

**WINTER 2021** 



**POETRY** 

## SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

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#### DESERT POSTCARDS

We turned opposite ways on I-82 as I sang rock anthems + drove past vineyards on strawbacked hills. I felt your departure as an artery stretched thin—the cell wall strained to hold in blood, the blood pulled tight, polysaccharide bonds held on, each cell lined up as a single iron passenger, a suitcase of oxygen for my finger muscles around the steering wheel, until the blood vessel snapped + flooded + all that red water spread out over the combines.

More news of highways soon.

\*

Today UT-12 threaded the Grand Staircase, all that red + white + yellow. I saw road like water monsoon wash— a highway knot twisting into host rock, blacktop stripe through sediment chaos— I knew that you would like it. I'm becoming less afraid of medical necessity. Yesterday I fell for a blonde woman with skin thick enough to cook pancakes on, red sugar dirt on her sandaled toes, strapless clad with shoulders soft + square, a scar right down her spine: straight, weft, absolutely surgical + beautiful enough to lick.

\*

Wind all night, like stars trying to run.

I keep thinking of our little turns
of finger brush + breath gone into knots.

In this Zion cut the rocks can breathe + weep.

I want to show you this + this,
+ would I could record it more completely,
but words are hammer tools for beauty
that spreads up to the desert edge.

In this red earth time I would give you all my waking days.

My knees look grey standing in the Virgin River the one which brushed silt down a canyon course for epochs + carved out this place called paradise. Perhaps the air will still tonight.

\*

Sunset is done here in Southern Utah. I'm writing in green ink but in this light it comes out black. A rock wall is looking over my shoulder + it's still a little bit peach but will be shadowed in no time I bet. Breeze here again.

Took a five- or six-mile hike in midday sun, drank a whole river's worth, almost. I imagine you'd love it here: all red rock + never cold. Sandstone sloughs away with wind + water, allows ten thousand vacancies in the cliff walls. Porcupines live in them, or snakes, or nothing. Forgive my handwriting, I'm running out of light.

Some days I feel that I'm only adventuring so I can tell you about it later. Moab tomorrow.

\*

Red rock underfoot all day + a meteor strike crater which churned up sedimentary layers like a stand mixer. I wanted to show you the spire splash mid-midden, to stand with you + imagine that moment of impact, all the evaporative heat of it, to follow your finger point around the teal sand rim + watch you devour the beauty. When we are in love we know that it will never end.

Tomorrow I'm off to Dinosaur National Monument. You'd appreciate that irony, I think.

\*

Bats overwhelm the light at sunset here. At first they look like leaves turning across + back over the river. Each time they start I watch myself grow fear for the sickness they might carry.

Just before we parted ways you said you like my anxious brain, as is, but I'm not so sure I meet you on that point. There's a lavender strip above the ridge + tree frogs are singing. It's hard country out here: the air gives nosebleeds,

but it's clear clear clear all night + stars come out—one, then eight, then ten million.

## [DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY WE DROVE] (A CENTO)

Do you remember the day we drove as if death was a place and the dream was rectangular? Are you watching?

Stars

with the residue of morning, evening and morning, the bare trees of work, weather, money, guns, grief, deception, feeling again the cold tightening against the cold before the other night begins.

It was love for you that set me thrusting my little burning red backside like a baboon right when I wanted to tell you a good thing. As if each day, after breakfast, someone asked you What was wrong with me how could I ever think when my back is turned you still love me.

What I'm trying to tell you is that I'm not pine nuts and mint sprigs in a glass. Your goodness, a firm arm in the air.

While we are still alive, even if it hurts, I trust completely whatever's in your body. It's too late to tell you, but I think you'd have liked to know.

Credits in order of appearance: "Dear Seth," Heather Christle; from Please Bury Me in This, Allison Benis White; from Florida, Christine Schutt; "How much longer will I be able to inhabit the divine sepulcher...," John Ashbery; "Something About Joy," Cameron Awkward-Rich; "Austerity," Erika Meitner; "Ha-ha Wall," Miranda Field; "Yesterday," W.S. Merwin; "Still Life with Worsening Income Inequality," Julia Guez; "For Grace, After a Party," Frank O'Hara; "The Glass Essay," Anne Carson; "From the Ash Inside the Bone," Ada Limón; "To a Publisher...cut-out," Amiri Baraka; "The Brute / Brute Heart," Emily Skaja; "Poem (New York, February 1951)," Frank O'Hara; "A Brief Ontological Investigation," Erika Meitner; "Tea," Leila Chatti; "Sun," Molly Brodak; "Holdfast," Robin Beth Schaer; "Supplication with Rabbit Skull and Bouquet," Kaveh Akbar; "What I've Learned about Cottonwoods," Gretchen Marquette

#### CARTOGRAPHY OF A RECTANGLE OF SKY

First the bitter twists of arm clogging the lower dome. Robin's domain once more,

only so out of reach. Something beyond the fingers of thought, but still, really, quite loveable. And then

the wet air in its tufts, the hot vinyl sacs touting little baskets, untethered humans

who, it can't be denied, look up to you. Or, higher, in the blue space, the bluest, pierced

by copper and lithium bent into better wings. Finally, we're here. Finally. You are an astronaut's

astronaut. Visor wide and clear as Earth's softest curve. Pistol star a weapon in your belt.

You belong to the up-there now. Forget the wet earth. Forget my name, the poor syllable. Forget

the robins who came back.

#### THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

Brushing my teeth in a South Station bathroom is the closest I come to being myself the morning. The buzzing florescents illuminating my body bent here over the sink, my hands flashing under the faucet is not a faithful copy of dawn like I am. I am so faithful. I am the sky's dog. At 6:03 a.m. I look in the mirror and I see words scratched into the weather. I spit, and it's clouds.

### OISÍN/AKTAEON (SONNET ON TRANSLATION)

Dogs' teeth click shut like a lock.
Your throat, your antlers, your ankles wasting down,
you had, you were a body once, spasming, fragile, and now?
Lighthouse—Jaguar—Chariot of Fire—
Marshall tried making Mayakovsky legible
to wartime anglophones by staging him
a blakelight incarnation; we were beyond that
then and we remain beyond it now.
Second death, third death, picture death, word death.
I wrote this down in a café thinking of wetlands.
Marshfire, swamp cities, concrete embankments, things harnessed in threes,
the rites that fold like liner notes, translations—
complicity floods my mouth
copper of deer's blood, bathwater's soapy base,

#### PORTRAIT OF MY BROTHER WITH HIS HABIT

after Nick Flynn

Though the internet claims it takes twenty-one days to form a new habit, I am here to tell you it takes only a single moment of choice, then a lifetime to unmake—powder falling up through a slip of sunlight into his nose or a loose handful of pills, dead white bugs in his palm; without sense of where his body began or how it could end he bent the world to his will: like a cartoon he traced his wants onto air and they solidified, he drew windows on his arms and they filled in with stars, black holes the size of a needle's point, tiny mouths with their unremitting hungers, and all the while I went on assuming the worst, though what I imagined was the worst was not, and even once he told me I couldn't really imagine—a body of doors swinging loosely on their hinges, the twenty-one days coming and coming again, an army of days that were all the day he was going to quit, the day he'd rewind, walking backward through every opening he'd made until he stood at the entrance to himself, the first door of this life I couldn't imagine, and finally he'd slam it shut, all the other doors behind it falling like dominoes.

#### BOOM TIMES AT THE SHAKE SHANTY

Boom times at The Shake Shanty, sliding out malts and burgers, a tin-cup speaker on the roof in eternal loop for what's not quite a tune but something more than a ditty, something that puts you in mind of Christmas without the cheer, a scale of notes that might sound familiar if you'd just woken to a world without dream, at least until this moment, the whole town turned out, six blocks of sidewalk filled with a patchwork of lawn chairs and camping chairs and kitchen chairs and it's an hour overdue but here it comes now, its steel tread and god knows how many tons or just how high the crane, crawling with its wrecking ball held tight up high but shimmying in place like a tease, like an exotic dancer at the very start of her moves, the sweetest part, that first ripple, you can feel it beneath your feet, the crane pressing the asphalt down, the Harley din of its engine, people shouting but what's the point you can't be heard, and they're tearing into fried chicken and they're passing the slaw and the men can't drink enough beer to soften the spectacle of the company mill that stands at the butt end of the street and will stand no more once the ball starts swinging and takes down a place they're told will be rebuilt but were never told in what century, and it's arcing across so slowly, each pass

of the iron ball stoves in a wall of brick, a gallery of windows, support beams and floor planking, and the kids can't get enough of the wreckage, and the big dogs have busted their leashes, and with each swing the sky pours a little more of itself into the distance where the trees show themselves as they haven't done for a hundred-odd years while people shake heads shrouded in dust and debris, keep the Saran wrapped around the pies, and smile at how their shadows lengthen into the red kiln of dusk.

#### HOME

Childhood in a tract house: eight feet of earth marking the boundary between neighbors, springing green for two weeks every April before dying back to the color of a tin can. Each family claiming half and laying in slabs of colored flagstone or cunningly uneven shapes of shale, the better to catch the feet of children and send them laughing toward five more stitches. And the dog won't shut up you'd think it'd never licked blood before. like raw hamburger had never been tossed its way from the incessant weekend barbecueeveryone fired up on Saturday, lighter fluid and a six pack of Schaefer mixed into a 1950s cocktail that just doesn't taste the same all these years later. You blame the brewery for changing the formula, you blame the farmers for impure hops, and you blame God for allowing acid rain to spoil the fermenting process. Because all you're trying to do is pull back a jag of memory sharp as the chipped lip on a longneck bottle, the one your father snuck you so you could taste what it was like to be an adult. And when your lip bloodied from the drinking, it didn't really matter which house you turned to. You could have called any one of them home.

#### BUST OUT THE BLUEBERRIES

Bust out the blueberries, the ones we picked forty years ago. If I hold my hand up to a naked moon I can just make out the thin welts, the etched lines of blood from the thorns. Forty years in the healing. Forty more if I live that long.

Break out your guitar too, if you can hear me. Don't worry about the tuning, it was never right, ever. Your voice was everything, rising like heat from the ground in the hour past dusk, its dark drift and ragged scent of earth. Then gone.

Hike up your skirt, there's that creek to cross. Crossing it still. I was the one who slipped and cursed the god you believed in. You were the one whose laughter silenced the water's headstrong flow, whose cruelty bound my pain as I leaned into your body making our slow way back.

I didn't know who you were then. I know even less now. No fault in that. It was neither reason nor knowledge that tore down my heart. Heat was to blame. The night sky revolving. Hands brushing in the dark. Your father calling you home.

#### ON WISHING I WERE A PILLAR OF SALT

Home is memory painted in desert moonbeams and violet rain. I like to think most people remember voices pillowed beside softness and window light. I'm always there: the popcorned ceiling fan plopping centimeters from my feet and clicking its way into carpet, adamant on its intent. I want a reason again to craft you an edge, to write heel hard, bare—to itch at creosote brushing my neck. I dance with a dragnet of resin-scented air and a bleached sunsoaked sky. I can still hear the train's song near that nutmeg house, careening through fossil, the coyotes chasing alongside and they're certain this will take them where moths have failed. All of this echolocation, disembodied and familiar and only mine—fuck what it means to remember. I came here to say, I wish I could understand why I can't stand it, my mother texting me good night I love you every night. I could write about the way we once hid beneath the sheets as thunder broke desert washes into tributaries and how she said be very still very still but still—I hate how she feels like she should tell me every night. And I really hate more than anything that it bothers me. Like I won't write her into tired brush or how amber the air breathes during September. Out west, night marinates starlight like a bowl seasoned with a flowered desert where bats kick nectar into a churning cauldron. I want you to feel the hot breath of a July morning with two doves cooing away the mists rising high above and for once the horizon is mountainless and just plain soft. God, I really want to. I really want to be the sort who says good night I love you every night but I think it's enough to just know, and what I mean is, look at how hard I try, to move so far by getting closer.

#### GROWING UP IN THE DESERT, I PLAYED OCEAN

The game was to balance between stony skeletons and jellied tentacles—orange and yellowing blossoms, to not be pierced by purpled rosy heart-kissed spines. I felt so safe then, in those peak-shredded horizons,

those gardens of fleshy leaves dripping aloe: it was all sea breaks and seaweed washed up like organs glistening under sun. *Stand like a canyon* and I will dance inside a trenched you,

please hold very still. Monsoon undertow: I dip my arm out the door, a piece of reflection pelting my skin. I hung that fact on my wall, wide mirror of earth scrying the heavens. I thought, each range,

that's the end of it. The stars are right here, it is all here. We left sticks in chain-link. Spelling out bad words and leaving behind secrets. I used to think the rain bled the dirt,

it is the only way I can describe that smell that made me feel so deeply mineral. It was always this, a constant underwater scheme, and I don't think it was because I wanted to

leave, to be somewhere like that, to taste salt air and hear hollow crashing—I just knew that this was what it felt to be inside something unending, unconquerable. I knew that time slowed here, paused as if

to take a gulp. The fossilized fringe of the horizon with history a humming cosmos of mineral. Unsure we are as we listen to the static tell us unusual lights hover. In the car as the radio anxiously paints

and recalls, I am an eel. Where I came from no one is really all that sure. The cycles of life drift into the depths cluttered with abyss where I know only the untouched dwell.

## ON HUNTING METEORITES AND FALLING ASLEEP TO MARS DOCUMENTARIES TO EASE MY ANXIETY

Something about being right—I mean, how fragile

that magnetic hum

pinned against us

is. The green-blue wavers

and teases above, bodies of starlight

scatter each of our selves

so we only ever know

them once. The narrator in this

documentary on Mars says

Mars is a great reminder

of how easily we could break. We as in

you, as in me, as in earthen

little bursts—there was a time

I couldn't stop imagining

dying. I say time like it doesn't keep

going, dying over and over

in this head of mine. In Russia,

they have meteorites like we do

daffodils. Deep in their forests,

pirates sift through rock,

look for thumbed and shredded

material like geologists

but they could be

one and the same in this

place. I want one, I admit

it. I would wear and worry

it like a locket. As if carved

with initials or a lover's eye

inside. I just want to feel

exactly like I would breaking

through atmosphere, knowing

its thinness and violence. I will settle

for it just around my neck, hanging

there like a clock. I don't know

a single person who wears a watch

but I'll bet they all watch the sky, the dark

ember of themselves puffed into whisps
of breath like they would be
in that cold forest
full of extraterrestrial handprints. I fall
asleep to the sound of dust
and devils spinning in an arctic
cold. Melting into vapor,
I look to a moon
birthed from canyons
as it shifts and I linger
as the distant blue
hue of a slow-moving sun pulls me open.

### "ATTENTION POSSIBLE VISITORS"

or saviors, I'll take either. It's August—
I think—and I need your help. I've posted
this SOS because I'm near death. What does
SOS mean, anyway? Save our ship? Save
our souls? Stay out, suckers? No, this isn't
a joke. How could it be? Berries—

I'm out collecting berries and I'll be back later. Wait for me? In the name of Gogol—I mean, God—please remain to save me. I know I was stupid and you have your own skins to consider, but I am too weak to

admit that I'm a goner—I mean, to hike out of here. After all, aren't those the same?

#### A ROTTEN IDEA

As I shrink in my sleeping bag, I am the most un-free I've ever been. Whose stupid plan was this? Even at Emory, even under parental rule, even working at that goddamn McDonald's in the barren Arizona desert, I was less destitute. I hallucinate

being back, brushing against other human beings in a place that makes sense. Social creatures, societal creatures it's where we belong. No matter how much we hate it.

They all said I was crazy, well who's laughing now?

They are. They're laughing.

## NEST OF STARS BY NICOLE VERRONE

(Atmosphere Press, 2021)

#### REVIEW BY HOLLY MASON



Nicole Verrone's debut poetry collection, *Nest of Stars*, moves with grace and fervor. The poems are acute, attentive, and they shine. As the title suggests, these poems bring the heavens to earth.

The poems in this book offer reflection, contemplation, and wonder. The speaker's questions illustrate a curious mind and a comfort in, and embrace of, uncertainty. Mystery is welcomed—as in the poem "stars" when Verrone writes, "But these stars, light grown from nothing, stand in / mysterious assembly." Later in the same prose poem, she continues, "And yet, housed in a code, in the hot bed of / synergy where dust meets dust, the flowers of light and night / fill deciduous space in

the eye...." Here, stars described as "flowers" direct the reader's attention from the sky down to the land.

In a later poem, "eclipse," on this same, contemplative path, the speaker asks:

Does one pay more attention when life begins than in the coasting, tween, adult, mid-life scenes, abruptly re-focusing in the end?

What does payment of attention mean?

Do we fade like static snow; an eclipse of moments?

Alongside these existential questions, the poem moves into the territory of pregnancy and birth and then closes with this compelling tercet:

It passed so fast, I passed so fast from light to fog to darkening. This poem brings the "heavens to earth" through the language of "eclipse," which the poet uses to describe earthly beings and their life cycles. With attention upon a lineage of women, the poems span generations—from the speaker's grandmother, to her mother, to herself as daughter and mother, to time with her own daughters. The speaker is nonetheless steady across the pages—the voice consistent. She recalls a childhood memory in the poem "afterwards":

I hid behind the circle of lawn chairs in the limbs of a mimosa tree heavy with a secret

I was four.

In thinking of memory and matriarchal lineage, we can return again to what I think of as a thesis poem of the collection, "stars," where the speaker recollects her grandmother with incredible clarity. The poem begins with "My perception of stars is dim. These lights are scattered / pockets of floating fire," and moves into an introduction of the farming grandmother who "viewed the stars as God's drawer of diamonds." Verrone writes:

Down to earth means down to earth. If I could hold her hand and walk through her dark farm, my grandmother would see the starry sky as acres of potential good soil. Perhaps she would compare star beds to prolific crops, thriving as an iridescent stream of mineralized water.

Atmospheric and packed with truly dazzling imagery, *Nest of Stars* offers meditations on existence and beauty. There is a speaker in these pages who is pleased to experience beauty solo, but is also pleased to be in community, companionship, and with her beloveds. A later poem in the collection, "ride home," offers an illustration of the glorious moments when marvel is shared, in this case between mother and daughter:

Last evening,
I lifted my dancer
home over autumn fields.
[...]

Amber and wheat plowed brown eaten by silver columbine. The profuse perfumed earth, deep-breath smell of dusky dust arrested she and me mid-harmony and we locked eyes.
[...]

Smoking bales lassoed with twine surrender to November. But my dancer, here, in her pink tights, leotard and pursed lips, her sharp jawline and lilac eyes, holds my hand for landing.

You'll find in these pages carefully crafted lines that invite us to read and reread them for their deliciousness and precision. For example, this couplet in the poem "observe": "observational visibility occurs / in the net of epiphany." Or these lines in "veil": "theories are veiled, / hidden truths of youth, / sweet like china bells." Or this inviting stanza in the poem "profile":

Press your ear to the canyon wall, warm as Sunday bread. Cupped closelobe skin to stone, just a minute or two like a daughter listening to waves recorded in a conch shell.

These lines lure the reader in with sensory details, offering a moment of stillness and welcoming awe. Often in the collection, such atmospheric moments are followed by moments of wisdom to savor. In the opening poem, "voice," we are told "it was all oak and grief, / file after file" and "moonlit mountain path, / barefoot tones / in a sullen summer." "Voice" ultimately winds around to a line of captivating truth, "time will not unwind." Verrone's poetry is both highly sensory and unpretentiously intellectual; phrasing serves as a clever vehicle for philosophical thought. Take for instance this stanza in the poem "scar":

Pain creates memory, notching an end when the scene's sting suspends the clock.

Here, the speaker contemplates the way a scar still holds ache over time. Alongside a speaker's captivation with, and delight in, mystery and the supernatural, the speaker expresses interest in science, logic, and intellect. As in the poem above, we don't just have the metaphor of the scar, we also have the medical science behind it, too. We have the stars as luminous points and as space matter. We don't just have a heavenly celestial sphere, we also have astronomy and "NASA's image as the center of a dahlia" (from "stars").

Being human on Earth means living within a range of experiences. There are moments in the poems that examine corners of loneliness and others that delight in familial love—sometimes both within the same poem. This duplicity is finely rendered in the poem "hunger" as the speaker asks in one stanza, "Isn't loneliness cruel?" while in another confesses:

I asked my father this morning for help. My battery sparking in a dark cave trapped in exhaustion with self.

If the specifics in that stanza aren't captivating enough, the next stanza's descriptions are no less sharp:

His cherry-faced joy cooed, not with anticipated scolding, but cheered me in the furrow.

And in the final lines of this poem, a sonic and cerebral offering:

The feast, and wedding fleece awaits at the end of solemn roads.

Various modes of storytelling, mythologies, fables, and age-old stories offer backdrop and backbone for a number of poems. At times, with parable-like movement and framing, the poems exist in a space of both wonder and wisdom. Borrowing from and repurposing these narratives welcomes the reader into an arena that feels at once

familiar and new. There is sacrament, demon pigs, Eden, Camelot, Neptune, Orion, Athena, and Icarus. There are wise men silenced by a babe and a night of holy prose. There are seven swans, seven sins, and seven wonders.

The poem "eden ash" expresses concern over climate change in our current moment and thinks ahead to what may be (or may not be) for our grandchildren—"now Eden smolders / and our grandchildren / with metal shoes / will pop exhaust bubbles." A good steward of the earth, the poet laments the "price of emissions, / the cost of omission" and ends with this powerful stanza, a climate prayer, a fervent petition:

Power mutes
voice of low repute.
Lend her thine earwith a sharp point,
erase the bottom line.
Retrace
the verdant fruit laden vine
for them
before apple infection
makes masters of war
look like all men.

The book's speaker is a disciple of nature, and there is a love of the natural world throughout that is almost transcendental at times. Many poems offer a rootedness in place, as in the final stanza of "hen" when Verrone writes:

Fragile enough to die, or brave enough on chilly tips of October to hide my bones in the crook of your limbs.

In *Nest of Stars*, lines and stanzas can be enjoyed for their imagery and prosody, but the reader will also find a buried treasure of ideas to piece together and questions to consider. Take, for example, these stanzas from "siren tone":

Can one hear their own siren song—honeyed pitch or is it behind cognition in the womb of a dream region?
[...]

Hush it, quiet it, wail it out into deep midnight. The drape of dreams is a poet's seam. Isn't hunger innate?

That question sings out there in the end, thinking about the human condition, after the poem explores notions of filtering through the varied voices that aim to lay out our paths. The collection as a whole explores another type of hunger—hunger for discovery. Near the end of the collection, in the poem "amelia," the poet offers a striking elegy for Amelia Earhart and is in awe of her courage. This poem, like the whole of *Nest of Stars*, praises the daring spirit, the daring girl, the daring woman. The poet closes with Amelia's own words: "the stars seemed near enough to touch and never before have I seen so many." These words are perfect and haunting—an embodiment of awe.

#### **ENOUGH**

Between the gratefulness of having been given it

and the greed of wanting more, lies a long desert

and a thin road curving through hills, a river

twisting beside it. A slim stream keeps the wheat-

grass on the bankside green, but nothing else.

#### PARADISE

through beige neighborhoods houses painted faintly never a deep hue our suns leech pigment clean

somebody's father drives a Tesla home from school
we had everything settled my only task
to stay stay
the first command (something about gardens flaming
swords something about apples)

backsides of curtains bleach in brightness sit stay in the kind of light that strips color off the siding blands the fence nobody flinch

#### AFTER THE SHIPWRECK

Paradise can't have people, so they all died. The wooden sides of the ship bleached in the sun, smoothed by waves, were salvaged by artists on their way to another island. The paintings done on this soft wood have lasted over four hundred years now. Curators feel their hands tingle, shake, when allowed to hang the paintings in their museums. The wandering artists died so long ago, just like the sailors before them. Not shipwrecked, no drama, they lived together and one by one died. They knew their best work had been painted on the wood from the ship, and though careless in so many ways, they protected the paintings, which hang in all the great museums, anonymous and brilliant.

#### THE TITLE OF THE POEM

A century or so later, we knew the era of freedom had passed. Our art had become a thing of suggestion, the product of contingency, the child of a father whose path must be followed.

We were free to think we had choices. Our colors were pale blue and citrus yellow.

## YOU'VE TURNED INTO MY BACKYARD TABLE, DADDY

and I'd paint you

if it weren't too late,

brush you with what I craved as a child—a sheen of hunter green, the thinnest of lacquers over the lattice-legged, rusty-footed you,

the hard-welded,

fifty-three-when-I-was-born,

the too-brittle-to-roughhouse-and-play-with-me

you.

Look at you, Old Man.

How you anchor my deck under a rain of yellow leaves.

How you linger with your silence, your flaking iron.

ग GA

Third consonant of the Sanskrit alphabet.

Gaṇgā

What can you give to your children?

We went down into the glacial, gray-green waters
of the Ganges, at Rishikesh.

Above us, a town of temples shimmered in one-hundred-and-three-degree June heat.
The river, tumbling out of the Himalayas,
ran clean and swift and cold.

Women in saris walked into the water, bent down for its blessing and showed us how.

Ma Gangā, Divine Mother, river and goddess, star river, fell from heaven, poured through Lord Śiva's hair.

All my life I dreamed of coming here. We bow down, our heads go under.

ऐ AI

Twelfth vowel of the Sanskrit alphabet.

An interjection, a name of Lord Siva, the Auspicious. Under the letter, we find these words:

aindra

Of the God Indra; therefore, a name of the Goddess, Durga. aindrajāla

Of magic, sorcery—from *Indrajāla*, "Indra's Net."

In the beginning, Indra, creator, spread out the cosmos like a net.
In every knot, He placed a jewel, cut with ten thousand facets.

Now, every jewel reflects every other.

Every being, every individual holds every other.

aindrāyudha
Of Indra's rainbow.

Once,

I walked home after rain
with my son in my arms.
Puddles lay all around us like pieces of sky.
My son kept his eyes on me, and I remembered
how when I was four
I saw my face inside my mother's eyes.
When my son and I reached home, we walked along the porch
where every window held our faces in its hands.
Inside his room, crayons, toys, coins, carved animals, rocks and shells,
a room of treasures, room of jewels.

## APHORISM 52: WHEN GOD THROWS THE DICE THEY ARE LOADED

Polish the round river rocks until they're smooth as faces for someone to carve them mouths and give them something to say then drop them into a dried goat's bladder or some wooden grail so whatever's and shake them hard listening knows that you're still in it then kneel in the grit & gore to win it all-in on every throw to cast your lots waiting for a miracle for some kind of lucky some kind of loved.

### APHORISM 21: HOUSE OF STRAW, House of Bricks

In the beginning there were dreams enough for everyone (and even nightmares hammering their confusing prognoses like water in old pipes)

because everyone's scars were everyone's all of us the same scared monkey though now (like sleep and hope) under the fur we each get just enough to see how lost we really are sinking through euphotic zones shedding aspirations like pearls deep into that far vision in which breaths nothing changes least of all the self that comes knocking like the pressure of the airless depths calling in our own gruff voices little pig little pig let me in.

#### APHORISM 19: PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

thick as driven Here we gather giving that which honey is holy unto the dogs & inside these pale lives swarm two hundred thousand years (fourmillante cité cité pleine de rêves) that squat and vibrate their wings dry until each one is stiff and black as gum on a sidewalk as the spot on our setting sun that's nothing more than cooled regret from which we walked away still stuck exactly where we left it.

## APHORISM 23: THE FINGER POINTS AT THE MOON, THE FOOL LOOKS AT THE FINGER

The moon goes down as an abstraction like pity or the meaning inside the winding down of all the wound-up worlds spun like pennies around a missing middle that gapes round as a moue as a well in which nothing not moon nor stars nor you casts a reflection on the bright & trembling surface of its waters.

### those who keep arriving by Julie Danho

(Silverfish Review Press, 2020)

#### REVIEW BY MILLIE TULLIS



Julie Danho's *Those Who Keep Arriving* places intimate ekphrastic poems alongside poems that examine the bonds of family in the face of the reality of human violence. Danho zooms in and out with remarkable clarity, examining the details and imagining the processes of the art she encounters. The fragile bodies and powerful histories of family members, strangers, and the self are both studied and held in this expertly woven body of poems.

Danho's collection opens with "Erased de Kooning," which examines both a piece of art and an idea: "Robert Rauschenberg wanted to know if unmaking art / could make art." The silent questions

behind the poem and much of the collection may also be the most familiar and difficult ones: What is art? What is art for? What is the difference between art and idea? Between humans and their art? The speaker turns to the beloved, who is absent from, but intellectually imagined to be, studying the piece alongside the speaker. "If you were here, how you would / praise this, how we would argue over whether this was true, / over what, if anything, was." But the speaker determines, "My love, Rauschenberg lied." After studying the erased canvas, sprouting "de Kooning's violet crayon" and seeing that "there are even eyes, / still looking" the speaker answers, "The idea, / yes. But how his arms must have ached afterwards." After a month of Rauschenberg's effortful unmaking, the canvas is changed, but it is not wiped clean.

While in "Erased de Kooning," the speaker and her imagined love stand before a painting and an idea, in "Process Inspiration for the Final Piece," a response to Carles Piera Claramunt's installation from Inner Light: An Art and Therapy Experience at the End of Life, the speaker must enter and move through a room filled with lightbulbs in order to view the artwork. Instead of making light, the lightbulbs playfully interact with the observers-turned-participants, knocking "lightly against our faces, arms, even knees, / no matter how carefully we slip between. / Inside each, in place of the filament, // a feather." While this room was once part of a Barcelona hospital, "where people came to be saved, or try

// to be saved," and lightbulbs were needed to provide light, now the peacock-feather-filled bulbs offer the participants something else:

now we stand here amidst bulbs with no glow, no heat, useless except for their glory, the way they bell

off our bodies, their feathers like tongues either silent or ringing at a register that's too high to hear.

Danho's poems are not afraid of this kind of wonder; these poems provide an understanding that is both ordinary, knocking against our bodies, and occasionally just beyond our reach. In "The Night Before Kindergarten," the wonders coexist as the speaker and her husband share Saturn with their daughter through a telescope in their backyard.

To her, the extraordinary

is still ordinary, so why not planets shuttled to the eye by a tube tall as a sister? We've shut every light in the house to keep the night clean, to let her see

the show that's all for her, the girl we made then circled until she knew she was the sun. Tomorrow, we'll send her off to unlearn it,

to discover, as we did, how small we are, how little we matter anywhere but here.

But Danho's collection is not interested only in positions and perspectives that take place inside of art galleries and personal spaces—the family home, the pink-lead-paint bathroom, the couch, the bed, the night sky in the yard, or Saturn through the family telescope. These poems are as intensely political as they are intimate, as "It's Terrible What's Happening There" makes clear. This poem begins mid-sentence, continuing the title's statement by drawing the details of a family name and a family's food to the distancing term "There" in the title:

people say, if it comes up I'm Syrian when my daughter mentions her "Sito" or I'm microwaving my kibbe at work. And it is. But I don't need to tell you.

#### You've heard the numbers of the dead.

When the speaker's great-grandparents "left Aleppo, / they carried their stories like gold / sewn inside clothes, but no one since / has pulled hard at the stitches." The speaker's daily horror, then, is not of a city "that bombs are skinning / down to concrete and bone," but is instead "that of a woman who looks / at the sky and expects only blue—a luxury / my ancestors passed down to me." Danho's collection reminds that safety, or even just the illusion of safety, is a privilege of distance.

Horror and harm are measured and understood in terms of distance in this collection, not unlike the observer who shifts her perspective as she moves through an installation that is a room full of lightbulbs offering her something other than light. In "Distance" the speaker states, "it's said that tragedy draws us closer, / yet we look for a rock to wedge between us"; when a woman is stabbed to death on the bus route the speaker takes to work, she interrogates our responses to such news. At the bus stop, "how quickly talk leapt / from shock to sympathy to *did she / know him?*"

Did any of us wake today and think we'd be dead by today's end? Maybe she did. After all, it was her husband, which made us feel better. It's always safer when someone is killed by someone they loved.

This brutal, simple diction rings true as it horrifies. Danho exposes our human instinct to distance ourselves from danger and pain and condemns this othering. In "The Museum of Broken Relationships," she argues, "In the end, there's no marvel / in how we suffer, only in how / we build skyscrapers out of rubble." However, if this is the purpose of art, to build with what we have before us, experiencing art is never the experience itself. In "When the First Father Dies," the first line answers the "When" of the title: "You're glad it's not your own." Danho reminds us of the limitations of our imagination,

But no matter the soft comforts you utter, or the number of bodies you hold,

your turn will not be better. Seeing a mugging isn't being mugged. Holding your breath isn't a pillow held over your face.

Danho's collection questions what spaces imagination and art allow us to access, and where we fail in the face of lived experience—in the face of both real love and real harm. In "Erased de Kooning," she writes, "like much art, / its title tells me what to see." *Those Who Keep Arriving* takes its title from "Early Marriage," one of the book's many love poems. Here, the speaker hypothesizes that if she catches "death's wandering eye," her love "won't widow forever." Still, she says, "death isn't what I fear best. It's the living / who must welcome those who keep arriving, / must open their arms to people who keep arriving."

## THAT WINTER I WROTE THE SAME POEM OVER & OVER—

after Topaz Winters

since childhood i've been consumed by maps

moonstruck by miles covered while motionless

as a carcass crawling

into the back cab of the truck my grandfather used to haul whatever it was he used to haul i'd pore over

the crinkled routes he'd take all across the eastern seaboard even now when blessing

a land new

-to-me with gloom

i stand before

placards charting public transportation & courses for wandering

wobblelimbed

up & down the webbed

streets infinite

tracks trace the arc of any heart ache

sunstrobed or rainswept i'll spend hours bewitched

by the crescent path from montparnasse to père lachaise

in paris or the cobblestoned

back alleys

that twist through the alfama district in lisbon

like damp hair wrapped around a finger or the bending

cartilage when it

breaks

don't get me started on miniature city models a crisis brimming

a craving really

to crush the whole damn thing one swift movement my foot makes

its sole a culprit

caked with debris

guilty too my admittedly blasé heart not off my sleeve

as the poets love

to say but a wet rose in my teeth

years ago i worked at a bar on a slow night as

i'm wont to do playing

songs of love & hate by leonard cohen front to back one of two

customers a woman

who looked a mélange of edie sedgwick & wednesday addams beckoned me

asked are you playing this to chase

us out?

(i was) because as long as you play leonard cohen i'm not going anywhere

i could see

the sum of our affair already stretching like molasses across the sky to be read in stars

so caustic & close

i didn't know

if they'd burn or crown us she stayed til 4am & then the next two years

without ever really falling in love

of course this poem is about another woman entirely but i didn't need to tell you that.

## ALL MY ATTEMPTS AT MEDITATION END IN SHOUTING MATCHES WITH GHOSTS

the day i turned 32 years old / tears froze on my face they were not / my tears they were tears / from a woman i love & i was the one / who had my heart / broken i know my luck only / too well / & when her cab eased down / myrtle avenue well that was likely the last / i'll ever see of her i did not watch / her slushy ebb i was distracted / by the sky dirty as the bottom / of an ashtray i know someone / out there must be thinking / how prosaic but this is merely / heartbreak the sky is the sky / it's unlanguageable / even planes get lost in its latent prose / even this temperature / -bending grief stumbles / under its piles of soot i see a man below / a pale halo / wearing a coat like a flag whipping / away its filth hauling / trophies two arms full / to a trash heap & i know / what it is to crave / freedom from victory / to pray off the gilt & glitter / it guts out of you maybe / the trophies aren't his / spoils but scars that burn / smokeless like psalms or votives / closer to skin than salt / maybe he's vain or he's proud / they cheapen what's made / for bleeding / maybe they don't belong / to him at all / but a beloved who left / them to languish until he could no longer / take it he simply does not need / the reminders / the gimcrack gold's every curve seared / to memory the sharp glint keeps him / from sleep he wants / release / i envy this man / to walk away in repose so / cavalier he appears to hover / to hunger / for absence like the magician / who rips the sheet from beneath / the wine & candles losing / none of his sacrament / not a drop / not a flicker / tongue fixed as spots / on a leopard

#### SOMETIMES AT NIGHT

When the house goes soft like this

And candles hiss

Inside their smoggy jars—

Smoke and brick

of cratered stars

Lemon bergamot charcoal patchouli

Anesthesia enough

For curtains like burnt hair

And time we've torn through

Seared around the edges

You doze in the den

To an old checkered Noir

While our son with brush to teeth

Saws paste into his blunt enormous crowns

We're down to the nerve and root

Fortifying a fragile future

As the moon, a warden's lamp

From the window's fugitive side

Levies her wagging beam

Okay okay I answer

I'll stand it a while longer

## I GET WHY DOROTHY PARKER LEFT ALL HER MONEY TO THE NAACP

Tired writer she was at the end. of all the hustle, the bait and switches. Still, she bit with the best, the nag apple turned to gold in her liquored, equine teeth. She knew how rigged, how fixed the game for those not looking like the Easter Bunny dipped them in powdered sugar at birth. Before being pulled from the mountain pass of a mother's legs, as we all are, hauled out like little row boats from the womb's mystical barge. In case someone's forgotten. That, and how many forced to dark baptisms at sea. Convenient mind slips, the status quo. But not Parker, who recognized it begins with blood smear and a cry, and whatever technician's weighing and prick, metal settling you into the collective river, the fire of time. Cool water, flames high. Who said who could decide which names would burn—(What fresh hell is this) which faces replicate, multiply?

### FLANNERY O'CONNOR AND I GO BOWLING

a lane is also an aisle. a ball is also a weight. i bought her a ninety-cent fountain drink that in her hands morphed into a pitcher of light, a pitcher made of light full up with light,

light inside of light, sharp pulsing brightness of a birth or a blow. when she drank a blaze ripped down her throat in one straight line, and in her stomach i saw cells take the light

> to all corners of skin, all specks of blood, each small grain of bone. god hovered in place above the pin machine, opening and closing his mouth. i touched her palm

so i could hear him, the roar of his voice sweeping down the boards, tumbling and crashing, keeping careful score. wouldn't it be best if we were different people, i said,

> but she told me the self comes back like a sleeping bulb, like a bowling ball, returned from tunnels under the earth, delivered for us to throw away again.

#### AT THE CARNIVAL'S DIME TOSS BOOTH

That what shimmers, shatters was the game's principle thrill. Cut glassware

stacked to a palatial sheen, precious as precarious under white tent lights' brash

glare. Congregants gathered at the booth's edges to pitch their wishes

that showered down a chandelier of dimes. Plinks and jingles

in giddy trickle over goblet lips and tumblers, assorted dishes

and colored ashtrays, amber and rose. Whatever the employed

technique, the game defeated intent since the object you meant

your aim for deflected each coin's level best, but then a luckless lob

would ricochet, sail and—kissed by grace settle on some humble plate, sidelong like a glance, and in this manner resembled life, its glimmer of gain and each

itching toss pitched against near certain loss.

#### WINTER AUBADE

Sour milk, an unmade bed. A woman asleep in a falling-down house in Paw Paw, Michigan. Yard blurred with snow. The world is burning, even so. The barn, the blackberry thicket, the house where I learned *rape*. Learned no. Everything becomes normal after a while. The child's bed, broken teacup, a length of rope. I woke up and the pond had frozen over. The sheets were dirty. I turned on all the lights. I lit the stove. Animals started coming out of the woods: rabbit, doe, a murder of crows. The kettle sang, thin and flat. A child wept in the back room. Television tuned to static. The house grew warm, then hot. Snow sloughed off the roof. If you give a woman a match, she'll light it. The smallest things are the first to burn.

#### SELF PORTRAIT

a lake of a window whited out by the finishing December coming out the rear of the worst blizzard to drop by the east coast in years the yawning door a snare of a mouth collecting lookers like the white gunks at the corners of lips becoming spectacle in a paper gown the gauzy shade of a dollar store shower curtain so many priests in white robes charging in to format my sins chart them take my confession with my temperature Were you trying to hurt yourself? Why were you trying to hurt yourself? ritualized the thwack of a stethoscope urgent against my rib cage and the throbbing underneath systematized the chatty machine and its long-winded appendages see-through and skeletal and plastic holding my hands and arms the itch on the belly at needlepoint the tickle on the inside side of my palms of my elbow I am forbidden to scratch or bend and the wail of the machine when I do the light and loose kind of faded my mind is the brilliant anger bringing me back to my own body the aching unsoothable the pressing hard on my chest to find it smell it like you touch the back of your ear and smell it and I the filmy afterbirth of grief right on the rim of dissolve

### SUGAR ASTROLOGY

## BY SHARI ZOLLINGER ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOLLI ZOLLINGER

#### ZODIAC IN TRANSLATION—AN APARTMENT ON URANUS

Drawing from Paul B. Preciado's book *An Apartment on Uranus*, I am taken by the author's detailed account of their own gender crossing from female to male, from Beatriz to Paul. Oddly, but perhaps not so oddly, this book has me thinking about the sky, and of Uranus and its zodiacal playmate Aquarius, and how, possibly, paying a monthly rental on Uranus is not so far-fetched a notion given the current planetary conditions.

In planetary-speak, Uranus rules Aquarius and Aquarius is currently dominating the sky. It is common, when planets are in Aquarius, to feel disconnected, isolated, and alienated. As we emerge out of collective isolation, these themes are present. Have we all lost our social muscle? If, collectively, we are all emerging from isolation, or limited social experience, I thought, possibly we could, by Zodiac sign, show the various ways that each sign connects to self and other.



ARIES: March 21 to April 19

Through the element of fire, Aries, you connect directly, actively, and assertively. Try not to let your fierce independence obstruct your desire to laugh, joke, and play with others. An initiator, you prefer the beginning of things, bending toward color, warmth, joviality, expressiveness, optimism, and movement. Invite someone to take a walk. It is here you'll find the perfect cadence for conversation.



TAURUS: April 20 to May 20

Through the element of earth, Taurus, you connect through the sensual world, breaking bread with others and sharing genuine moments. When non-human connection is limited, put your hands in the earth for the purpose of growing things, plants, carrots—trees. When you feel particularly ungrounded, brew a fine cup of coffee and pour it into your favorite mug. Allow for quiet enjoyment.



GEMINI: May 21 to June 20

Through the element of air, Gemini, you connect through the intellect, social interplay, and wordsmithing. Yes, you do need to talk, my friend, even if all the talking is to be had virtually. You also like to hear what others are thinking and saying, so listening is in your wheelhouse as well. But you also need downtime and quiet meditation. Give that brain a rest at regular intervals.



CANCER: June 21 to July 22

Through the element of water, Cancer, you connect through deeply nurturing experiences. It is generally easy for you to see what others need. What do you need though? Do you know what nurtures you? If you've been skirting the surfaces too much lately, let yourself drop back down into your place of intuition, this place you know very well. Let yourself be understood.



LEO: July 23 to August 22

Through the element of fire, Leo, you connect through active participation in art, culture, and creativity. With a penchant for flare, you bask in the warmth of human enterprise, even human invention. The heart, your monitor for joy, rarely fails you. Doing what you love is the right kindling. Music, poetry, or a good book in front of a warm fire will keep you smiling.



#### VIRGO: August 23 to September 22

Through the element of earth, Virgo, you connect through truth, expressed either in conversation or through the written word. Quietly reading while dinner is baking in the oven might be the coziest way for you to spend an evening. Ironically, even with your practical and organized nature, you have a mind for awesome fantasy, and complex thinking. Use these gifts well!



#### LIBRA: September 23 to October 22

Through the element of air, Libra, you connect through the establishment of authentic relationships. You also have a most exquisite eye for design, symmetry, and beauty. Paying special attention to your closest friends and relationships keeps your creative excitement alive and well. You do not like to be weighed down. You have the extraordinary gift of relating to all types of personalities.



#### SCORPIO: October 23 to November 21

Through the element of water, Scorpio, you connect by sharing your resources with others—time, love, gifts. You are a deeply emotional being, yet it is through the eyes of others that you recognize yourself. Honor the mirrors you've chosen—most imitate others in your life. Keep the channels of intimacy as clear as possible. Intimacy is your muse.



#### SAGITTARIUS: November 22 to December 21

Through the element of fire, Sagittarius, you connect through activism, honesty, and direct action. There is nothing more exciting than shared growth and collective journeys. You have a way of setting your sights firm on the horizon. Who would you like to take with you on this extraordinary journey? Travel mates must be chosen wisely. You, of all the signs, must court adventure.



#### CAPRICORN: December 22 to January 19

Through the element of earth, you connect by securing your base, and building something beautiful, brick by brick. Not easily swayed, you have enough patience to wait and remain steady until your dream becomes a reality. It might take a long time. That's okay. You can hold not only your own weight, but the weight of others. Your reliability is essential.



#### AQUARIUS: January 20 to February 18

Through the element of air, you connect, ironically to both microcosm and macrocosm, the one and the many. Use technology to your benefit. Open your eyes to the bigger world, the cosmic world, the world that is human and trans-human. Find patterns in chaos. Use your knowing to help those around you who have lost their way. You are at home in this windstorm.



#### PISCES: February 19 to March 20

Through the element of water, you connect through music, possibly dancing, poetry, and any other activity that allows you to transcend. It is through connecting to something larger than yourself that you satisfy your most Piscean self. You are so much larger inside than you think. Myopic thinking is antithetical to your nature. Finding what takes you to the greater octaves is essential.

### Talia, sun & moon

once I dropped a stone on a spider and her fat white sack

the littles erupted hatched by my hand

it was like that

the strangers were everywhere

seizing me where I puckered

two fat stones hanged from my nipples like wolf cubs like future kings

#### GOD SEES EVERYTHING

but sees can't be

the word for how

God everythings

in my childhood He saw all

do you need a body

to house a verb

Mormon God has eyes

pupils a tiny God

shaped window for Picture

to crawl through

#### AFTERNOON ROUNDS

The sun slants through the windows of the skybridge. Outside, the hospital's rooftop is flat, seamed with steel. I see the white cross on the helipad, and the turkey buzzard sunning himself against the glass in his usual spot. When he turns towards me, the skin of his neck crumples into wet tissue. Three stories down, a family—almost ant-sized—waves at the helicopter tilting away. They must not know the child whose skull floods with blood, or the woman whose aorta has split like sausage. That the helicopter isn't coming back is the secret I don't want to hold. When the buzzard raises his wings, serrated shadows slide under the windows.

#### WITNESS

Shards of bald cypress wreck the sky. Each night's turmoil of feral hogs stiffens in mud. Behind the metal grate, the trapped boar swells and surges, all hackles and fever, tusks bursting the leaf litter.

The game warden's rifle draws a line between his eye and ear.

This is how I imagine ice splits granite, or the way Newton's second law translates: the sudden posture of a force accelerating into nothing but mass.

#### LORENA BOBBITT

O what's in a name? Three months before I was born ten policemen, stepping gingerly holding their flashlights and crotches, searched a gravel field for John Wayne's dick. She released it at night as one does an apple core, slowed for a hurl from the driver's side before a swerve back to inertia. When they found it. not arm nor any other part, it was placed on ice in a hotdog box from the 7-11. She worked at a nail salon, sometimes slept in a car. During the day, she pushed metal plows down cuticles, harvested nailbeds and their futures. the myth of more polished, attached. When I was pulled apart from my mother's body she named me Lorena. I didn't know until I was twenty, her name crossed out on my papers, canceled by 90's headlines. The news and its astrology led to public shame at a De Los Muertos fest, her name haunting my mother as she introduced her baby gnawing on a sugar skull. O, be some other name! Lorena, not yet deemed rape victim, nor feminist, immigrant icon. Soon-to-be mental health hero, budding, tricky sex politician. Future president's dinner guest. I once dreamed I met her, at the beauty shop. She gave me a manicure, pink. That which we call a rose doubted any word would smell as sweet.

#### COVID COSMICOMICS

To reduce spread of coronavirus, experts recommend to not touch our own face, protect weak membranes in our mouth, nose, eyes. Everything is new again. The new language is "guidelines." My new chisme is Reddit, my new low point a YouTube makeup tutorial.

Once while in the woods, eating Starbursts, we heard a bee touch a girl's face in the tent next to us. Her scream spread, opera sang the stars until they cracked & burst, fell to the earth, melted our campsite to its original lava & poured it into a well-oiled baking tray whose shape looks something like the state who ignored the shelter in place. We will never

touch a scream, only its source of spread. The air was so distanced from itself tonight that a carrier rapped its claw upon my door, bored & looking for a postcard rendezvous. The clouds, lying on one another, taunting me. Trees tangling around each other like DNA, no, like cousins. The sky holds the moon & smells her hair. *Just look at that shine*, she says.



Trump announced if we lay under the sun it would somehow gift us antibodies. I got my first sunburn at 20. I was sure I would die. My marble friends reached into the fridge past the ketchup & gave me a cold bottle of aloe.

That night I lay in bed under a clear ceiling & begged like a goddamn poet for the moon to come & heal me. When I told the moon I want its light to drip like honey & melt onto my skin like ice, the moon said I needed to stop using such high-reaching & ineffective metaphors.

That was the night the moon gave a speech. It was rather long, & like a goddamn poet I'd rather hear myself talk. I can still hear it now, something about churning, & how my body was made from pacific mists & diaspora, made to move with tides I always feel but cannot understand.

•

Analysts carved into electric tablets: we have at least 1 more year of 2560 x 17000 pixels hardening us & our eyes, incubating time till crow's feet break out of their shells a season or two early, meek croak of a caw.

The world holds in its heave: burp of hot greenhouse gas & a torch tilted to the brink of election, of nightfall, of 10 days pre-Republican intimidation tactics to steal Florida. Brooks babbling, Brothers Rioting & banking beached palms on a door to rouse the re-counters.

My mail-in ballot is a dead bird in a shoebox. My mail-in ballot is on a conveyor belt to hell. The red leaves in solidarity with the stars ask us if death is beautiful,

which is not really a question at all. Before a bluster settles the long-awaited unpresidented beauty, *please not 4 more years* ice skates my skull during Netflix as winter approaches.

If it be so, pop the lightbox in my eye, shatter the cornea before cornucopia so that darkness is no different from seeing.

**\** 

My parents mailed me a Therapure electric filter, which delivers me maximum protection against air pollutants, hopefully their source. Toxic sneeze, tricky frenemy. *Triple action*, that's what I need. Effectively reduce me & my allergens. Smoke, odor, my airborne backstabbing bacteria. I keep the machine between me & my fiancé like a child, who, if real, would second-hand boost our immune systems by plundering in the mud, touching a dog's eye, sucking on a floor marble.

Today I saw the bottom half of someone's face.

It energized me so much I scaled a tree
& had a nice chat with its red leaves.

They were quarantining with star spores
who were gentrified out of their own night sky
by those fucking satellites. They lay in my mask like a hammock
& told me about the Comcast Bistro that replaced
their favorite constellation, the Light Pollution
Neighborhood Tour guided by some prick named Josh.

The day & its room reduce me to a weighted blanket over my mouth, which is alright, because mercury is in its tower against my wall, dropping over twenty degrees. A robot offers me a *Soothing Acoustic Playlist*, compiled by another robot. But I see this as new love, which is only an 8-month-old, just learning to crawl, on the brink of giggle & gigabyte, watts lighting words.

#### **SNOW**

It's so quiet you can hear the trees opening and closing their mouths

drinking the snow in the dark.

The sunflowers have collected little cloche hats atop

their dead earthward heads.

Some headlights up on the hill
are two flakes moving

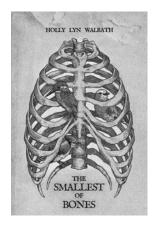
in the same direction, headed home from loving or shooting, someone

who shares this brilliant desire to suffocate the familiar and the good.

# THE SMALLEST OF BONES BY HOLLY LYN WALRATH

(Clash Books, 2021)

### REVIEW BY JESSICA DRAKE-THOMAS



Our bones can tell someone everything about us—our occupation, our habits, our illnesses. Even when all the flesh has been stripped away, our bones can tell someone everything about who we were and how we lived. Holly Lyn Walrath uses human bones in her poetry to discuss issues of body and gender. "If you strip me down to my bones / am I yours?" the speaker asks in Walrath's collection of dark poems, The Smallest of Bones, suggesting that when someone reveals their innermost layers, ownership by the observer is implied.

The book is in sections delineated by skeletal anatomy, such as the cranium, the mandible, the ster-

num, the sacrum, the spine, the calcaneus, and the temporal bone. Much like an anthropologist, Walrath uses the bones to demonstrate differences between men and women, exploring not only the physical, but the expectations and violence perpetrated against women. Of the mandible, Walrath says, "Fractures of this bone are the most common in cases of domestic violence. The fist is a favorite tool for assaults. The mandibles of the female of the species are smaller. Thinner. Rounder. More obtuse." The poem shows how it is the female jawbone that is more susceptible to the violence of a physical assault.

Likewise, Walrath says of the spine: "Evolutionary psychology suggests that heterosexual men might be on the lookout for a very specific kind of spine in sexual partners. Are they looking for weakness or strength. Maybe we should stop looking for men as partners." Her tone here is wry, weary; it's an extreme that's suggested, but the fact is, most women who are victims of murder or abuse are harmed by the men in their lives. The situation that exists in the world is an extreme in and of itself.

In addition to lyrical essays on bones, each section contains brief, luminous free verse poems that further explore the different themes linked to specific skeletal parts. These poems balance out the matter-of-fact nature of the essays. The poems are short, but are pared down to perfection. In one untitled poem, the

speaker says, "your mouth tastes like chaos bourbon-sweet / harder than obsidian [...] where the demon's tongue is rough like a cat's / how I strain against it."

This piece is dark and alluring, drawing the reader into the world created within. It's difficult to write such stripped-down poems. To say something in its entirety while simultaneously distilling it takes skill. The speaker says:

I told the demon I loved you she stood over the water and whispered a word— brought down the mountain

what is a demon anyway but a flushed girl with ocean eyes

The paranormal aspect of this piece creates an interesting foil to the academic tone of the bone essays. It says that we are more than just the sum of our parts—there's something deeper at play; something far more sinister and beautiful than just a body, existing. In other words, the body as a whole is an intelligent haunting.

Furthermore, the presence of the female demon brings out the shadow-side of femininity. Often, women are presented as smiling, pleasant, docile. However, that which is feminine can also be dark, powerful, angry. There is female strength that patriarchal norms would deny, and I love that this piece draws that out through the demon who can bring down a mountain with a single magic word.

In another poem, the speaker says, "there are few places left that man has not touched / we square cities, parks but long for wildness." Here, the speaker is comparing a woman's body to land. The parallel being made is indicating that men attempt to stake their claim on female bodies, just as they would the land-scape. It's been a common occurrence throughout history—men declared land for themselves, then built upon it. In a similar way, men staked their claim on the female body through marriage, through laws. They viewed women's bodies much the same way they would the land they stood on. That is, they believed all they saw belonged to them without question.

The speaker in this poem says, "let us not assign / too much power / to the virgins // buildings have ghosts but so do trees." Throughout history, men have praised women who are what they consider to be "pure." They have praised women who do not seek knowledge and pleasure of themselves and their own bodies. In this piece, Walrath continues the idea of the haunted body—the beautiful, natural

haunting of the female body—the body that seeks to know itself, separate from what she is told that she needs to be. The speaker says:

What is the price of water?

I sink myself in the river at dawn your words are the stones in my pockets.

In continually regulating women's bodies, men and politicians are saying we are not smart, capable, or important enough to lay claim to our own bodies, to speak for ourselves and make our own choices; they are saying men must do it for us. Walrath's book is a testament to the idea that our bodies are our own. That we are more than just bodies, more than just minds, but whole and complete people with desires and choices.

In another untitled poem, the speaker talks about tearing off her breasts, an act symbolic of removing one's womanhood. She says that:

when one member of a social group considers itself a burden it may commit self-destruction some parasites infect their hosts until they have control of their minds at which point they drown themselves

This second reference to drowning and self-destruction is a refrain throughout the book. One where the speaker drowns, becomes a corpse, then ash and bone. Through the bones, Walrath indicates that there are differences in the way that female-identifying bodies manifest. She explores the relationship between the body and the metaphysical world, and how there's more to the body than just what we can see.

The Smallest of Bones is both smart and sexy—it's an autopsy in verse, which reveals how bones give structure to our bodies and protect our organs, and how they also show evidence of our deepest injuries. Walrath's poetry is dark and lovely; *The Smallest of Bones* is a lush, gruesome gem of a book.

# **HUNGARIAN STAY-ALIVE SONG**

The first time I lay supine in a box I Was lurking in some apartment building trash pile In a game that was part hide-and-seek, part Marco Polo, Part hazing ritual. M sought me with a Wiffle bat.
It was only after his funeral, all these years later, That I dare to pretend I had attended: In the version I'm forced to imagine (part hazing ritual, part Marco Polo, part hide-and-seek), I'm staked out
Behind the closed casket, beneath a calamity of flowers. <i>Marco</i> , I hear, over the Billie Holiday (that sorceress Whose voice, I'm convinced, facilitated M
Even <i>Can my animal play too</i> , when uttered by a stranger To the boy in the cardboard crate, was a request too polite To decline. That day, to my adult surprise, the stranger did not Cinch a leash about his neck and crawl nude and barking
Into the box with me, and so there was no need to divulge my spot To M I have to remember that everyone carries a curse Inside whose single word we must repeatedly forget, just as each night I keep quiet, though heart and bladder strain, and ruin the game.

#### HARROWING OZ

A path once wracked with static track marks Now easing, via rehabilitation bricks, into a road:

The hanged munchkin of legend reborn as an exotic bird.

How the child assumed color was suddenly invented At the crack of Dorothy's concussion, her lion's bones

Dyed and pounded into gelatin, then quilted into film.

Remastery the proper term for taming the crow's Feet in the VHS parents' faces, restoration the facelift

That overlays them, pixel-perfect, on their digital kids:

Scarecrow whose every cigarette burn is plugged up And cured with salt, with antivirals, with revision,

The struggle in his shadow compression artifacts,

While underneath the film, the child noticed, Crept Judy Garland, stripped of all emulsion,

Closer to her heir, Fairuza Balk, till each consumed the other.

Underneath the film, fathers, jitterbug-devoured, smother Their children in the analog snow, while, birdlessly,

Small people rot forever in the trees. The better

Every generation gets at deepening the green, the vaster The emerald mines elaborate beneath, where tin bodies

Swelter in the shafts as paradise comes clear above

Until ignition: Projector fire that boils this, the uncut Poppy field in which the child still wakes, ringed

By faces so correct he hardly knows them.

#### DODDER WOBBLE

I jockeyed a dinosaur on my fifth birthday, and for my sixth I ate my cake and got yours too. I didn't feel bad, when I

saw you with nothing on your plate and stuck to your fork—imaginary cake. It was chocolate, and even of that I was

jealous. You met Warren Buffett as a teen, but I met the president before it was a joke and rode a wave of blue all the way

to freedom. You took me to the church with the stained glass reputation, rejoiced religiously while I sat in the corner

listening to fantasy while you heard facts flying off the page like moths off the branch of a dead tree, spouting sprouts

of falsehood from the mouths of frightened men at the end of their tightropes held up by both ends of history. You sing

along to the words like a toddler and a Disney musical, but you don't see that the dinosaur I tamed when I was five

was as imaginary as the cake I cried about when I didn't share.

#### KINGDOM COME AND GO

Men rode dinosaurs on sheepskin saddles while Jesus walked on water then turned it to wine drunk by the Flintstones and forced

down their purple pig garbage disposal like men rode horses or camels or donkeys or women. God said, " - ," and it was. You said

"stop"

and he refused, raptor claws against the flesh like chains of chalk and strychnine tongues dragging against the concrete

idea of safety. Vanished discretely
into the nightmare, on the back of biblical
barnyard brachiosauruses; string cheese

trees whip at his face as he bolts away, but you still smell the cologne, like gasoline poured on an open flame, his breath

hot on your neck. Men rode men like men rode men and then they stopped.

#### WHEN I WAS A HORSE

When I was a horse I made an awful first impression. At potlucks I'd swing my neck around for a good look at everyone, toss back my head, Not worth it, I would whinny, offended by inattentiveness. Understand me by my breath, I'm unnerved by the smallest horsefly's wingbeat, understand me by the blaze between my eyes, meet my silence with sweet grain in an open palm, I said to no one.

#### DIVORCE

I can't wait on the back porch the whole of August clapping starlings from the ripe, fat figs. *Under the canopy is sweetest*. That's what I'll tell you, without ever sampling what hangs at the tree's sun-bleached crest. *When things seem too good, I worry something will go wrong,* my friend confides. *I don't think it works that way,* I say. But who knows. Maybe there's a cosmic scale, maybe warm, worn-slick rosary beads are a vaccination against broken wrists and layoffs. My brother-in-law's marriage is unraveling. *She can't do this to me,* he says, trying to leash an idea before it skitters away. I understand: I've unlaced my fingers to find my palms empty, too. I've paused at each red cedar in Volunteer Park, branches sheltering the under-canopy from sun, regardless of angle or season. I've watched the koi in their lilypad ponds breach, drift. *She can't do this to me,* I've said, with a tone better suited for August storms. A sudden icy updraft turning rain to hail.

## ANOREXIC LOVE SONG

With each shed the threat grows louder, more musical, the body defined by scales, all muscle, throat and rib. A little sun draws us out to Mulholland to watch the rattlers speed their bellies with warm asphalt, the slow dying into questions, lying along the road like cast-off belts. The living must sleep like the dead, eyes open under their own folds. They'll follow a meal into its burrow until the burrow is their own and did we choose to live like this. by the taste of air, to hold two points on the tongue?

#### **HOARDS**

Like the friend who accumulated piles of hats on his apartment floor, borrowed

from other addicts after using, to hide his face and his shame.

Or the drunk lying dead next to drawers full of AA welcome chips.

Like the cabinets of grandma's jewelry that we sack today—my mother and my aunt

squabbling over glistening scraps of memory as I step outside into the crisp cold

to collect myself, collect bags of acorns beneath a broad live oak,

emptying the earthen nooks soon forgotten by squirrels,

whose obsession gives birth to legions of trees, my grandfather sitting on his satin

park bench, feeding sparrows worthless handfuls of diamonds.

# AND NOT TO BREAK BY JANET SYLVESTER

(Bordighera Press, 2020)

#### REVIEW BY CLARISSA ADKINS



Of the many brilliant aspects of Janet Sylvester's poetics in her collection, *And Not to Break*, most notable is a masterful blend of narrative, imagery, and musicality that shimmers. The poet's artful elixir of craft captivates readers from piece to piece. In her third collection of poems, Sylvester does what many poets dream of being able to do—flawlessly mix craft and creativity.

Sylvester's poems immediately synthesize a trifecta of narrative, image, and lyricism, often doing so with a balance between grounded and ethereal descriptions of place and emotion. For example, in the first poem, "Marionette Lines," Sylvester's

speaker provides longing, loneliness, and location in the span of a few lines: "Tonight it's better not to look too far. Instead, / I focus on the oval the little Christmas tree, / untrimmed and living still in its green container." Then, personification intimately places the reader in the same cold room with the speaker as the tree "breathes clear into the window's icy vapor." This detailed imagery of the tree performs almost like a muse, inspiring nostalgia in the reader; yet, Sylvester immediately draws us away from "pretty snowflake-shapes" and the "sun / the weatherman assures us is on the way," and offers a vulnerable assessment of the present moment: "Whatever / I used to know doesn't matter."

What follows is a rising dynamic of emotional stakes: "a choking and unsayable distress" that Sylvester elevates with lyricism. In the last stanza, a physician is "lightly stroking / the little finger of the left, my writing hand, / in its ligament an indecipherable ache." The meticulous content combined with the alliteration of "lightly," "little," "left," and "ligament" accentuates the complexity of the speaker who painfully creates. A presumed arthritis in the speaker's hands, and the lovely alliteration, suggest the speaker's position—she is a poet experiencing professional disappointment that aging hands only compound. Sylvester herein accomplishes a smooth combination of poetic craft and expert account.

The poet continues to entice the reader with another seamless marriage of im-

age and narrative in the first lines of the prose-style poem "Marais Des Cygnes (mare-uh-duy zeen)": "Ralph, the closest neighbor on the road, hoisted a can of beer and / scanned his rabbits." The reader visualizes the "car seat spewed innards" and "the picnic table beside the burr oak, dogs moved; catfish heads dangled / from its branches." Sylvester divulges much about the people in the poem, but does so with such vivid images that the reader wants to know more. And Sylvester does not disappoint, creating lyrical lines that allow one to meet people through all the senses. In the second stanza, we learn about "Ralph's hand, Rex's hand, Pearlie's, greased black to their / shirtsleeves, neatly rolled" and "her palm above a century of footprints." Sylvester's narrative-natured poems work masterfully as story, but also excel with their obvious abundance of lyricism: "downstream a doe and fawn fording the Marsh of Swans" and "sharp-/ toothed gar idling in its currents." The poet grounds the reader through these expert elements of craft.

Likewise, in the autobiographical vulnerability of "Ragged Man," the author pulls the reader into quantum telepathy, a tragic ex-husband, and alcoholism in the span of five stanzas without the reader having to question, even for a moment, whether they're vested in the narrative. At the start, the poet creates intrigue:

Attention's seed-pearl strand snaps between eye and mind, I'm looking out when reading, not down and through, as I did in Virginia ...

Within these lines, one wonders why the perspective of the speaker snaps as it does, like tiny pearls, and why it changed from how it was in Virginia. Sylvester explains within the intensely specific imagery of the poem that harkens back to the delicate nature of life passing by too quickly: "My last image of you—dun / overcoat, hair a shade too long, your eyes / blinking hard, as I tipped my umbrella down." The last stanza also expresses the fragility of existence; we can't help but feel the painful nostalgia of the speaker:

I clicked on a page, gone now, devoted to Maria Callas, in resplendent grief, singing an aria from Butterfly, I think, out of tinny speakers and there, clear as notes on a score, your dates, 1948–2007, "always in my heart."

Sylvester finishes the braid of narrative and imagery by combining the univer-

sal emotion with the grief unique to this poem: "Stay in touch, we say, / when we're afraid someone will travel great / distances through what separates us, and they do."

Sylvester also hauntingly charms the reader with her expert world-building in the poetic realm with "Blue Dress Video," a poem that explores the tumultuous life of the author Vladimir Nabokov. The reader sees him "in knickers and a flat cap" as he:

... poses on a rocky summit, his net, long-handled, balanced in the crook of one arm. It is 1957. Small butterflies, he writes, all of a kind, settled on a damp patch of sand.

The drama of the rocky summit joined with the net, which alludes to the predatory nature of this more persona-based poem, make the last lines of the final stanza even more jarring: "open, a needle of glass, a whipstitch / instant—you little tease." Sylvester shocks, here, with her ability to blend setting and emotion into undeniably compelling imagery.

The same poetic world-building emerges in "Breakwater," but Sylvester's lyrical control shifts to wavy quatrains of lines, mostly consisting of nine, ten, or eleven syllables:

The Manufactory of copper paint, locked above its sum of antique pollutions, and Ten Pound Island gulls, were quiet, stubbed like push-pins on a windward beach.

Sylvester's exploration of whales and birds is allusive, lyrically, of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," or narratively, of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, as the speaker encounters a Carolina warbler's violent "plummet into the boat." The small bird attempts to upright itself "around a pony tail," or with a "balance on a sandal," and we feel the helplessness of the speaker being "Admonished not to touch it, we were instructed / that northeast gales had forced it // for days above the water." The heightened emotion, syntax, and diction all come together in a single, breathtaking line: "breaking as a covenant once did, // sudden, brutal in the down-rush, beautiful."

In "Unbinding," Sylvester builds narrative in a less traditional but just as effective manner. The poet paints her relationship with her mother through a series

of snapshot-like prose poems. The twenty-seven sections of "Unbinding" highlight Sylvester's eclectic style and poetic talent. The piece collects the speaker's familial moments through a loose, temporal construction, starting in the seventeenth century in the first section, "1 Mitochondrial": "Pollen eddies in air, lilies sing beside a / stone fence mapped with moss" moving into more recent time, as in section four, "4 1947," where the speaker has "a last-minute date for dinner and dancing at the best hotel in town." The poet takes us through these images of a lifetime in a less straightforward manner, and then delights the reader with how the collective narrative is built: a "brittle newspaper clip," "the snake's spermatic head," or "plumes of steam, / she'd never live to see."

The sections' titles add to the atmospheric qualities and produce an eerie feel. For example, "Choking" follows "6 Hat, continued," and all in third-person perspective. One title juxtaposes against the other. Together, these images and sections are dreamlike and subliminal, yet demonstrate the speaker's complex awareness of her mother in fantastically radical pops of prose.

Sylvester seems to acknowledge the abstract narrative elements of "Unbridled" by following with the villanelle "Field Glasses." In this poem, the poet brings the reader back to a focus on musicality within a more direct setting. This is particularly pronounced in the form's required refrain by how it includes the word "refrain": "Though birdsong shelters in the word refrain, / that stallion, several mares and pair of foals / the water meadows utter, stand in rain." This seems to imply that now the refrain is, in fact, the location for the birds' music, finding shelter within it. Emotional undercurrents, which *And Not to Break* weave magically throughout, shine dramatically in the foreground in "Field Glasses": "I know that loss has nothing left to gain / today from me. I'm made of parts and holes, / personified as standing water in the rain." The rhythmic element contributes to the vulnerable content.

The reader enjoys a similar musicality in "Tu Shu and the Pear Tree": "In peridot and yellow grass, in a xeroxed / photograph, one cedar at his right, healthily / greening." Late in the poem, the ear gives way to all the senses in lines such as "live now in your grin, moist even in digital / reproduction, pink-tongued, open to take in / that lofty-scented incense and the musk." Imagery craftily marries sound in each line.

In "Sea Smoke," Sylvester develops context for the reader in a fanciful motion of lineation. This second-person poem double indents every two to three lines and thereby uses the white space to create the breath alluded to in the title:

Frost on a window, indistinguishable from roses knotted into a curtain, burning as blue dawn drains into it from the backyard apple, its parabola

In subtle answer, another line seems to nod subconsciously to the author's ability to weave together elements of poetic craft:

Past the Square that plows
have already heaped into drifts,
you slide onto the bridge
and—how can it be worded—the braiding tensions of the current,
the light the world flows inside,
have turned to precious metals.

"How can it be worded" cuts to the heart of the poet's task—how to navigate the "tensions" and "currents" of life's ups and downs, to weave them together. All this, Sylvester realizes:

Every register of platinum and rose gold issues into the frigid channel, coaxed by sun into thermal plumes, bright steam cooling to droplets

The final poem of the collection, "Prologue," returns to first person, a befitting gesture, given the detailed, personal nature of many of the works in this collection. However, Sylvester gives the reader everything they need to balance the confessional aspects because she provides the universal in the personal. This balance results in the poet's unique brand of lyricism: "Last night we fell asleep before the end / of the world," and "We opened the door to the porch / that hot ghost had pressed against for so long." Sylvester's poems are specific, unique, and planetary all at once. The entire collection manages to engage, shock, entertain, and sing exactly as the title suggests—without breaking the reader's attention or rapture. *And Not to Break* is an expert blend of storytelling within the enchantment of lyricism and imagery.

#### ON THE DRIVE DOWN

Behind the washed-out boards of a roadside stand and those empty shacks with windows so thin the glass becomes part of the room, lawn signs

remember lost elections, their letters uncollected and warped with moisture. I've resolved never to meet these houses away from the road for fear

they'd try to keep me, so I hold an even sixty-two in a fifty-five and watch the pawn shops fade to vulture feathers around pits of old rain. This trail

is seamed between homes, crosshatched the way snow melts striated from a hood and I see, by the lights lining the water, a bridge emerging as if it was just being

formed. I play the good moth and lope along, morning wearing over me in dull blue streaks.

#### THIS MYSTERY PLANT

grows well without shadow, the yellow not too bright; it won't clash with cactus or yucca: this habitat suits it.

What else can we grow here at the edge of the desert frequented by bearded Gila monsters splotched with

gold and black, what can sustain itself in the nearly constant light? Some creepers feed on shadow, arrange discreet twining

stems, while death glides overhead shaped like an airplane. Here such shadows I see prove only imaginary, surcease

from heat. At night I dream my house is fed slowly, board by board, into the flames.

#### THE WEST IS BURNING

You see the elm leaves? Brown before summer's end. Their choristers are rasping.

A bitterness of smoke greets the tongue today. Grays the afternoon.

Still, a gang of sparrows cheeps and checks under the spruce, eager for the black oil of seeds, eager to outflap the mourning doves.

A jeweled hummingbird chops the air. She dives into forsythia, that heaven of sticks.

Last week? Her jade wings beat one tomato blossom to the next—lazy, entitled, worshipping.
She hung in the evening, there, a child of the garden over rectangles of brick, loving fast and slow.

The West is burning. You can see the ghost of hectares. You see the elm leaves are too crisp. You worry about the next forty years.

Still, the feathered ones come. They gossip in the wild hair of ivy and play chase with green-eyed tabbies. The sky should belong to the choristers.

# PLEASE LET MY MOUTH PRONOUNCE THESE WORDS

my first Chickasaw lesson

tell me speak better to articulate dumb child these big lips honey together the labor

I don't know my accent grandmother

mouth open and busy hurrying her language to me an-nun-ci-ate your words Anowa for again her syllables bruise apart

between words I rest

without flinch

she inhales— wild bees gather the sting

# THINGS THEY WANT AFTER FIRE

to the dog I found under a bed

Hands offer compressions

to swollen body. Mouth around

blackened nose expires. The taste

of failure stains the hole dug

beside a tree for you. At the station,

in my room I shovel through sleep.

Like a bad obituary, plagiarize me better.

#### ADVICE ON BURNING MANUSCRIPTS

A simple charcoal grill for a simple task works best, rickety and self-assembled. Bear in mind a manuscript of even moderate ambition makes a dense sheaf, so an igniting fluid will be necessary. Set beloved pages gently onto the grate, douse liberally, and touch each corner with a struck match. Take your time. No urgency is required, no violence beyond the awaking flame itself. A ritual of release, not revenge. The intimate, irremediable act. Sip your beverage of choice and squint through coruscating fumes as the autumn night descends. (It is of course October, month of regret, reflection, and sorcery.)

As the top pages, transmogrified, curl into the twilight like black moths, and a simmering, steady heat caresses the body of work, cover with the lid. Your part is done. Trust fire now to bring the words to their inarguable conclusion.

In my twenties I burned a novel and witnessed its conflagration. *The Death of Auguste Rodin*. Indeed. Days later, I followed with my entire folder of short stories. Fourteen. No carbons, no files, no discs, no jump drives. Students tend to stare incredulously when I sometimes conjure those sweet moments. No exhilaration, no fervor, certainly no regret. Just a settling calm, the confidence of a right thing, as ragged tissues of ghosts silently rose in the chill of evening. Embers, aglow on their grave, sputtering a few last, spent words.

# WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FIRE, WE MUST FIRST TALK ABOUT BIRDLESSNESS

night divides a burning into hands & harvest,

field of poppies blood & another man's history.

our husk of empire hangs scarecrowed shirt loose as a dead grandfather's resurrected by straw

& old newsprint into some-& children from the trees. thing to nightmare the birds that sewn-up burlap mouth

contains so many stories & forgetting. yesterday's war,

wrapped in muslin & skull too far away to reshape

into a better body. tomorrow's impossible prayers for just

is leaking light like my daughter's one more impossible bird to cut

across her wide-open not to part, minidoka heart. through the curtains i tell her fades to guantanamo to incantation

to myth. this goneness sweet the poppies are still burning in us.

as evening tea. as privilege. i'm sure for us. like the stolen fire i pass down to her.

#### GOODBYE HORSES

my dead work their fingers through my son's gnarled & knotted hair wilded already from my touch ligatures i hope translate lovingly once the damage is done & my apologies all played out can be seen as rehearsal for the burning house he'll inherit

×

an unmothered bird that plumeless factory writing itself all over the horizon i tell him nothing out there will hurt more than this brief kiss not the steel-springed horses rusted & reddening in a park in a town that's forgotten how to child not the bloodied noses of this is mine everything here is mine the world unevenly & divvying up like shot marbles not these fingers relentlessly combing my dreams through his sleep our dead only as dead as

×

a sung-out lullaby raptured as the snapped steeple down the street the birds congregate on snagged & unforgiven as barbed woolen tufts once the wolves another fence & feast & goodnight have done their worst not that our horses ever needed breaking this field forever fallow springs rooted to hard earth this map leading home always back home forgive me son this kiss as innocent as i can make it

# LOVE'S THERMAL SERVICES

The most important things? Grass long and weedy, wheels of abandoned bicycles, Saturn's rings, fruits that can be washed and dried, ears, lightning, singing, glass jars filled with cut flowers, gold, green, select industries, certain cars, pencils and the scent of their shavings.

What's the problem? The destruction of air and earth and of the summer camp where you hid in the woods beautifully, beautiful, sinful—your little heart foaming like a cake of pink soap.

#### ODE TO A USED CONDOM IN THE PARK

I like to think of them fishing you out, then hooking you on, their freezing hands fumble-crinkling at your difficult package.

Their horny carefulness almost makes me love them, and though I know they should have tidied

you up, urging you in past the flapping door of the metal bin,

that too is good, reminding me how all rolemodels are temporary, all loves flawed & sketchy:

even my dog's, dropping you now as I bark at her, back to where, serenely, on your snowpile, you lie:

good omen, hex against winter, milky light reaching

down to us from a filthy star that, you know what, might not yet be dead.

# Dog-Walking in the Shadow of Pyongyang By Devon Balwit

(Nixes Mate Books, 2021)

#### REVIEW BY ALAN KING



Imagine watching a city burn. You're far enough away from the blaze that you don't hear the sirens. Everything plays out like a silent horror film. Then survivor's guilt sets in:

... I know cars clog the roads like unsaid things clot the throat, words

that would have changed everything. That I thought them must be enough,

like a weeping parent who beats her hands on steering wheels, willing my children,

the cat, the dog beyond the mayhem.

After the guilt comes denial when the mayhem is drowned out by "Bach spilling from the speakers" (from "Despite the Blaze"). These bizarre twists spill throughout Devon Balwit's new poetry collection, *Dog-Walking in the Shadow of Pyongyang*.

The title has its own tale. If you know the history of Pyongyang—how that North Korean city was demolished and rebuilt, then devastated and revived again—you might think of it in two ways: 1) that it's a city of misfortune or 2) that it's a lesson in resilience. If we look at each poem through the first lens, one might think the speakers in this book are fools "dog-walking" themselves into one disastrous situation after the next. But I prefer the second view, which is an empowering one. In that sense, the characters populating Devon's collection show the reader that—as the novelist Jodi Picoult once put it—"the human capacity for burden is like bamboo—far more flexible than you'd ever believe at first glance."

You see that bamboo bend of a mother burdened by her son's question: "Is the U.S. Ready for a Nuclear Threat?"—which is also the poem's title. In that piece,

the mom manages by learning "the poetry of defense, / the naming of the deadly arc—boost, / midcourse, terminal." She uses humor as another way of coping:

... The first two stages

sound almost hopeful; who doesn't want a boost? Mid-course, like me,

one feels still able to veer. The latter third is bad, but surely there are therapies,

intercepts to spare us impact.

Balwit's use of that tone here speaks directly to what the actor/comedian Mel Brooks once said about humor, how it's "just another defense against the universe." Balwit's speaker elaborates on that point:

... The problem is the threat cloud. We know it well

from life, the way trouble comes in clusters.

We see a similar threat cloud in the book's opening poem, "Demeter of the Ex-Urb." In this scene, the speaker is a grass flower sprouting where she's not welcomed. The so-called "mistress of spathe, spikelet, glume / and peduncle" is confronted by Demeter, the goddess of agriculture. A standoff ensues, but the speaker stands her ground:

... my green fuse

stutter-stepping—paling to near-guttering, barbarian weeds

creeping—before re-flaring, fierce in a campaign of ripped roots ...

The music of those lines intensifies the brawl with the alliteration ("stutter-stepping ... flaring, fierce / ... ripped roots"), popping like jabs, then the final blow: "me flailing the blunt trowel." Poems like "Demeter of the Ex-Urb" and "Sarracenia, the Siren Singer" almost feel like trickster tales, where the protagonist uses

their wits to survive. "Sarracenia" flips the predator-prey interaction:

... You come to me, all the while thinking it your own idea.

to stumble on my fluted lips. It's almost too easy. With each conquest, I plump further. Waxing new traps.

What's striking about this collection is Balwit's ability to bring the reader into alternate realities, where they gain new insights. She does this in "East Egg," a nod to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The speaker—a "wide-eyed ingénue"—is in a rendezvous with Tom Buchanan in the East Egg, or old money part of the river:

He invited me here, and I came, already wet, trailing him like fingers through condensation.

Daisy laughs, knowing what he is beneath skin. Later, I'll swear I also knew but didn't care.

The last line of the second stanza almost reads like regret. This reader could imagine the speaker preparing for the walk of shame. That is until these lines:

Anything to shuck corset and slip into a flappers' insouciance, and, top down,

feel the rush of wind. Later, chastened and headachy, I'll stack vows like unread novels

by my bedside. Anyone can fetch and obey. Even briefly, I wanted claws.

That the speaker slips "into a flapper's insouciance" makes the reader wonder who played who, who made whom "fetch and obey." Then it becomes a poem about women's sexual liberation, the speaker stacking her male conquests "like unread novels" by her bedside. That her lovers are unread novels could mean it's not worth her time exploring something deeper within them. The speaker's actions come with another kind of burden, especially in a society still policing women's sexuality.

A reader might assume as much from the poem "Sad Night," where the speaker

and possibly-a-lover flee from their "burdens across the causeways of night" until the road disappears, or "has ghosted." Balwit's sensory imagery shows a desperate situation:

... We bring each other down,

then use the twisted limbs to keep above dark water. If we survive till dawn, it is because we are guilty.

The final lines evoke the Salem witch trials in colonial Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century. During that time, mostly women were accused of practicing witchcraft for acting out of the norm. The speaker in "East Egg" would certainly fit the grand juries' descriptions of someone acting witch-like for being "stubborn," "strange," or exhibiting "forward behavior." Those characteristics might also apply to the speaker and her partner in "Sad Night." Witch trial victims were tortured by devices like the ducking stool—what looked like a seesaw with a stool. The accused would sit on the seat that hung over a local pond. Their accuser, on the other end, would dunk them in the water. If the accused survived, they were considered a witch. If they drowned, they were innocent. Hence the lines: "If we survive till dawn, it is because we are guilty." Other sensory details add to that allusion: "Ravens clack from purple-black hoods, eyes fierce / with knowing" or "newlyweds twisting bright rings about captive fingers." One can't help but wonder if the speaker and her partner are not supposed to be together, if their relationship goes against the norms of a city casting them out, where:

... We bruise beneath offal,

gag on the taste of iron. Grudgingly, dawn releases us from where we sprawl in mud patterned by flailing.

That they love each other despite the consequences shows an attribute that the speakers in this collection have in common. They're courageous enough to face their disasters head on—bruises and all—and emerge with a hero's heart. After all, as Khalil Gibran put it, "the most massive characters are seared with scars."

The most important lesson that comes out of *Dog-Walking in the Shadow of Pyongyang* is that we're measured by our courage, even when we curse the journey. We see that with Devon's speakers in the poem "What We Are":

... We blame our childhood

or the rough journey, but it may just be the way we were made. A tracery

of brick, a careless daubing. Neither side matches, but we have learned to celebrate

imbalance, not to care when eyes peer in between our slipped slats.

Let them look. Even clouds pause overhead for a glimpse.



#### **INTRODUCING SUGAR SUITES**

Sugar House Review acknowledges that the way people use language is changing. Technology impacts how we experience the world, how we communicate, and how we define community. Poetry and poetics undoubtedly reflect and shape this evolution.

To help us explore our diverse and rapidly changing media landscape, we present Sugar Suites, poems that extend beyond the printed word, beyond the page, to include sounds, images, and interactive elements. We're interested in work that investigates connections between different media forms and modes of representation, including film, music, sound art, electronic literature, and digital art.

In a time when boundaries between textual, visual, and aural art forms converge and overlap, we're inspired to showcase writers' efforts to accommodate and complicate media transformations. While we believe printed poems remain vitally important, we recognize that digital media allow for the creation of new forms that disrupt and extend traditional poetic expression.

Please check out the first set of Sugar Suites, published at SugarHouseReview.com in September. The following pages highlight pieces of the works and also include QR codes, so you can easily navigate to the entirety of the poems on our website.

Beginning January 31, 2022, we will open up submissions for the second set of Sugar Suites. We can't wait to see what you send us.

Sincerely,

Ben Gunsberg, Multi-medium Editor



Scan any of the QR codes with a mobile device to be taken to Sugar Suites online. This one will take you to the whole set.

#### full piece includes video



#### DEAR DAVID,

for David Bowie

When I write to you now I write to one who has left the here for the beyond. That's the future, as you know better than anyone. In the past, that rainbow zigged across your face, your eyebrows absent and so your eyes in their sockets went unsheltered, direct and uncanny. I can remember myself most clearly when I remember how unnerving, how the gaze from behind the paint

loosened the strength of what I thought I knew. All collapsed now, total blam blam.

Each new face effacing the last, a kind of courage, I think now, an offering and a refusal at the same time. And why would you regret any of it? The trick was to give it away, but not all of it, the unspent light drawing us to you, to what you sang, with a gravitational pull. Whatever that secret was, it keeps telling itself.

#### full piece includes video



## COOPER'S HAWK

November 2019

Through the grid of the screen I see it, barely, something hopping up and down, then

again, the thing—a bird—half-circling on the grass, pausing at the edge of sight: I call to

my husband: he sees it, says cooper's hawk, not the first we'd seen in the backyard taking down

a smaller, slower bird: by virtue of naming it, I can now see the hawk's pounce as a part

of its killing, an ascertaining of the dove's death, and somehow triumphal, both procedure

and conclusion, enacted as it detects the last stir and twitch, before it begins to eat.

\*

I woke

on the first day of testimony, my first thought *testimony*,

and turned on the television to the drone of a statement: I lay in bed to hear it, to register

the flow of it, as it moved, a river eddying around evidence and points. The dance of questioning, a parrying

of answers. A ritual disappearing into air. The room had seats enough for an audience.

Men to hear and men to say, parsing themselves in their drab suits, bunching and releasing:

an army colonel, immigrated to the U.S. from Ukraine, testified to what he saw and heard, and spoke to

his absent father, saying do not worry, I will be fine for telling the truth.

A hawk taking and dismantling a bird belongs: to autumn, to the field behind us, to

an order we know as *natural*. And what order is this? this room, lined with curved tiers, the onlookers bored, taking notes, their talk whispered into the ears of confreres—

×

—and the hawk finishes its ceremony,

the ring of feathers on the grass the last of it. Circles without malice or mercy above the field, taking the last

muscles' pulse as signal to kill, to kill harder, the last life in the dove a directive: made to do it, to take

prey from the ground or from the air, to eat it, transmute it into another kind of power: I listen, watch

for what is ending and what will soar free from this scene, what will be left, only the trace of itself on the ground.

# INTERVIEW EXCERPT WITH LISA BICKMORE & SUGAR SUITES EDITOR. BEN GUNSBERG

BEN GUNSBERG: I'm curious about your composing process. Did you set out to make mixed media pieces or did you conceptualize the audio and video elements after using alphanumeric writing?

LISA BICKMORE: In this case, I had already written these poems. Natalie and Nano told me about the new Sugar Suites project, and I thought I might have a couple of poems that I could 're-mediate,' as they say in composition studies—translate a piece from one medium into another. I'm working on a book manuscript right now, so I looked through the poems in that project to see what sparked. I found some possibilities in these two poems.

About twelve years ago, I got a sabbatical to work on a project I'd proposed, to teach myself to make video essays. In that project, I worked more organically—that is, the visual content and the textual content and the aural content all developed at the same time. It was less adaptation/re-mediation, more composing in several media at once. Because I was teaching myself how, I also set myself technical challenges—learning how to composite, how to use still images with moving images, how to use more than one audio track, and so on. Some of the pieces I made later in that project had a number of layers in their composition.

For these pieces, I wanted moving image and the voiced text to work as a kind of counterpoint. It was a pleasure to make them, just as writing them as poems was a pleasure. I like the process of managing images and the voiceover, of editing the pace of the video so that it spoke to the text as voiced. In some ways these are simple pieces, but I hoped that, for instance, the image of Bowie's graffiti'd head resolving, then fading, behind the letter being written, would in some way evoke a kind of elegy.



read the full interview on our website

#### stop-motion poem







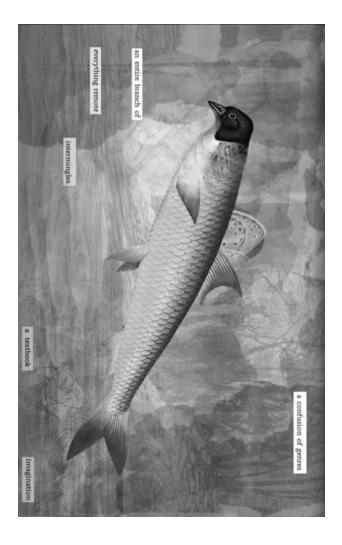
#### ARTISTS' STATEMENT:

Many people struggle to find the point of trying, especially when on a path toward a predetermined destination. "Train" is a collaboration that explores one's place and ability to impact the world. The piece began as a sound poem, and as words began to evolve out of the sonic qualities of "train," the idea of trying came forward. We wanted to explore the combination of different art forms (music, stop-motion animation, and poetry), and how that union creates a new, unique experience for the viewer.

## visual poem includes video



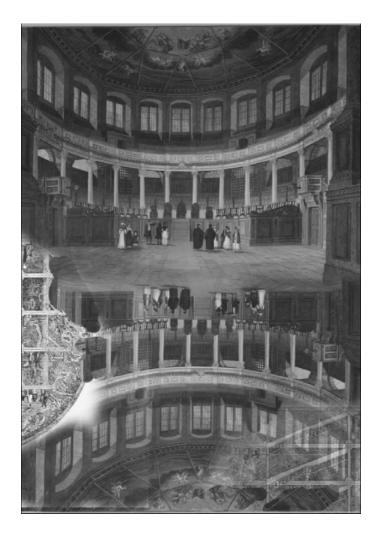
# ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY



#### visual poem includes video



#### LABYRINTH ESTABLISHMENT



#### full visual poem online



#### QUIET BODY

Quiet Body



Everyone, this is quiet body. Everyone,

please say hello to quiet body.

("Hello quiet body.")

Hello, quiet.

But how come it stops me from screaming wise?



#### full piece includes sections II-V and video



#### YETI POEM

#### I. The Shiver

Waiting inside the principal's office, he tried to find the right face—smug Dillinger mug, calm Capone aplomb? Outside, his mom bargained for the soul of her lawless son

again. Then the word "expulsion" broke into the room, clobbered his ears, and left him there encased in fear like Han Solo carbon-frozen. But he wasn't alone:

on the wall hung a wood engraving of a glum nun drooping with Jesus: Angela of Foligno. She too awaited judgment. Perhaps she didn't deface pews

or set Barbie dolls ablaze with aerosol cans, but she too shivered in God's perfect shadow, she too polished sorrows like secret fangs in her cell, so he fancied her

his wild patron: he was a monster trapped in an ice slab of trouble and Angela, his guardian gargoyle, mushed a sled of St. Bernards come to rescue him! As the doorknob

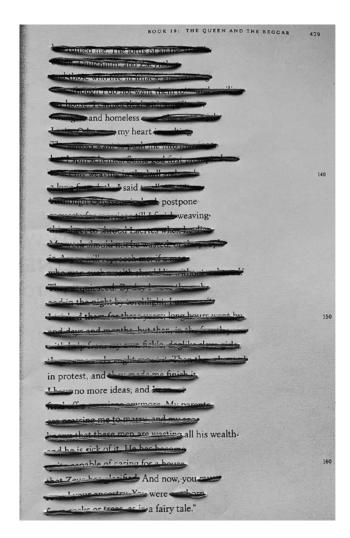
clicked his childhood shut, he settled on a martyred look.



#### "my heart weaving" full, color erasure online



#### MY HEART WEAVING



- Clarissa Adkins, Building Alexandria, Lily Poetry Review Books, 2021
- Maya Abu Al-Hayyat, transl. Fady Joudah, You Can Be the Last Leaf: Selected Poems, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Raymond Antrobus, All the Names Given, Tin House, 2021
- Nicky Beer, Real Phonies and Genuine Fakes, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Daniel Biegelson, of being neighbors, Ricochet Editions, 2021
- Craig Blais, *Moon News*, University of Arkansas Press, 2021
- Hayan Charara, These Trees, Those Leaves, This Flower, That Fruit, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Ana Castillo, My Book of the Dead, University of New Mexico Press, 2021
- Grady Chambers, North American Stadiums, Milkweed Editions, 2018
- Jos Charles, A Year & Other Poems, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Bill Chatfield (editor), Post Script: An Anthology of Postcard Poems, Peterborough Poetry Project, 2021
- Ha Kiet Chau, Eleven Miles to June, Green Writers Press, 2021
- Robert Clinton, Wasteland Honey, Circling Rivers Press, 2021
- Leigh Anne Couch, Every Lash, University of North Texas Press, 2021
- Charles B. Cross, If I Settle Down, Independently Published, 2015
- Marilyn Hacker and Karthika Naïr, A Different Distance: A Renga, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Jennifer Huang, Return Flight, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Gary Jackson, Origin Story, University of New Mexico Press, 2021
- John James, The Milk Hours, Milkweed Editions, 2019
- Rachel Long, My Darling from the Lions, Tin House, 2021
- Patrick T. Reardon, Darkness on the Face of the Deep, Kelsay Books, 2021
- Martina Reisz Newberry, Glyphs, Deerbrook Editions, 2021
- Arra Lynn Ross, *Day of the Child*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Rob Schouten (editor), *Rinkeldekinkel: Anthology of Dutch Poetry*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Brian Simoneau, No Small Comfort, Black Lawrence Press, 2021
- Brian Tierney, *Rise and Float*, Milkweed Editions, 2022

CLARISSA ADKINS' poems appear in *The Pinch, Whurk Magazine*, River City Poets' anthology: *Lingering in the Margins, Passengers Journal*, and more. She earned a Best of the Net nomination from *Parentheses International Literary Arts Journal* in 2018 and was a finalist for the 17th Annual Erskine J. Poetry Prize. Lily Poetry Review Books published her first full-length poetry collection, *Building Alexandria*, in April of 2021. Clarissa loves being a reader for *Sugar House Review*.

MATTHEW IVAN BENNETT is a resident of Plan-B Theatre, where he's premiered several plays, including "Eric(a)," which won Best Drama at the United Solo Festival in New York. He's written nearly a dozen radio plays in collaboration with KUER's *Radio West*. His poetry has appeared in *Mixer*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *Utah Life*.

LISA BICKMORE'S work has appeared or will soon appear in *Psaltery and Lyre, Blossom as the Cliff Rose, Quarterly West, Tar River Poetry, Caketrain, Split Rock Review, Menagerie, Terrain.org, Hunger Mountain Review, Southword, The Moth, Timberline Review,* and elsewhere. Her second book, *flicker* (2016), won the 2014 Antivenom Prize from Elixir Press, and she won the 2015 Ballymaloe International Poetry Prize for the poem "Eidolon." Her third collection, *Ephemerist*, was published in 2017 by Red Mountain Press. She is the founder and publisher of the new nonprofit Lightscatter Press (lightscatterpress.org). She lives and teaches writing in Salt Lake City.

MICHELLE BITTING was short-listed for the 2020 Montreal International Poetry Prize; won the 2018 Fischer Poetry Prize and Quarter After Eight's 2018 Robert J. DeMott Short Prose Contest; and her fourth collection of poetry, *Broken Kingdom*, won the 2018 Catamaran Prize and was named to Kirkus Reviews' Best of 2018. She has poems published in *The American Poetry Review, Narrative, The Los Angeles Review, Vinyl Poetry, The Paris-American, Love's Executive Order, The Raleigh Review, Green Mountains Review, Plume, Tupelo Quarterly, and others. Recently, she was a finalist in the 2020 Reed Magazine Edwin Markham Prize, as well as the 2019 Sonora Review and New Millennium Flash Prose contests. Michelle is a lecturer in poetry and creative writing at Loyola Marymount University and film studies at University of Arizona. MichelleBitting.com* 

JOHN BLAIR has published six books, most recently *Playful Song Called Beautiful* (University of Iowa Press, 2016). His seventh book, *The Art of Forgetting*, is forthcoming this winter from Measure Press.

GAYLORD BREWER is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he founded and for 20+ years edited the journal *Poems & Plays*. The most recent of his 16 books of poetry, fiction, criticism, and cookery are two collections of

poems, *The Feral Condition* (Negative Capability, 2018) and *Worship the Pig* (Red Hen, 2020).

CLAUDIA BUCKHOLTS received creative writing fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and Massachusetts Artists Foundation, and the Grolier Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared in *Indiana Review, Minnesota Review, New American Writing, Prairie Schooner, The Southern Review, Tar River Poetry,* and others; and in two books, *Bitterwater* and *Traveling Through the Body.* 

SAMUEL CHENEY is the winner of a 2021 Pushcart Prize. His poems have recently appeared in *Copper Nickel, The Literary Review, The Missouri Review,* and elsewhere. He has been awarded scholarships from Bread Loaf and the Sewanee Writers' Conference and received the 2018 Erskine J. Poetry Prize from *Smartish Pace.* He is from Centerville, UT and lives in Baltimore, MD, where he is at work on his debut collection.

M. CYNTHIA CHEUNG is an internist who trained at the University of California, Los Angeles, and currently practices hospital medicine in Texas. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Journal of the American Medical Association, Zócalo Public Square, Hawaii Pacific Review,* and *The Ekphrastic Review,* among others. She was previously a finalist for the Michael E. Debakey Poetry Contest, and is on the judging panel for 2021.

LISA COMPO has a BA in creative writing from Salisbury University and is a poetry reader for *Quarterly West*. She has poems forthcoming or recently published in journals such as *Rhino, Puerto del Sol, Crab Orchard Review, Cimarron Review,* and elsewhere. She was a semifinalist for the 2019 Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry.

TODD COPELAND'S poems have appeared in *The Journal, Southern Poetry Review, Valparaiso Poetry Review, California Quarterly, The Dalhousie Review, Christianity & Literature,* and *Columbia Poetry Review.* His essays have been published in *Literary Imagination, JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory, and Media, War & Conflict,* among other publications. He holds degrees in English from Baylor University (BA), The University of Georgia (MA), and Texas A&M University (PhD). A native of Ohio, he lives in Waco, TX.

NICOLE COX is a creative writing undergraduate at Utah State University, spending her summers at home in Sandy, UT. She enjoys playing piano and guitar in the middle of the night, and loves reading so much that her family holds interventions.

SARAH-JANE CROWSON'S poetry and visual poetry can be found in a variety of online and print journals, and has been shortlisted for various awards.

She is interested in exploring the space between the real and imagined in a gently subversive way. Inspired by fairytales, nature, psychogeography and surrealism, Sarah-Jane uses bricolage to investigate the unusual and surprising using words. You can find her on Twitter @Sarahjfc.

JESSICA DRAKE-THOMAS is a poet, fiction writer, and book reviewer. She is the author of *Burials*, a gothic horror poetry collection. She's a poetry editor at *Coffin Bell Journal*.

LYNNE ELLIS writes in pen. Her words appear in *WA 129, What Rough Beast, PageBoy,* and others. Lynne was a mentee in AWP's Writer-to-Writer program and won the Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize. Her book *In these failing times I can forget,* a collection of city poems, is available through Papeachu Press. See her current collaboration with Felicia Rice—a growing collection of digital broadsides—online at Moving Parts Press. LynneEllis.com

CHELSEA N. FABIAN is a PhD student and graduate instructor at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Her research focuses on intersections of female queerness, trauma, and visibility in contemporary anglophone literature. She has poems featured or forthcoming in *Puerto del Sol, Atlanta Review*, and *Coal Hill Review*.

JEN STEWART FUESTON is the author of *Madonna, Complex* (Cascade Books 2020); *Latch* (River Glass Books 2019); and *Visitations* (Finishing Line Press 2015). Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *AGNI, Thrush, Western Humanities Review, Spoon River Poetry Review,* and elsewhere. A native of Colorado, she has taught writing at the University of Colorado-Boulder, as well as internationally in Hungary, Turkey, and Lithuania.

AMELIA HARRINGTON'S poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Warm Milk, Sporazine*, and elsewhere. In 2020, Amelia graduated with the inaugural class of Randolph College's MFA program. Now they are circulation manager for *South Dakota Review*, a PhD student in the English Department at the University of South Dakota, and a coordinator in the university's writing center.

An award-winning poet, KEN HOLLAND just received his second and third nominations for the Pushcart Prize. He's had work widely published in such journals as *Rattle, Tulane Review, Southwest Review, The Cortland Review, The Carolina Quarterly, Chariton Review,* and *The American Journal of Poetry*. His poems have also been included in a number of anthologies. He was awarded first place in the 2019 Stephen DiBiase contest, and third place in the 2020 Naugatuck River Review competition. He has book and chapbook manuscripts out on submission, an effort that eluded him until he found his way to retirement.

JUSTIN HUNT grew up in rural Kansas and lives in Charlotte, NC. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Five Points, Michigan Quarterly Review, New Ohio Review, Robinson Jeffers Tor House, Bellingham Review, The Florida Review, Cider Press Review, Southword* (Ireland), *The Bridport Prize Anthology* (UK), *Arts & Letters*, and *The Atlanta Review*, among other publications. He is currently working on a debut collection.

STEFAN KARLSSON received his MFA in poetry from the University of California, Irvine. His work has appeared in *Forklift Ohio, Tar River Poetry*, and *Spillway*.

DEBORAH KEENAN is the author of ten collections of poetry, and a book of writing ideas, from tiger to prayer. With Roseann Lloyd she edited Looking for Home: Women Writing About Exile, which received the American Book Award. Recipient of the Minnesota Book Award for Willow Room, Green Door: New and Selected Poems, she recently retired from thirty years as professor in the creative writing programs at Hamline University. She continues teaching at The Loft, a center for writers in Minneapolis, and privately.

ALAN KING is a Caribbean-American poet whose parents emigrated to the U.S. from Trinidad and Tobago in the early 1970s. He's the author of two full-length collections of poetry: *Point Blank* (Silver Birch Press, 2016) and *Drift* (Aquarius Press, 2012). Plan B Press published his recent chapbook, *Crooked Smiling Light*. US Poet Laureate Joy Harjo said, "Alan King is one of my favorite up-and-coming poets of his generation. His poems are not pop and flash, rather more like a slow dance with someone you're going to love forever." King is also a videographer and motion graphics artist. The video he produced for his poem "Gluttony" was an Official Selection of the 2021 International Video Poetry Festival in Athens, Greece. A Cave Canem fellow, King is a graduate of the Stonecoast MFA Program at the University of Southern Maine. He lives with his wife, children, and mother-in-law in Bowie, MD.

JEREMY KNAPP has ventured onto many crumbling paths throughout his journey through reality until finally finding the solid road beneath his feet, or at least a two-dimensional version of one, which is a start. He dabbled in the culinary arts, business, management, retail, banking, and finance, but has always loved writing. Although he still works a 9-5 in the financial industry, he earned his BFA in creative writing from the University of Nebraska, Omaha, and is a current MFA student at Hamline University in Saint Paul, MN. He previously had poetry published in 13th Floor Magazine from the University of Nebraska, Omaha Writer's Workshop, where he also served at a later time as editor-in-chief.

IBE LIEBENBERG lives in Chico, CA and works as a firefighter and a lecturer at Chico State University. He is a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and is currently enrolled in the MFA program at the Institute of American Indian Arts. He has been published in *The Journal of Chickasaw History and Culture*, Chico State University's *Multicultural Echoes*, and *The Threepenny Review*.

ANTHONY THOMAS LOMBARDI is a Pushcart-nominated poet, organizer, and educator. He was named a finalist in Autumn House Press' 2020 Chapbook Contest, the Mississippi Review 2021 Prize in Poetry, the 9th Annual Gigantic Sequins Poetry Contest, and was longlisted for the 2020 Palette Poetry Emerging Poet Prize. He previously served as assistant director for Polyphony Lit's Summer Scholars Program, and currently runs Word is Bond, a reading series that benefits bail funds and mutual aid organizations, in conjunction with *The Adroit Journal*, where he also serves as a poetry reader and interviews fellow poets. His work has appeared or will soon in *Guernica*, wildness, North American Review, Gulf Coast, Colorado Review, THRUSH, Passages North, Cherry Tree, and elsewhere. He lives in Brooklyn with his cat, Dilla.

HOLLY MASON received her MFA in poetry from George Mason University. Her poetry, interviews, and reviews have been published in *The Adroit Journal, Rabbit Catastrophe Review, The Northern Virginia Review, Foothill Poetry Journal, University of Arizona Poetry Center Blog, Entropy, CALYX, The Rumpus, and elsewhere.* She has been a panelist for OutWrite (a Celebration of LGBTQ+Literature) and DC's Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here events and RAWIFest as a Kurdish-American poet. Holly is currently on the staff of *Poetry Daily* and lives in northern Virginia.

OWEN MCLEOD teaches philosophy at Lafayette College in Easton, PA. He has this recurring anxiety dream in which he is alive.

REBECCA MORTON'S work appears in *RHINO*, *TriQuarterly*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Pacifica Literary Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and elsewhere. She serves as a poetry reader for *The Adroit Journal*, and holds an MFA from Eastern Washington University. Rebecca lives in Chicago with her wife and children.

CHRISTOPHER MUNDE is the author of the poetry collection *Slippage* (Tebot Bach 2019), which won the Patricia Bibby Award, and his poems have previously appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal, Blackbird, Bombay Gin, The Literary Review, Massachusetts Review, Third Coast, West Branch Wired*, and elsewhere. He is a graduate of the University of Houston's MFA program and the recipient of an Academy of American Poets Prize. Presently, he lives in western NY, and teaches at Jamestown Community College.

TWILA NEWEY received her MFA in writing and poetics from Naropa. She was a finalist for the 2019 Coniston Prize at Radar Poetry and won honorable mention in the 2019 JuxtaProse Poetry Contest. Her poems also appear in various journals including *Green Mountains Review, Summerset Review,* and *Ruminate.* Twila is a poetry editor for *Psaltery & Lyre.* She lives in the San Francisco Bay area.

DEREK OTSUJI is a writer from Hawaii and the author of *The Kitchen of Small Hours*, winner of the Crab Orchard Review Poetry Series Open Competition. His work can be found or is forthcoming in *The Threepenny Review, Rattle, Pleiades, The Southern Review,* and *Beloit Poetry Journal*.

TERRA PERANTEAUX has been previously published in *Stillpoint Literary Magazine* and *Sink Hollow Literary Magazine*. She lives in Logan, UT and enjoys traveling and playing the flute.

A. PREVETT is the author of the chapbook *Still, No Grace* (Madhouse Press, 2021). Their poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Sixth Finch, DIAGRAM, West Branch*, and others. They are pursuing an MFA in poetry from Georgia State University, where they edit the journal *New South*. You can find them online at aprevett.com or on Twitter under the handle @a\_prevett.

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SARA QUINN RIVARA is the author of two collections, *Animal Bride* (Tinderbox Editions) and *Lake Effect* (Aldrich Press). Her poetry and hybrid work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *Mom Egg Review, Colorado Review, West Trestle, Indianapolis Review, Heavy Feather Review, Whale Road Review,* and elsewhere. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her family.

JEREMY ROCK is from Frederick, MD, and is a graduate of Salisbury University. He has work published in *Ninth Letter, Waccamaw, The Shore, Stonecoast Review, Cider Press Review, The New Mexico Review,* and elsewhere.

SAMANTHA SAMAKANDE is a Zimbabwean poet currently based out of Bloomfield, NJ, where she resides with her husband. She is a graduate of Allegheny College and is a junior editor for F(r) iction. It is her lived experience as an immigrant that made her a poet, an observer, and a daughter of many tongues and in-betweens. Her work has appeared in P if P in P is a P in P is a P in P in

ADAM SCHEFFLER'S first book of poems, *A Dog's Life*, was the winner of the 2016 Jacar Press Book Contest. His poems have appeared in *Narrative*, *The Yale Review, The Common, The American Poetry Review, Verse Daily, Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day*, and many other venues. He teaches in the Harvard College Writing Program.

ROS SEAMARK is a queer poet and translator from Central California.

Poet, essayist, yoga and meditation teacher, MICHAEL DAVID SOWDER writes about wilderness, fatherhood, yoga, and spirituality. He is a professor of English at Utah State University. His books include *The Empty Boat* (winner of the T.S. Eliot Award), *House Under the Moon*, and *Whitman's Ecstatic Union*. You can find his poems and essays in such venues as *American Life in Poetry, Five Points, Green Mountains Review, Poet Lore, Sufi Journal, New Poets of the American West, Pilgrimage, The New York Times Online, Shambhala Sun, Poetry Kanto, and elsewhere.* 

MARISA CELINA TIRADO is a Latinx-Indigenous poet from Chicago and New Mexico. She is an MFA student at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and has received fellowships from *Image Journal* and *Kenyon Review*. Marisa can be read in *Colorado Review*, *Triquarterly*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Nowhere Magazine*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. She recently founded an international collective of BIPOC activist poets called Protest Through Poetry.

MILLIE TULLIS is a poet and folklorist from northern Utah. She received an MFA from George Mason University in 2021 and is currently studying folklore at Utah State University. Her work has been published in *Rock & Sling, Cimarron Review, Ninth Letter*, and elsewhere. She serves as the assistant editor for Best of the Net. You can find her on twitter @millie\_tullis.

CONSTANT LAVAL WILLIAMS is a Los Angeles-born poet and former resident of Paris, France, where his writing first came of age. He studied creative writing at the University of Southern California where he received the Beau J. Boudreaux Poetry Award, judged by Nick Flynn. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The American Journal of Poetry, december magazine, Hotel Amerika, Otoliths, Paris Lit Up*, and others.

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS is the author of six collections, including *The Drowning House* (Elixir Press Poetry Award), *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize), *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize, University of Nebraska Press), and *Summon* (JuxtaProse Chapbook Prize). A twenty-six-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous awards, including the Wabash Prize for Poetry, Philip Booth Award, Phyllis Smart-Young Prize, and Laux/Millar

Prize. He serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review* and founder of the Caesura Poetry Workshop series. Previous publishing credits include *Best American Poetry, Yale Review, Verse Daily, North American Review, Prairie Schooner,* and *TriQuarterly.* 

NICHOLAS YINGLING'S work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *The Missouri Review, 32 Poems, Pleiades, Colorado Review, Nimrod,* and others. He was a finalist for the Sunken Garden Chapbook Contest, longlisted for the Frontier Chapbook Contest, and an honorable mention in the Chad Walsh Chapbook Series.

MARIA ZOCCOLA is a queer Southern writer with deep roots in the Mississippi Delta. She has writing degrees from Emory University and Falmouth University. Her work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *Ploughshares, 32 Poems, The Massachusetts Review, Colorado Review, Southern Indiana Review, Salamander,* and elsewhere.

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

A 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.

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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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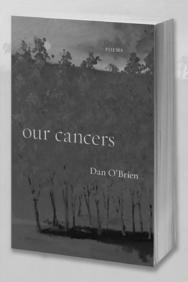
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