

# Penumbra

## 2021

### Volume 31

**The Art & Literary Journal  
of Stanislaus State**



penumbra (pi-num 'bre): n. 1. A partial shadow, as in an eclipse, between regions of complete shadow and complete illumination. 2. The partly darkened fringe around a sunspot. 3. An outlying, surrounding region; periphery; fringe. [Lat. *paene*, almost – Lat. *umbra*, shadow]

# All About Penumbra

Since 1991, *Penumbra* has proudly published poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and visual art by contributors from the Stanislaus region, throughout the U.S., and abroad. Our staff is composed entirely of students: they make all editorial decisions, including which submissions are accepted and how the journal is designed.

Because new students staff the journal every year, *Penumbra* constantly evolves. Each year, we receive hundreds of art and literary submissions, and through an anonymous voting process, we decide which works to accept. We then select the top prose, poetry, and art pieces from which the judges select the prize winners.

Every Spring, English 4019: Editing Literary Magazines is open to students with junior or higher academic standing. Students from all majors are welcome: the course offers professional training in areas including art, business, and communications.

Annually, we launch the new issue with a reading on the CSU Stanislaus campus, near the end of the Spring term.

Thank you to the many contributors to *Penumbra 2021*. Your talent makes the journal what it is. Please continue sending in your work: submissions will open for *Penumbra 2022* at the end of November of this year.

# Penumbra Staff

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# Judge Bios

Nancy Au's full-length collection, *Spider Love Song and Other Stories*, (September 2019, Acre Books), was a finalist for the 2020 CLMP Book Award for Fiction, and one of just ten books longlisted for the 2020 PEN/Robert W. Bingham Award for Debut Short Fiction Collection, and listed among *Entropy Magazine's* Best Fiction of 2019. She won Redivider's 2018 Blurred Genres Contest, The *Vestal Review's* 2018 VERA Flash Fiction Prize, and her flash fiction is included in the *Best Small Fictions* 2018 anthology. Her flash fiction, essays, and short stories are published in over thirty literary journals including *Gulf Coast*, *Foglifter*, *Craft Literary*, and elsewhere.

She is co-founder of The Escapery, and teaches at California State University Stanislaus. Learn more about Nancy by visiting [www.peascarrots.com](http://www.peascarrots.com).



**Prose Judge:**

**Nancy Au**

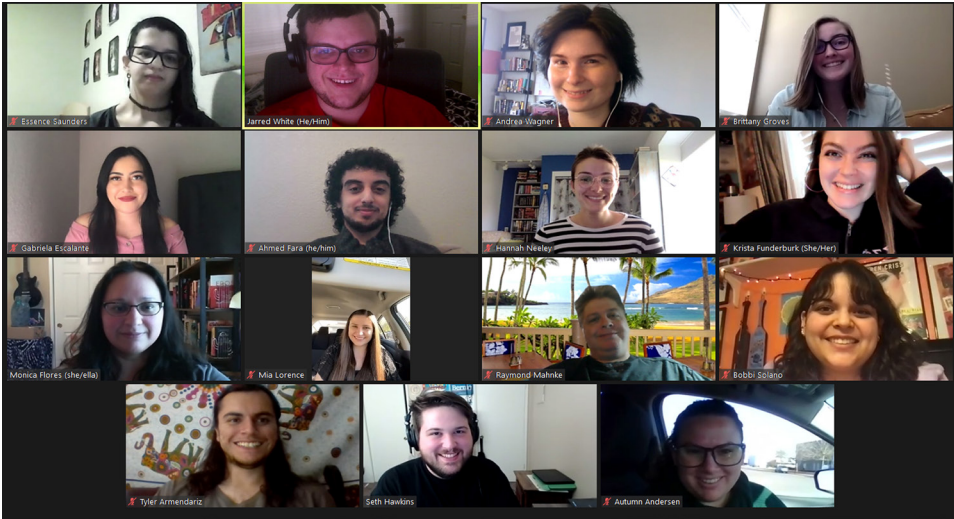
David Campos is the son of Mexican immigrants, a CantoMundo Fellow, the author of *Furious Dusk* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), and the forthcoming *American Quasar* (Red Hen, 2021). His work has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *The Normal School*. He is the winner of the 2014 Andres Montoya Poetry Prize, and the Annual Prairie Schooner Strousse Award for the best group poems in *Prairie Schooner*.

He teaches English at Fresno City College. He lives in Clovis, California. If you want to learn more about David's work, his website is [www.davidcampos.me](http://www.davidcampos.me)



**Poetry Judge:**

**David Campos**



## Art Judges:

### The Penumbra Staff

The Penumbra staff is comprised of both graduate and undergraduate English majors, all of whom share a passion for literary excellence. We decided that this year we should also take on a new responsibility and act as the art judges. The staff went through the art multiple times, leading to spirited discussion and thrilling debates, thanks in part to how many wonderful submissions we had to choose from. While we all have different areas of expertise and aesthetic tastes, we came to a unified and satisfying conclusion.

### Staff Favorites

Jarred/Essence: Augustus Gloop..(Poetry)

Seth: Osmosis (Poetry)

Raymond/Mia: The Bravest Thing...(Poetry)

Alyssa: When We Bloom (Art)

Hannah: Babyland Cemetery (Poetry)

Andrea: Blue in Green (Poetry)

Krista/Gabriela/Yoselin: Safe (Art)

Tyler: Dusty Days... (Art)

Brittany: Tis Pity She's a Whore (Hybrid)

Ahmed: Salvation Diptych (Art)

Bobbi: Rose Laundry (Art)

Autumn: A Migrant's Quest (Poetry)

# Come and Go with Us

*Ace Boggess*

Nearness to death brings us fetishes,  
new desires the virus can't devour  
like after the Towers fell when all was lust & fear,  
drugs or booze & fear, religion,  
want of ice cream, fear.

Fading the pandemic, it's men or women  
or toys or chains. Don't know  
where catastrophe leads—  
we'll go there in a fast, light, boat,  
motor purring as blades stir swirling pools.

We've stood in place on shore too long,  
our bodies inadequate vessels.  
We will push them out, experience tide.  
What better time  
than the end of the world for a mid-life crisis?

# Expressed

*Eun Young Park*

Silence, then  
Tune to me  
Take the air I breathe.  
Observe my neck and let's be one  
By threads of synchronicity.  
Emotions on a singular wavelength,  
No interference.  
Pay no mind to the voyeurs  
Who delight and listen  
to what we have to say,  
expressions meant  
for one another.  
New key, new rhythms,  
Look how they applaud  
when all that was repressed,  
clenched, and jaded  
Beats against the fears we undo;  
the visions we restore;  
and the longing we can ignite...  
With the chamber music we love.



# Elegy

*Alexandra McLaughlin*

When I see her  
she is standing in the backyard,  
coffee cup in hand  
in the early morning  
looking at her plants.  
Lilies, sunflowers, and hostas in the garden,  
basil, thyme, and mint on the deck.

She died before dawn  
but she would have loved the afternoon sky  
on that Tuesday in October.  
A pure blue.  
She would have come home from work,  
thrown the stick for our dog,  
put on a fleece sweater,  
drank the warmth of four o'clock sun,  
the trees aflame with red and orange,  
her favorite time of year.

Maybe on that Tuesday  
she would have pushed a wheelbarrow of mulch.  
covered her garden  
to protect the flowers from winter.  
She loved the earth and I think  
it loved her back.

Two days before she died  
we went for a family hike in Lebanon Hills  
Light sweaters and nylon pants.  
She and my dad kissed  
in the parking lot  
beneath the canopy of trees.  
They looked young,  
in love.  
His left hand pressed to her back.  
Her arms around his neck.

After, she faced me and my sisters,  
Our scrunched noses.  
Sixteen, nineteen, twenty.  
We called it “gross.”  
My mom laughed and laughed.  
Fall in Minnesota never felt the same.

In Georgia,  
we sweat in November.  
The south stays hot.  
The trees stay green,  
No crisp breeze or leaves crunching under foot.

I am writing this poem while walking  
along the river.  
I cannot sit at a desk,  
breathing the stale air conditioned air.  
I need to move.

I need the sun and sky and rush of the river.  
I look up at the trees and feel reassured by their height.  
I stare at the deep purple of flowers and wonder  
how the earth makes something so beautiful.

# Filmed Over

*RC deWinter*

fifty thousand thoughts  
some geek squad in a lab  
determined the average number  
our brains produce each day  
and that's it

let's say i don't have 50K  
let's limit me to half

even at twenty-five thousand TPD  
(thoughts per day)  
those times you flick through my mind  
amount to not even a hill of beans  
(somewhere between  
0.0004% and 0.0008% a day  
for you beancounters)

what should be  
an insignificant penumbration  
shadowing my universe of thought  
has become the filter  
through which i perceive the world  
a film that coats the windshield of reality  
and glazes possibility with grime

i need to find a car wash for the mind

# Pannonica

*Ahmed Fara*

“I don’t like to be alone,” my mother often tells me, convinced that time is running out on our

family—that soon all her children will be gone, and she’ll be alone.

I’m unsure of how to comfort her.

Driving her to a therapy appointment one afternoon, I play Thelonious Monk on the speakers.

Stray piano notes bounce off of the glass and fill the silence.

An hour and a half later, she exits the therapist’s office in tears. I wrap an arm around her and walk her

to the car, realizing I should probably be seeing a therapist myself.

That evening, as with most evenings, we go on a walk.

It’s quiet, per usual.

Every so often, she remembers a story from her childhood and relays it to me.

A man from her village murdered his cruel uncle, disappeared for twenty years, then returned home to

his wife and

children one day out of the blue.

“You should turn it into a movie,” she says to me. I laugh, and we walk home. On our way back, a plane passes by overhead, splitting through the stars.

# Still Walking

*Ahmed Fara*

Out walking together some autumn evening, both of us silent.

The dim, yellow glow of a nearby trail light illuminates the figure of a motionless grasshopper at our

feet.

We both jump and shriek and laugh, my mother frantically slapping her pant legs for fear of being

overtaken by an army of insects.

Then, we continue on, our silence happier now.

At the end of the trail, we arrive at a hill that overlooks the quiet, rural town and observe all of its

distant evening lights—street lights, house lights, the headlights of passing cars.

My mother has had a rough year.

I wrap an arm around her, and we continue walking.

# Dusty Days and Restless Nights

*Evan Young*



Photography

# Demobilized

*Richard Stimac*

My dad left part of himself in Viet-  
nam. You can see them in a tourist pic:  
A foot under a tea house table. A rick-  
shaw decorated in red ribbons for Tet  
Holds forearms in the spokes. A girl, baguette  
A femur's length under her arm, skips quick-  
ly past a begging monk. A snapped chopstick  
Gives the finger, angry at unpaid debt.  
These are keepsakes no one meant to amass.  
The collector of these gems is a fool.  
Another father, ARVN, VC, N  
VA, amputated names from a time when  
Names mattered, sits in the shade on a stool  
And counts his own parts scattered in the grass.



# Anxiety

*Shannon Meyers*

My heartbeat quickens.  
The need to do anything.  
A sickening feeling within my heart.  
I feel I must move.  
My fingers, my legs, something.  
Before I unravel on the spot.

It squeezes and tightens its grip  
As if I were a rag drenched in water  
Yet no matter how many droplets freefall  
The fear still saturates every corner.

It starts in my chest but it spreads  
Down my ligaments to the tip of my pen.  
If only I could click away the feelings  
I'd be free of this prison I hold myself in.

I stand, I walk, it follows.  
This is the game that we play.  
I feel my soul has hollowed  
As our eternal race degrades my resolve.

I haven't gotten any faster  
But you've gotten so good at the chase  
When did you grow so big?  
Have I always been just outside your grasp?

You delude me with visions of what could become  
You've taken on a life of your own  
A seed inside my heart, watered with fear  
Has helped you flourish, it seems.

When you catch me, we fall to the ground  
Though I may struggle,  
I'm pinned by your intensity.  
You press my face firmly  
Against this image you created  
Soon I crumble underneath your weight  
You make me give myself to you completely  
At the cost of my peace.

# For the Good of the Dance

*Ashley Renselaer*

I have been mad, a demonic wolf spirit,  
lifting my wicked tail, ferrying mayhem,  
teasing souls from flesh, tempting the illicit  
whispering rattling brass, from men to men,  
bold, brazen, half-beast, wild with a pen.  
A woman like that is not a woman, then  
I have been her kind.

I have played the docile nymph in the river  
numbed, folded pretty, beneath the ordinance  
cookie-shaped, shelved, never to quiver  
muddied the self for the good of the dance  
smiling meekly, cutting my voice in half.  
A woman like that is far from vigor.  
I have been her kind.

I have stepped upon the hay, moonlit night  
clutched the burning air of eager angry eyes,  
feeling the sting of scorching skin, head high  
watched my spirit soar from scattered ashes  
while my body met its dour demise.  
A woman like that steadfast refuses to die.  
I have been her kind.

# Filling My Own Cup

*Lucy Murphy*



Acrylic on Canvas

# Osmosis

*Rachael Drenckpohl*

The walls begin to speak,  
oozing cruel words with every exhalation.  
They drip, black and tar like,  
pooling at the baseboards.

The ink is odorous—a noxious gas—  
that curdles my thoughts,  
turning them gelatinous in my head.

Their words are cutting,  
draining me one drop at a time,

Where do I go from here?

There is no door,  
no windows, no skylight,  
just a box containing me  
and the puddle of words rising ever so slowly.

My ankles itch as the  
words penetrate my skin,  
osmotically filling me with doubt.

I can feel them in me,  
burrowing in the deepest corners of

my kidneys, my bowels, my sinew,

these words that cut.

# Where the Railroad Meets the Sea

*Marc Janssen*

Queen Anne's lace

Nod in a September afternoon,

Wigwag back and forth on lithe green stems.

Anchored between rocks on the abandoned line

And down the incline to the soft earth below

A grey metal and stone interruption between industrious pavement  
and the Pacific chaos.

Featherweight trunks bend as heads regally bow,

Maybe one day the waves will find their way here

The way wind crashes over the dour dispersing ballast

And in churning regularity scratch at wood and rock and steel.

But Queen Anne's lace even then will gracefully nod at a distance

Or swirling disagree.

# They Say We're Just Fragmented Cavemen

*Nieko McDaniel*



Acrylic, Cardboard, Yarn

# A Migrant's Quest for Home

*Debasish Mishra*

Alone in the dark of a wintry night,  
with the wheels of his cart caked with dust  
and earth and dung and some defiant sweat,  
the laborer pedals with his leprous feet  
and continues his quest for a place to call home.  
The roadside shops are half-shut now,  
held open only by a drowsy flame.  
They will melt in the dark one-by-one  
and undo the difference of roads and tombs.  
But what will this poor traveler do?  
The tussle ensues: the unbuttoned shirt  
and the unrelenting cold.  
But what can deter the unfazed soul  
which draws new hope with every grind  
of the rusted pedal and the russet feet?  
A home, a home, is all he seeks.  
A home of hopes and peaceful sleep.  
A home beyond this world and skies.  
A home where he can rest his eyes.



# 'Tis Pity She's a Whore

*Molly Dunn*

Content Warning: Sexual Violence

Tis Pity She's a Whore.

I stand and read this title in the bookstore

And laugh, because

I've heard that line before –

She's beautiful but,

'Tis pity, she's a whore or,

She's the kind of a girl I would marry but,

'Tis pity, she's a whore.

I never knew I deserved more. My brain was filled with Catholic lore –

You're either Mary the Virgin or Mary Magdalene the Whore. I

never understood exactly when I became the whore.

It didn't seem to take much,

Just one or more.

Because the first time I had sex

Was the day after I was raped.

I didn't know what else I could do.

I thought I had finally learned

What I all along knew to be true –

If you have something they want, you give it to them or they

will take it from you.

But I never liked giving it.

I never liked their fingers on my skin,

Colder than ice,

How I shivered and froze

But ran towards them like blind mice

Because my tail had already been cut.  
I could feel it in my gut.  
I thought at least maybe they could rebut  
The fact that I felt so unclean.

I grew so tired of knowing what they mean  
When they ask if I'm sure I didn't want to have sex,  
As though my choices now must be my choices back then,  
As though the 'yes' I say now changes the 'no' I screamed back  
when,  
As though the way I chose to heal  
Somehow means I must have agreed to his deal.

Because I never agreed.  
I never agreed to him making me feel so dirty.  
I never agreed to him making me feel like I was less than  
Whole,  
Like I was just a  
Hole.

And they do not know that the cause of their doubts  
Is the proof that I was hurt  
Because as soon as they see how I can smile and I can flirt,  
It doesn't take long before they revert  
Back to their sympathy for the pervert.

So you'll excuse me if I get angry.  
You'll excuse me if I get mad  
When you don't know why I do what I do

But have the guts to call it bad,  
When you spread blanket statements  
The way I spread my legs,  
When you ignore my accusations  
The way he ignored my begs.

Though I'm not the victim you had in your head,  
Your indifference isn't that different from the indifference  
he had.  
Because he may have raped me and walked out the door  
But when I told you what he did, you said  
'Tis pity, you're a whore.

# Gulf

*Thomas Michael*



Photography

# Up the Old Treehouse

*Brian Yapko*

A shout-out of freckled joy for the playground pals  
who taught me mastery of tetherball, hanging  
upside down on jungle gyms and climbing through  
closed school windows with torn dungarees  
wearing candy-store wax lips. I was real then.  
My bare feet collected chewed up gum at the  
swings, my shirtless back and unruly hair stained  
red by the hot August sun. Shoes were for suckers,  
grass was for sleeping, newspapers were for  
catching paint and rules were for nobody.

One dog-day rowdy flag football grew quiet and  
dangerous with finding a pack of smokes.  
Contraband treasure, we hid it in the crook  
of a tree 'till we could pocket matches. Next day  
we met at the abandoned treehouse over on the  
nearby monastery grounds, past the apple orchards  
near the creek. The mysteries of the Michigan  
forest grabbed us by the tadpoles and transformed  
us into squatters on the frontier where We Six  
blood-brothers shared our first taste of corruption.

One pathetic Virginia Slim and we hacked our lungs  
out. We hid the pack. Next day, turning thief, I  
betrayed my brothers, went back alone, stole the pack.  
Shaking, feeling my wickedness, I put the poison-stick  
to my lips, lit the flame, took the noxious smoke into  
myself. When, my folks smelled the innocence lost  
from me they had a fit. I got the belt, a mouth full  
of soap, and first knowledge of my sinful self.  
On that was the day I learned to hide what I did.  
That treehouse became my closet.

# Waves

*Donna Pucciani*

not of water but memory  
the foam lick of youth  
a vanished spray

as the May morning  
blooms light green  
in the yellow sun of now

awaiting tomorrow's rain  
and tulip petals open  
in lollipop colors

to the impossibly blue sky  
of today's death embracing  
the elderly the meat-packers

the delivery drivers  
the grocery clerks  
with their worn smiles

behind masks and plexiglass  
strap-hangers on the subway  
nurses peeling off scrubs at night

showering before  
they check the children  
asleep in their beds

dreams ascending  
in the light of tomorrow  
in the soul of a grandmother

cautiously taking  
a morning walk among  
the sleeping houses

she waves to a faded moon  
never having known a time  
quite like this



# When the Trees Fall

*Alyssa Schaffer*

Content Warning: Implied Domestic Abuse

It is the slow crashes you can't look away from,  
like the bulldozer unearthing the pine trees next to your childhood home.  
They don't go down so easily.

Meticulously cut then crushed and shoved into a cluster of dead leaves.  
This house was made from his friends same wooden remains,  
or the kind everyone sees on their

daily commutes to and from work.

Slowing traffic even more only to be disappointed by the cleanup,  
nothing to look at other than some left over shards of glass  
from someone's real life horror story.

So, it's no surprise that I sat still on the living room couch  
while she was dragged across the carpet to the adjacent bedroom.  
The door shut and they will still preach about  
*How you don't know what happens behind closed doors?*

I used to stare out at those same trees back then,  
look to them for some sort of comfort  
but like the other neighbors they too stood undisturbed for years.

Except for the day they were taken out.

The woman next door raises her fist to the air in protest  
and shouts profanities at the working men.

More bothered by this unscenely site  
than she ever had been by the strange  
noises that shrieked for help from our windows at night.

# Flashlight

*Molly Dunn*

When I was nine, my parents called a family meeting. I sat on the couch next to my brother and sister, quietly. I was wearing my favorite pajamas, a matching set of white cotton pajamas with a hundred little sheep printed on them. I loved those pajamas. I thought I was special. Most people had to count imaginary sheep as they were falling asleep while I got to actually count sheep.

That night, though, I did not count my sheep.

Cancer. Stage IV.

I didn't really know what it meant. It was a word I'd heard before, but only from a distance. I knew enough to know it was bad news. I knew enough to feel guilty when I remembered how my brother and I laughed at the word *mammogram* when we heard our parents mention a doctor's appointment over dinner the week before. We both held our hands up to our imaginary breasts and in our thickest Italian accents chanted:

MAMM-O-GRAM-A!

Children have a remarkable ability to see life with a flashlight,  
To ignore the storm clouds and focus only on their kite  
Because the winds make it blow so incredibly high  
That it never even occurs to them to cry  
When it comes crashing down from the sky.

I had the perfect childhood  
But in all the wrong places  
And for all the wrong reasons.  
My mom would get worse with each passing season,  
But my life stayed the same.

I had a box full of Barbies and toys and craft supplies  
That I would play with while a  
really nice nurse tried  
To get my mom's heart rate to stabilize.  
I got to spend 2 weeks at my rich cousin's cottage  
While my mom got her mastectomy  
And was knocked out on narcotics.  
And when I was 10, I got to steer the car on a highway  
While my mom threw up while driving  
Because she had chemo earlier that day.

It all felt like child's play.  
I would play Cinderella and clean the whole house,  
Trying my best to be as quiet as a mouse  
To let my mom sleep.  
I didn't yet understand that it was deep.  
I didn't understand that it was about more than pajamas and sheep.  
I didn't understand what losing her would mean.

But the moment she died,  
I took that grief and wiped myself clean,  
Tucked it away where it would never be seen  
And abandoned my faith in meaning before I was even a teen.

It is easy to become jaded when the first one dies,  
When you see a man go up to your father  
And remark how our family was dropping like flies.  
I accepted death like I was the last soldier standing  
And the enemy was quickly closing in on my landing.

Yet, I resent my mother for what she did to me by dying,  
When I made her promise that she would always keep trying.  
I resent her for asking me when she knew she would die,  
Whether I'd rather she die at home or at the hospital.  
I thought the hospital could save her  
So I sent her there to die.

Had I known,  
I would not have wanted her to die all alone.  
Had I known,  
I would have chosen home.

# When We Bloom

*Lucy Murphy*



Acrylic on Canvas

# Maybe the Bravest Thing You Did Today Was Open Your Eyes and Agree That It Was Morning

*Trinity Fritz Lawrence*

maybe the bravest thing you did today was cross the street  
maybe the street was on fire and maybe  
you were on fire and you needed to cross the street to get  
to the gas station because the gas station was the only thing not on  
fire but when you got  
to the gas station it started to melt and you realized  
there was no gas station it was just the fire  
melting the air into your eyes and the start of  
blindness falling  
on top of you.

maybe the bravest thing you did today was open your mouth  
maybe your mouth was too full of cornstarch and  
things you wish he'd never said to you and you  
just wanted to let it all fall out but in order to  
open your mouth you had to break  
your jaw but your hands were made of pizza dough  
and it's hard to break your jaw like that.

maybe the bravest thing you did today was open the front door  
maybe the doorknob was made of tortilla chips and  
it just crumbled in your hands but you were  
in a hurry like as though you had to pee but  
so much worse and you opened the door with a  
sneeze and when you sneezed you left  
your shoes on the ground and went up and up and up  
and the ceiling stopped you before you  
could ever leave the house.

maybe the bravest thing you did today was fall in chocolate  
get it haha like falling in love except chocolate won't hurt you  
it just gets stuck in your underwear feeding  
yeasts and fungi and gets stuck  
under your nails and if you breath it in and hold it  
you can have a chocolate negative-mold of your lungs  
except you won't be here to see it like at  
least you were there to see the semen he left in you.

maybe the bravest thing you did today was let the cat out  
maybe you don't really have a cat and opening the  
front door means letting all the little red snowflakes in and  
maybe they're not really snowflakes they're little red  
fire ants and maybe they bite you as if they know  
you're not a peony and they wish you would  
start to smell like one and maybe you just did all this to prove  
you can still feel something and you are a person not  
a peony.



## Blue Suitcase

*Andrena Zawinski*

The blue Samsonite never traveled  
north to Montreal, south to Florida Keys,  
just lodged inside a rusty tin cabinet  
in a Pittsburgh South Side Flats basement  
gathering dust and must of forgotten years.

On top a linen tablecloth she cross-stitched  
with pink and blue crewel flowers, tagged  
“Helen made this, 1968,” next to starched  
pineapple burst doilies for a high school  
cedar hope chest graduation present.

Inside clippings from The Pittsburgh Press  
on her husband’s mistaken identity as petty thief  
and the fancy scroll on a governor’s pardon.  
Others of the kidnapped Lindbergh baby  
dead ringer for a curly towheaded son.

All of it there next to the grandson’s SAT scores  
for colleges he would never attend, greeting cards  
of embossed Mother’s Day carnations, flurries  
of Christmas poinsettias, bright get well daffodils,  
she saved, all carefully bundled in satin ribbon.

Then wrapped in a handkerchief stitched with initials,  
the cracked prayer book, Holy Communion rosary beads,  
magazine articles of Liberty Avenue women's crusades  
through the pornography district trying to take back  
the night and the streets, her daughter at the lead

At the bottom an afghan she crocheted, arthritis  
wrenching her fingers, the one the paramedic used  
to cover her, drew up tenderly over her face  
in its carnival of color the day she lay sprawled  
pasty white and dead on her living room floor.

Objects left behind inside a tattered blue suitcase  
in a damp basement's rusty cabinet, spirits left behind  
with the sting of memory, with the stilled throb  
of a wound, with the body gone underground,  
these things, their abandonment, their silencing.

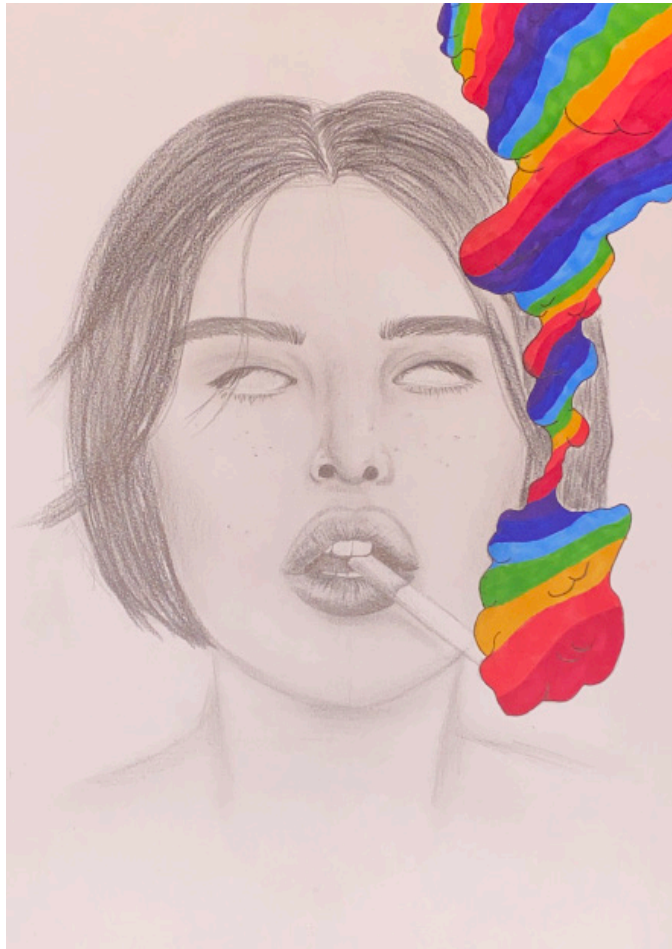
# Negative Pleasure

*Andrena Zawinski*

This is a poem that bumps into you  
in the dark, doesn't excuse itself,  
makes you want to dust yourself off,  
straighten up, move along, as if  
nothing ever happened. This poem  
offers no apology for the discomfort  
it causes, continues to stumble drunken  
on its own discontent, lumbers along  
all the jagged edges, unsettling under  
thunderous skies, leaden footed  
sinking into quicksand with teeth.  
This poem has lost its place. This poem  
is reductive. It is nothing. It is lost, locked  
in a room without windows or doors.

# A Post Traumatic Child

*Shylah Groves*



Pencil and Ink

# A City with Literary Routes

*Alex Phuong*

*Tales of the Alhambra*

Books I have loved lifelong

*A Room of One's Own*

Virginia Woolf's classics

Pink book in my white room

Other books in my room

*Wuthering Heights*

Thornfield

Pemberley

Tara

Manderley

Darlington Hall

Out in the open air

Artificial Architecture

Chairs on my lawn

Which are like the chair

On the cover of my

Beloved book

My White House

Earth beneath my feet

Home

# Life, I Suppose

*Patricia Mathu*

life i suppose  
is like wet spoons  
dripping with uncooked batter  
raw eggs, milk, flour, sugar  
Almost-but-not-yet-brownies:  
licking anyway.

and when I began Lexapro,  
I felt so sick.  
I thought I was going to die I thought I should go to the ER I thought  
I needed to call my doctor  
I was underwater, drowning, dry-heaving alone at night  
One night, my leg wouldn't stop shaking.

But out of the woodwork, after months of feeling alone,  
Microwaving a heat pack  
Making gentle soups and feeding me soft crackers  
Reminding me to drink water, and discretely adding electrolytes to it  
when I wasn't looking  
I realize friends might not have known how to support me when  
alone, crying, feeling like I am  
floating on the floor  
But they could pretend it was just a flu, and not a symptom of de-  
pression  
And rub my back and love me well.

now we lick spoons all night and forget to put the brownies in the  
oven

**Safe**  
*Amanda Trask*  
**Art Winner**



Ink

# Chula Vista

*Adeline Cruz*

Chula Vista, my beautiful sight  
velveteen mountains curled in half  
brushing against the screen door

Sapphire rings fused to crystal spheres  
running over every possibility  
earnest in their searching

Marbled waves wrapped in a ruby harness  
swinging against the gravel and grass  
mirroring our movements

Undivided resolve of mind  
tending fluorescent orbs  
scattered throughout gardens

Fountain of exuberant innocence  
bubbling to a spate of tracks  
weaving across the clearing

Ancestral instinct  
gathering up our little ones  
like sheep in the pasture

Quiet loyalty left unspoken  
forging unbreakable vows  
beyond the rainbow bridge



# 30 Days

*J.C. Cordova*

When inmates are released  
from the psychiatric wards of prisons,  
they are given cab fare, the belongings they  
surrendered at the time of their incarceration,

and a one month supply of psychiatric medication.

One month of an antipsychotic and/or  
an antidepressant and/or  
a mood stabilizer; one month's respite

from hallucinations and paranoia,  
from mania and depression.

This equates to 30 days of normalcy, of  
predictability, before the return of their

increasingly impersonal demons. 30 days  
in which to find a job, a home,  
an insurance plan, and a physician.

As their month begins to dwindle away, so do

the grains of hope within their fragile hourglass;  
anxiety begins to set in, yielding rapidly  
to desperation, surrendering finally to despair.  
They find reprieve in self-medication or

they commit another crime, consciously  
choosing the health inherent in re-imprisonment.  
They ever-increasingly find solace in tragedian suicide,  
opting for instant release over the gradual death of mental decay.

These men and women, these human beings  
who dream and live and breathe and regret,  
should be met with pity instead of judgment. Their deaths  
should be met with despair instead of callous acceptance. Their lives

should be met with love instead of hatred.

30 days is simply not enough.

# A Psalm of David

*J.C. Cordova*

No, not that David and not those Psalms.

This one comes from another David,  
an aging homeless man I see when leaving the hospital.  
He's forever alone and always happy to see me;

his unabashed joy compounding my unremitting shame,  
filling me with guilt for the infrequency of my visits.  
I certainly stop whenever I see him, driving comfortably  
through his home, these streets of our city,

but couldn't I and shouldn't I stop more often?  
His mother raised him on the Bible, on the Psalms,  
and named him after King David. One day she asked him  
to write his own Psalm, the 151st, this one of another David.

He still knows it after 50 years, still shares it  
with strangers, with passersby like me,  
while the memory of his dear mother  
courses through his fragile veins.

He tells me of mistakes he's made,  
of the promise in his life that went unfulfilled,  
of education he had planned but did not complete,  
of opportunities that he has wasted.

But he also tells me of his Psalm  
each time I speak to him,  
greeting me anew with fresh allocution;  
grateful to find ears for his words

and a bosom friend for his thoughts.  
His skin is rough, his clothes are worn,  
his wheelchair is dirty and unkempt,  
but his Psalm?

His Psalm is beautiful.

# Being Both Bitter and Wise

*Charika Swanepoel*

It's winter here; I'm sunbathing through the window  
of your childhood room, listening to something on YouTube called  
“oldies playing in another room and it's raining v.3.”

Funny—the magic of time.

I wake up to your motorcycle stickers still  
decorating the wall,  
t-shirt size and “do not iron” stickers faded into the back of the door,  
the tiles have come loose, and your dad got rid of the chickens yet  
I still pretend that we share the space where our feet fall from the grace  
of sleep.

You should have married me in March  
when the world was only just about to end,  
when we were still working out who we were going to be  
in the muddy waters and the two or three continents now drifting  
between us.

You should have married me in March before time slouched full circle,  
wrapped itself round the machinery of the mind  
and selected our suffering for us  
—slow, methodical, dangerous.

It's winter here; the sunsets get more beautiful this time of year,  
do you remember the time you nearly cried for the African skyline,  
the time I carried you outside on that little Skype screen, pretending?  
Pretending there was room in the ether for love, for us, for more of us?

# Babyland Cemetery

*Will Neuenfeldt*

Why the little fence?  
children can't climb over when  
playing underground.

# Books

*Brian Potts*

“I think that I shall never see  
A tree as lovely as ‘Blueberries.’  
You know. The poem by Robert Frost?  
Remember when you thought you lost  
Me hunting shelves for books that cost  
A buck or two? You called my name.  
But I stood opposite the same  
Dilapidated shelf and aimed  
A wink at you through parted spines.  
You laughed. I gathered up my finds  
And circled back to you, the dimes  
And quarters jingling applause  
(That should have told you where I was)  
Like they were happy for the cause  
Of augmenting our library.  
I showed the books I unburied.”

“I told you we already had ‘Blueberries.’”

“I know. I gave you *North of Boston*.”

“And *double* copies of Jane Austen.”

“Admit the poem by Robert Frost in  
Pocket form has been so good  
To take on walks into the woods.  
Yet you gave me that look that stood  
For incredulity. One brow  
Flared up so high, the other bowed  
So low I thought they’d break their vows  
And flit away to separate places,  
Far from the loveliest of faces,  
Far from quarrels on cluttered spaces,  
Far from brimming, bowed bookcases.”



# Pandora's Inbox

*RC deWinter*

the days drip  
slowly just like the  
candle i  
have to keep  
relighting i'm waiting for  
a short sweet message

three words but  
the inbox is stuffed with  
nothing but  
junk mail and  
spam i've won a contest i  
never entered it's time

to renew  
a magazine i  
never read  
i can save  
on auto insurance if  
i switch plans today

can you send  
a donation to  
help starving  
children and  
politicians who need your  
money so they won't

have to spend  
their own to get re-  
elected a  
slush pile of  
nothing i want to know  
read do as i wait

on the verge  
of despair for those  
three sweet words  
the promise  
fullfilled as two lives become  
one: i'm coming home

# A Subway Muso

*John Grey*

He plays saxophone  
in the subway,  
back to the wall,  
face to the crowd.

His instrument  
blows over and through  
a wall of noise.  
His face is contorted  
by commuter shadows.

There have never been  
so many people  
whose hearing only extends  
to their own thoughts  
or the person standing next to them.

Even if the platform shook.  
from a loud blast of brass,  
they'd put it down to earthquake,  
not music.

But sometimes,  
the underground jolts just enough  
for a coin or two  
to fall from a hand,  
drop into his cup.

His time,  
though ignored or unnoticed,  
is not wasted.

# Your Personal Best

*Eliza Fixler*

The life that grows around you's one  
you had to peel me off of you to get.  
Not like a band-aid, ripped, you wanted  
my permission to be left.

Began packing  
up your thoughts during shared showers,  
hot water leapfrogging from your belly  
to my hips. I refused to wean, spat back  
the hint, and slept in your t-shirts as long  
as I could.

In the end I came away like tape,  
pressed down several times on linty jeans,  
letting go through an operation of application  
and separation.

Now, in that space where once  
I clung, insistent, the garden of your life grows wild.  
The fountain of your springtime gurgles, grins, spills over.

# Harvests of Chernobyl

*Michele Reese*

You can't miss the berry pickers—  
women and children, lean and suntanned  
with hands stained deep purple.

Money for their resettlement was depleted  
collective farms turned to weeds  
while the forest berries and mushrooms bloomed.

They brave the radioactive isotopes,  
move through the woods like a pack of bears,  
stoop, shovel, step, weigh, scan, export west.

# Blue in Green

*Lucas Khan*

It is a gift not to see  
the news on my chart,  
that my MRI  
is on a compact disk  
in my hands  
and CD's are vestigial.  
That my insides rend apart  
on the rainbow patterned surface.  
It is a gift  
how words like "every step  
of the way" taste  
like anesthesia-  
forgetting the height  
of each stair.  
The chair by the window  
is empty.  
How bedside flowers  
wax pestilence  
although the petals  
are beautiful and young.

It is a gift how you  
are nowhere to be found.

I lured one woman  
into my wound,  
as if she would make me  
whole.  
I meant to say

you shouldn't step  
inside me.  
This body is crumbling.  
I didn't see the fissures  
in my heart,  
in my palms  
clutching your waist.  
On our first date,  
we swayed like flames  
in the kitchen.

This disease  
eats.  
Dissolves  
my temporal lobe  
into fluent aphasia.  
I keep meaning to say  
that I'm spilling out  
on the pavement.  
That joy gets lost  
in the cataract of my blind  
eye,  
but I mostly remain  
silent  
not knowing how to speak.  
Sometimes when I laugh  
I break softly.  
I need to escape  
from my unlocked cage.



The door is open.  
I find that absence  
can also fill a body  
like a truant cure.  
A curse.  
I sent you away  
and my body  
hasn't broken down yet.  
    Why not?  
On nights  
when only a few lights  
burn in Atlanta,  
the sirens fade,  
I taste mint  
cigarettes and Larceny.  
Hear *Blue in Green*  
by the oven and sway,  
my hands on your waist--  
my hands holding air.

# A Word of Protest

*Thomas Osatchoff*

Blooming glaciers  
in April's promise  
turning everything  
into something else  
such as dragon-  
fly geraniums  
sheltering near  
self-carved lakes  
under leaves  
mirroring themselves.

# Cash Flow

*Ernst Perdriel*



Mosaic on Wood Box (Ceramic, Plastic, Electronic)

# Goat Hairs

*David Perez*

*“No eres un hombre verdadero...”*

He'd pause to keep 1% milk from flaring through his nostrils.

I patted the kitchen table tops as nonchalantly as possible,

Holding onto my temper would be the only wa—

*“...hasta que te salga la barba y bigote!!”*

There.

The punchline was executed, right?

I tightened my grip on my glass of milk as my father's carcajadas

Danced around the littered dinner table all while his

*Pan dulce* in the shape of a *concha* scattered into a cloud

Of sweet particulate matter.

The joke was on him—

Besides, I was 99% certain the stubbles on my chin and upper lip

Would mature and extend at any moment now...

Who needs facial hair anyway?

Stubbles erect themselves as bristles and our cheeks sprout whiskers—

Facial hair is a monster,

The boogeyman to my fellow pubescent and prospective men.

As we look upon the soft and formative pasture known as our faces,

The uneven leaf blades there appear as if they were egregiously grazed.

The next morning, following a sprinkling of my lawn,

I impatiently crank the faucet knob counter clockwise.

The unwanted dew resides as

I look in the mirror and see little goat hairs.

# Burying Day

*James Piatt*

I gazed at the pine box,  
my memories sprinted back to a forest,  
next to a river rippled with blue,  
and the sounds of birdsongs  
hung upon my ears  
like bronze bells chiming in a church's bell tower:  
The bell's clangs echoed inside my head,  
like long forgotten dream voices;  
and my mind saw images  
of us walking down a deer trail,  
that was quickly vanishing into the past.

As the sun sank  
into the deepness of the scarlet horizon,  
I felt a presence next to me.  
As the gnarled trees' leaves were awakening  
old memories in my mind,  
I walked here and there searching,  
Hanging on to the past,  
Which I was pretending to be the present,  
And I whispered your name in longing,  
While your image was fading.

I awakened to the present  
and saw people gathering,  
whispering, and speaking your name.  
They told me, these people,  
that this would all go away,  
and everything,

whatever everything is,  
would be okay.  
They told me that  
I should just get on with my life.  
But how can I get on with my life,  
when half of my very existence  
has been ripped away,  
and buried,  
and the ache in my feet and my heart  
is so painful,  
I find it difficult to walk or feel

# Harold the Otter

*James Morena*

Content Warning: Implied Sexual Abuse of a Child

The little girl shuffled over to her father. Her long, sandy-blonde hair held tangles from where her head had laid upon her pillow. The tangles had become more knotted and greater in number in recent days as she struggled to remain asleep throughout the night. The little girl still wore her pink nightgown with a Disney princess that seemed to be either waving at, or about to karate-chop, something nearby.

“Did you sleep?” the father said.

“No,” she said.

“Ah, Pup. What’s the matter?”

The father placed his coffee mug on a side table, then attempted to rake his fingers through his daughter’s hair.

“Nothing,” Pup said, pushing his hand away. Then she crawled onto his lap, pressed her head into the crevice of his armpit, and stared at the television.

Pup’s father had been sitting in his recliner with his coffee cup in hand. The TV flickered cartoons that contained morals of kindness to others to never giving up when times got tough. He, too, still wore his pajamas: basketball shorts and a T-shirt with a picture of Bigfoot riding a unicorn. Pup loved that T-shirt, so he loved it too. This had become their Saturday routine since the divorce: he woke early, made coffee, turned on toons, sat in his chair; she ambled downstairs whenever she was ready to cuddle and to watch whatever animation was on.

“What’d’ya want for breakfast?” he said. “Wait, let me guess, pancakes?”

Pup smiled then said, “With—”

“Chocolate chips,” her father completed the sentence.

The little girl peeked at her father. He glanced at her. They both smiled, then returned their gaze to the bald boy of seven or eight, wearing bright-colored clothes, walking alone in a bustling urban area.

“Do ya want me to get Henry?” he said, pointing at the stuffed

otter sitting on the couch.

Pup curled into a ball. She leaned closer into him.

“Here, let me get it,” he said.

The father stuck his arm out to reach for it.

“I don’t want to,” Pup said. She slapped his arm, which forced him to sit back into the recliner.

“Ouch. What’s wrong with you?”

Pup kept her eyes affixed to the TV. The cartoon boy was now talking to a stranger, asking for directions, pointing away from his home.

“You love Harold,” he said.

“I don’t,” Pup said.

The father leaned back into his chair, wrapped his arms around his daughter. He stared at the ridge of Pup’s nose. He remembered how they had to race to the store to buy the otter.

“Can I have one of those?” Pup had said.

They had been watching the animal channel. A documentary about otters. It was soon after his wife had moved out.

“I want it as a pet,” Pup had said. “I want to swim with it.”

“We can’t have otters as pets,” the father said.

He noticed how deflated Pup became.

They had been eating pizza, sitting on the carpet in front of the TV, something that they weren’t allowed to do in the past. They were drinking soda too, and there were plans for vanilla ice-cream, or cake, or something sugar-laden for dessert, whether they finished dinner or not.

“Look, Daddy, how cute they are,” Pup had said. She giggled, tomato sauce on each corner of her mouth.

Baby river otters had been darting into and out of the water, chasing each other while their mother combed her fur and floated on her back. He thought they were cute, very cute, too.

“We can buy a stuffed one,” he had said. He liked how happy Pup looked in that moment, and he wanted to keep her happy as long as he



could.

Pup perked up, dropped her food. "Let's go now," the little girl said.

"What about dinner and ice-cream?"

"Please, Daddy," Pup said.

The father took a huge bite of pizza, which left tomato sauce on his face too. He paused the show so that they could watch it when they returned. They gathered their things, went to four different stores, until they found the only stuffed otter in town.

"What're'ya going to name him?" the father had said.

"I don't know," Pup said. She was hugging the furry creature so tight that it folded in two.

"It looks like Uncle Harold with its buck teeth."

Pup unclined the otter, held it in front of her, stared at its teeth, then started laughing until tears trickled down her cheeks. The father giggled at his giggling daughter. Harold the Otter became his name. They had become inseparable: Pup took him to the store; they held hands at the park; she even took him to Uncle Harold's as he babysat her when her father traveled for business, like he had a few days ago. When they came home that first night, Pup had played with Harold the Otter in her room until she fell asleep on the floor, while the father learned about sea otters.

The little cartoon boy continued to wander about the city unsupervised. Pup and her father watched as he entered and exited a bodega, smiling.

"What's wrong with Harold?" the father said.

"I don't like him," Pup said.

"What did the otter do?" The father crinkled his brow. "Did he bite you?" He tried to be playful.

Pup turned shy and distant. The father turned his daughter's face to him.

"What's wrong?" he said.

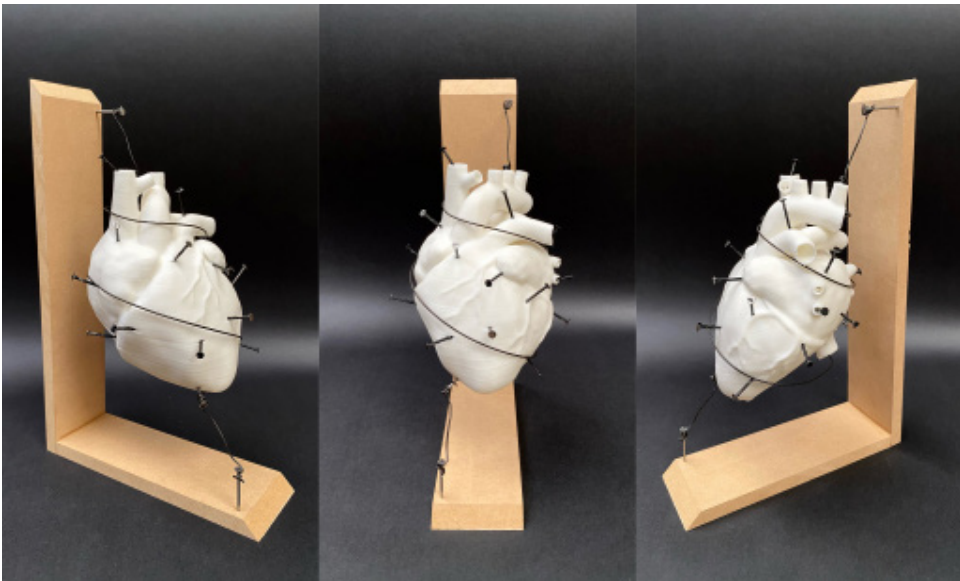
"I don't like Uncle Harold," Pup said. She buried her head against his chest, digging deep into her father, grasping onto the galloping uni-

corn on his T-shirt.

The father began to shake. He looked at Harold the Otter, who was staring—large, wide black eyes—back at him. He remembered the documentary and the sea otters and the baby seals. He encapsulated his daughter within his arms and cupped the knots of her hair in his palm while rage consumed him as the cartoon boy returned home, safe.

# Palpitate. Pound. Tighten.

*Stephanie Morales*



Mixed Media

# Holy Colors

*Stephen Finlay*

Holy colors—deep autumn orange and yellows and reds. I can imagine strapping a crown of twigs to my head, and a mask for my face, and dancing the round dances through fields pregnant with corn and soybeans, until I collapse roadside in spent, orgasmic satiation. A dance of submission, of humble, beseeching desperation in this insulating and forgotten tract of Illinois. A place no one travelled unless it was home, or else accidentally. And then to make these offerings. To hang a deer from its back legs, to open its throat, to quench the thirst of the gods in the grass. To return a stillborn child to the soft earth by the new moon. To return to work in the hammer factory or the field on Monday, while heaving Gaia breathes into life the dawn's fog, the distant deer on the frost-flecked grass, the steam of the Casey's breakfast pizza, the colors of our grandparents' dens. So dark, that blood-black wood.

# Paying Attention

*Nathan Bachman*

It was a wet and dreary April. I woke up alone and went downstairs. McKenzie was in the kitchen fully dressed. She was pouring herself a cup of coffee.

“You fell asleep.” She sounded upset. Behind her, the clock said it was three a.m.

“It’s late,” I stated.

“We were talking.” She brought the cup up to her lips and blew on the black surface.

“We never finished.”

“Oh, sorry,” I said and remembered—we were fighting. I poured myself some water. “Can it wait until the morning?”

McKenzie leaned back against the stove, and I leaned back on the sink across from her.

“I’m sorry I said you have split personalities,” she said. I nodded.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“And I don’t hate your work, really. I think what bothers me most is that you’re never present.”

“That’s fair.” I gulped a little water and set the glass down.

“I’m present now.”

She took her first sip. I watched her and thought about her jeans and the underwear underneath those jeans. I wanted them to be the blue lace ones, and I wanted to take them off with my teeth. I never did that, but I should. A man who takes a woman’s underwear off with his teeth is an animal, and that’s worth writing about.

“See, you don’t even look like you’re here now.”

“Let’s go upstairs,” I said. I wanted to toss her onto the bed because I was almost certain I loved her.

“Shit!” Larry’s voice came from above. He was my roommate, and

I had forgotten all about him. He had a gig working nights and must have heard us fighting.

“I don’t want to sleep,” she said.

“Neither do I,” I said.

Larry came pounding down the stairs, hollering, “Does anyone know how to get to Mount Helen’s Medical from Neil?”

“What?” I yelled back.

“You’re always in your head.” McKenzie’s arms were crossed.

“This guy got shot, and I need to drive him to Helen’s Medical!” Larry came pounding into the kitchen with his phone in both hands. He was piloting ambulances remotely for extra dough. It was a new thing the university was trying out, an in-between of fully-automated and human-operated.

“Oh, shit. Shit!” Larry paced around the table.

“You’re always inside your head,” McKenzie said. “You keep all those thoughts to yourself and I hate it.”

“I know that,” I said, and crossed my arms too. “I’m just really busy. But listen, let’s go upstairs.”

“I don’t want to,” she said and stomped one foot.

“The navigation system is down, and I don’t know where Neil Avenue is!” Larry sobbed. “Where is Neil Avenue?”

“Just Google it,” I said and turned back to McKenzie.

“You have my full attention.”

“I miss what it was like when we first started dating. It needs to be like that again.”

“It will be,” I said and thought about sliding down to her crotch and ripping open the button of her pants.

“Let’s go upstairs.”

“Oh, God, I’m on Riverside.” Larry bit his thumbnail and circled the table between me and McKenzie. “Does that go to Broad?”

“Google it,” I shouted.

“I think I should go home,” McKenzie looked suddenly sad.

“No!” I put my arms up. “Wait, let’s just talk, on the couch.”

“I know Lawburn Street,” Larry muttered, “that’s near us right?”

“You know Amber thinks we need a break.” McKenzie stared straight down to her shoes and then swung her gaze up to me. “Do you think we need a break?”

“Sure,” I said. “Let’s just go to the couch.”

“Sure?”

“Jesus, is that our apartment?” Larry sank to his knees and banged his phone against his forehead. “I brought a dying man to our apartment!”

“I mean, no. No break.” I corrected myself. Larry was distracting me. I needed to be in an empty room with her, a room with her, me, and a bed. Everywhere else was too crowded. I could write about it later.

“You only care about your stories. There’s less and less space for me.”

“Do we have any medical supplies?” Larry dashed out of the kitchen and answered the door. The ambulance’s lights splashed through the dark living room.

“Are you even happy?” she asked.

“Yes.” I watched Larry pull out a body on a gurney.

“Well, you don’t act like it.”

“Sure, that’s fine.” I leaned around the corner. Larry had tripped and the stretcher fell over. Now he was dragging a motionless body up the stoop and through the front door.

“See, you’re not even listening.”

“What?” I said and moved back a few steps. Larry pulled the unconscious man into the center of the room.

“He’s bleeding everywhere!” Larry began compressions.

“What did I just say, then?” McKenzie threw her hands into her hair and pulled out loose strands.

“Put pressure here.” Larry grabbed a kitchen towel and handed it to me. “Don’t let go!”

“Remember how you told me your father barely noticed your mother?” McKenzie asked.

I looked up then. “Yeah,” I said, “he’s an asshole.”

“Well,” McKenzie took one step toward me and looked me dead in the eye with her hazel irises, “you’re the exact same.”

I held the towel to the dying man’s stomach and the blood was warm and free. It poured through my fingers and ran into the thin grooves of the floor. She walked around Larry and I and out the front door.

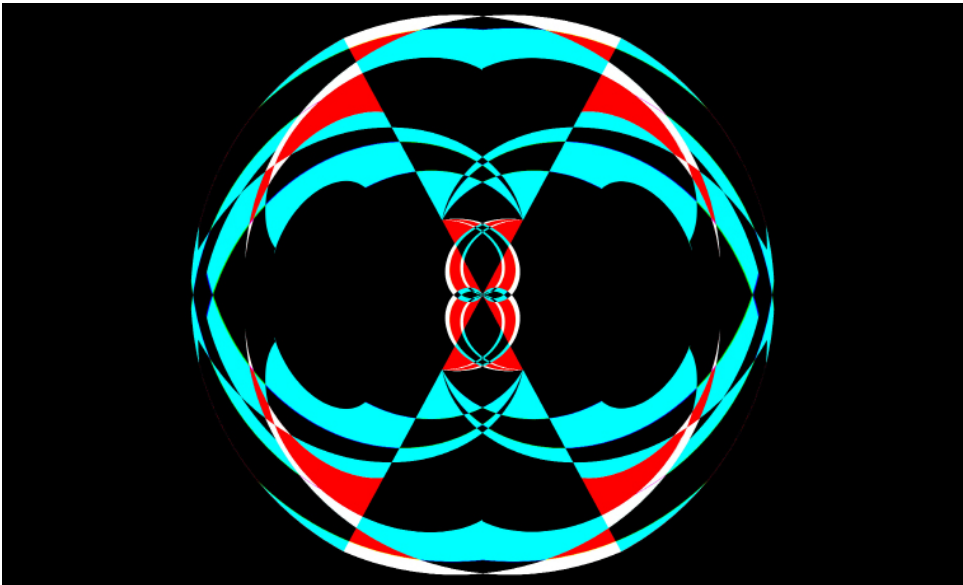
“Think he’ll live?” Larry asked, and for the first time I realized what my hands were doing.

End.



# Gleeful Darkness 2a

*Edward Supranowicz*



Digital (GIMP)

# I Think of Solutions

*Kolbe Riney*

like seawater,  
where one thing dissolves  
into others;

he said  
look at me,  
he said  
I am the sky and sea;  
me: I am the sand  
on the beach,

I am not salt,  
I am what the sea  
throws itself against,  
flowing in and ebbing out,

and, in the water,  
pieces of me  
float in turbulence,  
a suspension,  
the way I find my mouth  
open  
as you speak,  
the way I find my lids  
falling  
as you drift to sleep.

# Always a Fixer Upper...

*David Grubb*

Content Warning: Miscarriage

In late May 2016, my wife's doctor ordered her on bedrest because of complications with a risky pregnancy. She began her second trimester on lockdown, deflated. We'd owned our modest split-level ranch with three bedrooms and one and "a half" baths for about a year when the diagnosis up-ended our lives. Even before this, I doubted the house would ever become our home sweet home because it was built in the late seventies for utility. No amount of fixing up our fixer upper would ever change it enough to become our true sanctum.

After a few days, I put our four-year-old son down for his nap and sat beside my wife to provide some much-needed company. In the middle of a different topic she blurted, "Our bedroom will be the first thing you repaint when we find the time and money." The walls of our master bedroom were painted mint green years ago, and being trapped in our king-sized bed for hours on end made the passive color loathsome. Unsure of what to say, I smiled and nodded.

In those long summer days that followed, our bedroom became stiflingly hot, and she sweltered adhering to her doctor's staunch directive without fail. I installed our only AC in the eat-in kitchen because it was too big to fit in the bedroom windows. Fifteen thousand BTUs did little to cool off her isolation chamber on the opposite end of the house, which the sun baked from midmorning until five p.m. She refused to let me buy a smaller AC since our income was cut in half overnight. I've had my fair share of being laid up from injuries and sickness, but she languished in ways I'll never comprehend.

Caring for our son and doing the household chores kept me too busy to cater to her every whim, which I yearned to do. And time blurred. One morning when I was outside tromping around the property, I stumbled across a large thorny bush full of wild black raspberries. I rushed back to the house, got a bowl, and began picking. About an hour later, still hot and sweaty with my arms scratched up like a cat tree, my fingers purplish from juice, I presented her a bowl of ice cream with fresh ripe black raspberries. My gesture raised her spirits, at least for a little while. As she shared her treat with our overexcited son, I thought, perhaps things were going to turn out all right.

My wife did everything she could, and more, yet we lost DJ at twenty-three and a half weeks. Coming home from the hospital after she gave birth to a premature child that died in our arms was abhorrent. How could we sleep in the bed she was trapped in for eight weeks when we were broken? The same bed where she did everything possible to ensure the life growing inside her had every chance to survive, but it was all for naught.

If we loved our house, maybe she could've found some modicum of comfort. We arrived at a drab-gray, lifeless structure neither of us wanted to enter. We bought the place for the picturesque view from the large living room window and the idyllic three acres with mature sugar maples, open play area, and seasonal rills full of tangled overgrowth. The house merely came with the splendor outside its confines.

After we got settled, we did our best to normalize, which proved even more difficult because our son kept asking, "Where's my baby brother?" As we tried to avoid a greater calamity, the power went out from a summer storm with high winds. If we would've been renters, our time of enjoying life the way it should be, would've ended before we scrambled for candles, headlamps, and our old camp stove.

When my wife gave our son a tepid bath, I stood in front of our large picture window listening to them cavort as if nothing was amiss: a small reprieve in her long bouts of crying. The sun continued to sink below the horizon and the sky was swathed in purple, pink, and orange. Before the worst moment of our lives unfolded, the vivid colors of Maine's incredible sunsets were majestic and made me glad we chose the Pine Tree State for our adopted homeland.

In that moment, the pinks and purples renewed my tears. DJ was born ruddy and healthy like any other baby—he even had that wondrous newborn smell—but as he slowly succumbed to the inevitable, he turned more purple until the darkest eggplant I've ever held paled in color.

If she would've rushed out of the bathroom and said we're moving on, I would've begun packing, no questions asked. What propelled us forward was our indomitable survival instincts and the desire to stick with our plan of putting down roots in Maine, a first for both of us.

Every so often I'm forced to take DJ's ashes off the top shelf in our closet to gain access to the airless attic. Sometimes I hold him for a few moments and debate whether I should ask her if it's time to set him free from the black plastic hospital container. The timing always seems wrong, and she'll never settle on the right location—down by the raised garden

beds, in the denser forested area past the shed, or where those juicy black raspberries grow. When I'm done working, I put him back where I found him and go on to the next project, my body heavy with guilt.

If it were up to me, I'd stay put for the rest of my days and have her spread my ashes behind the rotting chicken coop left by the previous owners. Perhaps then she would do the same for the baby boy we lost, finding comfort that his remains were remixed with part of his origins. Maybe then we'd all be home.

#

# After de Kooning

*Bonnie Wolkenstein*

The rich palette of peach and yellow and white conjures feminine reverie,  
light and feathery in places, paint thick and heavy in others,  
a pool of burnt orange coagulates at the bottom of the canvas.

We can trace the brush as it stroked away form, left only movement and energy,  
released legs from torso, lips from face, flesh from bone, all in a kind of writhing.

They call it art—that which can blast apart a woman's form, embellish her  
by removing symmetry, blend her with found objects, carve her eyes on the wrong side  
of her head, toss her lips halfway across the canvas, remove her head from her neck,  
deconstruct her until there is nothing left.

On a linen canvas the image never coalesces, thighs and breasts and buttocks  
could be anywhere—anywhere—as if this is what we want. Women to be torn  
apart, swept this way and that. Eros drawn from our bits and fragments,  
whole pieces cleaved off and flung to the corners of the canvas, unrecognizable  
as human parts until our eyes find the enigmatic title, bold black print on the wall  
informing the viewer this is an homage to love.

Your love, artless, shattered my form, severed heart from chest, cleaved skin  
from soul, erased light from eyes, rubbed out my edges, smudged my face  
until only the faintest outline remained. Stretched across a fresh white canvas  
I painted myself back to form, pulsed the lyrics of my heart, flecked  
brown and green longings onto each iris, tucked coral dreams  
beneath locks of auburn curls, wrote my name into the story in bold print,  
informing the viewer this in an homage to love.

# The Curse

*Fabian Gonzalez Gonzalez*

Because of the Mexican song, “*El hijo desobediente*,” Ernesto’s mother upheld the maxim, “*La maldición de los padres siempre llega*.” A parent’s curse always gets to you. He didn’t know if it was a common Mexican belief or just hers, but he’d heard this proverb often as he grew up, particularly mornings on which the song played on the radio as she hand tossed tortillas onto a hot comal.

“That’s why you should always be obedient, you should always respect your parents.” She explained the moral of the song, and he nodded as he concentrated on the next warm tortilla about to be placed in his hand. “Lest a curse be put on you by either your father or I!” she’d exclaim, her face brightened by the fire that consumed the logs beneath the comal.

So when, at thirty-five, having been married for a term of nine months, he gave her the news after his last hospital visit of his infertility, she at first clenched her jaw, attempting the rigidity that had consistently defined her as a mother in times of crisis. But she could not hang onto it, and her eyes melted into tears that he knew were not for him but for herself. They sat in minutes of silence on the sofa, the only noise the awkward creaking of her mobile home’s floor as they shifted their body weights from one side to the other.

She broke the silence with a question: “And it’s not her?”

“Course it’s not her,” he retorted. Then, in a more sedate manner, “I hope she leaves. She could have a family of her own.”

They fell into silence again, the creaking floor desperate for it to end. Overwhelmed by the solemnity, his mind began to wander into the past, as it often did when he visited her; they never seemed to have much to say to each other. He reminisced by taking on a bird’s eye view, as if scanning a landscape far below, a landscape filled with polygons like tiles, or rather city blocks, a cityscape wherein each lane led to an intersection that, for better or worse, held a remembrance that marked his life. That day he found his mind descending at the maternity ward in the Mercy Medical Center in Redding, his memory vivid as he held his newborn nephew in his arms, the first time he’d ever held a child that small. Ernesto was fifteen years old then, exhilarated by the moment, perspiring as he felt in his hands the palpitating life, the squirming body whose first gasps

of breath, first sights and smells must have come as a welcome but strange surprise, something rather similar to what Ernesto experienced as he held the baby, imagining that he could make his tremulous arms strong like gardens where things could grow.

“Will you ever forgive me?” Ernesto’s mother interrupted his musing.

“There is nothing to forgive you for. I know you never meant it.”

He was eighteen when his mother cast her curse. He’d been going through a depression which he tried to hide, but irritability became a common byproduct. That day, his then three-year-old nephew had exasperated him to the point that he had to push him away. Though unintentional, the strength of the push made his nephew fall and break his little left arm. That’s when his mother screamed, “You animal! May God never give you children!” She didn’t mean it, and he knew it, of course, but he resented it and reminded her of it often as he grew older, never imagining the news he’d just gotten from his doctor.

“Your floor needs fixing,” he said after a while and moved all his weight to his right foot. The floor beneath him creaked. “I’ll tile it up for you by Christmas.” His gaze moved from the damaged floor to the splintered paneling of the walls, the sagging ceiling, the windows, the door...



# Lake Day

*Erik Suchy*



Digital

# Wisdumb

*Madison Durand*

## **Poetry Winner**

I am so stupid  
Therefore, please do not attempt to change my mind by saying  
Wisdom infiltrates my mind  
Since, when push comes to shove  
There's nothing smart about me  
I won't waste my time telling myself  
Cleverness and wit dwell in me  
And you better believe I'll always remember  
"There's not an intelligent bone" in my body  
None of your words will convince me that  
I am smart enough to fool people  
Since despite everything  
I am too stupid to be listened to  
No matter what, I'll never think  
That I am brilliant and bold  
Since whenever I see my reflection I constantly reason  
Is it true that I'm as stupid as they say?  
(Read it again, from the bottom up)

# Lights the Gas Stove & Says Fire

*Mercury-Marvin Sunderland*

lights the gas stove & says *fire*  
cooks this big boiling pot  
of bathtub water

season myself  
with all the expensive bath bombs  
rose petals  
citric acid  
epsom salt

this is a  
blood-colored soup  
hiding away these  
flesh prison troubles

lights the gas stove & says *fire*  
boiling, boiling  
turn my skin red  
let those mirrors fog

lobsters  
are blue in the ocean  
and are red after you

grab them by their torsos  
rubber-banded claws flinging  
throw them in that boiling pot  
and watch them  
boil alive

rose petals  
citric acid  
epsom salt

lights the gas stove & says *fire*  
cooks this big boiling pot  
of bathtub water.

# Revelation

*Peter Spaulding*

Very few are given such an honor  
in a lifetime, though many seek it.

I have prayed at the mountaintop,  
where the trees can no longer breathe,  
succored the dead rock with my tears  
as avalanches of black cloud rose up  
the far horizon below me  
to invaginate me for a second birth,  
but I have not been struck by lightning.

I have wandered in the open field  
with a metal hat in the downpour,  
dancing in the drowned grasses,  
but I have not been struck by lightning.

From pulpits and platforms  
I have sung the song of fallen angels  
in the prose of ejaculated curse—  
attempting the light god's wrath—  
but I have not been struck by lightning.

It was out of fear of it that my fathers—  
they were once all boys in rooms  
peering out into the night—  
built up the frames of their houses,  
but they, also, were never struck by lightning.

# Shoulder Dystocia

*Charlene Hoit*

Content Warning: Imagery of Medical Trauma

It felt different.

He was trying to come out of my hip, I thought.

It was sharp, the pain, and it was wrong. I must have screamed a little.

I don't remember.

My husband told them, "Something's wrong. That's not how she sounds when she pushes."

This was about to be our fifth baby. So he knew.

They asked me to push again, and I did, because I wanted to be done.

His head came through, but there was no relief in it.

I must have been screaming, or so my husband said. Usually the end is where it happens

So fast.

But, instead, we paused.

We stopped,

he and I.

The baby wouldn't come.

Time

Seemed to jump,

And then my husband wasn't holding my hand,

he was replaced

By several other voices and faces and hands and arms.

The Voices came from a tunnel and told me to push and I pushed like a creature I didn't recognize, with a high pitched scream

That even I remember.

The Hands and Arms moved me, and pressed on me.

There was no pain relief. So my body said  
Goodbye  
To my brain, and the rest is a jumble of sounds, and commands, and  
feelings of intensity  
That I had never known before.  
I did have a few thoughts:  
This is really hard  
And  
Why are they putting him back inside of me?  
But they were trying to get him out. He was caught on my bones,  
So they had to move him,  
but also change the shape of me.

And then he was freed, and finally I could breath.  
I wondered why they didn't say, "Here comes baby!" with the typical  
delighted sing-song,  
That they always do.  
No one joyously proclaimed, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!"  
We had decided not to find out and I wanted to know.  
But no one cared.  
They checked for breathing, and bleeding, and trauma,  
And life.

He lived, so they gave him to me, and I immediately felt he was big,  
and I reached between his legs and excitedly proclaimed his sex,  
and no one cared but me  
Because the events still hung heavy.



But I didn't remember it.  
He wouldn't remember it either,  
But for now, he was angry. He yelled, and hollered at us.  
It was understandable.  
His safe place had become his prison,  
And his strong shoulders that would one day wrestle with his brother,  
Kept him trapped  
in his mother.

# Summer Shade

*Erik Suchy*



Digital

# Immigrant Life

*Armand Ruci*

I remember the one time when I completely spaced out in Geography class and started looking outside the window. At that moment, I thought of what life would be like in a new country with different people and traditions.

In 1996, my country started getting engulfed in what are known as pyramidal schemes. This was a simple transaction and it involved giving money to a person that represented the company and, a month later, you would get your money back with 50% interest. Practically all Albanians took their savings, and some sold their houses and put their money in these schemes. Even my parents did the same and lost quite a bit of money in them. It took these folks many years to recover from this financial meltdown and some never regained their financial foothold in the economic system. I had heard horror stories of people committing suicide and jumping off balconies because they had lost everything and were going through these uncomfortable and uncertain times.

The year that everything came together for me was 1998, which was when I lost the dearest person to me besides my parents and brother.

In 1998, there was a big contingent of religious people that came from Saudi Arabia. They were mostly missionaries that preached their religion. I guess they chose Albania given how poor of a county it was. These folks were relentless, and they worked day and night to try to convince Albanians that they should all convert to Islam. However, they did not get the results that they wanted because Albania was secular for 50 years under the communist regime and its people were not entirely religious. I remember, growing up, we celebrated all the different religious holidays from Easter to Christmas and New Year's. I was not brought up religious, so it did not occur to me that these folks were very serious about their mission.

My first encounter with them happened at my school lunch break, where I was approached by three of them. They gave me two notebooks and a pen and told me that I would get more gifts if I joined their religion. I remember going home that day and leaving the gifts in the apartment. The next day, they all approached me as I was leaving school and asked me where the gifts were. I told them I left them home because they were gifts. After inquiring whether I would join their religion, they started to

threaten me because I told them I was not interested. A block away from my apartment building, they finally caught up to me and started beating me with their fists. Thank goodness for my fifth floor neighbor who saw me and came to intervene, because otherwise I would have ended up in the hospital.

A few days later, my dad woke up earlier than his routine and found C4 right outside the door. He worked for the government, so it was easy for him to dismantle the dynamite.

However, this was not the end of it. A week later, after being away from the apartment, we came home and found out that something had exploded by our doorstep. The neighbor said that he saw a bunch of bearded guys and that when they left, a big blast was heard. He opened his door, and the material must have exploded, leaving the front door in shambles. I remember Dad spending a lot of money buying one of those heavy-duty security doors that had three heavy locks in them.

This was a harrowing event that shook me to the core. I was not sure I wanted to stay there anymore. Fearful for my life, all I kept thinking about was how to escape my gloomy reality and leave everything behind. At school, all I kept thinking was of a way to leave the country and my prayers were answered. My basketball team was invited to a tournament in Chicago and all I had to do was pass the immigration interview at the US Embassy.

The date was July third, if I am not mistaken, and all ten of us went to the embassy to see if we could get visas to travel to the states. Out of ten players, only half the team had their visas approved and I was one of the lucky five. My father could not believe his eyes when I told him the news. He had tears in his eyes and choked up when I told him I was determined to go. All he kept saying was that I was too young for such a journey, but I did not budge. Close to three weeks later, I was on a plane to Chicago and I have never looked back since.

# I Was a Flat Earther

*Nieko McDaniel*



Photography

# The Loudest Kind of Silence

*Alyssa Schaffer*

My tongue is tied up in unspoken truths  
that stay pressed against my teeth

calcifying into secrets  
I don't want to keep

sometimes I swallow the splintered lumps that slough off,  
slitting the inside of my throat as they slide down

smothering any sounds or screams with sealed lips,  
concealed behind a sweet smile.

My silence is all that ever dared to speak  
until I finally said something I'd always wanted to say...

spilling words from unfiltered lips  
that never again felt the need to unnecessarily utter the words

"I'm sorry."  
at the post script.

# The Phoenix

*Ryan Mason*

It's a cycle. Every 500 years  
The Majestic Phoenix  
Ignites to attention and rises like steam from a wounded reactor.  
It sounds romantic, but  
the Phoenix is a crazy fucker. Hair (I mean, feathers)  
on fire, punch drunk, rambling.  
Too loud, too tense for today,  
no fun to have around. But even so,  
nobody ever stops to ask the Phoenix if it's ok.  
Clearly there's something wrong with it,  
some screw loose, bad childhood, genetic predisposition  
for the fuckup firebird to combust and crumble  
It's not aware, it's not aware  
why though? It doesn't matter but  
in the name of compassion and kindness  
and empathy  
someone really  
should talk to it  
it seems a bit self-destructive.

Or—  
is it enraged? Does it want revenge?  
Something must have put it down there,  
nobody chooses the ash pile  
Even if we burrow into it with our mouths open.  
Who, who?  
No, a screech.

Listen—

My five hundred years are up. *Ding ding*

I'm rising off the canvas now,

uppercut still hot, face red and pounding,

flame feathers, ancient, out of place and come undone—

look out, bastards

here

I

come.



# The Rhino

*John Grey*

The zoo's sole rhinoceros  
is nibbling hay, munching carrots.  
Its company is its own shadow,  
crowding around its feet, its armored belly.

It has room enough to move about,  
two baths, one mud, one water,  
and an ample supply of food  
and 24/7 medical care.

My Aunt Rosie would be jealous.  
She'd willingly give up freedom  
to be so lovingly taken care of.  
Like the time she lay in hospital,

nurses, doctors, at her beck and call,  
meals served promptly three times a day,  
TV perched on the wall above,  
adjustable bed, phone at her side.

The family were concerned  
that she was dying.  
They didn't understand.  
She was really living.

But Aunt Rosies aren't under  
threat of extinction.  
The rhino's unaware of his breed's fate.  
So I interpolate the concern

into his dour expression.  
And no one really knows  
if he prefers it here  
to his birth home on the African veldt.

So, once again,  
I do his thinking for him.  
Look at those sad and weary eyes.  
They need a refresher course in freedom.

And the slow, stumbling gait.  
He longs for vast plains to open to him.  
And his long, sorry stare in my direction,  
the realization that I'm no potential mate.

But his native land is rife with poachers.  
Any one at any time could take him out.  
And the zoo is a hive of anthropomorphism.  
The rhino in my mind can't tell the difference.

# The Water

*Walter Weinschenk*

Ocean swirling in itself,  
Rushing glassy white,  
Especially if you're dancing in it;  
Crashing water polyrhythm:  
Brinal, tidal percolation,  
Swirling silt and prickle salt;  
Aquamantic carousel  
Tossing life that lives within it;  
Diving, tumbling over,  
Swimming in the panoramic:  
Fisheyes fly like dots on dice;  
Sinking slowly through the murky,  
Hiding in the hydra fog,  
Water jade or matted shadow  
But something stirs in the down below:  
Leafy wavy, weedy string,  
Sometimes yellow, sometimes green;  
Angelfish in dinner jackets,  
Brassy flat and silver shimmer,  
Caps of gold, copper eye,  
Thin black stripe across the center;  
They run in lines, all as one  
Like sonnets through the crystalline;  
Bubble air like lost balloons  
Rising through the know not where;  
Scuffle crab on rock and pebble;  
Tortoise shell in bits and pieces:  
Rolling, random tumbleweed  
Across the raw sienna sand;

Orphan urchins, neon blue,  
Sullen needle inflorescence;  
Slither eels, tubey worms  
And orange starfish pimpled spiney;  
*But what of bones and shards,  
Scrap and skin that once  
Were living, breathing things?*  
They don't matter, they never will:  
The foggy depths are thick with them,  
The ones that move are everything:  
Fish be nimble, fish be quick,  
Swim or sink in the dying drift,  
You'll find yourself among the shells,  
Swept up in the shift and shuffle;  
Ancient current winding down  
Quiet coral knows your secret  
Dancing sea anemone  
Insane waving in the churn,  
Blue on grey and grey on green;  
Drifting, drifting, upside down,  
Drifting, drifting, not a sound.

# The World Is Our Oyster

*Yi Jung Chen*

Entangled ourselves in giant seaweeds,  
we tried to keep ourselves buoyant.  
With swirling sea still raging,  
we drifted apart.  
Holding hands to avoid the rough waters,  
we looked up to the sky and found our star.

Cracking sea urchins open on the rocks,  
our furs came in handy.  
Rafting is the skill our children must learn,  
surviving is whatever matters most.

Smashing waves broke our dreams for navigating  
the world became eerie and cold,  
made us become the luckiest of all.

God bless me with the heavily serendipity,  
having you by my side,  
I ask for no other luxury.  
Cuddling and hugging each other,  
free and unbound.  
Neglect the envy of raucous human race,  
one of a kind,  
our lives are forever and more.

# Adolescence

*Cassady O'Reilly-Hahn*

A ladybug lands on my forearm  
and paddles about its soil-caked pools,  
twining its branches like an eloped squirrel  
till she comes to rest in the chasm of my palm.

For a moment, her parted red skirt  
sways on the sales rack of spring  
and I call to my daughter, Aliana,  
still wrestling with the petals of her hair,  
to come see,

but Chloris breathes a sharp sigh  
and she slips through the cinch in my fingers  
to a tub of age and magnolia  
like bathwater through a child's eager grip.

# Memories

*Martin George*

## **Prose Winner**

She slipped on the stockings. The expensive ones. Guanaco fur, or something like that—vicuña? Llama? Alpaca? She could never remember. They were gifted to her by an ex, a Chilean woman she'd met in New Zealand. Traveling the South Island together, sleeping in a rental van, eating red beans for dinner every night. Equal parts sublime and messy. Lesbians, queers—life on the sapphic side was supposed to be easy. Shared genitalia, hormones, periods. But no, relationships were work. No matter who was involved. Sacrifice to appease, compromise.

She smiled, recalling the time they spent together. The taste of her tongue. The rambunctious outings in Christchurch. The dancing. The journey, the exploration. It was special. Really, truly. Until the differences, the problems, built up, thickening like the accretion of ice on a windshield. Overnight. And then, come morning, it's all there. So clear and so cold and the question comes to you: how much can I abide? Suddenly wrathful, angry, rabid and ready to bite at the mere suggestion. Don't you dare go to bed without washing your plate! Don't even consider moving that shelf! And why are you always rolling around in your sleep? And the smoking, it's all over you—yellow teeth, bad breath, stinking clothes. And somehow what was beautiful and rich now feels antithetical to the very idea of your own happiness.

Still, as she slid the stockings on, the warmth of their fur caressing her ankles and calves, she couldn't help remembering fondly even the worst of times. That's love for you. Relationships. Always filtered through the lens of nostalgia. But it really was tremendous. For a time. Naming the rental and scrubbing her until she was lustrous, blinding. The makeshift curtains. The exhaustive hiking. The bawdy jokes that inevitably functioned as foreplay. The myriad of whimsical ideas: crossing the Tongariro dressed as Frodo and Samwise; having sex aboard the ferry that crossed the Cook Straits; creating a computer program to detect homophobes; wearing cloaks to stave off the baleful Eye of Sauron.

She glanced down. Her right stocking was pilling. But that didn't concern her. All things come to pass; everything ends. Good or bad. It was her leg she was considering, contemplating. How much had it impacted everything? Had she not broken it climbing Mount Cook would things have been different? Would their time have lasted longer? Would the end

have been less messy? Without a leg, she was kaput—broken, useless. She couldn't do any hiking, climbing. No kayaking, no rafting. Nothing. And Manuela always waiting on her. It wasn't fair. But Manuela had insisted: it wasn't a big deal; she was happy to help.

Maybe it wasn't a big deal. Maybe she was just feeling guilty. Maybe she missed her. Manuela. Her freckles. Her dimples. Her thought pattern. Her tenderness. And yes, her body: her stumpy legs; her curvy hips; her misshapen breasts, different sizes with nipples like thick baby carrots; her paunchy stomach. The smell of her hair—that acrid fragrance that was the mix of tobacco smoke and lavender shampoo. Maybe. Maybe she did miss her.

She couldn't say. In hindsight everything melted together, the good and the bad. Nostalgia. Romanticizing an idea, an illusion. Wasn't she happier now? Back home, with a new job, a new apartment—wasn't this what she wanted? Already she was due for a promotion. Her colleagues adored her. She was seeing someone. But wasn't something missing? Didn't she leave something behind there? Some part of herself, some quintessential part of her being? Hadn't she been incomplete since her return? Like something wasn't quite right, like a person without a shadow?

Gently, she lifted herself from the edge of the bed. She went into the bathroom adjacent. She studied herself in the mirror. Short black hair, olive skin, glasses. Beauty mark on the chin, droopy ears, bushy eyebrows. What was missing? Everything appeared normal. As it should be. But she could tell: something was missing. Something wasn't right. But what was it?

Suddenly, as if guided by some force of nature, she returned to her bedroom. To the desk where her phone sat. A woman possessed, she scrolled her contacts, searching. She thought about sending a simple message, but this was too important, too urgent. So she called instead. But all she heard was the automated voice of rejection: The number you have dialed is incorrect...Maybe she changed her number. That was always possible. Maybe a mutual friend had her new one. Again she scrolled through her phone, searching. Martín—Tincho—he would know. She texted him immediately.

And almost automatically, timelessly, he answered. She read the text a thousand times, but it never sank in. Everything was blurry, wet.

Hadn't you heard, it read. Manuela died. She took her own life. No one knows why.

THE END



# Midwinter Interlude

*Eun Young Park*

Clouds traipsing across the sky  
So pure and blue they feel ashamed  
Of adulterating its beauty

Rottweiler on a chain that glistens  
When the sun falls on it  
Every which way, not so scary

Mother breastfeeding  
An infant so small, whose cry so weak  
I'd guess he was born yesterday

Yolk atop tartare, balanced on a plate  
Delivered to the table  
Uncooked egg falls to the concrete griddle

No grating tire chains to give the cars their grip  
Or to leave pockmarks on the concrete  
As they transport summer produce

Californian winters, a luxury  
Whose goodness I didn't know how to enjoy  
Till I left and came back

# Salvation Diptych

*Sophia Zhao*



Photography

# Midian

*Robert Beveridge*

*“Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.” --Exodus 2:15*

In this landscape I  
have been thrust into I  
can do nothing but stare  
at this portrait of you  
that hangs where once  
there was a wall

in the babble of voices  
around me only yours carries  
I have your voice, your likeness,  
the secrets you keep  
from everyone else.

But you  
you are not here  
cannot be here

I have searched that room  
this world  
for the rules that keep  
you away from me  
I may find them  
if I keep at it

I touch your portrait  
rough and cold  
so unlike the voice  
that says "I love you"

maybe soon  
these rules will change  
and I will reach  
for your painted hand  
pull you into this Midian  
to be my bride  
make this featureless  
life bearable

maybe soon  
we can build a house  
around this portrait  
erect again  
the solidity that once was

maybe soon  
our love will have the effort  
it deserves

# The Tiger's Touch

*Bruce Crown*

The magic of the dawning sun shining on the fresh grass  
Before the splendour of moonlight on a sleeping tigress,  
A heart falling in love and coming to pass

for a lovely mistress

Who wields a heart made of emeralds and cracked glass.

The night will never sleep and does blossoms enshroud,  
No matter the fading rose or dying lily hoping to spring,  
Nor breaking hearts or black skies hidden behind a cloud

for elation to bring,

And deliver the fiery heart and still soul from the crowd.

The sunlight will forever set those crackling hearts ablaze,  
With the turning of distant burning stars of a lover's desire  
Cast against the stormy thunders of painful sunless days

and glistening fires,

Who'd cross the sky for her fleeting and fiery gaze.

A heart beloved is liberated through the windy skies,  
Destined to flee towards the awakened tiger's touch.  
To be in love is to become grey mist and forlorn sighs,

And the sky such

That you never tire of her beautiful clear eyes.

# My Spice

*Shannon Meyers*

Anger

Visits as often as a holiday

So when the time comes

I have to remember

What to do

With the taste I seldom

Sprinkled upon my tongue.

When I was a child

I tasted rage for the first time

I rolled it along my tongue

And found the longer I held it

The more incoherent words

Spewed from my mouth

It was bitter.

So I learned

To pour it into a jar

And tighten it

And place it at the very back

Of my spice cabinet

Every so often I will shove a little more inside

Opening my heart

Leaning over

And letting it fall from me

Until it spills from the sides,

Onto my hands and all over the floor.

# My Old Dog

*Walter Weinschenk*

Old dog now, for sure, he is:  
Chases deer, slower than before  
But still he runs.

Wears a mask these days,  
Grey beard whisk broom mouth;  
Silver fiber undergrowth  
Rises through the fur;  
Incremental transmutation  
Of a coat worn year to year;  
“Like a faded shirt,” I thought:  
It caught my eye one afternoon  
But I had not been watching.

A pallor rises from his skin  
As though it were a color,  
Rides across his hide.  
Over chin and collar;  
Pallid paths around the hummocks,  
Through muscled corridors;  
Threads of gray along his back  
But these stripes rise from the inside out;  
They propagate like moss  
Through fallow fields  
That once were tan and black  
While long white shadow clouds  
The granite gorges of his eyes.

He's not as fast as once he was,  
Graceless in a rumpled suit,  
But his spirit lurks somewhere in there;  
He may not know who he used to be  
But needs to be who he is right now;  
He lumbers, stumbles, unaware  
Of that which waits for him:  
A hill too far, too steep to climb  
Toward which he runs headlong;  
He'll run until his mouth is dry  
And stagger till his legs are done;  
But why does God demean a dog  
When, today, the twilight sun  
Rains gold upon his brow?  
Why ridicule the thing he is  
Simply because he saw a deer  
And felt, once more, the need to run?



# Natus Ex Machina

*Andrew Furst*

I imagine beginnings,  
Where word makers harnessed the stars,  
Leading up to the two of us.

Now, the Atlantic air lifts the curtains  
Up over the indignities of dishes  
And unbleached enamel.

Our worn minds and hands  
Retrace the contours  
Of mountains and empathy.

Softly watching  
As crossroads and names  
Morph into self,  
into oblivion.

# Sabdariffa

*Mandakini Bhattacherya*

1.

When  
the marchers warmed  
to the wondrous songs  
of wayward odysseys,  
hope was only in the  
steel rails they stept  
and slept on.

2.

All else—  
Serene, sensuous,  
spectacular, splendid,  
stellar, stunning, superb—  
Aye, even the Spirit—  
All the spunky, funky,  
sporty things were  
stamped upon.

## SABDARIFFA

3.

Incredible!  
How the invincible heat  
ingratiated itself  
with the intense army  
of soft marchers,  
till welts became  
inviting and photogenic!

5.

The quick quixotic  
marchers are home;  
some, indeed, are carried in.  
Home and hearth, and the  
shy *hibiscus* garland  
are all they want.  
*Bidis* and faces aglow,  
they wait to build  
the next dawn.

4.

The world watched  
candid, curious—Musing  
on the magical,  
harmonious hordes  
that flourished  
and flowed with  
ballads, trunks  
and toddlers.

Reference: The poem is a comment on the unfolding migrant labor tragedy in India in the wake of a suddenly-declared nationwide lockdown.

# On Time.

*Alexa St Martin*

Oh how I strive  
to hold Time  
like a lover.

Patience, patience,  
this lover knows waiting.  
An open flame so close you can taste it.  
Take a step back, there's no need to chase it.  
Hold your tongue, patience, patience.

Hold your tongue, embrace hesitation.  
A little more Time, another breath bated.  
This moment is far too precious to be wasted,  
so hold your tongue, patience, patience.

Oh how I strive  
to hold Time  
like a lover.

Balance, balance,  
the metronome sings.  
Swinging, swinging, ever between  
logical, rational, and sensible things,  
selfish, primal, and passionate things.

Each moment my lover is closer to me;  
Each moment my lover is just out of reach.  
Returning, returning, the pendulum swings.  
Patience, patience, my beautiful dream.

Oh how I strive  
to hold Time  
like a lover.

# At the End of the World I Think of My Beginning

*Zoe Luh*

somewhere between  
wanting to bleed my heart into paper and  
wanting to become stone  
or let my bed swallow my dreams so i don't have to face  
myself or the world again

i am becoming  
unbuttoned and i don't know where  
in my body  
i am unraveling.

at the end of the world i am unraveling.

at the end of the world i am thinking of you.

at the end of the world we are falling.

i remember your hands  
are the first thing i ever knew

remember if i choked on my breath tomorrow  
my mother taught me to breathe

remember every plant i know comes from your mouth  
comes from your hands crafting earth into daydreams

remember every song i sing is from your lips  
remember you taught me the stars and planets

and all that lies between  
remember you taught me to speak

remember i never knew how  
remember i used to say i love you

you say i love you more  
remember i used to say

if i could line up all the mummies in the world  
i would still choose you

remember you would choose me too  
remember i come from your lips

remember you are part of me  
remember

remember

and time        stands still

i want to press my palm to yours  
and ask you if we will be again  
want to thank you for every breath  
every second  
    and

    waterfall

want to tell you every dream and  
weave my prayers into a net  
to catch you before we fall into nothing

floating in the in-between

i want to tell you i love you  
one last time  
tell you i would choose you again and

we are floating  
and i know  
we make home in our chasms

# Augustus Gloop and the Chocolate Factory

*Ryan Mason*

Und golden ticket! Or more precise,  $7/8$ ths of one.  
The other eighth ended up in my mouth. I chewed the sweet mush,  
felt something stiff— then, a crunch.  
Only then did I look down and realize what I had in my hands.  
This is not surprising.  
Of all the sins life has offered me,  
gluttony has always been my favorite. I've never known when to stop.  
That's why I wanted this chocolate factory.  
But I have to be honest. Given my history,  
I find it quite interesting that God in his wisdom  
would trust me with something like this.

My parents were so proud of me.  
That night, I ate twenty weisswurst and a roasted pig, drizzled with honey.  
My mother tore her rotator cuff carrying it to the table,  
but refused to leave my side until I was done.  
My father, pewter stein in hand, ranted about the future, wouldn't stop  
advising and requesting, requesting and advising.

The day came. I lined up at the door. Four other kids were there.  
Sweet Charlie, the good boy. Deserves it? Who says.  
Veruca, a stealer of kidneys, a bad egg, a wanter, like me.  
Violet, the obnoxious girl with the gum, chewing and spitting—how does  
she eat?  
I disliked Mike TV on principle, empty as— how do you say?  
But anyway, I remember thinking that day—  
these people are my enemies.  
They're trying to capitalize on this opportunity,  
and no misguided idealist will steal it from me.  
I want it, I want it, I want it.

And would you believe? I actually got it.

Veruca, the only person on Earth greedier than me,  
let her exquisite tastes simply pull her beneath.  
I made a scrumptious warm strudel out of blueberry Violet,  
and Mike TV, a bowl of hot pixel soup.  
Sweet Charlie the hero (along with his Grandpa)

got sucked into a passing jet engine thanks to  
some cleverly placed and powerful pop.  
That left just one— Augustus Gloop,  
the 12 year-old owner of a chocolate factory.

It didn't take me long to make my mark in this industry.  
I've had a lot of ideas.  
There's no one left to call me crazy, so  
my beer-battered chocolate sausages,  
my caffeinated marshmallows,  
my cinnamon pork rinds,  
have selflessly donated important calories to the hungry people of the world.  
I'll feed you till you're as fat as me,  
a maker of music, a dreamer of dreams.  
At this moment,  
I'm sitting in my office, looking at  
eight long lines of cocoa powder,  
Jell-O pudding by the pint glass,  
maple syrup by the shot,  
a candy cigarette burning in my mouth.  
Sugar,  
it's gotten a bit  
out of control.  
I sweat all the time, attracting ants.  
I don't own a single shirt that's clean.  
I take my insulin in 2 liter bottles, one after the other.  
I'm licking the wallpaper, meine Mutter—  
I don't even taste it anymore.  
Sick, swollen, panting, I'm ready to burst.  
But nevertheless  
I still want it  
I want it  
I want it.



# The Underdog Story

*Matthew Berg*

Surrounded by memories, those of good and bad. Stuck on replay. However, I can only see the failures clearest. In the corner of this room of memories, where I sit viewing the movies before me, another feature begins to play: one called reminders. In the dark glow of the screen before me, this brighter light beckons me to see. Rising from this familiar seat, steps are taken to explore this new phenomenon, this new way.

Attention now shifting to this saving place, I begin to watch. Reminders—good times gone by where successes were known. Great victories along this journey of living, playing boldly, clearly, before me. Squinting to see the screen, adjusting my focus with every effort possible, the eyes of my soul not accustomed to seeing good. Welcome to the struggle of a recovering pessimist. Slowly, very slowly, events come into view of memories needed to the downtrodden such as I. It is here I begin to remember, to change, in the encounter of a great transformation.

Through a lens of disbelief I watch, wondering if this is me. This call of skepticism still strong upon this life, one that is much too comfortable in the chains that have held it, that have held me. Clouds of gray roll thick over my soul, these bitter disappointments and jaded occurrences that have set the tone for what I'm used to seeing, a way that needs to change.

In spite of this internal conflict, I watch what's different. I venture forth in a mindset of both desperation and determination, taking the long paths of better times, my soul now invested in the way to the rest of me, the best of me, in each moment watched. Heard still are the voices from the old me, the worn out, warped, wrecked me. Old memories of past injustices, monumental failures, shameful events now preached to me in the distance. I still hear him, acknowledge him, acknowledge me; to deny this darker half is to fail already, to never grow. Yet, even in each attempt, I refuse to remain that way. Focusing my attention on these good seasons before me, I steel my resolve for success, to see the whole picture, let healing take place. Here, I begin to live once more—the dead man now alive!

To these smoldering ashes this fire of inspiration is more than welcome. Such a needed kindling to these dying embers of hope! I watch diligently, letting the tired, the worn, the broken parts of me engage for healing. Life plays in front of me within this thing called memories. Life

plays and I watch to remember, to live for once, finding I'm far too accustomed to the gray light of pessimism. I watch for this better me, remembering there's more to me, more than this destructive thought life, this rot of disbelief eating away at me. In the viewing, hope grows little by little, memorizing the rest of me, the underdog story where failures aren't my end, only my beginning.

**Too Much**  
*Amanda Trask*



Ink

# The Cemetery of Forgotten Ideas

*Paul Van Sickle*

The Cemetery of Forgotten Ideas opens to visitors each autumn equinox. Our small crowd jangles the wrought iron gate welded between its thick limestone walls. Past the gate some cattails wave in the fog, shooting up from puddles like old porridge. A gravedigger emerges from the cattails, fusses with a lock, lets the gate chains rattle and swing. She has taupe hair and thick lines breaking her face into wormy segments.

We walk through arcades of overworked pillars. Crimson leaves of trees like the wooly fingers of some dead god. Mausoleums piled like dirty laundry over rusted out statues with pockmarked faces. I can't make sense of the words scratched across marble and granite, fuzzed out by rain and lichen. We gape at the disrepair, the haphazard mounds of abandoned tombs. "You won't linger here," the gravedigger croaks, "this section is too old. Even we aren't sure what these graves once consecrated. Look!"

She slaps a sleeker, still-crumbling tombstone. It reads *Records for section 2C, Cemetery of Forgotten Ideas, Dates unknown*. The gravedigger beckons us past the corroded walls flanking the crypts and columbaries. A man drops a lily from his bouquet at the tomb of the records. "You're welcome to wander," the gravedigger continues, "but you'll see more if you stick with me."

She leads us to the Sanctuary of Extinct Species, where topiaries dip and loom between statues of impossible creatures, forgotten weeds. A dodo. Dinosaurs and skinks and tortoises. A woman tells us she'd led an international marine search before departing to weep at the grave of the Caribbean monk seal.

Others bow to dead buildings: the Library of Alexandria, the Great Mosque of al-Nuri, the Singer building. An elderly couple stays behind at the mausoleum of the Berlin wall. In the Sculpture Garden for Abandoned Art, the gravedigger shows us the tombstone she's carving for postmodernism. "Been waiting since day one. I keep chiseling," she crows, "but it keeps refusing to die. Selfish, really."

Obscure history buffs and two pimply boys with fascist haircuts trail off at the Labyrinth of Lost Wars. A woman with a pruny face in a green church hat tuts after them, then saunters toward the Pyramid of Civilizations Pillaged. The gravedigger exhumes a smile from the wrinkled depths of her face. "She's going for the Urn of Departed languages."

We circle an inky pond. The damp leaves sway like flags from their gnarled, shipwrecked branches. I scrape mud from my shoe with a twig as more of us stay behind, gaping at their reflections. Someone flicks two coins into the pond, gazing out at the ripples. “What does the water commemorate?”

The gravedigger kicks a bit of wood. “It’s just a pond. Don’t worry about them.”

At the Chapel of Eclipsed Theories, proud graves stand for phlogistons, Martian canals, the static universe. Scientific detritus. Despite an outcry of surprise from the remaining folks at a bronze sphere floating above its magnetized plinth, I feel called away.

Strolling from the chapel, I admire the trees. I sit, watch at a fountain. Finally, I spy a calamity of mauve bricks and stained glass that reads *Gift Shop*. The shop is full of smoke. Altars and bouquets. Cans of soda. Gold trinkets and wooden gris-gris. The gravedigger beams down at me from behind an old cash register. “Anything catch your eye?”

“What kind of cemetery has a gift shop?”

She sighs and the smoke seems to clear. “Every graveyard is a cemetery of forgotten ideas. Each person buried stood for something now lost. With reverence, we walk the cities of the dead looking for an answer, some *idea* of why they departed. But like anything lost, sometimes the meaning can be hard to find.”

“The others?”

“Came blinded by prior fascinations, items specific to their unraveling lives. In the forgotten minutiae of the cemetery they hope for relief from their endless thirst for more acute nostalgia. We let visitors in so rarely because, unlike other graveyards, it’s much easier to resurrect the dead we house. My job is to make sure they stay put, but occasionally an idea lost to time resurfaces.”

“Which means?”

Rain falls, hard. Drops beat into rivers against the cheery stained glass, hammering against the ceiling as wind slapped through cracks in the brick and disturbed the pluming altar smoke. “Since you came only for your own curiosity,” the gravedigger suggested, “I ask again. Anything catch your eye?”

# The Rose Laundry, An Oil Painting

*Rebecca Pyle*



oil on Canvas

# I May Destroy You

*Thomas Fucaloro*

I know how to fail. And I know how  
to capture that failure in a poem. Purple  
or blue, there is always spilling

My fuckups are pretty porcelain  
cracking each side of the page  
gaining crumble, and how you

fail becomes my ringtone. And how  
we all fail becomes temporal lobe  
gold. I know how to succeed.

I just chose to be a poet instead

*\*When they cut you down  
let them, then bleed\**

# Making Space

*RC deWinter*

the walls turned purple as crickets bled  
my hands plucked dead cabbages  
from the overcrowded bookshelf  
and the choir sang offkey as the sun went down silent  
echoing

um...wait...  
the echoes must've been leftovers from the choir  
or maybe the sighs of cricket souls  
because the sun was definitely silent  
and dead cabbages can't sing...can they?

of course not  
cabbages can't sing alive or dead and good thing too  
imagine their musty exhalations fouling the already dirty air  
but then again how would we know?  
what nose could pick out those sour green notes  
in the toxic stew we breathe?

this being a bird cage for thought  
i gave up and put myself to bed doors and windows firmly shut  
against the sounds and smells of a world i cannot parse  
lying wide-eyed until the collapse into the blackness  
of what passes for sleep



# Film and TV Reviews

## WandaVision

Matt Shakman

Disney+, 2021, Season 1

9 episodes



While there have been other enjoyable television shows with tangential connections to the larger Marvel cinematic universe, *WandaVision* is the first Marvel television series to not only feature members of the Avengers, but also to directly continue their storylines from the films. Set within the twenty-three film Marvel universe, there are deep backstories for the two main characters, Wanda Maximoff and Vision. Fortunately, head writer Jac Schaeffer and director Matt Shakman use a common television trope of “previously on” before each episode to provide a primer for new viewers. While these short segments do an acceptable job of allowing new viewers to understand the complex story, fans who have seen the films will catch numerous callbacks and references sprinkled through each episode. New viewers can keep up, but this series was made for Marvel fans.

The series opens with Wanda reunited with her romantic partner, the human-synthesoid Vision in an *I Love Lucy* or *Dick Van Dyke Show*-like setting. This revelation introduces the two main mysteries for this series. The first is why has the setting, filming style, music, clothing, and even the language and social interactions shifted from present day to that of a 1950’s television show? In each subsequent episode, the setting shifts to pay homage to television sitcoms from the 70’s, 80’s, 90’s, and 2000’s. The entire production design team deserves recognition for their attention to detail in each episode. The opening theme song changes to reflect the new filming techniques, wardrobe, and humor seen in each decade. *WandaVision* does not feel like a modern show trying to be classic; it feels like the television classics we all know and love.

The second great mystery involves the presence of Vision. Here he is in black and white glory and tripping over ottomans while audiences are aware of his two emotionally charged deaths from the films. We are keenly aware that we are watching a ghost interact with a powerful superhero who is known for her ability to change the fabric of the world. While the build-up of this and the setting mystery allows for fun and unique situations for both audiences and the characters, the unraveling and discovery process moves rather slowly and makes the last three or four episodes much more impactful than the first five. Younger viewers who may not have been exposed to classics such as *I Love Lucy*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Family Ties*, or *Malcolm in the Middle* may find many of the references and jokes go over their head while they wait to see the mysteries fully addressed.

For those who enjoy the art of acting, the multi-decade approach to the first half of the series is a joy to watch. Elizabeth Olsen as Wanda and Paul Bettany as Vision remain true to their essential characters while altering their acting to be at home in each decade. These actors did not play a single role; they played a new version of their character in each episode. Along with their production team, these actors transport us back in time and pull on every one of our nostalgic heart strings. As amazing as their performances are though, the real show stealer is Kathryn Hahn as the ever-present, nosey next-door neighbor. In each episode, Hahn makes the audience question her true nature and intentions for Wanda. In future seasons of *WandaVision*, other Marvel television shows, or even on the silver screen, I want more of Hahn.

While this is a superhero television series and that means plenty of superpowered people punching and kicking each other, the core of the television series reveals two very deep truths. The first of these truths is the way in which popular culture, ironically a category this very series fits into, shapes the consciousness of its consumers. What we envision as the “ideal” house, spouse, family, friends, and life are often the product of the media we consume. This concept is the very core of *WandaVision* and, again, Schaeffer’s writing and Shakman’s directing are critical in telling this story.

The second deep truth that this series reveals is the lengths we as human beings go through to assuage our grief. Loss is a powerful emotion, and superpowered beings are not immune to it. Olsen’s portrayal of Wanda, a woman who saw the love of her life die not once, but twice with her own eyes, is powerful and moving. Knowing how much Wanda has lost and seeing her work through her own grief without mysteries to be solved and villains to be dealt with would make a compelling and entertaining series all on its own. The inclusion of real human emotions in a world of

superhero fantasy helps ground this series and allow for universal appreciation. At the end of the day, we all hurt, but we also have hope. *Wanda-Vision* captures the hurt and the hope of humanity and puts it on display for the world.

- Raymond Mahnke  
California State Univeristy, Stanislaus



## Days

*Tsai Ming-liang*

Homegreen Films, 2020,  
2h 7m

*Days*, the eleventh feature film by acclaimed Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang, begins with a typhoon; more specifically, it begins with a man, played by Tsai's eternal muse, Lee Kang-sheng, sitting in the living room of his spacious abode and watching a typhoon through his window. This shot, a nearly five minute, unbroken take of Lee gazing longingly at a storm we can't see, aside from its faint reflection in the corners of his window, sets the tone for the rest of *Days*' two-hour runtime, which is filled with long, meditative expanses of isolation and silence, broken only by a single fleeting moment of human connection in the film's latter half.

The premise of *Days* is simple: two men—one a young chef, Non, played by Anong Hounghueangsy, the other an ailing man, Kang, played by Lee Kang-sheng—go about their quiet days alone before briefly and passionately connecting one evening, then parting and resuming their lives as they were before.

Much of *Days* is made up of very lengthy, silent scenes of Kang and Non going about their daily lives: Kang stands under a tree and massages his neck, which suffers from an unnamed ailment; Non wakes and cooks himself a meal in his kitchen; Kang receives an experimental treatment for his neck, then goes for a walk around Bangkok; Non works a stall at a night market, but receives no customers; Kang waits patiently for a bus. These scenes of Kang and Non's everyday lives are filmed almost exclusively in unmoving, distanced long takes, a trademark of Tsai's that immerses viewers in the daily routines of these men. The immersive quality of these scenes is further aided by the performances of its two leads, which are so naturalistic that one often feels as though they are watching a documentary rather than a narrative film.

For much of the film, the relationship between Kang and Non, if there is any at all, remains unclear. They seem to live their lives alone, with Tsai cutting between the pair of them every so often to shift the

perspective. Then, in the second half of the film, their connection becomes clear: Kang is visited in his hotel room by Non, who has been hired as a masseuse whose services extend into sexual territory. The men share a very brief, intimate moment together, one that is seemingly transactional. Then, before parting, Kang gives Non a gift: a small music box that plays the theme from Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight*. Non accepts this gift, and Kang watches as he plays it for minutes on end, both enchanted by the dreamy little tune. In this moment, the relationship between the men goes from merely transactional to something more. An unspoken, deeply felt connection is formed, one that words alone are unfit to describe. Then, just as soon as they've met, they part, their days continuing on as they did before.

*Days* is a film whose power lies almost entirely in its beautifully poetic, moving visuals, a rarity in an age where so much focus is put on dramatic, punchy dialogue. The film begins with a brief title card: "This film is intentionally unsubtitled." For much of *Days*' running time, no words are spoken, and those that are seem unimportant. One of the only instances of dialogue comes in the moments following Kong and Non's intimate encounter; the pair shyly stumble over a few words that one can assume are pleasantries; however, the music box soon fills the silence for these men, who are seemingly unable to communicate their feelings through words. If moments such as these were filled with dialogue, *Days* would surely lose the quietly profound power that it is able to harness with images alone.

While those who are unfamiliar with Tsai's singular approach to cinema will likely struggle with the glacial pace of *Days*, as well as its non-narrative, those with the willingness to allow the film to wash over them and the patience to submerge themselves into its poetic imagery will find themselves deeply immersed in and entranced by the beautiful, lonely vision of modern life that Tsai presents viewers. Though somber, *Days* is a film that ultimately believes in the ability for humans to connect with and affect one another in deeply meaningful ways, no matter how brief our moments together might be. It is also a reminder to appreciate the beauty of life and the world around us. No matter what struggles one may face, the days will continue to pass by, just as they always have and just as they always will.

- Ahmed Fara

California State Univeristy, Stanislaus



## Devs

*Alex Garland*

FX, 2020, Limited Series

8 episodes

*Devs* combines technology, foresight, and determinism in its sci-fi drama offering. Created and directed by Alex Garland, the 2020 miniseries of 8 episodes had its run on FX on Hulu. The plot revolves around two main character trajectories which merge at the end of the series: Lilly Chan (Sonoya Mizuno's role), with her quest of solving the disappearance (and murder) mystery of her boyfriend, Sergei, enters the world of corporate espionage and a techno-mogul's crazy obsession of determinism and future projection using quantum computing.

The soundscape of *Devs* along with the accompanying visual cues become inseparable: unconventional and sometimes eerie, the soundtrack becomes the marker of the timeline shifts and projections of the future(s), and creates anticipation and relief through auditory means. The clash between determinism and free will takes center stage with the narrative efficiently combining quantum computing with philosophy, morality with determinism, and narratorial progress with eerily relevant tidbits from literature. The visuality of the multiverses is enmeshed in the unreal setting of Amaya—the geographical limit remains Silicon Valley, but the portrayal seems unreal due to the microcosmic nature of the narrative trajectory. While the series is not without flaws, the creative execution shocks and hooks the audience at the same time by playing with the mind's understanding of how reality works.

The guilt-driven obsession of Silicon Valley entrepreneur Forest manifests as a desire of viewing the alternative futures of his daughter Amaya whom he had lost in a car accident which he believes to have been caused by his actions. His technology company, Amaya (named after his daughter), becomes the locus of all the action—it is at Amaya that he sets up a protected and covert unit called Devs which focuses on quantum computing research based on determinism to project the future. Lily and

Sergei both work at Amaya, and eventually Sergei is invited to work at Devs where he tries to steal code and gets killed by Forest's security head Kenton while trying to escape. This initiates all the action—Lilly Chan tries to uncover the mystery of her boyfriend's death after seeing morphed CCTV footage where she finds valuable information; Lilly's ex-boyfriend Jamie becomes involved in this quest for truth after she asks him for his help; and finally, the Devs facility meets its end when Lilly defies determinism and enacts her free will only to reach an unfortunate end, effectively sealing the system's future-telling fate.

The array of the critical plot elements—from quantum computing and tech, determinism and philosophy, to action and literature—render the genre of the series open-ended; it combines sci-fi with action, and the philosophical with drama. All these make the series likeable for a wider audience by acing intersectionality while also retaining the flavors of the individual aspects.

The visually rich (yet staggering) plotline brings about a performance of the multiplicity of possibilities (with the many-worlds interpretation) by showing the infinite range of actions and futures that each character chooses and negates, only to end in a simulation where both Lilly and Forest live the rest of their lives with their loved ones despite their death in the real world. The Devs system is kept alive by Forest's girlfriend Katie and houses the simulated lives of Lilly and Forest who go back to the beginning and relive their choices but with their loved ones.

- Subhradeep Chatterjee  
Jadavpur University



## The Queen's Gambit

*Scott Frank*

Netflix, 2020, Limited Series:  
7 episodes

*The Queen's Gambit* is a Netflix original, seven-episode limited series following the life, struggles, and achievements of Elizabeth Harmon. Written and directed by Scott Frank, who created the show with Allen Scott, the series is a visual adaptation of Walter Tevis's novel of the same name. Although I cannot speak for the novel, the show itself does a great job of captivating its audience within the first few minutes. It is no surprise that the limited series was on Netflix's "Top 10 in the U.S." for about three weeks after its initial release.

Elizabeth Harmon is an extremely gifted chess player. Orphaned at the age of nine, Beth begins her battle with addiction while also finding solace and purpose in the game of chess. As she gets older, her love of the game grows along with her dependency on drugs and alcohol in order to stay focused on the match she's in. The show has an engaging theme of facing one's demons and does a really good job of sticking to that theme throughout the series.

The cast was also impressively put together, and they all work well together. Anya Taylor-Joy delivers a compelling performance of her overly analytical character. The quality of the acting was personally never in question, and I felt she did a great job portraying Beth Harmon.

The show takes a unique approach by beginning near the end of the series, and then having her flash back to her life and how she got to the moment she's in. In the first episode, titled "Openings," we see young Beth Harmon and the events that led to her arrival at Methuen Home for girls. The dull colors, backgrounds, and even clothing of the children in the orphanage provide the audience with a sense of numbness that Harmon and the other girls must be feeling. Almost everything about her up until this point is being stripped by the orphanage, and this is solidified with the introductions of the tranquilizer, one of her first demons, making the numbness and dulling effect of Harmon's emotions that much more prevalent. As the show progresses and Harmon is able to continue doing



what she loves, the colors of the show seem to acknowledge that as well, making it simple to follow the mood of the show. The colors throughout the show also make it a vibrant and accurate portrayal of the time period.

While the point of view is mainly on Beth Harmon, it also closely captures those around her as well. All of these characters have fascinating development as they come into Harmon's life. It seems as though everyone Harmon meets ends up finding their path as they help to influence her own. I think this fact makes the show more enjoyable as it doesn't take away from Harmon's story, but gives the audience a chance to get to know other characters as well. Each supporting character helps Harmon to face one of her demons, though some entertain the demons as well.

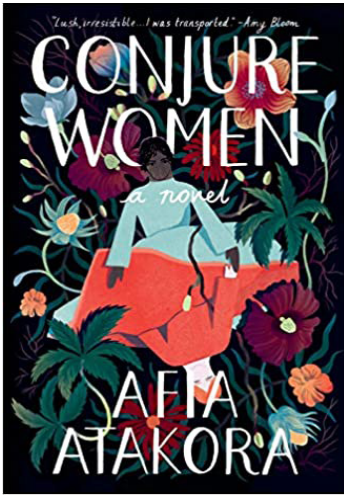
Scott Frank does an incredible job making each chess match as intense as any other action scene you would see in another show. The music they use and the cutting of different camera angles really help you to feel the focus of the players and makes it difficult to look away. I will admit that was the one thing that kept me from watching this series for so long. I figured it would just be about chess, which I don't know much about, and I would get bored rather quickly. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised to see just how binge-worthy the series is.

The show is a more serious drama, although it could be recommended to anyone. While it is about chess, you do not need to know the ins and outs of the game to understand the show. If you have a very vague understanding of the game as I do, it can be very educational as well. I definitely learned a lot about the game through this show. There is also something to be gained from watching as an experienced player as. If you find yourself bored this weekend and want to watch something that doesn't require much commitment, give *The Queen's Gambit* a try.

--Brittany Groves

California State University, Stanislaus

# Book Reviews



## Conjure Women

*Afia Atakora*

Random House, 2020, 401pp.

E-book

\$12.99

Afia Atakora's debut novel is a historical fiction set in the South, both before the Civil War and very shortly afterwards. Broken into five connecting parts, the structure of the novel switches between chapters covering the past and chapters covering the present. Each part has its own focus, and the names of the chapters in each serve as a slight description of what they entail.

The language of the novel closely resembles the language of the time, and readers with sensitivities to such language should go into it with an understanding that even though the novel can be seen as so much more, it is also a slave narrative. Readers should be aware that the book does include the "n-word" and has an instance of rape, though it does not go into detail. That being said, I think Atakora did a good job showing this time in a unique way, and her descriptions and imagery are very powerful. It is very clear that she took her time researching this era and depicted it with accuracy.

The story mostly follows the life of Rue, the daughter of the healing woman in their town, as she steps into the role of healer not long after her mother passes. She struggles with living up to her mother's reputation as both a healer and a conjure woman, while also trying to stay true to herself and her own beliefs. The novel starts with Rue tending to a newborn child named Bean, who had been born in his amniotic sac, with scaly skin and black eyes. Atakora beginning the novel in this way sets up the novel with a sense of unease, creating a sense of mystery that isn't resolved until the end of the book.

There is a theme of secrecy throughout, and while the narrative mostly follows Rue and her mother, almost every other supporting character in the book carries a large secret that isn't revealed until the last two parts of the novel. Though this is one of the main themes of the book that stood out to me, Atakora created a very rich text that has many different layers that can lead readers into many different directions.

Atakora keeps readers hooked by providing important details without betraying the context behind them. This led to many different plot twists, none of which I saw coming. It kept the mysterious nature of the novel present throughout the entire book, and it wasn't until the end that all the pieces finally fit into place.

Religion and nature also seem to be an important aspect of the novel, although it is a complex one. The main religions in the book are Christianity and the "hoodoo" magic that Miss May Belle practices. In the present timeline of the novel, the town is torn between praying for miracles or seeking a magical cure to whatever ailment they are experiencing, and there seems to be a balance of both. The river that runs through is seen and used as a place of worship and of baptism, and it separates the town from the woods just outside. The woods provide a sort of perimeter around the town. It is said in the novel that Miss May Belle cursed the woods with her conjuring or hoodoo when she died and that the foxes carried her spirit. This furthers the connection of the religious and the mystical, as the river and the woods are often mentioned together, but their purposes in the novel are often opposites.

The novel is long and can almost be seen as dense at some points. Atakora definitely layered her novel with many different themes and connections, making this a good book to go back to a second time. I think what makes this a strong novel is that it lends itself to many different audiences, whether it be those interested in historical fiction, slave narratives, the study of women, or even just a mysterious plot. There are so many different directions you can go while reading this novel, and each one is worth exploring.

- Brittany Groves

California State University, Stanislaus



# The Midnight Library

Matt Haig

Canongate Books, 2021, 304 pp.

Hardcover

\$26.00

*The Midnight Library* is Matt Haig's latest novel, centering around Sylvia Plath's quote that begins the book pertaining to infinite lives, possibilities, and not enough time to enjoy them. Matt Haig has written a number of adult and children's books prior to this young adult novel, but the tone of the book retains a child-like quality. His main character, Nora Seed, learns much about what it means to take advantage of life's potential thanks to her stay at the Midnight Library, but in terms of execution, the novel itself leaves a bit to be desired. While the message is comforting and inspiring, the structure of the novel and the word choice can be tedious. Even so, the book itself engages the reader in a way that is unique, as the plot itself deviates from the norm.

Haig's novel is about a British woman in her early thirties, Nora Seed, who is depressed. Nora is utterly dissatisfied with her current life, and after a series of unfortunate incidents, she comes to the conclusion that she wants to end it. This is where the Midnight Library comes into play. The Midnight Library allows Nora to explore different pathways her life could have potentially gone. If Nora is dissatisfied with one life, she can return it and see another. In this way, Nora can see what life would have been like if she, for instance, became an Olympic swimmer or had gone through with her wedding plans. Haig sets the story up in reasonable chunks so that the book could be finished in one day, and the plot itself technically only extends throughout one day. Regardless, the reader, like Nora, feels as if they are spending long stretches of time in a number of lives, all similar yet vastly different.

On the one hand, *The Midnight Library* confronts a serious topic relevant to many people who have regrets with their current life. The novel approaches this issue in a unique way and makes the main charac-

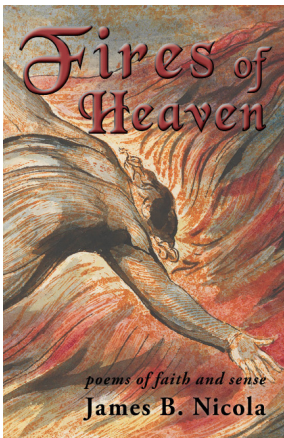
ter, Nora, sound quite believable. That being said, there are drawbacks to not having a typically-structured novel. For instance, with no stable plot, the characters fail to advance much. The readers only really get to know Nora since the novel essentially takes place in her mind. In addition to this, much of the language seems a bit cliché to be taken seriously, and the moral comes off a bit too forceful, especially near the end of the book. What the novel lacks in eloquence, however, it makes up for in relatability. Nora's situation is quite common for those with similar existential questions and regrets, and Haig makes an obvious effort to convey this problem in a familiar, comforting way.

Despite its pleasant message, the novel is sparse when it comes to description and eloquence. Much of the story feels as if it is being told rather than shown, and due to the nature of the novel's structure, not much character development happens beyond what occurs in Nora's mind. Considering its moral, the novel probably could have been condensed into a smaller, more concise book. The novel may have been more effective with less cliché wordings and phrases, which is why the book, at times, felt childish, despite it dealing with adult topics. Near the end of the book especially, it felt as if the novel could leave a bit more to be unsaid.

That being said, *The Midnight Library* leaves the reader with a lot to think about. Its charming metaphor and relatable protagonist makes it a pleasant read, especially for those who also feel as if their lives are a series of regrets. The novel leaves on an optimistic note, reminding its readers how infinite life truly is and how our minds can hardly comprehend that. While not perfect in its execution, *The Midnight Library* approaches an important subject most everyone can relate to in a way that leaves the reader inspired and thankful for the unique opportunity to live.

- Andrea Wagner

California State University, Stanislaus



## Fires of Heaven

*James B. Nicola*

Shanti Arts Publishing, 2021, 150 pp.

Softcover

\$14.95

Poet and overall creative James B. Nicola released his newest poetry collection in January of 2021, titled *Fires of Heaven*. As the title suggests, this collection of poems has a religious and existential focus, ruminating on faith, fear, love, science, and life. Composed of 105 separate poems, the collection has a variety of poetic forms, styles, and language. All the poems are joined by themes of skepticism and faith in equal measure.

The collection begins with poems saturated with natural visuals and earthy language. The first poem, “Alternate Perspectives,” considers how, “a graveyard is a garden / too.” The poem explains how a higher being’s perspective of the world becomes quite different from man’s. The first few poems contain language such as, “Earth, Water and Air,” and, “fertilizes futures with more carbon / and sand,” bringing the reader’s focus to the earth and nature by juxtaposing these images with the discussion of God and the divine.

As the reader digs deeper into the collection, a variety of forms and poetic language begin to emerge. “Apostrophe” is composed of rhyming tercets whereas “Hellsgate” is composed of multiple limericks. “Cross-Examination” follows a conversation and thoughts of a speaker who believes that if one can say they love someone, then God must be real. This variety of form reflects the universality of the poems’ themes—love, the deliberation of the existence of God, capitalism, and science make their appearances throughout. Nicola approaches some topics with skepticism and others with nostalgia, but they all touch the reader personally as experiences and questions that we all consider as humans.

Nicola’s “One Day Years Ago” mixes this nostalgia with his ideas about God while reminiscing on an encounter with a poet he met while at the beach. The speaker compares the creation of an artist and their

inspiration to that of God's creation of man; just as a man creates a sand castle, God formed man out of "an idea He entertained." It begs the reader to consider their thoughts about the intention and process behind the creation of man and the world, and prompts them to question their previously held beliefs about the world.

"Lamp Stand" rather reflects the speaker's disillusionment with the church through a free verse narrative of an experience they had as a child. Seeing through the eyes of a child, the reader learns how the "eternal flame," representative of God's presence, was not practically eternal. By sharing a personal recollection of when they learned the difference between symbol and reality in their church, the speaker shares the other side of faith, one of shattered expectations and the everyday world. This poem's more negative approach to ideas of faith follows the general trend of the second half of the collection. It comes "full circle," as the back of the collection suggests, shifting from surreal ruminations on faith to nostalgia. Finally the collection urges the reader to consider each other in their quest for truth and experience.

Whether the reader is considering whether, "each star / were a Soul," in "If Each Star" or listening to "Exegesis on a Church Sign" and taking, "a good hard look at dogma, doctrine, and church laws," they will find thought-provoking verse that lays out the thoughts and experiences of someone trying to find their own understanding of life. Nicola delivers a poetry collection ripe with questions and an overwhelming sense of togetherness as the poems attempt to figure out life, love, hurt, and loss within the framework of a stanza. Readers looking for poems to challenge their ideas and grow their awareness of the world around them won't be disappointed.

- Hannah Neeley

California State University, Stanislaus



## Ready Player Two

*Ernest Cline*

Ballantine Books, 2020, 366 pp.

Hardcover

\$28.99

In 2011, Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* told the story of a world falling apart while its occupants opted to spend their time, money, and energy inside of a virtual world known as the OASIS. Upon the death of James Halliday, one of the creators of the OASIS, a virtual scavenger hunt is announced in which the winner would have riches beyond their wildest dreams and full control of the OASIS. Nine years later, *Ready Player Two* returns readers to the adventures of the hunt's winner, Wade Watts (known as Parzival inside of the OASIS), and the remaining members of his clan, the High Five. Another hunt, one that only Halliday's heirs can complete, is discovered. An unlikely antagonist holds the OASIS hostage while forcing Watts to "seek the seven shards to make the siren whole." The "siren" is an A.I. recreation of Kira Underwood, the now deceased wife of Ogden Morrow, Halliday's former partner. To find the seven shards, Watts needs to rely on the unique histories and knowledge banks of his friends. As he collects the shards, Watts becomes more open to understanding not only his friends but also the life experiences of Kira.

Fans of 1980's and 1990's pop culture spanning music, television, movies, anime, and especially video games will appreciate the vivid descriptions and attention to detail that Cline uses in his frequent references. The world of this novel, like the previous novel, feels alive and possible. In many ways, this novel is less science fiction and more speculative fiction. Environmentally, economically, and technologically, the world of Watts and his friends seem closer to the real world than we should be comfortable with. Cline's OASIS-centered world is presented as a positive eventuality that, like all technologies, has costs that come with the benefits. While technology has the power to improve our lives, these improvements have the power to reshape the world in negative ways as well.



The highlights of this novel are each of the smaller quests. Ranging from battling seven versions of Prince to recasting and reenacting scenes from John Hughes movies, each quest works well as a self-contained adventure. Cline's love of pop culture clearly shows in these segments. The use of the OASIS allows users, and by extension, readers, to embrace their fandoms and build stronger relationships with their obsessions. Who wouldn't want to walk in Middle Earth, drive the *Back to the Future* DeLorean, or dance at the prom from *Pretty in Pink*? Cline's use of speculative technology in this way is every fan's wildest dream come true.

One of the most unique pieces of speculative technology introduced in this novel is the OASIS Neural Interface (ONI). This interface bypasses the sensory organs and allows for a direct link to be made to the brain itself. While in the OASIS, users are now given a much deeper, realistic experience. Their mind believes it is actually seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, and feeling things in a virtual world. Additionally, this interface allows users to record real world experiences and share those with others via the OASIS. While humans already have the ability to use empathy to understand each other, this technology allows the user to "live," at least briefly, in the skin of someone of another gender, race, sexual orientation, age, or physical condition. Cline, through Watts, touts these features as one of the greatest selling points of the new technology as he introduces it in the book but soon abandons these features. This type of introduction and abandonment, unfortunately, is a common theme for Cline.

The very structure of the book, an amazing world building introduction which eases new readers into the universe while at the same time sprinkling enough new information for returning readers, seems disjointed and abandoned once the protagonists start their quests. Many possible plot points and conflicts are introduced in the opening chapters and are either never mentioned again or wrapped up quickly and conveniently, and thus, not rewardingly. Too often, issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economics, personal autonomy, and even ownership of the soul, all deep and important issues which should have meaningful discussion and exploration, have their topic raised but then abandoned. Most disappointing to me is the manner in which a quest to give "life" and autonomy to the digital copy of Kira Underwood is resolved. Even after spending the bulk of the book showing examples of why females do not need men to validate them, Cline spends more time using men fighting men for control of the "siren" than just letting Kira decide her own fate. For every step forward that Cline makes, there are also steps backwards.

While very entertaining, *Ready Player Two* has numerous concepts and ideas such as treatment of race, gender, ethnicity, concepts of phys-

ical and digital persona, and ownership of identity that could have been expanded without the need to remove any pop culture references. Ready Player Two is by no means perfect, but it can act as a starting point in the discussion of complex topics.

- Raymond Mahnke

California State Univeristy, Stanislaus

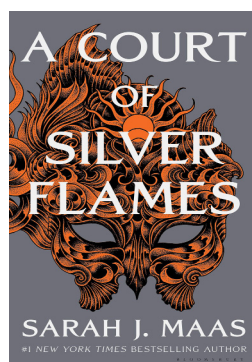
# A Court of Silver Flames

Sarah J. Maas

Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, 768 pp.

Hardcover

\$28.00



Fantasy readers and fans of Sarah J. Maas have waited just shy of three years for her latest addition to the world of Prythian in her new book *A Court of Silver Flames*. Published by Bloomsbury and released February 16th of this year, this book is the fourth in the *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series, a series that began as a fantasy retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*. This series goes beyond a simple retelling, following the love and loss of main character Feyre Archeron as she finds herself in the world of Fae and magic. *A Court of Silver Flames* is the first of multiple books Maas is writing to dig deeper into supporting characters' stories. This story follows Feyre's sister Nesta and the war general Cassian as they struggle through grief, trauma, and rebuilding after the terrible war they survived the previous year.

*A Court of Silver Flames* at its core is a story of redemption and healing. There are themes of romance, mental health, and female friendship. Nesta Archeron has spiraled into a self-destructive and addictive lifestyle in the year following the devastating war with the kingdom of Hybern. While her friends and family seem to move on with their newfound peace, Nesta slowly drowns from the memories and weight of everything she had to endure during the war. The book begins with her circle of friends giving her an ultimatum: she can train to fight and defend herself and study to control her magic or be banished from Prythian into the human lands, where she will find only isolation and discrimination towards her kind. She was once human, turned Fae against her will by the king of Hybern. She grudgingly chooses to train rather than be sent off alone. As the story unfolds, Nesta learns to face the demons that have been haunting her, grows new friendships, and falls in love in the process.

This book is a must-read for New Adult fantasy lovers. Unlike the previous books in the series, *A Court of Silver Flames* focuses on the character development of Nesta and Cassian as the main storyline, creating a plot driven forward by character development. It is a story meant to delve into the trauma and hurt that life and war can leave on a person and

how that can be overcome. Some critics may dislike this novel because of its emphasis on Nesta's romantic relationship and her ongoing journey towards mental health, claiming it lacks a real plot or conflict. The conflict of the story lies in Nesta's battle with herself, her mental health, and the acceptance of how past events have changed her.

Sarah J. Maas does an excellent job depicting Nesta's mental anguish and her struggle to regain clarity and overcome self-loathing. The grief and journey back to a healthy place is believable yet difficult to read; her trauma and challenge to understand her power are depicted as processes, rather than challenges easily overcome by falling in love or winning a war. As she trains and grows stronger physically, she slowly acknowledges the pain of her past and how to move beyond it. Her relationship with Cassian, while entertaining for readers, creates a mental foil for Nesta's character. They have both made it through the war, both almost dying and losing loved ones in the process. Cassian has managed to deal with his traumatic experiences through his close bonds with his family circle and training, whereas Nesta has deliberately ignored her pain and fallen victim to the vices she's indulged in instead. Cassian trains Nesta to fight and defend herself, but more importantly is there to walk her through her own journey towards recovery and health.

Not only does Nesta's relationship with Cassian help pull her from the pit she's fallen into, but it is the friendships she forms with Emerie and Gwyn, two other females who have experienced loss and hurt, that show her the path back to herself. Nesta's growing closeness with Emerie and Gwyn are examples of strong and healthy female friendships, something readers will appreciate. Maas is known in her books for writing strong female characters, and this newest edition to the series is no exception. Her books are refreshing in their depiction of both female strength and male trauma, breaking from stereotype. Readers see men and women struggle with trauma and hardship, and both strong and independent male and female characters.

Readers looking for a captivating New Adult fantasy novel will want to pick this book up right away. Though one could arguably read this book without reading the previous four, it's highly recommended a reader start from the beginning. Readers will understand the depth and significance of the events and characters if they've read the rest of the series. Readers looking for fast-paced action might find this book difficult to finish, but those looking for genuine friendship and authentic narratives of trauma and healing won't be able to put this book down.

- Hannah Neeley

California State University, Stanislaus

# The Heiress: The Revelations of Anne de Bourgh

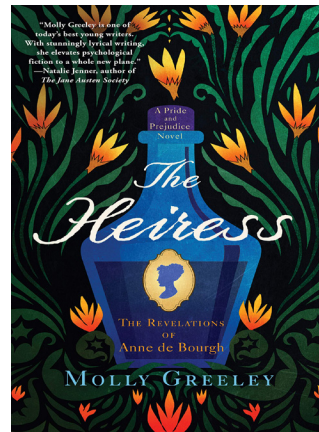
Molly Greeley

William Morrow Co: HarperCollins,

2021, 368 pp.

Hardcover

\$25.99



Molly Greeley's *The Heiress: The Revelations of Anne de Bourgh* is a derivative novel based off of the minor character from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Pacified with laudanum (a potent opioid) from infancy, Anne de Bourgh eventually grasps hold of reality long enough to escape its addictive effects. As she furthers herself from the medication, she also furthers herself from the domineering grasp of her mother, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and begins a quest to construct her own destiny in London at the behest of her cousins.

Anne is introduced to all new avenues of life, which equally excite and terrify her sheltered sensibility. Through these growing pains, Miss de Bourgh comes into contact with the eclectic and worldly Miss Amherst, with whom Anne quickly forms an intimate relationship. Miss Amherst teaches her about life, about books, how to dance, and above all, why it is important for Anne de Bourgh to embrace all facets of her complex personality.

By playing off Austen's world, Greeley backs herself up into a creative wall—or so one might think. The spirit of Austen is alive and well throughout the entirety of the novel, full of carriages, witty verbal sparring, and the intricacies of Regency life. However, the tone of the novel is eerily different from that of Austen's satirical voice. Anne de Bough is no Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse; she is insignificant despite her wealth, stunted, and shaded from understanding the fast-paced society of her mother and other wealthy socialites. Through this angle, Greeley presents a new perspective on the Austen tradition. Miss de Bourgh is highly introspective, acutely aware of her unique circumstances and stolen childhood. Despite this, she is no coward and quickly convinces the skeptical reader that she is worthy of not only inheriting the vast estate of Rosings, but also worthy of the title as heroine of her own novel.

Fans of Austen (such as myself) will happily be reintroduced to some beloved characters. The Darcys make multiple appearances, with Anne recognizing the awkwardness of confronting Elizabeth given the circumstances. Fitzwilliam and Elizabeth Darcy are treated with proper respect by the author and stay entirely within the meticulously built characters that Austen created for us. However, Anne is not ignorant of Elizabeth's thoughts on her; to Mrs. Darcy, she is ridiculous and weak. Their interactions are emotionally complex, with each character gradually developing a profound respect for one another by the novel's conclusion.

Time changes rapidly throughout Greeley's novel. Anne reflects on her childhood and mute adolescence; she grows up rather quickly, sparking a stark change in her destiny once she leaves Rosings for a season in London. As the relationship between Anne and Miss Amherst gains traction, time begins to slow down, with minute details becoming emphasized and simple tasks such as visiting a bookstore or buying a new bonnet marking momentous occasions in Anne's vapid emotional history. In this sense, the style of *The Heiress* is similar to that of Virginia Woolf or other modernists, like James Joyce. Furthermore, the novel's tone and highly introspective first-person narration is almost reminiscent of the works of Charlotte Brontë. Like Jane Eyre, Anne de Bourgh is insignificant and small—plain amidst a sea of beauty and wealth, and it is for her character, courage, and ability to love that the reader comes to respect and love her in return.

By borrowing and reinventing the styles of so many literary giants, Greeley creates a story that is both historically significant and emotionally appealing to the modern reader. The treatment of non-heteronormative sexuality, for instance, is simultaneously appropriate for the 1800s while also kept from being depicted as merely disastrous or vilified. Instead, Anne's life and emotional pull towards Miss Amherst is respected and easy with which to empathize. The novel then can reach a vast audience without discrimination. Avid Janeites can appreciate a distinctive addition to the world of Austen, while those unfamiliar with her texts can appreciate a case study in the emotional development of an ostracized and isolated individual who loves one whom she is told to let go.

Perhaps most importantly, Greeley gives Anne de Bourgh a meaningful ending. In Austen's text, her fate is left hanging in limbo with Mr. Darcy marrying Lizzy Bennet, and it is subtly suggested that we do not worry ourselves over the plight of the de Bourghs. In Anne's own story, however, we witness the heiress come to terms with her duty and her personal desires, inheriting Rosings Palace from her mother and transforming the gaudy mansion into a respectable and tasteful household. The development of her character from beginning to end is satisfying and conclusive; all ends are tied nicely and within reason. By the end, one feels

melancholic, though happy. No one, after reading *Pride and Prejudice*, thinks they need a story devoted to Anne de Bourgh, but *The Heiress* convinces us otherwise. By the end, we are thankful and appreciative of both Jane Austen and Molly Greeley.

- Tyler Clark

Northern Arizona University



## Sweetdark

*Savannah Brown*

Nielsen, 2020, 99pp.

Paperback

£12.00

\$16.50

Savannah Brown, author of *Graffiti (and other poems)* and the novel *The Truth About Keeping Secrets*, focuses again on the existential struggles of a young woman thrown into a chaotic, senseless world in her latest book of poetry. Sometimes set in apocalyptic end-times, *Sweetdark* takes modernist ideas about humanity and tempers them with the perspective of an American girl living in London. In her new work, Brown expresses the burden of articulation in a world where nothing matters and sifts through bittersweet memories of the past. The poems' use of conversational tone juxtaposed with eloquent and violent imagery makes for a provocative yet insightful glance into the psyche of young adolescence.

The book is split into three sections, all three of which grapple with similar issues: the struggles between the self and others, cruelty from an uncaring world, nostalgia for the past, and much more. Many of Brown's poems engage with these issues philosophically, but remain accessible with candid and authentic descriptions. Nothing is left untouched—Brown doesn't shy away from the ugly depths of the mind, which is what makes the poetry so delightfully engaging in an almost disturbing way. Her poetry simultaneously wrestles with immense pain and joy, evoking within readers a full spectrum of human emotion.

Most notably, *Sweetdark* begs to be read over and over. Its pithiness allows for a quick read, but its style and diction stay with the reader. The poetry itself is reminiscent of the modernist writer T.S. Eliot, but Brown is able to transform this style to create greater accessibility for the reader. Her perspective as a young woman enlarges the conversation pertaining to existence, and she dissects deeper into the psyche as to why humans do what they do. *Sweetdark* conveys a wide range of emotions and discusses difficult questions about life in an incredibly intellectually stimulating way, which will have readers who are interested in this sort of analysis of existence excited to read it again and again.

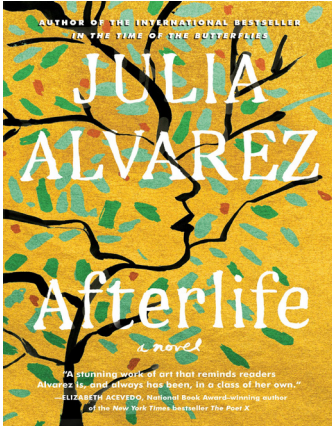


Each poem has an intimate quality to it that allows readers to feel as if they are conversing with the speaker about the troubling topics of life, suffering, and chaos. Brown's unique imagery, whether it be bugs, oceans, teeth, or the London tube, contrasts with abrupt and frank stream-of-consciousness, repeatedly oscillating the reader from imagination and reality. Her poetry's bitter attitude confronts the harsh dichotomy of sweet existence and inevitable nothingness and manages to capture dissatisfaction with life without seeming pretentious. Rich descriptions coupled with authenticity makes the poetry feel like it's not taking itself too seriously, which in and of itself is refreshing. During a time of heavy isolation and confusion in the real world, *Sweetdark* embraces the chaos, invites readers to sit comfortably with questions unanswered, yet encourages us to continue asking them.

In all, *Sweetdark* is a celebration of life. Words that can articulate pain can also attempt to describe some of life's greatest treasures. Brown invites her readers to enjoy living in the same breath she expresses indescribable suffering—her familiar tone like a cold hand reaching toward someone else who feels this way. That is why *Sweetdark* is so approachable. The poet manages to capture these frustrating emotions effectively while at the same time remaining vulnerable for her readers. By remaining honest yet uniquely poetic in her descriptions of the everyday thoughts and encounters a troubled youth has in a nonsensical world, Brown encapsulates a bittersweet fragment of time which readers can come back to whenever they read again from the pages of *Sweetdark*.

- Andrea Wagner

California State University, Stanislaus



## Afterlife

*Julia Alvarez*

Algonquin Books, 2020, 272 pp.

Hardcover

\$23.95

*Afterlife*, written by Dominican-American author Julia Alvarez, is brilliantly crafted into fragmented hardships, piecing together the most central and significant message of this novel—*there's beauty in the damage*. Antonia's life is destroyed when she loses her beloved husband, Sam, to a fatal heart attack. As she begins to pick up the pieces wondering, "how to create an afterlife for him," she becomes acquainted with a new version of herself. When Sam is no longer there to tell her what decisions to make, she must rely on herself to construct this new life with foreign fragments. She quickly becomes entangled in the life of the neighboring farm worker, Mario, as she unexpectedly finds his pregnant and undocumented girlfriend, Estela, taking refuge in her garage. As she anxiously scrambles to piece together the young lives of Mario, Estela, and their unborn baby, Antonia's oldest sister, Izzy, goes missing without a word. These two monumental events may initially just seem like a timely distraction from her late husband's tragic passing; however, she is rebuilt with a new conviction and a profound understanding of *fragmented* beauty.

Alvarez masterfully captures the metaphor of broken pieces as she weaves it into the lines of the narrative. With the title of the prologue being "Broken English," the foundation for *Afterlife* is already suggestive of *something* in need of being mended from past trauma. What we immediately learn is there is much to be recovered: Antonia's grieving heart, her connection to her cultural heritage, and the voices of the, "invisible ones who increasingly enter Antonia's line of vision and become visible." "In America, where you put your oxygen mask on first," Antonia serves as a liaison between the privileged world that more willingly accepts "her kind" and the cold world that does nothing more than silence those who are already oppressed.

The suffering sustained by Mario and Estela creeps into Antonia's day-to-day life as she is engulfed with the anxieties of harboring undocumented immigrants. The shattered pieces of her previous life—with

Sam—begin to take on a new shape as her life is attached to Estela's. The young "countryless" girl who has brought out a previously, non-existent maternal instinct within Antonia takes the reins of her heart strings. Alvarez unites the two through fragmented language. Although their personal experiences are different, *Spanglish* blends their two voices into one. It is their connection to each other. Where language saves Estela's life in this new world, it revives Antonia's cultural identity back to life.

*Afterlife* authentically captures the diverse hardships of life in a way where almost any reader could find a place in the narrative. While this is admirable and offers us a chance to become better empathizers, it is challenging to let one's heart become fully invested in each sub-narrative without being pulled in many other directions simultaneously. However, this element of the novel does bring readers back around to the theme of fragmentation lining Alvarez's narrative.

When Estela, Mario, and baby Marianela return to Mexico with Antonia's gift of financial stability, Antonia finds a new peace in her life after Sam. She embodies not only the fragments of her own sufferings but of those she loves as well. "The damage is made visible, repaired...it tells a story," and it, "is beautiful." *Afterlife* speaks to the fragmented heart of every reader and convicts us to consider the hardships of others and the voices that have been silenced. It shakes us awake and convicts us to consider our own "call to action" in a hurting world.

- Danielle Enebrad

California State Univeristy, Stanislaus

# Author Interviews

**Interview with Jasminne Méndez, author of *Island of Dreams* and *Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e: Personal Essays and Poetry***

**By Jarred White**

**Hello Jasminne, I wanted to take this moment to express how appreciative I am for your time and how thankful I am that you agreed to this interview for the 2021 addition of the Penumbra Literary & Art Journal.**

**Every author develops their own process for writing. What does your writing process look like?**

Over the years I have developed a very unique and personalized writing ritual. While it does vary from time to time, I have found that by sticking to my pre-writing rituals it helps “call the muse” rather than waiting around for the muse to “hit.” As the mother of a toddler, I don’t really have the luxury of stopping what I’m doing to write down my ideas or lines. So, I’ve found ways to call the ideas and inspiration to me. I prefer to write in the early mornings. I’m up most days at 5 or 6 am. I like to do my morning self-care of washing my face, moisturizing my skin, hands, and feet. Then I light candles or incense and meditate and do some light yoga or stretching. I love to engage all the senses before I write. I follow this with journaling or, as I like to call it, “a brain dump.” Some people refer to this as their morning pages, but I just call it journaling. Then if I’m feeling stuck or if I know I’m in the drafting stages I like to read – sometimes it’s just one poem sometimes it’s a chapter or two of whatever book I’m reading. THEN I get to the writing or revising. But even when I’m not at my desk or at my writing couch writing I’m ALWAYS thinking of my work, coming up with new ideas, randomly researching things on my phone while my toddler eats or sleeps, or jotting ideas down on my phone while picking up groceries etc. Writing for me happens ALL the time in my mind, in my body, on paper, out loud etc.

**Has your writing process changed much throughout Covid? What tips do you have for any aspiring writers?**

The only real difference between my writing process now and pre-COVID is that because I lost my job in Jan 2020 I’ve turned writing into

my full-time career, so I don't HAVE to wake up at 5 am to write but I can make time for it a little later in the morning which is nice. I've also begun to explore a lot more new genres such as YA and Middle grade fiction and playwriting.

My main tips for aspiring writers is this: 1) Make time to write. Just write! Don't worry about if it's "good" or "bad." JUST WRITE! 2) Find your community. Find the people who will support you and your writing goals and dreams. 3) Tell your stories. Write what YOU want to write because if you don't, someone else will do it for you, and they WILL get it wrong.

**In *Island of Dreams*, you provide readers with expertly crafted insights into your personal and family history. Were there any moments that didn't make it into the book that you wish had been included?**

Hmm. What a great question and not one I've really thought about. I think that I often don't think about what I wish I would've included because I know there will be more books and more stories and more poems that I will write, and so I will always have the opportunity to tell those stories. Some of the essays and ideas that didn't make it into *Island of Dreams* found their way into my second collection *Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e*, and others have found their way into the second YA memoir I have coming out in 2022. Even when essays or poems get cut from a final draft of a book due to editorial decisions or for whatever reason, I don't feel too sad or upset about it because I know it's not the end of that piece. I believe and know that piece will find a home in another book someday, and I'm ok with that.

**Throughout *Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e* there are numerous instances and themes of intense loss, pain, frustration, and, ultimately, hope. What story (or stories) were particularly meaningful for you to write about?**

The whole book was meaningful to me because I myself have read very few collections about chronic illness from women of color. But I guess if I had to really choose one of the most meaningful pieces, it was the essay on my miscarriage. It was really difficult to write, and it took me about five years to find the courage to tackle it and just finish it. I think miscarriage is too often seen as a taboo subject and not enough women feel safe enough to share their experiences. I know that by sharing my story I've helped other women cope with their grief and shame around miscarriage.

**Because you've written in so many genre formats—poetry, non-fiction, hybrid, and plays—I find myself wondering if you have a favorite format?**

I don't know if I have one set favorite genre. I just love telling stories and I write or tell the story in whatever way I feel called to OR in the way the story is demanding to be told. My favorite genre is whatever genre I'm currently writing in, to be honest. I become engrossed in my writing projects and truly love every moment of creating and revising the work until I feel I've told the story I want to tell. Right now, I'm really loving novels and plays in verse. I love being able to take my first genre (poetry) and using it to tell a full story with characters and plot. It's really like the best of the fiction world mixed with the best of what language can offer through poetry.

**With the advent of Covid and virtual meetings, have you been able to maintain, or perhaps even expand, your work as a performance poet?**

Yes! I've definitely reached more people through virtual events than I ever would have or could have before. I can't travel too far given my mom life responsibilities and usually colleges and universities can't or don't want to pay for flights, hotels, food, and all that, so virtual events have really expanded my reach and I've been able to meet and share my work with so many more people now. I really hope virtual events remain something people are willing to do in the future even post-pandemic.

**Do you have any projects in the works for your readers to look forward to?**

I have so many things brewing! Some I can talk about and some I can't. Coming up real soon I have a reading of my play *City Without Altar* happening online on May 15th. I also have a picture book coming out with Arte Publico Press in October titled *Josefina's Habichuelas* and my second YA memoir *A Bucket of Dirty Water: Memories of My Girlhood* coming out in the spring of 2022 as well as a poetry collection titled *Machete* (Noemi Press) coming out August 2022. All of my upcoming readings and events can be found on my website [www.jasminnemendez.com](http://www.jasminnemendez.com)

**Thank you so much for participating in this interview. Everyone on the Penumbra team wishes you all the best.**

Thank you!!!

# Show and Tell

*Jasminne Mendez*

It was Tuesday  
Mr. Gleason asked us  
To bring something  
That would show  
And tell the class  
Something new  
About our culture  
And our identity

On Wednesday  
I wore my father's  
Military uniform  
Tucked a Dominican  
Flag in my pocket  
Carried a rosary  
Around my waist  
And told the class

Where I stand  
Now  
Is not where I was  
Yesterday  
Or where I will be from  
The day after  
Tomorrow

**Interview with Dr. Jesse Wolfe, author of *En Route* and  
*Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy***

**By Jarred White**

**Hello Jesse, I have to say how wonderful it is to once again have you involved with *Penumbra* and how grateful I am that you are granting our readers insights into your works and writing process.**

Thanks, Jarred! I think that *Penumbra* is a jewel of our campus culture. I was honored to be the journal's faculty advisor for six years, and now I'm delighted and thoroughly impressed by the directions in which Professor Monica Flores is taking it. *Penumbra* is over three decades old, and its longevity is, to my mind, one of its strengths.

**In terms of time management, do you find it challenging to balance your creative writing projects with your work as a full-time professor?**

Yes. I think I speak for many of my colleagues in saying that it's a challenge to balance one's creative or scholarly work with one's teaching and service to the university. When working on poetry (as the writers and artists among *Penumbra*'s readers know), and when working on scholarship (as any student who's written an essay for class knows), it helps to have a lot of time to let the mind wander, to write a draft, to let it sit, to come back to the draft, and to take it in a new direction. But creative writers and academic scholars tend to have one advantage over students: their projects aren't due next week (or tomorrow morning)! So, finding the time to come back to a poem, clouded as little as possible by presuppositions about where it's supposed to go, as open as possible to its multiple potential avenues of development—this is the challenge. It's doable, but working full time (for anyone, not just a professor) means that you can keep putting off the creative task, and therefore that the poem can get cold, that I (speaking of my own process) can lose connection with the mood that originally inspired it.

Ideally, the two things—creative writing and teaching English classes—feed into one another. I get ideas for poems from the literature I teach and from my students' wonderful insights. (Sometimes I take notes on poetic or suggestive student comments.) And the fact that I'm writing poetry—thinking about the challenges of craft—can make me more effective in the classroom. *Craft questions* (“Why did the writer put a poem or story together a certain way?”) are not the same as *meaning questions* (“What are this poem's themes?”), and being a creative writer helps me to bring



craft questions into my teaching. My scholarly specialty happens to be modernist literature, and modernists often make craft questions central to their works, so they nudge my teaching in that direction, anyway.

So on the one hand, being a full-time professor and a creative writer creates time-management challenges, as your question indicates, but it also creates opportunities for synergy.

**When writing your poems, do you write with an overarching theme in mind, or do thematic connections develop organically as you write?**

This is evolving for me. In the past, these connections tended to develop organically. But as I was assembling *En Route*, I asked myself, “What is this volume about; how can I fill out its underdeveloped parts?” For example, if I want to have 3 sections organized by theme, of roughly the same length, but at the moment I have 12 good poems about Theme A and only 5 good poems about Theme B, then do I need to write some poems “to order” on Theme B? Now that *En Route* is done, I’ve partly reverted to writing whatever comes to mind. But this practice is balanced by the question in the back of my head: “What should my next volume be about?”

Assembling a volume gives me a bird’s-eye view, both of my poetry over time and of how *I* have evolved. It’s hard to put a finger on, but since my 20s (I’m turning 51 this year), I’ve come to think differently about the passage of time, and more about maturational/developmental stages. Often these concerns emerge organically in a poem—I don’t necessarily set out to write from “a middle-aged POV” or the POV of a “young dissatisfied wealthy guy from New York,” even if a poem ends up in one of those spaces.

But actually, now that I’ve started thinking in terms of volumes—of how my poems speak to one another—I *do* sometimes work in that deliberate manner. *En Route* has various speakers and characters: male and female, young and old, rich and poor, to list some demographic traits. I like this characteristic of my poetry, and at least for now, it’s something I want to keep doing. So, without constricting myself unduly, I might think, “This poem’s speaker will be a 60-ish year-old woman in the latter years of a loving marriage.” Or I’ll think, “Have I written lately from a child’s point of view?” That’s not exactly the same thing as an “overarching theme,” to refer to your question, but it is a way of having a game plan.

***En Route* often intermixes scenes of domestic life with picturesque visions of nature. Are there any specific locations that particularly inspired you?**

I grew up in Southern California and have lived in the state most of my life. California images (beaches and seagulls, Turlock's canals) appear in my poems. I've traveled a good deal, often with family, by car, plane, and train, across California, to the Midwest (where I went to grad school), and the East Coast (where my wife's family lives). So freeways come up [see "Getting Better," page 30-32], and other images of mobility—sometimes suggesting freedom, other times dislocation. Most of *En Route's* poems aren't tied to specific, real-world locales, as prose fiction might be—although I did spend some of my childhood in Manhattan Beach, near Polliwog Park, which is the title of one piece, and although "Getting Better" makes use of Yosemite National Park. All of which is to say that *place* is sometimes specific and factual, and sometimes diffuse and fictional, in this volume built around the titular theme of transit.

**In writing, authors will often revise or entirely rework certain sections of their works. Were there any portions of *En Route* that radically changed shape from your first draft?**

Yes, changes of shape happened in several ways. Individual poems changed because I eliminated lines or stanzas, or because I reordered stanzas and wrote new connecting material, as a student might for an essay. This happened with "Getting Better" as I thought about the speaker's relationship with the female character—including the degree to which I wanted that relationship unspecified, so readers had room to make their own inferences.

Or I might find that I disliked 90% of a poem, but that if I kept the 10% I liked, I could expand it into a new poem. To date, I've generally been better at taking stuff out of poems than at putting new things in. But I want to get better at the latter.

The truth of the saying that "good writers are good re-writers" comes home to me often. "Find a good workshop group" is an excellent piece of advice for young writers. There's nothing like other sets of eyes to increase your options as a re-writer.

Another way to address your question about "radically changing shape" is to think about how I assembled the volume. Should it be a full-length manuscript (which might run 60-80 pages)? This was my debut manuscript, so I opted for the shorter, chapbook form—a frequent route for new poets. How many chapters/sections should it have, and should they all be the same length? Should I think of each section as its own narrative, and if so, what should its first poem be? How connected to current events, such as police violence and protest, would I like the volume to be, and does this mean I should write new material? As I thought about these

questions, the volume got shorter or longer, some pieces got eliminated (including ones I like that don't fit the volume), and I faced the question: "Should I edit *this* poem in a certain way because it's going in a volume with *that* poem and I want the two to be in dialog?" I don't think any of these questions about a volume's "shape" have right answers, but I enjoy mulling over them.

**Since the advent of Covid, many of us have been unable to go outside and appreciate the fullness of the world. Do you feel that these conditions have changed the way you write about interpersonal relationships or the great outdoors?**

To write about these and other subjects, I'm thrown back on other resources: day-to-day interactions with my family and the neighborhood scenery, memories, my imagination, reading material, and whatever poems have been gestating in my mind, waiting to be coaxed out. Enforced isolation hasn't changed my writing methods or the content of my work, in glaring ways, *yet*—though that's a great question. I suspect that my life experiences and readings, pre-Covid, provided enough momentum that my imagination had a backlog of tasks to work through. I had a half-century to develop habits for thinking about nature and relationships. But years remain for me to process the pandemic; I'm sure that it will affect how and what I write, including in ways of which I'm not conscious.

**Do you have any upcoming projects that our readers can look forward to?**

Yes. I'll start with a scholarly project; thanks for mentioning that genre in your header, along with my poetry chapbook. As a loose sequel to the monograph noted in the header (*Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy*), I hope to have a book entitled *Intimacy-in-History* published in the next year or two. It will examine how twentieth-century British and American novelists think about love, friendship, and sexuality, and whether they believe that, as social justice advances, people's intimate lives improve as well.

As far as poetry goes, now that my chapbook is out, I'm back to a new square one, submitting individual pieces to journals and magazines. I'll be patient and hope to have enough strong and published material to put together a full-length volume in a few years.

**Thank you so much for participating in this interview. Everyone on the Penumbra team wishes you all the best.**

Thanks, Jarred!

# Getting Better

*Jesse Wolfe*

We drove north, up the 101, toward  
Napa. That day was incredibly beautiful,  
like this one—maybe I confuse the two.

She looked healthier than ever: hair blown back,  
cheeks flushed in the wind, eyes half visible  
behind her sunglasses, talking about gratitude.

“I always resented anyone’s success,”  
she said: “when my sister had her show  
at the gallery (her sketch of you

was always my favorite, at Yosemite,  
El Capitan behind you, your eyes  
serenely blue, one tree branch in the corner

of the frame), I couldn’t look at it,  
framed on the wall, with a price tag.”  
I still remember that show, how she leaned

in the corner, by the tall window,  
studying the curve of her fingernails.  
I called her on that once: how she used it

to escape from what she couldn’t control. We  
were having dinner at the Cuban place. She  
stormed from the table, without paying,

an entire garlic chicken on her plate.  
But on the Napa day, she thanked me for it:  
she said I'd been right about her in *most* ways.

That “most” came from her old self: she couldn't help  
defending something, though she couldn't say what.  
“Even when my dad remarried,” she said,

“I couldn't enjoy it, since I only cared  
about what it meant for *me*.” Here she smiled.  
Her point—she didn't have to say it—

she was dispersed: at one with the universe,  
something to do with her new medication,  
which she said she took religiously.

I'm not trying to be mean, and I don't know why  
I'm telling you this now, why Wisconsin  
should remind me of California

or a modest lake recall the Pacific.  
I've loved this park since I was a kid,  
when my folks drove here during the summers.

For some reason I have to talk this through.  
It's like when I have an idea  
for a story—yes, I still write short stories;

I'm working on one now, in fact;

no, it's not about her—if I forget it  
before jotting notes down, it obsesses me;

I can't help thinking it's my lost masterpiece.  
On that Napa day, we lunched at Pismo,  
dipped our toes in the water; our jeans bottoms

were soaked, we couldn't stop laughing.  
She had that capacity for pure joy  
since she was young; I never understood it.

I used to sit on this same bench  
when I started writing, with a blue pen  
and yellow legal pad. Those first stories

rushed crudely toward happy endings,  
but touched the same themes that haunt me now. I  
have them all in a box under my bed.

I'd bring a loaf of bread for the ducks;  
I could swear that fat brown one by the tree  
was here twenty years ago. The way the sun

unrolls like a carpet across the water  
(as if inviting us away somewhere),  
is just like she and I saw on the ocean,

which I guess must have been totally still,  
with a sailboat in the distance, like that one.  
Our feet froze all along the highway:

she kept her roof open the whole time.  
I believed about half of her ramble:  
how doing a generous thing every day

made her happy, how walking a mile alone  
every evening brought her mind to stillness.  
Something about telling this all to you

makes me happy. Perhaps relief that my mind  
has never been *quite* as morbid as hers,

or that we never slept together.

But I think it's something kinder.  
It's not that I can always remember her  
at the vineyards, slightly drunken, relaxed.

She was a dozen different women,  
and I remember every one of them.  
We got adjacent rooms at the hotel;

I lay awake wondering what she was thinking.  
I think it's the feeling she projected,  
even if part of it was a façade,

that wherever you are, there's always a way  
to get better: maybe just telling yourself the  
story helps to make it partly true

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# Dedication

This year's journal is dedicated to all those who lost their lives to the Covid-19 virus. The pandemic has devastated communities all across the world and we offer our condolences to everyone who had to suffer through these terrible conditions. Events like this serve to remind us how precious our lives, our families, and our friends truly are.

## Commitment to Anti-Racism

The faculty and staff of *Penumbra* stand in unity with communities of color, who have long been the victims of systemic racism, violence, and murder. We will not allow those assassinated by police brutality and white supremacy to be forgotten. With a heavy heart, we remember George Floyd, Auhmed Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, as well as the victims of the Atlanta spa shootings, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Soon Chung Park, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Paul Andre Michels, Delaina Ashley Yaun, and Elcias R. Hernandez-Ortiz. We also turn our minds to the lesser known victims, the ones who are taken away each day, but whose stories do not appear on the national news. Even though we may not know their names, their absence will be felt throughout the world.

We owe these people fundamental changes in our local, state, and national governments to espouse equality for all and root out systemic racism. We are outraged by the acts of police brutality that continue to be committed against communities of color and we support the efforts of protesters to reveal and rebuke the legacies of white supremacy from our core national ideologies.

Racist systems have long been present in the publishing industry and we are committed to breaking racist publishing processes and standards. We are dedicated to promoting, highlighting, and celebrating the work of Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian American, LGBTQIA+ writers and artists and all groups marginalized by systems of hate and oppression. We make this commitment today, tomorrow, and always to diversify our publications and uproot oppressive practices and ideologies that attempt to silence marginalized groups. *Penumbra* rejects those attempts at silencing and offers a space to amplify the voices of the oppressed.