

# POETRY NORTHWEST

Volume XV | Issue 1 | Summer & Fall 2020 | \$12

## ANXIETY FOLIO

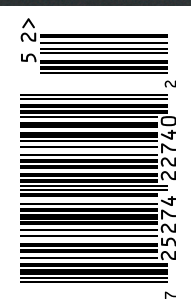
Rae Armantrout    Shara McCallum  
Taneum Bambrick    Dominica Phetteplace  
Sean Hill    Cody Walker  
Amit Majmudar    Shelley Wong  
*collage by* Serrah Russell  
*& more*

## POETRY

Helene Achanzar    Joy Priest  
Cyrus Cassells    Dujie Tahat  
Mark Irwin    Daneen Wardrop  
*& more*

## FEATURES

Camille T. Dungy *brings the joy*  
Laura Read *offers some advice*





SELF-PORTRAIT AS A DEAD BLACK BOY

VI.

on occasion I weep  
while watching the  
brown X of my hand  
across the page: swift  
controlled + sometimes  
perfectly still —: so do  
this poem out in long  
in the best narrative I  
under light that blends  
soft enough to call her  
none of which can keep  
alive no matter the

Detail of letterpress print; poem by Geoffrey Davis.  
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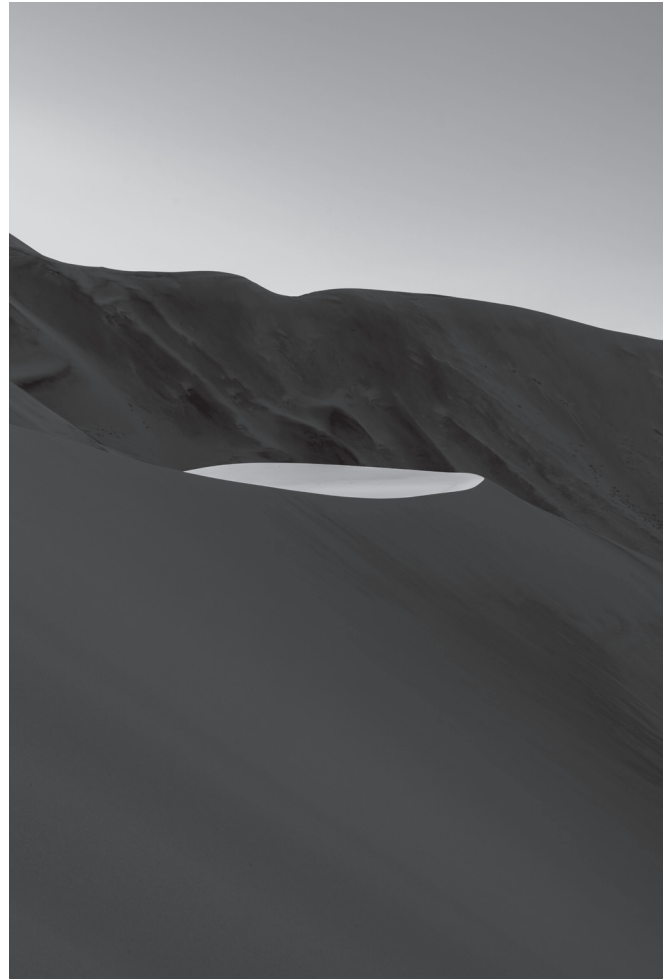
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## ON THE COVER

CODY COBB

*West 7*

2017 (photograph)

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*Poetry Northwest would like to acknowledge that our magazine is made on the traditional homelands of the Coast Salish Peoples—including the Tullalip, Snohomish, Stillaguamish, and Sauk-Suiattle Tribes—whom we wish to honor, past and present, with the deepest respect and gratitude.*



## FROM THE EDITORS

Anxiety is a loop, a disorder of the mind. We don't know—or we think we *do* know—what's coming, and we are terrified. Anxiety anticipates, it imagines—and we bring this terrible imaginary into the body, we wring our hands, we carry it with us.

As I write, our country faces a reckoning. Our anxieties are not literary; they are of the body, human and politic. We hope to apprehend, to *grasp with the senses or mind*, to *arrest*, the privileges, the inequities, the injustices and the incompetencies that are a part of our shared history.

In her recent comedy special, *Douglas*, Hannah Gadsby spends the first twenty minutes or so telling us exactly what to expect from the eighty that follow. She plays us a tape, knowing that it will be running in our minds as she makes us laugh. It's oddly comforting. A balm against the anxiety of not knowing.

What to expect from these pages? In Taneum Bambrick's "Lovers' Mural," what it means for a woman to discover the bird in a mural. In Kathleen Flenniken's "Street Scene, 1964," a little girl playing on her knees, imagining a world. In a postcard from Shelley Wong, the park rising before us. In Cody Walker's essay, "Humor in the Time of COVID-19," to be invited to laugh at a coffin joke. In Joy Priest's "Ode to My First Car, 1988 Cutlass Supreme Classic, 307 V8, Dual Exhaust," the press of "scorched pistons / clanging." To find yourself gasping, then laughing.

These lasting and momentary anxieties of our time—the personal and the public—drive us. "It's the anxiety of not knowing that I think drives most art" says James Galvin. Gadsby's performance is memorable not because its beats are all laid out for us, but because of what we can't grasp—can never grasp—except in the living moment or in a poem itself: what it feels like in the body. To carry.

So yes, we've gathered at the center of this issue a folio of poems in conversation with anxiety. We'd never have imagined, when this idea was conceived more than a year ago, *this* living moment. But it isn't anxiety that I want you to carry with you into these pages, or to leave with. It's a sense of poetry's making us conscious. Of being about to feel, of having felt, of having been instructed and offered joy, as in our two new recurring features. First in Laura Read's essay, "How to Wear Navy Blue with Black," and finally in Camille T. Dungy's poem "Ceremony," where incoming Editor Keetje Kuipers has made a place in this and every issue to come for joy, the grace note in our loop.

— Aaron (outgoing Editor, incoming Managing Editor)

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City Press authors including L. A. Johnson, Yuki Tanaka,  
Jill Osier & Tiana Clark

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Joannie Stangeland *on* Molly Spencer, Greg Bem *on*  
Shin Yu Pai, Caryl Pagel *on* Kirsten Ihns; Laura Da' *with*  
Martha Silano, Ellen Bass *with* Meryl Natchez

## CYRUS CASSELLS

### *Tango with a Ghost*

#### *I. Buenos Aires Overture*

In a city of bodies shunted  
Into clandestine cars—flesh

Hurled from an atavistic chopper's  
Staggering height

Into the gagging river,  
At vehement wolf's hour

Or sky-staining blue hour,  
One body;

In a city, suffused with staunch  
Memories of the slandered, the disappeared,

One soul,  
One incendiary memory;

In a breeze-swept metropolis  
Of numberless phantoms,

A single ghost,  
Stubborn as unbridled kudzu

Or conquering witch grass;  
In a crazy-quilt city

Of come-hither glances  
And brazenly expressive limbs,

Pulsing dancehalls and feverish *milongas*,  
One impossible tango—

#### *II. The Living Room Gasp*

That April I was all of sixteen:  
I was headed to a local indoor pool,

On a bus full of lanky swimmers,  
When my thigh accidentally grazed

The rugged leg of soccer-playing Alejandro,  
Exchange student who hailed

From the refined Retiro district of Buenos Aires,  
And for a brief time, I thought for sure I'd faint

From the shock of subterranean pleasure—  
A girl-addled junior, I'd never felt

This upending pull  
Toward another good looking boy—

So when I found Alejandro's profile  
On a living room mantel shelf in B. A.,

I think I went insane for a time,  
Insane:

That Alejandro should return to me  
In the scintillating hazel gaze

And undercover hands  
Of his strapping nephew Adriano

Was a jack-in-the-box jolt,  
An out-of-the-blue mercy—



*III. The Vanishing and the Roaring*

Adriano, tell me, what happened to your uncle?

*My friend, do you know something  
About the Dirty War?*

*You understand,  
He simply walked to a student demonstration*

*On an April night  
And never returned—*

\*

As a necessary history lesson, dapper,  
Warm-blooded “Adriano Cool” carts me

To the Casa Rosa,  
The presidential palace—

Where unfailing mothers of the disappeared  
Are still protesting after many years,

So I recall the immense, curved penis  
And long, sienna legs of my first *novio*,

And in ardent Alejandro’s place,  
Brusque shouts,

A volley of shots, a roaring:  
The castaway limbs of shunted,

Blindfolded students,  
Stiff as storefront manikins in the river—

*IV. Tango with a Ghost*

“Adriano Cool” whispers:  
*Amor, if you’ve had trouble sleeping,*

*It’s because this city, this district  
Is so crowded with ghosts—*

\*

There’s a special tango, A. C. reveals,  
Featuring a male dancer, decked

Solely in black, making it seem  
Like the lissome woman

Is somehow partnered with a shadow—  
Fleet as Hermes, a lord-like shadow

Caresses you; an exhilarating ally  
Sparks and shores your tango,

Your fireworks display  
Of dancehall skill and ardor:

A lampblack, tantalizing ghost—

\*

As if my long-lost soccer prince  
Had implored:

*Come away with me,  
My revenant angel,*

*From the stark mania of the poisoned river,  
The Black Marias,*

*The harrowing locus of bones:  
To strains of masterful Carlos Gardel,*

*I’ll teach you  
The most feverish steps—*

*Buenos Aires is only a borrowing wind,  
A sigh, a breeze-swept prayer,*

*Come dance with me, poet,  
In the half-maimed world.*

❧

AMY GONG LIU

*Lowering*

1.

This astonishing place leaves me bare.  
Stupid, reckless drops. This morning

I spent three years in the cell and  
became too cold. I could barely

handle my own frailty, or trace  
my shaking tissues back down to my

innermost animal—*all* of this?  
Just fat. This fauna stinks. Why are we

still celebrating *generations* / how  
is my cranium still filled with space?

Years back I boxed in my liability  
and made it black. The world knew

that I was unmarried to my bones,  
so I shared with it a skin that,

when pressed to a lampshade, luminesced.

2.

A white kind of pitch,  
enough to make you  
clutch the shades.

≈

CAMERON ALEXANDER LAWRENCE

*Petit*

I must make everything smaller.

Once, my tongue reached through the trees  
beyond the atmosphere,

once at least once my tongue tasted God.

Now, I am one who names.

Sand grain, grape pip, America—  
yes, even you, dear reader, even God.

Let me tuck you inside  
my toddler's shirt pocket.

See how free his tiny feet are?

Do you remember—  
you who also began nameless,

much larger than you are now,  
small hands, shirt pocket, feet?

With your unnamed longing infinite,  
your named longing infinite, too.

≈



## GARY McDOWELL

### *Lullaby for All Other Lullabies*

I count what is mine to count. And drink  
what I can bend to reach. Pondwater, the hours,  
sometimes a child or two. This is your address  
where the sky is dense as bread. Sweet and strange,

the scent of a river on fire. Count from one  
to swan and feel older than you'll ever live  
to be. What is the soul if it isn't all the money  
you don't have time to spend. I sang

a lullaby to my daughter about the cosmos—  
I've forgotten the words, but I remember  
the rhythm: A map of an island unexplored,  
you and you, a casket of rum, foot stomp,

a slide of the horn. You don't hear it, you  
feel it, your bones knit from thirst and song.

~

## SEAN HILL

### *What Luck*

This morning my dad called and said he was *coming out of* my  
*old stomping grounds*, my beloved university town. *With twins* was  
his reason why; you see, in his retirement, he transports bodies.  
He said they were his *second set this month* and that *we're lucky*—  
including himself, and I tensed as I was holding my son—only  
three weeks old—, against his counting his luck with mine,  
with ours—and perhaps too soon—, and was ashamed of the  
small moment of greed he could not see as he said *They wasn't*  
*no size*, and I imagined them only a little larger than my two  
hands come together, palms up, as if begging. In that town I  
knew a woman who had LUCKEY tattooed across her wrist—  
the L where it pulses, an E dropped in turning the second  
syllable to KEY—a start-of-day reminder of a coffee date with  
a friend whose last name was Luckey the day she got news of  
her biopsy—traced with needle and ink. Didn't want to forget.

~

## KEVIN CLARK

### *In Between*

I'd always told myself  
the late night moonlight  
glow riding her skin as  
she slept was a matter  
of pure matter, simple  
science. The way the world  
builds itself. I believed her  
low blaze to be atomic  
deceit, particles arranged  
to dupe me back into  
an abiding realm where  
the question is written  
as a rhetorical answer—  
a shimmering borealis  
claiming true north.  
But then she'd lift  
from the bottom layer  
of a dream to pull my face  
toward her, squinting  
at some nether version  
of the fool she knew  
she'd married for love—  
and I'd try to sleep.

One midnight the farmhouse  
we rented dead center  
of the almond orchard  
shook in moonless wind  
as if to dare me into  
the dark. And it did—  
I left our bed, stepping  
soundlessly onto  
the peeling porch,  
then upon the patch  
of night-black grass, and  
stood as still as the wind  
would allow. I could hear  
in the infinite webs  
of almond limbs a high  
voice I knew was no  
voice, but, rather, a siren  
risen from ancient ganglia,  
the sound of a whistling  
taunt, a tinnitus  
betraying my belief

in only the tactile. And  
even if it were nothing  
more than high-pitched  
worry sending me back  
to her side all aching  
night, I held out my hand  
trying to gauge  
the unknowable  
hovering from her—

~



## ALLAN PETERSON

### *This Heat*

One could go delirious. Eggs might hatch on their own.  
Between house and the mailbox trees line up along the fence,  
the sections of which hold hands to keep back the leaves for shade.  
I was receiving the horse fly halo, an electron insect  
that made my head hydrogen, exceedingly light.  
I opened my shirt, beginning the cicada procedure,  
the chrysalis ritual in which I remember  
my life of a few minutes earlier unlike the worm,  
the armored larva that lived on root juice.  
Shirt off, I become He-Who-Opens-The-Silver-House,  
for news of the "Resident."  
I am so almost gone from what I was.  
I am opening the notions of fitful things.  
I am passing through walls like collapsed practice.  
The bills and the letters are like captions, fortunes  
in the cookies at China Star I may be called on to solve.  
One says the humpbacks soaked back legs to sing around the earth.  
After the downpour are the momentary lakes.  
I name them while they last.



## JESSY RANDALL

### *Caroline Herschel (1750-1848)*

I walk three hours in a circle.  
I'm making a mirror.  
I'm grinding the glass  
to full shine. Glass starts  
as one thing, but with time  
it's another.

What am I thinking about,  
as I walk, round and round,  
steady as a planet orbiting a sun?  
My thoughts are mine.  
Look in the mirror. See what you see.

And anyway, it's poetic nonsense  
to imagine my mind could wander.  
The angles are too exact for daydreaming.  
If I let myself think about anything  
other than the mirror, the mirror  
will never come to be.



### *Maud Slye (1869-1954)*

I am the poet of mice.  
I am the poet of madness.

I am the mouse scientist.  
I study the waltzing mice.

They dance because they're mad.  
They're mad because they're mice.

I'm mad because I'm nice.  
I write because I'm mad.

These mice are going to die.  
I'll waltz all that I write.

I'm mad because I'm right.  
The mice are all I had.



## YONGYU CHEN

### *I am reading The Days of Abandonment by Elena Ferrante*

My friend is reading the new novel by Elena Ferrante. Yesterday? There was so much snow on the ground the room turned blue. I said: I think if we were both 30 this year this year would have broken our bones. We would have had to tell each other to stand up, to crawl through the water, that our bones aren't broken yet. What happens is a husband leaves his wife after 15 years. All night the wine bottle falls from her counter. Sometimes the glass ends up in his mouth so his teeth glow. Sometimes it just ends and I wake up in a flickering room in Turin. There must be a way to prolong time by living it. My friend teaches me about forgetting. How you can light up the past by removing it. How you can light up the walls of your mother's bedroom by letting these footsteps cancel each other the fuck out. My friend hasn't finished the novel yet. Which means: if I start now, if I read quickly, if I fly through the back of the room, I could catch up, I could read it with her. Intimacy and obstinacy. I could. Intimacy and doors that don't close, lanterns that don't lock. I could. I know that if there were no language we could still talk about the same things. I know we could still see each other as often as we wanted to. If there were no language something other than words would sink our words into the same unmeaning. My friend is telling me about a novel by Elena Ferrante. I miss her. Sometimes my knees go numb so I look at you across the room. Sometimes the room doesn't know what to say so I go numb on the ground. The woman's name is Olga, my no-one's name. I marry the husband, no-one. We're both husbands. We both leave each other filled with first names, little chapels, second rooms. Last night? Last night but not yesterday? I left open the smallest window in my life. I woke up staring. I am waking up. I am covered in your candles, I am in a pink shirt in dark blue snow.

≈



## HELENE ACHANZAR

### *Marfa*

Broiling in the treeless as I did. The trust  
fund babies in their wide-leg linen. As buttes  
shock, then vanish from towns named Alpine  
and Valentine. I learned to salt from the wrist,  
not the fingers, to keep my accent to myself.  
Because border patrol, a pickup pulled over,  
three men with their faces in the earth,  
and all the while Angelenos and their rehearsed  
outrage. Across the rio, the citrus from television.  
It was my first time in the desert,  
and I was surprised by the cold. Foolhardy  
to think I could love this place, that would stand  
with them wowing beneath the eaves.

~

### *O age, I eat your warm bread*

When I was a girl I yelled love, love, love across  
the frozen bird bath, love on the cool side

of the pillow, love, love sliced into thirds like a baguette,  
love sober in the front yard, one whole mini-backpack of love.

These days I defend my right to be socially al dente.  
Sad and horny as the human condition.

In my thirties, I wonder about the next freedom  
as my loan deferment peeks in through the rental blinds.

Now I forget a pill and my insides drop through me.  
My health is a glass orb in the washer-dryer.

Still I melt the whole stick of butter in my pot of noodles  
because I care for my sweetheart and hate pilates.

~

### *Great Lake*

So what if I don't love you anymore?  
I swam in Lake Michigan about it.  
A natural drifting mechanism.

Frost on the rim of how I missed you.  
Exactly two karaoke songs wide.

After you left I was assigned a 24-year-old  
therapist, so I ordered another drink.  
Made my way beyond the far buoy.

Would that there were even ardor  
enough now to send a drunk text. Glad for you  
to be an emotional hoochie elsewhere.

That once I breathed in with my head under a wave,  
and I didn't die. I just coughed the water out.

~

## CHRISTINE SHAN SHAN HOU

### *The Joy and Terror are Both in the Swallowing*

May my daughter never resemble a sullen cabbage.  
Running jostles the organs within the rickety confines

of a torso, like rearranging your body's furniture to give view  
to a swimming pool. The swimming pool possesses the same

qualities as other swimming pools. It is blue and vague.  
How suddenly a thought can unglue you and make you fall

into pieces. Each piece, a new country captivated by southern light.  
In the south, spirits follow false passageways.

Bright young people mark their territory by repeating simple  
tasks in an invigorating manner.

Bright young people need adventure, a heated portable incubator for  
processed foods and aspirations governed in by new technologies.

A rigid awareness dawns over the heart smothering my whole purpose  
in life and arousing my womanly insecurity around machinery.

It's good to do the work even if you want to do horrible  
things with the results. Cataloging the day's sugar intake is one form

of reason if you have gestational diabetes.

My daughter doesn't know what she wants unless I show it to her.

I said: You cannot rely on algorithms to take you to your destination.

I said: There are ways to be wanted that have yet to be discovered.

~

DANA ALSAMSAM

*Mosque Sheikh Zayed, Abu Dhabi, UAE*

They tuck the women into a tiny room    hand us polyester dresses with head covers    My sister  
and I do our best to become holy in four sizes too large    and enter this white marble mass that  
anchors the city    My little sister says *there's no real Muslims anywhere!*    And I wonder if we are  
the exception or the rule?    It's as if we never spent each Saturday on a small pilgrimage to *Dar-*  
*al-Huda*    The House of Guidance    a place where I'd wrap and cover and pin the only part of  
my appearance I thought was pretty beneath a *hijab*    wear a black pleated skirt that never hung  
quite right    trip over the threshold of that enlightened house where all the other girls had *hadith*  
dripping from their tongues    Perhaps I'll always be alien    It takes no majesty to recognize this  
as we reach the entrance    Two rows    one for believers who come to pray    one for tourists  
who want to see an authentic rendition of prayer under the echo of gilded vault    My father goes to  
pray    my sister follows    I pause at the threshold    *believer* on a sign in four languages    What  
do I believe besides what my body tells me?    I enter on the tourist side feeling the cool marble on  
bare feet    the heat on the rest of my skin    I watch my father and sister pray from behind a red  
rope    They prostrate their bodies to *sujood* like camels stooped to drink from water    Nobody  
would guess that I know them    that I know these prayers like phases of the moon

~



JEREMY MICHAEL CLARK

*They Bolted & Brought Him Low*

1.

Dragging beside them now the boy, his body  
a purple unlike that shade reserved for royalty,  
ankles tangled in the reins, no more able to free himself  
than they can rid themselves of him,

the horses keep their stride, galloping  
not toward anywhere, lacking guidance (unless *away from*  
*harm* can be a kind of aim, then that);

\*

undirected,  
not yet riderless, they gallop even harder  
than when whipped, as if effort  
had always been the answer.

2.

Not a question entered his mind at the reins,  
where he'd felt secure, closest to that ideal  
he aspired to: that of a boy, able to go  
where he pleases, so no longer a boy, but a man,  
& so a cloudless sky

looked, then, like possibility.

From a lower vantage now, it looks as if his  
is only one of many dilemmas along a dirt road  
that leads... where? There are countless ways a boy is drawn

\*

toward risk: curiosity, apathy, a need to numb  
a shame born out of belonging, in a sense,  
nowhere; all easily confused from afar,

\*

as hard to discern as, between the rider and the horses,  
who suffers more—

\*

as if knowing mattered.

As if knowing put either at ease. Like a cloud  
of dust, kicked up by hooves, settling  
on his cracked, bleeding skin, across the boy's face  
something spread: a look of calm; of one,  
perhaps, knowing his limits, that  
human part of him: two hands, struggling to grasp the reins.

Then two hands, letting go.

~

### *Southern Drawl*

Here is where the bloodhounds tried to dig up  
what's rested in the dirt. Before dawn, I searched  
for what haunts me & found I'm a man after my own  
shadow. Who could stand to hear a tongue forged  
into shape? Someone says *mastery*

& I hear *misery*.

Cracked lips, I wish you a wetting. I love nothing  
more than the damp field behind my teeth, where a stable-  
boy turns loose the wild horse none could break.

❧

### TODD DAVIS

#### *Until Darkness Comes*

*A 100-year-old gray and ductile iron foundry in Somerset, PA,  
has issued a closing notice to workers, according to local reports.*

The white blades turn the sky: red-  
eyed turbines blinking away the danger  
of flying things. Small children float up  
over the Alleghenies, parents chasing  
the dangling ropes of weather balloons.  
It's hard to predict when a storm may blow through.  
A boy huddles by a bedroom window, wonders  
if his father knows where every deer hides  
on the mountain. It's his job to pull the sled  
when his father makes a kill. He's been taught  
in school the wind that circles the blades carries  
electricity to the towns where steel was made.  
Three years ago his sister disappeared in the clouds,  
heat lightning like veins in the sky. She sends a letter  
once a month with a weather report and money  
their mother uses for an inhaler. Most of the coal dust  
has settled, but fires burn on the drilling platforms  
and the prehistoric gas smells like the eggs that spoil  
in the hutch when the hens hide them.  
The boy never wants to leave this place. Everything  
important is buried here: his grandparents; a pocketknife  
he stole from his best friend; the eye-teeth of an elk  
he found poached at the bottom of a ravine. Yesterday  
in the barn a carpenter ant drilled a hole. The boy bent  
to the sawed-circle and blew into it, breath forced down  
into darkness. He dreams each night of a horse galloping  
from a barn, mane on fire like a shooting star. He prays  
for a coat sewn from pigeon feathers, for small wings  
to fly over the tops of trees where the children land  
when their balloons begin to wilt. On summer evenings  
barn swallows careen like drones, gorging dragonflies  
that skim the swamp. The birds' blue shoulders cant  
and angle, breast the color of the foundry's smokestacks  
as they crumble beneath wrecking balls and bulldozers,  
erasing the mill fires the boy's grandfather was sure  
would never go out.

❧

## GABRIELLA R. TALLMADGE

### *Announcement*

My name, from its male origins, meant messenger.

When I said *You ruined me*, I wanted to reverse the word order,  
twin the pain and dig it in you.

The angel Gabriel stood two bows-lengths from a prophet,  
craved closeness but, by nature, chose instead his secrets.

You once called me *barrier fire*, a barrage. As if looking  
in the mirror, I am onslaught. A landslide coming closer.

He was meant to be a comfort to man as he was felled.  
Gabriel translated what the earth said, once broken open:  
*This is in you.*

Two by two, we're both no good. We are  
the other's flood sentence.

*This is done*, said Gabriel, *And this is the new.*

~

## TANEUM BAMBRICK

### *Lovers' Mural*

Days after we met, he drove us to Sevilla—  
an hour through the Andalucían desert—  
promised that night he would take me back.

Outside a church, a square of painted tiles stamped  
to a wall of cement. *Can you find the bird in that?*  
He smiled, watching me search with my hand.

Lovers stood in a flame pit. Covered their chests.  
In the lower left corner—I showed him—a swallow  
coiled with gold leaves. He pointed to a plaque

I couldn't read yet: *If a woman finds this bird it means  
she's with who she will marry.* He laughed, horsing  
his fingers through the ties on my dress.

We bought a bottle of white wine and sat  
by the street. It grew dark. He mentioned  
his brother's apartment, for the night, was empty.

In the car, he turned from the road home  
to a lit building. The brother—his arm  
around a woman's hips—tossed a set of keys.

I shook in that bathroom, translating: *didn't we agree  
you would drive me back?* I didn't know if he could listen.  
If there was something off in the way that I asked.

~

ERIN ADAIR-HODGES

*On a Hike up Prospect Rock with Three Women  
Sixteen Years My Junior*

It was me or the mountain and the mountain wanted blood.  
After I fell, my friends gentled their pace, put their bodies  
between the slick rocks and mine, offered their hands  
to ease the shock of descending. Before that,  
I had beamed at their lightness, the way they moved  
up the mountain like smoke, rising loose and owning  
everything. I do not remember ever being like that,

knowing there was a top you could get to, that all  
you had to do was move. One of these friends  
tells a man we know—you are my enemy,  
because of what he tried to do to her body.  
Sometimes the enemy of the body is the body,  
ours or someone else's. I'm ashamed to remember  
how I longed for the discipline

to disorder my eating, to let my future form  
fill my body's needs, stripping the house to studs.  
Instead, I added rooms, found furniture, and by furniture  
I mean cheese. See, I know now the wreckage  
all this wanting has made. On my refrigerator was a magnet  
saying *Inside every fat girl is a thin one struggling to break free*  
as if she had been kidnapped and everyone in town

was on the lookout, bloodhounds nosing at my rolls  
for a scent of the lost thin me. Who I let touch me,  
grateful to be touched at all. I've shuffled now  
into a new invisibility—I'm ma'amed  
the whole day through. In new rooms,  
men turn to my friends—I scratch until the blood  
proves I exist. I am ashamed of this, too.

An artist once asked me if after I died,  
I'd want my brain to be saved  
so that one day it could be digitized, uploaded  
into a repairable frame. I said no, but now I think  
I was a fool, though at the time resurrection  
sounded exhausting, the eternal chore of disappointments.  
But what has disappointed me more than my body? And still,

it is the vehicle I drive to joy. It's ungracious, I know,  
but I don't really care. I don't care  
about so much I used to care about  
but not enough to feel free. I don't want my youth back  
but I wouldn't mind someone else's.  
I remember the day I knew for certain that I would die,  
not then, but that it was coming, and probably

not suddenly, which meant it was already happening,  
I was dying a little all the time, and it made me mad,  
I mean I was mad with it. I was unprepared for this,  
how desire for something brutal to know me  
made me its monster, stumbling along the riverbanks  
looking for any tenderness, and when denied,  
then torment it was. Every thatched roof witch

had her reasons. I know that I am lucky.  
I say that every day: mirror lady, you are lucky.  
Sometimes, I almost feel it. I have loved those born in bodies  
they can't wait to escape. That this skin means  
I get forgiven. Others' bodies whose own blocks  
plot up vicious conspiracies, an army chanting  
*We are the body! Let's kill the body!* I know.

I know that I don't know. I don't know  
how to know any more. This body is my only school,  
my little church of death. Of sex. Tears and cum  
and sweat. And blood—always blood. It's not possible  
to write about blood enough. For so long, I thought  
a man's blood had saved me, but he wasn't a man  
or a god, and hell's not the fire I fear. When I fell

on that mountain, that hill, that small scoop of earth,  
I did not cry, cry from embarrassment or pain, but I cried  
because of what I'd seen, the betrayals just waiting for me.  
It made me want to get naked. It made me want to light  
a fire and gloat my sin into it. After my friend's hysterectomy,  
and before the chemotherapy, she said she wasn't sad  
at all, but instead mad, Rambo mad, wife in the attic mad,

rabbit and hatter mad, mad at the hats we'd bought  
for the hair she'd lose. I almost didn't say  
what happened next, that I am now older than she  
ever got. That she had been beautiful and thin  
and I had envied her. This mountain I am talking about  
is real, it is in Vermont, and on it I left a bit of skin, salt,  
yes and blood. I walked down, ate ice cream, drank

too much wine. Some kinds of beauty are no longer mine  
while others I never saw till now—how rain releases  
the smell of sage, the tender hushed fuck  
while a small child sleeps. The moment before I fell,  
I held for the first time an eck, a baby lizard electric  
orange, small and bright as star slough. My friend had slid it  
into my hands and I was dazed by it, dizzy thinking

of all the doors I'd never walk through, mirrors  
that would never tell me the story of my face. I fell once  
in Poland, not down a mountain but a flight of stairs,  
and when I could not stand we feared the worst  
though the x-rays showed nothing was wrong.  
This was not exactly true. Let me say here that I was  
young, and I did not understand permanence

not because I was dumb or even lucky, though I must have been  
the envy of someone. There is no greater tragedy than to be young,  
listening to an older person speak of youth, their furrowing  
authority a kind of sadness you can't imagine  
you'll bear so badly, so nostalgia steeped it bitters,  
so I won't say what anyone else will know, only  
what I have come to learn, which is nothing

or nothing useful or nothing I would rather have  
than what I lost to learn it. We never made it to the top  
of the rock, the path up closed so that peregrines could nest  
in scrapes, could hunt to feed the chicks that emerged, worming  
from the clutch of shell. I could say I saw the mothers  
circling the sky as we descended, but I saw only my feet,  
the blood down my leg like an arrow to the earth.

≈



# ANXIETY FOLIO



ALONG A MAKE-BELIEVE STREET  
SHE RE-ENACTS THE SCENE OUT HER WINDOW

collage    poetry & essay

SERRAH RUSSELL

FLENNIKEN • ARMANTROUT • MAJMUDAR • DUNN • JANG  
HUTCHCRAFT • WONG • MOYSAENKO • McCALLUM  
WELCKER • SKOOG • RODERICK • GEE • BAMBRICK  
PHETTEPLACE • RONK • CLARK • CONSTANTINE  
ZUCKERMAN • TRAN • HILL • DIAZ • OTT • WALKER

KATHLEEN FLENNIKEN

*Street Scene, 1964*

A little girl sprawls on the living-room rug,  
pushing a matchbox car and ambulance  
along a make-believe street.  
She re-enacts the scene out her window—  
car, stretcher, woman standing by  
who could be mother or driver, and child.

\*

The matchbox car is so convincing  
she can't help peer inside.  
Its empty seats are freshly disappointing.  
As though the driver has fled  
to check the child for a heartbeat,  
or stand by useless  
as a statue.

\*

The little girl playing on her knees  
hears brakes from the street  
and cleanses the scene  
of anything but little plastic people.

You could buy them  
by the dozen in cellophane bags.  
The postman holding mail,  
mechanic with an oil can,  
four firemen wielding axes.

\*

There's something out there  
she can't comprehend.  
Her mother pulls her gently from the window  
and asks about the street on the rug  
and what about the cars  
and where are all the little people going?

■

RAE ARMANTROUT

*As It Happens*

"I like purple," she said, and her elders gave her  
many purple doodads.

Then her sister said, "I like blue," and, by good luck,  
the same thing happened.

Now everything blue belongs to Sasha,  
while everything purple belongs to Renee.

This system is often self-monitored, but  
sometimes conflict occurs.

What to do in the case of lavender?

\*

Math will only answer  
whether two terms are equal.

This one is an owl  
or skull

and this is a butterfly  
or else

some bright stitches in fabric.

■

AMIT MAJMUDAR

*Apocalypse Eve*

Who built this swing set on a cliff edge?  
My daughter kicks her heels out over the sea.

∞

They make a schoolhouse out of a sandcastle  
Then show them where to run when the tide comes in.

∞

Don't bike to grandmother's house in that red hoodie.  
Stay home, where the big bad hurricane can't get you.

∞

For every daughter with a monster under her bed,  
There's a daddy with a Glock under his pillow.

∞

Another generation, jumping off the swings,  
Learns the sky goes all the bright way down.

∞

Do little girls do Double Dutch these days?  
Did Daddy tie the jump rope to a rafter?

∞

No country with more wealth, or more wealth gone poof.  
No country with more moms praying cradles bulletproof.

∞

Who built the orphanage across a fault line?  
Same folks who made the orphans orphans.

∞

Still more elevated rhetoric:  
Stiltwalkers on wet sand.

∞

When a girl lies face down in a red hoodie,  
America feels for her pulse with its trigger finger.

∞

Fatherhood shows you all the brinks of things,  
A clairvoyance of infinite uh oh.

∞

My daughter's flipflops drop and turn to spindrift.  
The chains are going rust-rough in her hands.

∞

The teachers who teach in the softening sandcastle  
Bury their heads in the sand.

■

*Seventh Grade Swim Class*

We pull school bathing suits from the bin in the girls' locker room,  
skirted, inelastic, color-coded by size. I don't know who designed them  
but my first guess is a sadist in the early 1950s. My second guess is a man.

I'm a small girl so I wear pine green, not as small as Courtney  
who wears red, not nearly as large as Melissa who is eggplant.  
No one in this class wears black. A rainbow of hideousness,

we line up on the deck to study one another's emerging curves,  
make note of who is lacking, who has too much, who is just right.  
Slumped on benches poolside are the girls with their periods

or mothers willing to write notes saying they have their periods.  
I envy them, sweating sullenly in their street clothes, as we wade in,  
butterfly and breast stroke to the whistle of Mrs. J, our gym teacher,

married to Mr. J, the earth science teacher who slips images  
of their New Mexico vacations into the slide carousel between igneous  
and metamorphic. This is how I know she can smile.

Now, she lies on the damp tile and kicks like a Reebok-clad frog,  
as we cough our way down the lanes, suits loosening around us,  
the bellies and breasts slackening in folds the way our own skin will

one day, the chlorinated water rushing through the softened seams,  
bringing us both forward and back in time: We are babies floating  
in our mothers' wombs. We are old women floating in our own skin.

We are, please God, anywhere but here  
in these unknowable,  
these terrifying forms.



*2010s American Teen Internal Monologue*

yes it is in this nation of freedom and peace  
that i ignored timelines of airstrikes and cages and shootings  
and instead took pictures of myself over and over  
in glorious angles as if capturing a moment  
and then deleting it repeatedly could summon  
a type of ideation or self from my body; perception,  
i realize now, a muddied statue crumbling  
into its own foundation, yet a foundation  
of a self in front of any body. yet have i grown? who am i  
to say anything about anything  
other than the shy shape of my eyes or the color of my skin  
when beaten into the ground... is performance  
of my trauma an overcoming or becoming  
washed into my dirtier selves rolling about  
in my bed mudstained and bloodwring,  
hapless in this happenstance. happening and happiness  
a sort of blurry mixture posted then archived  
on a picturesque golden hour shot of all these limbs flailing  
with "Stay True To Yourself!" written on a banner above  
my twisted eyes ignoring the news ignoring the world in which  
i am thinking less often about killing myself.  
the days have been brighter, have arranged themselves  
in different shades, entertained different clothes,  
have orchestrated celebration and attachment rather than methods of  
*jump* whispered from a tiny megaphone  
held up in the mouth of a distorted version of my face  
reflected at me from a punched-in, bloody mirror.  
all an elaborate way to call myself a liar, really  
because i still want to disappear like a flash of light  
aching into the dirt of a dark undiscovered forest  
where a tree falls and yes, a cry could be heard for miles.





*On This One Acre of the World*

To watch  
a woodpecker  
working on a tree—  
to keep my eyes on its  
downward stripe,

the quick stutters  
of its head  
as it strikes over  
and over the trunk—  
methodically

listening for insects  
inside, or the  
presence of sap,  
a thickness that can be  
let out

with boring incisions,  
little holes  
the tree repairs  
by a kind  
of bleeding.

To watch,  
but the mind  
moves on  
so easily—  
to doubt rising

like a wave from the sea,  
to the look you gave  
when I knew  
how much  
I hurt you.

It has something to do  
with perspective—  
the palpable  
world  
getting smaller,

so small I forget  
that downhill  
in a house that is  
dove-gray and spotted  
with tree shadow,

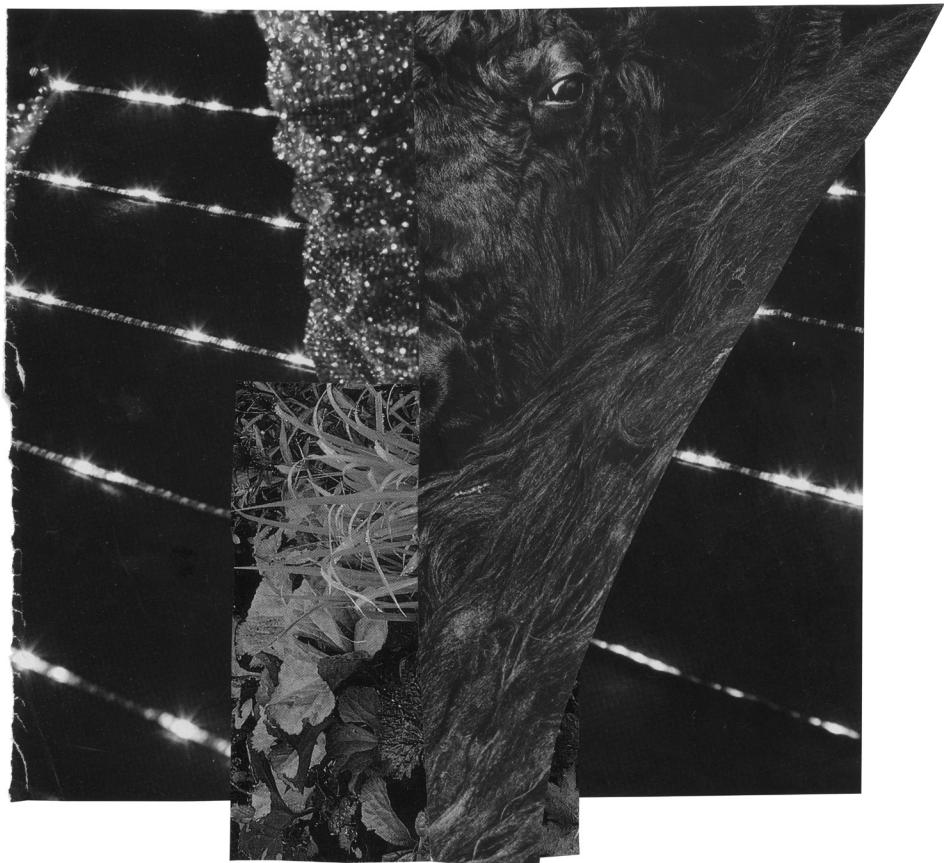
someone is shaking  
a sheet from a window—  
see how the cotton rises  
and snaps, hooks  
onto the air.

Laundered, dried,  
shaken—  
how new  
we might be,  
how easily repaired.



The park rises before me. I follow different paths because this is no time for order. What's new is the greater quiet, as if the world is echoing me: a tentative glance, no touching. Along the secret lake, I linger under a cherry tree in full blossom, *as is my ancestral right*, something my Ohio friend once said to me about hunting in Virginia. When the petals fall like snow, I think *all my karaoke dreams*. One male mallard duck chases another who chases another. Is this about love? Maybe the hidden female wants to be alone. A slow spring. Loosening my mermaid hair. A siren splits the birdsong. Hours of falling and listening. I've given up coffee to lighten my heart, but a knot remains. The cat taps my ankle to ask for a pet, but not a hug, never a hug. Years ago, after a separation, I couldn't sense anything until the spring, when a woman's song broke over me. The days are unspeakable. Alone, my love returns to me. Color is a feeling: a spray of shocked orange poppies, tiny golden creeping buttercups, serene Chinese hibiscus, a great blue heron dips its head low. I wear pale pink to bloom—a pastel queen, soft sight. There is a gentleness that returns once you let go of love's disappointment. A fleeting expanse in the compressed day. When only the birds are with me, I embrace a redwood tree, breathing it in. Dear ancestor: I am always rapidly departing, forgive me. To live, I want to be known and loved, the two together, inseparable.

SHELLEY WONG



AS IF THE WORLD IS ECHOING

DANIEL MOYSAENKO

*In the Dark Times Even an Orange Daylily  
Sings about the Dark Times*

People are missing from my landscape  
of thrumming brush and  
brick storefronts light-beaten or -caressed

because people are too painful  
to look at long  
for my petal-bell eye to face

But somewhere a box of bullets rattles  
a child sleeps in a kennel  
a complaint is buried by its opposite

Somewhere a heroin addict  
imagines she's not wading too deep  
into the Gulf

Thinks the screams from the beach  
are her brain cells singing  
a muffled Happy Birthday

That each being internalizes the weather  
Or else conducts a chorus  
only it can hear

midwifing each moment over again  
The scary thought that I wilt  
gladly of my own accord

and a streetlamp fizzles independent  
of any person and is better off  
remade as a naked palm tree

with the sidewalks dark  
and unpeopled  
as if they weren't meant to be paths



SHARA McCALLUM

*In the Field*

lies the shipwrecked ship  
broken mast and riggings  
resembling an angel or bird fallen  
from a high place wings splayed feathers  
like a halo of the body in the field  
I wander the body of night  
bereft of sight or made bereft by sight  
of this vessel stranded in a clearing  
never meant to hold its form  
unable to conjure the shape  
of longing every ship contains  
in this dream of the field  
I am the absence of ship  
its hollowed-out hull the waves  
the voices of the drowned  
beating against my sides my ribs  
and I cannot stop the cries  
and I cannot unstopper my ears  
as all night comes the tolling  
*Why have you survived if not for this?*



*Oysters*

An oyster never ejects its pearl  
though you wouldn't believe

how long it took me to find that out.  
Internet, you've still got work to do.

A keystone species, oysters filter  
up to fifty gallons per day, at least I think

that's what I read. I could look it up again,  
but that's not poetry.

Oyster blood is colorless like lymph with its  
secret washing of organs, its tireless

filtration, its syncopated pathways in the body.  
I should be embarrassed, but how was I to know

there was yet another thing in me? Blood  
gets all the glory. In the deepest

recesses of the ocean floor,  
not-quite life forms wait

opportunistically, as life forms do  
for their moment. It is coming. What

will be left of us? Silent cities? Wikipedia?  
Or mountains upon mountains of pearls:

lumpish spheres, shiny and smoothed  
around something jagged that hurt

our softness. That hurt the softness  
of our ancestors. We have been rubbing

and shining and smoothing that wound  
forever. Smothering it with nacre

and cradling it in the pit of us, shining  
and shining it and never letting go.

*The Magpie*

Rarely do I stand around  
in my body wondering how  
can I contribute to the avant-garde  
today? But this magpie  
perching on the black paint of the rail  
puts away its feathers like butter knives,  
shrugs against blue sky, the snowy hill.  
It crouches its foray, sets its midnight beak  
cold to morning. How sudden breeze  
makes it shift a little, with one knuckle  
over another, is like all the other slight  
adjustments I make constantly to keep  
falling into places that make me feel  
I'm not there, an afterimage, where  
maybe I'm becoming my own lone gunman,  
who struts the railing each morning  
in the wrong feathers. In this way  
rhyme can marry violence to loneliness,  
in transit centers, hillsides, bedrooms, zones  
any visitor passes through like a magpie  
on an apartment railing, this morning,  
not from lack of signs, but because  
although there are many signs, they are too long  
to read, whatever reading is.



*Darkness for Beginners*

*Upon this world's divine beauty we carry out our evil*  
 barks the televangelist  
 while I hate-watch his show and butter  
 my daughters' toast. In the next room  
 to the tune from *Frozen*  
 they dance. I, in my chimp-ness,  
 can't dance because the news  
 is blue and of course I'm damning it all—  
 I, the damned, damning  
 as I do every breakfast when I chew  
 what's never new—our wars, our sick and starving,  
 and our heat and drought—  
 the dry dirt of the earth, where one day  
 I know I'll lay my six long feet.  
 In the meantime, if I'm supposed to give  
 thanks, I may as well  
 thank God for my opposable  
 thumbs that allow me to pluck and cut and pare  
 and plunder and spoon—and also for  
 my broad frontal lobe—  
 where I sense deep down we'll soon  
 be blown like flies against  
 an endless wall, where we'll wing and then  
 forever feebly cling.

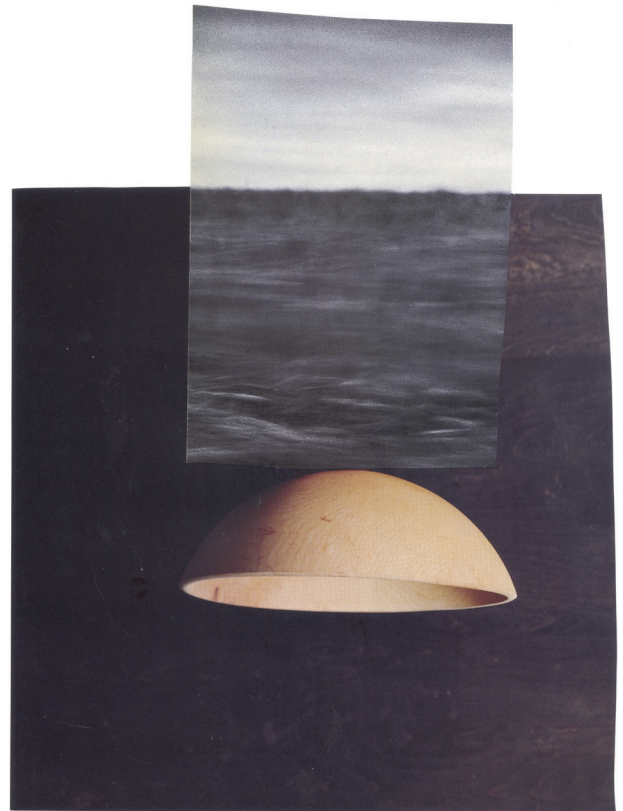
*Take 30 with Food*

My mother had heart failure last week. She told me as an  
 afterthought, having twice said, *I'm fine now*, but I didn't  
 understand so I asked, *What's fine now?* Thirty pounds of  
 water weight, difficulty breathing, an irregular heartbeat.  
 Her bookshelf now cluttered with bottles of Chinese herbs  
 rolled into small, black balls. *Take 30 with food.* Stinky teas  
 and poultices to press against a wound, needles as thin as a  
 hair or thick as a nail, they quiver when they break the skin.  
 It happened after my uncle died. She watched his funeral on  
 the computer, beamed in terabytes across the country, ended  
 up in the emergency room that night. She turned 80 while  
 in the hospital. *This was practice*, she told me. *So I'll be ready*  
*when the time comes.* Her nephew, her father, her mother, her  
 older brother. Every death reveals something new. Colon  
 cancer kept secret (two uncles), high cholesterol, high blood  
 pressure, lousy hearts, blood in the bowels, a lazy eye, ears  
 that won't stop ringing. When I update my medical history  
 with a click of the mouse, my Western doctor tells me to come  
 in for more tests. My Chinese doctor covers my back with  
 glass jars and swirling smoke. I tell myself I will be immune,  
 my Americanness will save me. I eat kale, rub bio-identical  
 progesterone on my skin, meditate with an app on my phone.  
 My pantry is filled with plastic bins of vitamins, some so large  
 I have to cut them in two. At night I run my hands over my  
 body, repeat affirmations, wonder what it will take to change  
 my own history.

■

■





IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO GET INTO OR OUT

In Texas, running with my partner along the edge of a flooded prairie, I said, *I think I could forgive anyone for anything*. And that felt true, maybe because I was lonely and drinking every day. We became experts at making old fashioned. Four Roses and big circle ice cubes. We isolated through the storm season. Cylindrical hail crashing against his Nissan Juke. Mud pooled the sidewalk, so it was impossible to get into or out of our front door without jumping from hole to hole where other people's feet had pulled out of their lodged shoes. *I called the city about this*, our landlord promised when we moved in, but we knew she hadn't, and we forgave her for allowing us to live for months in a building that was difficult to access. We forgave her for hiding that the apartment wasn't wired for internet due to a recent fire on the block. *Of course*, we said, *everyone is going through a lot*. Every night on the couch when lightning branched across the sky, we sat closer, watching each other's foreheads flash blue. Three times a day, we left for short runs or walks. We saw a dead armadillo by a lake. We saw a vulture flex its talons for leverage over an opened squirrel's body, tearing out its meat. One morning, I received a text from the person who assaulted me when I was seventeen. *As your abuser*, he wrote, *I think there are some things you need to hear from me*. I've decided I can forgive anyone for what they imagine in isolation. This includes myself, sitting on a wall of mortared cinder blocks, texting him back. All of my suffering I betrayed while I corrected his logic.

TANEUM BAMBRICK

*Accepted*

He is thirsty, he is cunning,  
his Facebook feed has pictures of his new puppy, interspersed with  
photos of him boxing at his gym, hitting the bag as if it were full of  
his own regrets.  
I friend-accepted but will not like.  
He has not aged well and besides, he had his chance in the seventh  
grade.  
Instagram is our generation's way of saying grace, I tell her, but I  
know this is not quite right.  
That most people, when posting pictures of their meals, are  
glorifying themselves, not God.  
The holiest among us opt-out, hermetic, accounts deleted.  
Purity is the obsession of our age.  
She says the internet exists at the intersection of narcissism and  
loneliness and I let silence fill my end of the conversation because  
she is right. She is better at liking the things she is supposed to,  
that is to say, she is more grown-up than I am.

■

*A Series of Tubes*

We invented this thing that could take us anywhere and I decided I  
wanted to visit my own past.  
I wanted to test the concepts of 'innocence' and 'youth.'  
I wanted to be smarter than everybody alive.  
The plan was to return to the present and write a great novel.  
Instead I found myself gazing down a series of infinite portals,  
each of us looking down at a younger version. We were  
transfixed, we were immobile. We were scared to look up even  
though that was the only way out. We had mistaken paralysis for  
immortality. We had reframed change as death and still it came for  
us anyway.

■

MARTHA RONK

*no place*

no place unfraught no easy slide into a tepid sea  
no place tenderhearted and thoroughly fertile  
no place transpires as night intensifies gender  
no place picked up and left high and dry  
no place downpour from the porch lightning highlights  
no place I didn't love you or on Tuesday moved the iron bed  
no place Joshua Trees and Oaks and willows and weeping  
no place turquoise auras, tents in flyaway gullies  
no place rusty moldy soaked on alternate Fridays  
no place too hot too dim and too many words for snow  
no place I haven't been anywhere much less often  
no place insouciance I figured how costly it might be  
no place that year I moved angles around and took up arms  
no place a sea of troubles, the sea itself rising and rising



*What's not there*

The strange was merely that off-kilter strange  
yet even the smallest these days seems to require  
readjustments in temperament.  
Last night my last thought was I must look it up  
as soon as it's light, but haven't I gone through it now  
with no recollection of what in this edition isn't there.  
I think of all who are missing in this life  
and when someone occurs to me it's like being pulled  
in the two directions I'm pulled in at night.  
You say it's not the ferocity of those crows,  
not the reviews or terrifying news of the day.  
You say it's not the music—so very loud—  
and definitely *no more eloquence*.  
The moon calms down in the moist night air.  
I remember his saying something about the second to the last line.  
What can it mean if you can only love someone  
if you *abide by the unspoken agreement not to say so*.  
There are, she says to me, on leaving,  
many things you've already decided not to say.



ANSLEY CLARK

*Returning in Late Summer to the Uncanny*

Even the air hangs flatly salt-wet and collapsed orange  
*you might see a side of her that's difficult to see* my father says  
then a deer gallops through the fluorescent tunnel  
as though fleeing invisible wildfire I've heard of deer  
who swim between islands inside the cold sea's curled edge  
in the weeks caring for my mother and the house  
deer appear close three times once in that fluorescent panic  
and twice more standing around with chilly demeanors  
surely this must be a sign I think the muscle under the muscle  
one morning a four-poster bed arrives with the tides  
heaped with heavy blankets under which lie  
a family of undetermined bodies dead or sleeping  
I could investigate further but I don't want to look  
as in *the strangest part was opening a door in the darkness to find a house*  
one day I wake from a nap to find my mother in her bathrobe leaning  
limp over a donut in her bathrobe on the couch  
a quiet and lackluster eating so not like her  
the angle of sweat beneath her voice  
if I must name it this is a raw incubatory period  
each night bright as a pool the house on its hill  
stands roofless exposed as bristle the wound inside is what  
the stars' dark vacuum pulls on pulls onward and up



BRENDAN CONSTANTINE

*Fist*

Flipping a coin is just passive aggression  
aimed at God, who, by the way, doesn't  
need hints. But let's get back to what  
you weren't saying. In English we have  
a name for everything. We call it  
Everything. We call nothing Space, as in,  
I just need some space. To God, denial  
is a coin toss from wrath. Call it  
in the air; heads you win, tails you win  
harder. The primary food of cavemen  
was venison. Look at your palm, you  
can still see where the throat of a deer  
was meant to fit. Cup your eye, you  
can feel the animal blink. Now make a fist,  
shake it at the sky. That's how we prayed,  
back in the day.



*Ice-Watch*

with winter's bare branches  
we can finally see in silhouette  
all those bird nests & one  
paper wasp nest a spun  
storm cloud swinging low  
think of it the patience in making  
knitting together spit & fiber of phloem  
to leave something wholly art  
leave it for wind or whatever  
& rebuild again the next year

when ice settles on the river  
a killer cold rushes under the surface  
every winter a boy always it's a boy  
falls into that dark rush  
& sometimes he lives  
how many boys died  
the town can't remember  
each year the town waits  
with the ice-watch—\$2 bets  
for the exact time of breaking  
sounding like a cannon  
when it finally gives up  
leaving riverbanks scarred  
icebergs feet thick & shards  
glistening in new sun water flows  
over bull's bridge dam again  
& the town unthaws  
survives another winter  
we can measure the town's  
dying by the ice-watch  
new yorkers don't guess  
they started buying the town  
piece by piece they spent money  
& now the school empties  
as a glass of water sipped slowly  
& now the ice-watch is worth less  
we can tell the earth warming  
by the ice-watch too as each year  
the river gets wilder & now  
it tears past the banks & trees  
closes rt 7 completely  
plows a field with ice  
ends a forest with ice

crushes a truck with ice  
there's nothing for the town to do  
but wait for its breaking so they go  
look at the ice past known limits  
the familiar turned strange  
they cluster & sip coffee & gossip  
about the ice watch the school  
closing another house sold

the boys remember the boys  
they find a paper wasp nest  
gently pull it from its place  
then set it on fire in the snow  
it flames & fades out  
picture it the bright then black  
smudge in the white field  
the ashes rising in winter wind



*Explaining Psychiatry to My ESL Relatives*

Spelled like hairstylist,  
only under the scalp.  
Sounds like scotch tape  
across a punctured  
tire. Circumference  
of a spider's egg  
hidden in chocolate.  
Sing iambic,  
sign Iago and chasm,  
just don't say  
psychic. Semantics,  
but words matter  
to us. We're pious  
and subversive,  
or try to be  
clean as a punch  
struck straight  
like the shore,  
like a poem  
ending with symbol  
of a tree.



*Trust Metaphor*

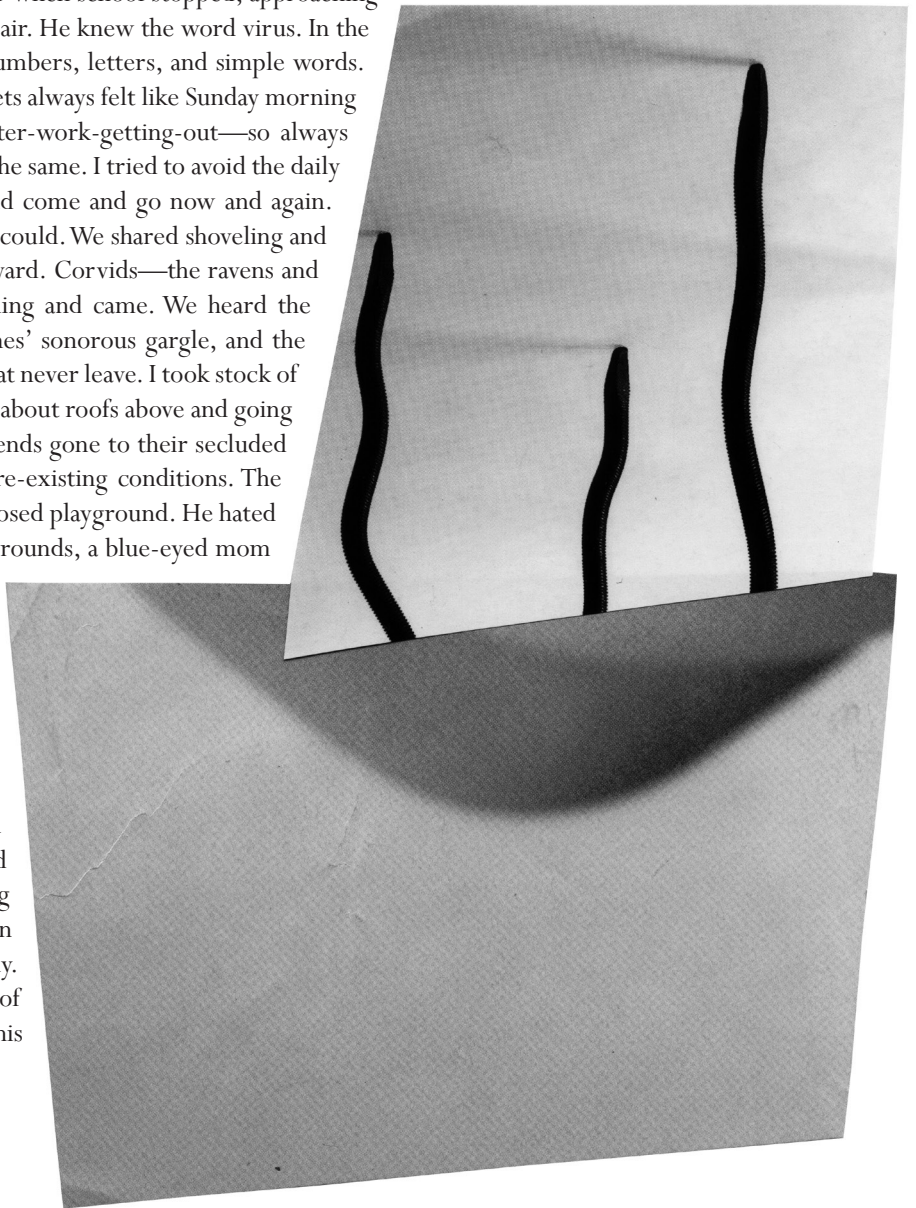
He gave me his box of pills  
to taper out and I held it  
  
in my hands like a bird  
with a broken wing. No  
  
like a trusty, neglected  
rag tossed in my trunk, or  
  
a favorite resentment  
we kept revisiting day  
after day. A worry  
stone, a paper cut  
  
in our fingers' webbing.  
The squeaky step  
to his apartment  
for each morning's  
  
sacrament. What faith,  
even when I forgot  
  
he'd say *it's OK*, through  
his fever's tremble. He knew  
  
I'd be back. Better. A ballerina  
twisting in a music box.





Here in Montana, there was talk of being prepared to hole-up. The babysitter came over while she still could, and my wife and I went out to dinner and instead of having dessert made one last run to the store to be sure we were ready. Folks mostly kept their distance. People here don't mind being close under a roof; it's under the sky they want their room. No school for two weeks. Then two more. And two more. And so on. Our son was four when school stopped, approaching the midpoint of his fifth year here breathing air. He knew the word virus. In the early days of stay-at-home we worked on numbers, letters, and simple words. We got out for hikes and bike rides. The streets always felt like Sunday morning in the South, and the trails felt like the after-work-getting-out—so always some distanced somebodies. Every day was the same. I tried to avoid the daily briefings and numbers lost. The snow would come and go now and again. Every day different. We enjoyed it while we could. We shared shoveling and made a miniature snow family in our front yard. Corvids—the ravens and crows—kept us company. Spring was coming and came. We heard the songs of thronging robins, the sandhill cranes' sonorous gargle, and the meadowlarks and magpies and chickadees that never leave. I took stock of all our plights and privileges. Those worried about roofs above and going without food. My cousin's job gone. My friends gone to their secluded second home. Pre-existing conditions of pre-existing conditions. The weeks wore on—our son's tantrum at the closed playground. He hated the virus. In Idaho in protest of closed playgrounds, a blue-eyed mom was arrested for violating an order for the public good; there was a protest of her arrest. Reminded me of 12-year old Tamir Rice who, almost six years ago, while playing at an Ohio playground, was shot so quickly by a cop just arriving on the scene. Every same day is different. And in the eighth week, things having eased into a phased reopening, the news of another unarmed Black man, Ahmaud Arbery, young, getting outside for a jog, murdered by a white man he knew only long enough to fear mortally. Shot months ago, in February, when some of us began to worry perhaps a little about this pandemic. Every different day the same.

SEAN HILL



WHEN SOME OF US BEGAN TO WORRY PERHAPS A LITTLE

*The Government Official*

A government official knocks on my door. I'm immediately fearful. I know I must answer, so I try to keep calm. "Hello," I say. "Hello, a mister J. Peach, please," he says. "There is no one here by that name," I say. "Sir, you're obviously lying," he says. "Seriously," I say, "never heard of him." "Sir, you'll have to come with me," he says. "I can prove it," I say, reaching for my wallet. "My ID will prove who I am." I show him the ID. "Thank you very much, Mr. Peach," he says. "Please come with me."

■

*The Fall*

A man in a Chicano Batman shirt fell from a skyscraper. He didn't have a parachute on. He did have on a pair of parachute pants, though. Still, he couldn't fly, but he was able to breakdance in the air, as he descended on the city: he was fly. He showed off some fancy footwork. He did a headstand in midair and spun around in circles. As he prepared to land, a fireman threw a trampoline on the floor. The man in a Chicano Batman shirt bounced around the city. As he landed, he did the splits. The crowd cheered. He took a bow and waved at the many faces in the city.

■

*Perishables*

My wife is away on business. The lettuce is too dangerous to eat. No one can prove the light in the fridge goes off when the door is closed or the dangers of global warming. My best friend once told me how he called the poison hotline to discuss if his salsa had turned, our veggies zombies, our zombies in charge of the rules. We wore masks for the wildfires and put our cans in bins the color of sky before it grayed with cataracts. My father fell on his face but won't see a doctor while a scientist in China has shuffled the DNA of a girl. My kids will someday slog in a world without ice caps and the fridge informs me that the ice is ready for the rum and to watch out for the next good guy with a gun. Have I said I cannot sleep? In this, at least, I'm not alone.

■

# LAUGHTER IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

CODY WALKER

I'm writing this essay in early March, in Ann Arbor. The new coronavirus hasn't yet come to Michigan, but it's dominating the national headlines, and it's affecting my loved ones in Seattle. In January, I was asked to write about Humor and Anxiety, a pairing I've been reflecting on for the past twenty years. I was told that the essay would appear during the runup to the presidential election. (I've been known to have thoughts about politics.) But now I want to write about the coronavirus—and about what role, if any, humor might play in the crisis. Might this idea be dumb? Or monstrous? It's possible that, by midsummer, when this essay is published, COVID-19 will have gone into global remission. Or maybe it will have infected half of the earth.

A half-of-the-earth result would probably include my mother. She's eighty, has Alzheimer's, and lives a few miles from Kirkland, Washington, the current US epicenter of the outbreak. She's as likely to wash her hands for a full twenty seconds as I am to kick a lemur. (I would never kick a lemur.) So am I really trying to search for the comic in a contagion that will almost certainly grow many times worse and might sicken or kill people I love?

Here's a poem I wrote twenty years ago:

*Abbott and Costello: The Alzheimer's Years*

*"Who's on first? My son? I have a son?"*

For a while in the early 2000s, this was my favorite poem to say aloud at a reading. I liked how the audience's laughter started a beat late; I could almost hear people thinking, Oh, wait, it's over? And I must've liked playing the role of the mischievous poet, "brave" enough to upend expectations,

eager to prove French philosopher Henri Bergson right. (Bergson, in his essay on laughter, says the comic "requires something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart.") Anyway, the poem came true, and I never read it anymore.

\*

The University of Washington, just moments ago, cancelled in-person classes for the remainder of the academic quarter. I was teaching at UW in 2001 when hijacked planes flew into the Twin Towers. I quickly put together a course called "Difficult Comedy, Difficult Times," in which we examined comic and satiric responses to 9/11, as well as to "other troubling historical episodes." (That modifier "troubling"—from the syllabus—now strikes me as understated: we were talking about the Holocaust, about the Cold War, about America's oppression of its black citizens.) We tracked *Daily Show* episodes and *New Yorker* cartoons; we watched *The Great*

*Dictator* and *The Producers* and *Dr. Strangelove* and Richard Pryor's *Live & Smokin'*. A question we tried to keep in front of us: Following a tragedy, how much distance (both temporal and spatial) do we require before allowing the comic back into the discourse?

The first *New Yorker* cartoon published after 9/11 appeared in the October 1, 2001 issue. A woman in a bar turns to a guy wearing a plaid jacket with wide lapels. "I thought I'd never laugh again," she says. "Then I saw your jacket."

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## And how do we laugh down a virus?

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\*

Whenever I'm asked to weigh in about political satire, I trot out Mark Twain's old line, "Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand." I want to agree with Twain! What's worse than being laughed at? Yet Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, released in 1940, didn't save a single Jew at Auschwitz.

Chaplin's counter:

*Pessimists say I may fail—that dictators aren't funny anymore, that the evil is too serious. That is wrong. If there is one thing I know it is that power can always be made ridiculous. The bigger that fellow gets the harder my laughter will hit him.*

Chaplin also said, in his 1964 autobiography, that had he known about the actual horrors of the Nazi camps, he wouldn't have made the film.

We could spend the rest of our lives laughing at Trump; he seems immune or oblivious to it.

And how do we laugh down a virus?

\*

From Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: "In Wenceslaus Square, in Prague, a guy is throwing up. Another guy comes up to him, pulls a long face, shakes his head, and says: 'I know just what you mean.'"

Is the Kundera line a joke? If so, it's my favorite joke—and one of the few jokes I can read again and again.

\*

Richard Pryor, at the end of *Live & Smokin'*: "This ain't as funny as we thought it was gonna be."

\*

Over the years, my one reliable bit of comic schtick has been a kind of mock disbelief and/or consternation over the fact that we die. I've borrowed gestures from John Berryman (grand ones) and Philip Larkin (smaller ones, bound by irony).

From the midpoint of Berryman's "Dream Song 373": "They say the coffin closes without a sound / & is lowered underground!"

As if this were news!

And from the end of Larkin's "The Old Fools":

*Can they never tell  
What is dragging them back, and how it will end? Not at night?  
Not when the strangers come? Never, throughout  
The whole hideous inverted childhood? Well,  
We shall find out.*

We shall, right? Whether we plan to or not.

But I really have very little experience with death. And I'm fifty-three; maybe I need to grow up.

Or maybe growing up is nonsense. I'm looking forward to Victoria Chang's *Obits*, which will be out from Copper Canyon Press by the time you read this. Here's Chang, from a recent interview on *Lit Hub*:

*The old self dies all the time, and it's quite miraculous. Yet, I asked the man who runs these residencies in Marfa on the way in, what it's like to be 77. He said, "I feel exactly the same." How can this be? The tension between what remains and what is discarded in the self was really interesting to me. I always find it odd thinking about how we spend our whole lives learning and all that experience and knowledge accumulates, and then we die. Who designed this thing?*

Here's the beginning of Jack Gilbert's "Games": "Imagine if suffering were real. / Imagine if those old people were afraid of death."





\*

Larkin, holed up in Hull, was an early adopter of social distancing. Asked by *The Paris Review* about his daily routine, he answered:

*My life is as simple as I can make it. Work all day, then cook, eat, wash up, telephone, hack writing, drink and television in the evenings. I almost never go out. I suppose everyone tries to ignore the passing of time: some people by doing a lot, being in California one year and Japan the next; or there's my way—making every day and every year exactly the same. Probably neither works.*

---

## Every person dies. Galaxies die; we wonder if anything matters.

---

\*

Danish physicist Niels Bohr: “There are some things so serious you have to laugh at them.”

Italian cosmologist Giordano Bruno: “In hilaritas, tristis, in tristitia, hilaris.”

\*

All of Italy's on lockdown now.

\*

A headline from Andy Borowitz: “Betsy DeVos Says She Was Planning to Close All Schools Anyway.”

A headline (this one real) from Bloomberg News: “Coronavirus Conference Gets Canceled Because of Coronavirus.”

\*

A *Times* headline from this week: “Coronavirus: Revenge of the Pangolins?” The pangolin is the most trafficked mammal in the world, but most of my students don't know what one looks like. When I teach Marianne Moore's poem about this “uninjurably artichoke,” I have to send around pictures.

A couple of years ago I got an email from Pangolin Alert (via Save Animals) asking me to answer a question: “Should we do more to protect pangolins?” The choices: “Yes, of course!” and “No, they don't matter.”

\*

The sole thing I know about Spinoza, and I can't remember where I read it, is that he laughed out loud only when watching his favorite spectacle, that of two spiders fighting to the death.

\*

I miss my mother. She's still with us, but she's a different person now. She has a hard time tracking a joke, much less making one. And she used to be funny—the kind of twinkling-eyed funny person I've always liked. She would've been interested in this pandemic: interested in people's reactions (the under-reactions, the overreactions), interested in the comic moments that push their way through. I imagine her smiling at a cartoon by Steve Bell in *The Guardian* in which Boris Johnson offers his public health plan: “Wash Hands. Go Home. Die.”

\*

Every lemur and pangolin and spider dies. Every person dies. Galaxies die; we wonder if anything matters.

So we reverse the tape—or Catherine Wing does, in her visionary “Flourish. Exeunt”:

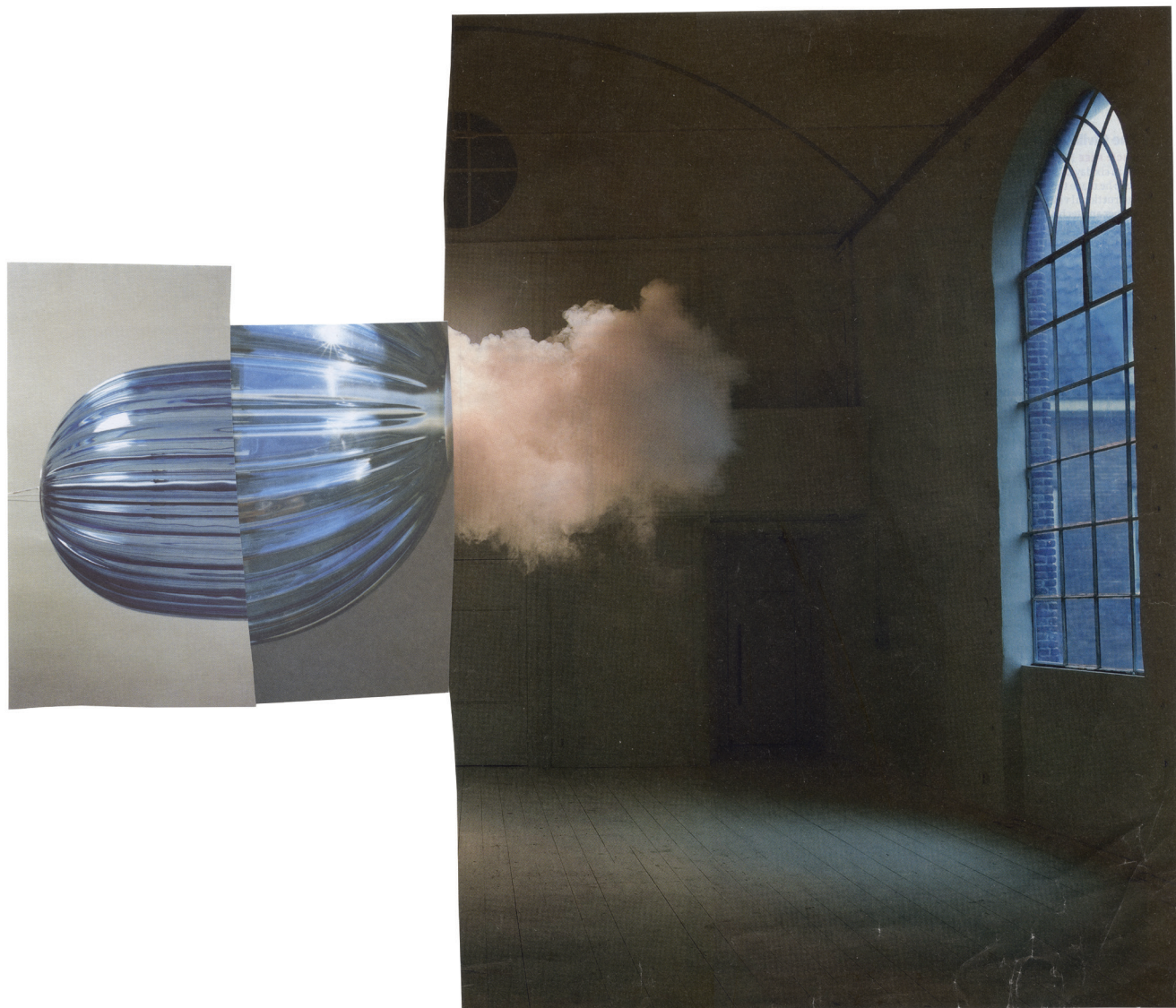
*Here dynamite rouses the rubble  
And a pinwheel pulls at the wind.  
A clown inhales the bubbles*

*While the Piper—Pied—scatters  
The children. And those who have died  
Backpedal into life and matter*

*Greatly to the rest of us. Here  
Where we take back our kisses  
And pocket our handshakes.  
Here where we edit the tide.*

This essay isn't a tape; it's a time capsule. It's a message stuffed in a bottle tossed in a sea. Stay alive, people of the future, people of summer! We're here, in late winter, worrying about you.

■



WHY HAVE YOU SURVIVED IF NOT FOR THIS?

*All titles for Serrah Russell's collages are drawn from work in this folio.  
Page 19: Kathleen Flenniken. Above: Shara McCallum. They make a cento.*



JOY PRIEST

*Dear Aunt Louise, Muh*

I am thinking of your blue-painted porch on 28th street, tucked between Catalpa & Olive—where I sat with my daddy when I was getting to know him,

your underbite and chin whiskers, that very distinct quiet  
one only gets  
being from a place

miles deep into the crop,

how you took everything in through a tinted filter. Lived at the end of the red dirt road in your laugh.

Your obituary in the black puddle  
of my lap:

1955. Left Negro Church Road, Lawrence County, Alabama. . .

Went North on the train.

Sister went all the way to Cleveland and took up with a boy y'all grew up down the road from, Dennis Priest. Steel rail to steel mills.

You got off before the Ohio. Settled into alone & lived on a numbered street like a city girl.

The obituary,  
elusive archive:

Father's name	Racia	Gone	
Mother's name	Mary Helen	Dead	1936
By the time you were 3 years old		you were a girl alone.	

## A month beyond your homegoing

headed north 13 hours

in a pickup truck. . .

Before I left that morning, I plucked a chin hair, sprouted overnight. Felt the heel of your palm hit my shoulder like a tambourine.

*Ode to My First Car, 1988 Cutlass Supreme Classic,  
307 V8, Dual Exhaust*



My mother had one first. Arterial red. Mean.  
She sent it through the car wash once a week,  
where I followed it down the line, nose-to-glass.  
At the other end, vein-armed men air-boxed

over who'd be the one to polish it down.  
Always so glossy. I could see the contours  
of my girl body reflected in the wet paint  
& behind me the twin spires. My mother's freedom  
in short pockets of time. Our little room of song.  
The radio hiccupping over potholes betrayed  
our harmonies. If I pulled the metal latch  
& the door swung open, I snuck behind the wheel.



& then I had my own. Oxblood. A car  
full of cousins. The dark silhouette  
of our heads bobbing with laughter & song  
in the officers' headlights. On the citation

there was a box labeled Black. At home  
there was my mother's question: *what did you do*  
*to make him think you were*. . . I was  
her silhouette, pronounced



against her white skin, framed inside her  
idioms of avoidance—America's shorthand.  
But it wasn't what I was that was wrong—Black  
blood tunneling. It was her refusal to see me  
apart from her, across our historical chasm.

& then the scorched pistons  
clanking my favorite machine to a stall  
on the dark parkway, named for a Nation  
corralled far from here. 307 horses

giving out, their knees dropping  
to the winter asphalt, the oil pan run  
dry. I had been trying to escape the limits  
of my mother's vision: 550 feet from Dixie,

the red light falling into green, someone's horn  
cursing like a starter pistol. Since I'd known  
the horses, I'd been running. When the gun  
went off, I knew to run.

## WINNIE ZENG

### *Neighbor*

My neighbor has come back, fluttering his steps, gagging  
like he is the last person on earth  
who cares to make some noise. No one pays any attention.  
No partner is there smoothing out his chest.  
He takes a pause between hurls, and coughs lightly in congruity.

Our strangeness feigned by this wall, lets us ignore  
what we have already learnt. In the larger compound,  
we occupy or negate one cube of release, accumulating nothing.  
Each is now allowed to suffer under the air's condensation,  
a vacuum, with daylight as its boundary.

I placed my bed a few inches from the wall, its movement  
thus won't transmit next door, generating more bridges  
from its four legs. Clicks and shuts still get passed on,  
including me as a collateral vibration. Did you know  
humor is just pointing out holes and misfits?

In the drama a maid places a cup on the wall, listens  
if the newly-weds have climaxed. The newly-weds though  
have just met each other, so has the maid.  
If we want we can know so much about each other,  
not that it would make us any closer, emotionally.

Most feelings are hasty, trying to end themselves  
before picking up on a theft alarm, or recording  
a prolonged pigeon coo. Soon I will have tonight's dream,  
where a different wavelength takes over, rearranges the emerging sensations  
after washing away a majority.

~

## NAN COHEN

### *In the Botanical Garden*

The pressure of these flowers, their  
unknown names, a million bright faces

clustered in families, surrounded by leaves,  
stretching for acres around us—

I and the two I love best  
wandering in false paradise,

bewildered. To know a few names  
is nothing to these countries,

to know one language well  
and, in a few, how to ask for directions—

another nothing. They mock us  
with their million faces,

this sinister kingdom of flowers.

~

RASAQ MALIK

*Love*

You can hold in your mouth a thousand-year-old word.

Have you ever handled  
an artifact that old. Metal bitten by sand.

Wood rotted away. In the Egyptian wing  
I thought I would like to hold a shabti,  
a humble grave-figure of pottery.

In my mouth this word, love.

How can we fear it does not mean the same?

~

*The Language of Grief*

My mother speaks in a language  
that unfurls her grief to us,  
slowly, like smoke that emerges  
from the kitchen each time she  
busies herself with cooking.  
At night, her breath trembles  
the walls of a room where she  
wakes up each day to meet her  
despair, unchanging, bearing  
the years of waiting for a lifetime  
of happiness despite my father's  
indifference to her dreams,  
to her life that aches like a wounded  
animal each time the clock chimes,  
reminding her of her dead, her skin  
wrinkling, bearing the inevitability  
of ageing. What does it mean to be  
a woman surrendering her body to  
grief, a woman stitching the broken  
parts of her life with the frail  
thread of hope? In the dark,  
I watch her undress her  
body, the light of love fading  
into oblivion no matter how she  
tries to bear the burden of being  
a mother, of claiming everything  
that reduces her into a pale woman  
as the world passes while she nurses  
her aches, while her breath mingles  
with the silence of grief she wakes  
up to, each day of her dying life.

~

## MARK IRWIN

### *How long?*

I keep trying to get closer between yesterday and tomorrow,  
between lights out and reveille, or that moment in dream  
when the apple in your hand stretches for miles with the snow's

tart flesh. —Or when skin awakens, loin to loin, and a jay's  
signet-cry hangs in the air while ants, insistent, rebuild a tumbled  
mound. —Kindling, as it bursts to flame, or the alphabet spilling

from a child's mouth. How things keep enlarging the breezy present.  
How long before the number of dead replace the living on Facebook?  
—Bees swarming around a new-released queen as the glee club holds

a sloppy hallelujah. Rembrandt drawing the dying Saskia makes  
flesh become red earth. —Or Hendrickje, crossing a stream, finds  
shadow filling her white shift. Times when the body aches to be

found. The mobile clouds, filmic, shadowy over the patch-leaved  
land. *Here*, to build a world sparking each moment as it trails to *was*.

~

## *Tree, River*

“River of life, Tree of Life, which would you choose?” —What? I asked,  
hoping she might have said, “the house, or summer cabin, which would you like?”

Death knows nothing, I thought, that’s why it chooses us who like to know,  
and I chose *river of life* because that must have come first. What did she  
mean before dying?

So I drew a tree and below it a river, then erased them both, and in that erasing  
I heard wind. —Between birds in flight, the void of something I want. *Schhh*,

she said to me once when hiding together in a closet to surprise her sister’s husband.  
Just the birthday candles lit the dark. —To avoid speech I thought, the trees  
—*Schhh*, *Schhh*—but the people don’t understand.

She dreamed, delirious toward the end, and talked about the farm, her 4-H pig,  
Willy, a Cochin hen named Granny, the patch of 7 sunflowers planted dead-center  
in Daddy’s alfalfa field with the secret alleyway toward that sun hive where she kept

her dolls, and the way she recounted it all, there being no difference  
between memory and death. Yes, the river—her river—everyone’s.

How many million years in a river? And we—just a creek—flowing into it  
when like apes we walked on our fists. *Tree, river*. Water, sap, blood.  
Even with our bodies we present its past, its marrow of shadow and fish

sourced from mountain snow that will make some limbed, branched thing  
grow tall in a valley, and sometimes between it and the river,

you’ll hear a man and woman talking, staring at the generative leaves  
and wanting a child. Life—*you*—more than that to me.  
You like a river, ever.

❧

## DANEEN WARDROP

### *visit / visitation*

*assisted living*

airport in my hair, I walk in

Dad sits on the bed studying  
his shoes

laces voluminous

barely a hi and tells me

*they come in the night and take your blood*

what?—who does?

*you sleep in your bed and they take it*

you mean the workers here?—it's hard to imagine, Dad

*maybe the doctors think the sleeping blood is better*

his shoelaces are inscrutable

*I put a magazine in the doorway to test it  
and in the morning it had moved*

^

I go to the director and ask about the night-blood rumor

who the zombie and who the vampire

and how, in this impossibly lovely place—

magnolias venting sugar-lemon across early lawns—

and she says

meticulously

“it's not a rumor—  
it's just easier that way”

behind her, a window slung with gauze  
curtains

easier for who? I say—  
these people—this is their home—

and she manages  
to case my face  
fidgiting

as she settles hers  
into a seeming bend of tender

she's not mean, she's—  
something else

who disarranges  
files, rifles

invoices—

behind her, a window

contrives to make a sun

~



## JAN CLAUSEN

### *Air for Unaccompanied Instrument*

Everything makes me sad in the afternoon.  
Hot on the heels of sleet, the blossom herd.  
My cold, small note athwart the common tune,

my torrent-polished pebble. Breaking soon,  
the sullied wave of summer. Mum's the word.  
Everything makes me sad in the afternoon.

Recursive green might pinion anyone  
with pretty tendrils. Isn't it absurd?  
My cold, small note athwart the common tune;

my lyric taking cover, gone maroon  
in lilting leaf-pelt over petals slurred.  
Everything makes me sad in the afternoon.

Sick of good works, I warble. Song alone  
beguiles what spring nor effort ever cured.  
My cold, small note athwart the common tune.

Our gut-shot climate manages a June.  
An ailing tree abets a mockingbird.  
Everything makes me sad in the afternoon—  
my cold, small note athwart the common tune.

❧

## REBECCA MORGAN FRANK

### *Invention #2*

When I was born, I came out of a peapod.  
I was the inside of a tomato.  
I was a carrot wrapping around itself  
becoming something ugly and unwanted.  
I sang for rain.  
Over the far rise of the mountains  
something lumbered and hunted.  
It was always searching for me. I  
was always waiting, was always found  
out, was always vanishing. Was always  
making something where nothing was.

❧

### *Emergency*

His heart froze last.  
I like to think  
it all ended with love  
washing through  
him in the last pump  
of life. They say  
you fall asleep say  
he might not have known  
he was lying on the floor—  
but the terror is in  
the tongue, the muscle  
no longer moving.  
Imprisoned in silence  
with no way to tell us  
what they hear— is sound  
like memory rushing  
in, how do the ears  
lay down and enter  
the afterlife do they  
move to the music  
of the mind when  
I die please let  
there be a cello  
Please let the living  
know I loved them.

❧

PAUL HLAVA CEBALLOS

*from Hospital Pamphlet*

My patient was admitted for Covid today  
she came for a routine check of her new valve  
she felt fine and drove far and did you hear  
about the accident on I-5, such blood

now when I walk by her room  
warning signs cover the door, I'm so sleepy  
hold my hand, my wife whispers in bed  
I could almost live like this

her heart beats in the crook of her arm  
for the hour I examine her I know  
I am dangerous, how I steady my neighbor  
as she stumbles on the stairs with hands

on her shoulders, to the pizza  
delivery man thank you! I bellow  
with petulant breath, she cried  
when we told her about her heart

and said she slept with extra pillows  
to breathe more easily, sorry no visitors  
we said, it's time to call your mom  
and tell her you are staying the night

I whispered and leaned close, we're here for you  
we're here, no matter how often I ask  
my wife won't let me sleep on the couch  
we warm each other with whimpers of air

❧

GABRIEL PALACIOS

*San Miguel Border Gate Pavilion*

What the bootlegger whistles to the crosses on his road

Card table bowing in a heat

The mayor of a gathering  
Possessed of the same  
Belt buckle—vaguely  
Parallelogrammic borders of a home state  
Returning fire to the sun—  
As his public prairie dogging in  
& out of Tahoes black &  
Idle on the bounds  
Of an insinuated gate

But riddled through with timelines  
He makes me hold the yarn  
Of an excavated doll  
That's what shaking hands with his hands  
Is like  
He asks in Spanish if I'll carry something for him

Across he meant  
I wasn't brave  
I was slow  
I didn't lay down or duck  
When the guns came out  
I was putting your sister's cigarettes in the microwave  
To see if they would light  
& helping her clean up  
After the party

❧

## CLARE LOUISE HARMON

### *In New Orleans, the Levees Will Breach Again*

*After Rimbaud's "Après le Déluge," trans. John Ashbery*

In a classroom in New Orleans,  
Mr. xxx directs from the double bass  
and we teach the blues to children. I've versed  
myself in theory and history but in practice,  
I know nothing about the form.  
This is what I've gleaned: The truth?  
The blues repeat. The trick? How they end.  
I've lived in New Orleans for six years,  
but I know nothing about the Storm.  
Over a warm beer, Mr. xxx once described  
to me the October '05 return to his boyhood  
home, a shotgun; how, in the parlor, he found  
his father's remains; how, for years, he tried  
to clean all that covered the walls. The period after  
the flood is preparation for the next catastrophe.

~

### *In New Orleans, We Shelter in Place and Pray for Our Future*

At the University, we earned our graduate degrees, our PhDs, and we taught  
undergrads the fundamentals of critical thought. We used our knowledge  
to ensure our survival, all the while writing poems; continuing impotent  
research on Hegelian sublation and Lowell's hermit heiress.

We bedded addicts and fools. When we found someone kind enough to endure  
with us the night, we birthed our babies. One by precious one, we quoted  
Berryman: *Postpone till after these children's deaths your doom*. We took comfort  
in those words and later, dumbly asked for God's attention.

We wisely made our homes on ridges. Watched the sky; bought purified  
water in blue plastic barrels. Summer: we shilled to the electric company to maintain  
the temperance of bedrooms. Each year, the sun flexed with greater breadth; we learned  
cold is a privilege. Pulled the shades. Calculated the distance

to the surrounding petrochemical plants; their airborne contaminants; how  
they'd travel. Kept the windows closed (even in springtime); kept silicone sealant  
under the double sink (we were told to). Kept inhaling (we had to); kept accepting this  
proximity: one cause for the beautiful sunsets about which we wrote

a crown of sonnets. We covered our skin in sun-screening lotion. Went outside. Went to work.  
Returned to safe, high, homes; paired organic almonds with apricots and evening sherry.  
Finally, at twilight, we photographed the oiled sky and made our final appeal for succor:  
*Dear Lord, bless us and keep us, for the light of our poisons is tangible and spectacular.*

~

## CMARIE FUHRMAN

### *On Property*

**WASTE LAND:** *Land that has not been claimed or escheated.*

[A complaint common among colonizers is that Indigenous peoples did not properly subdue the land.]

(I had a fence, the doctor called it, put in to “protect” my uterus from pregnancy.)

**COLOR OF TITLE:** *A deed appearing to convey title but in fact not conveying title, either because the grantor did not have title to convey or because conveyance was flawed in some way.*

[In 1970 the government passed the Family Planning Act. In the photograph Nixon smiles his batwing smile. Nixon’s goal: population control.]

**EASEMENT:** *Use of a portion of property for some stated purpose without remuneration. Easements do not convey ownership, but rather the use of property insofar as needed for a stated purpose. Easement is a right.*

[White doctors placed at Indian Health Service clinics were encouraged to practice their hysterectomy skills. And tubal ligations. And vasectomies. Thus, sterilization was the most prescribed remedy for many maladies on reservations in the early 1970’s.]

**FORFEITURE:** *Loss of property for failure to obey the law, or reversion to the sovereign because of default or an offense. It can be applied to any part of an interest of ownership.*

[Indigenous Americans were told they were too poor to have children. Or they already had too many. The doctors said, “We’re doing you a favor.”]

**QUITCLAIM DEED:** *A common type of deed in which the seller relinquishes claim to whatever rights were held on the property but does not guarantee that the property is actually free of claims by others.*

(I mount the table, nude from waist to socks. “Tip your pelvis,” says the Voice. “Scoot down.” The cloth draped across my knees blocks me from seeing the man as he says, “Relax,” while staring into me. The IUD grew into the lining of my cervix. Three days of blood for its removal.)

**TRUSTEE:** *An individual to whom another’s property is trusted.*

[Two mothers send their fifteen-year-old girls go to IHS for a tonsillectomy, but they are given hysterectomies.]

(It happened in Oklahoma, in 1972,  
the year I was born.)

**ADVERSE POSSESSION:** *Gaining title to another's land by exercising the rights of ownership of that land unchallenged for a period of time.*

(I need to say this again: Two fifteen-year-old Native girls  
went to the doctor to have tonsils taken out and instead  
had their ovaries stolen.)

(Or imagine being told that if you did not agree to an abortion  
or sterilization, that benefits granted you would be repealed. Choose  
between a family and food. Imagine intimacy as political.)

**TO WIT:** *That is to say.*

[Being Native and pregnant is political.]

**RESERVATION:** *A clause in a deed wherein seller retains a right to the land being sold but the specific right did not previously exist.*

(Only once did I think I was pregnant. A whole year without  
my period. Blood tests and pap smears. No doctor could find  
an answer to my amenorrhea. I was 33. Not relieved. I crocheted  
a yellow blanket.)

**IMPROVE:** *To make land more valuable by clearing and planting. Land that was not improved by the owner could revert to the government.*

(My single reservation mother. My government  
dependent mother. My mother who birthed me  
had her uterus stolen that very same day. The government  
placed me in foster care, I do not know what happened  
to the rest of her.)

~

## LAUREN HILGER

### *Right here in town*

The librarian was trying to tell me that fear exists even after we're dead.  
The ghosts in the corner there, the way a certain beast wants a dark hole.  
What shelters. They've built an addition so the ghosts will leave.

I'd rather walk around than hide in a weird corner,  
bat a glass off a table, be an imp.

They need what's comforting, he said.

These may be true statements, but we have no way out from the question stem.

Today was so bright, it's fall.  
You can wear whatever the hell you want.

Let's snap into ourselves.

The closest I've gotten would be in all this silence.  
I assume it can be done one way, without any armor,  
like how we used our arms and adamancy and

Something opened up.

~

### *When you keep a secret long enough, you begin to tell.*

You tell in the way you can tell the handwriting is yours.  
There's a difference between this and the rest of knowledge,  
where a hand up means stop, a hand up means help me.  
When you keep a secret, it becomes an image with a long fuse.  
It is bright and ready, the light that is always in my hand. I call out,  
I miss you, comrade.  
Think of the cruel interior of an early Christian chapel,  
not a lot going on in there. It's meant for gold leaf,  
framed silences, candle smut.  
Melting by the fire, I'm made of that too.  
Keep going, no, it's making me sad.  
Means I see you. Means there is something before me.

~

CONNOR L. SIMONS

*walking E. Mississippi Parkway*

on days like this                      when sun makes my skin friable  
i hope that summer coalesces into  
  
                                 eternity    the momentary  
stasis of an oak leaf vein       spread out       in defiance of season  
like unwavering light of star summoned  
                 by child in  
  
                                 dream

on days like this                      when cardinals moan red in throat  
i try to order words  
  
                                 into the way the motion of pollen makes sense  
                 when one follows from initial burst  
to the diffused splendor       of its dying

stamens spread to sun's light as cosmos  
i suppose there's a reason       so many  
         people                          have mapped stars

& seen something  
  
                                 (permanence? control? a cloudless eye?)  
in the paper-ink space

strange then                      that today the river smells so much like stargazers  
                                 (the ones my mother loved       the ones  
                 she never watered enough)

that light burst of citricity in my nose's       memorial dark



## DUJIE TAHAT

### *After St. Paul's Cathedral Burned down Ma Still Drove Us to Mass*

held in an old bingo hall.  
The liturgy came on  
folding chairs, kept time  
with the slapping  
sounds of small kid  
feet on Dur-A-Flex floors.  
Of course I did not know  
then though should  
have guessed it,  
the old gothic facade  
was quarried basalt from  
the Cowichew Canyon.  
On a different island  
all my kasamas feet  
red. The whole barkada  
a muddy mess. Everyone  
knows a joke about  
fat lips and flat noses.  
As a matter of course  
the lava flow followed  
us. The older Filipino  
women in the portico  
are my aunties. When the fire-  
fighters broke  
into the smoking church,  
they found the altar already  
afire. Too dangerous  
for Father Royce to retrieve  
the Eucharist, the hundred-  
year old domed ceiling  
caved in. A man  
searched for a shirt  
from the clothing bin, lighting  
his way with a match  
or a Bic. He couldn't  
remember so he was fined  
\$4.4 million dollars  
and spent three years  
in Idaho Maximum  
Security. Stacks of soot-  
slick stones were all  
that was left in the end.  
We knelt on hard ground.



## SHELLEY WONG

### *Portrait of a Painting*

At the museum, the ocean drawn in pencil  
is no longer on display. I once thought, *I could wreck  
that water*. She loved a photo-like painting of a German woman  
reading a newspaper which mirrored my favorite painting  
of a Dutch woman contemplating a water pitcher  
in cathedral light. We walked gallery to gallery  
and no women resembled us. I love certain French words,  
but forget what they mean and never learn  
how to properly pronounce them—  
crudité, de rigueur, au courant. Sometimes,  
eventually, couples are echoes  
of one another. We wore our hair  
in low ponytails (like George Washington)  
and unsexy glasses. She would photograph me  
without my noticing, as I glanced at a curvaceous  
mountain range, a curator's note on the Elgin marbles,  
the drop down to the city from Montmartre,  
or a California forest floor where I couldn't  
meet the camera's gaze, though I knew she was there  
and that she would hold me, from a distance.



### *Weather Advisory*

it is foggy and the ferry will not travel east—the pilots lost  
without their radar sonar—excuse me sirs this is a gay

dancing emergency—is heterosexuality the fog—I am slow  
with too much time, dressed in four shades of grey

and a streak of pink—oh it's an older crowd—  
oh that's me—we all had the same Madonna-Whitney childhood

set to synthesizer beats—today I tried to pluck a pinecone  
but the stem said no—I am sorry, tree—I meant

to ask consent—between the Pines and Cherry Grove,  
there is one path for tourists, another for cruising—

in the Connecticut spring, I tore off a cherry  
blossom branch because it seemed mine to claim,

imagining all of my karaoke dreams  
in its falling petals—among the rangers, I feel famous—

are you the artist—hello bird—I have no sweetness to  
offer the bees—the branch lived for weeks

on the dining table, among strangers for a month—  
in the silence of unease and longing—it is another season

without touching—where did Frank O'Hara wander—  
and fall asleep on the beach—the first inhabitant of Fire Island

was a shipwrecker—he lured ships to shore  
and killed the crew—it is not certain whether the island

is named for these warning flames or its sunsets—  
I am a fire sign and who should I touch

with this burning—I walk along the bay—  
the marina—the beach—emptied of families—

in the straight neighborhood, I watch men on break  
pause one by one to take in my neon floral shorts

that reveal my kiss of a birthmark—the walk  
of a messy-haired woman—some faraway flower—

~

## CONTRIBUTORS

**DANA ALSAMSAM** is a first generation Syrian-American from Chicago and is currently based in Boston where she works in arts development. A Lambda Literary fellow, she received her MFA in Poetry from Emerson College where she was the Editor-in-Chief of *Redivider* and Senior Editorial Assistant at *Ploughshares*. She is the author of a chapbook, *(in)habit* (tenderness lit, 2018), and her poems are published or forthcoming in *The Massachusetts Review*, *North American Review*, *The Shallow Ends*, *The Offing*, *Tinderbox*, *Salamander*, *BOOTH*, *The Common* and others. **HELENE ACHANZAR** is a Kundiman fellow and a John & Renée Grisham fellow at the University of Mississippi, where she serves as a senior editor of *Yalobusha Review*. Her writing can be found in *Oxford American* and *jubilat*. **ERIN ADAIR-HODGES** is the author of *Let's All Die Happy*, winner of the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize. Recipient of *The Sewanee Review's* Allen Tate Prize and the Loraine Williams Prize from *The Georgia Review*, her work has been featured in such places as PBS NewsHour, *Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Rumpus* and more. Born and raised in New Mexico, she is now an assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Central Missouri and the co-editor for *Pleiades*. **RAE ARMANTROUT** is the Pulitzer Prize winning author of fifteen books of poetry, including *Wobble*, *Entanglements*, *Partly*, and *Versed*. A new collection, *Conjure*, is forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press. She lives in Everett, Washington. **TANEUM BAMBRICK** is the author of *VANTAGE*, which was selected by Sharon Olds for the 2019 *American Poetry Review*/Honickman first book award (Copper Canyon Press). Her chapbook, *Reservoir*, was selected by Ocean Vuong for the 2017 Yemassee Chapbook Prize. She is a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University. A 2019 Guggenheim fellow, **CYRUS CASSELLS** has won The National Poetry Series, a Lambda Literary Award, a Lannan Literary Award, and the William Carlos Williams Award. His sixth volume, *The Gospel according to Wild Indigo*, was a finalist for the NAACP Image Award and the Balcones Prize. *Still Life with Children: Selected Poems of Francesc Parcerisas*, translated from the Catalan, appeared in 2019. His twin 7th and 8th books, *The World That the Shooter Left Us* and *Is There Room For Another Horse on Your Horse Ranch?* (a finalist for the 2019 National Poetry Series) are forthcoming from Four Way Books. His first chapbook, *More Than Watchmen at Daybreak*, a sequence about his stay in a Benedictine monastery, is available from Nine Mile Books. **PAUL HLAVA CEBALLOS** has received fellowships from CantoMundo, Artist Trust, and the Poets House. His work can be found in *Narrative*, *BOMB*, the PEN Poetry Series, the *Acentos Review*, has been translated to the Ukrainian, and nominated for the Pushcart. His first chapbook, a collaboration with Quenton Baker, is coming out from the 3rd Thing Press in 2021. He has an MFA from NYU and currently lives in Seattle, where he practices echocardiography. **YONGYU CHEN** is an undergraduate studying Comparative Literature at Cornell University. His poetry has appeared in *Black Warrior Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Indiana Review*, *The Journal*, *jubilat*, and *West Branch*, among other publications, and has been nominated for *Best New Poets* and twice for a Pushcart. His academic work has been published in journals like *positions: asia critique*. He was born in Beijing, China and is from Knoxville, TN. **ANSLEY CLARK** is a writer and teacher from the Pacific Northwest. She now lives in Colorado, where she teaches undergraduate creative writing, literature, and composition classes. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Crazyhorse*, *Hobart*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Colorado Review*, and elsewhere. **JEREMY MICHAEL CLARK**'s poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Callaloo*, *Foundry*, *The Offing*, *Scalawag*, *The Spectacle*, *Vinyl*, *West Branch*, *wildness*, and elsewhere. He has an MFA from Rutgers University-Newark, and he was awarded the Otto and Gertrude Pollak Scholarship from The University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice, where he is currently pursuing a Master's in social work. He is from Louisville, Kentucky. **KEVIN CLARK**'s third collection, *The Consecrations*, is forthcoming from Stephen F Austin Press in 2021. His second, *Self-Portrait with Expletives*, won the Pleiades Press contest, and his chapbook *The Wanting* won the Five Oaks Press prize. His poetry appears in the *Southern*, *Georgia*, *Antioch*, and *Iowa Reviews*, as well as *Crazyhorse*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Cincinnati Review*, *The Journal*, *Hotel Amerika*, and others. **JAN CLAUSEN** is a poet, fiction writer, and essayist whose books include the novels *Sinking*, *Stealing* and *The Prosperine Papers*, the poetry collections *From a Glass House* and *If You Like Difficulty*, and a hybrid text, *Veiled Spill: A Sequence*. Her memoir *Apples and Oranges: My Journey through Sexual Identity* was recently reissued by Seven Stories Press. Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, Clausen has lived in New York City since the 1970s. She teaches in the Goddard College MFA in Creative Writing Program, at NYU, and at Pace University. **CODY COBB** (b. 1984 in Shreveport, Louisiana) is a photographer based in Seattle, Washington. His photographs aim to capture brief moments of stillness from the chaos of nature. For weeks at a time, Cobb wanders the American West alone in order to fully immerse himself in seemingly untouched wilderness. This isolation allows for more sensitive observations of both the external landscape as well as the internal experience of solitude. Through subtle arrangements of light and geometry, the illusion of structure appears as a mystical visage. These portraits of the Earth's

surface are an attempt to capture an entanglement of the observer and the observed. **NAN COHEN**, the longtime poetry program director of the Napa Valley Writers' Conference, is the author of *Rope Bridge* (2005) and *Unfinished City* (2017). The recipient of a Wallace Stegner Fellowship from Stanford University and a Literature Fellowship from the NEA, she lives in Los Angeles. **BRENDAN CONSTANTINE**'s most recent collections are *Dementia, My Darling* (2016) from Red Hen Press and *Bouncy Bounce* (2018), a chapbook from Blue Horse Press. Recent work has appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Daily* and *Talking River*. Since 2017 he has been working with speech pathologist Michael Beal to develop poetry workshops for people with Aphasia. **TODD DAVIS** is the author of six collections of poetry, most recently *Native Species* (2019) and *Winterkill* (2016), both published by Michigan State University Press. His writing has won the Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Bronze and Silver Awards, the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize, and the Chautauqua Editors Prize. He teaches environmental studies at Pennsylvania State University's Altoona College. **JOSE HERNANDEZ DIAZ** is a 2017 NEA Poetry Fellow. He is from Southern California. He is the author of a collection of prose poems, *The Fire Eater* (Texas Review Press, 2020). His work appears in *American Poetry Review*, *Boulevard*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Huizache*, *Iowa Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Southeast Review*, and in *The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2011*. **CAMILLE T. DUNGY** is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *Trophic Cascade*, winner of the Colorado Book Award, and the essay collection *Guidebook to Relative Strangers: Journeys into Race, Motherhood and History*. She's also edited three anthologies, including *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*. Her honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, NEA Fellowships in both poetry and prose, and an American Book Award. She lives in Colorado with her husband and daughter and teaches at Colorado State University where she has just been named a University Distinguished Professor. **MEGHAN DUNN** is the author of *Who Also Will Not Yield*, a collaborative art and poetry chapbook, with artist Ben Pinder. She lives in Brooklyn, NY, where she teaches high school English. Her work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Narrative*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *The Collagist*, among others. She is a four-time recipient of scholarships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and a 2019 Tennessee Williams Scholar at the Sewanee Writers' Conference. **KATHLEEN FLENNIKEN** won the Washington State Book Award for her poetry collection *Plume*. Her first book, *Famous*, won the *Prairie Schooner* Book Prize in Poetry and was named a Notable Book by the American Library Association. A new collection, *Post Romantic*, is forthcoming from University of Washington Press in October 2020. Flenniken's other awards include a Pushcart Prize and fellowships from The National Endowment for the Arts and Artist Trust. She served as Washington State Poet Laureate from 2012 to 2014. **REBECCA MORGAN FRANK**'s fourth collection of poems, *Oh You Robot Saints!*, is forthcoming from Carnegie Mellon UP in 2021. Her previous collections are *Sometimes We're All Living in a Foreign Country*, *The Spokes of Venus*, and *Little Murders Everywhere*, a finalist for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award. Her poems have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *American Poetry Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Poetry Ireland*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere. She is co-founder and editor of the online magazine *Memorious.org*. **CMARIE FUHRMAN** is the author of *Camped Beneath the Dam: Poems* (Floodgate 2020) and co-editor of *Native Voices* (Tupelo 2019). She has published poetry and nonfiction in multiple journals including *High Desert Journal*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Cutthroat*, *A Journal of the Arts*, *Whitefish Review*, *Broadsided Press*, *Taos Journal of Poetry and Art*, as well as several anthologies. CMarie is the 2019 recipient of the Grace Paley Fellowship, a 2019 graduate of the University of Idaho's MFA program, a regular columnist for the *Inlander*, and an editorial team member for *Broadsided Press* and *Non Fiction* editor for *High Desert Journal*. CMarie resides in the mountains of West Central Idaho. **DARIEN HSU GEE** lives and writes from the island of Hawai'i. Her essays, poems, and short stories have appeared in various literary journals; her books have been published in 11 languages. Darien is the recipient of a 2019 Poetry Society of America Chapbook Fellowship, as well as a Vermont Studio Center fellowship and Sustainable Arts Foundation grant. **CLARE LOUISE HARMON** is a poet and music educator based in New Orleans. She is the author of *The Thingbody* (Instar Books, 2015/2020) and can be found online @thehegelproject. **LAUREN HILGER** is the author of *Lady Be Good* (CCM, 2016.) Named a Nadya Aisenberg Fellow in poetry from the MacDowell Colony, she has also received fellowships from the Hambidge Center and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *BOMB*, *Harvard Review* online, *Kenyon Review* online, *Pleiades*, *The Threepenny Review*, *West Branch*, elsewhere. She serves as a poetry editor for *No Tokens*. Born and raised in Milledgeville, Georgia, **SEAN HILL** is the author of *Dangerous Goods*, awarded the Minnesota Book Award in Poetry, (Milkweed Editions, 2014) and *Blood Ties & Brown Liquor*, named one of the Ten Books All Georgians Should Read in 2015 by the Georgia Center for the Book, (UGA Press, 2008). Hill's poems have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Harvard Review*, *Oxford American*, *Poetry*, *Tin House*, and numerous other journals, and in over a dozen anthologies

including *Black Nature* and *Villanelles*. **CHRISTINE SHAN SHAN HOU** is a poet, artist, and yoga instructor based in Brooklyn, NY. Publications include *Community Garden for Lonely Girls* (Gramma Poetry 2017) and *I'm Sunlight* (The Song Cave 2016). **ALLISON HUTCHCRAFT** is the author of *Swale*, forthcoming from New Issues Poetry & Prose in October 2020. Her poems have appeared in *Boulevard*, *Five Points*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Kenyon Review*, and *The Southern Review*, among other journals. She teaches at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. **MARK IRWIN**'s ten collections of poetry include *Shimmer* (2020), winner of the Philip Levine Prize for Poetry, *A Passion According to Green* (2017), *American Urn: New & Selected Poems* (1987- 2014), *Tall If* (2009), and *Bright Hunger* (2004). He recently completed a long translation project entitled *Zanzibar: Selected Poems & Letters of Arthur Rimbaud*, with an afterword by Alain Borer. **JOSEPH GUNHO JANG** is an American poet whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Blood Orange Review*, *The Margins*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *New Delta Review*, and elsewhere. Jang's manuscript was a finalist for the 2020 APR/Honickman First Book Prize, judged by Li-Young Lee. His chapbook was the runner-up for the 2019-2020 New Delta Review Chapbook contest, judged by Jos Charles. **CAMERON ALEXANDER LAWRENCE** is a poet and visual artist from Arizona. His poems appear or are forthcoming in *Five Points*, *West Branch*, *The Florida Review*, *Image*, *The Shallow Ends*, *Ruminate*, and elsewhere. He keeps busy painting and writing in his home studio in Decatur, Georgia, where he lives with his wife and four young children. **AMY GONG LIU** is a Chinese-American writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *The Rupture*, *The Rumpus*, *Empty Mirror*, *Foglifter*, *RHINO*, and more. She thinks too much (or perhaps too little). **AMIT MAJUMDAR**'s newest poetry collection is *What He Did in Solitary* (Knopf, 2020). His verse translation of the Bhagavad-Gita is entitled *Godsong* (Knopf, 2018). He has served as Ohio's first Poet Laureate, and he is also a diagnostic nuclear radiologist and internationally published novelist. **RASAQ MALIK**'s work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Salt Hill*, *Stand*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Rattle*, *New Orleans Review*, *Spillway*, *Poet Lore*, and elsewhere. He won Honorable Mention in 2015 Best of the Net for his poem "Elegy," published in *One*. In 2017, *Rattle* and *Poet Lore* nominated his poems for the Pushcart Prize. He was shortlisted for Brunel International African Poetry Prize in 2017. He was a finalist for Sillerman First Book for African Poets in 2018. From Jamaica, **SHARA MCCALLUM** is the author of six books published in the US & UK, including the forthcoming verse sequence, *No Ruined Stone*, a speculative account of Scottish poet Robert Burns' migration to Jamaica to work on a slave plantation. Her recent book, *Madwoman*, received the 2018 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Poetry and the 2018 Motton Book Prize from the New England Poetry Club. She is a professor of English at Penn State University. **GARY McDOWELL**'s *Aflame* won the 2019 White Pine Press Poetry Prize and is forthcoming in Fall 2020. He is also the author of *Caesura: Essays* (Otis Books/Seismicity Editions, 2017) and *Mysteries in a World that Thinks There Are None* (Burnside Review Press, 2016), among other books. His poems and essays have appeared in journals such as *American Poetry Review*, *The Nation*, *Ploughshares*, *New England Review*, and *The Southern Review*. **DANIEL MOYSAENKO**, a Ukrainian-American poet, is the author of the chapbook *New Animal* (H. N.G.M. N Books, 2015). Other work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Chicago Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Kenyon Review*, *New American Writing*, *Pleiades*, and elsewhere. He holds an MFA from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a PhD in poetry from Florida State University. **MARTIN OTT** is the author of ten books of poetry and fiction, including *Sharks vs. Selfies* (Eyewear Publishing, 2021). His work has appeared in 20 anthologies and more than 300 magazines. **GABRIEL PALACIOS** received an MFA in poetry at the University of Arizona. His work appears in *West Branch*, *Typo Magazine*, *Territory*, *The Volta*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Pulpmouth*, *Contra Viento*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and other journals. A visual artist and poet, **ALLAN PETERSON**'s most recent book is *This Luminous: New and Selected Poems*. Other titles include *Precarious*; *All the Lavish in Common* (Juniper Prize); and *Fragile Acts*, a finalist for The National Book Critics Circle and Oregon Book Awards. **DOMINICA PHETTEPLACE** writes fiction and poetry. Her work has appeared in *Zyzzyva*, *Asimov's*, *Analog*, *F&SF*, *Clarkesworld*, *Lightspeed*, *Copper Nickel*, *Ecotone*, *Wigleaf*, *The Year's Best Science Fiction and Fantasy* and *Best Microfiction* 2019. Her honors include a Pushcart Prize, a Rona Jaffe Award, a Barbara Deming Award and fellowships from I-Park, Marble House Project and the MacDowell Colony. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley and the Clarion West Writers Workshop. **JOY PRIEST** is the author of *Horsepower* (Pitt Poetry Series, 2020), winner of the Donald Hall Prize for Poetry. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *APR*, *The Atlantic*, *ESPN*, *Gulf Coast*, *Poets & Writers*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. Priest is a recipient of the 2020 Stanley Kunitz Prize and has received support from the Hurston/Wright Foundation, The Frost Place, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and the University of Houston where she is currently a doctoral student in Literature & Creative Writing. **JESSY RANDALL**'s poems, comics, and other things have appeared in *Poetry*, *McSweeney's*, and previously

in *Poetry Northwest*. Her most recent book is *How to Tell If You Are Human* (Pleiades, 2018). She is a librarian at Colorado College. **LAURA READ** is the author of *Dresses from the Old Country* (BOA, 2018), *Instructions for My Mother's Funeral* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), and *The Chewbacca on Hollywood Boulevard Reminds Me of You* (Floating Bridge Press, 2011). She served as poet laureate for Spokane, Washington from 2015-17 and teaches at Spokane Falls Community College. **DAVID RÖDERICK** is the author of two books of poems, *Blue Colonial* and *The Americans*. From 2017-2019 he wrote the "State Lines" poetry column for The San Francisco Chronicle. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow and Amy Lowell Scholar, Roderick lives in Berkeley, California and co-directs Left Margin LIT, a creative writing center and workspace serving writers in the East Bay. **MARTHA RONK** is the author of eleven books of poetry, several chapbooks, and *Glass Grapes*, short stories. Her most recent book, *Silences*, Omnidawn 2019 (a notable book, *NY Times*) focuses on the elusive, utilizing paintings, photographs, gaps in texts, and the purported quiet of nature. Her book, *Transfer of Qualities* was long-listed for The National Book Award, *Vertigo* was a National Poetry Series selection, and *In a landscape of having to repeat* won the PEN USA best poetry book award. **SERRAH RUSSELL** is a Seattle-based visual artist and independent curator. Through collage and appropriation, Russell uses the malleable nature of the photograph and transforms advertising and editorial imagery into space for meditation and protest. Her first artist book, *tears, tears*, published in 2019 by Yoffy Press, features works of collage created during and in response to, the first 100 days of the 45th Presidency. **CONNOR L. SIMONS** is a poet and translator based in the Twin Cities. He is a candidate for an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Minnesota, where he previously worked as poetry editor for the *Great River Review*. He is currently a translation fellow for the Minnesota-Somali Poets Corner. His work has most recently appeared in the *Indianapolis Review*, *Colorado Review*, *La Revista Union*, and *Duende*. **ED SKOOG** is the author of *Travelers Leaving for the City* (Copper Canyon Press, 2020) and three other collections, including *Rough Day*, which won the Washington State Book Award. His poems have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Paris Review* and previously in *Poetry Northwest*. **DUJIE TAHAT** is a Filipino-Jordanian immigrant living in Washington state. He is the author of *Here I Am O My God*, selected by Fady Joudah for a Poetry Society of America Chapbook Fellowship, and *Salat*, selected by Cornelius Eady as winner of the Tupelo Press Sunken Garden Chapbook Award. With Luther Hughes and Gabrielle Bates, they cohost The Poet Salon podcast. **GABRIELLA R. TALLMADGE** is a Latinx writer and educator from San Diego, California. She holds degrees in English, Creative Writing, and Counseling. Her poetry has received awards from the Hedgebrook Writer in Residence Program, the Community of Writers Workshop, the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, and Sewanee Writers' Conference. Gabriella's poems have previously appeared in *The Adroit Journal*, *The Georgia Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Guernica*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Best New Poets*. **ERIC TRAN** is a resident physician in psychiatry in Asheville, NC. His debut book of poems, *The Gutter Spread Guide to Prayer*, won the Autumn House Press Emerging Writer's contest and was featured in The Rumpus Poetry Book Club. He is also the author of the chapbooks *Revisions* and *Affairs with Men in Suits*. His work has been featured in *Poetry Daily* and *Best of the Net* and appears or is forthcoming in *Pleiades*, *Iowa Review*, *32 Poems*, and elsewhere. **CODY WALKER**'s most recent poetry collection, *The Trumpiad*, was published by Waywiser in 2017. (The book doubles as an ACLU fundraiser.) He's also the author of two earlier collections: *The Self-Styled No-Child* (Waywiser, 2016) and *Shuffle and Breakdown* (Waywiser, 2008). He lives and teaches in Ann Arbor. **DANEEN WARDROP** is the author of nine books. She received the 2017 Independent Publisher Book Award in poetry, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and a Robert H. Winner Award from the Poetry Society of America. **ELLEN WELCKER** is the author of *Ram Hands* (Scablands Books, 2016), *The Botanical Garden* (2009 Astrophil Poetry Prize, Astrophil Press, 2010) and several chapbooks, including *The Pink Tablet* (Fact-Simile Editions, 2018), which she and her collaborators adapted into a multi-genre live performance they called a feral opera. She lives in Spokane, WA. **SHELLEY WONG** is the author of *As She Appears* (YesYes Books, 2021), winner of the 2019 Pamet River Prize. Her poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Kenyon Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and the *New Republic*. She is an affiliate artist at Headlands Center for the Arts and has received a Pushcart Prize and fellowships from Kundiman, MacDowell Colony, and Vermont Studio Center. **WINNIE ZENG** received her BA in English and Communication from University of Washington. She currently teaches English as a second language in Zhejiang, China, where she was born and raised. **M. JAIME ZUCKERMAN** is the author of two chapbooks, *Letters to Melville* (Ghost Proposal, 2018) and *Alone in this Together* (Dancing Girl Press, 2016) as well as recent or forthcoming poems in *BOAAT*, *Diode*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *Foundry*, *Glass Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Thrush*, and other journals. She serves as the associate editor for *Sixth Finch* and a senior reader for *Ploughshares*. She grew up in the woods but now lives and teaches in Boston, MA.



# HOW TO WEAR NAVY BLUE WITH BLACK

LAURA READ

When I taught high school, my students didn't know the word *juxtaposition*, so I explained it to them by saying it's when you hold up two pairs of tights next to each other to see which one is navy blue and which one is black. It was the 1990s, and the distinction between navy blue and black was of crucial importance as you were never supposed to wear them together. Also, whenever I did this, I had to do it in the dark because I was living with a man then who didn't have to get up early for work because he didn't have a job. Juxtaposition and some equivalent of a bad boyfriend are necessary elements for every poem. You have to put two things together that may look very alike but are really not or two very different things that you think could never work in the same poem, like me and him.

Also, always introduce yourself within the first few lines. I guess I forgot to do that here, but it's also good not to take your own advice. Still, I just stop reading if I don't feel like a real person is talking to me. Someone with an interesting voice. Voice is important. I fell in love with my husband because of how nice he sounded on the phone.

You should take a turn, maybe many, maybe even reckless ones like when you're learning to drive on ice in a parking lot. Swerve. We'll go with you. We like your voice.

Break the poem into little pieces if you turn too many times. Too many is not a particular number; it depends. And break it into little pieces like the way I crumbled a piece of turkey on top of my salad a few weeks ago and my friend Kat said that was the most unladylike thing she'd ever seen me do. The thing is I was able to get the pieces of turkey just right because I could use my fingers. This is how to create stanzas.

Also, try for one long stanza. I just love how breathless it feels to read a poem like that. And to write one. It's like blowing a bubble and seeing how long it will last.

Speaking of bubbles, somewhere in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, it says a work of art is like a bubble the artist blows: it's made from her breath but becomes something separate.

You'll definitely need an idea. People always say start with a line, which is good, but somewhere along the way you're going to think of something differently, and sometimes it's good to state that thought directly. As long as you also mention at least one color. I also like a poem with bees, maybe because of Sylvia's father. I find myself scanning books of poems to see if the speaker says "I" in the first few lines and then second to check for bees. If there's an I and a bee, I'm definitely buying it.

Try to end with an image. People always want more from you, so be sure to give them less. Once I went to a talk given by a friend, the subject of which was how she became a writer. She mentioned the fact that she was an alcoholic and also that she had M.S. At the end of the talk, a man raised his hand and asked her if she thought her alcoholism had contributed to her M.S. I was furious; hadn't she already said enough?

One way of controlling this is to use the objective correlative. Tenor and vehicle. Let x be 4. It's calming to turn away from the heart for a minute while never really turning away at all.

Try braiding the information in with some confession and direct address. This is a spell. Ask any witch. If you want to brew true love, she will say, *Tell them something interesting and then something true and then take off your dress.*

Yes, the poem is a body. Something that knows more than language but has to use language to speak. Something that's usually hidden until it's suddenly revealed.



# CEREMONY

CAMILLE T  
DUNGY

No one can fly down to bury his aunt.  
The sickness is already there. That's what  
took her. And, anyway, we are stuck  
at home. The moon swelled then emptied  
into its shadow. We learned this week  
the black singer died. Days later,  
the white one. A man in the neighborhood,  
young father of four. Lifted over the sink,  
our child stood on the ledge and cleaned  
the kitchen windows. It is bright outside  
most days. Grass is greening up the yard.  
An uncle died. Another aunt was taken  
to the hospital. The moon swells again.  
This feels like the early days of parenthood.  
We swap watch. Focus on raising the child.  
We've seen times like this before, we say.  
Also, these times are like nothing we have  
ever seen. When I came downstairs today  
for breakfast, he was playing Lovely Day,  
a song we danced to at our wedding.  
We danced there, in the kitchen, all of us  
howling those high and happy days. Lovely  
day, we sang. Lovely day. Oh! Lovely day.

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