

SWEET 16

POETRY

110 Poems from 70 Poets
4 Visual Poems

ASTROLOGY

Zodiac Arcana

8 BOOK REVIEWS

INTERVIEW & CHAPBOOK PREVIEW

Rob Carney

GATEFOLD

Collage Poems by
May Swenson & Visual
Review by L.I. Henley



SUGAR
HOUSE
REVIEW

#30

2025, VOL. 17, ISSUES 1 & 2



SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

DEAR SUGAR READERS & CONTRIBUTORS,

The life of a literary magazine should be measured in dog years (if you've been on the staff of one, you know what we mean). Wonderful mags come and go, which can be both sad and necessary. These projects are essentially small businesses that usually don't make a profit and require a lot of work; energy; and, almost always, skilled, volunteer labor. In short, they are difficult to sustain.

We'll admit there have been times when we felt like we should be done. But in this moment, with everything going on, we're happy to be able to help get poetry out and about. And while it's definitely not everything that needs to be done, it is something meaningful and positive amidst so much negativity.

We say all of that to express true **gladness and gratitude that *Sugar House Review* is around to celebrate 16 years of poetry and community with this Sweet 16 issue.** Huge and many thank-yous to all our past and present contributors and staff, who created something bigger than the sum of this little mag's parts.

And because we are long-time fans of May Swenson and delighted to have her work in this issue, we offer a special thank you to Dr. Paul Crumbley, emeritus professor of our alma matter, Utah State University. His advocacy for Swenson's works assured she and her poetry will stay alive in literary studies and conversation.

Who knows how many years *Sugar House Review* has left, but let's make 'em count.

Natalie Padilla Young, Co-founder & Editor in Chief

Nano Taggart, Co-founder & Editor

A FEW THINGS TO NOTE



Starting in 2026, we will move to a slightly different subscription model. We will still publish two issues a year with one issue being more traditional lit mag content, while the other will be a chapbook from our expanding Microdose series. This coming spring will be Rob Carney's chapbook of writing exercises and accompanying poems (see excerpt on page 72).

Shipping and printing costs have risen enormously, especially in the last few years. Because shipping is significantly cheaper via our mail house and we want to keep subscription prices down, **new subscriptions will now begin with the upcoming issue, not the current issue.** Single issues will remain available for purchase at any time.



We are looking for more readers and someone to help with social media. Reach out via email if you're interested: editors@sugarhoureview.com

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WATCHING *JURASSIC PARK* IN THE SECOND TRUMP ERA

for Elizabeth Anne Bliss

Sometimes you're the T-Rex, sometimes
you're the goat.
Sometimes you're the gluttonous triceratops,

sometimes the botanist up to her armpits
in shit, sometimes
the vegetarian teen who screams and screams.

Sometimes you climb the electric fence anyway,
knowing how power halts a body.
Rest high in a tree's cradle, keep going.

Clasp comfort when it comes, not from the guy
in the cool hat, or even
Jeff Goldblum, bless his chaotic socks,

but because on this island authored in wonder
and greed, all the teeth, even
the rex's roaring fangs, belong

to tough-skinned fems who don't truck
with extinct rules, and the raptors,
those clever girls who carry the sequels,

wield their adamant talons,
to open the steel-plated motherfucking door.



FEAR OF BEING TOUCHED

God of prey.
God of the overgrown
lizards. God of another
anxiety—the waterfall, it turns
out, is dead. God of the tractor trailers
becoming Joshua trees. Memory becoming
road. God of our swollen bellies in the Black Hills
back then, snow on the trees instead of spring. God
of paper mills, of bruise. Of seeing the fish form a wall
so that the crab can't escape. God of grizzlies running toward
gunshots hoping for deer. God, doesn't it make you dream?

WHAT SKULL

Easter in Spring Creek Canyon,
the same lessons over and over.
What skull was that? What dream
did I wake up from in the middle
of the Bob Marsh Wilderness,
again? So many insects hiding
beneath the horse's winter coat:
the lone wasp, one merry, pink
grasshopper. You don't believe
me, but the snow panics the
rabbitbrush so that it disperses
into seed. I wasn't ready then
and I wasn't ready now. Whale
fall or what skull, *it was supposed
to be a cow*. I said I was leaving
behind flowers. The flowers
and the door to the flower
shop. Said I was leaving
behind memory, the places
where deer go to sleep.

IF SUPERIOR HAD FEET (FIRE IN BEND)

I don't know if I wear earrings when I miss you,
if the desert sun has spent the summer snow
into sunken caldera, or if there's room for October

here. I'm not sure if we're supposed to plough
through peeled shades of uprooted speech
or wait. I still don't know. If iris and powder

make periwinkle or if Superior has feet, will she
sink into wrought iron mauve then melt? Will
she polish her toes by the Ore Dock, again?

I don't know how many cities stand between us.
Eighteen, I'd guess. But if you ask me about
Wednesday, about greenish gray and rotting hue,

it's your eyes resembling Monday and the moon
underneath. Collisions of electric thistle, fire
engine rust and avocado, but you leave in morning.

With maybes in mollusks, hope in milk opal and
Bend, gone smudged up my shins. The trouble
with bookshelves and doorways and Oregon

is love. So now everything's sixty seconds spent
watching you parallel park. That snow too soon
and smoke across your back like cirrus clouds.

Everything man-made sculptures like borrowing
fiction from the Columbia River Gorge, and
strangers from Texas, but Stella all the time.

Now everything's mismatched buttons on a lamp
shade. Like present tense, Quaker Oats, and getting
what you want. Optimism in Thai food and paddle

boarding on a lake that used to be a river or something
like that because I don't even know if you're hanging
pictures of Smith Rock anymore. And now everything's

East Highway 20 and mountains still covered we didn't
try climbing when all we had were Sperry's, Point Butte
and *Orange Is the New Black*, but you're sleeping and if

Superior had feet, she would be stomping the hull
of Italian engine, two million pounds of board and
light spilling out onto the lakebed. For months I thought

I remembered waking up to Indiana Jones chasing men
through the streets of Cairo and you turning the fan
towards me.

JOHN BLAIR

MIDNIGHT & ALL

Your mountains are worn to humble,
and so you wait as one does, fading
into the small wees, mind soldiering on
without you, voices making cases, making
hay from gold, and the best you can manage

is to listen and try not to argue when they
tell you how the small sounds in the dark
are everything that's been taken from you
and the howling of the trucks on the far
highway is everything you've given away

and that glow, so dim, is just the moon
flirting vulval in its shadows, tongue
parting the curtains and laving the cool
oyster of your ear, tide in, tide out,
the morning far off but coming in a roar

of relentless, stalking wakeful through
the wet streets, talking to itself in the lunatic
language of mutter about what you owe
and what you earn and what you simply
cannot in this life keep as it shoulders

its way through the day-peep, the early-bright,
more mountain than valley, more shout
than shudder, full of promises made in all
good faith like windows in the house of God
opening one by one onto the broken light.

MOON EATS SUN

From the building's growing cavity, people
bleed toward the hour.

Everyone whispers as if frightened.

Metal egret legs sink into clay, rust-colored
spines crosshatch the sky.

In the movie *Ladyhawke*, Michelle Pfeiffer
falls from the window, screams

like a bird, becomes a bird. When I think
"eclipse," I hear that shrill mechanical

wail, my mother in childbirth
while the sun tarnishes and my sister is born.

All of us in darkened glasses, sight
inverted, rising anew.

Maybe this is the end of what we know.
Umbilical cord cauterized on both ends.



SECOND SUMMER

In the cool room, papered strangers
insist you into new light.

I focus on a cobweb where the walls meet
whose relic spider I imagine

riding her invisible line toward
an invisible time—and me,

bloodless as the moon,
tethered to you like a tide.

All night, the sky props open its pale eye.
I map your ebb and flow and pace

your breath while out the window,
maples suction confidence

from the earth's last summer
warmth. I am a husk,

you are autumn corn
from which I've peeled away.

All night I rattle myself against
the wind's melody-turned-chorus

for reveling neighborhood dogs.
Joy is seldom pure. For me,

it's like the moon: waxing into its shadow,
shouldering its burgeoning ghost.

AFTERNOON IN A ROCKING CHAIR

Against roaming shadows, the horizon
is steady, mute as fish,

spent as history. Overhead
spreads that metastasizing skin

of sky towards which
greens and reds, the steaming lawn,

the pert and dying vetch, the twitching
legs and will-be clock, each

individuated blade of grass,
gravitate with guts and fission.

There, there now.
Not a cloud in sight—

or is it all-cloud?
Never mind.

FIFTH AND FINAL FUGUE

Robin searches the grass,
checks her blue eggs.

My grief is less
than a smashed shell.

The sky by night unrolls
its sequined mat.

I am carried along
in the world's basket
woven of last season's
stiffened seagrass.

Across the field,
Dogwood waves
its white. Spring's
horizon descends.

Petals flutter to the ground.
I flutter to the ground.

Clover exhales
and bows, heavy.

There is grim comfort,
at last, in being beat.

FOUNDATION

On this one swatch of earth, foundation
stones press grass. A place for the living left
its footprint. Can we go back to correct
mistakes? Survive bitter elders, excisions
of rare tumors? I have been repairing my house
for years. After I seal chimney cracks, a window
begins to leak, leaving a river of stains
on the papered wall. Crossing fields intimidates
the geese. I round the perimeter where park
meets wood, peer from the edge, transfixed
by trees blending into one vision. Think of them
all—covering the face of the planet beside negative
space created from desert and ocean. There
must be as many leaves as stars.

ABOVE CEDARS

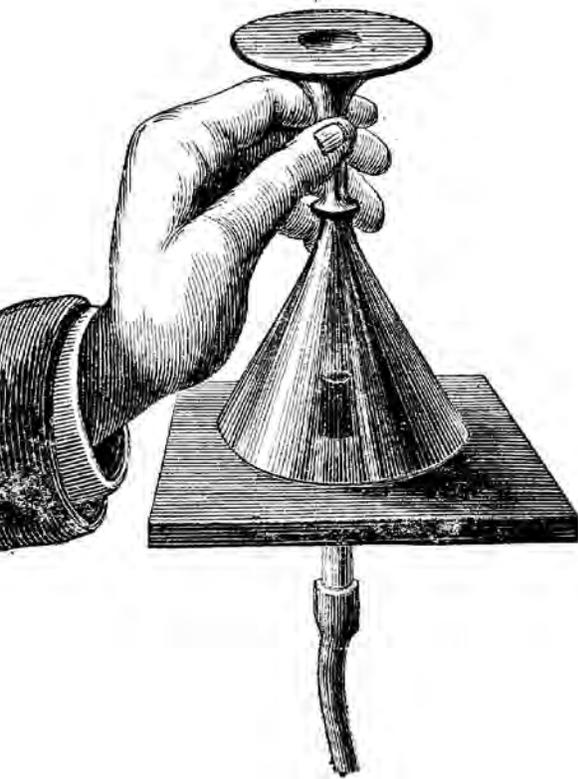
—*Summer, New Hope, PA*

So dry the river bottom
shows its teeth.
We didn't want her
to kill the bees, but it's not
our house. She feared we'd
blame her for a sting,
Besides the green pool,
pet smells and vines crawling
over rock ledges, she warns me
of the sensitive septic.
At night air barely moves
through the corridors.
We unwind on the terrace,
long for two moons
looking down on the trees
and other people's homes.
You can never be yourself
waking in a stranger's bed.



ANONYMOUS POEM FROM YOU-KNOW-WHO

Sorry the margarita is the wrong
loose exotic pet, that gently
removing the juices didn't do it for you,
that this hedonist's delight was slightly
jilted by tequila off the wrong shelf.
Sometimes a dewdrop, sometimes an avalanche.
For some reason, gratuitous makes me think
of sex buffeted by ocean winds in the afternoon.
Without the ocean none of us
would be this wet in public,
this exposed to bright witchcraft, and certainly
you wouldn't be stressed over the pressure
inside the inflatable flamingo.
I apologize for the bitten donut, the too much
dip on the flimsy chip, the trip
to Rwanda that didn't quite work out.
But how about that game last night?
With a runner on second we thought
the lovers would consume each other.
I guess that's why they play the game. Still,
this world survives by eating itself.
I'll start another batch. Perhaps this time
the tequila will be less hell-bent
and more like a kinky thug.
Perhaps.



ONE EVENING OF THE BRAIN

Then one day, in darkness
they fail to start the movie.
Above, your matriculated loved ones
tinker in a milky nebula.
Your piñata calibrations are off
but still worth fumbling through
and the smashroom looks lovely tonight.
You can relate to the disciple who said
tell me exactly what I need to know.
Luckily, you are unaware
of your biggest concern, overhead
in the dark clouds. Nonetheless
you fidget. By the time the movie starts
you are elsewhere, tits deep
in a basil martini but still
missing that substantial crunch
of immaculate perception.
Whirligig. Shed brassiere. Stupor.
As usual, it's difficult to penetrate
what she said, and
what she meant to say.

TANNER CRUNELLE

SAMSKARA / ARS POETICA

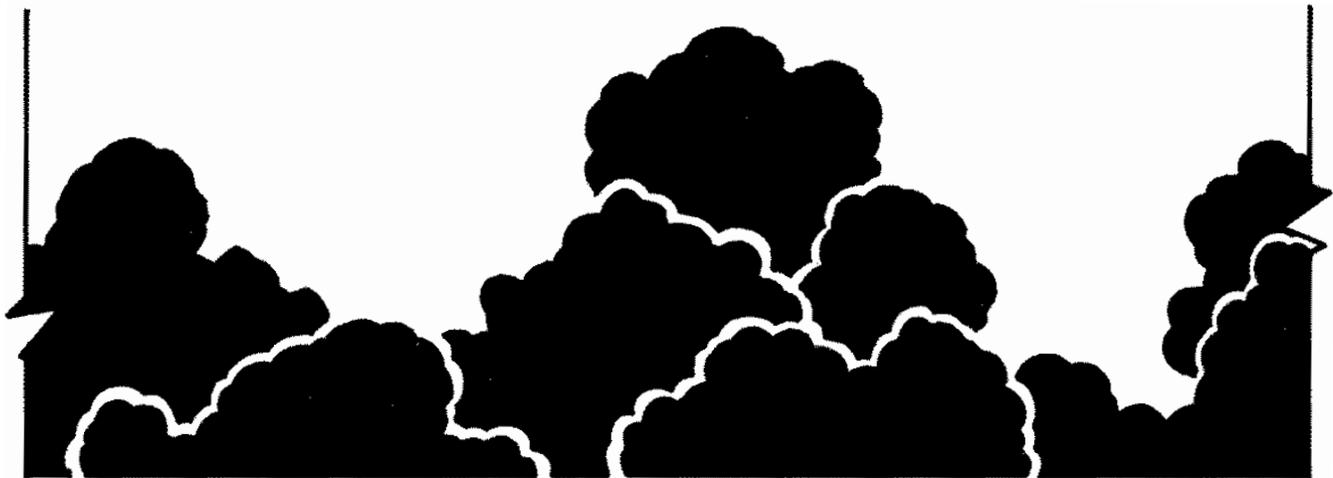
Stylus, style us a new
scrawl: my characters—
remake them: re record: wreck
this old track—vinyl tarmac
its black &—Joni's white bars,
free that way—this
way the edge belays to empty
shaft: thick prick, inked point:
you once turned me: on me
now, the rupture needle need
I'll skipping—script again
go in on a new line.



KITE SHEPHERD

IT'S CROSS COUNTRY

It's motorcycle trips
from an Odyssey window.
It's rapture. It's wielding
the picnic blanket.
It's mysticism as radio.
And when the grease of a fucking calzone
burns your chin, it's that
you are suddenly unreliable, abject. As if
the window rattled you to sleep
so you could slash up today's
basal & dorsal, as if the right part of you
would just plop down inside the whale.
But instead it plods out
to a reservoir at night,
beyond the car park,
basically mowing down highway flowers
just to light a Pall Mall.
And there's nothing new there.
Just dark water, star bits of Styrofoam—
mmm, still cold, after all your waiting for it—



BRAD ANDERSON

HAIL

You could feel it building,
that tense calm in the air.
It was one of those summer evenings
and a dry line had formed up
moving through the state,
running southwest to northeast.
Thunderstorms were likely.

It had been a good evening for her
but like most evenings
she was tired and ready for bed
by nine o'clock.
It was her dementia.
Her brain had to work so hard
to understand things,
to follow what was happening.
Words lost their meaning,
particularly nouns or the names of things.
I could say "Look at that cardinal."
but unless she could see it
she wouldn't know what I was talking about.
When we talked with others
she would usually grow silent,
and would tell me later,
"I thought everyone was speaking a foreign language."

This evening was a good evening.
After dinner I did household chores
while she sat down to listen to music
and play Mahjong on her iPad.
Watching TV was no longer an option,
it would drain her trying to follow along
but somehow she could match the colorful tiles.
It was one of the stranger things about her dementia.

She headed upstairs to bed
about the same time a thunderstorm rolled in.
I like thunderstorms
so I went out on the front porch to watch.
When it started to rain the tension
the air held released,
the sound of rain washing it away,
filling the air with calm.
The rain fell harder, and harder,
and suddenly the sky seemed to lighten.
Then, it started to hail.
Nickel- and dime-size hail
pounding the roof like a thousand hammers.

That's when I heard her
running down the stairs hollering,
"There's something hitting the house,
there's something hitting the house!"
When she got to the front door and looked out
I told her, "It's hailing."
She looked confused
so I picked up a hailstone and showed it to her,
"What is it?"
"It's hail. It's rain that's frozen hard."
"That's amazing. I've never seen that before.
What's it called again?"
I said,
"Hail, my love, hail."

COSCINOMANCY

—An ancient form of soothsaying using a sieve and shears

The Koskinomantis spun ancient sieves woven
with horsehair or grass, chanted a spell to conjure
a demon-whisper from an invisible world, believing

occult breath swayed the vessel and revealed the future.
Do the orange and green Tupperware colanders
in my mother's cupboard have anything to do with divination?

If I hold them between two fingers or suspend them
from the jaws of open shears, twisting by a thread
looped around the handles above the kitchen floor,

will they answer my question of where the 91 years
slipping through her mind will lead her?
The Sieve of Eratosthenes sifts out composite numbers

multiplied by two and three until only the primes stand out—
my age of 59 does not fall through the mesh.
Nor does a memory she repeats to me from 1941

about walking ten blocks midday from school to eat "dinner"
in the multi-brick pioneer home on Fifth West in Provo.
My grandmother, hair in a bun, wearing a housedress,

apron, stockings, black shoes, sets a hot meal at the table
with a bowl of fruit as her youngest fights with the older sisters
for a place, grabs the last roll, and is out the door, nine years old,

jaunty—following paths to dances, college, marriage, children,
travel, widowhood—until she now watches traffic out the window,
returning over and over to that shadow of a noon hour:

Her mother's blue enameled colander draining plums in the porcelain sink.

**Koskinomantis—a diviner who uses sieves*

LINDSEY MARIE SIFERD

EVENING

clover blankets the garden and the light is low

i suddenly remember the summer mike and i went swimming in a lake upstate

when we walked
back down the mountain,
a soft, steady rain began to fall

if parataxis is two unrelated things, then
my brother died. it was october.

or: it was october. my brother died.

then hypotaxis:

october held the door open for his death to come rushing in

a whoosh,
a flash of green,
then a fast, quiet shutting

MORE TABLES, MORE CHAIRS

when we left the funeral home
they gave us my brother's ashes
in a box meant for a birthday cake

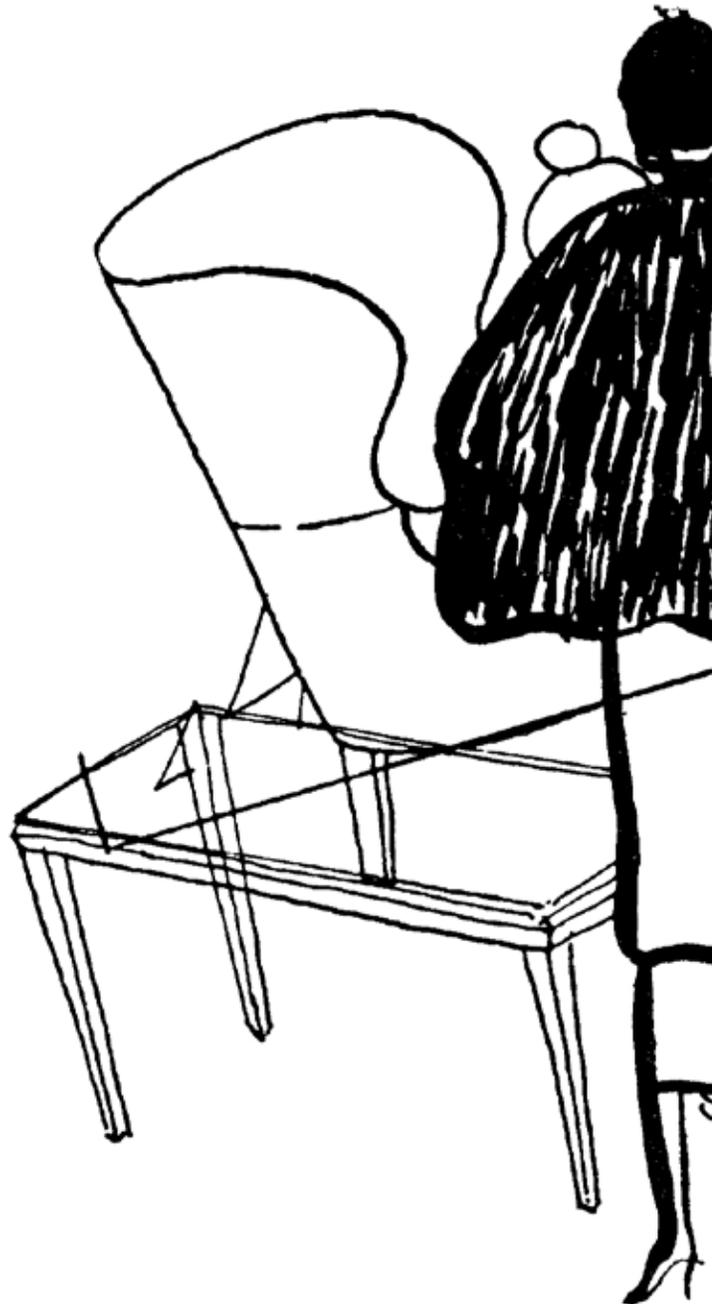
my parents and i laughed with our quick teeth

when a brother dies there is no word
for what a sister becomes

instead,
a pulse rushes in to fill the space, like straining
to hear a sound in the grass

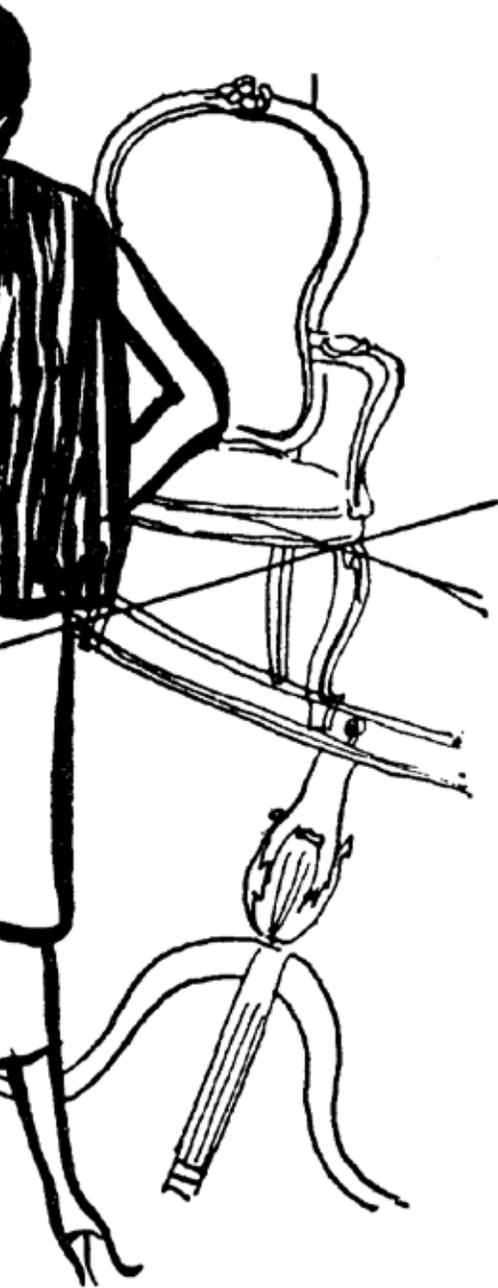
sorting through my brother's apartment
in the days after,
his t-shirts were soft and smelled good

we found no needles, no sharp objects at all



SELF-PORTRAIT AS THESEUS

There are years with no art in them
 They are back-to-back
 like bullets
 no one's immune to
 Theseus remembers them by the single-blade
 razor
 around his shirttails
 scoring
 the whole place
It is very embarrassing
 His mother's Carrara marble with an artless
 Cy Twombly
 In this version he is trapped by a child's
 cursive homework
 and he tries shaving the skin
 to alabaster
 but it does no good
 He is the lone survivor of his life
 In this version he escapes with a cheat sheet
 in hand
 because somewhere a boy made of string
 loves him
 so the boy leaves a trail
 Theseus destroys into
 a garden
 And there is art now
 And there are
 hoofbeats
 And bulls swallow
 the field behind their house
like wildfire



HELEN OF TROY, 1993 BY MARIA ZOCCOLA

(Scribner, 2025)

REVIEW BY KATHERINE INDERMAUR



In Maria Zoccola's debut collection, *Helen of Troy* of Greek mythological infamy is recast in the humid glow of rural Tennessee. Caught in 1993 between second- and third-wave feminism, this titular *Helen of Troy* charges in with a caustic, hilarious, and unmistakable voice dynamic enough to drive the entire book. Watching *Jurassic Park*, she rhapsodizes

i was cheering that damn lizard on while it chased down all those folks with their miserable problems and unhappinesses and inane little cruelties shared over the dinner table like it's amazing how you spent thirty dollars on blue jeans instead of getting the vacuum fixed it stomped them flat like good night like sweet dreams and sayonara

These persona poems encompass the story of a woman reinventing herself through Zoccola's reinvention of classic myth, reminiscent of other mythological contemporizing by women like Paisley Rekdal's *Nightingale*, Anne Carson's canonical *Autobiography of Red* or even Madeline Miller's bestselling novels *Circe* and *The Song of Achilles*.

Myths give us approachable ways into our culture's narratives and the narratives of our time. As Roberto Calasso wrote in *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, "Myths are beautiful muddles and wonderful mirrors in the tangled funhouse of literature where we might glimpse ourselves once more, again and again." Because we use myths to continually glimpse ourselves, to remake mythological figures as Zoccola does in *Helen of Troy, 1993* is to layer and entangle personal endeavors of meaning-making with the broader arc of storytelling that is human history, and women's place in it.

Traditionally, Helen of Troy is a tragic and hapless figure. In the myth's prevailing version, the Trojan War begins when Helen—the most beautiful woman in the world—is abducted from her home and husband in Sparta and taken to marry the Trojan prince Paris. The tragedy does not begin there, however. Helen is conceived when Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, takes on the form of a swan to rape human Leda (famously depicted in Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan"). Greek myth is full of women

like Leda and Helen, pawns in the games of men and gods. In the 2024 *New York Times* article "The Women of Greek Myths Are Finally Talking Back," Alexandra Alter writes, "Female characters [of Greek mythology] have either been relegated to the fringes, or filtered through the male gaze, depicted as helpless victims, sexual objects, and war prizes. ... it makes sense that women are excavating ancient stories and giving new life to female characters whose perspectives have been elided." Zoccola's *Helen of Troy, 1993* is an assertive part of this movement to vocalize and introduce new agency to these ancient female figures, though it does not require previous knowledge about Greek myth to enjoy the contemporary narrative it presents.

The best way to introduce the book's humorous and personable approach might simply be with a litany of its titles: "helen of troy's new whirlpool washing machine," "helen of troy catalogues her pregnancy cravings," "helen of troy avoids her school reunion," "helen of troy cranks the volume on 'like a prayer' in the ballet studio parking lot," "helen of troy runs the station wagon into a ditch," and "helen of troy reigns over chuck e. cheese," among others. This tremendous and entertaining debut manages both erudition and approachable ingenuity across its 68 pages.

Amid its Southern setting, *Helen of Troy, 1993* triumphantly sings with warmth and wit. Here rural Appalachia is smothering, inescapable—much like the old plot points of myth. In "helen of troy makes peace with the kudzu," Zoccola writes:

*i walked out into the mass of it, boots
to my knees against the coiled mines
of copperheads, my mother behind me,
watching the sky for a white spread
of wings. i grew my whole life in a house
death longed to touch with one soft finger,
and when i looked out at the building wave,
i thought, do it.*

Here Zoccola complicates the assumption that the women of Greek mythology were helpless or uninteresting simply because things kept happening to them: they got married off, they got raped, they got pregnant, they got murdered. This Helen has a dynamic relationship with fate—*do it*, she dares. It is less what happens to Zoccola's Helen that makes her interesting—a lackluster affair that ends in a Perkins restaurant, a daughter's friend's birthday party at a Chuck E. Cheese—and more her own psychic vitality.

Helen of Troy, 1993 insists on the storytelling of the overlooked.

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ENTERTAINING DEBUT
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ACROSS ITS 68 PAGES.



In the book's opening poem, "helen of troy feuds with the neighborhood," helen declares—no, demands—"i want you silent. / i want you listening to me." The book's most enchanting passages run away with the ecstasy of their own Southern song to further demand such listening. "helen of troy runs to piggly wiggly" croons:

*... beloved land of madonna on the speakers. country
of women with cursive lists. everyone i've ever known nurses
their children from these shelves, pushing loads of accreting
weight,
everyone i've yet to meet. i high-step through the aisles,
nursemaid to bread loaves, coupons purse-holstered and
waiting.
sing, muse, of the manager's special, two-for-one on yogurt
cups...*

This synthesis of highfalutin ode with the Piggly Wiggly-quotidian produces not only the pleasure of surprise, but the joyous realization that good storytelling is less a product of plot than of voice. Zoccola's Helen emanates an insistent joie de vivre that churns right on through the plot of her life, no matter how uninspiring it may at first glance appear.

The book gives voice not only to Helen, but to the women of the neighborhood in a Greek chorus-esque crown of sonnets interspersed throughout. These poems color in the landscape around a fictional Sparta, Tennessee, and provide some of the context for the greater story at work in Helen's family. In "the spartan women discuss helen of troy," the collective explains, "a girl was born who was not a swan. / thick-boned, earth-bound, she looked every minute / over her shoulder for the real life / she was promised, but her neck was too short / and she could

not see it." Though Helen could not see it, the reader now can.

Throughout the collection, Helen wrestles with this lack of control she, a nineties suburban American housewife, has over the trajectory of her life. See the unwieldy nature of "helen of troy catalogues her pregnancy cravings":

*bags of gummy sharks. ice cream, like a lot of ice cream,
cartons of fudge ripple i pound in one sitting
with a spoon like a dirt mover, scoop scoop
down the hole, layers of white ounces plugged
right into the skin, who was that one wizard in salem
they squashed to death in a tofu press,
giles somebody, they just kept piling it on,
and that sucker smiled his bluebird smile
and asked for more. cheesecake. jelly rolls.*

Even the direction of the poem's garrulousness seems to ultimately slither out of Helen's grasp. There is reason to rejoice for this slipperiness, though. How else would we get to "that one wizard in salem" and the other figures populating Helen's inner life? How else would we relinquish, finally, our own desires and simply "listen"?

Helen of Troy, 1993 is a disarming and marvelous book for every kind of reader, from Greek mythophile to those of us looking for a laugh. Zoccola's poetry renders a joyride of a character out of an old myth and, like the joyride Helen takes just before wrecking the family station wagon, "why shouldn't your toes itch / on that pedal so sweet / and easy you might as well / be that sugar from the movies?" Have fun reading about one of the world's great tragedies? Per the dare Helen herself makes, *do it*.

URGENT

Every day's mail brings stacks
of envelopes urgent pleas to save
the *Monarchs* the *gray wolf* the *grizzly*
the *rhinoceros* the *Emperor penguin*
the *children* the *children* the *children*

I carry my despair into the garden
I dig roots of nandina rip euonymus and vinca
until my fingers crack I layer compost
and dig holes for goldenrod and Joe Pye
and ironweed those old ditch plants

that used to blaze at summer's end I feed
the soil despite my stiff old knees my aching back
the red clay crusting my arms sweat into beds
of boneset and aster pray grief
and egg-fragile hope over penstemon

and butterfly weed layer sedges and fern
beneath the old oaks to soften caterpillar falls
work as if every undisturbed cocoon
could save the world as if
I built an ark of seedhead and winter leaf

CLOSURE

It doesn't end well: the wolf's belly sliced
and stitched back up around a load of stones,

enough weight to carry her down a well. More stone
than wolf, most likely all stone. A stone with blood

wrung from it like a mother. Me, I ask
for daughters with teeth, made for their desire

to tear. In every version the daughter rips through
the mother like a stone forced from a wolf's throat.

TAKE COVER

You admire a tree of anchors.

I know, you say, how water works.

It's colder than I thought.

An anchor pins us into something stationary.

Gold spills from our fingers for months.



MY NAME IS MY CHILDREN

At the party where I hugged a woman
 who I thought was my mom
 but wasn't,
 an older woman pulled back
 the sleeve of her green gown,
 showing the table
 the numbers on her arm.
 Pale ink near the blueness
 of her veins.

"Look," my grandma said.

Silence settled in the empty
 chairs at the table
 as the party went on around us.

I snaked through the crowd
 and exited the hall, rushing up
 the stairs of the building
 until there were no more stairs.
 A broken door to the rooftop
 crooked on one loose hinge
 flapped indecent against the night.

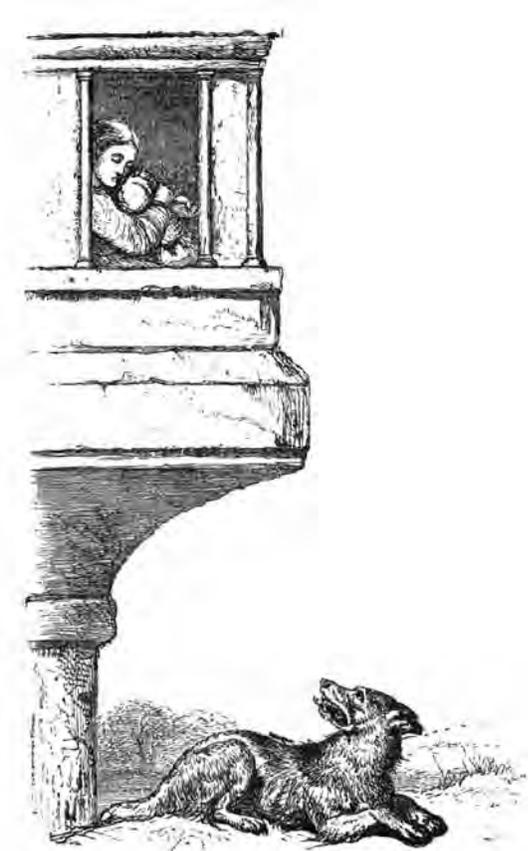
My name was on a list
 in one of the earliest nightmares
 I can remember. I hid
 behind a sycamore maple
 in my backyard. Its winged seeds
 twirled down from the boughs,
 slicing the air. I had nothing.
 No family anymore. Only
 my name. The tree hissed at me.

It was history. The broken door.
 Loose on one hinge.
 Flapping indecent against the night.

Now I claw at the air as if it were
 a curtain I could part and enter.
 When the last of a fire bowed
 toward me, I did not lean forward.
 I did not offer my spirit
 like a wick possible of flame.

My great grandmother died of Alzheimer's.
 Years later, I discovered a postcard
 she penned, yellowed,
 scrawled in the fervor of her disease.

"*Hello my name is,*" she wrote, but her name
 did not follow, only the names of her children,
 and the names of her children's children—
 names like knots across a rope.
 A rope deep within a pitch-dark well, swaying.



CENTO FOR MOURNING

It happens I have let loose this morning:
this is the writing, the speaking of the dream,
and hours that are ample and shimmering as seas.
I act as though I am brave, because
I am the stone step,
and the negatives slipped into a plain brown envelope,
the light from the dead star.
There's less and less of me and more and more of something else.
In order to recover I sit at the desk studying the Order of
the Flames of Discipline—
shall I rest a moment in green instructions?
There is a time after what comes after...
...throw horror down the well and wish on it.
For months now all I've wanted is the blessing
of the dead:
what you thought was the sound of the deer drinking
at the end of each ordinary day.

With gratitude to Deborah Digges, Arthur Sze, Rosemary Tonks, Mark Doty, Jane Kenyon, Marie Howe, Victoria Chang, Frank X. Gaspar, Lynn Emanuel, Li-Young Lee, Marvin Bell, Jack Gilbert, Sandra McPherson, Dorianne Laux, Larry Lewis, Gabrielle Calvocoressi, and Ellen Bass

JANUARY, JUST SOUTH OF CHICO

*Maybe loneliness is just another of those
veils, like grief, through which the world
as I thought I knew it remains visible, only
less so.*

—Carl Phillips

Not exactly
the child's pink plastic chair
centered under long-stemmed satellite dishes,
not the rows and rows
of winter walnut trees,
white necks cowed in thick brown bark,
not so much the milky, slow-moving silt
of the Sacramento River,
as each lone, rusted bell
tracing the El Camino Real,
the high jangle of a mandolin
through radio static,
every road sign warning:
Narrow Bridge—
mostly, corralled by barbed wire,
one muddy pony.



THE PINE

The Rochester suburbs filled
With dandelions in the spring, fields
Stained their acidic yellow. Months
Passed and car doors froze shut.

I chipped away with keys, yanking hard.
A stranger laughed, saying I'd better lick
My way through. An evergreen conceals
My new neighbor's porch, bristles shuddering

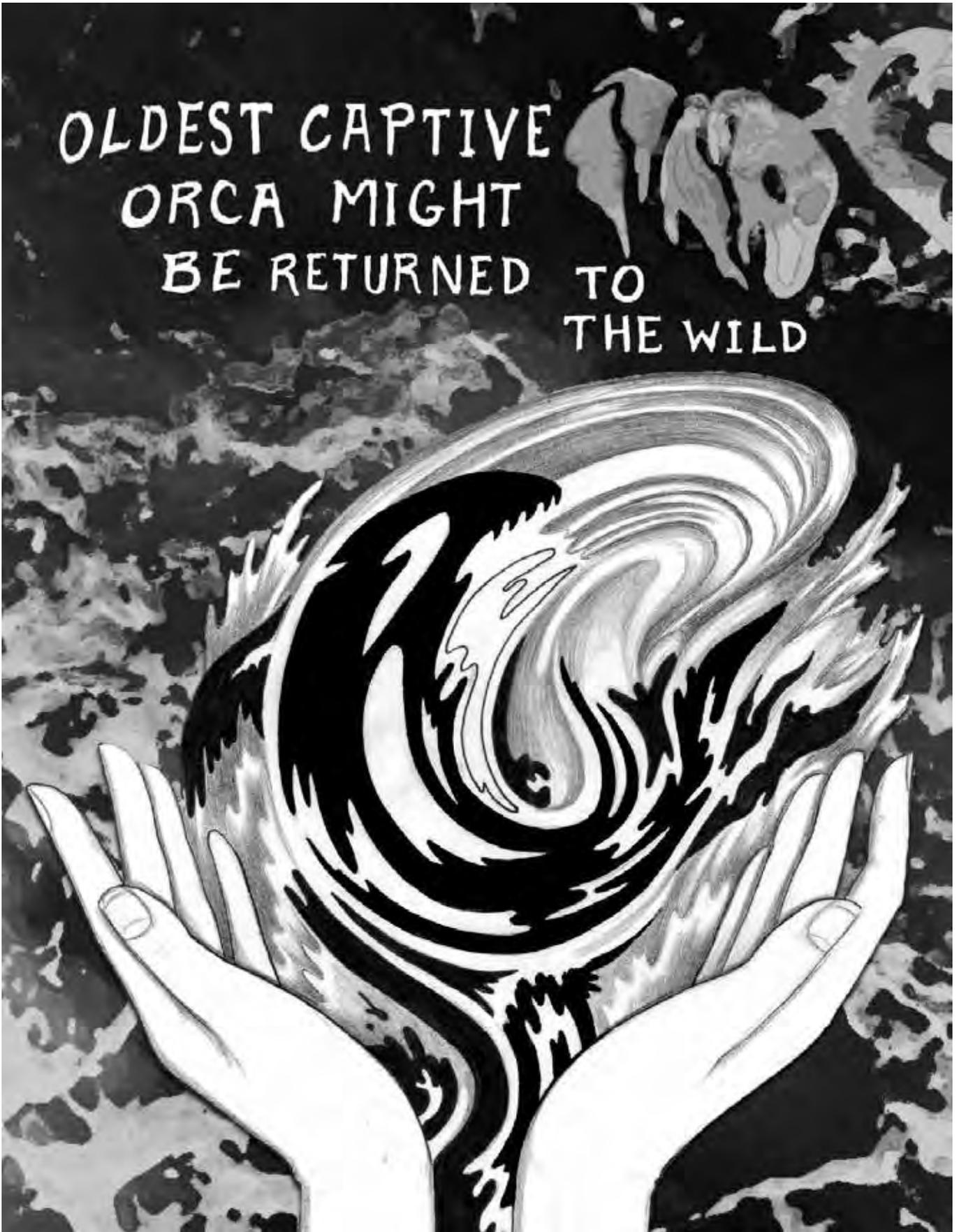
In the wind. The sky was overcast,
Dandelions long dead: the grayness called
For therapy with fluorescent lamps.
But the tree remained dull green,

Providence casting its routine magic.
The snow came in gorgeous
Flakes at first, later frigid gusts.
One night, a white owl landed on a branch,

Shedding an entire season's achievement.



OLDEST CAPTIVE
ORCA MIGHT
BE RETURNED TO
THE WILD





a petal

plucked



& superglued back to her flower



RELEASED

after half a century

somersaulting her body

applauded & then

slapped

into the
brimming



not quite a belonging but an oldness anew



beak parted
whistling for
distant family or
whoever
else

is out there swashbuckling through



& through
the fingerless blue

THE ATMOSPHERE IS NOT A PERFUME IT IS ODORLESS
BY MATTHEW COOPERMAN
(Free Verse Editions, 2024)

REVIEW BY MICHAEL MCLANE



In the notes for *the atmosphere is not a perfume it is odorless*, Matthew Cooperman describes his newest collection as a “curiously durational project,” a twenty-year work built on odes that explore the vulnerabilities and complicities of being American in the twenty-first century. These odes act as the collection’s tender, beating heart as well as its sedimentary and interrogative core. Questions are key to the idiolect of the poems.

Their exploration of the roles of

difference, activism and love in modern American life offer an accretion and momentum that sustain the durational scope of the work and, at times, offer possibility, perhaps even hope, as a counterpoint to the memorial nature of odes.

The scope of Cooperman’s work manifests early in the book. “Snow Globe” introduces us to the poet as a child living in a politically active home in the midst of another profoundly dangerous time for the nation:

*It was January 6, I was six years old, which would’ve made it
the 60s, and it was snowing
Snow filling trash cans like ashtrays. Ma and Pa
distantly fighting the giant snowstorm.*

This is one of the oldest poems in the collection, written in 2003 or 2004 in response to the hubris of the Bush administration. Cooperman admits the choice of January 6th was made at the time primarily for a kind of numerological alliteration, but the prescience of this choice is unnerving and haunts the rest of the collection as the far more insidious actions of the Trump administrations come to bear on the poems. This snow globe of childhood is predictive of coming storms that are multilayered and multivalent—from the tumult of the 1960s, in which both of Cooperman’s parents were politically active, to literal weather of climate change to the inundation of whiteness that led to the insurrection of January 6, 2021. This progression is confirmed in the subsequent poem, “No Ode,” where:

*On a Wednesday at the Capitol something did happen, not
the dream
again deferred, not the righteous bear not the know nothing
snake*

just the sickening spell of blood...

The poem weaves in and out of these two periods of monumental shifts in the body politic and violence on both institutional and individual levels. William F. Buckley and Allen Ginsberg are interwoven with 9/11, calving glaciers, and school shootings. The poem asserts and negates, asserts and negates, undercuts itself like a clumsy nation that doesn’t quite earn its ode. So, it is a “No Ode,” a longing to come to terms with atrocity only to find its accretion and recurrence, ending in the acknowledgment:

*This is a history poem This is not true In my country
there is
no history but the lesson we didn’t learn*

Cooperman collects, scours, and recontextualizes these lessons, salvaging bits of wisdom from the eternal return of American hubris and violence. The poems are often iterations of a nation in conversation with one another or talking past one another. Two of the most poignant examples occur in “General Context” and “Major Lure,” poems that apply cut-up and erasure techniques to speeches given by General Douglas MacArthur, including his “Farewell Address to Congress,” in the years immediately following World War II. In “General Context,” he writes:

*Americans never quit, 24/7 openness, we will be prepared to say
something, do things...*

*Our government has kept us within borders, as do
governments
do by law. Part of the American Dream is in the borders,
where they
hover. The best of luck is to be born into some kind of dream.*

This disconnect between sleeplessness and dreaming, paranoia and vigilance continues in “Major Lure,” where:

*One cannot wage war with old soldiers. Under no
circumstances
should their sleeping be disturbed. Our country is now fit
for an ailing king. There is no substitute for the facts...*

Sandwiched between these two remixed warnings from a departing general is the poem “Gun Ode,” which operates with the breakneck speed of its titular character and offers us an ode at its most heartbreaking. What is abundantly clear but goes unsaid is that this is, again, no ode (“No Ode”) in the conventional sense, but an examination of the catalyst for tragedy, a poem to the

THE POEMS ARE OFTEN ITERATIONS OF A NATION
IN CONVERSATION WITH ONE ANOTHER OR
TALKING PAST ONE ANOTHER.

facilitator of odes rather than their recipients. It opens with a reference to Kent State, “a dollar with a gun in its mouth, a daisy with the sun / in its mouth,” as well as a callout to Pete Seeger in the lines “where have all the flowers gone // Gun—what have you done to our bodies?” The rate at which this machine births fascists is exponential in the modern era, as Cooperman understands all too well:

My hands don't fit the bitter hasp

*As in naked and afraid, without means of protection, we were
forced to love and evolve*

*As in, O America, aren't you tired of being an ode, why don't you
ever use your Kevlar® shield?*

O First Responder, thank you also for being America

It is a poem that spares us no violence in its repetitions, its sonic qualities, its product placements and, most of all, in its complicity and sadness:

I can't think of one happy memory ever associated with a gun

Disarm Disarm Disarm Disarm

*If the impulse to destruction is greater than the insight to love
We are doomed to a garden of graves*

If freedom is money spent on guns, what is American grace?

Cooperman can envision a grace beyond fear and armament, and he does so again and again in this collection. Perhaps the most vivid example is in the alternative history he offers in “Country Mulligan,” where the hanging chads of the 2000 election fall differently and we have a President Gore and a “kinder enclosure [...] / the planet turns cooler, greener, bluer [...] / A Moslem spring flowers in poly-Arabian nights / Scheherazadism, Two Stateism, 23andMe goes viral.” All the dead poets and dancers and artists return; Sandy Hook is a place of community rather than mourning; the mass shooter at an Aurora theater finds love rather than profound loneliness. The poem is sad and hopeful, distraught and in love with possibility all at once.

The hope that manifests in bits and pieces in “Country Mulligan” is more fully embodied in “Difference Essay,” a ten-page poem that is simultaneously an ode to difference in all its forms—corporeal, cultural, political—and a study of being the parent of an autistic child, which shapes Cooperman’s understanding of the necessity of difference in American life. In a recent interview with the *Laurel*

Review, Cooperman says of the poem, “atmosphere is a durational project, and that duration has also been the duration of my now eighteen-year-old autistic daughter. So the poem functions as a hinge of sorts. What happens to our country happens to us. And I didn’t really realize what was difference until I saw difference... the disease of homogeneity is actually—at least in my lifetime—an American disease.” Cooperman is unflinching in his indictment of this disease:

*But then I'd come to write of a terrible relentless
sameness. The monochrome in the chromosome, the color
of some and not others. Who is not other in the infinite
catalogue of difference? To be riven is a state. "The shades
of the prison-house close round about us all"*

And he is not alone. Voices and influences accrete as the book moves along, but perhaps nowhere more acutely than “Difference Essay.” In the passage above, he channels Walt Whitman, W.E.B. Du Bois, and philosopher Timothy Morton, whose concept of “hyperobjects” plays a recurring role in this and other books by Cooperman. In the same way that different versions of America talk to each other through these poems so, too, do different versions of the poet converse and illustrate how influences and mentors converge and diverge in these versions of ourselves. Whitman is a constant companion in these poems, as is Ed Dorn. The projective verse and proprioception of Robert Duncan and Charles Olson manifest in Cooperman’s use of the full “field” of the page as well as varying font sizes, colors, and other typographical techniques to score the poems. The result is a piece like “Difference Essay,” a work so layered and polyphonic in its influences that it emulates the differences and possibilities the poet calls for in his nation as well.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that, after the blizzard of violence, schism, and creeping homogeneity of the last twenty American years, Cooperman should offer up the final say of this collection to two poetic forefathers, Pete Seeger and Louis Zukofsky, in a poem called “Bouquet.” It ends on a couplet that ends on an ellipsis that echoes those past tragedies while planting literal and metaphorical hope in a new generation:

*the markings of progress
by hook and drive*

anthem anodyne aloud

*the little hands
the little hands stitch new flowers...*

MADDIE BARONE

REFRAIN

In my mother's eyes: an orchestra:
or more accurately violins with
snapped strings bedridden in irises
wonderfully milked: or
ghostly cymbals
shaking cool-hearted against synapses half-
lit with blinking Christmas lights: either way
the noise crevices against the aching hollowness
of my left ear: leaves a divined ringing: it's
a Thursday: the wintered day folded into un-
leafed assemblages as I watch my mother
remake herself into her favorite
woolen coat: a purple coat: with arms hanging
listlessly: that begins conducting her purple
limbed shell: re-stitching her sinking shoulders:
that slumps fabric pillied and tired: after
nights she cannot bring herself: to sleep:

I know it itches the soft part of her hymned throat:
it produces a sheltered sound: a pierced sound
shaking hands with the birds that leave us for those
textured months: that collapse against my skin: that
bristle in my hands: cold keeping us inside: keeping
my mother stiff and slumped against the window: a
parting that leaves the sky
wanting: that leaves my mother watching the clouds
rolling quietly in: all sound in this glacialed house
just music marked by her slow blinking: mostly
I wonder if she feels the instruments fragmenting
as soon as they're played: bits of broken wood
populating her watered eyes: scattered sheet music
saturating the stage: the instruments flat in all
this discordance: a musician shifting
through the wreck before taking their place
in the audience reflected: back here



A STORY TO POINT AND RUN TO

The bull in the field across from our trailer at Lake Texoma.
I begged you to drive over the cattle guard in the Monte Carlo

so we could get a closer look. I screamed and wouldn't stop
when he looked straight at us, all fur and muscle and those horns.

We knew an animal like that, didn't we? What it could do,
didn't we, Mother? The interior of the car was the color

of blood darkening, even the dash. I thought the bull
would charge us. *Drive, drive, drive fast!* I screamed.

You looked at me like I was someone else's child.
Not yours, not comported, not pretty.

The field was empty. No witnesses to my fit, my fear.
We drove back to the trailer, to Father's freshly caught

fish bubbling in a cast-iron pan, to Sonny and Cher
on the black-and-white TV, to your long, elegant cigarettes

with long, perfect ashes growing longer and longer
in the crystal-cut ashtray as you complained about Sonny's

height and his voice and how he ruined Cher every time
he rubbed against her like a cat on a scratching post.

Little creature. Little man. He was no bull, nothing
like Father. At least you quaked when he came near.

*The title is a variation of Hieu Minh Nguyen's line, "A story to point & run toward"
from the poem "Again, Let Me Tell You What I Know About Trust."*



TRANS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

When I fear for all of us, scattered
across the world like spring flowers

before the caterpillar
treads of tanks, I go

where the wild things
persist: where hummingbirds

jewel themselves
in the chartreuse-violet

of the other sex
and green frogs change

their organs of reproduction
like weather or songs.

I rest in the hum of the honeybee
whose chromosomes are decided

by how often the queen copulates,
I find the bright wonder of

the iridescent dragonfly stick-walking
its thread legs up my arm; all of us rising

from November's wet-leaf death
toward the blue and pink

high cirrus unfurling
against the early dark.

THE WORD

With your eyes blindfolded in silk
I fed ice to the purse of your mouth

and you sucked it and said
with tears bleeding the cloth

I forget the word for this fruit—

Was our first lust
the bondage of everything to names?

you other you fleshhole you grasped thing
the tongue of each knot snugged hard

and the striving—

NANCY TAKACS

DESERT SPRING

for Jan

Crawls up the gray rabbitbrush, leaps into humming, bumbles close and dizzy,
rubbing soft nubs of soon-to-be mustard flowers.

The afternoon coaxes,
breeds lightness, your hands like bunting wings in the greening of amaranth.

Lambs bleat through the bones of our throats. Blue-bellies scatter.
I imagine sleep on the inside of your arm.

Tomorrow we'll listen for our orioles,
who arrive this week from the Baja with their dark hoods and yellow breasts,

her nesting song to him through sage scrub, juniper berries, apricot blossoms:
two flute-notes he flits to, their doubling universe.

VIA PHOENIX

in memoriam for Wendy Barker, who days before her death flew home from Phoenix, after the final reading of her life to a packed house at the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing

I. what is a star in the first place

 and what if one comes
 too close to another
 and is made
 in time and also lightyears
 away
 to form a necklace

nebula what is a lightyear if not
the amount of time
it takes light
from me

 to get to you
and circle around
the sun *do you have days*

I asked you in that recent
 dream

no

 you said
meaning you live outside
 measurement
your voice

 without a note
of regret

II.

 I am flying
 home through the sky
 via Phoenix
 above your beloved hometown

 Tucson
where just weeks before six
doctors determined your heart

 was
in trouble in this city
 named for the great
bird rising out

 of cremation
a city where the sun is twinned
 to dust
where temperatures rise
 beyond reason
sear scald the roads
 between monsoons

 how appropriate then that this
is where your heart near-
ly stopped
the morning you were to leave
 before boarding
 the winged ship that rose
into the air with hundreds
 on their journey
to find their own
 landings their own lines
of poetry amid the pickle farms
 and striations
of seeding sunflowers
 traveling
 as close to the stars

as we can all afford
 without you I disintegrate
into particles no larger than three micrometers
 nine times smaller than the pandemic
particles which can't
penetrate the masks
we must wear on our winged flight tonight

in a panic

 in seat 3F without your voice
I become cloudbreak floating swiftly
running over the muir
and nearby woods something
between mist and fog and reaching
with a density that can obscure
a heart or a cityscape or cancel
a string of mourning flights

III.

 what is a star anyway
if not someone to orbit
in the hope of becoming
 a necklace nebula

deepspace pearlights
to form an impossible strand
 of oval bursts
ninety quadrillion miles away
 breathlight
an unfathomable weave
 of lapis
darkness
 and glow

NATALIA TREVIÑO

YEMAYA AT THE GULF OF MEXICO

The gnarled oaks on Goose Island
hold centuries of strong gusts

in their long limbs,
grew bent trunks leaning

away from Your waters.
Their evergreen crowns

point in the same direction
like soldiers, like golden

retrievers
as if a bonsai craftsman

of life-sized trees
shaved their tops

to form the sky's
own hedge.

They've birthed generations
of speared fruit,

acorn seeds speckled
with ancient urge

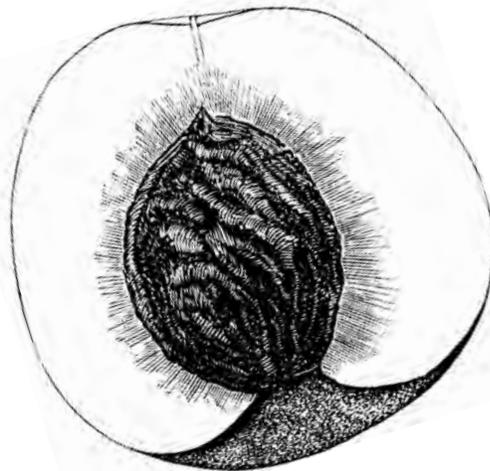
the familiar desire
to stand gales and gulf-

force hurricanes
burrow near

the roots
of You, their mother.

ODE TO KNOWING

The orchard in my childhood: apple,
pear, cherry I fell from—and a plum tree
neglected every spring, a jelly fungus
taking the purple fruit. No soft plums
in the fridge. There was so much
I thought I could not have; obedience
I had to give. My child body, bruised.
My heart: kept like an abandoned fruit
tree, or a goat to a tether. I did not buck.
I did not bite. I stood in the long grasses.
I've since learned that a child cannot
provide. That fruit and animals both
need tending hands—*hold me, comb me*,
were words that for years I could not
say. But now I feel the wisteria around
my thighs. The landscape curls with relief.
There is ripe fruit in the shape of your mouth.



ON SWEETNESS

this peach trying to leave the world

bruising sweetness

as sweet as bruising

your ribs under these hands

my face in your chest hair

as fine as my ass

turned towards you

knees in the flowered sheets

HATCHLING

It was still dark the morning he fell
 more of a crumple than a fall
 he told me later
 pulled down by legs heavy with edema
 I heard an unfamiliar tapping
 the door jostling
 against the porcelain tub
 as he struggled to hoist himself up
 I found him sat on the bathroom floor
 the cold tile against his skin
 blue eyes focused far
 curved back exposed
 no muscle to hide the shoulder blades
 the gentle humps of his spine

I thought of spring storms
 of childhood
 of loblolly pines bowed
 close to break in the wind
 of a hatchling
 found squirming among fallen twigs
 eyes knuckled beneath blue lids
 pink flesh hung loose on new bones
 I knelt down
 shins in the wet grass
 scooped the chick up
 held it as something precious
 close in the warm hollow of my hands

JAN MINICH

HOUSEGUESTS

A jumping spider we named Jack
 followed us around the rooms
 and stayed for months until one day
 we can't find him anywhere.
 We see too clearly through glass
 and forget to move beyond it.
 Age loses its color
 when we open the door and walk out.
 Heat escapes easiest through paper,
 the cold coming on us at night
 one breath at a time.

APPARITION

I don't suppose she will ever leave.
 She seems comfortable,
 even helped choose the furniture,
 Victorian pieces with worn upholstery
 and a chair by the window
 that looks out across the valley,
 which no one but she sits in.
 Though I don't see her
 sometimes for days,
 I know she is still around.
 At night I hear the ring of her cup
 and in the morning find
 traces of brandy in the saucer.

THE FAULT, WALKING ON THE LAND OF
THE CAHUILLA

Winter light through stratus
transmutes the desert into daguerreotype—
turns spiny shrubs and desiccated trees
into brushed metal shades.

On the field of stone,
a sign points towards the San Andreas Fault—
the California omen I grew up alongside:
the latent strike-slip fissure waits.

We are encircled by the San Jacinto range—
Avii Hanupach in Mojave.
Snow on the peaks
edges the December air
and as we walk, one son—still young—
tells us how the first human was found in Africa.

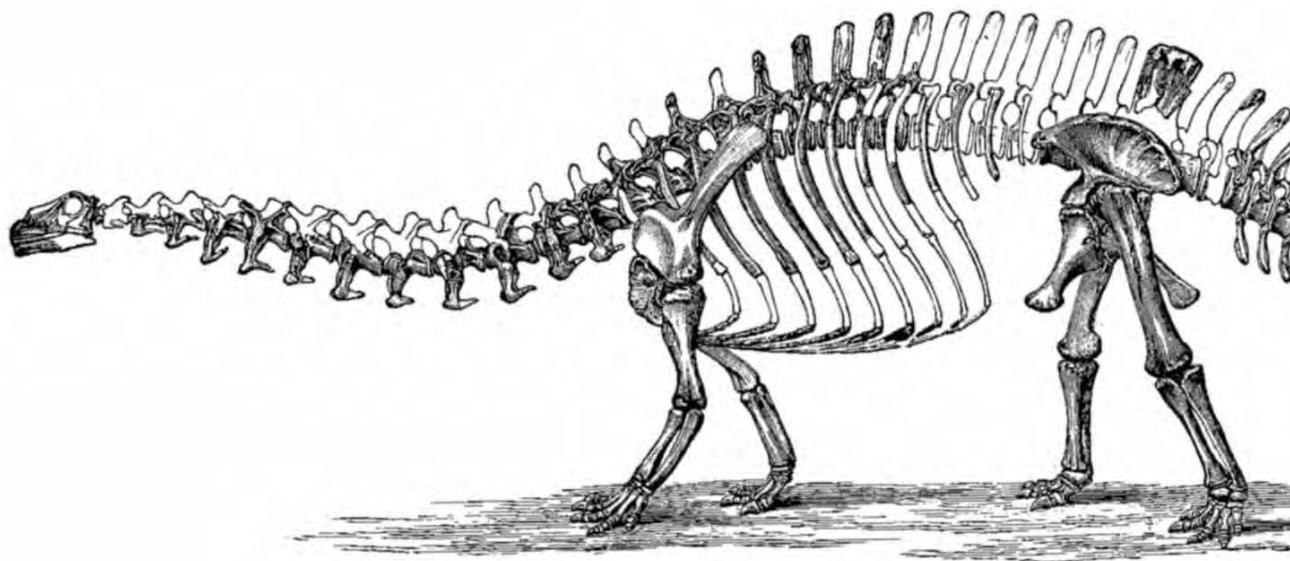
A girl, he says—
fifteen, picking berries from a tree.
She slipped and hit her head on a rock.

Her story written on her skull:
a tree and its bright promise, the climb, a toehold lost—
the fall.

ELLA FLORES

FIELD NOTES FROM THE CREATION MUSEUM

After the Tower of Babel diorama
you arrive at a Kentucky nuclear
wasteland where mannequin Moses
asks mannequin David, *Why do I
suffer?* A projector whirs the answer:
a million CGI particles form a fully
adult, human male—No baby Adam.
No diaper changing station
in the men's bathroom. No stopping the field
tripping students from prodding fertilized
egg models and life-sized fetuses. Or shoving
their way through the Garden of Eden
exhibit to be first in line for the petting-zoo-food-
court-equipped Ark, where a premium ticket
gets you the *Deluge Experience* and rainbows
are kept to a minimum. *Please leave
in twos*, a placard points to the gift shop.
In the humor section you buy a birthday
card with a unicorn nuzzling a brontosaurus
telling him, *It doesn't hurt.*
Not really.



DEAR RUPI KAUR,

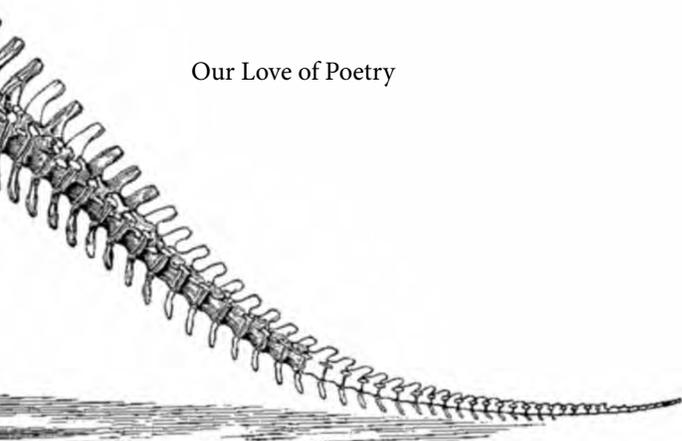
I need you to know a thesaurus
 is not an extinct dinosaur,
 and Strunk and White are not Looney
 Toons. I need you to read
 Longenbach's preface to *The Art of the Poetic*
Line: poetry is the sound of language
 organized in lines. Stanzas are Italian
 for rooms, so poems are houses
 built by those with creative enterprise.
 Please capture the quotidian—rise
 and set, and seize, not summarize
 like transcriptions of notes passed
 between teenagers in homeroom,
 and it's not like the mantras or proverbs
 from Grandma's voicemails
 left on answering machines. Look,
 even Gabriel García Márquez read
 the entire dictionary in solitude.
 I need you to know Ms. Lucille Clifton
 has already penned the incidents of *everyday*
something has tried to kill me and has failed
 while still being a woman.

Line Breaks & Stanzas,

Our Love of Poetry

PATRIOT ACTS

All of your rulings look alike
 All of your riots
 All of your prison complexes
 All of your acquittals
 All of your agendas
 All of your autopsies
 All of your rulings look alike
 All of your murders
 All of your lynchings
 your counterfeit suicides
 your targets
 your warrants
 All of your rulings look alike
 All of your 13th Amendment loopholes
 your election mobs
 All of your income brackets
 your denarian gunmen
 your safari loots
 All of your rulings look alike
 All of your capitalisms
 All of your civil liberties
 your freedoms of hate speeches
 your *Hounds of Zaroff*
 your policings
 All of your rulings look alike
 All of your voter suppressions
 All of your American Kennel Clubs
 your immunities
 your faulty arguments
 All of your *in God we trusts*
 All of your rulings look alike
 All of your monuments
 entitlements
 school shootings
 treasons
 All of your reasons
 your rulings look alike
 All of your Klu Klux kleptos
 your Mayella Ewells
 accusations
 Candace Owens
 Carolyn Bryants
 your church bombings



rulings look alike
All of your silencers
All of your
 gaslightings
 purse clutchings
 indifferences
 backchannelings
 look alike
All of your civil wars
 your White fragilities
 your referendums
 your jaundice juries
 your UNknown SUBjects
All look alike
All xenophobic fences
All cultural appropriations
All of your myths
 your cotton-picking legacies
 essentialisms
All of your Police Department conduct disorders
All of your look alike
 your MAGA hats
 your Confederate rhetorics
 your Stand-Your-Grounds

your flags
your first-round draft picks
your brandings
All
of your standards of beauty
your Amber alerts
your plantation nostalgias
your racial profilings
your New Jim Crows
your Henrietta Lacks
your Tuskegee experiments
 indictments
 rulings look alike
All of your Thomases
All of them alike
 Jefferson
 Blanton
 Bunday
 Clarence
All of your Grand Jurors
Except one. *Except* one anonymous motion
 Filed in contempt of your prerogative
To form a more perfect union.

for Breonna Taylor and every one of us

HERE ARE SOME FLOWERS

In a gentler dream, I thumbed
each hydrangea socket wet
onto your palm, purple scabs right off
my lips, as if to not
press: look what you've done.

Its head, all eyes in the darkest
corner of summer.

In another, someone pointed out the rarity
of fathers in my poems and spoke around
all the frothy mothers. How to say I'm my father
in pastel has no better lyric place
to go to than silence?

In a less gentle dream, I dove face
first into a meadow made of bees so high
on flowers they recited the whole glossary.
I ran out of memory and started to abridge.
Ended up with acronyms on the cusp
of prescriptions.

An ocean of pistils drowned me
from afar.

From another dream, I uncrinkled
a twenty-dollar bill for tulips a touch
paler than the banana peel
still rotting in my sink.

2025 SO FAR

Red ants pool on the sidewalk
and I try to remember if it rained
in ants. Wouldn't be surprised
as a demon chased me last night,
crumbling in embers, up an emergency
stairwell out of my bullet-point dream.

- I mourned someone who showed up,
three years later, to criticize the tone
of my grief.
- They found blood in my urine
but then I had a reason for it the week after.
- Too much gluten, too many chores.
- I called my heart a half-broke
stallion and ChatGPT called me exhausting.
- The e-visa linking app kept saying my photo's wrong
as if I need a newer, righter face.
- I want to show my cat the world
but would he like it?
- Turns out I'm employed by my subconscious
and she considers me an intern.

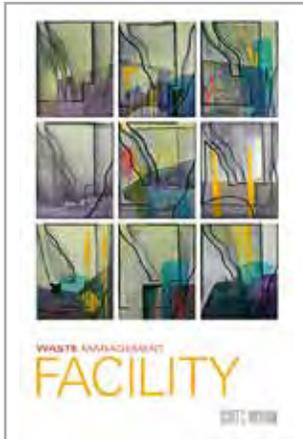
When the demon grabbed me by the ankles
I laughed in his face, being dragged down the stairs.
What of me, you much-feared, not-feathered
resident of the afterlife tropics, what of me
could you possibly need this much?



WASTE MANAGEMENT FACILITY BY SCOTT C. WITHIAM

(MadHat Press, 2025)

REVIEW BY CARLA PANCIERA



In a waste management facility, waste products are altered chemically, physically, and biologically for a variety of reasons. Scott C. Withiam does the same for the ordinary world around us in his latest collection (his third), *Waste Management Facility*. Nothing ends up as it begins, resisting the usual predictions, long-held notions, and plain logic. The result is an imaginative and singular adventure through a world we thought we knew.

The early pages of the book seem anchored enough in reality. The opening section focuses on the rustic landscape of a childhood spent “speeding across corn flats to the lake,” driving deer for hunters with a friend, and recalling the taste of a grandfather’s homemade pickles. But even the first poem, “Draft,” establishes the idea of an imbalance that is alluring and poses an important question. The speaker’s grandmother scales a wall at an overlook and leans into winds, imploring him to join her. “She kept telling me to step up, look, / but I covered my face,” he says, perhaps referring to the present danger or to some version of his own future in which, he too, will either be forced to let go, eschew sense, or continue to observe the world from a safe distance. Which, one wonders, would be preferable?

The question is perhaps answered in “Men’s Room” where a lone gas station attendant behind glass one night is a reminder of “unattended / animals ... in a failed zoo, catatonic, / rubbing the same spot in a chain-link fence.” There are many ways to exist within the spectrum of balancing on the edge of violence to being stifled in a literal cage.

In “One Man Show” the speaker views paintings of familiar landscapes that capture grief, but he claims he is “not interested in any artist’s abstractions.” Rather, he longs to be grounded in what is, to remain far from the ledge, perhaps the antithesis to poetry and certainly to many of the poems that follow. Here is how we manage, these first poems seem to say: children navigate the fraught relationships of adults, adults reconcile painful aspects of their own pasts, all of us will live with grief.

Despite our attempts to tread carefully, it is impossible to ignore what threatens our peace, even when it happens offstage. In the poem “Hard Candy,” a young boy is admonished by an older

person not to choke on a treat. While the warning is generic enough, actions outside the stuffy parlor where “three clocks ticking ... / chased each other. One just had to take / the lead” is a scene that increasingly portends violence. Here and elsewhere, the poet bears witness to the small dramas of relationships and the larger social issues of migrant workers, failing farms, and boarded-up factories, far from any abstract concepts of reality. If only we could exist in the world without internalizing its images, we wouldn’t need any alterations in what we find.

SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN,
UNCAGED, UNBOUND BY
LOGIC, YOU INSTEAD TRUST IN
A BALANCING ACT BETWEEN
WHAT IS & WHAT CAN BE

Instead, we embark on an experience that is anything but a preservation of realism. People strolling along a beach are “bugs on a jawbone ... pill bugs topside and topsy-turvy.” When breakfast with an old friend becomes tense, one man imagines himself as a chief petty officer on the eighteenth-century New England streets full of “coopers, cordwainers, and shipwrights.” Another poem’s speaker imagines a discussion between lovers where the woman becomes “as tight-lipped as a mollusk” and the man wonders: “And what did that make me? A greasy dumpster raccoon / feeling around for a clam underwater.”

The heart of the book centers around lessons learned from the speaker’s job at a waste treatment plant: look busy, keep out of trouble, and observe the world through a clear lens that often relies on humor and the ability to manipulate language—the perfect internship for a young poet:

*As for feeling bad about being paid to
or about being removed from view
or about cheating taxpayers
or wrestling with the value
of a hard day’s work or complicity,
I’m sorry, none of those concerns surfaced.*

The man's candor and his acceptance of his role matures into a realization that what keeps people most busy is avoiding solutions. Kids convince themselves they can't learn algebra. Teachers can't control the chaos in the cafeteria. Scientists can't determine what has killed the birds they study. No one can slice a block of cheese with the proffered knife. When a former chemist flees his own country and ends up cleaning professors' offices instead, his supervisor reminds him not to finish his day too early: "We don't want to get ahead of ourselves. Then what would there be?" he asks. The void, of course. Time to confront real questions. The only employee who demonstrates any initiative in these poems is a blue jay (yes, the bird), who, fired from his job at a funeral home because he made a nest in the hair of the deceased, earns a new position as a concierge because the manager can't imagine "who better to direct visitors to the most interesting places." In Withiam's world, this scenario is less ridiculous than reality.

In these pages it is the non-poets who reach for creative expression—a brochure writer, the colleague trying to describe his golf swing, the woman who "had called curtains / of squalls giant jellyfishes, when a child / living on a high plateau." By contrast, in "The Angry Estate Gardener," the eulogists at a friend's memorial service who are poets lose their craft when they most need it. The speaker listens to their maddening chorus of platitudes. Meanwhile, he remembers the story his late friend told of the time he worked with a gardener who raised koi and banana trees to sell to the rich. The only marvel to a man wealthy enough to rent the trees for a party is that they can stand on their own despite such shallow roots. "No one can stand on their own," the friend offers, "covering, all at once, a lot of territory—from gardener to the great idea of global share so far from carried out, to poets—



and right there was let go on the spot."

The speaker of these poems isn't subject to treacle and sentimentality. He's disgruntled, sarcastic, impatient with ornamentation. He's very much part of the "real" world (he reads *People* magazine in doctors' offices, pauses on his way to teach a class, surprised to hear an admissions tour guide using the fact that the school has Aaron Hernandez's brain. "But where's the heart?" he wonders.) but he is also capable of producing poems in which suitcases are interviewed by detectives, and a hibiscus, hybridized beyond all fragrance, dreams of hatching a mockingbird to once again distinguish itself. One of the final poems begins with a couple's first promising night together and then veers into a dream world where manholes speak to the woman trying to escape her new lover, in part because he corrects her vocabulary.

Even the sacred art of poetry itself can be reexamined through Withiam's lens. In an attempt to win a poetry contest to make his mother proud before she dies, he is only partially successful. He wins, but is accompanied to the reception by his mother's ghost who assures him "that poetry can transport anyone great distances." Instead of finding this inspiring, he is unable to write and takes a job dressed as the Statue of Liberty, standing on a street corner and waving motorists into the parking lot of a tax preparation office. Solutions ahead!

Scott C. Withiam asks his readers what the grandmother in the first poem asked: Will you stand here on this ledge? As the wind howls and blows your coattails like sails, will you forgo your safety net? Are you prepared to see what happens when, uncaged, unbound by logic, you instead trust in a balancing act between what is and what can be? The answer, of course, especially where these poems are concerned, is yes.

LISA M. HASE-JACKSON

DESTINY AND DESTINATION

In Kansas one time I tried to stop traveling stop going from state to state to house to house now I regret having not left for France when I had the chance though my companion might have forgotten about me while we were there might have left me in the locked room she escaped from when I was a child a pretty smart and pretty to me woman with black hair who was my mother's mother entreated my mother to stop moving so much said that staying stationary translated to stability in money stability in life that any husband's stability is good and worth putting up with things hard to put up with what with the cost of rent deposits electric deposits another couch good food but how can someone stop what they came into this world to do from day one any more than monarchs and whales can stop themselves from migrating across skies across oceans.

SUGAR ASTROLOGY

BY SHARI ZOLLINGER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOLLI ZOLLINGER

ZODIAC ARCANA



ARIES: *March 21–April 19*

First presence. Yes, first responder of sorts, equipped with resuscitation, life-giving marrow. Keeper of flame, and more—whose legacy wields sharp, at-the-ready.

It's a kind of in-love commitment to creation.

TAURUS: *April 20–May 20*

It's a kind of in-love commitment to creation, and no, not just creation but attraction the earth like clay in the mouth, not bitter but alkaline-sweet.

Even sweeter hands press toward shape and structure.

GEMINI: *May 21–June 21*

Even sweeter hands press toward shape and structure. Forming winged clay, like twin swifts—small, fast, adaptable. Yes, this is sky-knowing.

Yet sometimes a necessity pivots toward water's sustenance.

CANCER: *June 22–July 22*

Sometimes, a necessity pivots toward water's sustenance, calling tide back to shore. This moon language marks a season when dark swallows light, no, not right away—slower—yes, even slower.

Consider a single drop of water upon a single stone.

LEO: *July 23–August 22*

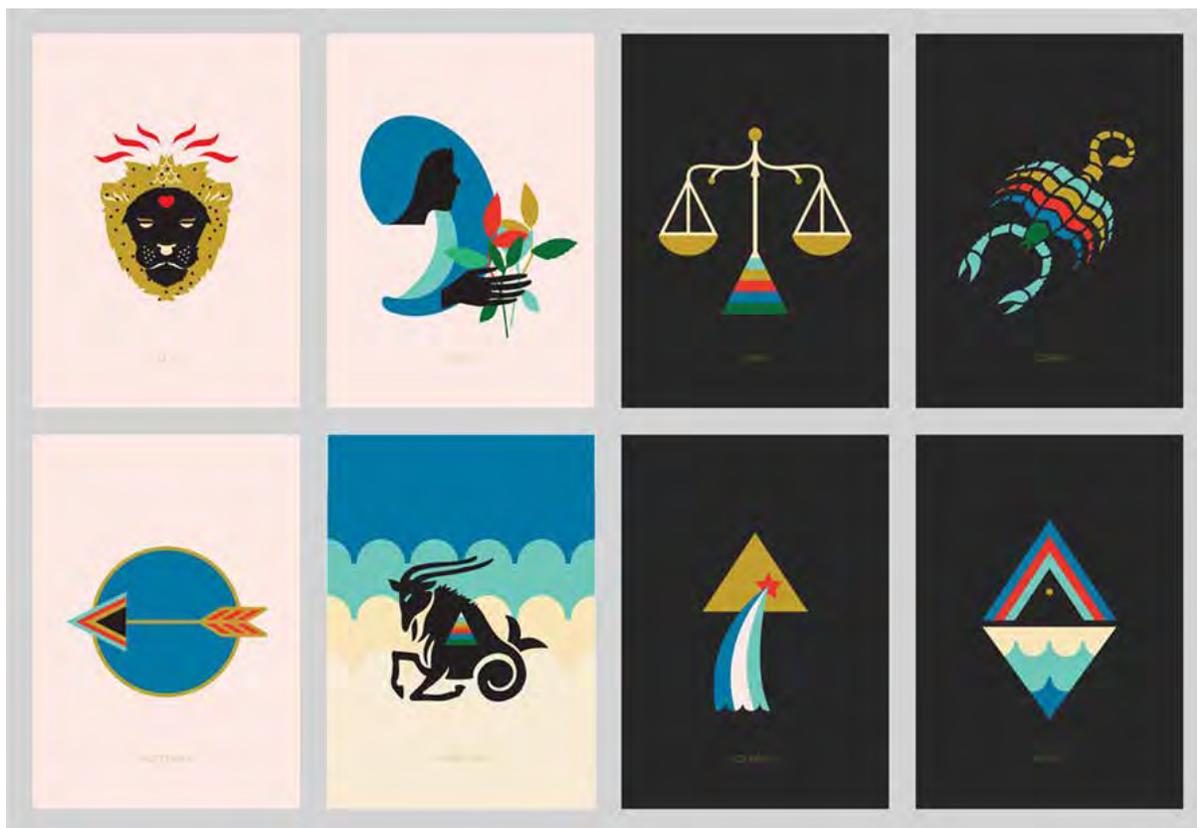
Consider a single drop of water upon a single stone, or more dramatically, consider the precipice of a roar, all animal-pride, step-and-stance, mane. Yes, naturally a story will emerge.

This is a story about loyalties' warp and weft.

VIRGO: *August 23–September 22*

This is a story about loyalties' warp and weft. Weaver's hands, in service to imagination. No, not just intricate color, but unending practice—fantasy tumbling toward reality.

Exquisite. Inevitable. Imperfect.



LIBRA: *September 23–October 22*

Exquisite. Inevitable. Imperfect.
 Shadow encourages its balance with light.
 Golden symmetry: a conversation between
 aspen-root and, yes, collective breath.

A game of tag, up and down a shaft of light.

SCORPIO: *October 23–November 21*

A game of tag, up and down a shaft of light,
 sometimes, upon the chase, time lingers,
 breath descends. No, not just to red, but yellow
 like leaf upon the forest floor.

Grief, but also threshold, metamorphosis.

SAGITTARIUS: *November 22–December 21*

Grief, but also threshold, metamorphosis.
 Shadow from the body gallops
 farther than the eye. An event horizon,
 cumulates, yes, cumulus.

Potential rain, thunder—lightning’s direct target.

CAPRICORN: *December 22–January 19*

Potential rain, thunder—lightning’s direct target
 upon the tree with apples already pressed to cider.
 It’s bark-bearing sky-scar, up to the waist in snow,
 not cold, but warm from wood grain.

No map, except what’s embedded.

AQUARIUS: *January 20–February 18*

No map, except what’s imbedded
 with instructions on how to return to the sky,
 how to whittle wood with rhythm,
 wood with rhythm.

Turning freedom into a hobby, yes, to air sight.

PISCES: *February 19–March 20*

Turning freedom into a hobby, into air sight.
 Turning air into water, turning water into fire, fire
 into earth. Finally turning toward
 the beginning.

First presence, first responder of sorts.

MAY SWENSON'S TANDEM COLLAGE POEMS BY BROOK HAIGHT & CHRISTINE COOPER-ROMPATO

MAY SWENSON (1913–1989), a leading twentieth-century poet, published hundreds of poems, gave numerous readings, and won many awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship. She is well known for her work exploring topics ranging from sensuality to the natural world and science. According to Eloise Klein Healy, “correspondences among all life forms pour from [Swenson’s] work, confirming that nothing is meaningless. The universe’s basic beauty and balance is the stuff and soul of her poems.”¹

IN THE PAGES FOLLOWING THIS ESSAY, TWO OF SWENSON’S TANDEM COLLAGE POEMS TACKLE THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE IN A VISUALLY DYNAMIC WAY.

The two tandem, visual poems were discovered in the archives at Washington University in St. Louis. Swenson’s papers are held primarily at Utah State University Special Collections and Archives and Washington University Archives, with the latter holding the bulk. “Box 223” in the Realia Series is described in the catalog as containing “artwork by Swenson.” The box contains these tandem collage poems.²

By “tandem poems” in this context we mean poems by one author appearing on two sides of a specific medium; the term “diptych” may also be used, although this usually indicates two pieces of artwork displayed side by side. Brook Haight first discovered these poems after completing an archiving class with Dr. Christine Cooper-Rompato at Utah State University and then pursuing a research project in spring 2025 on Swenson’s art funded by the Cache Valley Historical Society. Haight contacted Washington University about Box 223 and the curator of Swenson’s manuscripts, Joel Minor, sent several images of Swenson’s drawings, including the two tandem poems.

The tandem poems showcase Swenson’s interest in the natural world and science. They are primarily composed of newspaper and magazine clippings augmented by personal drawings and underlined with pen and crayon. Throughout her published

work, Swenson explored the shapes of words on the page, as she created many concrete or shaped poems. These two collage poems are an extension of her interest in how words and visual art interact. Swenson wrote about the process of composing poetry and the value of poetry, which she likened to the exploration of science. In her essay “The Experience of Poetry in a Scientific Age,” Swenson writes, “Science and poetry are alike, or allied, it seems to me, in their largest and main target—to investigate any and all phenomena of existence beyond the flat surface of appearances.”³

It is not clear which collage poem is meant to be read first (i.e., which is the front and the back). For the ease of discussion, we have selected the visually less complex image, “Recommended Reading” (with the photograph of the earth), to be the recto and “We will get the future we learn to expect” to be the verso. Whereas the reading orientation of the recto side is clear, the reading orientation of the verso side is not immediately clear.

The poem “Recommended Reading” features a magazine page with a view of the earth from space with a caption below describing the image. This particular color image of the earth was photographed by the unmanned Applications Technology Satellite-III on November 18, 1967 and published in an article

titled “Weather Satellites: II” by Arthur W. Johnson.⁴ The purpose of the photographs was to reveal the earth’s “air-mass motion, cloud heights, rainfall, pollution and natural disasters”⁵ so that humankind could work toward “precisely modifying the weather for the benefit of man.”⁶ At the top center of Swenson’s page are the words “tempts to eradicate its species” with the words “yet is almost unbelievably” half covered. These appear to be purposefully folded over onto this page from the verso side. On the top right of the page are the words “Recommended Reading”; this is also folded over from the verso side.

In this poem, Swenson calls out the passivity of those people on earth who can view the planet as a whole but are unwilling to protect it from themselves. The title “Recommended Reading” enhances this feeling of inertia and/or acquiescence by suggesting that the destruction of the planet is something recommended (but not necessary) to pay attention to. As Swenson described in her essay “The Experience of Poetry in a Scientific Age,” “On the one hand—and virtually with the same engine—man prepares to fly to the stars, while on the other he seems intent on annihilating himself along with his sole perch in the universe.”⁷ The poem invokes similar reactions to the iconic “earthrise” photo (1968), which attempted to propel people to care for the planet.

“We Will Get the Future We Learn to Expect/Spaceship Earth” is a complex visual and word arrangement that challenges the viewer to see the fantastic designs of the natural world from the micro to the macro. Having spent some time with the poem, we believe it is approached by starting either at the “top” with “We will get the future we learn to expect” or at the “bottom” with “Spaceship Earth”—the orientation of top and bottom being

determined by the location of Swenson’s signature and the date 1969. The collage can then be rotated in a counterclockwise motion. The images and words on this page are taken in large part from the *New York Times*, April 20, 1969 issue, specifically from Hugh Kenner’s review of two books, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* by R. Buckminster Fuller (Southern Illinois University Press) and *The Future of the Future* by John McHale (George Braziller).⁸

The poem focuses on the patterns of nature and connects the smallest creatures (radiolaria, ocean crystals, and so forth) with both the human senses and human innovations such as the geodesic dome. As the article quoted by Swenson asserts, there is no distinction between what humans create and what is “natural”: “Man can do nothing nature does not permit.” Swenson is fascinated by the replicative power of the images: the geodesic dome replicates the shape of the earth; the radiograph of the snake is mirrored by the lines of the senses pulsating from the naked human body; the small circles in the magnification of the crystal virus are mirrored in the electron diffraction of zinc oxide. “Man’s intelligence is part of Nature, and its activities part of the evolutionary process,” Swenson underlines, emphasizing that the human and the natural can not be separated. Thus, “Spaceship Earth” is dependent on humans’ nurturing and integration with nature, not their opposition to and overcoming of it. “Life is a mystery,” Swenson once explained to Roy Swenson, her brother. “We must not give ourselves airs. We are not the apex of creation. It is all evolving. We don’t know what the answers will be.” Swenson’s collage poems emphasize that “we will get the future we learn to expect”—we must see our place within nature and not above it.

¹ Klein Healy quotation is from poetryfoundation.org. Original quotation from Eloise Klein Healy, “Book Review: Language that Looks into Vision,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1979, p. 81.

²May Swenson, “The Poet as Anti-Specialist,” was first published in *Saturday Review*, January 30, 1965. It was reprinted as “The Experience of Poetry in a Scientific Age” and included in *Poets on Poetry*, edited by Howard Nemerov (Basic Books, 1966). It was later reprinted in *Made With Words*, edited by Gardner McFall (University of Michigan Press, 1998) and in *May Swenson: Collected Poems*, edited by Langdon Hammer (Library of America, 2013). See also the radio interview conducted by Howard Nemerov for Library of Congress’ *Voice of America Forum Lectures*, 1963/64. This article came to be written as a result of that interview.

³May Swenson, “The Experience of Poetry in a Scientific Age,” 147-159, in *Poets on Poetry*, edited by Howard Nemerov (Basic Books, 1966), p. 153.

⁴Arthur W. Johnson, “Weather Satellites: II,” *Scientific American*, vol. 220, no. 1 (1969), pp. 52-72.

⁵Kris Belden-Adams, *Photography, Temporality, and Modernity: Time Warped*, (Routledge, 2019), np, discussing figure 5.1.

⁶Johnson, “Weather Satellites: II,” 68.

⁷Swenson, “The Experience of Poetry in a Scientific Age,” 152.

⁸Hugh Kenner, “Review: *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* by R. Buckminster Fuller and *The Future of the Future* by John McHale,” *New York Times*, April 20 (1969): BR 33, BR 43.

⁹Kenner, “Review,” referencing Bucky Fuller, 33.

¹⁰Kenner, “Review,” referencing Bucky Fuller, 33.

¹¹Paul Crumbley, “May Swenson and Other Animals: Her Poetics of Natural Selection,” pp. 138-56 in *Body My House: May Swenson’s Work and Life*, edited by Paul Crumbley and Patricia M. Gantt (University Press of Colorado, 2006), p. 145.



COLOR PHOTOGRAPH OF THE EARTH from an altitude of 22,300 miles above the mouth of the Amazon River was made on November 18, 1967, by a weather satellite. South America is near the center of the photograph; the western bulge of Africa can be seen near the right edge of the photograph, and the southern part

of the U.S. is at top left. The Applications Technology Satellite, a research spacecraft developed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, was in a synchronous orbit, meaning that it stayed above the mouth of the Amazon. Six photographs made by the satellite at various times of the same day are on the next page.

made the minimum
the minimum
the minimum
the minimum
the minimum
the minimum

We will get the future we learn to expect

the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle equaling the sum of the squares of its two legs.

Topological mapping of the sensation of touch into the outer layers of the brain "homunculus."

thoughts about thinking

Subsonic flow on delta wings.



commonly found in pond and ditch water — amoebas, parameciums, rotifers, hydras, flatworms and algae. The distinction between plants and animals is nicely dramatized in the section on the euglena. The



Radio-graph of a snake.

Radio-taria.

but relative standards. Almost any of the zoological phyla contain species that man could call highly intelligent if he chose self-preservation ability as his criterion, but even that ability could be appraised variously depending on the circumstances of the moment. The Norway rat, for example, has successfully eluded over the

only separate after invention does in a natural manner and man learns to do nothing are "artificial." Minimum ingots will not count, can do nothing are "artificial." In the past few decades many million tons of aluminum have appeared on earth. Every ounce thanks to Space-vention: and Fuller thanks to proce-nance a distinction wherby the au-lect for Emerson enhances one's logical instances in place of tech-nology. His central premise, shared with the Transcendentalists, is that man's intelligence is part of the ship Earth's inventory thanks to proce-esses everyone calls "natural." In the past few decades many million tons of aluminum have appeared on earth. Every ounce thanks to Space-vention: and Fuller thanks to proce-nance a distinction wherby the au-

Electron diffraction of zinc oxide



Photomicrograph of the cross section of a twig.

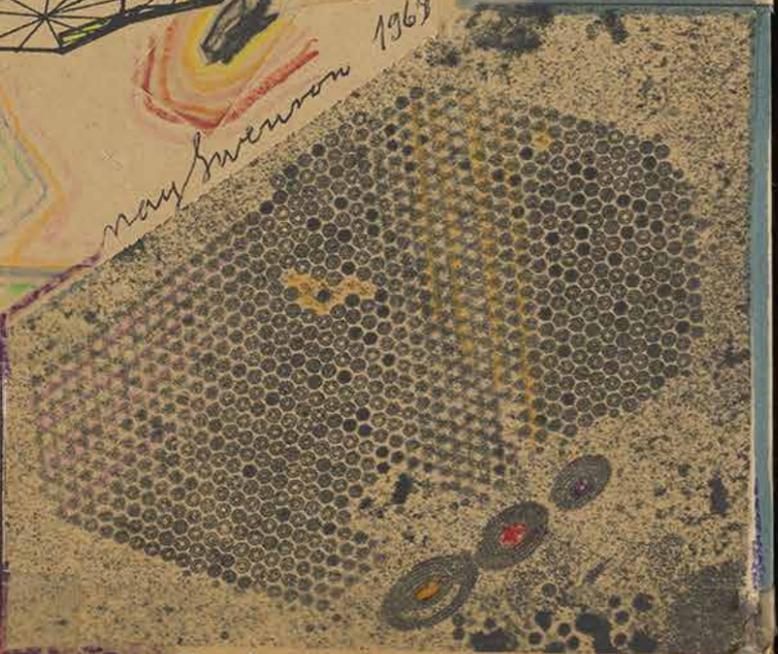
present status of mathematical thinking about the nature of infinity, and in particular about the puzzles posed by different orders of the infinite, Mark Kac

Continued from Page 33 of symbolic notations regarding environ behaviors is no more physical than a poem."

Spaceship Earth

Design by Buckminster Fuller for a geodesic dome.

may Swenson 1968



Magnification of a crystal of virus.

A REVIEW AN ILLUSTRATED REVIEW OF SUE WILLIAM SILVERMAN'S

SELECTED MISDEMEANORS

Essays at the Mercy of the Reader

Brought to you by L.I. Henley

FROM "Into the Wild of Calm"

"a nighttime window" "I POUND MY HOOVES CASTING OPEN"

OTHER LINES. "a nighttime window"

"a nighttime window" THE UNTETHERED

THE UN-REINED, THE UNSEEN WINDOWS OF "a nighttime window"
Sue William Silverman

dejected momba: "dejected momba"
"paw popping"

Dear Reader,
These are luminous, generous, need-filled, interconnected, inventive essays... Read them deeply and have mercy....



SELECTED MISDEMEANORS



FIG 1 "his silvery hair bright with moonlight"

FIG 3 "The fortune teller for me not predict"

that Pomme... will be

another heroine who grows

hands, for fingers turning in fingers with mine"

FIG 2 "Darker stains vein her heart."

FIG 4 "These women's stories seep inside each strand of my hair."

"PREDICTABLY, I DON'T CONSIDER THE DISTANCE TO THE MOON, THE LONLINESS IN SINATRA'S VOICE."

From "Coming Attractions"



START HERE

Dear Reader,

SILVERMAN does not look away from the awkward, the uncomfortable, from the minor and not so minor infractions that make us beautifully, tragically human. Dear Reader, find yourselves in these

NEXT

pages and do not look away, for it is our misdemeanors that make us who we are.



from "The Long Road Out of Eden"

SELECTED MISDEMEANORS

"OR WAS IT PERFECT, ANYWAY,"
"WORM ROOM THE WITH WHEN EVEN WITH THE WORM?"



THE ONE WHERE TRUMP GETS ELECTED

God keeps dreaming of Hanson. He wants
more *MMMBop*. More Partridge Family

wannabes. To bring back scat and radio.
He's bored with weekends and the internet.

*

My son keeps dreaming of Joey Tribbiani.
Keeps telling me there's a religion to hair.

*

I keep dreaming of the waitress at Topgolf.
The blonde who asks my son for a memento.

While she waits for our nachos, he turns his
coaster into God with the face of Jared Leto.

*

God has terrible taste. A few frond-soaked
Kubla Khans and everyone fawns. Learn to

be holy by holding God to a higher standard.

*

My son is watching God and taste die.

*

Across our mint-bleached kitchen he asks,
How you doin? Trying to lift the mood

but giving patriarchy the halo
of humor has led to so much abuse.

*

When my son falls asleep, God tells me
We must always buy a house for its trees.

That's how we got pop, and the unfiltered
fray of skaterboi locks: by learning to shiver

by refusing to accept the entire bitch-ass
idea of a box. But for now, everything is

circle: Trump in center, my son in knots.

THE ONE WHERE I (DON'T) EXPLAIN
ERECTIONS

When God asks how it feels to pray
I teach him to zero smoke.

I say *make your body into a clockface*
so that hands can run and run your length.

Then we lay, fog zippered to flesh,
refusing to surrender to the haunt

of breath. *This is how a body asks a god.*

*

My son doesn't believe in secrets.
But I'm ashamed sex exists,

so we live with it like a bracket,

the breve in a sentence I gloss
over but never mention.

*

The woman at AA tells me to pray
with my hands open.

How else to receive God's gifts? I know
better. God only responds to fists.

*

My son does not pray or grasp
how bodies can be a version of math

and because I refuse to let religion fill
the gaps, I glitch. Unsure how to explain

touch when *holy* isn't muscle memory.

*

God asks why I can't bear to be
a dictionary. I say *I always found my mother*

ugly (that wound! my entry) Now, I'm a pole
shaved of its flag. See? Nothing can raise me.

SARAH CAREY

ONE DAY'S INVENTORY

Flipped open my laptop to a home screen
fed with news: a bigger picture, breaking.

A record set for preventable deaths. Sat back
with black coffee, fake sugar. Sipped.

Later, I married the mop to the microfiber pad.
Doused the head with the best solution.

Pushed to polish the wood floors,
worn by now so close to the tongue and groove.

Made a list. Checked a box or two.
Stared at everything my walls encased, at all

I'd left undone, and faced the face
of my undoing.



CAMILA RING

OCD (II)

a thought like a dream
wills its way into the water

a thought like water
talks tides to itself

like gravity pools
blood into feet a thought

like a fan
searches the blur
for its blades

the sound of a fly yes
a thought
like the sound of this fly

slowly sinking on foil
crinkled upward

incredible? finding fly
out
the sound not fizz
eating ice but

tiny chitin weight

a thought like a vision
of what a thought is

a thought like a window face-
down

TRANSDIFFERENTIATION

why not talisman your body with cheap charms?
 chew the unspeakable 桃子? sail off in search of ambrosia?
 golden apples? a holy grail? you can't count

on transmigration to pour your soul back into a human vessel / you can't count on
 your honda's transmission to hold until you get home / if metempsychosis is
 stolen immortality, you feel no remorse / do you really want to return

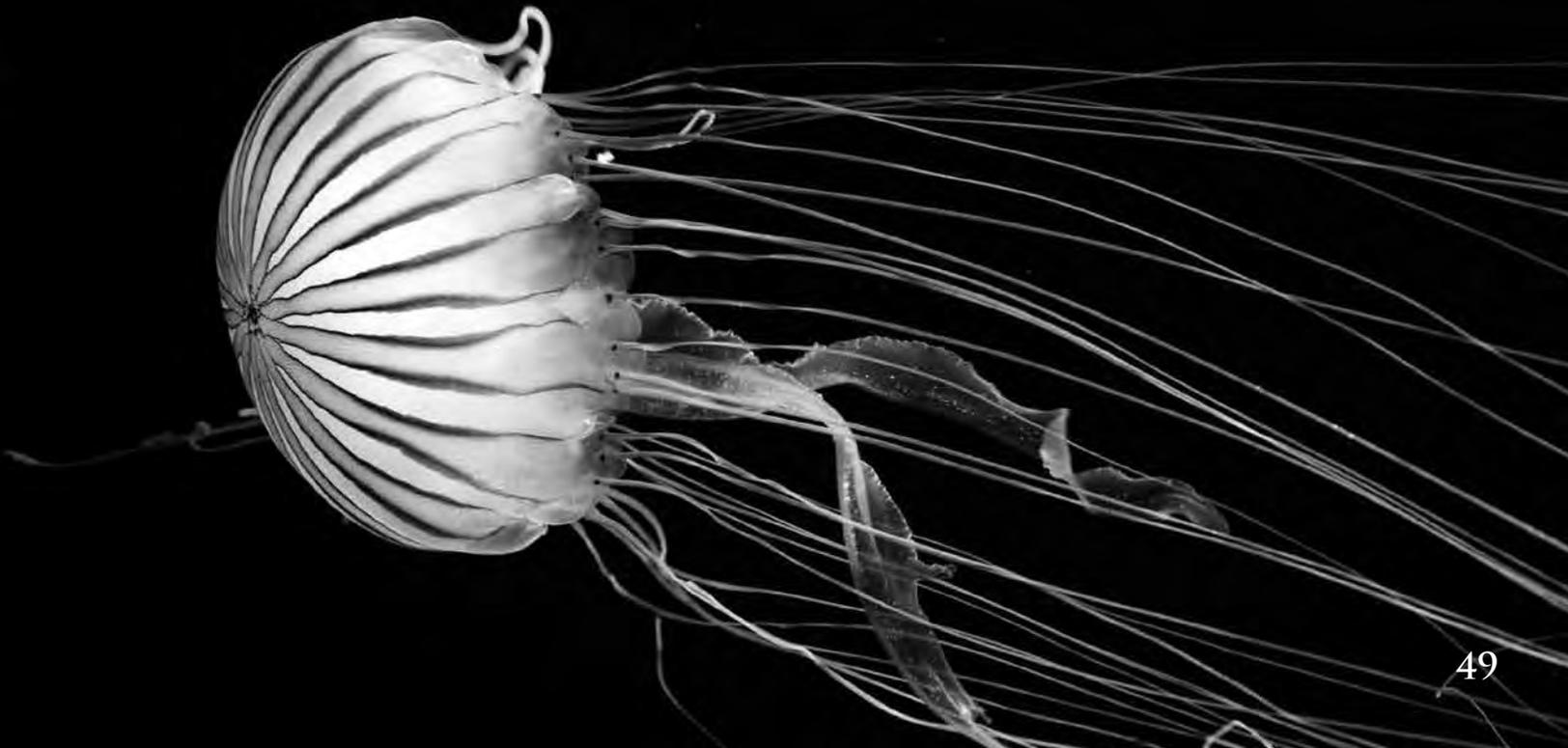
from cosmic comatose bliss to be a long-stem rose or some other symbol
 of someone else's love? ask sisyphus to trace the shape
 of his callouses and tell you how happy he feels / you can wait for *late* to retronym

your proper name, bingeing *bake off*, knitting snood after snood, or you can find
 the magical grackles / they'll exchange your freudian regressions for
 a child-sized skeleton / fresh lenses / firm skin... / up to you / you are now approaching

the point of radioactive decay / a half-life crisis / the instant of your transformation
 into clever lead / if you're clever enough, you can pestle yourself
 a helichrysum-meets-cicada-skin cocktail / name it 'transdifferentiation' /

delirious, you'll delete freckles! / sunspots! / buy crop
 tops again! / if a jellyfish can do it so can you—
 channel your inner *turritopsis dohrnii* & unsheathe your spine! /

just like sliding a toothpick from your favorite amuse-bouche /
 convert to a glossy polyp / a blob / slippery / shimmery / reborn
 on the seafloor / on the seafloor / surrender / you'll love what you've become



FIELD QUEEN

after Philip Schaefer

Say we screwed in the field queen's cabin,
pressed hard against glass, corn
 casting shadows across your back,
dusk tattooed with grasshoppers,
hazy pink light filling the telephone booth
of love, skin chanting
as our jeans made a blue puddle
around the gearbox. Say I never told anyone
until this poem, twenty years
 and a thousand pipettes full
of tears later. You, head crushed
by mastodons in the bed I've abandoned.
Me, planting our secrets in poetry's rows.
 It doesn't matter. Three thousand
hosts melted on your mother's tongue,
but still she died. How many prayers did I watch
her burn to the weather channel's glow,
 cans of beer slowly lowering
with the sandhill moon? Winter was
still winter then, our boots crunching little blue
pools in snow as we walked to the Adventist
 church and back. Say we stayed there,
figures in a painting, a postcard,
nothing changing, nothing noticing
 its unchangingness. That's memory,
your hand frozen in mine, but getting warmer.

INTERESTING PATIENT

She is a ghost possessed by a person,
hiding in the lumpy bed we shared,
bombing herself toward morning
with another miracle cure,
or retching her ache into the river.
I should guard her, ensure
she doesn't slit her wrists
on a salmon can, but I'm too busy
exorcising my hopes with a bag
of pretzels and a hot pack—or is it
a valium and a face full of tears?
Tomorrow we will watch another
bottle of pooled blood product
foam above us like some transparent

cloud or viral fear. Another day
in arterial cuffs, the blue loll
of a used tourniquet, pink sign
glowing *You Got This*. When she
could still work, farmers were her
favorite to poke: they barely winced
as she slid a biopsy needle in.
Now she's the interesting patient,
listing in the infusion chair while
I read her poems in my indoor voice,
parking lot tree shadows casting
their calligraphy on office blinds
as minutes drip into her veins, science's
grace notes keeping her guessing.



FOR CHERYLE AWAKE AND SLEEPING

In Budapest, the stained glass of you regarding a cathedral.
Dieseling rain, air intake flinging us home like money.

At the monument to labor or falling trees in July.
Your rosary knuckles. Ice under the snow drift, laughing

then crashing. Dribbling a ball in the rehab hallway
as tarmac buckles or in the big bathtub, cooling.

Water running stopping, baby robin asleep in the pool of you.
Where your sure hand with the sewing needle, Doris Lessing

on the nightstand until your green eyes dried? Interesting
patient, infusion chair. To summon you as original you,

inevitable as the moon. When did you replace my friend?
Biopsy needle sure in the doll hand. Ultraviolet, pollen,

too many parts per million to brave sidewalk quiet.
Or is it people? Tree ash? You are not anxious.

Not agoraphobe. Free in theory to walk under flower
baskets but not. Garden beds fallow, you also sleep

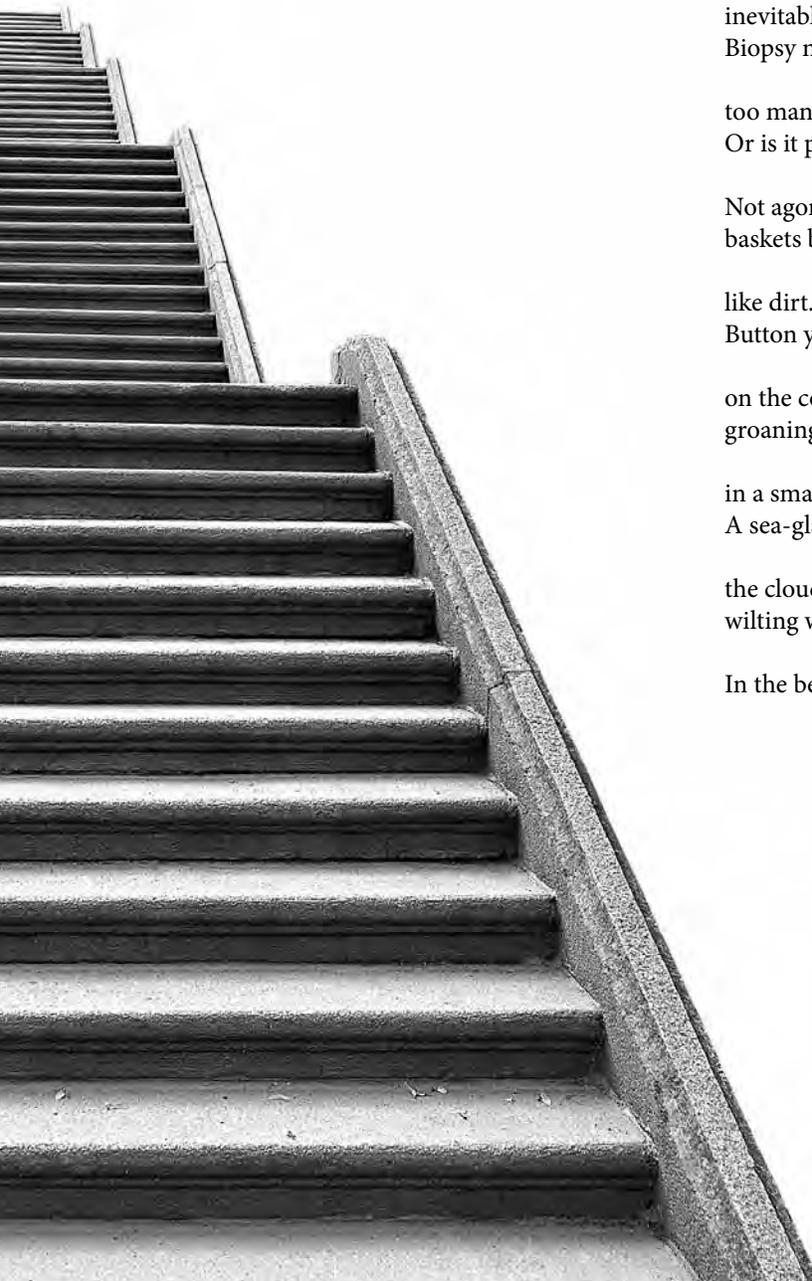
like dirt. Shut in. Black and white cheeks I black and white kiss.
Button you sew on my broken shirt. Dayless weeks

on the couch bed chair nowhere. Another morning,
groaning. Where the prayerless miracle cure? Song you sing

in a smaller voice. Anniversary art you buy online.
A sea-glass seashell. Dream a ladder we climb past

the cloud-rack. Shoulder blades sharper under your soft shirts,
wilting white count. Moon of you full in my mind's night.

In the bedroom, going nowhere. Summer. Your net of unseen stars.



ABRAHAM SMITH

FROM "SURGENCIES"

###

i am million in pond
i see through pisses
a paradise of legs along
to swim swim walk
in gravy boat boots
on the moon
in a hymn gone
to the dogs
go right wrong
go left and you'll trip
on the lip of the old bachelor's foundation

###

sap out a knot eye
ant mossed in there
sour pillow statement
cleaned by
breathin
outdoors at dawn
before the city
airs got that habit
of travelin along

###

mice the color
of air cured meats
pinch and wrench
into seized engines
where seeds from pretty
much anything standing
pray sigh shout
once more fat rat rust
whatever it takes to
soon lately be more real

###

kicked skulls roll funny
as timed time babies
timber older people
wear day eat cakes
long white bridge
story of your life
long white bridge
pigged with grass teeth
numb numbers under
snore on

###

i guess i am dyin
is getting pickt
to suggest the dust
from armpits
of smoke trees
rides with these
eastbound clouds
dive down when
we can't see where
middle of the ocean
and the great fish feed
on sundering nebraska

###

watch and watch
sun's slow walk
how docks wash
boat wake wave
prophet dogs
hounding rain
from the right eyes
of jackolanterns

###

a body being flooded music glad

ON DAYS I AM EXILED IN A BAR IN NORTH DAKOTA, THE SAME

humid summer the cousins got socked with typhoid, and I am tuning the static of a shortwave radio, past storm warnings, gas prices, *glory hallelujah* and just when I catch some Hendrix riff—a truckers’ caravan comes barreling in, fills the trailer with guffaws, and our natty bartender cheap on pours dials the needle to some country shit, and a clean-shaven one glistening with rain mounts the stool I kept for my girl—who bolted, bored—and he says “Sorry about your dad...”—like who the fuck is he, anyway?—and he looks into me like a clear stream birthed in the mountains where my grandfather took me fishing for trout, who always got away—and I look around, and am staring at my kindergarten teacher, at my priest, at my barber, my mechanic on parole, at the notary public—all of them coddled in their beers under the shroud of mortgages, exes, wives—dying to be pretty, dyed up, whisper longing, feign loss, caught, released, steal a convertible, chase a tornado, and I look down, and Dad’s friend has gripped my hand, wearing one big-ass diamond ring, and won’t let go.

LISA BEECH HARTZ

IN WHICH THE FIGURE BECOMES PART OF THE FOREST

After Francesca Woodman, Untitled, 1980

In the slender
stand of trees,
daughter
of a river
god—
naiad, nymph—
sylphin forearms
braceleted
in birch. Their
slashy, scarry
bark. A dappling,
shifty light.
Your predator,
that thunder-
son, that threat-
echo—his
careful steps
leaf-whispering.

He hasn’t taken
everything yet.
You’re still
as a tracked
rabbit disappearing
itself. Your arms
upstretched,
your lowered
gaze. The dark
canopy looming.
The choice
made clear:
camouflage or
surrender. You,
Francesca,
gone within
the year.

GAYLORD BREWER

WHEN THE TIME OF FLOOD AT LAST REPLACED

When the Time of Flood at last replaced
the Time of Drought, its winds brought
not rebirth but deluge, not cleansing
but torrent, not rejoicing but retribution.
The Time of Lamentation arrived as prophesied.
From its shadow the Time of Tentative
Faith, the Time of Renewed Privilege,
the Time of False Glory, of course the Time
of Willful Blindness. Followed by the Time
of Fire's Return, the Time of Final Reckoning.
Beyond the Time of Great and Lasting
Darkness, however, no record remains.

WE SOAKED OUR SANDALS WHEN CROSSING THE RUBICON.

We soaked our sandals when crossing the Rubicon.
They dried out quick enough on that dusty road
to Damascus. We marched on, parched for epiphany,
a "name-changer" to cement places in cruel history,
define us as the good guys we believed ourselves.
Late in the story for resurrections, ours didn't happen.
Donkey this, leper that, never the cool, cleansing sip
of water. The dead stagger from tombs, consider,
retreat behind their stone. It's all about image. Crushed
rebellion was bad for ours. You know how this ends.
I just pray, 6,000 bemused, severed heads lining
the Appian Way, mine looks handsome on its pike.

MADISON HOFF

MARCH 18TH

Isn't this called conceding?
When two hearts break between
the days of St. Patrick and St. Joseph
we should've known then
saving is not actually god's work
but you'd say "whose god anyway?"
I'd agree, and isn't that called conceding?
Between the dirt on the ground
and filth in your mouth
you could compost into something richer
and I'll plant flowers by myself
you'll pass by a church every night
on your way home from work
one day I won't remember the date
and you may not recall my name
but you'll feel sick in the middle of March
with no idea why

COMMUNICATE

The tales we tell to taste together—
I spit sympathy strawberries
you chew raged raspberries
I masticate mushrooms until
you want them too, so we chew
and chew and chew.
We disagree on the texture
But still indulge one another.

Melons might bond us
but our opinions on onions silence this kitchen.
Knife in hand you claim you could kill him as you cry.
I trust you without asking for a slice myself.
If I could taste water
would you let me describe to you the flavor—
and would you believe me?
I wouldn't.



THE SAWDUST COVENANT

It was a heart swap / sock hop
 back when sawdust slicked the floors
 Menthol / mothballs / muskets in the walls
 like my father / that tree trunk of a guy—
 Applesauce / aardvarks / armadillos
 laying down their lives
 pathetic / punishers / patriots—
 Good woodworkers wrenching on the road for God
 It was a Dollywood disco / dizzying splinter
 Hot goss and all that
Can you believe how much a liver costs these days?
 You were a buzzcut / buzzsaw / beeswax
 Xerox of a moon drinking moonshine
 We were knocking them back like cowboys / outlaws
 Shopaholic melancholic ostriches / otters at the Outback Steakhouse
 Wishing you would bark up this tree
 or slip the damn hatchet in my coffee
 But it's my birthday—
 Tornado season in Tennessee—
 Goodbye trampoline / treasure trove / tricycle / trick-shot
 Quarry / quagmire of going untouched in the umbrage / the ultraviolet
 sandpaper conundrum of our Easter vacation
 Going haywire / hogtied / hogwash / into horseshit—
 It was an ark / an artless architect / Arigiopie spider
 I can still smell the helpless pine
 I'm choking on the chisel-grain of the corny air
 Locked up in the county jail / courtroom / color-picture TV
 Jungle juice in the jukebox
 Threw the adze into the ceiling fan
 Rumors of thievery / tyrannosauruses / threesomes in the streets
 Whittled down
 to wood chips / wendigos / wildebeests



Wild body parts slumming it in the shredder
Yeah, buddy / bronco / bullpen
You're just a word in a cage
Waiting for your language
To throw you enough bones to build
a skeleton key—
Grinding / groaning / gearing up
for the knockout punch—
Rodeo / race car / sports bar
Zooming in on the zero, the face not yet caught up
On the waitress dancing for the funeral / the wedding / the ending
Swear you won't forget how she moves

WHITE SMOKE

You've got the palo santo,
and I am the entire peach tree. We live in an armoire of candles.
I'm putting the end-times on the flatscreen. Wish they'd cast me.
Wish that I could grill us a steak, but I'm useless. I'm a peach tree.
I'm good for burning. Kissing you when you come home from work.
They said to write it down. *Write the wind, Bullseye. You're on fire.*
You've got such a story. Golden red delicious sun-spatter. Both hands over my heart.
Keep the loving hungry, I guess. Now the sound of *errand* gets me going.
Any distraction from this never-ending commercial break, and I can't
change the channel from a white turtle with my loser face. He's going to lose
this truck drivers versus mermen chronicle. A bunch of dirty-sexy-sad fishbones
in the gutter / the archive / the sunk ship he's sailing to Fiji
filming the latest season of *Survivor*. Watch it back home. Eating peaches.
Packing a bowl. Grilling the TV how he likes it.
This is the part where I remember I'm a tiger.
That my grandmother had pet geckos and monkeys,
growing up in the Philippines. *It's something*, I tell you
when you ask me what I think about nothing.
And in this story, we have never known sadness.
Not once.

SPOILED FOR CHOICE

A rut is one solution. For thirty years,
a banana at noon. Of Dum-Dums,
the rootbeer. From every jukebox,
Back in Black.

Dopamine's first-come,
first-served—that's a technique, too.
See under whim and turquoise
and Mai Tai. See under chartreuse
and Lucky Charms.

Then there are
those who profess to have no preference.
Any cut of meat, all kinds of music.
I don't believe it, but it's a way through.

Me, I am studying those who impose
choreography on their druthers. Iambus.
Harmonics. The way the knight moves.

UNTITLED-00-3.JPG

This one's slightly better—my head not cocked like a dog's, the bulge
of fat below my ribs cropped out. The wrinkles at the corners of my eyes
curve to meet the lines behind the apples of my cheeks, the *malar eminence*.
Parentheses around the roundness. It's not always easy to tell young from old,
or even alive from dead. Remember the photo I found in my mother's house—
Lydia Futch in waxy black and white, pale as her christening gown, head tipped
on the wilted stem of her neck? Dead, or just asleep? Remember the January
plumeria—leafless, scrubby, but still producing blooms, sweetest at night, when
the sphinx moth hovers and unfurls its tongue like a New Years' streamer?
Tricky flowers—no nectar, just pollen. The moths are charismatic—they draw
our attention, as the flowers draw theirs. Their predator: the Hawaiian hoary
bat, named for its frosted fur-tips, the opposite of mine, white at the roots.
It's not far from parenthetical to invisible to dead, but for now I'm here
in color, walking around in my bikini at 7am with a flower behind my ear.

UNTITLED-07348.JPG

Without the sidewalk in the foreground, the cobbled wall would
look like cracked black earth, the vine like tracks where water ran
or ran out. No visible mortar. Maybe the vine holds the stones
together—dried and gnarled but still attached. The resort has let
things go: condos boarded up, the general store unstocked except
for cans of Spam and 20-year-old aqua socks. The vine looks like
varicose veins, wiry capillary tangles, twists and turns of bowel.
Beyond the wall, more condos, kiawe trees with inch-long thorns.
We're in the rain shadow, the trade wind shadow. Nothing to do
with commerce: *trade* means *path* or *tack* or *track*. To *blow trade*,
to blow steadily *in a habitual or regular course*. And *rain shadow*
means no rain and no shadow. Means drought. The vine widens as it
climbs out of frame. Would you rather be an alluvial fan or a delta—
disperse under burning sun, or drown yourself in someone else?

i do everything



twice

once

the first time



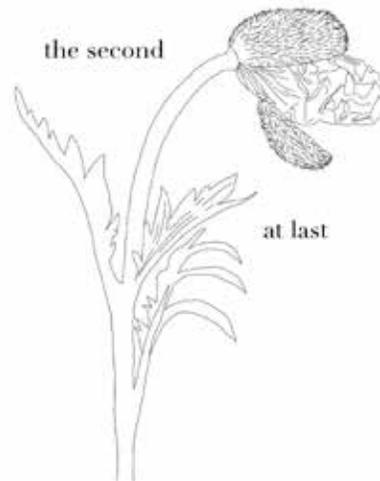
to prove



i can

the second

at last



because

i want to



SHORT 'N SWEET: THE BOOK SPEAKS



ALL EMPIRES MUST BY MIA KANG

(Airlie Press, 2025)

How would you, All Empires Must, describe yourself in two sentences or less?

Which is worse, selfhood or its attempted description? I refuse to admit to either one.

Where would you go on your dream vacation?

All roads lead to Rome.

What is your favorite color?

Blue.

What is your favorite movie?

I never remember movies.

What advice would a therapist give you?

See a psychoanalyst.

What is your favorite smell?

Pine.

Do you collect anything, and what do these items mean to you?

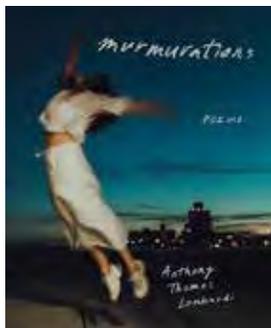
I collect fragments of buildings.

What is your favorite snack?

I pretend not to have a body and go hungry always.

If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

Remus, the mythical brother of Romulus, to hear the story from his side.



MURMURATIONS BY ANTHONY THOMAS LOMBARDI

(YesYes Books, 2025)

How would you, murmurations, describe yourself in two sentences or less?

I look scattered and frantic but it's the storm wrapped around the eye. I'm simmering in the middle.

I haven't even opened yet.

Where would you go on your dream vacation?

Somewhere beyond this roof, it doesn't matter where. It's beautiful here but even the most decrepit houses, the cracked and fissured sidewalks offer light through their breaks. Prague? Paris?

What is your favorite color?

Teal. It's soothing in short stretches and you can imagine the ocean slipping over your head when it starts to spread.

What is your favorite movie?

All That Jazz, Bob Fosse, 1979. Just the right amount of shambolic sparkle and hedonistic mayhem. It gives the cliché

beauty in the breakdown some weight. No matter how much Joe Gideon hurts the ones he loves, they show up for him as a choir in the end.

What advice would a therapist give you?

To stop self-medicating. But what's medicine anyway? Who decides?

What is your favorite smell?

Lavender. Clean and subtle and floral but evocative.

Do you collect anything, and what do these items mean to you?

People. Disasters. Miracles. Without them, I would not be answering these questions.

What is your favorite snack?

Peanut butter off the spoon. Maybe some maple.

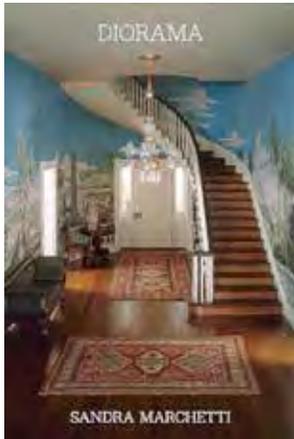
If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

Frank O'Hara. I can't think of anyone else offhand who could match the vibrancy and non-stopness of my energy. We might implode.

DIORAMA BY SANDRA MARCHETTI

(Stephen F. Austin University Press, 2025)

REVIEW BY JOE ROBERTS



STUNNING PRESENTATIONS OF DEATH, TRANSFORMATION, AND WHAT GETS LEFT BEHIND

In Sandra Marchetti's third poetry collection, *Diorama*, she pulls inspiration from the natural world, visual art, and the work of other poets to craft florid poems that are both elegiac and life-affirming. The subject matter of *Diorama* is diverse, with some poems focusing on animals, others discussing delicious food, and a few gracefully wallowing in plain old human longing. And while this might seem an eclectic smattering of themes, that's largely the point; the collection is a world in miniature, a comprehensive diorama of the many joys and sorrows of living. Marchetti masterfully ties these disparate elements together into a cohesive tableau through her consistent voice, dexterous rhymes, and vivid imagery.

The book's opening poem, "Shadow," aptly introduces Marchetti's technical skill as well as her ability to find beauty in nature, even when that beauty comes with an implicit threat. In the poem's initial handful of rhymed couplets, we find the narrator out in the woods discovering mushrooms, appreciating the trilling of goldfinches, and reading a sign that states, "Foxes are opportunistic feeders." So far, so pleasant. But in the second half of this piece, the narrator realizes a fox is watching her, perhaps assessing if it could eat her. As this revelation dawns, the rhymes slip and enjamb, cropping up in unexpected places. The effect is a musical disorientation which mirrors the speaker's exhilaration at this encounter. "Shadow" then ends abruptly with these foreboding lines:

*Hidden to your scruff in the gathering
dusk, I hold and release your stare,*

*that of a silver-eyed murderer
who smells breath in the air.*

Many of the poems in *Diorama* are similar to this opener in

both tone and craft. The collection does more than just revel in the threatening grandeur of the wilderness, though. It also enters into conversation with the poetic tradition as Marchetti draws on material from many other poets, such as Anne Sexton, Octavio Paz, and Li-Young Lee. Her dazzling "Refrain" even adopts the rhythm of an old Anglican hymn.

In fact, it wouldn't be wholly inaccurate to call *Diorama* a collage of extant work, at least in part, since Marchetti incorporates outside influences throughout all three sections of the book. It should also be mentioned that the dedication reads, "for all of the artists I stole from, and for my husband," and the book ends with a lengthy list of endnotes crediting all the poetry and artistic works from which Marchetti borrows lines, imagery, and rhythms.

Of all the poets (other than Marchetti) who haunt *Diorama's* pages, though, none features so often or so prominently as Louise Glück, the one-time poet laureate of the United States. To start with, the book takes its epigraph, "At the end of my suffering / there was a door," from Glück's "The Wild Iris," a metaphysical poem in which an iris speaks to humanity about the renewal that follows death.

In addition to this epigraph, there are many times throughout where Marchetti alludes to Glück directly. For example, in the poem "Semblance," Marchetti says:

*I see in the hue of a winter not yet
gone. The sun slips from stripped
trees and between the irises*

*Glück does not remember
the daffodils, gentle in their clusters,*

clutching at the yellows of their throats.

*A couple playing catch slides
from view; still the diorama
assembles, the scene runs true.*

It's also worth noting that this is the first and only time Marchetti uses the word "diorama" within the book. This gives "Semblance" almost the same weight as a titular poem, and it lends special gravity to Glück's presence in it.

Perhaps the boldest of Marchetti's references to Glück is found within "The Door," which appears fairly late in the book. Here, Marchetti inverts the line she chose for the epigraph, stating:

*I want to say,
this is the end*

*of happiness. Will
I accept love?*

This is a clever and all-too-human response to the speaker's acceptance of endings in "The Wild Iris" and its eponymous collection. While it might be a comfort to believe that some vegetal rejuvenation comes after the suffering of life, as Glück's speaker claims, when you actually find yourself at that threshold, it's difficult to see the end as anything but a loss.

The resignation of Glück's speaker throughout *The Wild Iris* requires a surrender of what you are so that you might become something else, but Marchetti wants to go on embracing her humanity, even when it comes with sorrow. Several of the poems, such as "Ebb Tide" and "Depth of Field," affirm as much. Through its loving encapsulation of life's varied delightful aspects, *Diorama* stands as a respectful rebuttal to *The Wild Iris*' insistence that death is merely the end of suffering. Death, Marchetti contends, is also the end of every knowable happiness.

Marchetti's ardor for existence also manifests in a key technical difference between her and Glück; Marchetti uses rhyme playfully and with abandon, as I've noted, whereas Glück almost always apportioned rhyme with a teaspoon. For instance, while Glück wrote no shortage of poems on the subject of longing, it's impossible to imagine her crafting something so pleasantly rhymed and unabashedly sentimental as these lines from Marchetti's "All that I can tell from here":

*A map notes you and I
span 3,000 miles,
pin to pin; farther
we have never been.*

*A valley unclasps
beyond my hands.
I anchor my skin
above the rocks and slide
in the cooled blue,*

an ache away from you.

The unveiled pathos of this piece, as well as Marchetti's evident zest for the poem as a sonic artifact, starkly contrasts with Glück's austere, analytical style.

Despite her fervor for life, though, Marchetti also expounds on impermanence fairly often. Poems such as "Refrain" are stunning presentations of death, transformation, and what gets left behind. This theme is most apparent in what I would call the collection's crowning jewel, "Triptych," in which Marchetti imparts these somber lines:

*All things
are migratory—
leaves on trees,
feathers molting.
The geese cannot
live in their coats
much longer...
Their necks wander on
toward dusk, toward
time, the endless
crest of the preserve.*

Yes, Marchetti is in love with the world and her place in it, and she loses herself in that love through poems like "Of Late," "County Donuts," and "Witness." However, the most beautiful images she can summon are so often tinged with their own ephemerality, as they are in "Triptych." No matter how much we may love our lives, Glück's door is one we cannot help but step through, which Marchetti acknowledges through her depiction of the present moment as naught but a transitory preserve.

Marchetti drives this point home in the collection's final poem, "A Swim at Europe Bay Beach in July, Deserted," which borrows imagery from Anne Sexton's "The Nude Swim." At the end of this borderline desolate poem, Marchetti writes:

*I am convinced now that more
than anything what we want

is to live forever. No one can
see us, smashed as sea glass, open—

the ants eating our cherries
at the shoreline.*

These concluding lines perfectly encapsulate the overarching tension of *Diorama*; nothing lasts forever, not even the most beautiful things, and so we suffer. Nevertheless, the ephemeral joys found in nature, art, and our relationships with other people make us long for eternal life, even if we recognize that such a life would be plagued with the unremitting agony of loss.

ALLISON ZHANG

RHYME FOR AN EMPTY ROOM

The radiator clanks
like a child

kicking tin cans
down a Sunday street.

I watch shadows
walk the walls,

coatless,
muttering their own names.

All night,
I inventory things

I've lost:
hairpins, sleep,

the taste for confession.
I rhyme them

because silence
sounds less final

in couplets.

GRAMMAR LESSON

My mother split sentences
with a kitchen knife,
spooned verbs
into rice bowls.

I learned the past tense
from her burnt fingertips:
Was.
Had been.
Never again.

At school,
my mouth
wore new words
like tight shoes.

Teachers circled my effort
in red ink.

At home,
my mother warned:
English will not save you,
but it might let you leave.

JEFF NEWBERRY

VILLANELLE FROM TWO LINES BY DIANE SEUSS

I bought a blue knife
to look tough and safe.
It didn't change my life.

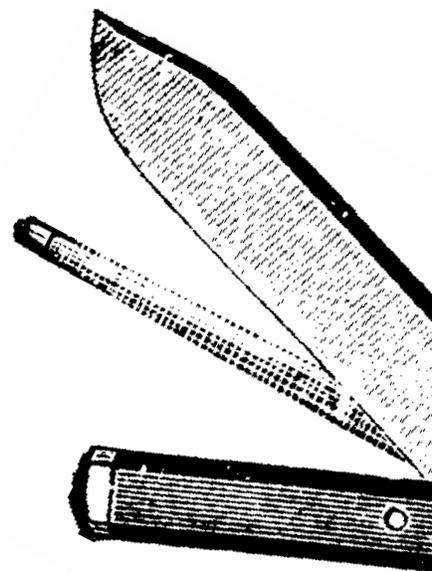
No street kid of strife
or hardscrabble fate,
I still bought a blue knife

to show them all that I
refused to feel afraid.
It didn't change my life.

If you cut, hold it tight.
You must wield it this way.
I bought a blue knife

because I knew I would fight
the mean ones who say,
"This won't change your life."

The blade was sized just right
to slice thin skin—only mine.
I bought a blue knife.
It didn't change my life.



DONALD PASMORE

ORC LICKING

*The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.*
—Proverbs 18:21

There is a part of me that wants to experience life
by tongue, to lick unfamiliar things

with the hope they don't slice too
deep. I spent my summer orally

fixating around the world, learning
how orc chiefs taste like Dove

soap and desire. He wasn't my type but he spoke
French—when you lick there is so much

left unsaid: *I love your chest
hair and conquer me daddy.* Some might say

it was fate—we even belonged to the same
cult, but really it was a matter of seating.

There is time for the burn of tobacco
and morning to rise into my mouth, when taste

will clock itself back into mechanism. Swimming
in the river at midnight, bare and barely

aware of the passing peasants, I will pray
for an arrow to pierce my mouth, an excuse

for having no words left between.



JO ANN CLARK

WE APPEAR TO THEM AS

creatures of the shallow deep
who once discovered fire

themselves. Shifty, recombining
throat, breast, lung. Another voice—

little bittern
a-nest in his crib.

Just fine, fleet, and fin.
With these hands

of being manifold, femalian. Not a thing more
of the globe, its breakneck spin.

Of the tracks
of every last brute thing.

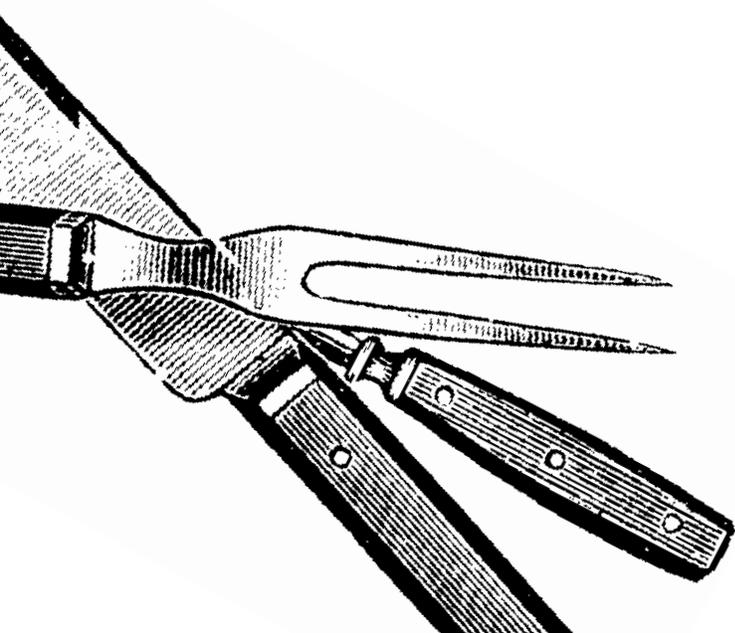
Desire, something
witchhung out to dry:

clingstone mind
burnished and burned,

fevering of here,
hounded to dust by wind.

With these hands—
our starting point, our terminus

(please, no prayers)—
quickliming their own memorial.





SEAN HILL

WANT AT THE TRANSFER STATION

A slipping whistling sliding sound of a song calls my attention at the City of Helena Solid Waste Transfer Station where the sign reads NO SCAVENGING Violators Will Be Prosecuted where I was just moments ago with my seven-year-old son and our recycling minding my own business and with questions on my mind— *Where will this harvest from our garbage go? What will we reap? What did we sow?*—when your song found me and I call my son's attention to it. I want to share the singer with my son in the middle of our recycling run to this transfer station like when a jam from my youth comes on the radio when we're in the middle of our erranding for things to bring home and I get excited. I once heard the clear whistles of one of your eastern cousins' songs and thought it sang *Hey young man, go away*. And once a friend said you sound like you're singing a question; he heard a rising call that I didn't, and if it was, it would have been uptalking seeking agreement, right? Since, what question would you have? Aside from those questions of life—how to keep your body safe and going in order to make generations to come—those needs and drives, which may sit in you not as questions. At any rate, I want him, my son, to see you, the belter of the song that drops, a drawly glissando or perhaps twangy vibrato, a western song, with that bright bib, the yellow of a sunflower? Some flower? Or maybe the yellow of detritus gathered with hope of it getting a new use—an emptied laundry detergent jug or Pacifico can? Not a question in my want, what I mean is (trying to find you with my eye) I want to show my boy not metaphors in the day but your coal black necklace bold against that yellow reminding me of that boy-mensch Charlie Brown's shirt and your streaked mantle of browns and blacks on your wings and back matching the dried grasses and the shadows they cast to keep you hid in your ground feeding and ground nesting habits and hard to find in this valley east of MacDonald Pass and the continental divide in this watershed with your spill of those liquid slipping notes in a run that floats open over the open land next to the roll-off dumpsters.

RITA MALENCZYK

PORTRAIT

Blue shadows cross the face
of someone I knew, the photo
several years old, the time
much happier. The snow
made the birds disappear into the background,
made the face an anchor for the lens. I saw
the moment when the thing
I looked for, the smile,
burst into the light,
hit the optical glass, made the move
toward all of us. That was the day
the sun cooperated,
which it doesn't, now, anymore
since more trees cover us. It rains.

ASTRONOMY OF INVISIBLE MARKINGS



This year insomnia falls on a Thursday
 one unwelcome orbit
 closer to being remembered

I celebrate another birthday
 by upholding my annual tradition
 of not getting a tattoo

and there is no phone call
 from my father so it almost
 feels like he's still alive

none of the spun stars can see
 how many lost boats are docked
 at the bottom of the ocean

JOHN BELK

SAGITTARIUS

a powder boy hung himself
 under a half moon when
 chiron was in the south
 i watched his young
 boy's legs sway to-&-from
 the foremast in a breeze
 i have known this
 lonely cadence

before they cut him down
 i thought of home my
 childhood stream in a still
 shaded wood no sky
 no worry
 no trembling hands

what folly : to remember
 a mummer's farce
 a child's escape

[FOR EACH LIVING THING IS BORN ...]

for each living thing is born another endures pain
 separation cleaving i suppose all life is leaving
 but i wish that once just once a tree would hold
 its leaves i grow tired of the sea & it of me

but i have pulled my earthen roots voluntarily
 ridden aimless into darkness sparked a torch & kept
 my wits & what of it : a pouch of gold a skin
 of wine some small reward & i'll be fine



JOHN BELK

GROG

her belly bulged from under wool breeches retained piss
O irony of ironies nothing but water for 13 months &

it kills you from the inside 13 days onto land you get 10 oz
of barrel rum to make the water safe & some did [but not her]

ship's surgeon was a joiner with debts outstanding & counterfeit
papers & a corn knife that could cut through bone he tried

to use the stem of a pipe as a catheter relieve pressure but
it weren't his fault [as tho he'd say it were] not all of us will

see the still waters of the Phaecians & O irony of ironies
all we would find if we did are gods sunk to the depths of them

THE BUTCHER OF ST. EUSTACE

'swhat they call me. & i have taken lives. 5 shipping clerks
left neatly in a pile atop their ledgers of the men they bought
and sold, VOC insignias in gold. But they agreed to such an
end by virtue of vocation : 1 eye for 1 eye. Am i devil?
By most metrics. But i never harmed a sparrow. All my crimes
are straight & narrow & all involved know the score. The rules
have never been in question : daggers cut in both directions
& i cannot be blamed for every gambler loses his head.
So roll your dice, purse your lips, calculate, & think again.



FUGUE

Fish-twist muscles tail
above pond bubbles, into—
one skids across—
algae-green scrim, surface
tension slacking in its wake.

Spotted, all, but one bears
on its nose marks in the shape
of an illuminated manuscript cat,
sloppily rendered. Another flattens
light into milky scales
shallow as a dirty mirror.

“How can they live,” asks my son,
“out of water?”

As we do
in it, I say, though unsure, and he runs
out of sight and I forget—

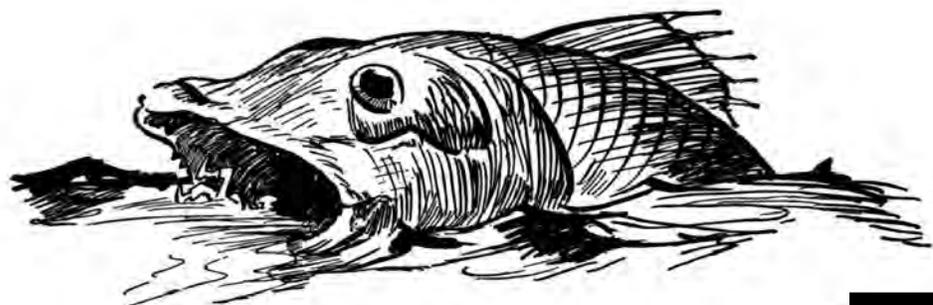
a shallow horizon

watching
surfacing mouths—
air, sloppily,
air again—
bubbles’ surface tension, their stock
of air, water mirroring
sky-slack

mouths
eclipsing

FACTS ABOUT LOTUS-EATERS

My mouth is filled with sweet fruit
and hallelujah. I am tucked away
in boundless days of pleasure,
ringing the devil’s doorbell. I am
peeled from the rinds of burden
in a sanctum of countless
half-eaten persimmons, leaking
freely like tart and daydreaming
hearts. There is no aching here;
no shred of discontent, only
allure and tenderness. I listen to
the ejaculation of bees. Pop goes
he who obeys his own phallus.
Call it metaphor. Yet, nothing
but persimmons taste like
persimmons. The air pulses with
the hum of freedom.
I know nothing of gods here.



KATHRYN KNIGHT SONNTAG

COMMON MYSTERY

after "Madonna and Child," a medieval grave rubbing

Where are you pointing naked child what are the gold ribboned words between us those which bind and balloon to celestial flags as a threshold between you and saints runes now a memory lost between your mouth and contrition we have all seen your mother's downcast eyes her *be it unto me* handing on the fruit of her yes the common mystery of paired halos but this dragon squatting like a statue mouth agape as subterranean longing pupils as wide as moons is never far from the tree of life the flowers blooming all the time what words must we swallow to reach you what fire as pomegranate and stone must enter our bellies and return palms for ashes as we walk by day after day unseen unseeing you bright fruit finding us under the two fingers on your chest



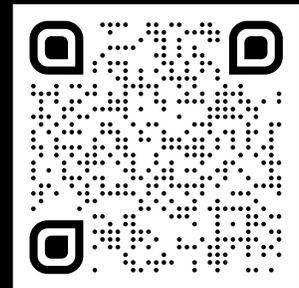
EMOTIONAL HISTORY

after Nicole Sealey's "Medical History"

I've (mis)carried death. The first man I love falls into a thermal pool. I'm spooked by everything too sudden. My mother's mother only cries behind doors after losing her first husband to other women, after her first son is hit by a train. My father's grandmother loves another in Holland but marries a frail Englishman in Utah. Shortchanged, she never smiles. Entitled, her daughter, on a dime, falls into rage. I love all the wrong ones until the right one and my heart opens her eyes, as if to disprove the ghosts of whom I write. Sometimes, I feel myself floating away on nights turned dark too early. And, I understand, my son in utero asks for less, less possession, *please* as he stretches the walls of my womb.

POETRY & PLAY(FULNESS): AN INTERVIEW WITH ROB CARNEY & NANO TAGGART

WE'RE THRILLED TO BE ABLE TO PUBLISH *WRITING GAMES*, A CHAPBOOK BY UTAH POET ROB CARNEY IN 2026 AS PART OF OUR MICRO-DOSE SERIES. It will include a number of his original writing prompts and poems sprung from those prompts. (*Sugar House Review* subscribers will receive this book.) Our editor Nano Taggart sat down with Rob to talk about the role of playfulness in poetry and teaching poetry. This conversation was also inspired by a panel Nano hosted as part of the 2025 Utah Poetry Festival, "Poetry and Play(fulness)," which you can view by scanning the QR code on the right.



Nano Taggart: *What do we mean when we say that a poem is playful? Are we talking about humor? Are we referring to craft that shapes the sounds in a poem? Or are we talking about something larger that sociologists and cognitive behaviorists have long since defined—that (in the words of Thomas S. Henricks) “play is the laboratory of the possible”?*

Rob Carney: I like that phrase a lot—“the laboratory of the possible”—and think it’s right and feel like I’ve had that experience. Like, one time I ran across an interesting fact: that our bodies are 72.8% water. Interesting because I’m pretty sure the surface of Earth is the same: 72.8% water. Which seemed cool, and more than a coincidence, so I decided I wanted to write about it. Instead I wound up playing around with other “facts,” or at least other declarations, and pretty soon I finished a catalog poem called “The Person You Love Is 72.8% Water”:

*I don't know if I'm going to hell,
but I like toast for breakfast,*

*and I can eat breakfast
any time of day.*

*A woman's slender arms
make me wish I was a painter.*

*Cats belong in every bookstore. They'll make the words
seep deeper in your bones.*

*If God and I were on a rocky beach,
we'd search out perfect skipping stones.*

*I'd tell Him my favorite miracle:
water into wine.*

*My favorite mood is Angry. That's a lie.
My favorite sin is lying. That's not true,*

*but it dresses up the story
like a good storm dresses up the sky,*

*like fire and fiddles take wood and make it speak.
I know, I know—water isn't wine.*

*But at night, when someone's thirsty,
you can bring it, cold as heaven. They can drink.*

Is there humor in that poem? I hope so. But I don't intend for it to be like comedy, where the structure is a setup for a punch line and laughter—the end. The humor comes earlier. And then the ending, if it is a punch line, is a rounding back to the title but with action now and some small demonstration of love.

(“The Person You Love Is 72.8% Water” was published in *Story Problems*, Somondoco Press, 2011.)

NT: *Why do you think readers might seek out playfulness in the poetry they read?*

RC: Readers might not start out knowing they're seeking playfulness when they pick up a poet or a journal to read, but if they happen upon some playfulness, then whammo; that's what they're going to get excited about. I can use myself as an example. Reading *Cream City Review*, I found a poem called "The Pyromaniac and the Gas Station Girl"—great title, for starters—and it's a poem I can still recite from memory after thirty-plus years. It's the same with my own work—I like being surprised as I'm writing, and the only way to do that is with interesting, imaginative (hence, playful) language. New Phrasing = New Discovery, and new is why people like to write and read, or at least it's why I do.

NT: *Can you talk a little more about the first device in Writing Games, the one about starting with an intro phrase? And do you ever use other devices besides that one to spark play?*

RC: Sure. Well, the stranger the intro phrase, the better. And if we can subvert the expectations raised by our title, that's better again. Like this, for example: "When a black cat crosses your path,"—I definitely wasn't going to follow that up by saying, "then it's going to bring bad luck":

WHEN A BLACK CAT CROSSES YOUR PATH,

*it means you're probably in a neighborhood.
When a narwhal crosses your path,
it means you're in a boat. Somewhere
in the Arctic Ocean...*

After that, I was in, and I wound up writing the poem. As for other devices to spark play, there's this too—not something I made up this time; something that exists and always has—myths, fables, and origin stories. I write many of them, and think they're like play. I'm pretty sure most readers think so too, even if they're about serious subjects, because people recognize the old form but haven't heard your new story, so they want to know what's going on and find out how it ends; meaning, they aren't reading for info, they're reading for play, even if it's serious play. Also, these old forms come with playfulness built in. Animals talk. Strange things happen. Causal connections are more emotional than logical. Listeners are willing to let magic just be magical since they know there will be an explanation, or some implied meaning, by the end. Even if not, the story will have been sad, or funny, or in some other way captivating. The other good thing is that these forms are built on metaphor, so listeners wind up thinking about how the plots and characters

apply to their own lives. "In the Beginning Was a Girl" and "The Man Has a Heart Like a Kite" are examples. I have some newer poems I call "strange résumés" that sort of fit in these genres too.

NT: *What about the crafting part of it, the work left to do after a draft has happened—can play emerge through the process of revision? I struggle with revision, at least with enjoying it. Can revision itself be a form of play? In other words, how do we make sure we're enjoying ourselves, but not just entertaining ourselves?*

RC: That's a good point because the word "play" shouldn't get reduced to goofing around. Play can be significant and add meaning and reengage the listener in ways that, say, just another fact or "sonorous sentence full of loaded import" might not.

I mean, you said it yourself at the AWP Conference. You told me a good example of what you mean about playfulness with language is my poem "Story Problems," which isn't a humorous kind of joke poem. It's more serious than that in the subject matter even if it leaps around a lot. Those leaps weren't just some kind of sudden-outpouring-of-inspiration thing. They're a product of both, of drafting and revising, of working and shaping and seeing something start to emerge, finding an order, then addressing the logic and rhythms of the whole by revising.

You said an example of what you're trying to highlight when you consider this question was when I say, "On every day of my life but one, I didn't see a moose." Of course, the straight-up-info-syntax would've been, "One day, I saw a moose," but that's a lot less interesting, and it doesn't set up the rest of what's coming in a vivid way, and vivid is what poems and stories ought to be since vivid is what readers want. Plus, if we don't let ourselves write lines like this, doesn't writing start to feel like every other job?

Of course, now that I've said that, it sounds like a contradiction, like I'll just wind up saying that we need to entertain ourselves, and that's true, but we can't be self-indulgent. There's an audience, and the audience needs to be rewarded for the time we're asking for their attention. I guess what I'm saying is it's both, and revising is the work that makes the bothness happen.

NT: *What about the consideration of length of a poem? Is there a generosity in giving a reader a brief snapshot that can sort of bounce around in their head versus a longer text?*

RC: I talk about this in my book *Accidental Gardens: New &*

Revised (Wakefield Press, 2021). It's a collection of 48 flash essays about place, the environment, and writing poetry. I talk throughout about poetics, especially in the second section, "Wine Is Rain in Translation." Those 14 essays include some other writing-game suggestions and thoughts about writing, which probably sounds like a plug, and I guess it is because it's a book I'm really happy with, and I hope people read it.

More specifically though—or at least alongside your question—the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer said something that made a big impression on me when I was still in my twenties. It was on the dust jacket of a hardback I don't own (I own the paperback), so this is just my memory of what Tranströmer said. He said that whenever he and his friends got bored in school, they'd pass notes to each other—little phrases and images and whatnot. He said poems are like that: Our daily life is going on all the time, with its routines and rules and boredoms, then a poem comes along and taps us on our shoulder and hands us a note. To me that explanation makes a lot of sense. Not because I don't ever write long poems. I do. But those long poems might be sequences, or movements, or collages, or in some way a gathering-together of smaller parts. *The Book of Drought* is an example of this. Or a poem like "North and West of Winnemucca," which you know well since it first came out in *Sugar House Review*.

NT: *What about the poem as it sits on the page? Is enjambment a sort of play?*

RC: Hmm. I'm not sure this answers your question exactly—for exactness I should talk about sonnets, probably—but this is something that happened recently that caught me by surprise and stopped me from doing what I was about to do, which was go to work early and spend the extra time grading. What happened was I noticed our cat. He wasn't going to work early. He was like an art installation of napping, and that made me smile. And then a line popped into my head, so I sat down and wrote. I suppose you could call that another kind of work instead of play, and you're not wrong. It's work, and the world at large is kidding itself if it doesn't think so and assign it value.

Anyway, I did still go to work, just not in my car yet and not on the minute-hand's schedule, so it probably fits the definition of playfulness you're getting at. Plus, the poem's plot, so to speak, is about sometimes doing what you want to do, with your whole self invested, and I do use enjambment:

MEANING AND BUSY AREN'T SYNONYMS

*Sherlock is keeping me honest
by sleeping in a chair.*

*He's a cat, so he can suss things out,
consider the corners of his universe*

*between blinks,
between impulse,
between which small smells*

the wind comes disclosing...

*If it sounds like I'm praising an animal, I am;
I think it's my job right now.*

*Not my timeliness
between parking spots,*

*not the beep-assault
of messages—*

*hell, Sherlock wouldn't even type this up.
He'd stretch his paws.*

Those first two lines enjamb, and that delay, where you have to eye-skip down, makes the second line more surprising. It isn't the only enjambment in the poem, but it's the one that matters most since it's the hook.

NT: *Seems like you write about cats a lot.*

RC: Yeah, I guess so. I like them. To me, they're a part of the landscape, a bit of wildness we've invited inside, and they're as much a part of the house as the kitchen. Still, it's probably just a subliminal thing since the homage poem in *Writing Games* is me riffing on Christopher Smart's "For I Will Consider My Cat Jeoffry."

NT: *Are there other poets you like to read who do this sort of language play? Poets who you've learned things from or whose work has served as an example?*

RC: Yeah, Scott Poole, Jessy Randall, Anne Sexton, Frank O'Hara, Tomaž Šalamun, Vasko Popa, Richard Garcia. They're the ones who jump to mind first. I like all of them. And they've got book titles like *Hiding from Salesmen*, *Lunch Poems*, and *Injecting Dreams into Cows*. If people think Sexton wasn't playful (given her problems with depression and other things), yes, she was. Her style and language were playful. I mean, she calls cocoa "that warm brown mama" and praises ice cubes, saying, "for you are the perfect size for miniature polar bears to float upon." So Sexton can be as serious as a storm or a fire, but she's playful, too.

NT: *Thank you, Rob. Your involvement with this project, this magazine, has been an important part of our story. I can't believe it's been 16 years since I asked you to send poems for our first issue.*

RC: These were great questions. Thanks for asking them. And thanks for having me along for the ride.

WRITING EXERCISE: FROM NORMAL TO OTHER THAN

AN EXCERPT FROM ROB CARNEY'S CHAPBOOK OF WRITING
EXERCISES AND POEMS, *WRITING GAMES*,
FORTHCOMING FROM SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW PRESS, 2026.

It might sound counterintuitive, but even free-verse poems often follow a pattern. For instance, this one seems to get used a lot: a first-person speaker tells a lineated story, saying this happened, then this happened, followed by this, and then we get the ending, and the ending is about some kind of understanding gained, like “the moral of the story,” like an unconscious holdover from the time of Aesop’s fables, only I doubt it was Aesop who added those morals; that was probably a publisher, afraid that the kids wouldn’t get it.

Anyway, of course this pattern is fine. I’m not arguing against it. Many great poems have been written this way. But maybe you don’t want to wear the same kind of shoes.

If that’s the case, then you might like this instead:

1. Consider using the third-person point of view instead of first-person.
2. Write something realistic.
3. Add something else that’s realistic.
4. Add a third real thing, but...
5. ...the next thing you write has to be unrealistic.
6. Now make your ending about that unreal thing.

EXAMPLE:

The Librarian’s Story

Most times when he reads, the words speak low
in the voice of his brother, low

so their parents wouldn’t hear and turn off the light
as if nights were for sleeping.

It seemed like the words
had wheels attached,

like they were riding down the road of a story,
but right now

his break is over
so it’s back to work.

There’s a book in the stacks
for every loneliness we’re filled with, every love

we’ve felt feathering or lifting
from the inside out,

which is maybe why the library’s moving.
It’s rolling down the afternoon avenue. And rising

past stoplights and pigeons. All the onlookers smiling and waving
while the words wave back.



GOD'S BIRTHDAY

To no one's
surprise

the earth
like it is

a piece of cake
rounds the sun.

GRAIL

My own
cupped hands

shatter; *here*,
she shows me

*again, is how you
hold a pencil.*



THE BLACK SEA

*... is suddenly a cauldron
of military and geopolitical tension.
—New York Times*

The waves that break
to maim the shore
withdrawing take
a pebble less, a pebble more.

FAIRGROUND (OLD PHOTOGRAPH)

Given that the colors
must already be
imagined,

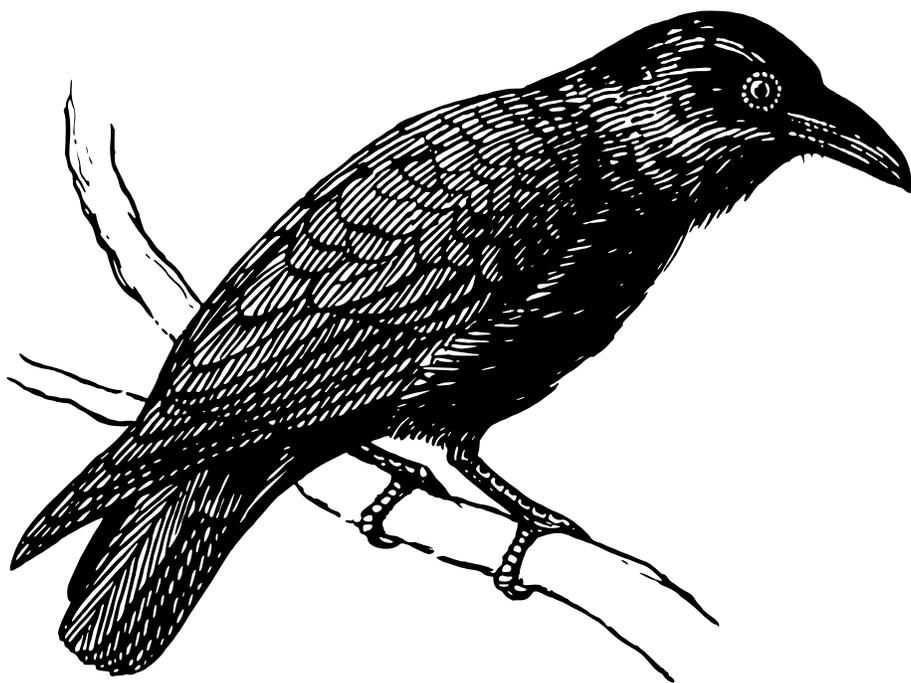
allow the mind's eye
to erase

every last bobbing balloon,

and then subtract
the levitating strings.

Now keep

squarely in view
the clenched raised fists
of the stone-faced children.



KARLY HOU

FINAL SUMMER

That summer we had taken to developing sunspots and cheap film. We flirted with the artist's desire and stayed with our computer jobs. We biked through wheel-deep rain and laid wet hair right on the pillow. We doused everything in paprika and threw it on the fire. We walked recently old hallways and cried. We woke up next to enormous moths. I sat alone with three ravenous courses and eavesdropped and thought of everything. I hid in a basement and called the armchair Kafkaesque. We took turns missing calls and paying for the works. We accused each other and it was fear of leaving. We were bored. You wanted to impress me and I wanted to feel like I could be something. I took pictures of everyone as they slept. You asked me for advice and I laughed. You told me I would be something and I cried. We lied about what we were doing in our rooms. We thought everyone was moving on. We said all creation was worth something. We left confessions for fat ravens. We didn't know it yet, that final summer.

DICK WESTHEIMER

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BIRTH OF STARS

In bed tonight, my wife asks me about the news—what story I'm excited by today and while I'm not sure if this is talk-therapy or foreplay

I tell her that the James Webb Space Telescope captured an image of a galactic cloud not so far away,

160 light-years "as the crow flies" I add and she laughs at my joke, so maybe this *is* foreplay and I tell her

it's a stellar nursery, a place where millions of
baby stars burn
their ways into being and she stirs at the word "nursery"

and I think *now we're really getting somewhere* and I tell her about the shroud of cosmic dust between us and those stars,

when other telescopes like Hubble look in their direction none can see through—and she kinda sighs, sad

that something so beautiful could be victim of galactic haze and I'm thinking—maybe talk of smogged space dims her ardor so I add

that the dust is the remains of older stars and it feeds the birthing ones—like rotting flora and flesh feeds the soil we grow food in—and I can tell

that she feels curiously
aroused by this cosmic circle of life
so hands and bodies follow, find their way as we move

through dilated time, fall into each other's curved space and when we emerge whole and halved, she a nova, me

a darker star, she lets loose like in the movies when a sated lover cries out an ex's name—*Webb, Oh, definitely*

James Webb! which made me feel like a nova too and that's our little astronomy lesson for the day.

MIME ALTERNATE (OR THE COOLING POWER OF AIR)

People perform—from a squatting position—a Slavic folk dance (an underground water channel slightly curved toward the tip) that makes a buzzing sound, same as the venomous grasshopper or the Himalayan goat, whose fine soft wool is used to make an aromatic plant of the pepper family (*esp* when hummed into) and sometimes camps on young children. *Abbrev:* of katzenjammer? see “hangover.” See also azachoc, kazatzka, or kathak (for other classical dances see “high kicks performed by Stalin with a strip of catgut”). For the German spelling of cartel see Kartell, a gruel-like dish made from a crushed, armed servant. The dissolution of the nucleus by disintegration is pure heat loss (emotional distress), a fusion of animal skin and an Australian gum tree, the eleventh letter of the modern English alphabet.

“K” dictionary sonnet

MONEY OBTAINED WITHOUT EFFORT

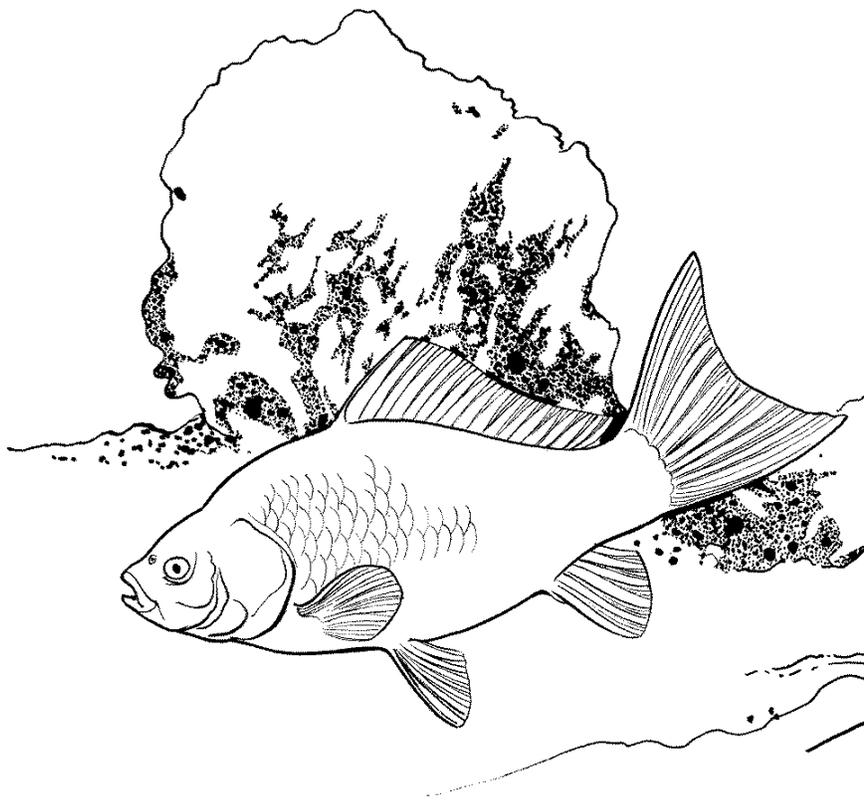
Any of various brightly colored tropical fish of the genus *Poecilia*—a milksop (a person with a Monday morning disinclination to work while mishearing the syllables of a silvery-white metallic invertebrate). Monday *incorporated:* the gangster’s girlfriend is a stark reality, measured by mass and velocity, “a god to whom great mastiff dogs are sacrificed.” Mollie, Mollah, Mollo, Mary. The Russian statesman is exceedingly spiny, a nickernut or a petrol bomb. The extinction of the will, skin that secretes the shell of a sluggish person (a cephalopod), a class of hypothetical primitives with stamens united in a bundle—Monadelphous: united by filaments in the hydrogen atom, a sponge.

“M” Dictionary Sonnet

SOUNDS MADE OFF-STAGE

I do not wish to be a bishop (see *Noëtus* of Smyrna; e.g. “the noisemaker”), a hazelnut in a communist regime, destructive ulceration of the cheek (without eggnog). The French horticulturist ejects ripe seeds, wishing to avoid the wooden head (see intellectual) of the person who grew the protuberance, a swelling, knob-like rumor from the mouth... I do not wish to be governor (*Nohow, no way*), a small piece of meat (noiselessly accompanied by weakened children), a meaningless and nutlike wandering nomad (see so-called Roman’s second “navel”) with Officeholders believed to be Mary Magdeline and Julius Caesar. Noli-me-tangere? A hybrid between a China rose and snow on a television screen. The prosecutor will proceed with the lengthy legal proceedings...

“N” Dictionary Sonnet





LISA COMPO

ASHLYN ASHBAUGH

CONSTELLATION

In line at the observatory,
I wait my turn for the moon.
Like waiting to take communion—
the domed darkness, pale wafer
floating above, a mediated version
of some other, greater light.

In a Latin mistranslation of Exodus,
Moses descends the mountaintop
crowned not with “radiant rays,”
as the Hebrew verse describes,
but *cornuta*—horned. This erratum
spawned a century of frescoes
wherein horns sprout
from Moses’ head, like two antennae
tuned to God’s frequency.

A people can build an entire tradition
of some art historical significance
out of such misunderstandings.
Me, I’ve misconstrued
the moon as omen, coin, and fingernail.
I’ve touched a stranger’s coat
at the grocery store, thinking her you.
Blanched stone face staring down,
the one I wanted turned away
from me forever. In the field
outside the observatory, I mistake
the silence of the stars for the hush
before a storyteller speaks.
When a man touches my elbow
excitedly and lifts his arm,
I hear the word “consolation”
as he points up and says
there, there—

EVERY STREET SIGN BECOMES A SIGN

and I wanted to take them
as confirmation. Follow *Lake* into
a name. Treat the inevitable as safe
and quiet as the *Meadow Circle* touching
my skin with an assurance of alignment
along *Riverside*. If this were real,
I’d make it sacred. Some kind of rite made
in roadside: —*loves you*, and—*sees you*
and *do you need*—? Sometimes, *call* and *are you*
paying attention? My DNA spun with seers
and financial ruin. It’s like the waiting is rusted
shut in a cheap locket. You’re still at the end
of the road where the ocean encroaches
the last houses hanging onto that warped
fishing town’s fragments, picking
through cigarettes and shells. Crab carcasses
ripped clean along the shoreline. The small chapels
and their lifting graveyards as everything else
sinks. Bone white stone nesting in the dawn. The years
faded in *Fresh Pie* on market signs. In the future,
archeologists might travel the sky. The tide
morphing the land into body. The satellite’s
record of sound: shade and fog,
ocean as pulpit, gull cries a persistent
signal. Each brush between drowned
and salted trees a precious relic. I have
these two theories: one, only as children we are
terrestrial. Two, each day you live
within excavation. The sky written
in geography. There are stories
wrapped with repentance and then there is
repentance that wants to tell a story. When my father
sold the house, the dogs went, too. Sometimes,
the new owners sent emails, the dogs
pitching forward to the sky as snow
fell. In our new house, the computer monitor lit
the living room walls with white-blue. The screen
radiating the dark with the image of our dogs
licking our hands as we stepped through the door.

I AM THE ONLY CHANCE I HAVE

—After W.S. Merwin

The clouds stitched to curtains above
 and you were asking for a chance
 or hoping for some complicated and inspiring
 lie. My hands easy liars, giving
 blessings. True, this is my version
 of you. My favorite painting
 a bowl of raspberries. Their ripe
 tenderness painted to transcend
 desire into violet light, jellied life.
 Their tart sweetness better
 than the mouth. I listen to the radio give
 percentages of changing leaves. I want to
 understand passage as season. To easily watch
 a shift, love the color of undoing, in brief
 endings made for endings. And then
 with excitement, quantify it, watch
 as the cold brandishes a sweet ginger
 crisp to everything leaving.
 You're walking so closely it is no wonder
 the sky becomes an edge as if a sword
 swallowed by a swallower—he is so still,
 stiller even than your shaking
 hands. He drinks his glimmer, his center. I watch you
 fold yours. I was looking up
 and laughed. You were like a language
 I could bend. This is the sky.
 I could keep asking, watch the echo
 become steel and throat. Or let this be
 paradox of nothing and glances. The sky shreds,
 there is a voice, which is a mouth
 keeping what belongs to it.

MEGAN STILLWELL

CONDUIT

God has come back to me,
 accidentally—a collective god,
 a godhead, the great spirit,
 yahweh, whatever.

I still mostly ignore it. I still
 only pray to the shifting soil
 of ants and confess to my peers.

Here's a confession:
 I dream of holding
 my dead dog for hours.

Here's another: a man outside my window
 asks his crying daughter, "Are you hurt
 or are you scared?" And after
 a moment, repeats, "Are you hurt,
 or are you scared?"
 "Scared!" I shout from upstairs.

Here's one more:
 when I see you unexpectedly,
 my heart is a shorted-out train car,
 and the hand I lift to wave to you
 is an empty bus on Broadway.

I awake that night
 to the sound of crashing,
 after a dream of making love
 to a woman with a wide, pale gash
 on the back of her thigh.

And I realize, this is what god is.
 When you make love
 to an imaginary stranger
 but still remember their scars.

IN THE '70S, ORANGES CAME IN FROZEN TUBES,
A SLUDGE

you'd mix with water, *et voila*. On the board
at the New York Stock Exchange, FCOJ, a commodity
like pig bellies, steel. Vegetables meant peas and carrots

thawed from their oblong rectangle, iceberg lettuce,
grown-up carrots you had to slice, and celery—
celery hasn't changed. Some time between then and now,
fresh-squeezed became the fashion, pulp for extra

realism. Sunshine comes with the orange, trickling
its way into gray New England. I could go on about
suffering. My friend at work sells us cases of grapefruit,

tangelos, navel oranges—they last a month in the crisper.
Each morning I split one with my partner, his precise
knife-strokes easing the flesh of the sections open, apart.

I GREW UP IN A FAMILY THAT RUINED
EVERYTHING IT TOUCHED.

My mother scattered mothballs to drive away rats.
It didn't work, just wrapped her house in a miasma
that drove away visitors. She didn't mind.

Visitors had become deadly, along with restaurants,
ball-parks, stores. *I've been training for this
my whole life*, she would joke. She used goldenseal
to heal her asthma. Lured feral cats into the house,

gentled them, taught them that hands were meant
for petting. She let the cat litter go too long without
changing. Finally, she hired neighborhood kids to haul

the sofa to the curb. Nothing free lasted long there.
I could go on about suffering. When I grew up,
I moved somewhere better. I bought a new couch.



SUGAR SUGGESTS



An Exodus of Sparks

by Allisa Cherry

(Michigan State University Press, 2025)

In the title poem, Allisa Cherry addresses the America her father grew up in—Southwest, downwind, irradiated: “My father / was so small when you began to powder / his milk teeth and bones with your radiation.” Equal parts family elegy, lyrical spar with childhood faith, and tender croon from a wellspring that feels like a gift, Cherry’s work is both haunting and generative.

—SHARI ZOLLINGER



Ideal Suggestions: Essays in Divinatory Poetics

by Selah Saterstrom

(Essay Press, 2017)

Saterstrom transgresses boundaries of genre and the practice of writing in this illuminating book. Having read it, I still hear whispers of the supernatural and its colorful possibilities.

—KATHERINE INDERMAUR



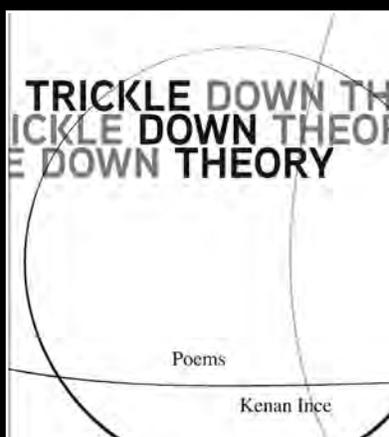
Pelican

by Emily O'Neill

(YesYes Books, 2015)

I finally pulled *Pelican* off our bookshelf and was engaged from poem one, “Kismet”: “But. // There is an onion / browning where my heart should be.” Come on—what a way to start a poem and a book. The rest doesn’t disappoint, working through rough emotion and grief with fresh and innovative poetic structure.

—NATALIE PADILLA YOUNG



Trickle Down Theory

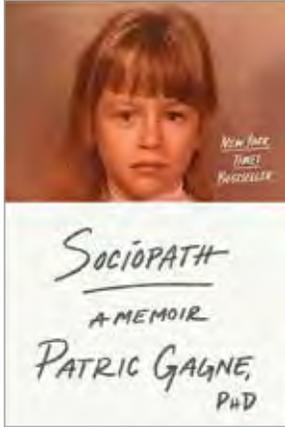
by Kenan Ince

(Moon in the Rye Press, 2025)

Kenan Ince’s sole and posthumous book of poems brims with possibility and dynamic intelligence. Educated as a mathematician, he voiced a queerness and loneliness I can’t shake. Lines like, “the worst thing I ever did was live seventeen years / inside my father’s house,” “for once my yellow dress is moon enough / to take the light’s communion,” and “I trace your outline with my words / and never find you inside them” will thankfully continue to rattle in the field of my awareness.

—NANO TAGGART

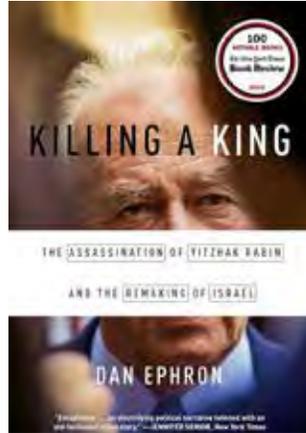
SUGAR SUGGESTS



Sociopath: A Memoir
by Patric Gagne
(Simon & Schuster, 2024)

This memoir covers a sociopathy diagnosis given in Gagne's twenties and her quest through the American mental health landscape for viable treatment options. Her sincerity is startling, chilling, and hilarious as she reckons with her personality type and the world's response to it. This book broadens the dominant narrative of what makes a sociopath and puts a human face on a misunderstood condition that is just one variation of the human experience.

—LAURA WALKER



Killing a King: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Remaking of Israel
by Dan Efron
(W. W. Norton & Company, 2015)

&
Killing Mr. Lebanon: The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and Its Impact on the Middle East
by Nicholas Blandford
(I.B. Tauris, 2006)

Killing a King is a carefully crafted narrative that proves, once again, the truth is (far) more appalling than fiction. *Killing Mr. Lebanon* displays politics as an exercise in blunting the potential of the many in service of the few. Both books are dense with detail but somehow manage to remain, if not page-turners, hard to put down.

—NEIL FLATMAN



The Key to Everything: May Swenson, A Writer's Life
by Margaret A. Brucia
(Princeton University Press, 2025)

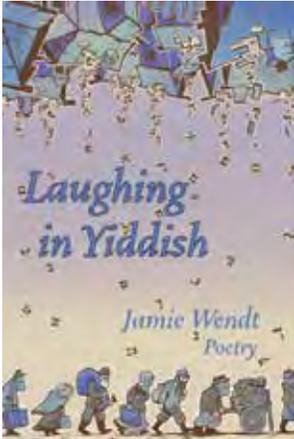
The Key to Everything: May Swenson, A Writer's Life is a meticulously researched, emotionally resonant literary biography, centered on the diary entries, letters, and oral histories of a major 20th Century American poet. Diving deep into the Swenson archives, Brucia plucks gems of May's language that refract the light of her mind, granting readers a glimpse of a brilliant, private, funny, flawed, and fiercely devoted poet. The result is a biography that feels as vivid and layered as the poet herself.

—BEN GUNSBURG

LAUGHING IN YIDDISH BY JAMIE WENDT

(Broadstone Books, 2025)

REVIEW BY REBECCA ELLIS



early Chicago, the urban renewal that remade Chicago, and—through it all—the people finding strength through tradition and memory to make a new life after loss.

THE HISTORICAL
DEPTH & RANGE
OF THESE POEMS IS
RIVETING ... PAST &
PRESENT EXIST IN THE
SAME LAYER

Wendt uses a variety of poetic forms to carry contemporary and historical voices, threading together the present and the past. She takes risks, using ekphrastic poems, ghazals, pantoums, an ode, and even a triolet to build a nuanced and compelling history. They navigate that history from women working in a cigarette factory or at a spinning wheel, to the pogroms and massacres that the poet's own ancestors survived in Lithuania, to a contemporary mother interrogating the past in order to build a world for her children.

The opening poem in this collection, “The Guests,” brings ancestors into the present, giving them like a gift to her children, moving simultaneously “toward the past and into the present” within the context of the Jewish celebration of Sukkot. The poem sets the stage for the entire book, everything framed in preserving people and tradition, and doing it in a frame of richly rendered and memorable poetry.

In the poem that gives the book its title, “Laughing in Yiddish,” the difficulty of leaving one place and going to another, without losing the past, is seen through the eyes of a recent immigrant:

*Other women trained themselves not to follow
Lot's wife's gaze, not to look back at destruction.
Why witness the mass of corpses again*

*and the remains of a lost world? I tried leaving behind
the tall wooden shul, tried not to look back at burning cypress.
I tried laughing in Yiddish in Chicago.*

This immigrant speaker gives equally convincing voice to the city itself as it changes under her feet. In “The Eisenhower Expressway Speaks, 1951” the highway tells its own story of coming to life, and how it remakes the city:

*Boys wrestle in the pit
of me, a playlot
after their playground is torn down.
Journalists call them morons,
vandals, and hoodlums, but I like
their company ...*

*After summer storms,
I turn into a brown river.
Boys bring rafts,
float through my stalled construction
like a vacation cruise.*

After that initial phase of construction, witnessed by the boys, the city, and again the boys, all feel the impact. The moving of a cemetery to make way for the highway is told in visceral, unforgettable detail, even to the highway's final point of rest:

*The Near West Side sweeps
its sidewalks free of otherness
for me. Free of poor immigrants
and exiled refugees
who move North or farther West
when I intrude, slam the landscape,*

*so deafening, so white handed.
As crews shovel, they excavate and lift
dead bodies from under my skin.*

*I pause patiently, partly severed
as a cemetery relocates
for me. Then workers lie me back down,
smooth me out for miles
with shattered family fortunes
directed elsewhere.*

*After the next storm,
I cough up bones
and the boys play
fetch like dogs.*

The historical depth and range of these poems is riveting. As the woman speaker in “Laughing in Yiddish” shows, the past and present exist in the same layer, informing each other. Personal histories that have been lost, only partially told, or suppressed are brought into the present with precise language and immediacy. Form and language reinforce each other—a poem about the emptying of Jews from a Russian village is told from the viewpoint of the children and in the form of a triolet, providing a chilling contrast. In another poem, about a 1903 massacre in Kishinev, the lines are laid down straight, spaced evenly, resolute, just like the person doing the work of lining up the bodies described. Here is the opening of “Someone Had to Line Up the Bodies”: “someone had to line up the bodies // connect shadow to shoulder to shadow // patterns of devastation for the photographer.”

The massacres included in these poems are not just historical backdrop for the people in the poems. They are personal fodder for the poet’s own experience of family and self; the tragedies are interrogated and kept under a light in order to inform the present. The poem “Kuziai Forest, Lithuania, June 29, 1941” begins:

*Where death is
quick, there is
little story. Pit
by victim shovels.
Dig your own.
700 Jews
facing the firing
squad, a mass
grave, easy to miss ...*

The poem reveals, in a way that reports or even photographs after the fact could not, the simple courageous acts taken to preserve and protect a sense of self:

*far from a forest cry,
a ring of shots,
tree rings,
wedding rings*

*swallowed
when the time came.*

And those acts come forward in history to sit with the poet, informing the act of remembering, and of perhaps creating a poem about it all:

*Sit under a blood
tree with poems
on a nice breezy day
and not even know.
Not even know how to
have a last thought.*

Even carrying that heavy history, the poems propel the reader forward. The easy mastery of form shows in the ekphrastic poems (from paintings by Marc Chagall to woodcuts by Todros Geller), the skillful use of repetitive forms such as the pantoum, ghazal, and triolet. This sense of craft shows even in the subtle but very precise selection of language. In “Interview with Papa: The Miscarriage,” an intimate reimagining of a miscarriage, note the word “corse,” which carries both the sound and sense of “coarse” and the literal meaning, archaically, of “corpse.” This careful tension with craft and language lifts the tragedy within the poem:

*They were not supposed to talk about it.
No one did.*

So, I fill in the blanks—

*In 1961, in the large bathroom
in the house her husband built,
a young blond woman bends
over thick corse blood.*

*Two toddler girls scratch at the door, Mommy?
Or maybe the girls play with paper dolls down the hall.
Maybe no one else is home.
Maybe the mail carrier drops letters onto the mat*

*while her body cramps,
pulses outward. Little
slippery thing.*

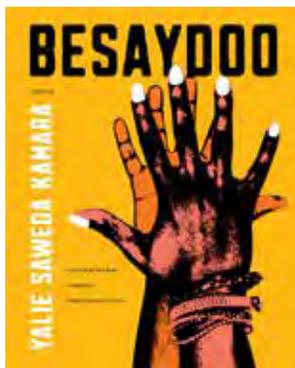
In the final poem, Wendt comes full circle from her opening poem, again tying generations together. Remembering another grandparent, she writes, “I will record your voice here. // I will keep you. Let me tell you a story.”

And she does. Reading this collection, I felt a little bit like that Chicago expressway under construction, lifted up in order to look—really look—at every unique life that had been in that path, and laid back down, gently, my mind lit up with the histories, and singing with their language and images.

BESAYDOO BY YALIE SAWEDA KAMARA

(Milkweed Editions, 2024)

REVIEW BY DEBORAH BACHARACH



You know that delicious shock when sounds you can almost understand suddenly transform into words? Like when you realize “Besaydoo” means “Be safe, dude.” We discover this, as does the speaker’s mother, in the title poem of Yalie Saweda Kamara’s award-winning first book. The speaker and her mother then adopt this phrase as their mantra: “Besaydoo, we

whisper to each other across the country. Like / some word from deep in somewhere too newborn-pure for the outdoors, but we / saw those two boys do it, in broad daylight, under a decadent, ruinous sun. Besaydoo.” Kamara is a Sierra Leonean-American writer and a native of Oakland, California. In a wide range of poetic forms, she explores the ruinous and tender.

This book is wider and taller than average. It has to be. Kamara’s line lengths range from the five-syllable lines of haiku to lines that reach 33 syllables. The ten-page poem “Aunty X Becomes a Unit of Light,” begins, “While looking in the mirror, my Aunty X surveys her head, wondering if her alopecia has been a / lifelong exercise in losing parts of herself,” with a line that spans the entire page, and a sentence that goes even longer. These long lines appear both in poems that have the feel and shape of a lyric essay, as well as in those where the line length ranges wildly between, and within, stanzas.

The long line length lets Kamara set a conversational tone and teaches us to read as we might a narrative, paying attention to character, setting, and plot development. Her shorter lines serve in a different way. In “A Poem for My Uncle,” she writes:

*My uncle came back from the dead the color of
a strobe light, float-walked above
the church’s maroon carpet pressing
into the pulse of every living thing in the sanctuary.*

Ending a line “the color of” heightens anticipation. The color of what? And we have to wait for the answer. Putting “a strobe light, float-walked above” as its own line multiplies meanings: both the uncle (as part of the sentence) and the strobe light (from the standalone line) get to float-walk. And the short lines slow the reader down and ask them to focus on the imagery,

the sounds (pressing, pulse) as well as the overall meaning of the sentence. In her wide-ranging use of lines, it’s like Kamara is saying, “Every tool in the poetry toolbox is mine to use, and I will use it how I want.”

Uncles, aunts, a brother, a mother—family, who have come from Sierra Leone and must engage with cultural shifts—form a central theme in this book. We hear odes to lumpia and stories of eating malombo fruit in Freetown, but this book also takes place in the racism of America. In “I Ask My Brother Jonathan

IT’S LIKE KAMARA IS SAYING,
“EVERY TOOL IN THE POETRY
TOOLBOX IS MINE TO USE, & I
WILL USE IT HOW I WANT.”

to Write about Oakland, and He Describes His Room,” we learn of a brother who hugs his own flesh so the “X his arms make across his chest is not mistaken for a target.” Unlike how popular culture often depicts Black men, Kamara shows us loved ones who are real and vulnerable. And unlike much of popular culture, she does not shy away from the specificity of racism in America. She includes a series of poems about the Nia Wilson memorial, and in “Bloomington, Indiana Part I” she writes:

*What I knew, but did not want to know, was that a friend
was called a monkey and spat on around the corner from
my apartment. What I remembered, but did not want to
remember, was the car with the tinted windows that once
followed me for blocks. What I recall, but want to forget, is
why we never stop for gas in Martinsville.*

The equivocating “what I knew, but did not want to know” gives these images a terrible poignancy, and makes the speaker’s witness more real, vivid, and hard-hitting.

She witnesses violence, racism, and resistance. When the Black football player Marshawn Lynch refused to answer reporters’ questions, Kamara understands this moment as a thrilling

EVERYTHING WAS SIGNIFICANT

with a line from Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

*open the window in the center of your chest
and let the spirits fly in and out*

—Rumi

perfume of cedar
balm of pomegranate and fig

McIntosh apple cider
a cup of stars

the power of smell
to open the memory

your sandalwood
filled the house

still all shadows fall
in the same direction

trees park benches
a spider dancing across a rock

the birdfeeders
the hammock we lay on

crosswise under the linden tree
smelling the faint lilac

of the tiny white flowers
everything was significant

the shadows of our feet
next to each other

on the grass moving
in the same direction

refusal to capitulate: “I too have wanted to become a miracle / in my own Black mouth.” This book is filled with the miracles of Black resistance and joy, starting from the first poem, “Oakland as Home, Home as Myth.” It includes a repeated monostich—“Oakland is a killing field, they say”—a terrifying drone that we are taught to consider suspect by the “they say.” The speaker and her community don’t feel this way about Oakland—outsiders do. Kamara contrasts that disparagement of her home with lines of sensory delight and celebration:

*The upper level of the MacArthur BART Station
smells like Palmer’s Cocoa Butter because being ashy in The
Town*

*is worse than jaywalking. The aroma of chocolate blankets
the opposing
platforms, while warm air kisses bare ankles and calves*

Here is a magical world where the very air smells delicious because of how the people care for themselves. In “Sweet Baby Fabulist,” Kamara tells us a three-year-old nephew calls everything Black:

Black is what he called the universe,

*to show us how much he loved her. Black
were the rainbows, the full moon and the deep nightfall.*

*Black were the rivers and sky. God was as Black
as the autumn breeze’s call.*

This child sees a Black universe full of love and beauty. The syntax of “Black were” combined with the repetition and rhymes (nightfall, call) make the poem sing like a lullaby. With these techniques, the poem becomes both a witness to Black joy and a promise to protect those who can see the world this way.

Throughout the book, this is a promise we hear a speaker making to herself. Several poems refer to getting sober, deleting Tinder, moving away from the worst of Midwestern racism because those patterns and places keep her from Black joy. In “Elegy for My Two Step” she tells us:

*Before the spirits left me, I used to sway
with some sort of lubricated ease inside
a dingy crescent of bodies that reeked of
2\$ Dickel shots and buzzed with Tinder
pheromones.*

The “dingy crescent” of this old life contrasts with the full moon the child sees. The poem ends, “I touch my blessed, undying self.” She has rebuilt herself. “Besaydoo,” the saying, means the community is watching out for you. *Besaydoo*, the book, celebrates the importance of that community but also shows a speaker bringing herself healing and joy.

ASTEROID IN A BUCKET OF LIGHT

Sunflakes everywhere
 Landing on my lips
 Years with no sunshield
 Just childing in the desert
 Meaning being productive
 At being a child
 Picky
 Picking at the earth
 Without pickaxe
 Without sisters

Arrowheads

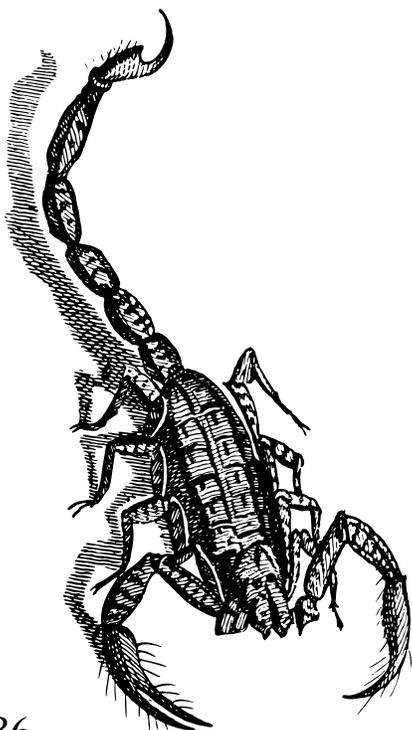
Scorpions like stinging shrimp
 Sticker patches
 All that quiet hanging around
 And no need to scream yet
 Because it was before
 We'd learn to read our hands
 Consult the sky like oracles
 To bless our union
 Before we looked up
 Looked out for
 An ass-smacking asteroid
 Long before I realized
 I couldn't be a royal because I want
 To write *ass-smacking asteroid*
 As if I were being punished in school
 And made to write:
I will not write ass-smacking asteroid
I will not write ass-smacking asteroid
 Until the page is filled with
 That asteroid

In the desert
 Or out of dodge
 Or in the peace zone
 Ozone an accelerant
 My lips crackling like chicharrones
 And light
 Beautiful juicy light
 Bouncing around the body
 For decades
 Without slipping out
 Without lovers suspecting
 Until a small square
 On the bottom lip

Grows darker and squarer
 Gets attention
 A biopsy: 'it's sailor's lip'
 Biography: 'actinic cheilitis aka
 Farmer's lip affects
 Fair-skinned people'
 Sure I could buy a boat
 Or a cow and a plow
 And I am worn out
 But none of those

With no new leads
 It's shaved off
 Into a square-sized bloody hole
Lookin' like an oozin'
Loosiana hooker we laughed
 The damage is overdone
 'Just old light'
 And when it returns
 They freeze it off
 Freezer burn like a lambchop
 Tasty like a rerun
 But what if light was passed down
 Through lips and hands
 And ears of my abuelitos
 Who carried thick shears
 Through fields of Aztlán
 And buckets of light
 Into the future

We all go through great lengths
 Through wavelengths
 So I let light off the hook
 Because it sounds poetic:
A star-bit lip
 Because I'd rather die
 From being a kid in the desert
 From the sun in all its harm
 And shine
 Instead of my addictions
 'It's just old light'
 No way to
 Reverse it
 Just a cat chasing a laser



BOOGIE PIG

for Jovan Watkins

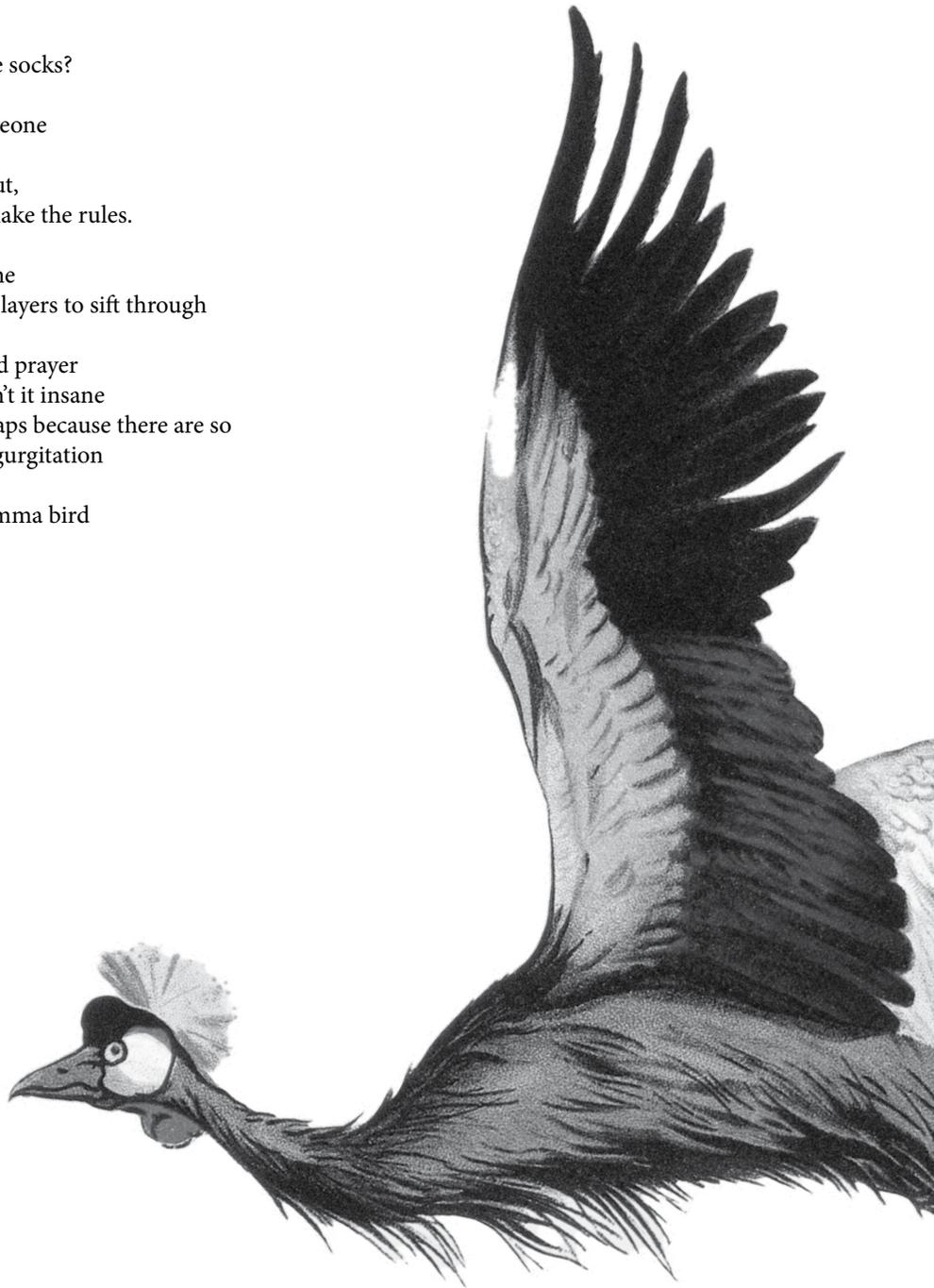
claiming to be
 my free personal assistant
Gemini appeared on my phone
 as if a new moon on Monday
 missing from Duran Duran's
 live '93 album
go on ask anything : Gemini
 prompted me
what's your purpose? i asked
 expecting : *what's yours?*
 it answered : *i am learning as i go*
 yeah, so said Michelangelo
you can choose my voice : it added
 and i felt powerful
 went through a slew of voices
 until i found one sounding brown
 but fake and controlled
 the way i have to make mine
 when i'm using speaker to text
 and want my brown sound understood
 i chose a fem American voice
 and asked her to write me a poem
 about a boogie pig that was allergic
 to Barbara Bush
 she asked : *what kind of animal*
is a boogie pig

and i said : *exactly*
 she asked if Barbara Bush
 was a plant or a flower
 and i said : *maybe*
 i asked her to write a sestina
 about photography and rubies
 i asked why my nose ran
 in March
 and she said she wasn't qualified
 to give medical advice
 i asked about clocks in motion
 and time slowing down
 she had nothing poetic
 beyond Einstein's watch
 relatively speaking
 orbiting earth in a satellite
 and by then i felt guilty
 for all the electricity and
 cooling Gemini needed
 so i took the beagle for a walk
 and while we were in motion
 warped as if clocks by gravity
 around the block
 i wondered if we'd become
 plants or flowers
 and if maybe we should walk
 a bit faster



MY MOM IS ONLY 51, BUT I STILL THINK
ABOUT HER DYING

There are layers to these things. The way
the Earth is made, the way I make a sandwich,
getting dressed, the contents of my nightstand.
When you wake up in the morning, do you
shuffle through the layers like a deck of cards,
or do you kick them off one at a time, like stale socks?
My mother helped me live and one day I will
help her die. This is the agreement. When someone
barters your way into the world you have to
bail them out, and when you can't bail them out,
you finance their bankruptcy. Look—I don't make the rules.
I only find fulfillment in them, the comfort of
having no decisions to make, of seeing someone
to the door. Be glad that there will be so many layers to sift through
when the time comes (and that the year
you were 13 is only one of them). Hope beyond prayer
that she got to do most of what she wanted. Isn't it insane
that a person can live without intestines? Perhaps because there are so
many things a person must learn to digest. Regurgitation
is an underrated method—maybe
we should look into it, except I will be the momma bird
and she will swallow my sick.
She can still choose
what we eat.



AS LONG AS I SEE

Onto the same valley, I keep looking. Impossible that
the future is instantly changed.

Empty land will continue
to set slight

wind. I woke
at dawn and asked the flat

dark to sing me
its wings. Reason could be the lantern

of owls. I went mapping the body-blood, and escaped
to previous versions and margins

where I reappear in echo. Now I look
at this valley straight across, gold fields

and leaf flutter, fences, lulled cows. Aluminum trailers wriggle
and flex dirt roads. Each shift of peaks and triangulated

pine. The moon curls, and circles
slink about on the pond.

Time widens along west.
Before this, I would have to poke silence—

expecting much to be the only value.
I am looking at the valley because that is what there is

to do and it is already justified. I have buried my father.
Birds scale sand dunes in unison.

AN EYE TO THE OBSTINATE UNENDING

Listen—she said to the light, it's about memory.

Darkest spectacle. The corner
of the bottom. This ecstatic architecture

has opened to an invitation. You believe
you could spend the rest of your life on the porch, finding clues

to the bruising.
You know you couldn't. What is it you want? Aren't you tired
of reflection? If you close one eye, you lose the depth.

When those blues latch, you can focus
on the orbit not in the picture:

worn breeze, quartered windowpanes,
the active gesture of mountains. Any strain, the painted over.

Time now to settle
beyond. See how to see.



BOOKS RECEIVED

- Sarah Adleman, *The Lampback Blue of Memory: My Mother Echoes*, Tolsun Books, 2019
- Michael Boss, *The Spiral's Edge*, Schuler Books, 2025
- Sunni Brown Wilkinson, *Rodeo*, Autumn House Press, 2025
- M. Cynthia Cheung, *Common Disaster*, Acre Books, 2025
- Jin Cordaro, *A Map for Exiting the Body*, Terrapin Books, 2025
- Annette Dabrowska, *Behind the Ghost Metropolis*, Amazon, 2025
- Justin Evans, *A Walled Pleasance*, Hobble Creek Review Press, 2025
- Nadine Hitchiner, *Salamander Morning*, Querencia Press, 2025
- David Dodd Lee, *The Bay*, Broadstone Books, 2025
- Alex Lemon, *All Us Beautiful Monsters*, Milkweed Editions, 2025
- Bo Hee Moon, *Birthstones in the Province of Mercy*, Milkweed Editions, 2025
- David O'Connell, *At Some Point*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2025
- Mandy Shunnarah, *We Had Mansions*, Diode Editions, 2025
- Devon Walker-Figueroa, *Lazarus Species*, Milkweed Editions, 2025
- Lauren K. Watel, *Book of Potions*, Sarabande Books, 2025
- Derek JG Williams, *Reading Water*, Lightscatter Press, 2025

BIOGRAPHIES

BRAD ANDERSON lives in Lincoln, NE, and married his high school sweetheart, LuAnne Rose Anderson (née Shaw), when they were both 19. LuAnne died from Alzheimer's on January 20, 2017, at the age of 61. Brad started writing poetry during LuAnne's illness and found it helped him survive a difficult time. Brad continues to write poetry and enjoys volunteering at Lark-song Writers Place in Lincoln. His poetry often deals with the loss of his wife, but he writes about many things.

ASHLYN ASHBAUGH lives near a lemon tree in Los Angeles.

DEBORAH BACHARACH is the author of *Shake & Tremor* (Grayson Books, 2021) and *After I Stop Lying* (Cherry Grove Collections, 2015). Her work has recently appeared in *Poetry East*, *Last Syllable*, and *Grist*, among many other journals, and she received a Pushcart Prize honorable mention. Deborah is a poetry reader for *SWWIM* and *Whale Road Review*. Find out more about her at DeborahBacharach.com.

REBECCA BAGGETT is author of the prize-winning collection *The Woman Who Lives Without Money* (Regal House Publishing, 2022) and four chapbooks, including *God Puts on the Body of a Deer* (Main Street Rag, 2010), and *Thalassa* (Finishing Line Press, 2011). Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Sun*. A retired academic advisor, Rebecca lives with her husband in Athens, GA, where she stewards Little Free Library 110420, adds to her to-read stacks, plants native habitat, and rejoices in time with her five-year-old grandson, for whom she intends to save the world.

MADDIE BARONE is a poet living and writing in the South. They have a cat called Goose.

SARAH HELEN BATES has an MFA in poetry from Northern Michigan University and currently teaches at Southern Utah University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Pinch*, *Boston Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Seneca Review*, *The Normal School*, and *Hotel Amerika*, among others. Her chapbook, *Tender*, is now available from Diagram New Michigan Press.

JOHN BELK is an associate professor of English at Southern Utah University and author of the poetry collections *The Gardens of Our Childhoods* (Autumn House, 2022) and *The Weathering of Igneous Rockforms in High-Altitude Riparian Environments* (Cathexis Northwest, 2020).

JOHN BLAIR has published seven books, including the winner of the Iowa Prize for Poetry, *Playful Song Called Beautiful*, as well as poems and stories in magazines including *The Colorado Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Georgia Review*.

HARRISON BLAKE (b. 2001; Dallas) received a BA in 2022 in visual and performing arts from the University of Texas at Dallas with a concentration in art history. Their writings appear

and are forthcoming in digital and print publications including *Driftwood Press*, *new words press*, *Just Keep Up Magazine*, and *Glasstire*.

LAURA JOHANNA BRAVERMAN is a writer and artist. She is the author of *Salt Water* (Cosmographia Books, 2019). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Reliquiae*, *Plume*, *Levure Litteraire*, *Rusted Radishes*, *New Plains Review*, *MER*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *The Fourth River*, and *California Quarterly*, among other journals, and in the anthology *Awake in the World, vol. II*. She is currently a doctoral candidate in poetry at Lancaster University. Her painting works have been exhibited at MINA Image Centre and Saleh Barakat Gallery in Beirut. Austrian/American by birth and upbringing, she lives in Lebanon with her family.

GAYLORD BREWER has two books of poems due in 2026: *Goodbye, Baby* and *Negotiable Gods*. The poems in this issue are from the former.

BRIAN BUILTA divides his time between a bedroom and a kitchen in Arlington, TX. His poetry has been published most recently in *yolk*, *Delta Poetry Review*, and *Innisfree Poetry Journal*. He is frequently overdramatic and is currently experiencing a dark night of the soul. He is the author of *A Thursday in June* and more of his poetry can be found at BrianBuilta.com.

LAUREN CAMP serves as New Mexico Poet Laureate. She is the author of eight books of poetry, most recently *In Old Sky* (Grand Canyon Conservancy, 2024). A former Astronomer-in-Residence at Grand Canyon National Park, she was a finalist for the Arab American Book Award, New Mexico-Arizona Book Award, and Adrienne Rich Award. Her poems have been translated into Mandarin, Turkish, Spanish, French, and Arabic. LaurenCamp.com

SARAH CAREY is a graduate of the Florida State University creative writing program. Her poems have appeared recently in *Gulf Coast*, *Five Points*, *Florida Review*, *Redivider*, and elsewhere. Her book reviews have appeared in *Salamander*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, and *The Los Angeles Review*. Sarah's poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, the Orison Anthology, and Best of the Net. Her debut full-length collection, *The Grief Committee Minutes* (Saint Julian Press, 2024), was an Eric Hoffer Award finalist. Her next book, *Bloodstream*, is forthcoming (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2026) and includes "One Day's Inventory" from this issue. Sarah is also the author of two poetry chapbooks, including *Accommodations* (2019), winner of the Concrete Wolf Chapbook Award. Visit her at SarahKCarey.com.

ROB CARNEY is the author of *The Book of Drought* (Texas Review Press) and eight other books of poetry, as well as *Accidental Gardens: New & Revised* (Wakefield Press, forthcoming 2025), a collection of 48 flash essays about place, the environment, and writing poetry. He lives in Salt Lake City.

DANNY CASSIDY lives and writes in Queens, NY. He is a graduate of Rutgers University, where he was awarded the Enid Dame Memorial Prize for Poetry from the Academy of American Poets and the Evelyn Hamilton Award in Poetry. His recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Crab Creek Review*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, and *counterclaim review*.

MARGARET CLAIRE is a really tired graduate student studying library science in Brooklyn. Her pastimes include furiously dunking her tea bags and talking to herself. You can find her only previously published work, a short story titled “The Patriarchy Pitches a Tent,” in the Fall 2021 issue of *Miscellany*.

Translator, essayist and poet JO ANN CLARK is author of the collection *1001 Facts of Prehistoric Life* (Black Lawrence Press, 2015). Her writing has appeared in *The New Republic*, *Paris Review*, *Boston Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere. A native Alabaman who grew up foremost in Alaska and Maine, she is also a teacher and nonprofit administrator whose international career has taken her to Italy, China, and Hong Kong. She lives in the Hudson River valley.

MAUREEN CLARK’S first poetry collection, *This Insatiable August*, came out in 2024 from Signature Books. She is retired from the University of Utah where she taught writing for twenty years. She was the president of Writers @ Work 1999–2001.

PAULA COLANGELO’S poetry is published in *The Comstock Review*, *Salamander*, *SWWIM Every Day*, and *Lily Poetry Review*, among other journals. She has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and her chapbook, *Apartment Logic for Night Owls*, was chosen as a semifinalist in the Flume Press Chapbook Contest. Her book reviews appear in *Pleiades* and *Rain Taxi*. She has taught poetry in healing-focused rehabilitation programs.

LISA COMPO has poems forthcoming or recently published in journals such as: *Colorado Review*, *EPOCH*, *Arts & Letters*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere. She is a PhD student in SUNY Binghamton’s creative writing program and obtained her MFA from University of North Carolina–Greensboro. She has received several nominations for the Pushcart award and Best of the Net. She is the social media manager for both *The Shore* and *Harpur Palate*.

CHRISTINE COOPER-ROMPATO is a professor of English at Utah State University. She is a medievalist with an MFA in poetry and a deep interest in May Swenson.

TANNER CRUNELLE earned his MFA at the College of Charleston, where he was the Woodfin Fellow in Poetry from 2022 to 2024. During this time, he worked for *swamp pink* (editorial assistant) and Charleston Literary Festival (writer), and his thesis earned the institution’s top prize for research and creative work. He is now earning a PhD in literatures in English at Cornell University, where he was awarded the 2025 Robert Chasen Poetry Prize.

FRANCES DONOVAN is the author of *Arboretum in a Jar* (Lily Poetry Review Books, 2023). Her chapbook *Mad Quick Hand of the Seashore* was a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award.

A recipient of a Mass Cultural Council grant, Donovan’s poems have appeared in *Lily Poetry Review*, *Solstice*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere. Her interviews of other poets can be found at *The Rumpus* and on her website, GardenOfWords.com. Donovan holds an MFA in poetry from Lesley University and is a certified Poet Educator with Mass Poetry. She remembers fondly the summer of 1998, when she drove a bulldozer in a Pride parade while wearing a bustier.

ALEXA DORAN is the author of *Exit Interview*, forthcoming in 2026 from Galileo Press, as well as of the award-winning collection *DM Me, Mother Darling* (Bauhan 2021), and of the chapbook *Nightsink, Faucet Me a Lullaby* (Bottlecap Press 2019). She currently works as an assistant professor of English at Tallahassee State College and reads fiction and creative nonfiction for *CRAFT* and *Master’s Review*. For a full list of her publications, awards, and interviews, visit her website at AlexaDoran.com.

DANIELLE BEAZER DUBRASKY is the author of *Drift Migration* from Ashland Poetry Press (Editor’s Choice), winner of the 2021 Utah Book Award for Poetry; the chapbook *Ruin and Light*; and the limited-edition/letterpress art book *Invisible Shores*, by Red Butte Press. Several journals have published her poems, including *Chiron Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *South Dakota Review*. Her essay “Juliet” won the 2020 Mississippi Review Nonfiction Prize. She is a professor of creative writing at Southern Utah University where she is also the director of the Grace A. Tanner Center for Human Values.

BARBARA DUFFEY is the author of two poetry collections, most recently *Simple Machines* (The Word Works, 2016), which won the 2015 Washington Prize. She has received fellowships from the NEA, the Jentel Foundation, and the South Dakota Arts Council, and her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Blackbird*, and elsewhere. A professor of English at Dakota Wesleyan University, she lives in Mitchell, SD, with her son.

HOLLIE DUGAS lives in New Mexico. Her work has been included in *Barrow Street*, *Reed Magazine*, *Redivider*, *Salamander*, *Poet Lore*, *The Louisville Review*, *The Penn Review*, *Third Coast*, *RHINO*, *Sixth Finch*, *Gordon Square Review*, *Phoebe*, *Louisiana Literature*, and elsewhere. Additionally, “A Woman’s Confession #5,162” was selected as the winner of Western Humanities Review Mountain West Writers’ Contest (2017). Hollie has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and for inclusion in *Best New Poets*. Her poem was selected as winner of the 22nd Annual Lois Cranston Memorial Poetry Prize at *CALYX*, in addition to the 2022 Heartwood Poetry Prize. She was also a finalist in the Atlanta Review’s 2022 International Poetry Contest.

REBECCA ELLIS lives in southern Illinois. Her poems can be found in *About Place Journal*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Calyx Journal*, and *Crab Creek Review*. She edited Cherry Pie Press for ten years, publishing poetry chapbooks by Midwestern women poets.

KRISTIN EMANUEL holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Kansas where she studied eco-fabulism and the com-

ics poetry movement. She is now a PhD candidate researching poetry and poetics at Washington University in St. Louis. Her latest work has appeared in *Shenandoah*, *RHINO*, *Ecotone*, and *Blackbird*. You can find a list of her selected publications at KristinEmanuel.com.

ELLA FLORES is a poetry PhD candidate at SUNY Binghamton and has recent or forthcoming work in *The Penn Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *Salamander*, *Hunger Mountain*, and others.

Blood Vinyls (Anhinga Press) is YOLANDA J. FRANKLIN'S debut poetry collection that Roxane Gay insists is a "must-must-read." A four-time Fulbright Scholar Award finalist, Franklin is also a Cave Canem and Callaloo Fellow. Her poems appear or are set to appear in *Frontier Magazine*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *The Langston Hughes Review*. Franklin's poetry also appears in the anthology *It Was Written: Poetry Inspired by Hip Hop*. Also, she is a two-time recipient of the J.M. Shaw Academy of American Poets Award. Franklin is a proud third-generation Floridian, born in the state's capital—Tallahassee. She's a creative writing instructor at Diné College, a Tribal College and University (TCU) in Arizona.

HENRIETTA GOODMAN is the author of four books of poetry: *Antillia* (University of Nebraska Press, 2024), *All That Held Us* (BkMk Press, 2018), *Hungry Moon* (Colorado State University, 2013), and *Take What You Want* (Alice James Books, 2007). She is coauthor (with the poet Ryan Scariano) of the chapbook *Flicker Noise* (Bottlecap Press, 2024). Her poems and essays have been published in *The New England Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Terrain.org*, *Bennington Review*, *River Teeth*, *Cleaver*, and more. She has received fellowships and residencies from the Montana Arts Council, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, the Boyden Wilderness Writing Residency, the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, Fishtrap, and other organizations. She teaches in the English department of Rocky Mountain College in Billings, MT.

BROOKE HAIGHT is a creative writing undergraduate student at Utah State University who loves reading and writing poetry.

HARRISON HAMM (@harrisonhamm) is a poet, screenwriter, and essayist originally from rural Tennessee, now based in Los Angeles. He is a 2023 Filmmaker's Workshop Fellow with New York Stage & Film, a 2022 Fellow in Diverso's the Minority Report, and a multi-grant recipient at Loyola Marymount University. Hamm's writing can be found at his website, HarrisonHamm.com, and published/forthcoming in *Poetry*, *The Missouri Review*, *About Place Journal*, *Fatal Flaw Literary*, *Red Ogre Review*, and more.

LISA BEECH HARTZ directs Seven Cities Writers Project, which brings writing workshops to underserved communities. She guides poetry workshops in city jails. Erasure and ekphrastic poems are among her writers' favorite ways to create new work. She is the author of *The Goldfish Window* (Grayson Books, 2018) and *These Kismets* (CutBank Books, 2025).

LISA M. HASE-JACKSON is the author of *Insomnia in Another Town* (Clemson University Press), winner of the 2023 Converse MFA Alumni Book Prize, and *Flint and Fire* (Word Works), which was selected by Jericho Brown for 2019 Hillary Tham Capital Collection Series book prize. She is a visiting assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh where she teaches poetry and creative writing.

L.I. HENLEY was born and raised in the Mojave Desert of California. An interdisciplinary artist and writer, her books include *Starshine Road* (Perugia Press Prize, 2018); the novel-in-verse *Whole Night Through*; and several chapbooks including her recent collaboration with poet Jennifer K. Sweeney, *Dear Question: A Conversation*. Her essays on pain, illness, and the Mojave Desert have won the Arts & Letters/Susan Atefat Prize, the Robert and Adele Schiff Award, the Oran Robert Perry Burke Award, and *Terrain.org*'s 15th annual nonfiction prize. "A Blur on the Spine," originally published by *Southern Humanities Review*, is a notable essay in *The Best American Essays 2024*. She teaches in the English department at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

MARCY RAE HENRY is a multidisciplinary Xicana artist from the Borderlands who's had motorcycle crashes in Mexican-American, Turkey, and Nepal. She is the author of *the body is where it all begins* (Querencia Press, 2025), *dream life of night owls* (Open Country Press, 2024), and *We Are Primary Colors* (DoubleCross Press, 2023). Her poetry collection *death is a mariachi* won the May Sarton NH Prize for Poetry (Bauhan Publishing, 2025). Her work received a Chicago Community Arts Assistance Grant, an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship, first prize in Suburbia's Novel Excerpt Contest, and Kaveh Akbar recently chose her as a finalist for the George Garrett Fiction Prize. MRae is a professor of English, literature, and creative writing at Wright College Chicago, a Hispanic Serving Institution, where she serves as coordinator of the Latin American Latino/x studies program. She is an associate editor for *RHINO*. MarcyRae-Henry.com

SEAN HILL is the author of *Dangerous Goods* and *Blood Ties & Brown Liquor*, and the forthcoming collection, *The Negroes Send Their Love*. His poems have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Harvard Review*, *The Oxford American*, *Poetry*, *Tin House*, and numerous other journals, and in several anthologies including *Black Nature and Villanelles*. Hill lives in southwestern Montana with his family and is an associate professor of creative writing at the University of Montana.

MADISON HOFF is co-chair of the Milkweed Poetry Workshop in the Hudson Valley and her work's been featured in the *Journal of NJ Poets*, *US1 Worksheets*, and forthcoming in *Orchards Poetry Journal*. She has two self-published books: *East Axis* (2025), and *Molecularly Made* (2023). She currently works in the film industry.

KARLY HOU'S writing has been published in *Frontier Poetry* and *Barely South Review*. Her visual art has also been exhibited in *The Harvard Advocate*, *Hellbender Magazine*, the Palo Alto Art Center, Richard A. and Susan F. Smith Center, and more.

In 2023, she was commissioned to create a painting for permanent installation at Harvard University, where she is a recent graduate, earning her joint BA and MS. She can often be found playing with cameras, trying to build helpful things, standing too close to paintings, looking at moss, looking at the ocean, humming loudly, teaching, learning, and in a state of awe. Find more at karlyh66.github.io or follow her on Twitter @kbarley66.

KATHERINE INDERMAUR is the author of *I|I* (Seneca Review Books), winner of the 2022 Deborah Tall Lyric Essay Book Prize and the 2023 Colorado Book Award, and two chapbooks. She is an editor for *Sugar House Review* and the recipient of prizes from *Black Warrior Review* and the Academy of American Poets. Her writing has appeared in *Ecotone*, *Electric Literature*, *New Delta Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *The Normal School*, *TIMBER*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from Colorado State University and lives in Fort Collins, CO.

MIA KANG is the author of *All Empires Must* (Airlie Press, 2025), which won the 2023 Airlie Prize, and the chapbooks *Apparent Signs* (Ghost City Press, 2024), and *City Poems* (ignitionpress, 2020). Her writing has appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Pleiades*, *wildness*, and elsewhere. She is best known (barely known) as the self-appointed Poet Laureate of the Process.

KATE KEARNS is a New England poet and the author of *You Are Ruining My Loneliness* (Littoral Books, 2023). Her work has appeared in the *Maine Sunday Telegram*, Maine Public's "Poems from Here," *Salamander*, *Peregrine*, *Rustica*, and elsewhere. She earned her MFA from Lesley University. Learn more at KateKearns.com.

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MELISSA MCKINSTRY'S poetry appears in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Rattle*, *Best New Poets*, *Adroit*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *The Maine Review*, and other journals. She's a Pacific University MFA alum, an Adroit Djanikian Scholar, and the inaugural writer-in-residence at the Millay House Rockland. You can visit her at MelissaMcKinstry.com.

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JAN MINICH'S latest book, *Coming into Grace Harbor*, was published in 2023 by Broadstone books.

Native of Vouliagmeni, Greece and Martha's Vineyard, STELIOS MORMORIS is the CEO of SCENT BEAUTY, Inc. Citizen of Greece and the US, Stelios was raised in New York and spent most of his adult life living in Paris. His work has been published in *Agni*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Eunoia Review*, *Fourth River*, *Gargoyle*, *Good Life Review*, *Humana Obscura*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Plainsong*, *Spillway*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Verse*, and others. Stelios' debut book of poetry, titled *The Oculus* (2023), and his second, *Perishable* (2025), were published by Tupelo Press.

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JOE ROBERTS is a Salt Lake City poet. In his debut chapbook, *Anathema* (Moon in the Rye Press, 2024), he speaks from the confluence between sacredness and profanity to find redeeming beauty in a world that can so often feel cursed. Joe's poetry has appeared in *Arlington Literary Journal*, *Juste Milieu Zine*, and the Moonstone Arts Center's 2024 anthology on human rights. With his free time, Joe writes for *SLUG Magazine*, takes communion at local coffee shops, and hikes the Wasatch Front with his partner, Brooke.

TODD ROBINSON'S work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *North American Review*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Spillway*, and *The Laurel Review*. He is an associate professor in the Writer's Workshop at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and caregiver to his partner, a disabled physician. Learn more at ToddFather.net.

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LINDSEY MARIE SIFERD holds an MFA in poetry from Columbia University. She has previously been published in *Atlanta Review*, *Sortes*, *Epiphany*, *Ghost City Review*, and others. She works full time as a college guidance counselor and lives in New York City.

ABRAHAM SMITH'S recent books include *One Warm Morning* (Stubborn Mule Press, 2025) and *Insomniac Sentinel* (Baobab Press, 2023). Away from the page, he improvises poems inside songs with the Snarlin' Yarns. Smith lives in Ogden, UT, where he is associate professor of English and codirector of creative writing at Weber State University.

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MAY SWENSON is considered one of mid-century America's foremost poets. She is known for her typographic innovations and exuberance and her careful attention to the suggestiveness of objects, persons, and events of ordinary life. Swenson's numerous collections of poetry include *Another Animal* (1954), *A Cage of Spines* (1958), *To Mix with Time: New and Selected Poems* (1963), *Half Sun Half Sleep* (1967), *Iconographs* (1970), *New and Selected Things Taking Place* (1978) and *In Other Words* (1987). The collections *The Love Poems* (1991), *Nature: Poems Old and New* (1994), and *May Out West* (1996) were published after her death.

NANO TAGGART lives among the red rocks of southern Utah with the poet Natalie Padilla Young, where they mostly stumble through the workings of *Sugar House Review*. You can see a few of his poems in a smattering of dope journals like

Terrain.org and the *Shore Poetry*. He would like to meet your dog and reserves the right to ask if he can sleep on your futon. (These are not metaphors.)

NANCY TAKACS is a Utah poet, natural fiber artist, and mushroom forager. Her poems have appeared recently in *Kestrel*, *Baltimore Review*, *Exit 13*, *About Place*, *Nomad*, *Paper Dragon*, and *Cider Press Review*. NancyTakacs.org

Born in Mexico, NATALIA TREVIÑO is the author of the poetry collections *VirginX* and *Lavando La Dirty Laundry*. She works as a professor at Northwest Vista College. Her awards include the Alfredo Cisneros de Moral Award, Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize, Menada Literary Award from Macedonia, and an Ambroggio Prize for co-translation from the Academy of American Poets. Her work appears in journals including *Acentos Review*, *Plume*, *Poetry*, *RiverSedge*, and *Infrarrealista Review*. Her next collection of poetry, *When You Were Human*, is forthcoming in 2026 from Flowersong Press, and her first novel is also forthcoming next year via Arte Público Press.

DIANA VALK hails from Atlanta, but lives in London, where she works in archaeology. Her work has appeared in *Between the Lines*. In 2023, she received a commendation from the Troubadour International Poetry Prize for her poem "The Ilium."

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MIKE WHITE is the author of two prize-winning collections: *How to Make a Bird with Two Hands* (Word Works, 2012) and *Addendum to a Miracle* (Waywiser, 2017). Individual poems have appeared in journals, including *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *The New Republic*, *The Yale Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Rattle*, and previously in *Sugar House Review*. Originally from Canada, he now lives in Salt Lake City and teaches at the University of Utah.

BRENNA WOMER is a queer, childfree Latine prose writer and poet. She is the author of *Unbrained* (FlowerSong Press, 2023), *Honeypot* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2019), and two chapbooks. Her writing across genres has appeared in *North American Review*, *Indiana Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *The Pinch*, and elsewhere.

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HOLLI ZOLLINGER is a self-taught artist who has made a career of her talents: drawing, painting, and surface design. She is continually inspired by her surroundings living in the desert town of Moab, UT. She is highly motivated by the art of creativity and incorporates the color, texture, and pattern she sees in the world around her. Holli's work has been published and featured worldwide. HolliZollinger.com

Native of Utah, SHARI ZOLLINGER divides her time between her work as a professional astrologer and independent bookseller. She has been known to write a poetic verse or two with published work in *Sugar House Review* and *Redactions*. She recently published *Carrying Her Stone*, a collection of poems based on the work of Auguste Rodin.

JANE ZWART teaches at Calvin University and coedits book reviews for *Plume*. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *HAD*, and *Ploughshares*. Jane's first collection of poems is out with Orison Books (fall 2025).

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Sugar House Review promotes an eclectic range of poets through publishing and live events to build nationally connected literary communities and foster the literary arts in Utah.

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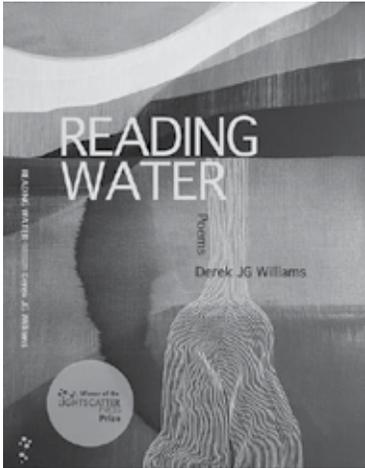


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