and self-validation
are two very different animals
and cutting subjunctively still gets you committed –
because seams unravel and no matter
how white you bleach the blood still wells.

During COVID I hosted a Zoom birthday party,
my guests numbered cubes, their gazes rendering me
pinned insect-like but on a sort of lag:
each of their mouths moving after the sound,
their lips poppies labeled
Love and Revulsion
and I could devour them
both at once because I was made of holes
and as dimensional as a throat.

Yet there was no shimmering into or out of focus,
no boulder nor cliff: Death and her constituents
already in attendance, Life spread
seeping before us all at once like a floral blanket.
The stone will fall no matter
how hard you strain against it, will remain
mired in the mud atop the cliff no matter
how hard you labor to push it
into the worry of flight.

THE REPLY

By: Andrea L. Fisher

In the blackness of the night, I listen.

In stillness I lay, under moon and stars, in the nest that is my tent.

Peering out through its netting, I see the universe.

My eyes gaze at a canopy of leaves, seemingly floating above me,
while sounds of the forest comfort me with strange, eerie tones.

Then, piercing through the darkness, beyond all that glistens,

I hear a long, haunting sound.

I wonder if it is a bird.

Its sonorous tone, followed by a syncopation of seven notes.

My eyelids, heavy with sleep - I force my body awake so as not to miss a single
sound.

Again, I hear the same melodious tones pouring forth from the same direction.

A hypnotic prelude followed by seven syncopations.

Its intervals of silence leave me longing for more.

As if by instinct, I say to myself, "It is an owl"!

And in that space where music becomes myth and myth becomes magic,

I would soon know the reason for this song.

From the other side of the forest,
through the blackness of the night,
comes a reply.

The same long, haunting sound
followed by a melody of seven notes.

My heart wild with excitement,
imagining their hearts beating furiously at finding one another
through the depth of forest in the black of night.

Drifting to sleep under a spell of moon and stars,
with a canopy of leaves rustling overhead,

I am happy - unusually happy in our little tent
with my husband sleeping at my side.

I want to hold on to this moment,
but instead, I sleep,
while time moves forward - - gently cradling me in her arms.

Until The End Of The World

By: Chris D'Errico

let's punish each other for transgressions even though we don't know where the lines are drawn, let's blur the lines, let's always be together and do the wrong thing for a corrupt cause, let's stay and pray together, let's be a community, let's commune together, let's always lie in tandem and deflect-deny-deny, let's be in denial, let's coexist, and be thick as thieves, let's clan, let's tribe, let's cult, let's get wired and ruthlessly native, let's get completely diverse, let's tolerate what we hate, let's be distracted by well-hung action heroes, let's dye our hair green in the sink of a tiny bathroom in a tiny apartment in a big city, let's move out to the country, let's fuck each other under public statues, let's privately hold each other's hand and jump off a rooftop, let's douse ourselves in repetitive garbage, hawking tomorrow's narrative, let's shake hands today, let's give our non-acceptance speech tomorrow, let's never concede or admit defeat and then let's consistently lie about how popular we are, unanimously and to a fault, let's get on tape just how hot and real it feels to kill each other over and over and over and over again and again, let's start fires with hate in our eyes, let's bust the dam open and drown in peace and love, dance around mindlessly chanting about joy and justice, let's pretend not to notice anyone else, let's complain about victims not helping other victims, let's gaslight together as a people and say we didn't, let's make a big deal out of everything, fill our hollow bones with digital gloriousness, let's act like everything is always existentially dramatically about us, let's make ourselves feel free while capturing, detaining and dominating everything that is not us, let's come together and make ourselves worm-food for the gods of indifference, let's not ever repeat this, let's not ever admit what was said here, let's forget we ever had this conversation in the first place, let's burn upon reading, let's live vicariously through the nonsense and vacuity, let's cheeseburger in paradise, let's go whacko in Waco, let's always get each other's back to stab, let's be inflexible and brittle, let's stretch out like a cat, like stars in the milky way, let's chew Styrofoam and eat gravel, let's toast to oblivion, let's spill milk all over the carpet, let's believe in a lower power, foreshadow a lesser apocalypse, let's summon previously unknown and totally unreliable gods and saviors, witness and worship the power of nada, let's grind our teeth away like rats, like gnats infesting the secret recesses of rooms stuffed with whispers, reeking of halitosis, patchouli and innuendo

In Order of Appearance

Deborah Jang is a visual artist and poet based in Denver, Colorado and Oceanside, California. A quiet observer, Deborah reflects on and responds to that which has occupied and encompassed her long lifetime. She captures “all the feels” surrounding family history, social reckonings, the process of aging, pandemic angst, celebrations of nature, experiences as an Asian American woman, personal contemplations and dramas, and grandmotherly enchantment. Her debut book, *Float True*, was published in March 2020 by Shanti Arts LLC. Her chapbook, *Last Will and Best Guesses*, was released by Finishing Line Press in September of 2022.

Originally from Northern Ireland, Ewen is an emerging voice in poetry in both English and Ulster-Scots registers.

Zion Bellefonte has produced for the Sycamores since they drafted him in the seventh round, leading the team in hits three years running. He has a spray chart that would make a peacock jealous, and many chalk up his success to his versatility and demeanor at the plate. “At least you can see Zion’s socks out there,” said one longtime scout.

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

Martheaus Perkins is an MFA candidate at George Mason University in Virginia. He is an emerging Black writer; his heroes include Maya Angelou, Billy Collins, and Langston Hughes. Currently, he is dealing with an obsession with hot foods and excessively long YouTube videos. He can be found on Instagram @mark__perkins.

Tierney Chapman is an emerging Appalachian poet, and a winner in the 2023 West Virginia Writers Competition. She also was awarded first place in Wingless Dreamers 2023 Enchanting Winter Contest. Tierney holds degrees in both Paralegal Studies and English/Professional Writing. She currently takes classes with the Gotham Writers Workshop of NYC, and is an author of a growing social media page, *Poetry For Us*.

S.D. Dillon has an AB from Princeton and an MFA from Notre Dame, where he was Managing Editor of *The Bend* in 2004. His poetry has appeared recently in *Tar River Poetry*, *Tampa Review*, *Barstow & Grand*, *California Quarterly*, *Red Noise Collective*, *Door = Jar*, and *The Under Review*. He lives in Michigan.

Devon Borkowski is a writer, artist, and actor from the Rappahannock tribe of Virginia. She was raised in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, and graduated from Rutgers New Brunswick with a BFA in Visual Arts class of 2022. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in *The Dillydoun Reviw*, *The Closed Eye Open*, and *Room Magazine*.

Atia Sattar is a Pakistani-born teacher, scholar, and meditator living in Los Angeles. Her writing explores the embodied intersections of gender, race, mindfulness, motherhood, and grief. Her work has appeared in various publications including *Rogue Agent* (Pushcart Nomination), *Lion’s Roar*, *Tricycle*, *Academe*, and the *Cambridge Quarterly* for Health Care Ethics. She is Associate Teaching Professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University of Southern California.

Matt Schumacher has published several poetry collections, including the titles *He* and *Drift*. He edits the journal *Phantom* and lives in Portland, Oregon.

Renata Santiago bleeds words. The young and aspiring poet pours out her most-human experience onto paper in attempts to connect the

world through shared loves, losses, traumas, and ailments. Often finding herself only in the footnotes of texts, Renata's writing showcases what life is like as someone who lives on the margins between an infatuated lover and heartbroken pessimist, resilient survivor and victim, American and Cuban, even woman and girl. Her varied life experience serves as everflowing inspiration for her writing, fueling her to pursue this dream and offer others a space to relieve themselves from the cramped margins. Currently finishing her B.A. in English Creative Writing at Florida International University, she has hopes to continue to grow as a poet in their MFA in Creative Writing program next.

Zane Perdue is an essayist from Albuquerque, NM. He currently lives in Philadelphia, PA. His work can be found in The Decadent Review, BarBar Online Magazine, Punt Volat, and elsewhere, in print and online.

Sam Culotta is retired and living in Southern California. He is the author of two books of personal essays: *Sleeping With Lumbago*, and *Clueless In Paradise*, as well as *James Dean Is Dead*, *New And Collected Poems*. His prose and poems have appeared in *The Write Place* at the Write Time, *Buffalo Spree Magazine* and *Avalon Literary Review*.

Nadine Fiedler lives in Portland, Oregon. She had a long career in communications and as a freelance writer and editor. Her poems have been printed in *Cirque*, *Windfall: Journal of a Poetry of Place*, and the Oregon Poetry Association yearly journal, and she was an invited reader at the Portland Winter Poetry Festival.

Matthew Nisinson (he/him) lives in Queens, NY with his wife and daughter and their two cats. He has a JD, and a BA in Latin. Each summer he grows chili peppers. By day he is a bureaucrat. His poetry has appeared in *Boats Against the Current*, *en*gendered*, *The Hyacinth Review*, and *Milk Press*, among others. You can find him on Instagram or Threads @lepidum_novum_libellum and on Twitter and Bluesky @mnisinson.

George Burns was the owner of a small company in the semiconductor industry until he retired in 2008. He has been writing short stories and poetry for more than forty years.

His short stories and poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Dissent*, *Duality Journal*, *One Sentence Poems*, *Passengers Journal*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *The Comstock Review*, *The DMQ Review*, *The Massachusetts Review* and *Verse Daily*.

In 2004, his poem, "Partly Heliotropic", was the winner of the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation Poetry Contest. "Like One Bird Wing" was a Poem of Special Merit in Comstock Review's 2021 Muriel Craft Bailey Memorial Contest. His first book of poems, *If a Fish*, was recently published by Cathexis Northwest Press.

When Kashiana is not writing, she lives to embody her TEDx talk theme of Work as Worship into her every day. *Woman by the Door* was released with Apprentice House Press in 2022. Her latest full-length collection, *Witching Hour* is due to be released with Glass Lyre Press. Website - <http://www.kashianasingh.com/>
TEDx Talk - <https://youtu.be/jzFflaqPrhM>

Lina Buividačiūtė was born on May 14, 1986. She is a poet and literary critic. Lina is an author of two poetry books in Lithuanian language. Her poetry is published in "Matter", "Masters", "Proverse poetry prize" contest anthologies, "Drunk monkeys", "Beyond words", "The Dewdrop", "The limit experience", "Beyond queer words", "Maudlin House", "Cathexis northwest press", "Red noise collective", "Poetry online" magazines and "Versopolis". Upcoming publications will appear in "New millennium writings", "The Stardust review", "BOX" and "Beyond words" magazines. This poem is translated from Lithuanian by Ada Valaitis.

Lillian Emerick Valentine is a poet and organic farmer from western Oregon. She currently lives in Missoula, Montana where she is an MFA candidate and writing instructor. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Ecotone*, *SWWIM*, *Salamander*, the *Fjords Review* and other literary magazines. She has received a Fishtrap Fellowship for her poetry. She spends as much time as possible outside. Her favorite bird is a kingfisher.

Julie Benesh is author of the chapbook *ABOUT TIME* published by Cathexis Northwest Press. Her poetry collection *INITIAL CONDITIONS* is forthcoming in 2024. She has been published in *Tin House*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Florida Review*, and many other places. She earned an MFA from The Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College, and received an Illinois Arts Council Grant. She teaches writing craft workshops at the Newberry Library and holds day jobs as a professor, department chair, and management consultant.

A Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, Clif Mason is the author of *Knocking the Stars Senseless* (SFASU Press) and *The Book of Night & Waking* (Cathexis Northwest Press Chapbook Prize). His poems have appeared at *Daily Rattle*, *The New Guard*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, and *Orbis International Literary Journal* (in the UK).

Laurel Rose Milburn holds her BA in English and Spanish and her MFA in Poetry from Columbia College Chicago. Her work has appeared in *The Ilanot Review*, *The Barnstorm Journal*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and her debut chapbook *'Toxicological Investigation for Missing Form'* is available from Bottlecap Press.

Jason Davidson has worked as a coach and playwright. He lives on California's Central Coast with his husband and small brood of four-legged children.

Wendy Insinger is an emerging poet whose work has appeared in the journals: *Common Ground Review*, *In Parenthesis*, *The River Poets' Journal*, and *Barzakh Magazine*, among others. She has participated in poetry exhibitions curated by Arts Mid-Hudson and Orange County Community College, as well as been invited to do a visual poetry installation at the Warwick Summer Arts Festival. Currently, she co-hosts Milkweed Poetry Workshop which has met 320 times since 2016.

Kai-Lilly Karpman is a writer, educator, and translator from Los Angeles. She has been previously published in *Plume*, *Image Magazine*, and *Passengers*, and was a finalist in the inaugural Ashland Poetry Broadside competition. She received her MFA from Columbia University and studied at Iowa University's writer workshop. She is the recipient of the Columbia University 2022 teaching fellowship, the Columbia University Word for Word travel and research grant, the two-time winner of the John Curtis Memorial Prize in Poetry, and the recipient of the Barbara Sicherman Prize in English scholarship. Her song lyrics have appeared in *Mz. Marvel* and *The Marvels* soundtracks.

Tifara Brown is a writer, performance poet, oral historian, and activist with roots in Southern Georgia, who has built a personal brand on the advancement of Black American history, cultural preservation, and community relations. Her poems have been published in *Quartz Literary*, *Wingless Dreamer Publisher*, *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *Gulf Stream Literary Magazine*, *Minerva Rising Press*, *Haunted Waters Press*, *Main Street Rag Publishing Company*, *Club Plum Literary Journal* and *Words*, and *Whispers Literary Journal*. In response to the flood of protests and organizing in 2020 through the George Floyd social movement, she published *Honeysuckle: Poems and Stories from a Black Southerner*, a memorial story to one of her ancestors who fell as a victim of racial violence in the late 1950s.

Maranda Greenwood holds an MFA in Poetry from Arcadia University. Her work can be found in *White Stag*, *Sundog Literature*, *Crab Fat* and other journals and anthologies. She was a prize winner of Vermont Poetry Society Poetry Contest. In her free time she collects Zoltar tickets.

Hannah Page has work published or upcoming in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and *Eunoia Review*. She earned her MFA from Columbia University School of the Arts in 2022.

Formerly a dancer, choreographer, and homeschooling mother, Andrea L. Fisher is a dealer in French period art, garden designer, and writer living in New York City. Awarded Honorable Mention in the Memoirs/Personal Essay category of the 92nd Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition, 2023 for "Ancestral Memories: Three Generations of War", she will be published in the upcoming "Chicken Soup for the Soul" book in 2024 and is working on her forthcoming book "Inspired By Beauty: A Journey Through Time".

Chris D'Errico lives in Las Vegas, Nevada, where he has worked as a cook, a neon sign maker, and an exterminator, among other vocational adventures. D'Errico's writings and visual art have appeared in various analog and digital mediums for the past 20+ years. Most recently in Wild Root Journal, and Panoply, a Literary Zine.