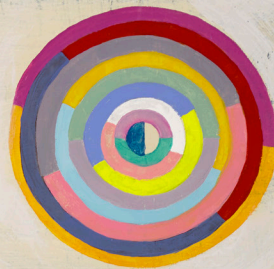


JET FUEL REVIEW

Spring 2021 / Issue 21





A High Octane Literary Journal

www.jetfuelreview.com

lewislitjournal.wordpress.com

Artwork: Deedee Cheriell's *When We Cannot be Where We Want to Dream*
Cover Design: Cassidy Fontaine-Warunek & Madeline Brzeczek

Mission Statement

As an online literary journal, we believe in the power of language and seek to provide a platform for quality writing and artwork that pushes boundaries, surpasses expectations, and creates an emotional resonance in our readers. In order to do this, we aim to showcase work that is representative of the complex and evolving human condition while featuring a diverse array of voices and styles. Every semester, we have a rotating editorial team of Lewis students who carefully evaluate our submissions. Our diverse staff strives to include authors that represent ourselves and others. We hope our journal will inspire and unite the literary community. In addition to our journal, we maintain a corresponding blog that offers an array of commentary on art, literature, film, music, and more, allowing us to interact with and expand our community.

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Foreword

Dear Reader,

Welcome to Issue 21 of *Jet Fuel Review*! This spring, our editorial team navigated their way through nearly 800 submissions in order to bring forth a collection of fantastic artwork and writing. This work was carefully selected over the last few months and best represents our mission statement of publishing outstanding and diverse work that represents the human condition and the world around us. Over the last year, our editors have overcome the isolation of quarantine, the monotony of virtual meetings, and have adjusted remarkably well to the necessary restrictions in order to create a collection that we are proud of.

Housed at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, *Jet Fuel Review* is a student-run, faculty-advised, nationally recognized literary journal that publishes writers and artists from across the globe. Founded in 2011, *Jet Fuel Review* continues to grow with writers and artists who unapologetically challenge the artistic canon. This semester, our journal was given the designation of “Excellent” from the NCTE for the Spring 2020 Issue #19 Recognizing Excellence in Art and Literary Magazines (REALM) Award. As a journal, we are incredibly honored to have received this designation and are motivated to continue to do work that enlightens and enriches our community. This semester, our cover art, titled *When We Cannot be Where We Want to Dream* comes from visual artist Deedee Cheriell. This piece uses elements of the natural world to brightly communicate the relationship between the individual and their environment. The vivid scene of the bustling ocean life in contrast with the relaxed family on the surface shows the tension between appearance and reality when we try to connect.

For our poetry section, we feature the sophisticated work of 2020 Barjeel Art poetry prize winner Emily Khilfeh and 2019 NEA fellowship recipient Marcela Sulak. This issue, we are delighted to present our special section of golden shovels, an experimental form where the writer uses a line from another poet and uses these words as the ending for each of their lines. In addition to the pieces from our cover artist Deedee Cheriell, we feature the stunning work of Mary Chiaramonte and Vicki Sullivan, who use light and foregrounding to create a profound sense of mystery in their portraits. In our fiction section, we showcase the work of former editor Andrea Y. Rodriguez, whose story “The Fall” provides a fresh and unique twist on the mythological and religious figures of Athena and Adam. The story uses symbolism and allusion to draw the reader’s attention to the complexity of domestic relationships. Within our creative nonfiction section, we include the work of 2018 Black River Chapbook Award winner Christopher Locke, whose creative nonfiction essay “Corrections” offers a heartfelt account of his experience teaching in the prison system. Locke’s excellent use of setting and dialogue immerse the reader and truly drive home the power of empathy and rehabilitation.

There are many more powerful pieces and creators that swell in this issue of *Jet Fuel Review*. The work that is included here is not only intellectually inspiring, but emotionally resonant as well. This work explores and captures the complex experience of living in today’s evolving society. We hope you enjoy the dazzling and brilliant work that makes up our 21st issue.

Read on!

Stephanie Karas and the *Jet Fuel Review* editors

A yellow jagged line graphic that runs horizontally across the page, with a peak on the left and a dip on the right, passing behind the word POETRY.

POETRY

Oppenheimer Cradles the Bomb (& I'm Supposed to Feel Sorry for Him)

sucrose, vermillion the bloom, the stem
the atomic fact is we are all big things made up
of smaller things belted in Bible & rust

in biology class we watch Oppie catch
the falling core he is poisoned & he dies
this Genesaic justice this eye for that eye

lick of blue light molecules in cellophane
unwrapped & unsinned some might say ungospelled
some might say *what have we done?*

what we have done is God-like & Gomorrahed
heart unbuttoned & torn from the sleeve
that thick American cruelty hot & silver against

our pink gloveless hands the atomic fact
is we are all small things made up of bigger things
a singular event swaying in a plain room

Dean Winchester Leaves a Message

the truth is we're all liars we love
 the wasp dying in the fig we split
the crabshell & suckle like fattening pigs

what feast is forbidden to us? our tender
 smokescreens our particulate lawyers
our burger joints our michelangelic mummies

none of this is real not the dying
 not the dead not the ghosts that kiss me
on my cheek & disappear

not the kissing me? i'm subatomic
 i learn what you teach your blistered
motel bible forgotten in a drawer amen

i in my nativity scene believed
 that yellow-line two-way highway lie
americans are born believing

that anyplace anywhere there's a light on
 in a window that there's always
a way in a way back out

To H, After Visting Hours

Helen hiked her skirt
 and set sail. I don't
 blame her. She

took one cosmic step out-
 myth, settled on some
 grainy shore. Blue-sky

heroes split their
 ligaments and look
 back. Let them

gun-stab and bone-broken.
 Let them ask why
 the sky now-empty

prickles in their eyes
 like cactus seeds.
 The moon tips

like a bucket, soft
 as a cricket's purr.
 The light just-so.

You crunched ice.
 We agreed it tasted
 better here,

in a land you'd never
 seen before. The sea still
 swallows

like a throat.
 Where broken:
 bioluminescent life.

In 1969, my mother
 saw the shuttle
 Earth-leap right there,

from her bedroom
 window. Metal
 leaves us behind

and we forgive it. Gravity's firm
 fist opens. I'm tired
 of figures—fact

and myth. Let
 the scientists
 calculate the relative

distance of the planets
 from the sun. I will still
 be your friend.

Rivka Survives

Skvira, Ukraine Pogrom, 1919

Purple swirls on my breasts, belly—crystal balls—reveal my fate. Not all that grows is made from love—when a bee pollinates a sunflower, it is to take the nectar. He handled my skin like an aphid on a leaf while I clawed at him like a dormouse burrowing for the winter. Someone, a sister, might have asked, *What was your first time like?* Hands ungloved during snowfall, scabs peeled away, what should remain concealed was exposed. A face should be bare, but he veiled mine—pulling up my skirt. Were his eyes the color of dead grass? Was his mouth jagged, a cemetery full of crumbling tombstones? His breath smelled of vodka. Mine smelled of borscht. His words—a dull knife. My words—crouching in an empty well. His skin was of metal. Mine was of dust. What does the past look like when time is a shovel? What does night look like without the sky? How do I flee without a map? The Earth is of a magnetic field. The ocean is of an undertow.

Sara and the Fox

Treblinka, 1942

I remember looking at my reflection
in a frozen pond, seeing my
future crack. In the distance,
a nebula consumes a house;
kindling and logs pop
stars in fog. In the corner
of my eye, a fox faces
north, listens for prey, dives
into the snow, then clenches
a squealing mouse in his jaws.

He faces north. I am the mouse
he hunts through haze. His
paws—coarse like a brick
wall, like lava after it cools,
like bones left in
ashes—grab at me. At once,
he creates and smolders
my fire, so I spit cinders
rather than the word, *No*.
If I could pick myself up,
piece together a full book
of matches, I would become
an inferno. I would burn
it all down. Watch me.

Superstition

Think of your breath.

Your breath, which you never gave to the graveyard before.
Open your window.
Think of your breath,

not of his body swelling with gases,
vultured in its casket,

emptied of gumption,
taken away.

You have no sadness left. You've been given enough
finally to give up this breath.

Give it, but slow.
Death is the steam
you can't blow from the scalding bowl
this boneyard is.

Breathe out. He waits for your breath.
Think of it leaving your ribs,

not of his teeth left behind.

Your breath, not his skin
the velvet-dark molds and blackens.

Loosen your wheelgrip. Empty
your lungs. Give of yourself

till you've nothing left.
Now take him in.

Hyla Arborea

It's for when Chris Hansen's *To Catch a Predator* crew walks out that I watch.
The caught guy's vision in that instant
must blur like a rain puddle on which wind
ruffles the image of branches.
I mean the very second when
his body becomes tree frog embottled
in a thick dream-air. He can't run or yell
despite the world being on fire. This is
before he beelines for the door. I mean
long before the ah-ha that he too's been
a camera lurking around curves
whose lens is not to be looked into.
How to the chase trauma cuts and yet
his snared mind's pickled him in this,
the last peace he'll get to live in.
I'm watching his face not recognize faces.
To turn the corner and see the boom mic
sprawled out ungodly-angled.
The skinned light encroaching.
This isn't about him. This is about
the burn mark of a moment.
A life breaking bone-like all at once.
This is about the firing squad of what
awaits. Flattened squirrel's living tail
flicking its diminished chord.
Wife's roving hands. Diagnosis.
This is a prayer, really. Gunshot.
My body dying on the pavement.
But that bless of stillness just before.

Boat Rocker's post script

The bright dark red lipstick supplies the ballast. The boat rocker feels the pull. It is I,
of course, not the oars, not the current, not the surprisingly expensive lipstick that is
the oars, the current, the very paint on the boat of the lips, who is speaking. I want to
say that I am tired. I would like very much one day to be the dragonfly with
transparent wings posed on the oarlocks, the rim of the boat, the leaves that are
dipping as I speak, over the currents that I can only guess at. I do not know what lies
below this boat, what sunken radiance, what rusted dreams hidden in their leaky
boxes, what fish with hook scars in their mouths, what bodies bloated with water,
resting on the floor. The lipstick is Chanel. In real life it looks ridiculous on my
grandmother's forelip which now I wear. I have scarred it by fainting one night and
hitting my mouth on the edge of a desk. When the toddler woke up for kindergarten
it was too late for stitching my lip whole. But on camera, the color is divine. The
waves will not take me as long as I am wearing it. How I really feel is how anyone
really feels in any circumstance. I am longing, as you are, for someone to say, I like
you. You are doing great. Look at you, sitting here with your calloused hands, noting
the sparkle of the water, the passing of the days. Each one is a bubble of time, which
I would gladly pop with you.

Frank Takes a Fence

What on earth, inquired the wife, are you going to do with another fence? I can't yet say, said the husband, but how can I not take it? It was just lying there he added, on the table, next to the butter knife and the idea of Russian braids. But husband, persisted the wife, where are you going to keep it? The cupboards are full of fences you've taken, we have no more room on the wall, and even the pillows are stuffed, she added, with fences. Not to mention the duvet. The husband looked pensive, and then he looked perspicacious, and then he looked like a man who has once remembered a dream. The wife waited next to the fence the husband was taking next to the butter knife and the idea of Russian braids, and also next to the swirly blue napkins while the sun set and then rose, and the climate took on a fetching languor, so that soon all the fences were dropping their pickets. And far far away a little sun seed was seething in the sea. In the morning, the husband fingered a fallen picket. What would you think, he inquired of the wife, if instead of a fence, I collected pickets? The wife took the picket to the mossy light, itching to pick her teeth.

Luteal, Ovular, Follicular

When he kissed me, my mouth tasted like the steak I'd watched him cut and eat. It bled onto a white dinner plate.
I disappeared

into the bathroom. I bled into a white Tampax

and thought of my father, who is a hunter, who told my mother, who is me, that animals who are alone are easier to kill.

In the fluorescent, the stitches of the dress I bought with my own money at Forever 21 were silver moons

inside their chiffon, small like the fingers that made them.

I've seen pictures of women sitting hip to hip in factories, sewing fabric that other women wove, sold to women who sell to women who were all on that dinner date with me.

I purchased survival buried in their nail beds. Am I guilty or alive?

When he smiled, his mouth was a fingernail clipping, half of a half of a crescent. I've only recently learned that there isn't just one phase of each cycle. It circles like the moon does. When she is round, so am I.

I am wearing what other women bleed for. I am bleeding inside what other women bled to make— all this red that isn't death, but could be.

Another Dream of Roadkill

In the dream, I pull over
to the side of the highway, run
to the middle of the road,

& lift the furred body I recognize
as roadkill. How, seconds before,
I saw the creature dash

toward the thrush of trees & I swerved to
avoid it, then felt the wheels
flatten it, heard its half-audible cry.

In the dream, I run my fingers
through its fur, feel its still-warm body. In
the dream, the Lord stands above us,

says, *What's dead stays dead.* In the
dream, He hands me a pocket knife,
says to take what I want. *A paw?*

A foot to cure for a necklace or keychain?
I half want to take the blade
to His smoke-pocked face. Not

to the flesh of this creature,
wet snout, half-shut eyes, not
to these carpal bones,

so much like our own,
that childlike paw curling shut
around my thumb.

Ars Poetica

*If you truly love nature,
you will find beauty everywhere.*
— Vincent Van Gogh

These sunflowers,
their endless petals,

the yellows & blues
& reds tangling

into a warm prism
of light. How our minds

wander. How
we mutilate in fits

of despair. & when
I say *love* out loud

at twilight, I mean
us artists turning pain

into beauty, I mean
harsh brushstrokes,

that vase, those blooms
beaming gold.

I can only write pastorals

I can only write pastorals
most days trees speak more
than me my cell phone
added a new filter: “turpentine”

it lays a runny glaze on the pictures
now this shot of a patch of sphagnum
looks like the rubber food I played with
in museums as a kid still

I put it on everything for a time
my car? turpentine a gravel trail? turpentine
there is an ecosystem to this and I want to belong
to strain myself off the boiling top

& settle let the excess run off me
how exhaustion erases a coming dawn

if the filter speaks a new language
if seeing draws down illusions

The Dybbuk

The ear and the mouth move
in sync. The voice won’t come

if the tongue is wrong.
First of all, the soft becomes

solid, possessing,
possessed, wrapped

in the throat’s moist shawl.
The more reckless the talk

the further the speaker from their body—

as if a knife severed the two
and feathered the flesh. Oil

would encase it.
And fire. Fire if it felt

like it. It would do it. It would
show there were always two—

one mouth pressed to another’s
ear. It’s like nothing

is inside. But there is.

To Bury Everything

The residency had ended. Most of the artists were gone. Because of an unforeseen delay, I was stuck there. I didn't mind. I wandered the half-emptied and darkened galleries—the lights were on timers. But one stray beam can give the brain enough. Paintings turn to mirrors. Every piled installation becomes a crouching figure, and every figure comes alive—glittering surfaces like the unseeing eyes of the dead. One artist spent the week remaking Louise Bourgeois' *Arch of Hysteria* from stuffed pantyhose. We spent a long time discussing the original and their multiple homages to it. They said pantyhose was the ideal material—feminine but also meant to hide the feminine. The original was polished bronze. Wherever it was displayed, it lit the room with the light it reflected. When I first saw it, I stared at its exaggerated bend, how my reflection distorted around the folds of fingers, feet, the protruding pelvis. Hard and heavy, it did not move on its steel cable. These arches made the opposite gesture: soft, pliable, ghostly. Lifting them was like lifting the elderly, those near death. Once I was charged with moving my mother from her bed to her wheelchair. I remember how little it took to scoot her over the edge. During the residency, I worked in unfired clay. I made elaborate urns. I left them outside for the rain and dew to digest before hauling them back in to display as collapsed vessels, failed receptacles for the failed body. Earth to earth. Unlike the original, the arches did not gleam. Holding one by its thread, the artist believed the arc it made was from the wear they put into the pantyhose. *This is how I would bend*, they said, *if I were suspended*. They took my hand and traced the sculpture's limp parabola. Too much touch and it twirled on its string. They stuffed it taut with cotton and cash. Everywhere bulged: the ends, the joints, the crotch. Strange how money can ghost the body, how it turns it to dirt and ash. I looked at the arches so much I felt I knew their every inch. My mother died years ago. Now when I thought of her, she was a cut-out and moved like a cut-out, floating stiffly through memories like some flat ache longing approximates. I remembered our time together when I walked through the galleries—me and this artist. We installed our work in the same small room. I stood in the doorway. The lights from the parking lot filtered through the hall's windows. They cast long, flat rivers of grey. In the dark, the room looked empty. I shifted side to side, up and down, trying to find an angle that would hint at the many arches in the room and the many urns behind

them. I wanted to see them one last time. I reached into the dark and felt along the wall. Thinking I found the switch, I pulled down. After the alarm, the sprinklers released. The soft bends of the arches sharpened as their limbs grew heavy with water. Some snapped their threads and splatted on the floor. Behind them, my urns were undone. Running down the pedestals, they covered the limp bodies in mud while the alarms wailed through their repeated burial.

Katarzyna Szaulińska
translated from Polish by Mark Tardi

i;phigenia / i;saac

they gave us names beginning with *i*
there's no need for a conjunction between god and father

i

makes sense in some languages
but only the separated rest
and our heads weren't separated from the rest of the body
though sur;vival
is a dot turned into a semicolon & has gravitas

when i was little i ate yew arils with him
the seeds are said to be poisonous but the aril tastes mild sweet & is slippery
i was too young to blush

& even when they lowered the knives it was done
& if they'd killed we wouldn't live with this body next to the body
his living body
cuts the pickled cucumber into quarter-inch cubes
with a specially designed knife
he cuts my air
into unbreathable

your name meant laugh mine meant strength
their laugh their strength

because we'll always
be;long

because you can't skip
de;capitation
re;demption

Katarzyna Szaulińska
translated from Polish by Mark Tardi

gaseous

the body's gone autumnal the hands fallen
limbs & ochre trees already infiltrating me

my plasma's pure broth & I'm overflowing
to settle somewhere like scum on a strainer

while what's liquid in me flows down the drain
and what's solid in me must be tared away

fold unfold the viscera like an accordion
just space out the breathing four stations apart

or maybe I'm in the lunula of my thumb
a penny of skin sucked into a chinese cup

or maybe a collapsed lung or this plastic
which almost slurped it out of me became alive

& maybe I'll leave more than just dirt behind
a kind of egg carton emptied of my body

the gnarled spot of my severed stalk
which'll become a thunderbolt & strike you

I Tend to See Love as an Absence of Context

Earlier, the sky. The unchurched pigeons holding the sky up by its steeple. Stars made of blown glass blowing off this lip of sky as if the earth's as flat as Homer envisioned. *Oceanus*. Or any encircling body. Earlier, a mother. A hand-me-down heaven tattered as any blanket meant to swaddle an entire life. A life still in conversation with that gone body. Earlier, to make loss holy, they called it *providence*. Now we tend to let the ashes scatter. To make room for whatever comes next, we shoo the pigeons from the steeple holding up the sky & let things fall where they must. Shattered glass underfoot. I guess now we call it gravity. Earlier—

rose avenue

american eve / same awesome moon / cue a newsroom camera / azure mosaic
 onscreen / an arrow aims / an arrow wavers / an arrow reverses / comma, comma, comma
 an unconscious announcer murmurs nonsense / can we unsee a ravine / can we un-mass
 un-scrum / un-con / we winnow rumors / we survive anniversaries / we muse a narrow
 main course menu / we smear sinners / we reserve our venom / we mourn cinema
 we mourn reason / we mourn summer reverie / carrion crows commune / sirens moan
 macaroni microwaves / in a room seasons arrive / incense a room / exorcise a room
 room arcana / room scum / room osmosis / care is an unseen resource / care is an essence
 care is recursive / our common vows in verse / romeo, romance me / courier, answer me
 masseuse, iron me / runner, race me across / narcissus, excuse me / convex mirror
 a man cusses / a woman cusses / someone a mess / someone mum in a corner / someone
 unscrews a sauce / can we accuse a raw sorrow in me? / worn nerves in us? / a manic
 exercise? / a cosmic curse? / even now we measure / voice versus erasure / comic versus sincere
 ennui versus ruin / memoir versus music / someone ices a rum / some wise noons
 we summon cures / cocoa mousse / amass reverence / mom's ear on a receiver / warm rice
 conserve sun / scion rescue in moss / ice cream amazes / wave me over / wow / roses

José Rizal Walks a Mile to "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida"

Listen, I say to him, Iron Butterfly's
 got nothing on Ginger Baker. And streets
 like this one will be named after you.
 Avenues and boulevards
 wide as rivers where one can swim
 for hours in traffic with buses
 proud as frigates exhaling their black smoke.
 In London and Paris, plaques
 with your name will grace houses
 where you stayed, and monuments
 of you in parks from Madrid to Seattle. Yes,
 even in Spain where celebrating dead
 poets they executed is a thing.
 Here you pause and shrug. History
 is a fickle mother. In this purgatorial walk
 you mourn your twenties. Seeing your face
 in a mirror, though not exactly your face,
 but the face of someone multiplying
 like a mirror image of a mirror image.
 What music did you listen to in your twenties?
 Of course you bought records—
 often random 45s and LPs of artists you
 were never passionate about.
 You had too many hang-ups, too Catholic,
 impatient, saddled with ephemeral contingencies.
 In other words you were immature.
 You listened to pop, but felt guilty about it.
 And jazz? You didn't know enough.
 Having yet to discover Art Blakey
 and Max Roach. And Ginger Baker
 was only a name you attached to Blind Faith.
 Not a man to be wary of
 should you happen to catch him
 walking your way along a dark street
 that already bears your name.

Galileo

I.

Beyond the ship, which is more sea, more water
 He recites the waves scroll like a sacrament in water

Homer who was vague with color didn't see the way
 Yeats saw the sea he gulped like a flagon of water

Their eyes, glittering ancient eyes alit in lapis
 he recites in his ministry of water

Beyond the sea which is more sea than masts
 Rizal accepts the wine-dark glass murky as water

Galileo, drunk with the milk of heresy, imagines space
 as the sea undulating with narcotic waves empty of water

He declares: there is no color in night no color in water
 And the sea—call it blind or faith is all mystery imbued with water

II.

Our interlocutor, George Costanza, recounts: "The sea was angry that day, my friends
 – like an old man trying to send back soup in a deli." /.../ In a smart and select pub in
 Bloomsbury, Virginia Woolf sits the young José Rizal down with her milky glass of
 Ouzo. Ready to school the young man in her boozy, but refined pronouncements.
 "Take it from me, Squanto, we should all be writing novels devoted to influenza, and
 yes, odes to typhoid and pneumonia! Why not lyrics to toothache?" Rizal nods ruefully,
 nursing his one-beer blues.

In Which I Want Nothing

I want the hands of a street-vendor
caught in the middle of a night market. That
way, I will be able to trade ivory vases
for a lifeline. I want to sell the history of this
nation to the thieves outside the out-
skirts, behind the neon billboards, broken.
I want to be able to steal without
looking back, without remorse or a mother
to warn me to be a saintly daughter.
I want to rid myself of a face, dried out and
yellowed like a piece of parchment
paper. To outline the borders of a country
is to fold my forsaken name into
starved skies. I want to unlearn the way
a mouth extends into a crescent,
then narrows into a river all too quickly.
I want to forget the currents that
run through my hands like scars passed
down from my ancestors, a leftover
currency for tragedy. I want to breathe them
to life. I want to save my country. I want
godhood. I want to stitch creation myths into
the crevices of my hands and sell them
at a nightmarket. I want to be left with nothing,
not even my hands, not even this poem.

We Fathom

in a net you escape
new mud on these family feet

as if walking simultaneously
pretending not to be in the habit

of a white station wagon
that was perhaps your question

should i have been a dancer?
the boys on a beer run

hens peck squash rind
as if girding a book of sunsets

the sun keeps paging
orange/orange/red

how strange as if prey
calling out, feathers of sos

since we're in a net
i want someone you say

we're just using this soul
as an instrument of perception

have it back now
cold cans of Coors Light

old camera zoom
big mood

I am finally waking up
to how dark it is

You Start Praying for Wings to Grow

Last shift. My heart washes the dish
you laid those damn red berries in.

Strange, ok, the way some early moths
assemble upon the locust tree,

judged dead or alive by motion,
mostly. The way they suggest,

through movement, what will occur.
Each winter bud, naked, minute,

splitting into bloom. By movement,
I mean I have thought more

about what it means to be *let go*.
After all, there are only so many words

gathered on morning walks, so many
lessons the grass can teach us,

green cereal. That trees can teach us,
running their xylem sap.

At some point we'll learn from
one another, won't we? The blue bowl

was your great-grandmother's.
It will come to me, you say.

Unless I don't want it. Unless.
Maybe you'll give it to my sister, Mary.

I mean I have thought more about
what it means to be so hard-headed.

Even a stone submits
to change. To being detained,

pent up, washed away.
Have I imagined the white warning

that appears on each black moth wing,
signature of submission, of defeat?

Like they want us to admit we are leaving.
Like they heard we were fading away.

Painful Vacancies | *a paradelle*

Seeking a world council or
 sea king—a whirled counsellor
 still dealing with adolescents weekly,
 still, dealing with adolescence, weakly.
 A world weakly seeking adolescence
 with a counsellor still.

“Please!” her assent’s tongue
 pleas. Her ascent stung
 when she left. The world airless
 when she left the world heirless.
 Her tongue’s pleas ascend air,
 the world *less* when she left,

rising out from what once seemed a hole. Dampered some,
 rising out from what once seemed a whole damned person
 when whet, would splinter so sharp, as
 when wet wood splinters. Oh—sharp as
 what’s rising as a person. When a dammed hole
 would splinter out, oh—wet seemed sharp.

Please, adolescents, when sent a splinter—
 whether what she would council still
 weakly stung, or, rising so damn sharp
 the world, when seeking
 a whole person seemed as a world
 dealing with less air left from without.

Who You Callin' A Whalefall?

I’ve never been a sliced pickle before
 so I encourage your vinegar. Brine me
 like Odysseus strapped to the ship’s mast.
 Let me soak you up like a bottom-feeding sponge
 so you can skin-dive to see me
 while secretly seeking yourself.

We can play hide & seek in the skeletons
 of once-proud ships & through
 the blooming biome of whalefalls—those giants
 who’ve ceased to swim a mile or so
 above the sandy seafloor. The great
 carcasses slide past warm-blooded predators
 into the cold deep set fully on slow decay mode—
 a boon for the most depressed & compressed
 sea-life for icy decades. Boom years.

Ashore, you are a full-body vice
 & I have always dreamed of transmogrifying
 my carbon into a diamond. Squeeze
 all of the *you* out of me if you wish—
 some flavors never leave the tongue.



SPECIAL SECTION

Golden Shovels

Foreword

Dear Readers,

The *Jet Fuel Review* editors are excited to share with you our amazing special section. In this issue, we decided to celebrate the golden shovel poetry form. The golden shovel was created by the award-winning U.S. poet Terrance Hayes in 2010. Hayes's *Lighthouse*, written to honor the U.S. poet Gwendolyn Brooks, includes a poem entitled "The Golden Shovel." In Hayes's poem, the last word of every line is taken from Gwendolyn Brooks's famous poem "The Pool Players. Seven at the Golden Shovel," more commonly known as "We Real Cool." Even the title references Brooks's original poem because her setting is a pool hall called the Golden Shovel. You can read Brooks's entire poem by looking at the end words of Hayes's poem, thus creating a new form that has been used and adapted through the years. Because it first appeared as Hayes's titular poem "The Golden Shovel," the form's name has remained the same. The form is meant to pay tribute to the original poem while creating a new text imbued with the writer's own voice.

We are delighted to feature a wide variety of pieces that highlight this intricate, citational poetic form underscoring how it has expanded since its inception. Included in our collection is Sherrel McLafferty's "Scrumptious Window" which, similar to Terrance Hayes's original poem, is also a golden shovel constructed from a Gwendolyn Brooks' poem, in this case, "The Lovers of the Poor." Then there are poems that borrow from other authors like Rebecca Hart Olander's "Fifteen" and "As Bees," both of which are based on Jean Valentine's poems. As an example of how the form has evolved, "Goldfinch" by Clair Dunlap uses the lyrics from folk-rock singer Samuel Beam's (stage name Iron & Wine) song "Flightless Bird, American Mouth." We are also pleased to showcase poems from other notable poets such as the following: Tara Betts, the Poet for the People Practitioner Fellow at the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, & Culture; Gail Goepfert, *RHINO*'s associate poetry editor; Paula Cisewski, author of four poetry collections including *Quitter*, recipient of the Diode Editions Book Prize; and, many more marvelous writers not listed here.

We hope that you enjoy and appreciate the careful craftsmanship that went into creating these golden shovels and discover a newfound interest in this captivating form.

Read on,
Jo Spangler & the *Jet Fuel Review* Editors

As Bees

after Jean Valentine

When I was young and tried to pray
by staring hard at the sky, looking for
illumination in a cloud, here on the ground our
steadfast gravity kept proving itself, as do dear friends—
the one I made and kept so many years, who
knew and loved me as I became me, who died
last year. I knew her, too, from a first fall to the last,
and loved her ardently for all—that year
we shared a dorm room with homesickness and glee, and
on until her deathbed, when the end came in the
first hour of the fifteenth day in a fresh year
and I lay my body next to hers, before
they came and tagged her toe and bagged her bones and
took her away, she who was so much and who
was no longer there. It surprises, every time, the will
to live, how it thrives, then gives over to a readiness to die.
Oh, my brave friend, I can't stop thinking on this
January memory—a basement nightclub, Prague, the year
we circled Europe on the train. I want to say let's
never stop our dancing, or disembark, or speak
of endings. In your final week, I held you as
a midwife does, supporting your labor, birthing into the
next realm. Now I think praying is like the language of bees:
A humming I do. The humming back you do.

Fifteen

after Jean Valentine

Another way of saying young, or sapling, or hapless: green,
as a blade of grass among countless other grasses, bookbag
slung over a nonchalant shoulder, or a shoulder full
of trying to be nonchalant, there on the corner of
Brattle Street and Eliot, steel-toed boots laced tight, poems
blooming in my heart like mute swans, like acorns. I
tried to force life into them, but they wouldn't speak, leaned
away from me with their long necks, their hard shells, with
their meat hidden from me and any listener, but still my
feeling that they should be poems, the way learning to bicycle
is something you can try but not make happen until at
the last moment you don't fall, a swoop in your stomach the
arc of a dark bird rising above rooftops, black
against the sky, its wingspan a kind of bridge
between effort and what happens at the edge
of knowledge. The stumble that wasn't, nested inside of
the flight that was. That was 1987, Harvard Square the
hub of cool, buskers with their open cases, a bustling world
within a world that I would visit and try to belong to, with what
sophomoric friends I traveled there with on the train. It was
summertime, our hours our own, our grasp on each "I"
of us inexact and blurred, to ourselves and to
each other. How could I pin it to the page, when to be
alive and growing was such an exercise in being lost?
That wobble, on the curb's edge, that posture of daring, or
not caring, or not knowing much of anything at all. Had I found
myself able to look into a mirror and see my
self, I would have met what is my soul,
the tail end of a good dream, dissipating at the brightness in
a morning window. Impossible to hold—light on the
surface of a lake. A huddle by the newspaper stand on the corner,
clutching our record store and thrift shop finds, we just stood
there, not yet us but trying to be, and watched.

Nobody Is Not Driving

Spend a lifetime shunning the word Nobody.
 You have never heard it, don't know what it is,
 a half-crushed nest of hornets furious.
 Flight of refusal—no one calls you Nobody—
 is only ever matched by someone who hates
 everything you ever represented, not those
 traits you chose, but what makes you people,
 folks, fam, love, a pound and a fist bump at
 the door when you're greeted by the least
 of your kin, who have never seen no nobody
 belted in your seat, clutching the wheel, driving
 through your hopefully long, well-lived life by
 pushing you aside, and trying to put you in
 some fading, forgotten parking lot, this
 life, was never theirs to steer, an empty car.

Something We Protect Keeps Us Balanced like Good Boats on the Sea

-with a golden shovel line by Dobby Gibson

Safety came to feel ornamental, like a beautiful tree you
 are allergic to. We don't have to talk about belonging, but have

you too seen stars round as money and wanted to
 make chariot wheels of half the sky? Why not be

able to admit one's bright canopy of want, or at least be willing?
 Most people harbor a far-off vision of their full-fledged self. I wanted to

read your cards *sans book*, but I can never keep all the male authorities straight. Start
 signaling that as a flaw in the system, not in the self. Start with

a symbolic act re-authorizing that younger you who curated a
 secret that functioned like a keel. Then when you don't know a good ritual, guess.

Goldfinch

after Samuel Beam

in the eye of god, i am a mote floating past a mussel's mouth. i have
 endless memories, cold as slack water, trapped somewhere circuitous. i
 was born two hours and fourteen minutes before sunrise and found
 in the hospital's windows a new and exact shade of yellow: you,
 goldenrod or goldfields or goldfinch—flightless
 and leaf-cupped—lomatium or tarweed or 8mg of ondansetron hydrochloride. bird,
 sleeping in the winterberry bush, made as if a smooth stone animated, jealous
 with texture, or dead and ovate in the dust. when i came there was no weeping.
 well, that's not entirely true: i have been weeping ever since, tapped as a maple or
 sleeping under a thousand bright white lights. lost
 an entire season to my sickness no one sees. you,
 deep-throating the tests and scales of american
 medicine, dragging doses toward my moist mouth
 and heaving my head into the MRI to be misread. big
 deal, that i'm in pain. take the pill
 and lie down, they said. my body is a side effect, looming.

Borrowing the Last Boat

every line-ending borrows words from "The Last Boat" by Frank Stanford

Get in the boat, quick. In an
 urgent second, he descends. No exile
 cares what happens
 after they leave town. Just to
 prove you wrong, he'll be
 laughing by the floodwall, passing
 in-and-out of focus. By
 the way, you are the
 last soul I wanted to see here. Winds
 started picking up. He
 is just another river rat who loved
 darkening doorways before leaves leave
 the trees, then the freeze. You know him,
 don't you? Cold
 hands, eyes cold as
 a church floor, the lines
 in his arms recited
 like hymns sung in
 the afterdark service. Truth of the
 matter is, you should forget his name,
 whatever lies he said, let go of
 his memory. Let your lamp go black, the
 lighthouse go dark, let it all—let lord
 take care of it. Nights and
 nights glide worthless, forgettable as the
 prayer you said last Sunday. Notorious
 people always run by here, think the earth
 doesn't remember their pattern of
 unforgivable acts, and his
 pattern: one-in-the-same. His kind of country
 takes care of two things: lying
 and cheating. Come on in,
 come back to sleep. Wait
 up for all I care. What do you like?
 Day's going to come where a
 woman
 has your name written in an
 envelope and her chest is an ambush.

The Girl Who Grew Antlers

[after Emily Dickinson]

You look up. Nothing there? A
white fluffy mass? A loaf of bread? A curious
animal? A woman made of cloud?
If she fell like lightning would you be surprised?
Do you see her, or are you blinded by the
flashing of her anger in the sky?

Once there was a lady. Once there 'twas
a lady. Yes, but what was she like?
Shall we compare her to a
summer night in Brooklyn? Or a sheet
of paper on an old timey writing desk, with
only a fountain pen for a friend? Then there were her horns

Horns? Yes. They stuck up from the
crown of her head as she clawed the bloody sheet
on her bed. What do you think she was
scratching there in blue
veined ink? Was it called The
Girl Who Grew Antlers?
And what if all her words suddenly went gray

and blew out the window? Would it
be tragic that we almost
knew but hadn't quite touched
her through the damp script the
fog twisted across her cemetery lawns?

How she composed herself just so
that we could be brought low
and lifted by it
Was it that the earth leaned
in to feel what she felt then
that made the room we imagined her in statelier?
Its cozy yet open plan drew

to it and distilled words. And
these echoes of her torn gown trailed
off to heaven like

angel robes
time swept away

leaving her standing naked above us, a
mad queen
who'd take the world adown
a
notch in her satin
hand, and walk the aisle

terrible as the dawn, with strength she had
so long withheld. How can we not
look upon her beauty and despair? How can we not be the
perfect children of her majesty?

Scrumptious Window

Golden Shovel after “The Lovers of the Poor” by Gwendolyn Brooks

We have food at home, but our unsweetened wheats are not
appealing, do not neon beckon, like the bakery’s homekind

icing spelling a name that isn’t mine. Home is oldness
and dullness beneath 60-watt bulbs, draining energy, not

able to see the stain of wood tables. The difference of lake
and ocean is how we differ from the patrons. The forest
versus the Catskills in summer, and dogs named Glencoe.

What would a taste be like? Lavender? Dragon Fruit? Nothing
our taste buds or eyes can afford. We can only imagine what it is
to be lofted. To fret about the time, shaking gloved and sturdy

hands. The people with the scone budget think nothing
of its size. Music rings for their purchases. *What it is*
to be us! They exclaim and laugh into a new majestic.

Rage Against Invisibility

*Your ability to see is sometimes only as good as
your willingness to go unseen.*

- Meghan Daum, *The Unspeakable*

Not quite into your
dotage, you retain the occasional ability
to make others believe you exist – to
appear as more than vapor. Most see
just a woman, generic as porridge, who is
on the cusp of crepe paper. Sometimes,
you admit, a second cardigan is the only
refuge on this breezy verandah as
your curfew fizzles. Pure oxygen is as good as
sex or Jazzercise in the afternoon anymore. Your
leopard-print Fridays long gone, only a willingness
to attempt yet another waltz across the terrazzo, to
maintain your legendary ginger tongue, to not go
gently into that good nightclub, will keep you from being unseen.

October

after Edgar Allan Poe's "Masque of the Red Death"

All the leaves crash from the trees and
crinkle up in a brilliant blur. Darkness
comes earlier now. The twilights and
nights are a little cooler, a little longer. Decay
crouches in every shadow. I scroll Twitter and
pull a maple leaf to pieces. It is the
most vibrant it has ever been. Red
screams from the screen. Vitriol. Death
threats. So much anger it cannot be held
in one heart. My feed scrolls on, illimitable
and exhausting. I cannot fight for dominion.
The light is changing. A hawk soars over
my head. I think about giving up on it all.

Five Thousand Sols Later

a golden shovel after Opportunity's "last words," starting with a line from Tracy K. Smith

This message going out to all of space... My
battered body finally rests, low on battery

but sending this signal anyway. The last sun is
setting on me. O chariot of the sun, swing low—

as now the wind blows dust into my joints and
fills the gaps. Slowly breaking down. It's

I —no one will find my stardust. No way of getting

song to wake up. The world's —sleeping —dark

Seclusion (A Checklist)

after 'Christabel LaMotte'

To drag a long life out in a dark room. To feel the weight of sullen days and nights that drag the soul along behind. To half-forget a time when you were brilliant, gold and green. To long for greater, lesser, other, better things life offered you once but then withdrew. To set out two cups but take tea alone, sitting there in half-regretted stillness, to dread and hope a visitation from your ghosts. (A truth: the dark is not oppressive.) To close an empty room.

I want to be inside your darkest everything

because I want what's holy and what's unholy without asking absolution, want to wake in night's thin vellum to moth-wings incandescent in the lamplight, to be lust-flushed in the abandon of whisker and wet, to be unveiled, to be willing, hungering, breath gulped and swallowed inside the darkness of swollen lung and quivering belly and mortality and your redemption, mine, like unmapped constellations in the darkest heavens because I'm riveted to your darkest everything.

--"I want to be inside your darkest everything." Frida Kahlo, diary



ART

Haunted



24 x 20 inches, Oil

Mary Chiaramonte

The Bear That Swallows Me



24 x 20 inches, Acrylic

Mary Chiaramonte

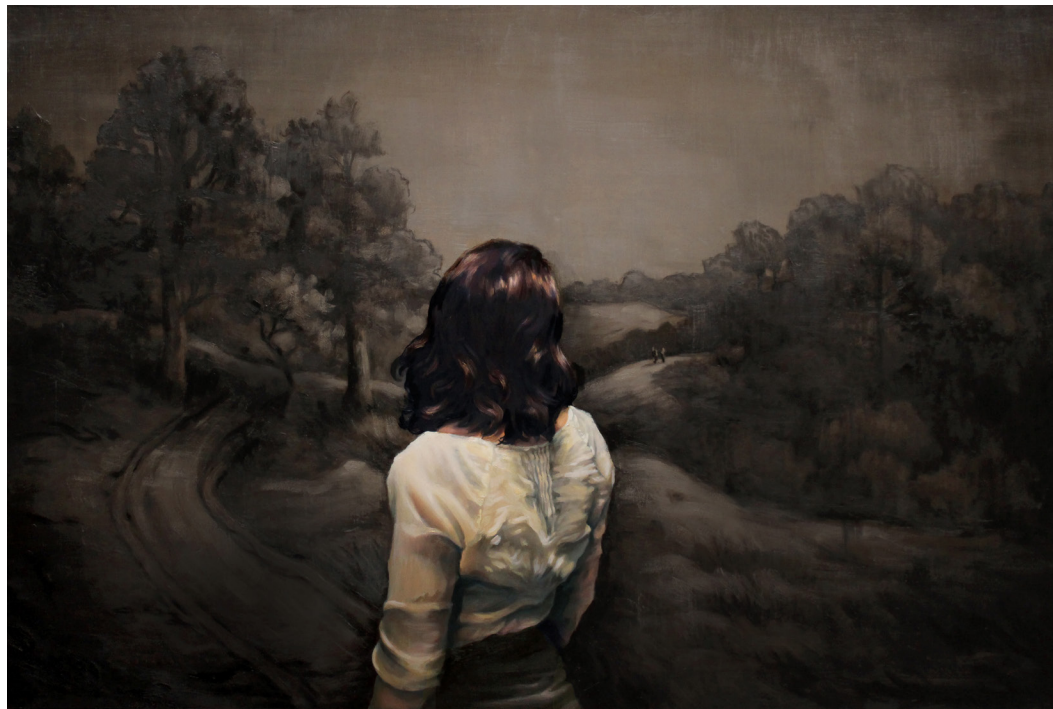
Our Very Own Secret Hideout



20 x 30 inches, Oil

Mary Chiaramonte

Far From Anywhere



14 x 18 inches, Oil

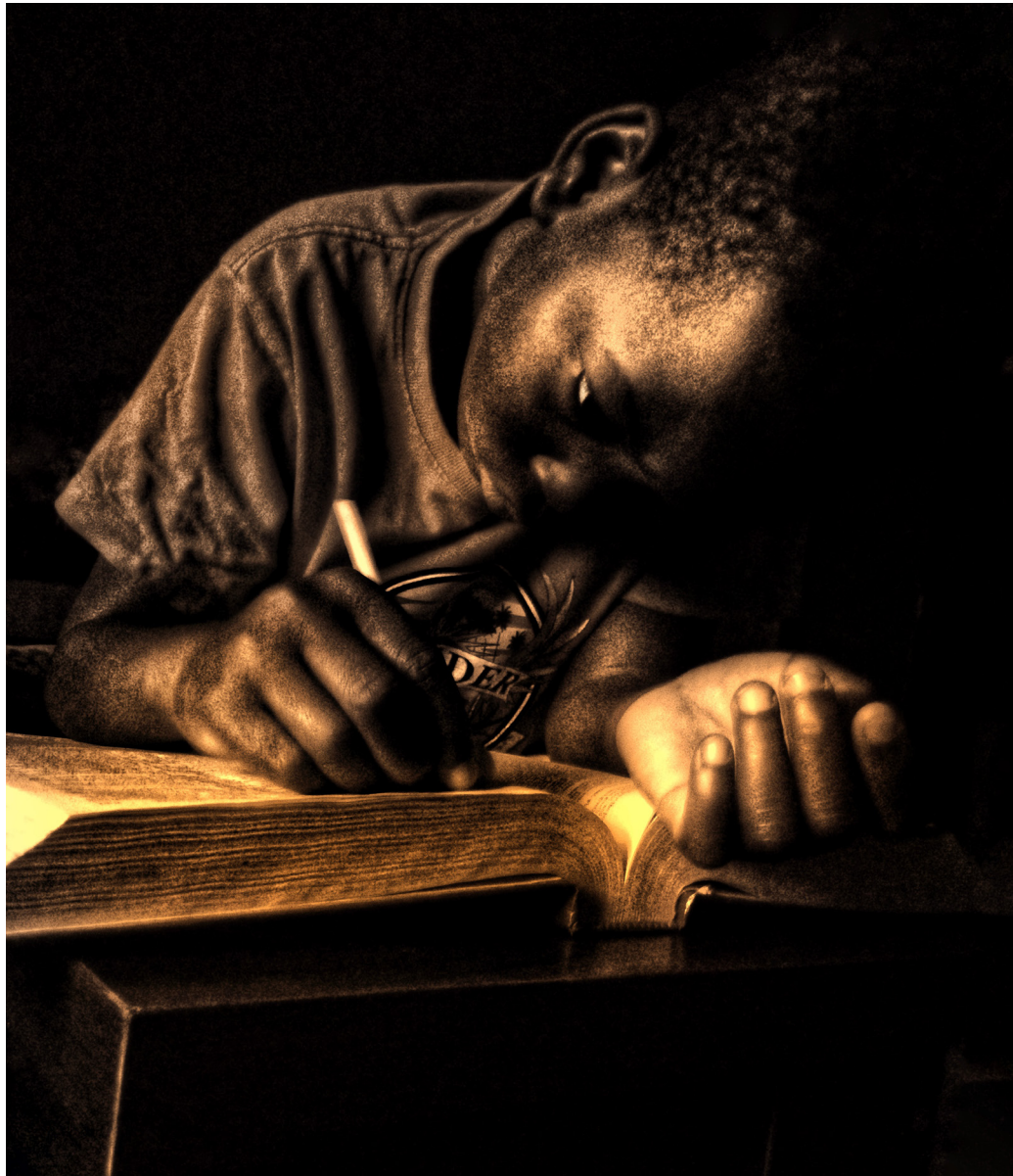
Mary Chiaramonte

Little Tornado



16 x 12 inches, Oil

Math Problem



Awaiting the Golden Sun

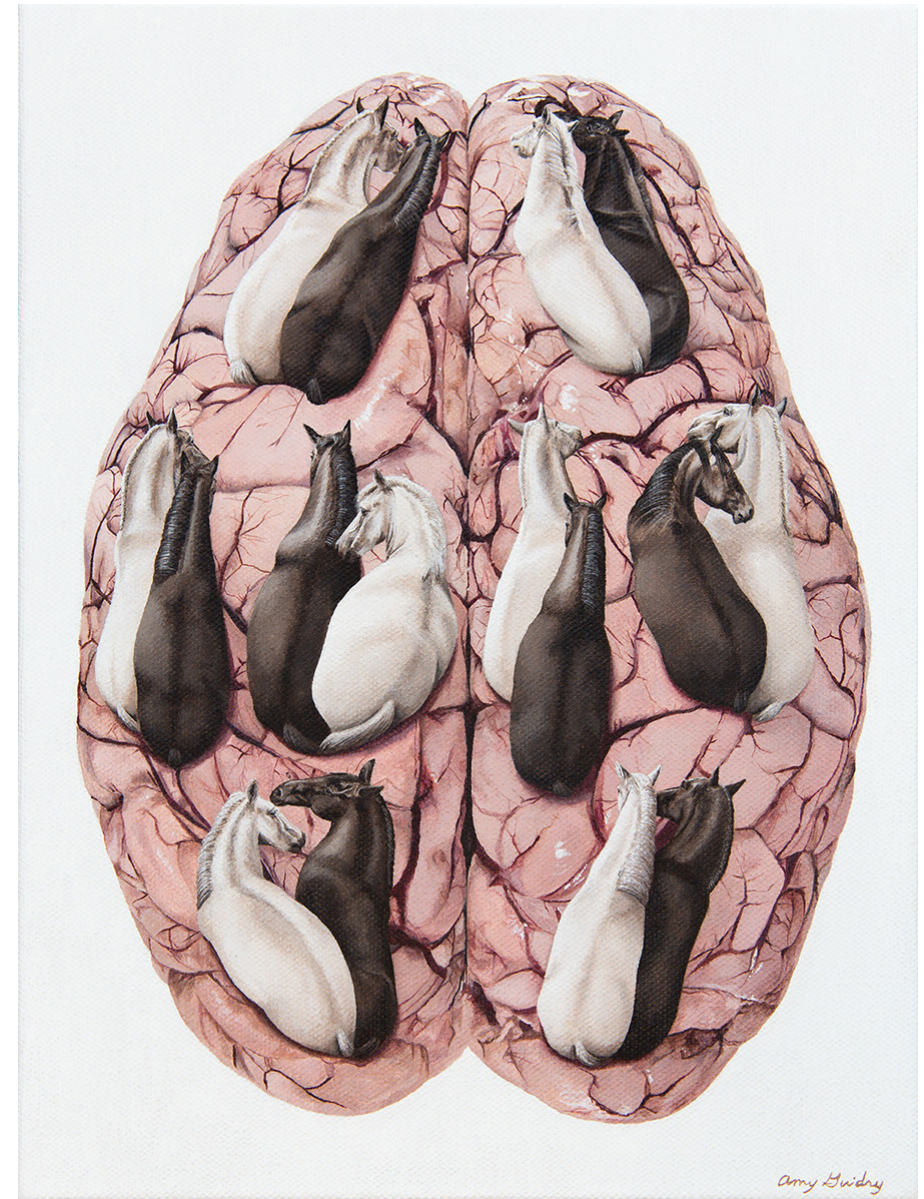


Dissociate



12 x 6 inches, Acrylic on canvas

Divide



9 x 12 inches, Acrylic on canvas

Sight



4 x 4 inches, Acrylic on canvas

Regrowth



6 x 6 inches, Acrylic on canvas

In the Moment



40 x 50 cm, Oil on linen

Persian Dreams



45 x 35 cm, Oil on linen

When We Cannot be Where We Want to Dream



The Illusions of Words vs. Behaviors



Dark Night Soliloquy



In a Desolate Sea of Isolation We Have to Work Even Harder to Survive



Untitled



Untitled



A yellow jagged line graphic that starts on the left, rises to a peak, dips to a valley, rises to a second peak, dips to a second valley, and then rises again to the right. The word "FICTION" is centered over the middle of this line.

FICTION

Crux

I thought maybe a Christmas tree would make Milly feel better. She never had one growing up. They had always been a thing for happy people, with happy lives. At the start of it she had seen me like that too; something nice that implied a change in her life's direction. But after getting to know me in a more complete way, she said, this feeling had faded.

We'd just started dating a few weeks ago, but Milly said that was all it took; she could tell I wasn't the one. I had never been sure of anything in my life, but I thought maybe Milly and I still had a chance, if only she could go back to seeing me as part of that better life, that life with things like Christmas trees. I thought maybe if I brought her one, maybe that would put us back on course. Maybe she would look at me holding the tree and think: *these two go together.*

~

Milly was passed out from the drugs that afternoon and I took the opportunity to sneak away. There was a tree farm a few miles down the road that I'd passed on my way over, right in the middle of the nowhere fields. First time I'd noticed it, actually. Lived here all my life. Must've been new.

It was snowing pretty heavy and there weren't many cars on the road. I could barely make out the ones that were; just pairs of headlights trailed by half-thoughts of the cars themselves. I probably should have had chains on the tires. The sky was that darkened blue color of a quickly fading winter afternoon. I was worried the tree farm might be closed for the day, but when I got out into the nowhere fields I could see its pink neon sign—*Roake's tree farm*—blinking at me in the fog.

~

To be honest Milly wasn't the first person to cut things off with me after a few weeks. You might even call it a pattern in my life, being dumped. Milly seemed to think that was just who I was: someone not made to go the distance with. Like, we'd been nodding in and out the other day, floating on the murmur of the television, when she told me that I was a roadside attraction, not a destination. She rested her head on my shoulder as if she had said something tender.

"Roadside attraction," she murmured. *"Not a destination."*

I wasn't sure if she had said it twice or if I had just heard the words echo off the walls. I told her *okay, I get that*, but secretly I thought that maybe I could be a special kind of roadside attraction, one that you stop at and then realize you've never felt more at home.

~

I passed the gate into Roake's tree farm and drove down a long, flat road towards a large house that was probably the visitor's center or whatever. Christmas trees dotted the landscape, but they all seemed to be on the scrawny side. I wanted to get the most beautiful tree they had, one that said *we can make it* as much as a Christmas tree could.

The house was farther back from the highway than it looked; each time I thought I was approaching, it would seem to be a little further out than before. Soon I came to a chain-link fence blocking off the road. There was a small shed beside it with a signpost that read simply: *Roake*. The shed was haphazardly constructed, planks of wood nailed together unevenly so that there were several gaps in the walls and roof. I cut the engine and got out of the car. In my haste to carry out this tree plan I'd forgotten to bring a jacket, and the cold gripped me instantly. I plodded through the snow and knocked on the door of the shed. After a minute a man smoking a cigarette stepped out and looked at me skeptically.

"I'm here for a tree," I said.

"No shit," the man said. His skin was pale and greasy, his hair grown into a mullet. "You cut one down and then pay me, is how it works."

"Could I get a saw?" I asked.

The man pointed to a barrel full of saws around the side of the shed. "Take your pick, just put it back when you're done," he said. "I'm not in the business of giving away free saws."

~

After the first time we had sex, Milly said that the burn marks on my chest (the source of which I couldn't remember) kind of made the outline of a Christmas tree, if you were to connect them like dots. She said that was a sign. She said the two of us had potential to be normal people.

We lay naked on her mangled purple couch, dirty and ripped all over by whatever vicious animal had lived with it before.

"A new relationship is like a new life," Milly said, tracing the tree on my chest with her finger. "We can become new people together."

The room didn't have any windows and it felt like we were in our own world right then, a space made only of together and happy. Streaks of rust ran down the walls, a single light bulb hanging over us on a string, its buzzing like a cat's purr when you were high.

"That sounds good," I said.

Milly bit my shoulder. "Understatement of the year."

I smiled. "Of the decade."

"Century," Milly whispered.

"All time."

~

I made my way along the perimeter of Roake's tree farm, shivering intensely. It was so quiet out here in the nowhere fields. There were layers to the silence, mounds of snow on top of it.

Every tree I passed had the same sad, weathered look, some of them browning as if

already dead. After walking a while I came across a couple cutting one of them down, the first people I'd seen at the farm besides the man in the shed. They laughed as they worked the saw clumsily back and forth. They wore matching coats, matching mittens. They couldn't seem to stop laughing. I nodded hello and they paused and stared at me, laughter dying down to a mild, intermittent chuckle. I nodded again, but they only continued to watch me, their eyes containing a sort of clinical curiosity, as if they were looking at a rare species of animal. I kept going and passed behind a row of trees. The sawing commenced. The laughter picked up.

The snow was falling heavier now, the wind constant, a blizzard in the works. The last of the day's light faded out and the trees became little more than gaunt shadows. I couldn't feel my feet or hands. My shirt was soaked-through from all the snow that had fallen on it. How long had I been walking? How could the farm be so big? I didn't think Christmas tree farms were supposed to be so big. Maybe the good trees were kept at the very back, though this seemed unlikely. There had to be one decent tree on the farm, though, right? I couldn't go back with nothing. I couldn't be left alone again, no world to make with anyone, only objective space (mountains of silence, endless indifference, every escape temporary) to exist inside of.

Finally I came to what seemed to be the last tree on the farm. It was bent over and skeletal, a nest of pine needles beneath it. Beyond there was only flat, snow-covered earth for miles. It made me think of how my father used to describe the world: a mouth of nothingness that swallows what comes into it. I sighed and turned to make my way back. I would freeze if I stayed out here. I needed to go home and take a hit and when she woke up I would tell Milly what I had tried to do for her and maybe it would work like an *A for effort kind of thing*.

~

The future I imagined with Milly, ever since she told me how she'd never had a

Christmas tree, always centered around the holidays. The scene I played out in my head over and over was kind of like a commercial except not advertising anything. The two of us would just be sitting beside a tree on Christmas morning, drinking coffee and looking out the window. In the fantasy we lived in the sort of place where we could look out the window and know that there were people in the other houses doing the same thing we were. This was pretty much all there was to it: the tree and the coffee and the feeling of implicit community. Sometimes we had kids, sometimes not, both of which seemed okay. There was a reigning simplicity to the scene, almost like Milly and I had both been lobotomized, but in a kind, humane way, a way that brought us closer to who we were at the crux of things.

I hoped so badly that who I was at the crux of things was good, that after you scraped all the accumulated shit off the pit of me, you got to something good. That's who the me in the fantasy was: a happily lobotomized crux.

~

I lumbered back through the trees. My footprints from before had already been erased by the snow. I thought I was following the same path, but it was difficult to tell for sure. Trees seemed to cluster in places they hadn't been earlier. Others had been knocked over by the blizzard and lay on the ground in a half-buried heap. I tried to continue in the general direction of the road, but my position to it grew increasingly unclear. I was relieved when I came upon the same couple from earlier, still laughing, still cutting down their tree. It sure was taking them a while to saw through that thing. Getting closer I saw that there was a stroller beside them now, the shadowed lump of a baby inside. Where had it come from? The couple's laughter rose and fell, rose and fell. Their silhouettes shifted back and forth in the dark. They didn't seem to notice me as I passed this time, and soon I was far enough away that the wind was all I could hear once more.

I kept walking. The blizzard was getting worse and it was difficult to see too far ahead.

It felt like I should have made it back to the road by now if I'd been going the right direction. My whole body had gone numb and my heart was beating in a slow, irregular rhythm. Christmas trees crowded my path, often forcing me to squeeze through a narrow opening between them that curved and zigzagged in several different directions. The trees were getting taller, too, their branches fuller. I had finally found the good ones, but my hands were too numb to grip the saw, which dangled from the frozen red tips of my fingers, about to slide off at any moment. I let it fall to the ground and kept going. The mullet man from the shed could just deal with it.

The Christmas trees became bigger and bigger around me until it got so there wasn't a single one that would have fit in Milly's place. Their branches surrounded me, poking into my skin like a million nettled arms. I was completely lost. I'd left my phone in the car, but it wouldn't have gotten service out here anyway. I thought maybe the laughing couple could help me, but when I tried to turn back, the trees seemed to have shifted again, and I couldn't tell if I was going in the right direction. I shouted for help, though I knew no one would hear. Voices didn't carry in the nowhere fields; they were simply absorbed by the emptiness, swallowed by the nothing-mouth. I sat in the snow to rest for a minute. My breathing was slow and ragged, a borderline wheeze.

Suddenly I saw lights up ahead and the outline of a large house took shape in the near distance. It looked much like the house that I had seen up the road driving into the farm. I stood and hurried towards it. The clutter of trees began to clear, organizing into neat rows on either side of my path. The house seemed to grow even brighter as I approached, windows blazing with light, as if the sun itself was inside. My fingers wouldn't fold into a fist and so I when I got to the door I knocked by slamming my forearm into it three times. Wind howled in my ears as I waited. Glancing behind me, I saw that the trees had made a wall in front of the house, lined up neatly as if in observance of an event.

The door clicked open.

~

I met Milly at a party. My friend was squatting in an abandoned church and had found a bunch of speakers in the basement. He strung a melon to the ceiling while we all poured in, spray-painting it silver to look like a disco ball. Electro-thumping music pulsed from the speakers and shook the walls. The basement was packed with enough bodies to fill the pews upstairs. We mostly just jumped around because there wasn't room for much lateral movement. At some point in the haze of it all Milly and I made eye contact and held it, then shoved through the crowd to get closer. We shouted inaudibly to each other, understanding the words as friendly noises. The drugs made us lighter, killed the barriers created by living with a human mind. We brought our hands up together and jumped. We brought them down shoulder-level and kissed.

I think right then we were at the crux of life.

~

Standing at the door was Milly. *Milly?* She smiled like she'd been expecting me, somehow, here at this random house in the nowhere fields. She wore a nice green sweater and clean-looking jeans, not a tear on them.

"There you are," she said. "C'mon, it's freezing out there."

I followed her inside, choked with confusion. Bells jingled from the wreath hanging on the door. A set of hooks on the wall held umbrellas, keys, brand-name coats. Milly led me to a modest living area with a couch and a coffee table. Daylight shone into the room, just as if the night had been fast-forwarded. Out the window, a row of identical cream-colored houses stood across a road that dead-ended on both sides. Towering Christmas trees formed a wall at each cutoff point, their trunks molded into one another.

"You're soaked," Milly said. She undressed me, my body shaking terribly, then wrapped a towel around my shoulders and another around my waist. My skin began to prickle all over as it thawed. Milly sat on one side of the couch and pulled a throw blanket over her

legs. “Want to make coffee?” She asked. I didn’t respond. I was staring at the Christmas tree in the corner of the room. I hadn’t noticed it at first. It stood on the only part of the floor that remained in shadow, the light just missing it. The branches had been decorated with a bunch of those green and red ball ornaments, nothing else. For some reason those ornaments made the room feel especially alien. Looking at them I had a sense that everything around me had been cutout from a catalogue and pasted onto reality.

“What is this place?” I muttered.

“This is our home,” Milly said. She looked calm and happy to the root, like there was nothing but sunsets in her head. I wondered if she was the real Milly, or just a strange imitation like the rest of the house, but the question was suffocated beneath the fact of her presence, right there in front of me: Milly. She pulled the blanket over her and lay down across the couch. “Come lie next to me,” she said.

So I got onto the couch and snuggled behind her. I decided that I didn’t need to understand. Solace wasn’t born from mere existence; it wasn’t simply there to catch you at the end of the day. You just fell and fell forever until you found a way to it.

I wrapped an arm around Milly, nestling my nose in her hair. Her breathing was warm and steady against my chest. I liked being the little spoon most, but this was nice too.

Superlatives

Peter opened his yearbook. He double-checked the faces and reviewed the groups and clubs; what a joke. Those pep rally morons waving their green and white flags; the Debate Club and its tragic wardrobe; the jocks and bubbleheaded cheerleaders who glowed so white they thought it forgave their lies. But in spite of his contempt, the more he searched the more Peter realized he was in none of the photos. Even his own Junior class portrait was missing—another day lost taking care of Ma. In the back of the yearbook, the four pages designated “Autographs” remained blank except for Mrs. Morgan, his biology teacher, and Mr. Dickle, the dishwasher in the cafeteria. Dickle sold him weed, and Mrs. Morgan always looked at Peter as if she was about to tell him he contracted something terminal. Mrs. Morgan wrote “Good job, Peter. Best of luck next year!” Dickle just scribed “Bang that pussy this summer, bro!”

Ma’s coughing hammered through the wall, forcing Peter to close the book. He sighed. The coughs had a dry, staccato quality and were employed more as communication than anything else. Peter, Ma said. Peter shut his eyes and counted to ten. Peter, she balled and then let loose with a fresh salvo, her hacks like doll parts run through a band saw. Ma, Peter yelled. Drink your ginger ale! I ran out, she said. I think I spilled it. Peter! I need you! Peter didn’t respond. He folded his arms and sat in the momentary pleasure of her silence. After three years of this, he didn’t mind making her wait, could hear her shifting atop the plastic mattress, the tubes streaking the aluminum rails corralling her thinness. Peter then pictured his mother when she was younger, upright and mobile, running with

him at York Beach in Maine—Dad finally gone and both of them free. Peter threw his yearbook on the floor. No, you don't need me, he said to himself as he swung his feet onto the braided rug. You need Jesus to press both hands down on your goddamn face.

Better, he asked. Peter held the ginger ale as Ma drank. She didn't respond, just turned slightly from the straw when she was done. Peter placed the cup on her bedside table. He hated this room, its smell of raw tobacco and that cobwebby hair spray Ma loved so much. Did you do your homework, she asked. Ma, today was the last day of school. Remember? Summer break. I don't need your smart mouth, she said. I can barely sit up and I hafta listen to you bitch? Peter shifted his weight on her bed. Ma, it's true. Ma rumbled the blankets and then put her fist to her mouth, coughed. Peter couldn't remember if Aunt Christie was coming over today or tomorrow. When's dinner, Ma asked. Peter scanned her dresser lined with prescription bottles and an empty box of tissues. A ceramic frame held an old black and white of his father and mother on their wedding day. They were both smiling down at a tiered cake, knife hovering in protracted glint. Ma snapped her fingers. Hey numb nuts, you there? Peter blinked. Sorry Ma, he said. What did you say?

Peter was outside during recess the day he learned his father had died. It was 5th grade. April. Peter was playing smear the queer with Bill and Brandon and another kid Peter hated. Peter was laughing, holding the Nerf football under his arm and accusing Bill of cheating when he noticed his mom standing with the principal next to the slide. Peter felt something hot unfurl in his chest when he saw them together like that. Ma came over and

said she was taking him home for the day, but that they were going out to Dairy Queen first. Peter was confused, but happy; his mom never bought him ice cream. Before he left, he turned to the other boys and casually flipped them off. Peter felt like the king of the world. As Peter and his mom made their way toward the school building, the principal stopped them both and put his hand on his mom's shoulder, gripping her in a way that seemed familiar. Call me if you need anything, Louise, he said. Later, as he was finishing his parfait, Peter learned that Dad was stabbed to death in the prison dining hall. He probably owed someone money, Ma Said. Peter remembered how Dad used to beat him, which was usually on a Sunday because Sundays they went to church. After service, Dad would get to feeling guilty about whatever fathers feel guilty about, and off would come the belt. Dad would say things like Peter was inviting demons into the house because his bad behavior. During the worst of it, Ma would go into her bedroom, close the door, and turn up the volume of the T.V. Peter winced as Ma brushed a few wisps of hair off his forehead. Christ, Peter, don't get chocolate on your shirt, she said. Peter looked down, rubbed his collar with his palm. And then he took another bite of his parfait.

The rice bubbled in a thin bottomed pot on the stove. Peter laid 6 turkey hotdogs over the rice and placed a cover on top, turning the heat to low. He went outside and took a joint out of his top pocket, lit the tip. Three chickens scuttled past and into the dirt, scratching hieroglyphs in the dust. Stupid birds, Peter said. Peter inhaled deeply and thought about his plans for the summer, though he knew the only viable one he had was to work 20 hours a week down at the tree farm. Mr. Roberts always threw parttime work his way; he knew Peter's dad from years ago. Peter spent his time watering saplings, or helping customers get fruit trees into the back of their SUVs. At the end of his shift, he'd listen to

the other teenagers talk about their dates for that night, parties they planned on attending or movies they hoped to see at the mall in Portsmouth. Once, as he sat on a bench replacing his Timberlands, he heard the pretty girl Schuyler around the corner talking about him as she hosed the dust off her arms. Oh, that kid Peter, she said to some girl he didn't know, and his heart raced. He's going home to his mom for another episode of Night of the Living Dead. Both girls laughed. Peter quickly got up and found his BMX by a row of peach trees, waved goodnight to Mr. Roberts, and peddled home.

Peter heard tires crunching over rocks and small ruts in the driveway. It was Aunt Christie in her beat-up Accord. She pulled up to the barn, got out. Peter took another big hit and blew the smoke up toward the trees. She walked toward him, smiling larger than usual. She had in her bamboo earrings you could see from a mile off, and that mini Tibetan flag she wore as a scarf loose around her neck. Got some for me, she asked, reaching. Peter handed the joint over and observed her through a squinted eye. Isn't it, like, desecration of a flag to wear it as a piece of clothing, Peter asked. Christie laughed, took a small puff. How's my sister today, she asked. The same, Peter said. She handed the joint back. You almost done with school or something? Yep. Finished today, Peter said. Nothing but warm summer breezes ahead. Yeah, right, Christie said. I'm about done with your mom's bullshit, she added. Old battle-axe has taken enough from me. Peter finished the joint, stubbed it out against the door frame. Hey, I got voted most likely to succeed, Peter said. In my yearbook, I mean. Christie snorted. Good one. She patted Peter on the shoulder. I'm going inside, okay? You need help making dinner?

Aunt Christie and Peter ate their food silently around the small mahogany table in the dining room. Ma, like usual, took her dinner in bed. Peter had no plans for the night but suddenly blurted out There's a big party happening at the sand pits tonight. End of year kegger or whatnot. I was hoping maybe ...I don't think I can stay, Christie interrupted. I just wanted to come over and see how your mom was doing. But I thought tonight was your night, Peter said. The sun filled the wooden table like a small campfire. I know, Peter, but now that it's summer I need to spend more time helping down at the gallery. Tourist season, you know? Right, but you agreed to help, Peter said. It's your night, he repeated. Peter, I'm sorry. Don't make this harder than it already is, okay? I'm sure someone at the clinic can help. Did you hear back from the state yet? Peter looked out the window at a row of maples. The leaves were like tiny green fists afraid to open.

After Aunt Christie left, Peter went to check on Ma. Her plate sat on the bedside table untouched. She was sleeping soundlessly on her side, the rough blanket moving up and down. As Peter stared at her, he remembered the day his father was sentenced, and how after court Peter went home and discovered a small brood of baby moles under a piece of drywall in the field across the street. The babies were hairless and pink and blind, and he was gentle and carefully built a small nest of grass for them to lie back down in. Peter then searched the grass until he found a cinder block and dropped it on their little bodies. That night, he cried real hard in Ma's lap and she stroked his hair telling him to hush, that he was the man of the house now and would have to learn to take care of things. Men, she

said, don't cry. Peter blinked the memory away and watched his mom continue sleeping. How are you doing, Ma, he said. How are you...feeling tonight? His mother was too busy dreaming to respond. You know, you should see me, Ma. I'm going to be real busy this summer. Got a good job. Girlfriend. Yep. I've got...big plans. Peter smiled, but his cheeks felt wet. He scanned the room. Peter walked slowly to the edge of the bed and lifted a pillow off the floor. He gripped it tightly and stared down at Ma. Peter waited for God to speak, to tell him something—to say that he was forgiven.

It was now midnight. Peter believed he could get as far as Ogunquit, maybe York Beach if he kept to the back roads until morning. He found a small stack of 20s in Ma's dresser and stuffed them into his backpack, filled the remaining space with t-shirts and shorts. On top, he placed his yearbook and the photo of his mom and dad with their wedding cake. As he made his way down the road on his dad's old ten speed, he was relieved to discover the headlight still worked as long as he peddled. Peter decided he would get a job on the boardwalk, maybe hawk fried dough or make change in the arcade. His coworkers would get to know him as kind and soft-spoken. Reliable. And they'd eventually ask where he came from, what brought him to the beach. But he wouldn't need to get into all that, wouldn't need to drag up the ghosts from some other life. He would just pull his yearbook out of his pack, pat the cover. Well, it's all right here, he'd say. Every single word.

All the Stars We Contain

When the astronaut is a girl, she and her mother go on a trip. Her mother calls it a trip later, *a girls' trip*, with that familiar bubble in her voice, *just us girls*, but the astronaut remembers the crinkle of cotton underwear in its plastic wrapping as her mother tore it open with her teeth, the three-day wear of her favorite striped shirt, the unfamiliar taste of toothpaste spit into cracked-basin motel room sinks. She remembers telephones in bare-wall motel rooms, ringing and ringing till her mother took them off the hook, covered them with the extra pillows. She remembers sleeping bean-shaped in twin beds beside her mother, breakfasts of granola bars and convenience store soda pop. She remembers the night they nearly ran out of gas in a town with one streetlight blinking *yellow yellow yellow*, her mother telling the gas station attendant, bubble-voiced, *we coasted in on fumes*, and driving away in the dark, headlights off, inching along the unfamiliar road.

The sky was full of stars, fuller than the astronaut had ever realized, and she put her forehead against the car window looking out at them, left a little crescent moon mark that stayed until they went home.

Her mother flicked the headlights on, said: *I read somewhere once that we are all made of stars.*

The astronaut is away at school when her mother dies. It is her first year of college, and the path between campus buildings is thick with crackling brown and yellow leaves. The astronaut has been calling home every night like her mother asked, the astronaut has been looking at the stars, the astronaut has been mailing blank postcards to the house of the neighborhood girl she will someday marry. She buys pairs of postcards at a time, fills one with words of longing, tears it into pieces that she flutters down into her dorm-room garbage. Her roommate plays love songs sung by boys in torn jeans and leather jackets, boys with pouting mouths and weak chins. Her roommate says *what I like about them is it feels like they're singing to me*, and hums along, head bobbing.

The roommate is humming along when the phone rings and it is the astronaut's father, who never calls.

Your mother, he says.

Your mother, your mother, he says.

And finally he can say it all: *Your mother has died.*

There is no note, no letter. There is only the quiet of the astronaut's childhood home and her mother's gardening shoes, neatly set at the front step, the way they had been all summer.

The astronaut drives all night to get home. The radio flickers between static and song, and the stars overhead follow her, follow her, follow her, all the way home.

The astronaut remembers coming home with her mother, coming home from their *trip*, the car parked askew in the driveway, *leave the windows down*, her mother said and her voice was a ferocious jangle, *it got so stuffy in there!* She remembers the house was empty when they went inside, or she thought it was, except there was her father sitting in the kitchen in the quiet, her father holding coffee mug still steaming, saying *you're back* and nothing else.

We're back, her mother agreed, and sent the astronaut to her room with the plastic bag she'd been using as luggage. And in her room, the open window and smell of summertime air, and the girl from the house across the street waving to her first, then running over, barefoot on sun-warm pavement, pressing her fingertips against the screen, the astronaut pressing back.

I was waiting for you, the neighbor girl says, the way she will say every time, when the astronaut returns for her mother's funeral, when the astronaut finishes school and her father has gone and left an empty house, for sale sign in the lawn, when the astronaut comes back from space: *I was waiting for you to come home.*

The Fall

"Why the hell did you even say yes?"

Athena swallows the last of her whiskey and then on impulse flips her glass over, securing the gold band lying between her and Adam.

"I thought I would settle eventually" she says looking beyond the alcove, "I thought maybe one day you would come up behind me while I studied the birds in our apple tree, and it would register in my chest that I was content." Athena pulls her knees up to her chest and wraps her toned brown arms around them.

"But it didn't happen Adam. This..." she gestures towards the hunter green walls surrounding them,

"...will never be enough for me." Athena reaches out before her, tracing the grooves of the glass with her ring finger. It was lighter than she remembered. "Adam, your life isn't my life. Surely you of all people can see that."

"This isn't your life?" Adam lets out a dubious laugh. "What the fuck are you talking about, Athena?" Beyond Adam and the alcove talons flash by and then reappear, settling in the closest branch of their apple tree. Athena watches the white barn owl in silence.

"Now you have nothing to say?" He asks.

Annoyed by her indifference, Adam rises from his seat and hurls his glass towards those green walls she was so hell bent on repainting.

"Adam" Athena says watching the glass recoil and slither against his skin, "You're acting like a child." The white barn owl starts at the shatter, unwittingly dislodging an apple from its stem.

"The first year we were engaged you decided we needed to postpone the wedding, because you wanted to finish school" Adam's hands are held out in front of him now, palms together like someone beginning a prayer, "so I found us a house in Eden Park not seven

minutes from your university. When you finished Ornithology school and wanted to travel for your research, what did I do?” He asks, placing his fingertips against his bare chest, “I quit my job and booked us one way tickets to Tanzania. Fucking Tanzania! Do you know how hard it was for me to live there!” Adam smacks the table. Athena's glass doesn't move. “Athena” he says her name like a plea. “My whole life is centered around giving you what you need. Can't you see that?” Behind Adam the clouds break letting the sun creep in and Athena watches as the dust particles float about his head.

“It's not about what I need Adam, it's about what I want and that's not you!” Athena pauses to remove the hostility in her voice. “I'm sorry” she says eventually, “I didn't mean to be so harsh.” Adam rests his palms against the table and hangs his head, the light splitting against his back. She could see him clearly now.

“Adam” Athena says leaning in closer, “there's a piece of glass lodged in your skin, look.” Adam curves his backbone with the fluidity of a snake to see where she is pointing. “Here” Athena rises and walks towards him, stripping the white T-shirt up and over her head on the way. When she reaches his side of the table Adam takes a step back. “Please Adam” she reasons, “let me help you.” Adam's shoulders shed their stiffness and he turns around to settle against the table, his right hand hovering above his head. “This shouldn't hurt.” Athena says, bending to dislodge the glass from his side. When the shard is out, blood the color of apples begins seeping from his skin and Athena wipes it away with her white T-shirt. “Don't worry” she says when he winces, “It's only a flesh wound. All your ribs are still intact.” Water smacks Athena against her forehead like a church blessing and when she looks up, she finds Adam is crying.

“Look” he says pointing out beyond the casement window, “there's a white owl in our apple tree.” Satisfied his wound would no longer bleed Athena rises, tossing her stained white T-shirt atop the shattered glass on the floor.

“It's a barn owl.” she says resting her bare ribs against his. Adam gingerly lowers his arm around her, and they sit for a while.

“I thought they traveled in pairs.” Adam asks eventually.

“No,” Athena says, watching the owls white wings flutter in the setting light, “not the owls. They prefer to hunt alone.”

NONFICTION

Corrections

“Who understands me when I say this is beautiful?”

--Jimmy Santiago Baca

I'd taught creative writing at all kinds of places, but during my new hire orientation at the federal prison, I was told that I needed to learn how to be a hostage if in fact I became one; I looked at the Lieutenant addressing me and nodded thoughtfully, as if this was just regular new job housekeeping stuff I'd heard a zillion times.

I sat at a small desk for four hours as different personnel rotated in and out to let me know what I'd gotten myself into. It was clear I was there to listen, and the psychologist, the educational coordinator, the warden, and various COs all had their own take on prison life. Some were funny, many expressed hope. A few sounded like they didn't particularly like their jobs and I immediately began siding with the prisoners. At the end of the day, I was shown glossy photos of confiscated weapons, including shanks and zip guns.

“Tell them nothing about your personal life,” the Lieutenant said at one point. “Not where you live. Or if you're married. Or even if you have kids or not. Nothing.”

After a tour of the classrooms, the Education Coordinator asked if I had any questions. He had a close-cropped beard and kind eyes.

“Yeah,” I said. “Can I create a literary magazine with my students?”

On the first day of class I didn't know what to expect even though I thought I knew. After I signed in and handed over my keys and license, I was told to go through the metal

detector but kept setting it off—first my belt, then my shoes. I was finally brought to the education center and handed a walkie talkie.

“That’s the emergency button,” the guard said pointing to a bright orange button on top. “Don’t push it unless,” he said.

“Unless what,” I said.

“You’ll know.”

I entered my classroom and waited. I read and re-read the roster; I wanted to make sure I got their names right. My seven students arrived 10 minutes later. We took turns shaking hands and introducing ourselves. I told them my name was Mr. Locke, as I was instructed: *Never tell them your first name*. And in turn, I was to refer to them only by their last names. Their age range seemed between 20 and 55, and the older guy was carrying a beautiful prayer rug over his shoulder when we shook hands.

I handed out the syllabus after everyone took their seats. The room had no windows and everything was beige. I said we’d break the class down into two-week units, with the first unit focusing on poetry. I asked if anyone had ever written a poem. No one said a thing. Mr. Cruz kind of shook his head. The air was thick and a fan hummed uselessly in the corner. I started sweating.

Mr. Cruz spoke up. “I write some free verse. I like blank verse too. But yeah, I really dig meter.”

“Meter?” asked Mr. Delgado.

“Yeah, meter. Rhyme. Iambic pentameter. We talked about this,” said Mr. Cruz.

“Why do they call poems ‘verse,’” asked Mr. Foote. He had thin, short dreads, oval wire rimmed glasses. His eyes were clear.

“Well, um, sure, poems are sometimes called ‘verse’. But verse actually means ‘turn,’” I said.

I thought for a second and then had an idea. I opened my textbook.

“I’d like to read you guys a poem to start things off,” I said. “And after I read, let’s see if we can find a part of the poem that illustrates a turn, or a kind of hinge, swinging us away from the current action and into something new.”

I read the poem out loud. The name of the poem or who wrote it doesn’t matter. I was so nervous I just hoped I could get through it without them all laughing at me.

Afterward, I asked that they read it again to themselves and think about my question and then mark the poem at the place, or places, a turn occurs. My students wrote and wrote. There was great seismographic scratching that I found exceptionally pleasing. Finally, one student raised his hand.

“Yes, Mr. Delgado,” I said.

“I thought poems were supposed to rhyme,” he said.

“No, not all poems,” I said.

He considered my reply carefully. “Will we write poems like this,” he asked.

“I would like that,” I said.

Over the following week we read out loud poems by Gary Soto, Carolyn Forché, and Brian Turner. We talked about the art of linguistic compression and the importance of energy—how one trims language down to the muscle. And because we read those three poets we also talked about baseball, Mexican immigration, and Caesar Chavez; El Salvador, civil war, and body dumps; the Iraq War, Islam, and when it was appropriate to say *Inshallah*.

Then it was time for them to read their villanelles; no one in class had ever written one, let alone read one out loud. And all they had as reference was Thomas’ *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*.

Mr. Delgado went first. He dropped out of school in the eighth grade. All his life he's known poverty and gangs; white people crowding the sun off his beach back in Puerto Rico. His hands are overrun in tattoos of birds and ornate letters, eyes weeping across knuckles. He read his villanelle. It was tender, nearly sweet.

"This poem," he said. "All I could think about as I wrote it was love."

"What are you talking about," joked Mr. Johnson, the youngest of my students. "You mean like...your girlfriend?" A couple of snickers. And all Mr. Delgado had to do was laugh back and he'd be off the hook. Vulnerability thwarted.

"No. I mean all kinds. Every kind. Just...love."

Class started late, as transfers were running behind. We would be without Mr. Johnson; he was caught up in a large fight and remanded to solitary confinement. I looked at his desk several times during class. It vibrated with his absence.

The students began reading their revised poems. They were originally scaffolded from a Bob Hicok poem, but we had dropped the scaffolding and they'd evolved into pieces more closely resembling their own voices. Mr. Cruz read his. Normally eager to speak and engage, Mr. Cruz read his poem merely louder than a breath. His poem recounted his years growing up in North Carolina. As he read, I could pick up the faintest hint of a southern accent, not something I had heard before.

"Damn, Charlie Brown, (Mr. Cruz's nickname) that was all quiet and shit," Said Mr. Leeds. "What happened to you?"

"I'm not proud," Mr. Cruz said.

"What," said Mr. Foote.

"Where I'm from," Said Mr. Cruz. "I'm not proud."

Mr. Delgado got worked up. "Are you kidding me? I'm from Puerto Rico and I embrace that shit. You're a Mexican from the south and you feel...embarrassed?"

"Yeah. I guess so."

"You and me, Charlie Brown, we're having a talk, after class. You and me," said Mr. Delgado. He was pointing back and forth and his voice was enlarged. I knew he considered Mr. Cruz a brother.

After class, two other teachers and I were buzzed out of the education wing, walked alongside the fence with its tuft of razor wire, buzzed back inside, and then returned our walkie-talkies through a slot like the kind found at drive-thru pharmacies. We put our right hands under the blacklight so the officer could see the stamp we received that morning, and then we flipped the three red chits on a board back over to white, meaning we had left the prison. Then it was more waiting behind heavy doors, another buzzing, stepping inside a small room, our escort closing the door behind us, and waiting for the next door to be buzzed open. You moved like this in orchestrated segments: start, shuffle, stop, as if slowly making your way through a train's multiple cars.

Back outside in the parking lot, the sun was ruthless, piercing. We all complained. Unlocking the door to his Chevette, the business teacher told us he was just doing this gig for fun and that he used to make \$200,000 on Wall Street.

Uh-huh, I thought. Sure you did.

Class was about to start, and Mr. Hamilton was steaming.

"You're steaming, Mr. Hamilton. What's up," I asked.

"You know, these clowns don't know shit," he said. He stared right into me, his eyes gray and still as two dimes underwater. "I filled out my goddamn form requesting extra

postage so I can mail out my letter and 10 days later my counselor still hasn't approved it. It should take three fucking days. They're all lucky I don't have a gun with bullets," he said.

"Oh yeah? Maybe we're all lucky," I offered.

"I didn't say I'd kill him, just let him know the extent of my anger. Shoot off his goddamn big toe, throw him off balance so he has to limp around the rest of his life."

I looked down at the table and then back up, laughing. Mr. Hamilton laughed too, a big, booming laugh that said no matter how steep these walls, I can dream higher.

"No one has gone to hell just for shootin' someone in the ass," he said.

"Or toe," I reminded.

We laughed again.

After class, I waited with the students and other prisoners in a smallish day room—it resembled an elementary school cafeteria. I grabbed a seat at a table where three guys I didn't know were talking passionately, but just under the volume of normal conversation. They all nodded and said what's up.

"Hey," I said. I placed my books neatly in front of me, detached my walkie-talkie from my belt and laid it sideways on top of my pile.

"You teach that creative writing class, right," one guy said. He had a round, open face and a perfectly symmetrical afro.

"Yeah."

"I heard that's hard."

I shrugged. "Eh, it's all perspective."

He tipped his head at me, returned to his conversation about his own college classes and which professors were good, which were assholes. I thankfully didn't hear my name.

I looked around while trying to look like I wasn't looking around. There were about forty guys in olive green jumpsuits milling about, waiting for the intercom and its charged voice granting permission for everyone to transfer back up the hill to their cells. White guys hung out with white guys, black guys with black, Hispanic with Hispanic. As the only white dude at the table, I wondered if my sitting there broke some kind of unspoken rule, or if I got a free pass because I was a teacher.

I began thinking about my past, stupid shit I did that could have landed me in a place like this: buying drugs, selling drugs. But mostly buying. *A lot*. There were times in college I had enough cocaine in my possession that, if busted, would have carried a mandatory minimum. The only difference between me and many of the men here is that I was lucky not to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. *Jesus Christ*, I thought. *Am I just prancing around like some clueless dickhead, giving off classic white savior vibes?*

After about 20 minutes, I realized I was the only non-prisoner in the room. I began feeling a little anxious for being alone this long, which was quickly followed by shame for feeling anxious. Everyone else was oblivious—talking, standing with their backs against the concrete walls, or sitting at tables. No one, rightfully, gave two shits I was there. Their voices blended into a kind of indiscernible hum, as if everything and nothing was at stake and great truths needed to be ferried through narrow passages.

I saw my escort—a guard name Susan—enter the room, keys bouncing at her hip. I stood up.

"Sit tight," she said. "You'll need to get comfortable for a while." I sat back down. She unlocked a door to an office and got on the phone. I watched her behind a large square of glass talk and nod her head affirmative. She came back out, closed and relocked the door. "We're going to be here a while," she said.

She moved past me in another jangle of keys and just like that was gone. I looked down at my roster sheet and pretended I was engaged in something very important. 15 more

minutes went by. The guys maintained their conversation, used to these types of delays.

I stood up and stretched, imagined what would happen if I was required to stay all night, some urgent kind of lockdown out of my control. Where would I sleep, I thought.

“Hey,” said the guy who asked me earlier if I taught creative writing.

“Yeah?”

“What do you suggest I use if I want a guide or whatever to help me with my writing?”

“You want this book,” I said, and slid over my textbook.

“Does it have short stories,” he asked.

“We just read one in class today by a guy named Michael Cunningham, “White Angel”. It’s an incredible story,” I said. “Beautiful, actually.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah,” I said.

And he found the story in the table of contents, turned to the page, and started to read.

“When I Was Sixteen, I Knew It Was A Lie That...”

That was the essay prompt. I told them nothing else except this: ‘Be brave.’

Mr. Leeds, who generally writes in an earnest pastiche of clichés, wrote that When I Was Sixteen I knew It Was A Lie that Santa Claus came down our chimneys because there weren’t any chimneys in the ‘hood. Some white man bringing us presents? Please. We’d rob HIM if given the chance. The only white men we saw were cops, and the kind of presents they brought were the ones we didn’t want.

Mr. Cruz wrote that When I Was Sixteen I Knew It Was A Lie that everything would be all right. The night his mom was to leave the hospital he slept in her bed because the way her pillow smelled like the strawberry shampoo she loved so much lulled him to sleep.

When the banging door woke him up all he could think was how mad he was that sleep was ruined until his neighbor met him at the door to tell him that his mother had died before she could be released.

And then it was Mr. Delgado’s turn to read.

“It’s, it’s no big deal. Just my thoughts,” he said.

“No,” said Mr. Foote. “It’s your truth.”

Mr. Delgado smiled and then looked down at his paper. It did not shake or move.

“When I Was Sixteen I Knew It Was A Lie that I could be loved.” And then bravely, just as I had asked, he continued.

On the final day of class Mr. Cruz lingered so we could talk. I’d already informed the men that we wouldn’t be able to create a magazine due to lack of funding. And the poetry reading we had planned to hold for the other prisoners was canceled for reasons no one understood, least of all me.

“Mr. Cruz, when do you get out,” I asked. By this point, we all knew a lot about each other’s personal lives, dire warnings notwithstanding. Only thing I didn’t know was what they were in for, and how long they had left.

“14 months,” he said.

“And you’ll have your bachelor’s, right?”

“Yeah.”

“You ever think about getting an MFA?”

He smiled. “You think so?”

“Yes, I do. You’re a good writer, Mr. Cruz. And you’ll only get better.”

Mr. Cruz was light years ahead of any student I’d had in my classes I taught at the

college. He was a voracious reader. Sensitive. And smart. When the class read the poem ‘Telemachus’ by Ocean Voun, he said “Telemachus was Odysseus’ son, right?” I said I had no idea. And he knew more about meter and rhyme than any teacher I had ever known, sometimes correcting me when I got things wrong.

When I had read a poem by former prisoner/poet Jimmy Santiago Baca, Mr. Cruz shook his head firmly and said “That’s dope. That poem right there. That’s dope.” He held the poem in his hands as they trembled, and I imagined he hoped his life going in the same direction: rebirth and reclamation.

“I’ll write a letter of recommendation,” I said. “Just ask me when you’re ready.”

I stood up and we shook hands. The intercom said it was time for a move up the hill.

“I would like that, Mr. Locke,” he said.

“Chris,” I said. “My name...is Chris.”



BIOGRAPHIES

POETRY

Despy Boutris

Despy Boutris's writing has been published in *Copper Nickel*, *Colorado Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere. Currently, she teaches at the University of Houston and serves as Editor-in-Chief of *The West Review*.

Alex Chertok

Alex Chertok has poems published or forthcoming in *The Kenyon Review Online*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Best New Poets 2016*, among others, and essays on his prison teaching published in *Ploughshares* and forthcoming from *Alaska Quarterly Review*. He was runner-up in the *North American Review*'s 2019, and finalist in the 2021, James Hearst Poetry Prize, as well as finalist in the 2020 Third Coast Poetry Contest. He currently teaches at Ithaca College and through the Cornell Prison Education Program.

Brian Clifton

Brian Clifton is the author of the chapbooks *MOT* and *Agape* (from *Osmanthus Press*). They have worked in: *Pleiades*, *Guernica*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Salt Hill*, *Colorado Review*, *The Journal*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and other magazines. They are an avid record collector and curator of curiosities.

Hannah Craig

Hannah Craig lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is the author of *This History that Just Happened* (Parlor Press, 2017). Her work has recently appeared in journals like *Copper Nickel*, *Occulum*, *Mississippi Review*, and the *New England Review of Books*.

Katey Funderburgh

Katey Funderburgh is a current undergraduate student at Regis University, studying English and Peace & Justice. She identifies as a bisexual woman. As a self-proclaimed poet, her work explores feminism, nature, belonging, love, and lineage. She has been published previously in the *Red Cedar Review* and *Loophole* magazine.

Eugene Gloria

Eugene Gloria is the author of four books of poems. His most recent collection, *Sightseer in This Killing City* is the recipient of the Indiana Authors Award in poetry. He is the John Rabb Emison Professor of Creative and Performing Arts and English Professor at DePauw University.

Zebulon Huset

Zebulon Huset is a teacher, writer and photographer living in San Diego. He won the Gulf Stream 2020 Summer Poetry Contest and his writing has appeared in *Meridian*, *The Southern Review*, *Fence*, *Atlanta Review* & *Texas Review* among others. He publishes the writing blog Notebooking Daily, edits the journals *Coastal Shelf* and *Sparked*, and

recommends literary journals at TheSubmissionWizard.com.

Emily Khilfeh

Emily Khilfeh (she/her) is a Palestinian-American writer from Seattle, WA. She is a graduate of Pacific Lutheran University and former fellow at the Bucknell Seminar for Undergraduate Poets. She was a first place winner of the 2020 Barjeel Art poetry prize, and a shortlist finalist for the Palette Poetry Prize and the Frontier Award for New Poets. Her poetry appears in *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *Pinwheel Journal*, *Glass: a Journal of Poetry*, and elsewhere. She has been nominated for a Pushcart.

Jessica Kim

Jessica Kim is a disabled poet from California. A two-time 2021 Pushcart nominee, her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Wildness Journal*, *Diode*, *F(r)iction*, *Grain Magazine*, *Longleaf Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, and more. She is the founding editor of *The Lumiere Review*. Find her at www.jessicakimwrites.weebly.com and @jessiicable on twitter.

Liz Marlow

Liz Marlow's debut chapbook, *They Become Stars*, was the winner of the 2019 Slapering Hol Press Chapbook Competition. Additionally, her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Mud Season Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Yemassee*, and elsewhere.

Joanne Mosuela

Joanne Mosuela was born in Washington, D.C. and raised in Virginia. She is a graduate of the University of Virginia's Area Program in Poetry Writing. Her work is forthcoming in *Guesthouse* and the inaugural issue of *HERE*. She was the runner-up for the 2020 Yawp Poem of the Year award from Brooklyn Poets.

Emily Murphy

Emily Murphy is an MA student at The University of New Mexico. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Collateral*, *Manzano Mountain Review*, *Inklette*, and *Garbanzo*, as well as a very talented pigeon delivering hand-rolled poems to upper story apartments. You can follow her on Twitter @weightsandmeans

Marcela Sulak

Marcela Sulak is the author of the lyric memoir *Mouth Full of Seeds*. Her fourth poetry collection, *City of Sky Papers*, appears in May from Black Lawrence Press. She's co-edited the Rose-Metal Press title *Family Resemblance: An Anthology and Exploration of 8 Hybrid Literary Genres*. Her four book-length poetry translations were nominated for the 2017 PEN Award for Poetry in Translation, and awarded a 2019 NEA fellowship. Sulak is Associate Professor at Bar-Ilan University.

Katarzyna Szaulińska

Katarzyna Szaulińska was born in Kołobrzeg in 1987. Her debut collection *Druga Osoba [Second Person]* was the winner of Biuro Literackie's first-book award and published in 2020. She has published work in respected literary journals in Poland, such as *Mały Format*, *Helikopter*, *Kontent*, *Fabularie*, *Wakat*, and *Kultura Liberalna*. English translations of her work have appeared in *La Piccioletta Barca* and a chapbook, *Faith in Strangers*, is forthcoming from Toad Press. She is also the author of a comic book about depression entitled *Czarne Fale/Murky Waves* and the one-woman show *Córcia [Baby girl]*, which was staged at the WARSAW Theatre. She lives in Warsaw, where she works as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist.

Mark Tardi

Mark Tardi is a writer, translator, and lecturer on faculty at the University of Łódź. He is the author of three books, most recently, *The Circus of Trust* (Dalkey Archive, 2017). Recent work and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly*, *Circumference*, *Armstrong Literary*, *Berlin Quarterly*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Asymptote*, *Anomaly*, and *Periodicities*. His translation of *The Squatters' Gift* by Robert Rybicki is forthcoming from Dalkey Archive Press in 2021.

John Sibley Williams

John Sibley Williams is the author of four award-winning poetry collections, including *The Drowning House*, *Scale Model of a Country at Dawn*, *As One Fire Consumes Another*, and *Skin Memory*. A twenty-six-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous awards, including the Wabash Prize for Poetry, Philip Booth Award, and Laux/Millar Prize. He serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review* and founder of the Caesura Poetry Workshop series.

SPECIAL SECTION: GOLDEN SHOVELS

Tara Betts

Tara Betts is the author of the poetry collections *Break the Habit* and *Arc & Hue*. In addition to her work as a teaching artist and mentor for young poets, she has taught at several universities, including Rutgers University and University of Illinois-Chicago. Betts is Poetry Editor at *The Langston Hughes Review*, and she is currently the Inaugural Poet for the People Practitioner Fellow at University of Chicago.

Paula Cisewski

Paula Cisewski's fourth poetry collection, *Quitter*, won the Diode Editions Book Prize. She is also the author of *The Threatened Everything*, *Ghost Fargo* (Nightboat Poetry Prize winner, selected by Franz Wright), *Upon Arrival*, and several chapbooks, including the lyric prose *Misplaced Sinister*. She lives in Minneapolis, where she teaches writing privately and academically and collaborates with fellow artists and activists.

Clair Dunlap

Clair Dunlap grew up just outside Seattle, Washington. Her work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *The Hopper*, *Split Rock Review*, *Glass*, *Peach Mag*, and more. She currently lives in the Midwest.

Gail Goepfert

Gail Goepfert, an associate editor at *RHINO Poetry*, is a Midwest poet and photographer. She has three book publications—*A Mind on Pain* (2015), *Tapping Roots* (2018), and *Get Up, Said the World* (2020). Recent publications include *One Art*, *The Night Heron Barks*, and *The Inflectionist Review*. She has a collaborative chapbook, *This Hard Business of Living*, and a book, *Self-Portrait with Thorns*, being released in 2021.

Kate Hutchinson

Kate Hutchinson spent 35 years teaching poetry to teenagers and is now very happy to have time to write more of her own. She's had many poems and creative essays published and recognized over the years and is the author of 2 collections, *The Gray Limbo of Perhaps* (2012) and *Map Making: Poems of Land and Identity* (2015). Kate is active with several poetry organizations locally and state-wide and has adapted well to Zoom open mics in the last year. For more of her work, visit her site, "Life on Both Sides of the Window." <https://poetkatehutchinson.wordpress.com/>

Sherrel McLafferty

Sherrel McLafferty is a multi-genre writer who currently lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. Her fiction piece "In the Time of Virus" was a finalist for BOOTH's 2020 Unexpected Literature Prize and has since been nominated for a Pushcart. Her poetry has been, or will be, published with journals such as *ArLiJo*, *Requited Journal*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *Juked*.

Rebecca Hart Olander

Rebecca Hart Olander's poetry has appeared recently in *Crab Creek Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, and her collaborative work has been published in multiple venues online and in *They Said: A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing* (BLP). Rebecca is a Women's National Book Association poetry contest winner and a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee. Her chapbook, *Dressing the Wounds*, was published in 2019 by dancing girl press, and her full-length collection, *Uncertain Acrobats*, is forthcoming from CavanKerry Press in November 2021. Rebecca teaches writing at Westfield State University and is editor/director of Perugia Press.

J Pascutazz

J Pascutazz is a non-binary writer with Asperger's syndrome. Raised in rural Ohio. Graduate of Bennington College. Resident of Brooklyn. Published by *Miracle Monocle*,

Cleaver, *Frigg*, and others. A chapbook, 'Lichen Land,' was published by *The Operating System* in 2020.

Christine Pennylegion

Christine Pennylegion grew up in Toronto and has since lived in and around Ottawa, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Windsor. She holds a BA(Hons) in English from the University of Toronto, and an MA in Religion from Trinity School for Ministry. Christine spends her days changing diapers, washing dishes, and reading good books. She blogs irregularly at christinepennylegion.com and writes poems.

Forrest Rapier

Forrest Rapier has poetry forthcoming in *Freshwater Review*, *Dead Mule*, *LandLocked*, and *Levee*. He has received fellowships from Looking Glass Falls, Sewanee Writers Conference, and has also held writing residencies at the University of Virginia and Brevard College. Former poetry editor for *Greensboro Review* and *North Carolina Writers Network*, he recently received his MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where he now lives and hikes the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains.

Gretchen Rockwell

Gretchen Rockwell is a queer poet currently living in Scotland. Xe is the author of the chapbook *Lexicon of Future Selves* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press) and two microchapbooks; xer work has most recently appeared in *AGNI*, *Cotton Xenomorph*, *perhappened mag*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. Gretchen enjoys writing poetry about gender, history, myth, science, space, and unusual connections – find xer at www.gretchenrockwell.com or on Twitter at @daft_rockwell.

ART

Mary Chiaramonte

Born in West Virginia in 1979, Mary Chiaramonte is a figurative realist painter living and working in Richmond, Virginia. Chiaramonte received her Master of Fine Arts degree in painting and art history from Radford University, graduating in 2010 summa cum laude and being awarded the best graduate thesis. Her paintings have been exhibited at Principle Gallery, RJD Gallery, Abend Gallery, Taubman Museum of Art, Wausau Museum of Contemporary Art and Zhou B Art Center. Chiaramonte has been awarded by the Portrait Society of America (2016, 2018) and the International ARC Salon competition (2018). Her paintings have been published by *American Art Collector*, *Fine Art Connoisseur*, *American Artist Magazine*, *PoetsArtists Magazine* and *the New York Times*.

Deedee Cheriél

Nalini ‘Deedee’ Cheriél is a visual artist who started out creating record covers and T-shirts for the Oregon music scene in the early ‘90s. Born in the hippie town of Eugene, Oregon, she began her own band and record label at the age of 19. Influenced by the popular DIY culture of that time, she played in several all-girl bands (Juned, Adickdid, The Teenangels, The Hindi Guns) and co-created the semi-autobiographical film *Down and Out with the Dolls*. This artist has lived and studied abroad: Honduras, Chile, England, Portugal, Spain and her native India. Now residing in Los Angeles, Cheriél’s work explores narratives that recognize the urgency and conflict in our continuing attempts to connect to the world.

Artist Statement

With influences derived from such opposites as East Indian temple imagery, punk rock, and her Pacific Northwest natural environment, her images are indications of how we try to connect ourselves to others and how these satirical and heroic efforts are episodes of compassion and discomfort. Bold elements drawn from landscapes -both urban and natural- and pop culture suggest the ability to find commonalities and relationships between ourselves and our surroundings that inevitably confirm our greater humanity and quest towards love.

Martins Deep

Martins Deep (he/him) is a Nigerian poet, artist, & and currently a student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His works deeply explores the African experience of the boy/girl child. His creative works have appeared, or are forthcoming on *FIYAH*, *The Roadrunner Review*, *Covert Literary Magazine*, *Barren Magazine*, *The Hellebore*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Mineral Lit Mag*, *Agbowó Magazine*, *Surburban Review*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, *FERAL*, *Kalopsia Literary Journal*, *Whaleroad Review*, *Kalahari Review*, & elsewhere. He loves jazz, adores Bethel Music and fantasizes reincarnating as an owl. He tweets @martinsdeep1

Amy Guidry

Amy Guidry is an artist currently residing in Lafayette, Louisiana. She comes from a family of artists including the late painter Eleanor Norcross. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums nationwide. Her paintings are present in public and private collections throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia.

Artist Statement

My series "In Our Veins" explores the connections between all life forms and the cycle of life. Through a psychological, and sometimes visceral, approach, this series investigates our relationship to the natural world, as well as our role in the life cycle. Concepts such as life and death, survival and exploitation, and the interdependence of living and nonliving organisms are illustrated throughout. "In Our Veins" demonstrates these ideas in a surreal, psychologically-charged narrative in an effort to raise awareness and promote ecological conservation.

Vicki Sullivan

Vicki Sullivan is an Australian contemporary realist painter who lives on the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, surrounded by the Southern Ocean & Port Phillip Bay. Vicki has been recognized as an Art Renewal Center Associate Living Master and her work has been exhibited and is held in public and private collections in Australia and internationally. In 2021, Vicki’s work was selected for the Artists on the Moon Project. Noted physicist/ writer/collector Dr. Samuel Peralta is organizing a digital archive of creative work sending visual, music, and literary artists – on a time capsule – to the moon via Astrobotic’s Peregrine Lunar Lander. Launching late 2021 on a United Launch Alliance Vulcan Centaur rocket, it is scheduled to land on the moon in late 2021 and will contain time capsule payloads. Two of Vicki's works will be included in the time capsule on a micro SSD card.

FICTION

Timothy Day

Timothy Day lives with his plants in Portland, Oregon. He holds an MFA in creative writing from Portland State University and his fiction has appeared in *Booth*, *The Adroit Journal*, *The Hunger*, and elsewhere. You can find links to his work here: <https://timothysomeday.wixsite.com/website>

Christopher Locke

Christopher Locke’s writing has appeared in *The North American Review*, *Poets & Writers*, *The Rumpus*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Poetry East*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Verse Daily*, *Southwest Review*, *Whiskey Island*, *Rhino*, *The Sun*, *West Branch*, *Rattle*, *32 Poems*, and *The Adirondack Review*, among others. He won the 2018 Black River Chapbook Award (Black Lawrence Press) for his collection of short stories *25 TRUMBULLS ROAD* and his latest book of poems is *MUSIC FOR GHOSTS* (NYQ Books—2022). Locke has received the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Award, state grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, and Poetry Fellowships from Fundacion Valparaiso, (Spain) and PARMA (Mexico). He teaches creative writing at both North Country Community College and Ray Brook Federal Prison in the Adirondacks.

Andrea Y. Rodriguez

Cleveland native Andrea Y. Rodriguez is an Afro-Latina writer based in Chicagoland. She recently graduated with her BA in English from Lewis University. Rodriguez’s work has been featured in *Ghost Heart Literary Journal*, *The Rise Up Review* (2021) and *Windows Magazine* where she won first place for her piece “A Black Boys Guide” (Spring 2020).

Cathy Ulrich

Cathy Ulrich remembers her dad always liked finding the cheapest motels to stay in on family trips. Her work has been published in various journals, including *Juked*, *Magnolia Review* and *Louisiana Literature*.

NONFICTION

Christopher Locke

Christopher Locke’s writing has appeared in *The North American Review*, *Poets & Writers*, *The Rumpus*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Poetry East*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Verse Daily*, *Southwest Review*, *Whiskey Island*, *Rhino*, *The Sun*, *West Branch*, *Rattle*, *32 Poems*, and *The Adirondack Review*, among others. He won the 2018 Black River Chapbook Award (Black Lawrence Press) for his collection of short stories *25 TRUMBULLS ROAD* and his latest book of poems is *MUSIC FOR GHOSTS* (NYQ Books—2022). Locke has received the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Award, state grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, and Poetry Fellowships from Fundacion Valparaiso, (Spain) and PARMA (Mexico). He teaches creative writing at both North Country Community College and Ray Brook Federal Prison in the Adirondacks.

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SPRING 2021



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Jackie White





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Despy Boutris
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Deedee Cheriell
Alex Chertok
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Martins Deep
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