About
The Vassar Review is an international, multidisciplinary literary arts journal that fosters working relationships between faculty, students, and published artists in order to engage its annual theme with care and reflective insight.

The journal is a revival of the former literary arts magazine published by the faculty and students of Vassar College. VR entered the literary scene in 1927 shaped by a small circle of students, including Elizabeth Bishop. Today, the journal is international in scope and multidisciplinary in nature, across both a print and digital interface. Each academic year culminates with a printed publication and a digital supplement.

Mission
The Vassar Review aims to reconsider the traditions that have defined many publications and structures, those that are not open to all, open to interpretation, or open to change, and unfold them into a collaborative journal that believes the artist’s voice and methods of expression are essential to our daily lives.

Artistically & intimately, we aim to cultivate an international community that holds at its core purposeful expression, visions of things to come, and a revision of what has already been experienced.

Submissions
Submissions are accepted each fall. Simultaneous submissions are accepted. We consider all artistic and literary forms, including painting, photography, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, scripts, and screenplays, but also forms that often prove difficult to present, such as new media art, spoken-word poetry and performances, hypertext fiction, and others. Please visit review.vassar.edu for full submission guidelines.

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FACT, FICTION, FABRICATION

Truth or Lies in Art and Literature

2019
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Dear Reader,

In August 2018, former Mayor of New York City Rudy Giuliani declared to Chuck Todd, “Truth isn’t truth.” Defending his client’s decision not to testify for special counsel Robert Mueller, Giuliani tapped into an exhausted, but potent epistemological problem that has enraptured the mainstream media since November 2016. Who gets to define what a “fact” is? Out of what discursive forces are “facts” produced? Does interrogating objectivity’s ontological foundations simply serve the reactionary agendas of ideologues like Giuliani, or can we deploy the troubled lines between fact and fiction towards more emancipatory ends?

The Vassar Review, founded in 1923, shuttered in 1991, and relaunched in 2016, has historically challenged the cultural norms that govern artistic production. From the erotically-suffused poetry of Elizabeth Bishop to Joseph Brodsky’s articulation of the poet’s role in an egalitarian society, the Vassar Review has long questioned and elaborated the relationship between art and politics.

Taking its aesthetic inspiration from this tradition, the theme of this issue, “Fact, Fiction, Fabrication,” is interested in raising new questions about aesthetic facticity apart from the odious politics of ascendant reactionary movements in the West and the moralizing pearl-clutching of the mainstream commentariat. If truth is historically contingent, what are “genres” when the historical forces that made their formal boundaries legible collapse?

Not since the culture wars of the 1990s has “truth” been so feverishly contested in the public sphere. The fourth edition of the Vassar Review investigates what these conversations spell for artistic production in 2019. The contributors of this issue, across media and geographic locales, grapple incisively with these questions, opening up fresh, alternative modes of aesthetic-political engagement.

I would like to thank our staff, contributors, advisory board, and especially our readers for their continued support of the journal.

Enjoy,

Nicholas Barone
Editor-in-Chief
Stefana McClure, *Secrets and Lies*, 2010
Sights of Removal

Kimberly Blaeser

We follow the tracks of the odd medical transfers. Not the clean-hooved markings of deer at water’s edge. A story more furtive. Like the ghost trace of owl wings on winter snow—the sudden halt to the skitter print of voles. We find him at the third nursing home we try. The teeth of a sprung track camouflaged as red brick. My children still retell the adventure. Tired wipers. Hide and seek in white-out conditions. Takeout breadsticks the makeshift batons for singing our way across two states. But I recall the steel I struggled to contain in my body, terrified it might explode through my lips and shatter the window glass.

The bent wing of Bill’s half-smile. The lift of his chin and lips before he speaks. This familiar slips like maple syrup down my constricted throat. “I heard there were some Indians around here,” he laughs when we walk in. None of us look like Hollywood’s version of Indian, certainly not him now that they have dressed him in sweats and slippers, his beautiful river of silver hair cut short. Missing his jeans, his t-shirt beneath western-shirt beneath plaid quilted shirt, missing his lace-up boots and diamond willow cane, he looks shorn—thrice shorn.

The clothing change, I learn, is more than symbolic. My uncle’s normal dress apparently constituted “evidence” in the case-workers decision to classify this eighty-nine-year-old man as suffering from Alzheimer’s. He wore layer upon layer of clothes, dressed “inappropriately.” The change in nursing home locations, the wheel chair, craft classes, and other altered circumstances—this twenty-first century removal—all justified in the same legalistic jargon of past assimilation projects.

In the thirty seconds during which my thighs search for the seat bottom of the chair I am offered in the family consultation room, I think of the Apache resistance, of Chief Joseph’s war, of the Ghost Dance Religion. In the time it took soldiers to bayonet one baby at Wounded Knee, I contemplate just taking Bill and walking out. I dream of escape, freedom, amnesty, like others before me, before him. And then, like the many nameless in the long history of conquest, I struggle to strike a balance between desire and simple survival. I pass the slightly balding, kind-faced man in the white coat a miniature treaty—a two by three and a half inch business card with my name and credentials. Another white flag waved to ward off slaughter, this one has a subtext about winners and losers that no one need translate.
It allows us to have this civil conversation as if he believed we were equals. I begin to say to him the five censored things I have carefully extracted from the mass of the unspeakable. "I understand that it might seem inappropriate for someone used to living in a house with central heating to dress in underwear, jeans, and multiple layers of shirts, but this is a man who has lived his whole life in houses with various kinds of wood-burning stoves."

Somehow I steer my voice down the narrow, even-toned road of rationality, avoid veering into the dangerous territories of pleading or accusation. I take the next careful verbal corner and imagine I glimpse our destination. "His dress," I state in my best professorial voice, "is entirely appropriate for his own lifestyle."

But for dark-skinned, working class Indians in the occupied lands of the Americas, the road to freedom waivers like an ever-receding mirage on the paved summer highway. "Of course, of course," he demurs. "But there are other things that have led to us making this diagnosis. His personal habits, for instance. He does not practice good personal hygiene. Quite frankly, he doesn't wash himself regularly."

Dirty Indian. He does not say this. I do hear it.

Something begins quaking inside me or perhaps my womb knows an ancient keening. This time I have difficulty speaking past the bile.

"You turn on a faucet and get water. Cold. Hot. All the water you want. You bathe in a seventy-degree room. My uncle grew up hauling water in cream cans on the back of a wagon and then a pickup truck, chipping away the ice in the water pail on winter mornings, heating water in a kettle on a wood stove."

This guy holds his own as a listener. He nods his head and, even when I know he wants to interrupt, he waits for me to finish. "In his trailer, yes, he did have running water—when the plumbing worked, when the pipes weren't frozen. He simply never learned to take a bath for granted the way you do. Does that mean he doesn't, as you say, 'have good hygiene'?"

We play this cultural ping-pong. But nothing here turns on today's semantics. History settled this long ago. Bang, bang went the bullets; down went the buffalo. Boom, boom went the cannons; farther west walked the tribes. Clip, clip went the scissors, off fell the long dark braids. "Kill the Indian, save the man" sounded the motto of Carlisle Indian boarding school.
Bill's been in this kind of place before. Taken to Pipestone—another boarding school, hundreds of miles from his White Earth family. Number him among the runaways. Hiding in ditches during the day, walking at night. Walking home.

I know he'd cross that state line again. If only he still had his cane to get him up out of that wheelchair. They know this, too.

I'd like to believe some Nurse Ratchet confiscated it and locked it away. Then I could confront my enemy. But I see ordinary farm wives, working to get their family through another Dakota winter. These Norwegian or German or even mixedblood children of children of children of immigrants, so removed from any understanding of history they don't even recognize the origins of the names of the rivers their ancestors fought to possess by language, carry out protocols that would have ill-suited their own forbears or branded them like my uncle as backward or mentally incompetent.

Apologetically, the nursing home personnel deliver the explanation for the wheelchair, the absence of the diamond willow cane, passing it to me with a token of civility—coffee on a green institutional tray. I fantasize dramatic refusal, perhaps throwing the hot drink, staining the white polyester uniform that stands before me. But the drive has been long—and cold. I add the powdered creamer, thankfully drink the heat, and listen to their account of “unfortunate incidents.”

I swallow a smile with my coffee when they say he has threatened the nurses. Never given to sweet talk, Bill would certainly have been capable of warrior prose and of striking a pose with the cane held aloft. A storyteller, he liked to dramatize his own role, the better for retelling. He once received a call from his grandson's probation officer who objected to Bill's suggestion that the officer travel thirty-five miles to Bill's trailer in the woods to see the boy. Not aware that he was verbally out of his league, the probation officer tried to sensibly explain his position—“I'm sorry, I'm not paid to. . .”—only to be interrupted by my uncle—“I'm sorry, too. What kind of job do you have, you don't get paid?” I could clearly imagine Bill suggesting what he might do to some hapless nurse trying to enforce institutional rule or schedule. Still, I knew it would do little good to try to explain the play in what was perceived as a violent threat.

Polite language and gesture here masks true belief, cold intention. Language play, too,
has been vanquished. I walk the colonized line, keep between the white lane markers, and address my attention to my uncle’s failure to participate in planned activities. Not certain if this is read as an insult or another flag of dementia, I wonder aloud politely exactly what these activities are.


I flash to an old Brownie-camera-era picture of Bill: a lean young man with a dark flap of hair falling over his eyes, standing on the steps aboard one of the ore ships he worked in Duluth. I look up from my stool in the fishhouse and meet his eyes, sparking with humor under his orange stocking cap, as we watch together the world underwater, spear in hand. I see him heave and step, heave and step up the stairs, his bad leg tired after a day in the woods trapping, brushing, hunting. He stands a moment before the small woodstove, holding his chilled hands out to warm them. Later, with frying pan still on the stove, the remains of supper waiting to be put away, his weather-toughened hands fall into the rhythm of indoors work.


Coloring? No. Crafts? Not the glue-stick, colored-felt variety. Bingo? Perhaps bingo, but not without his glasses which seem like his cane and watch to have suffered predictable vanishment.

I feel their expectation. My turn. But suddenly the careful sequence of recitation escapes me. I stand with determination but without grace. The lap tray tilts, its contents sliding to the edge of institutional oblivion, before I right the foundation and lay the peace offering on the seat of the chair I have now abandoned.

“Excuse me,” I manage. “The storm is coming on quickly. I want some time with my uncle. This conversation...” Here I trail off and the void of the unsaid haunts our parting.

I finish the sentence again and again on the ride back to Minnesota as my children’s questions and recitations wash over me. He liked the book, Mommy. Especially the photos of
the lynx. Did Uncle Bill really bring you home orphaned wolf pups? Why won't they let him cut his own food? Remember the rooms in his house, the way they go round in a circle? When will we go back there?

The exchange in the nursing home replays. Words launched on a hopeless trajectory of parallel pursuits, never intersecting. My conversation. Theirs. At a polite removes from the true politics of race and class. That trickle-down town in the hinterlands of North Dakota has no more access to legislated wealth and power than do many in rural America. But still they sign on to the propaganda of institutional might.

I never went back there. My uncle never crossed the state line again under his own speed. He died shortly after our last visit.

I like to think that one winter when the case worker’s furnace goes out and he reaches for a UND sweatshirt followed by a fleece jacket some tiny light of recognition will flicker as his fingers work the zippers. Cold necessity might remind him.

The everyday margin for error in human interaction accumulates toll enough. Factor in cultural distance and the numbers explode beyond tolerance. I wonder what any of us left unsaid in Grand Forks that might have unlocked the figurative and literal doors to liberation. When there was nothing else to do, we pretended. Circled ourselves with familiar humor.

“Ah,” he said, “these people don’t even know how to cook.”

“Maybe you could get some wiyas and teach them.”

I return to Bill’s trailer in winter. Steam rises from my coffee, from morning snow. Waabooz move through nearby trees, white against winter white. Here chickadees still flock expectantly. Some mornings in stocking cap he feeds them. The seed in his ungloved hands eternal.
Homeless after my college graduation, and I’m not the first to say being homeless doesn’t always mean being without everything, it’s no job and not enough money for first last and security deposit. It’s the first time I felt my heart palpitate in me, it’s $375 for an EKG at the emergency room because my medicaid doesn’t cover me outside New Mexico and I’m in Massachusetts telling nurses I haven’t slept in three days or eaten anything except Dr. Pepper and stale bagels from a Dunkin Donuts dumpster because I’m trying to save money. A nurse gives me a granola bar and I
save it in the glove box of my truck. I eat it when I can't sleep in the Walmart parking lot worrying about the other people who sleep in the Walmart parking lot. You can't get a job when you're living in your car, can't get a place to live with no permanent address. Staring through the steamed up windshield too hot to sleep in May with a socket wrench in my sweat slippery hand. Some people launched a car into space. A military parade on TV. A pair of leggings that won't give you panty lines. Doritos that fit in your purse and don't crunch because you're a woman and women aren't eating chips for breakfast or changing their tampons in their cars.
Sticky knuckles, check for blood. A boy comes into my class today with two black eyes and I don't say anything. We all pick who we care about and not everyone gets to be in the car when it's sent off to school or mom's house or the grocery store or careening through space as a big piece of trash and most of us are forced to settle on beaches early in the morning in our pit stained tank tops after working all night smoking our last cigarette and waiting for the sun to come up and the rocket boosters to splash down.
Three Coyote Stories

Deborah A. Miranda

1. Old Coyote says:
   After the buffalo there is no history.
   After the salmon there is no memory.
   A toppled statue does not erase the past.
   Leave monuments to silence
   and displacement far behind;
   plant purple sage for bees,
   magenta Buddleia
to attract butterflies.
   Watch swallows spill
   across the clouds at dawn,
   at dusk. That’s all the truth
   you need.

2. Found an outdoor altar, Old Coyote says.
   A true thing.
   I held it in my heart like a red tuna.
   So fucking beautiful,
   I had to avert my eyes.
   Humans invent the divine,
   Coyote says: Can’t take it out of them
   when it’s bone-deep.

3. You thought I was fierce —
   they’re still in the fight!
   A threshold people
   so mad
   they won’t get out
   of the way
   of their own damn lies.

   Old Coyote said:
   Sing a song with a child you love.
   Look for deer tracks.
   Tell a dirty joke.
   Tomorrow will be a good day.
   Forget what I said
   about no more history:
   I lied. Go make some.
   Didn’t I leave you
   my bag of tricks?
   It’s dark in there, sure,
   but down at the bottom,
   that’s where you’ll find
   best surprise of all:
   survival.
Yael Eban, Against the Backdrop 2 (left), Against the Backdrop 7 (above), 2017
At the center of the dinner table is a turquoise vase stuffed with flowers, or plastic things that look so much like fresh flowers I can't tell the difference. More than once I resist the urge to smell them. The table and vase will color my perception of this place and the people in it even after I leave the room. These objects may occupy space in my brain for the rest of my life, or perhaps I'll forget them, or they'll be obscured by plaque.

“Would you like some more wine, dear?” asks Jamie’s mother.

“No thank you,” I reply with a smile. “Maybe in a little bit.”

I focus on the table and the flowers to look at the people. Jamie, my boyfriend—that’s what I call him now—his parents, and his teenage sister. All of them blond. My favorite color. I see why Jamie likes to call me swarthy. We are all eating and his parents and sister are talking and Jamie stares at me and smiles in an encouraging way. I can see him in the corner of my eye, as I look at the flowers. He wants me to talk too. I smile back absently, bringing my fork to my mouth. I do not talk.

I have begun recreating a scene in my head—I am half-dreaming. This is what we do when we remember. People with photographic memories may have exceptionally detailed parameters: she was wearing her blue shoes that day and Michael had his left hand in his pocket when he asked, smiling dickishly, whether she had started eating fish again or was she still too worried about Fukushima... Such a person might have a thousand points of reference for each scene, but the gaps between the points are still filled with imagining, with an uncertain number of eyelashes or shape of earrings.

I don't have a photographic memory. My brain is lossy. My parameters are vague. Right now I’m remembering the only other time I sat down with someone’s family in this context, as a boyfriend. I was in high school, a junior, still dating girls, though I hadn’t dated many. It was something I felt I was supposed to do more than something I wanted to do. I don’t mean I was in the closet—I mean I was on so much lithium that I didn’t know which room the closet was in. Sexuality was an abstract. But I knew what teenage desire was supposed to look like, and I knew how old I was, felt the hair on my body itching against my clothes.

So I took a few girls to movies and football games, girls whose names I don’t remember. Another limitation: state-dependent memory. I am not on lithium now, so those memories no longer fit the shape of my brain. I remember Laura, though, because
I went out with her more than once. She didn’t seem to mind the pauses so much, the laggy responses to her sardonic commentary on school life.

Laura was the type to connect all the people around her to characters from movies. She might smirkingly compare a gym teacher to the drill sergeant in *Full Metal Jacket*, for example, and after a moment trying to process the reference, I’d reply that I liked the gym teacher’s hair, that it reminded me of my aunt’s.

That’s how I talked on lithium. People would often pretend I hadn’t said anything at all, even my friends. Even Laura, but she would also sometimes follow my trains of thought. She might’ve asked about my aunt, for example, and listened to me try to describe her. She was nice in that way.

“How do you like Chicago?” asks Jamie’s mother. I can tell by her enthusiasm that she has inquired not out of curiosity but from a desire to maintain a certain mood at the table. Or she’s trying to be kind. She wants me to be talking, and I can tell from Jamie’s face that he badly wants the same.

“It’s nice. It’s different from Iowa. I mean, of course it’s different from Iowa, there’s more to do. I like the water, the architecture, the museums.”

“A lot more accepting too, yeah?” asks Jamie’s father. Jamie rolls his eyes.

I laugh, “Oh, Cedar Rapids isn’t so bad. But sure, I have friends from small towns who had real trouble, went through serious trauma. That’s everywhere, though. I didn’t mind Iowa, I just needed a change.” I am a little red, I think. It happens when I talk around things.

Jamie’s mother seems to register my discomfort. “Well, anyway, we’re glad you’re here now,” she says. “You’re all Jim’s been talking about.” Jim is her name for Jamie. They talk a lot, I know.

I smile at her appreciatively, then look at Jamie, who blushes harder. Everyone around the table has turned a shade of pink. My plate is lavender embossed with green ivy. I resume eating. Garlicky chicken, garnished with parsley. I take small bites. I do not like fish, which is why I remember the meal at Laura’s house: tilapia in lemon. Distaste fixes things in our minds.

Laura and I were, I’m sure, asked about school, and talked about playing complex Chinese card games on charter buses to regional math competitions. I was likely wearing my only button-down and trying hard to present as normal. Possibly I succeeded, or else her parents were
so happy she had brought someone home that they ignored my weirdness. Laura was at that point plain, remarkably plain, small and skinny with a sharp nose and dirty blond hair in something like a bowl cut. I’m friends with her on Facebook and she’s very much grown into herself, always with a new boyfriend, always happy. Back then she was quite lonely, or anyway I thought she was.

After dinner we went to the living room and her father gave us each a bottle of beer. I don’t know if they would’ve given me the beer if they’d known I was on lithium. I certainly hadn’t told them, or Laura, or anyone at school. In any case, it wasn’t the beer that fucked things up. I think it was just something that was going to happen.

In the living room of Jamie’s parents’ house I have another glass of wine. I’m not taking any medication now, so there are no interactions to worry about except the basic one, blood and alcohol. His teenage sister is not offered a glass and leaves for her room. Jamie and I sit together on the couch but do not hold hands. He squeezes my shoulder as I sit, smiling again, but otherwise we don’t touch. We talk to his parents about life, as though we’re adult as they are.

Laura’s parents sat together on their couch, while she and I occupied the matched green armchairs adjacent to it, facing each other. We also tried to talk like adults. We discussed colleges and career paths. Laura’s father described his job at Mercy, the same hospital where I went for counseling. I think he was an X-ray tech, but while he talked I mostly thought of the psychiatry offices at the hospital. His stories of objects lodged in surprising places failed to hold my attention, but I was good at pretending to be interested. I focused a moment later, though, after Laura’s mother directed the conversation away from work, toward family vacations. Summers at Lake Okoboji.

“We used to go there with Pete and Tammy and Newton.” From that point on I remember the night clearly. “Laura said you and Newton used to be close?” Laura’s mother looked at me with expectation, or hidden emotion, with knowledge that she was broaching a sensitive subject.

“Yes,” I replied automatically, before realizing I had nothing else to say.

“He’s our nephew,” Laura’s father said.

I turned to Laura, who wore a look of intense discomfort. I noticed a faint resemblance to him, I think for the first time. The sharp nose and the skinny blondeness. How could she not
have told me she was his cousin? Or had she?

“How is he?” I asked, though I wanted badly not to know.

“Better. A lot better,” Laura’s mother said. I did not trust her, the way she said it. “Almost like his old self. You should give him a call, or maybe write him a letter, I’m sure he’d like that.”

Laura looked at the coffee table.

“That’s good,” I said. “That’s a good idea.”

The last time I’d seen Newton had been two weeks after he’d come out of his coma, three weeks after the accident. His parents had been braced by seatbelts and airbags, but Newton, unbuckled in the middle back, had sailed between them, headfirst into the windshield. After that he spent a week almost dying, a week sleeping, and another week watching TV in silence.

The last time I visited his hospital room, his neck was stabilized and his forehead was all in bandages with some intricate metal scaffolding centered around a spot above his left ear. I didn’t cry anymore when I saw him; I hadn’t cried since he woke up. I greeted his mom, sitting beside him, and she smiled at me, as horrible a smile as you can imagine. I walked to the bed, and waved.

“Hi, Newton.”

He looked at me, and for the first time in a month I saw him open his mouth to speak.

“Ah—,” he started, and there was a flare of hope, a certainty that he was about to say Arnold. Relief began exploding inside my head. But he didn’t say Arnold. The vowels didn’t stop as his eyes fell back toward the motion on the television.

I turned to leave the room before the sound stopped, accelerated wordlessly past my mom and ran down multiple flights of stairs, out the sliding doors, to the loading area, where I vomited into a planter. Two nurses comforted me without putting down their cigarettes, until my mom found me.

I was twelve and not on anything yet, so I remember that. We were both twelve. He had been my best friend for two years, since the start of sixth grade. For two years we had been constantly together or anticipating being together again. I don’t remember why we were so close, just the feeling I had when he was around. Or, I guess that feeling was the reason.

I know we met through Pop Warner. I caught a pass and ran over him, but he didn’t get angry. “Nice catch,” he said, adjusting his jersey, smiling with what looks to me now like honest joy. Unusual for an eleven year old not to
be bothered after getting knocked to the ground.

I want to say I fell in love with him then, when he said that, but that’s only because I can’t find words to describe what I actually felt, which was not love. I felt happy, I know, very happy in a specific way, but it wasn’t yet a feeling I connected to him.

I connected it later, as we quickly became friends then best friends. There was nothing interesting about how that happened, all normal stuff, or what seems normal looking back. Normative, the word Jamie would use. Playing video games together in my basement. Water guns, slap-boxing, slushies at an R-rated movie. Sneaking beers from a cooler in the backseat of his uncle’s car, Newton’s arm around my shoulders, a closeness I wasn’t used to with anyone. It bothers me that I don’t remember any words except those two. Nice catch.

Another thing about memories: they fade if they’re not accessed regularly, and I don’t talk about Newton with anybody. Not with Laura’s parents, who, wanting to reminisce about their nephew, tried to talk about his comic book collection. Whose house I fled after excusing myself to the bathroom and dry-heaving for maybe three minutes. Not with Laura, who I avoided after that night, turning away whenever I saw her in the halls.

Certainly not with Jamie, who looks maybe a little like Newton would’ve, blond and skinny with a prominent nose. Nothing like the apparition I encountered a year ago, just before I left Iowa, at a bar near my parents’ house. A doughy young man with lank yellow hair who asked, wide-eyed, in oddly cadenced too-careful words, if he knew me.

I am not crying now, but I must look sad because Jamie’s mother asks if I’m all right.

“Oh,” I say, shaking my head. “I’m fine, just a stray memory. It’ll go in a second.” I take a breath through my nose and smile.
Fang woke to a soft Taipei sky and a thin band of clouds along the horizon. Jinli was driving him to the hospital in a few hours. He fixed himself coffee—black—so he would be alert, and sipped it while he sat on the piano bench in the living room. Gradually, the room grew brighter. The usual thoughts began to press in on him and in no time, his mood had spiraled downward. Fang set his depleted mug next to him. A spill of sunlight broke through the window, pooled on the piano keyboard like gasoline.

The nature of today’s appointment was a re-evaluation of his right hand, which was in a fitted brace. The last surgery, six months ago, was meant to give him more mobility and grip strength. Yet, opening and closing his hand still felt like stretching a taut rubber band.

It was about then Jinli emerged from the bedroom, her frame swallowed up by a heavy coat. If she was surprised by seeing him at the piano bench, she did not show it. She no longer asked him to play for her. Fang could not remember when she stopped, but he did not blame her. His attempts at playing the piano were always when he was alone. She made her own coffee, fatigue still written in her movements. The curtain of her hair hid her face.

Fang shut the keyboard cover. He had not shaved in a day or two, and he knew she hated how the stubble looked like residue on him. It heightened his sense of unemployment, she would say. He slipped on a surgical mask and worn baseball cap, made sure his insurance card was in his pocket, and followed Jinli out the door. In the car, he stared out at nothing in particular as she adjusted the mirrors and drank from her thermos. The children next door tumbled outside like firecrackers, ready for school, glossy lunch pails hanging from their backpacks.

This was what Fang knew to be true: that once, sixteen years ago, he was the passionate student giving his graduate recital. By the end of it he was shaking and sweating, as if he had just stepped out of a shower. Everyone leapt to their feet and applauded, and many people brought him bouquets. Afterward at the reception, their mutual friend, Hua, introduced them to each other. Jinli would always claim that was when she first studied his face. Allegedly, she had spent the entire recital looking at the back of Fang’s head. Hua had told her Fang made ugly expressions when he played and deliberately picked those seats.

Fang had a different story. He remembered Jinli among the rows of faces when he first came onstage; her red dress. As he greeted the audience...
and bowed, they made eye contact. Jinli would scrunch up her nose whenever he said this. So boring, so clichéd!

It was a modest affair—the starting point of his career—but it was one of the last times he saw all his classmates. Everyone scattered after graduation, most going overseas. Clinking glasses, they joked that Taipei was too small to hold all of them. The future was clean when you had two good hands and your youth.

Inevitably, Fang would wonder whether he regretted staying in Taipei. If only he had left—then he would not have hailed a taxi next to Songshan station that night, and the drunk stranger getting out would not have slammed the car door into his right hand. It had not seemed like a devastating injury in that moment. Not until later, when he sat in a medicated haze in the emergency room.

There were ways to extract colors from Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Liszt passages. Even the most vicious chords betrayed a sensitivity, like the way his fingers used to stroke the knobs of Jinli’s spine, up, down, as they moved together.

* 

They drove to the hospital. Fang watched out of the corner of his eye as Jinli tied her hair up at the first stoplight and applied lipstick at the second. She smacked her lips. Construction forced them to take a detour and Jinli sighed, the furrow between her eyebrows showing. The smell of motorcycle exhaust permeated into the interior of the car.

Fang considered the group of construction workers as they passed by the cracked road. They were entering a heat wave, rare this time of year, and Fang felt sorry for them. One worker, angling the jackhammer, seemed to be in his late fifties or early sixties. His skin was badly weathered and tanned. It reminded Fang of his father, who lived deep in the southern part of the island. Fang did not know him well. His mother had moved to the city and raised him, alone, once his talent for piano became apparent and he needed a private tutor. It was the only thing his mother and father did not agree on, and it was enough to separate them.

When he thought back to the before—before the city—it was like looking at faded photos in a book. He was always unsure whether he was remembering something of his own, or someone else’s childhood. He remembered mud-stained sandals resting on the stoop outside the sliding door. He remembered hearing singing. He remembered following his father around the house and trying to put his feet in the same spaces he did. He remembered walking along the ashy line where water met sand, and the voice of his father behind him, fighting with the wind to be heard. \textit{Fang...兒子！...be careful!} Then the ocean cried out; a wave hit. Salt on his tongue. There was no footing beneath him. Fang remembered this scene.
the most. In this memory, his father’s strong arms wrapped around him and lifted him upright, and away from the danger.

There was a brief period, after he buried his mother, when Fang dutifully visited his father. Fang had been newly married then, so Jinli had come along with him. Though she never said anything outright, Fang could tell she resented those trips. How it dipped into the number of vacation days she had; how she could not speak Taiwanese fluently; how the mosquitoes there were particularly ferocious. Even though they doused themselves in bug spray, Jinli never left unscathed. They would bring back armfuls of yam leaves, red spinach, and chrysanthemum greens that his father had grown. Once there had been a whole chicken, too—their kitchen had been covered in feathers for days.

Soon they arrived at the hospital, its gold lettering shimmering against the concrete. The leaves on the surrounding trees were starting to fall and kiss the ground, like drops of blood. Jinli pulled up at the entrance. Fang knew she was running late, so he got out without saying anything to her. The brim of his cap sunk down further on his brow, and he watched as she made a rolling stop at the corner and sped away. She had a full set of classes ahead of her and papers to grade—Fang had noticed them piled precariously on the desk in her study. Ever since she accepted a more prestigious teaching post, Chinese literature at the national university, she often came home late, mood soured. She complained that she had to curl her tongue and speak in a phony mainland accent all day.

But it paid well, better than her last job. The surgeries on Fang’s hand had caused scar tissue to accumulate. The invoices, too: from the hospital, the labs, the physical therapist. Fang counted them up along with everything else.

*

“Will I ever play like myself again?” Fang asked.

He felt bold enough to ask because Jinli was not in the room. He had never asked before. He had decided, he would only ask once. Dr. Wong was sitting in front of him and examining Fang’s hand. Fang had been the one to seek him out, hearing that he had a high success rate with other musicians. The doctor did not move his head when Fang asked the question, only his eyes.

“You could barely make a fist in the beginning” he answered. “All things considered, I would say you’re making great progress.”

“But not as much, recently,” Fang said. “And the accident happened two years ago, now. Is there something else we can try?”

Dr. Wong went back to his examination. “This scar tissue has been worrying. I wouldn’t recommend another surgery. Rehab is still the best course. That, and time. Improvement
often comes at a slower pace during this stretch of recovery. Does it hurt here?"

“No.”

“Here?”

“No.”

“And what about here?”

“Yes.” Fang pulled his hand away.

The doctor paused, wrote down notes in Fang’s chart. Fang noticed he had marks on his nose from his glasses. A thought came and went: did this man wonder what life would be like if he couldn’t operate?

“Can you please show me the latest round of prescribed exercises?”

Fang obliged, only slightly self-conscious. The process reminded him of Teacher Chu—that mean old bird from his childhood—making him repeat scales and arpeggios, again and again. He hated the metronome, he hated having to watch her wrinkly hands as she played. Once he had complained to his mother, recklessly said he did not want to play piano anymore. His mother had been cooking, but she dropped the spatula and turned to him. Do you want to go back to the countryside and grow up a fool? Illiterate and dumb and penniless like your father? She knelt and shook his shoulders so hard he had started crying. He could not look at her bared teeth, the grease stains on her apron. The vegetables sputtered on the stovetop, forgotten.

“Good,” Dr. Wrong said. “Okay, you can stop.”

He gave him more exercises to try with the physical therapist, and told Fang to see him again in six months.

* *

Fang made his way back, but not in a straight line. He stopped to slurp beef noodles at a nearby stand, sitting elbow-to-elbow with a businessman who paused occasionally to hack into a handkerchief. On a whim, he decided to buy a box of braided donuts afterward, before taking the bus home. Their neighborhood was calm, windows shuttered. Fang threw his clothes into the wash and turned on the television. He considered eating a donut, but found he had no appetite. When Jinli came back home and asked if he had eaten already, he nodded. She heated up leftovers and sat, watching the local news with him as she ate. He asked if she wanted to change the channel, but she shook her head. Eventually, she retreated into her study to grade papers.

Fang lay in bed later, restless. Strangely, his mind was caught on the image of the old construction worker. He had passed by the same group on the bus back. Most the workers were eating or talking under the shade of an awning, but the old man was sitting by himself on the sweltering cement of the sidewalk. He had taken his hard hat off and was bald underneath. He was squinting into the distance, as though trying to find someone.

Fang untangled himself from the sheets and went to get a glass of water. He noticed the light was still on in Jinli’s study, so he slowly pushed the door open. Jinli’s head was buried in her arms and she was snoring lightly. At one point she had retrieved a donut
and it sat, half-eaten, by the tip of her pen. If he kissed her, she would taste sweet right now. Fang thought to drape a blanket over her but before he could, she stirred and sat up.

“Come to bed,” he said.

She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, played with an earring. “This essay has no flow. It’s appalling.”

“Just give him a passing grade so you never have to see him again.”

That got a smile out of her. For a moment, they considered each other. Her compassion, lurking underneath her expression, scared Fang. He feared stepping into it, and inhabiting it, finding it endless around him. He was relieved when she looked away.

She came to bed, her hand so small in his. Her back to him, Fang felt like he was staring up at the lights of a giant skyscraper. Every light was a person who was working late, a person boxed in. It inspired a persistent emptiness in him.

* 

It was the weekend and Jinli’s older sister, Min, and her husband, Rusheng, were visiting. Min and Rusheng were both biologists and had met when they were working at the same laboratory. Their daughter was attending university in America. Fang was not overly happy about their presence in his home, but Jinli had shrugged and said, “It was either this or a big dinner with the rest of my family.” Fang had to concede this was the better choice, and spent the morning mopping the floor and cleaning the bathroom after he did his exercises.

They sat in the living room around the end table, where Jinli had set out a bowl of cut pears and apples, a plate of pomelo wedges, a jar of ginger cookies, and hard candies. While they waited for the water to boil for the tea, Rusheng explained the latest research he was doing, something about plant cells, regeneration. Min chimed in about how their daughter was still deciding on a major, but had vowed to never follow in her parents’ footsteps. Fang left most of the back-and-forth to Jinli and hoped he was giving off the impression of restraint, rather than discourtesy. He went to get the finished kettle, tea canister, and tea strainers. It took two trips to the kitchen to get everything. He poured out hot water for everyone.

Eventually the conversation grew sparse, the acceptable topics gone. Jinli said, “Let’s play mahjong.”

Fang scratched his head. He was not opposed; at least this would give them all something else to do. “Do we have it here?”

“An old set. It’s somewhere in my study, I’ll go find it.”

“Ah, this will be fun,” Min said. “Even if our daughter comes home, we’re still always one player short.”

“Are we playing with money, then?” Rusheng asked.

Min slapped his arm. “Bah, gamble whose money, now? We’re all family so it doesn’t matter!”

“It can be a small amount—just to give everyone skin in the game...”

Fang stood up. “I’ll help her find the set.”

He found Jinli opening all the drawers of her desk, removing the books and stacks of folders from within. She cried out suddenly, triumphant, and hauled out a black case. Dust shot
up, quick. “Look at this. I can’t believe I remembered this was here.”

Fang unclasped it. All the wooden tiles seemed to be there, neatly laid out; the dice, too. They brought it out and cleared enough space to play. None of them could remember how to play with the flower and season tiles, so they left them in the case. They started shuffling the rest and the room was filled with the sound of clacking tiles for several seconds.

“The real pros play lightning fast,” Min said as they stacked their individual rows. “Ten minutes per hand. They barely talk. Yet they play all night.”

Jinli nodded. “Apparently the best players can tell what tile they drew just by feeling the carvings with a finger.”

Fang raised an eyebrow, felt a slight spark of mischief in his belly. “That sounds like nonsense. I can do that—here, watch.” He plucked a tile from his row and felt the bottom as Jinli watched, expectant. “This is definitely the east wind.”

He turned it over: it was a bamboo one. Jinli laughed, bright and clear, and Fang was struck by the sound of it.

“No even close!” she said.

They began playing at a comfortable pace. Fang had poor luck and adjusted his strategy not to win, but to avoid giving anyone a winning tile by accident. Jinli was chasing a win. Fang could tell by how she eagerly melded her tiles, how she reacted when she did not get the play she was hoping for. Her cheeks were flushed. In the end, it was Rusheng, sneaky—no one knew he had been that close to winning. Jinli groaned dramatically. They pushed the tiles back to the center of the table and began reshuffling for the next game, reaching out to turn over the tiles that had gone face-up. The rules of mahjong were easy to follow, the outcomes made sense. Fang’s fingers brushed against Jinli’s, once, twice.

Soon the afternoon had bled away, to his surprise. Everyone had won at least once, though Rusheng was sitting on four wins, the most of them all. The sky had turned forlorn and Jinli lent them umbrellas for the trip back, walked them out.

“Come over again soon!”
“Bye-bye!”
“Bye.”

Fang waved and closed the door. Suddenly tired, he sat down on the couch and closed his eyes, listened to the thump of rain against the roof. The chores began floating down in his mind, like a deflated balloon: laundry, taking the car in for an oil change, physical therapy. He exhaled, lingered on the feeling of no air in his lungs. Then he got up and looked out the window to see if they were still talking. They were, he could see the shapes of the two umbrellas poised below and the ember of light from Rusheng’s cigarette. A dog threaded through the legs of the passerby with a bird in its mouth. One alleyway down, a man was pulling down the sliding metal door of his shop and locking it.

Jinli came back inside. She swiped at her jacket, which was dotted with raindrops, before shedding it and holding it in the crook of an arm. The mahjong case sat on the table, all the tiles stuffed back inside. She picked it up and disappeared into her study. Fang kept watching the world entwine outside.
The construction near the hospital finished. One day he walked by it and then the next day it was gone—the yellow tape, the signs, the trucks. Jinli clawed her way to a promotion, associate professor, and Fang took her out for a steak dinner to celebrate. The restaurant was not busy, since it was a weekday night. Maybe he should have arranged something bigger and invited her friends, but she said it was okay.

Fang dreamt vividly. In one dream, he was walking along the white shore of the countryside again. He was younger; not quite a boy, he was somewhere in between then and now, already married to Jinli. He reached up to touch his face and his skin was smooth, elastic. The ocean was an open song and it unfolded out to meet him, overflowing with life. And then there were his father’s arms, catching him right on time, keeping him here for now. Fang understood. His father wanted him to stay.

Fang sat across from Jinli in their kitchen and they ate. Jinli kept putting her chopsticks down to drink from her glass, and her wedding ring would sing as it nicked the surface of the table. Fang had physical therapy later. He would still go, even if doing the same exercises endlessly made him want to quit. This was repetition in its worst form.

As it always did, the question rose up, unbidden. Today, he voiced it. “Should we have left Taiwan after school?”

“We had no money,” Jinli said, flatly. “Neither did any of our classmates who left.”

“We could hardly speak English.”

“Neither could they.”

“Life was not so rosy for them,” Jinli insisted. “And they ended up coming back, a lot of them. You remember Hua—getting served divorce papers like that, now she lives with her mother here because she has nowhere else to go.”

There were others, too. He remembered them all. They ate quietly for a few minutes.

Because it was far enough in the past, hypothetical enough, Fang did not feel bad bringing it up: “I wonder what would have happened if my mother never saw me playing piano when I was a child.” He tried to smile. “Imagine, me as a farmer.”

“We would have never met,” Jinli said. Maybe you would have been happier, Fang thought. He knew she was thinking the same thing.
Denied the door to a dream. We retreat into the dark. Here, what moves through us are those we have forgotten. We who have forgotten the tongue of the living. We who walked back into the throat of an animal to know the coldness of the earth know light has its own language. And what we are scared of is what drift towards us. We who are always afraid of a voice, always afraid of a thing that winds the heart. Here, every hoof must offer supplication to rain. What binds us together is a wish. We know grief moves faster through a body than a song. Lost in a forest, I sit by a tree to bring out what plagues a man. The arrow we named is no longer an arrow. It is a memory, a father opening a son’s body to the wildness of pain. And because the sun must rise, our first word of dawn is a prayer. I give you my hope. I give you my flowers. I give you the hunter prying apart what is without power. I give you a room where a son stands by a door to listen to his father’s anger. I give you what crawls under a table. I give you the scent of blood without bleach. Lord, may I see the bow before it becomes a thought. May I be powerful enough to stop a man from setting his body ablaze. The forest keeps expanding. What surrounds our grief is infinite, Lord, it keeps eating.
The Year I Was Born

Hannah Bonner

Prozac went on the market. My grandfather, the psychiatrist, wrote my grandmother a prescription. Mary Gaitskill published *Bad Behavior* and *S&M* shipped to suburbia. Thirty years later I only masturbate to fantasies of control and measured tenderness. When you buy me the butt plug my face flips from serious to smile lickity split. “I don’t want to hurt you,” you tell me. You do, just on a smaller scale, as I intended. The year I was born people wore scrunchies without irony, or shame. It was a leap year. My father was the age I am now, my mother: five years younger. People still drank milk and sunbathed and smoked, ardently. Women teased their hair. Bermuda was a vacation destination because some people always have to have something in the fire. Coke was just barely out of vogue. You could say everyone was having the time of their lives—you could say that. I would later run away from every nice boy so fast I’m still running to get back to where I began: running like Daphne before she twists into tree, a vantage of the epic’s epoch. I flirt often, but forget—am I terrified? Does my mouth move like an animal, all synapse and gristle? I am learning to enunciate even with your cock crammed in my face, so goddamn sure you’re like the sky opening: clear, chorus. I took so many sleeping pills the year of the election. You know which one I’m talking about, you know: the year I lost my profitability and prosody, with plenty of warning. In book club we collectively admit we’ve never read Hegel, but now seems as good a time as any. We set our vulnerability on ice, on velvet. We have never been so bold in our address, so lacking in capital. The year I was born Lis Rhodes’ told me: The arrangement of facts sprang easily into fiction. There’s no spring anymore, or past tense, or fact. I am rooting down in the fallacy of my whole fucking life.
I was staring at him, though I did not know it, and wishing I were he. He seemed – somehow – younger than I had ever been, and blonder and more beautiful, and he wore his masculinity as unequivocally as he wore his skin.

james baldwin
giovanni’s room
Jay stared at the bottle, its blue cap confrontationally new. The QR code she’d seen so many times before, all the way back to before QR codes were even a thing. Her visions then had been mucky and nightmarish, steadily growing more vivid, gaining vivacity with frightening grit until she found herself playing catch-up in the waking world.

For a minute, she stood there. Let the heavy stream melt her skin until her surroundings became more familiar. She knew the rhythm of the drip, the steam perking in droplets at the base of the shampoo, her own body aged now, belly distended and thick with inflammation. She knew the splashback and the lonesome whistle of the shower head, plastic and customizable, from brutal coursing tsunami to languid, lapping creek with few options between. She knew the white-on-white, light winnowing into her through the clear curtain, soft ambiance droning on as the hotel around her slept. She had seen all this before. Only now was its timing comprehensible.

Exactly as long as she’d done in the dream, she glared at the bottle of dandruff shampoo. She resented knowing its scent already, surly and cataclysmic, its status as harbinger burned into her brain, unforgettable. Unreachable.

Jay blinked, saw the smokestacks. Snakes. Gunfire. She heard the sound of the machine mapping her grey matter, saw her own brown eyes snapping open. She stood still, letting the water slide through every crevice, every fold of flesh or stretch of scar tissue. She knew the water would remember her for later. Would come back to bring her endgame.

Finally, she snapped the cap of the shampoo, scrubbing weathered hands through perpetually messy white hair. In her earlier fantasies, she’d been photogenic and brunette, a lip piercing pinched all tantalizing at the center of her bottom lip, ever pink. Young Jay had pictured her present self wearing glasses, two thick braids resting against her breasts, like a sexed-up Thomas Builds-the-
Fire. Academic, sensual, public, loud. Somewhere between eighteen and twenty, she'd given up on that goal way easier than she'd given up smoking. It started with her first white hair. Partway through a frenzied Google search of celebrities who'd gone grey prematurely, she accepted her fate. Poured herself a glass of wine and watched The Office until she passed out.

Jay's selfhood now was predicated on survival, moment to moment. She never thought about how she looked beyond what felt comfortable. Her adolescent acne, picked raw over four years of social exhaustion and an increasing pile of unfinished assignments, had faded into diffuse purple scars, deep and splotchy. Her eyes were brighter now. Too reflective. Open, but guarded in the old way, that way her old man's were, and his before him, all the way back to the very first Warren hundreds of dozens of years before, a knife tight in his taut back and a chip on his dropped shoulder.

After another ten or fifteen minutes, Jay turned the faucet off. It was three in the morning. That same quiet closed in around her, oppressive, needy. She leaned into it, breathing steam, her eyes fluttered shut as she swayed. Finally, she hopped out, dried off, and crouched, teetering on the balls of her feet as she spread her creams around her with wide sweeping circles. She scuttled to the edge of the bed before giving up and lying on the floor, back crunching as it readjusted to the wood.

She looked at the ceiling, and an old panic resurfaced. When she'd first started having those visions as a kid, her mind would fill in the blanks they left. What'll happen after that? young Jay would wonder. Well, then I'll get in a car with (Sydney, Elena, Josie, Smucker, Boots, Kelly, Lonnie, Hannah, Bruiser, Kayley, Runt) and we'll run away from this backwater town with its smothering sameness and constant sense of wait, we'll run away and I'll post a hashtag on Facebook and we'll be famous while we train our pet (dragon, water panther, double-headed snake, mutated frog, wolf from Chernobyl, badger from Chernobyl, mutated wolf, eldritch abomination, sentient android, rebellious military plane, rez dog, crystal with a consciousness, Juggalo) and we'll bring the apocalypse together, as a family.

Now, though, her brain went straight to the point. No polished prayer, no preconceived notions of what it all means. Her mind cut straight to the meat of it. Easing herself off the floor, Jay faced the other bed. Ellen was asleep, her fried blonde hair in curlers, a few already slipping out. She was having a flashback. This was something else young Jay had never—could never—have foreseen. In all her
hopeful fantasies, she’d embarked on her great American road trip with someone her own age. A love interest, usually, especially when she was in the throes of puberty, desperate to be touched. Jay watched Ellen thrash for a minute before slowly sinking into the other side of the bed, left hand trembling as she reached for her.

Jay’s hand closed around Ellen’s wrist, squeezing slightly at the clammy, veiny flesh. She closed her eyes, exhaling softly, keeping herself in the super-dark until she heard Ellen’s breathing level.

“Is it time?” Ellen murmured, barely awake.
“No,” Jay whispered. “You were having a nightmare. I took it away.”
“Mmm. Miigwech, Diindiisi.”
“Wa, Nokomis. Rest now. We’ll talk over breakfast.”
“Egg,” Ellen said. She drifted off.

Jay eased upright, crossing the room. They kept the blinds shut at night. Unwritten law. She tugged at the fat little medicine pouch around her neck and leaned into the heavy curtains, resting her forehead against the covered window. She could feel something out there, out in the cold. A presence breathing back at her. With another minute gone, she was itching for a smoke. She told herself she’d only leave for a minute, get her fix, and go to bed.

The lobby was empty when Jay left the elevator, lights dim and sickly. At the front desk, Sam was half-asleep, his blue eyes lazily tracing his book. Stephen King, appropriately.

“Boo,” Jay said, flat.

“Ah,” Sam replied, equally deadpan. “I should thank you. I’m literally about to pass out.” He laughed his usual hollow laugh, the nervous tinkling bell Jay had grown quite familiar with over the last few days. The two stared at each other for a minute. Sam averted his eyes first.

Jay felt no loss, which honed her worry. She could sense the timelines converging, beginning to grow inevitable, a once-dislocated joint snapping into place with a firm crumpling crack. There were no screams on the horizon, no more previews of the world-to-come. She saw herself and only herself, knew she’d been given all she’d have to draw upon for the next fifteen years. A war seethed silent, a cold, paranoid war, and every step taken from now on would be that of a hunter, a fighter. A soldier. Measured, disciplined, always ready.

“I have a weird favor to ask of you,” Jay said.
Sam raised his eyebrows. “Filed under: questions I'm afraid of facing at three A.M.”

“Nothing freaky,” Jay amended. “At least, I hope not. Just... be my spotter? I'm gonna go out for a smoke and it's below zero.”

“That's a relief. Yeah, sure, I'll keep an eye out for you.”

Jay smiled, genuine. “Thanks.” She huddled into her overcoat, white curls bouncing around her chaotically as she slipped a cig between her teeth and marched into the wailing wind.

She shivered, not from the cold, but from the memories. Curbsides were piled high with snowdrift, stained chunks of dirty ice, brown and translucent in the golden light of the packed parking lot. Cars were stuck, coated in a thick layer of snow from last night's storm. Off in the distance digital signs flashed, warning travelers to avoid certain roads. Jay huffed, her breath a cloud of steam. She teetered on the edge of the curbside nearest the sliding glass doors while Sam's eyes bored into her back, wary.

Balanced on the curb, Jay walked like an acrobat with outstretched arms. It was a clear Thursday night, the crescent moon a bright curve cutting into the inky blue sky. At the end of the parking lot, Jay lit up, drinking in her nicotine. Her sister had always reassured her cigarettes were useful for more than just stress relief, that their familial addiction served more than Death's purpose. Cherie taught her how to pray with them, inhaling deeply, closing her eyes, thinking hard on who or what needed divinity. She always exhaled in slow, measured breaths, facing the big-gods real grateful.

Which is what Jay did now. When she shut her eyes tight, she saw another pair of eyes open, purple imprints against her eyelids, violets blooming in the warm dark. Violet turned blue, then green, then red, which was how Jay knew it was time. She'd heard it all before.

Nameless Remainder was a girl tonight, her parents ruffling her black hair into a pair of loose braids as she faced Jay head-on. Each wind departed, carrying the topmost layer of snow, swirling around the two women in scattered, shimmering stars. Jay was always impressed by how prolific the trickster stayed in spite of everything. Someone, somewhere, always held a candle for her, always remembered when to speak her name and when to stay silent.

“S'cold,” Jay slurred, offering the trickster a fresh cigarette.

Nameless shook her head and smirked. Jay's cig vanished, reappearing in a
flash of orange between the trickster’s full lips. Chuckling to herself, she took a long drag, before putting the butt out on the back of her hand. She tossed it into the garbage can, clapped her palms together and rubbed them for friction, gritting her teeth in a slight grimace. Jay’s stomach swooped as her eyes drifted down to the trickster’s mouth, to the too-sharp teeth and chubby bottom lip, split in the center.

“Ellen with you?” the trickster finally asked. Her voice was always deeper than you’d expect, no matter what form she took. Now she spoke in a languid contralto, gravely and thick, about as close to her true nature she could get.

Jay looked away, her face hot. “Uh, yeah. Yeah, she’s upstairs. She knows it’s time.”

“You told her otherwise,” the trickster said.

“I’ve gotten real good at lying,” Jay replied. “Omission. I have to, I don’t know anyone else who’d be able to... who could handle knowing.” She looked at the trickster. “Jeez, some days I can’t even handle knowing, and I’m...”

“I know,” the trickster said, voice soft. “You should text me more.”

Jay blushed at that. Decided to play it off. “You starting a hotline for suicidal prophets?”

The trickster shook her head, an enigmatic, toothy smile spreading across her round brown face. She floated closer to Jay. “Nah,” she said. “I just got a soft spot for yous.”

“Yous,” Jay repeated as she avoided the trickster’s luminous gaze. “You’ve been spending time with Peacekeeper.”

“Not many of us left. At least, for now.” She nudged Jay, almost flirtatious. “I heard the ole gay boy paid you a visit.”

“Stop,” Jay hissed, but she was already laughing. “My cousin can be... flamboyant, yeah, but he’s more than that, he’s...”

“Goofy,” the trickster cut in. “He’s real goofy, that one. I remember when he was born. Funny lookin’ kid.”

“It runs in the family,” Jay murmured. This close, she almost towered over the trickster. They regarded each other with an intentional distance. The trickster toed the line, teasing it as if they were playing a game of chicken she knew she’d win.

“I don’t know about all that,” the trickster said, looking Jay up and down. “You turned out pretty easy on the eyes. You know. For a human.” She danced back across the parking lot, wiggling as she glanced around. “He tell you anything
about the new kid?”

“He didn’t tell me so much as he made me do his homework for him. I found out the kid’s dad’s name, his family, literally his whole lineage on his father’s side, but his mom is still a mystery. I know she’s got pale skin, blue eyes, a big nose, and that’s it. She’s real pretty. Dad’s Maori and Samoan.” Jay chewed the inside of her cheek, struggling to remember her notes. “He doesn’t know what he is, yet. Who he is. He won’t. Not until...” Jay trailed off. “They’re here, aren’t they.”

The trickster nodded. “The watcher brought the cold for you,” she whispered. “The anti-gods are already scratching the surface. I can feel them. I can feel their bodies warming the earth. I can feel them breathing.” She looked into Jay in that old way, that anxious way spirits sometimes would, especially when the earth first started getting sick. “Can you?”

Jay hesitated. Finally, she lowered her head. “Bangii eta go.” Tears slid down her cheeks. She felt a hot pressure on her skin. She opened her eyes to see that the trickster’s tongue had tripled in size, long and reptilian as it lapped away her salt, wiping her face clean. Jay laughed, brought her palm to the tongue, and touched it gently.

“You’re so weird,” she said, shaking her head. Her muscles relaxed as she leaned into the trickster’s ministrations. The tongue slipped away, returning humanoid. Jay shoved her hands in her pockets, bashful.

“They’re not gonna win,” the trickster said suddenly. “You know that, don’t you?”

“I seen it,” Jay replied. “It don’t make it any less scary, though. Especially now.” She felt the panic pushing against her ribcage, lightning coursing through her forearms, her fingers trembling in her pockets. “Are you sure it’s the watcher who brought all this?” She gestured to their frigid surroundings where the cold snap held steadfast to this no-name stretch of highway.

“Course I’m sure,” said the trickster, “it told me so. Told me, even, to find you. Said it saw you, Ellen and Makoons up on that rooftop, way back in May. Said you looked it right in its many eyes. That’s how it knew.”

“Knew what?”

The trickster stood on her tiptoes then, letting herself fall forward. Jay’s hands emerged from her pockets, coming up to the trickster’s broad shoulders in a firm hold, catching her midway down. Her face shifted across sexes, at once fluid and familiar, chaotic and prayerful, growing bolder and fuller as Jay’s response to
her presence remained the same devoted, fierce belief. The trickster pressed her forehead into Jay’s, breathing deep—in, two, three, four—hold, two, three, four—out, two, three, four, Jay mirroring her beat for beat.

Deep in Jay’s human brain, images unfolded of hyperreal worlds beyond her own, planets where people looked like people, but different—augmented. Pink instead of beige, purple instead of brown, vibrant greens and blues, noses long in unusual ways, and lips higher up on angular faces. Wings burst from pubescent humanoid backs, spread like dragonfly petals and fluttering fast. Thunderheads on Planet Earth became the skulls of bears, roaring as their bodies explode, soaking verdant countrysides in torrential downpours.

Arguments between strangers in corner stores were staged by invisible creatures directly behind them, their stick-figure arms digging deep into the strangers’ spines as they flung their human puppets side to side and whispered obscenities into their inner ears. Jay watched as a little old Chinese lady stopped mid-curse, her line of sight shifting directly to her right, where she spotted the stick person with its spindly hand still caught in her opponent’s vertebrae. She shook her tiny index finger at it and murmured in Cantonese, her eyes wide with horror. The other stranger, a thirty-something white man, froze, his eyes crept slowly to his left, tracing the shadows before darting back to the woman’s, afraid.

The old lady shouted and shook her fist at the stick person, while tears streamed down her jowls. She made eye contact with the white man and tapped at her temple—think!—before continuing to holler at his monster. His eyes widened and soon he was shouting too. Their argument had shifted from one another to the creatures riding them.

After a while the stick people skittered away, their ugly, triangular heads shoveling through the air that had grown thick with other spirits. They nipped at each other’s necks before they bounced through the back entrance to the corner store and vanished from Jay’s sight.

Somewhere in Jay’s memory she heard Makoons’ dad’s heavy Nish accent. The memory was chilly in the springtime way, the lake still too cold to swim in while the maples freely offered their sap. He held Makoons in his gargantuan arms, swinging him back and forth over the melting forest path. He was telling him how to make the bad ones go away. “You get your medicines and you smudge and you pray to our ancestors, hey?” Swing. “That keeps you good and safe.” Swing. “Or you sing, yeah, you sing a good song in a good way, you sing it real loud.” Swing. “If
none of that works, you can always tell it to get the hell out.” Toss—and Makoons flew through the air, cackling wildly, before landing on all fours with bared teeth. 

Get the hell out, his voice echoed over the corner store. Other beings, other places, other angry, knotted up, ugly little beasts of discord, scattered. Get the hell out. They ran away at the first sign of human refusal, real rage, beautiful, justified flames licking against human ribcages.

The trickster pulled away and Jay gulped for air. Lightning crackled out of her fingers, snapping and streaking bright yellow as it etched throughout the freezing sky. She no longer fought it.

“Hey,” said the trickster. “Hey, it’s okay. You’re okay.”

Jay breathed heavily, struggling as she forced herself to inhale. Every time she blinked she saw something new. Something real. She wasn't okay. She was afraid. She tried to ground herself in the trickster’s steady, unbroken scrutiny, but the swooping in Jay’s stomach was back again and its warmth bloomed in the dip of her hips. Human. Jay was human, a human being, held together by bone, blood, muscle, skin, not an amalgamation of stories propped up by the wind. She was corporeal.

There'd been a story once about a bird who’d been a girl. Jay was a girl who'd been a bird, turned human one misty morning on a whim, kissed first by her cousin, then by her mother. She could remember stories going back before that too. How her father had gone missing during the first year of his life. He’d always joked that they'd found him on the side of the road, eating rocks. That that was why his kids all had crooked teeth.

Get the hell out.

The trickster’s hand came up behind Jay’s neck first, her warm, smooth palm holding Jay soft, but firm. Jay’s scalp tingled at the sensation. She felt herself realigning, every joint ached as it usually did when she stood in one place too long. The trickster bit her lip again, black eyes magnetic and enervated, before they sparked, a playful light dancing inside her pitchy pupils. She stood on her tiptoes until she was eye level with Jay.

“Tell me one thing,” Jay began, her breath caught in her throat, “Tell me one thing and I'm yours.”

“In time,” the trickster said, “I'll show you everything.” She smiled wistfully.

“Trust me. It’s better that way.”

Jay nodded. “Can I see you tomorrow?”
“Tomorrow,” the trickster scoffed, mock-affronted. “Tomorrow never happens.” Her voice turned sultry as she impersonated Janis Joplin's growly Texan drawl that fit the old god a bit too well. “It's all the same fucking day, man.”

Jay cracked a smile and shook her head, starting to look away at the blue-grey snow near the far end of the lot. She felt her body moving before her head did, and she pulled the trickster into a tight embrace. The trickster tensed, then melted into the hug. Her hands moved from the nape of Jay's neck down, down to just above her hips, where she could feel them shifting nervously, the trickster's fingers locking and parting before they settled in a loose hold.

They breathed each other in like that, clouds of steam surrounding them with each exhale. At the far end of the lot Jay could see shadows start to gather, their skinny extremities struggling to enter the lighted areas as their broad, shovel-like heads pounded against some unseen barrier. She closed her eyes, not to shut them out or invite them in, but to show them who she was—what she could do. To make them understand that under this waning moon, they had no power.

“Do you trust me?” the trickster asked, sheepish and smaller than Jay had ever known her to be, her voice muffled and hot on Jay's clavicle.

“Do I have a choice?” Jay replied.

The trickster pulled away as much as she could in Jay's arms. Her face was every paradox she'd embodied since time immemorial, every promise broken and betrayal turned lesson, every boulder shattered with the force of her grief, every tree uprooted, every god angered, every ounce of hubris and pound of flesh given in the name of obfuscating the truth, of teaching the people how to be. Jay knew she'd asked the one question, however sarcastically, you never ask the beings sent to teach us.

She'd dreamed it so.

“Of course you have a choice. You always do.” The trickster enunciated each word carefully, as if Jay were very stupid, her face angled away slightly, guarded. Afraid.

Jay let the moment hang there exactly as long as she knew to before pressing her thumb into the chubby rise of the trickster's chin. “I do,” Jay said. “Trust you, I mean.” She traced the trickster's jaw idly, pleased when the trickster leaned back into her, apparently satisfied with that answer.

“You shouldn't,” the trickster allowed. “Don't you remember your stories?”

“Yeah, and? I know how this one goes, too.”
“Creepy,” mumbled the trickster, inching closer, “because I don’t.”
“Good. It’s high time one of us neechies surprised you.”
“Shit,” the trickster snorted. “All yous do is surprise me.”

Just as soon as she’d been meant to, Jay closed the distance between them. Though it had been months, years, even, since she’d kissed someone, this was different. This was memory in real time. Jay lost the imprint the dreams had left lying around in her mind’s crevasse the more she fell into the moment. Heat, presence, tension, relief and catharsis swirled around her head, her neck, throughout her entire body as her lips pressed into the trickster’s, fitting cozy. The trickster opened her mouth first, and then they were tangled up in another world, another dimension of warmth and tenderness where no stones stood cold and the land could never die.

They kissed and Jay saw the world as the trickster saw it. Wars raged on overseas as great, rippling beings, flat and grey-green, whipping like flags in the wind, rode both sides until they collided, and swallowed soldiers’ souls whole. She saw them in offices, silently urging each bureaucrat to choose another scapegoat, and rushing to the frontlines as young patriots splurged forth, ripe for eating. She saw these spirits stretched over oil fields scattered with children. Saw them return home with tales of how easily swayed these people were, the greedy ones, how good their minds tasted. Jay saw the war gods and she wasn’t afraid this time. Her mouth was occupied, so her fear dissipated.

She saw ghosts that looked like hazmat suits, their tattered ends dragged along the dirty floors of the subway cars they flopped onto, pulling themselves by the stubs of their elbows, hissing and whining and begging to be heard.

She saw alcohol as a little man, his dowdy clothes and grey scowl so unlike the brief joy he brought. She saw him accepting everything that was offered to him. First, a frat boy gave him his shirt, then the inhibitions needed to keep him from dancing. He gave him his filter next, and the alcohol spirit watched as he humiliated himself. He grew older and gave more to the spirit, mostly things he thought he wouldn’t miss. He gave his car up, which made him angry, but he didn’t like who he was when he was angry, so he offered his anger to the alcohol. He became a sad drunk, a crying drunk. He offered his tears to the spirit, who ate them. His wife walked out on him, so the spirit ate her love. His baby never met him, so the spirit ate their life together. Eventually, the spirit ate the man whole. Jay wept for him, for this man who had no clue what he’d given or why, but she stayed in the trickster’s
mouth, hands tight around her hips. She stayed and she saw multitudes. A single interaction went a thousand ways and launched a thousand realities. She saw the world’s most innocuous choices cause landslides. She saw where the mermaids had run off to and how many big things were beginning to wake. Jay saw it all, felt it all, and knew the moon could tell too. Knew these acts, these choices, were bringing her crashing into her own shoreline. That the force of a kiss could alight the valley of dying stars anew.

***

Over breakfast, Jay remained quiet. Ellen watched her, grey eyes narrow, as if searching for some sign that she’d gotten into the kind of trouble the old lady might live through vicariously. Her blonde hair fell around her in waves, save the shorter part near the top of her head. She’d kept the same mullet since the 80s. She enjoyed keeping things the same right up until she met this kid who everyone claimed to be the Omen, this awful little old girl who spoke to monsters and angels equally, this absolutely haunted buffoon who’d become Ellen’s only living friend.

For a long minute, Jay’s face betrayed nothing, her joy building up behind her teeth in a scream. She finally cracked under the pressure and beamed as she scrunched her nose at Ellen playfully.

“’You snagged,” Ellen said. “I knew it, I knew it. I knew I’d live to see this day.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Jay retorted and took a huge bite of her muffin, “but you’re right.”

“Chew your food,” Ellen chided. “Who was it?”

Jay raised her eyebrows as she chewed her food with exaggeration. Ellen waved her hand dismissively and looked toward the TV. Continental breakfast always tasted better with a healthy dose of daily horror. Her jaw went slack as the latest controversies played out on what she could remember being the show they ran fluff pieces on.

“Do you think they know?” Ellen asked. “Do you think they know what’s coming?”

Two news anchors struggle to interpret a prominent politician’s latest perfectly timed debacle and her heart did that numb little squeeze it always did when she sat in front of a TV.

“Yeah, I think so,” Jay said. “I know so, actually. One of them is like me for sure,
even if he doesn’t want to be. He’s seen up until the third wave at least. The black snake virus. It’s got him pretty rattled.”

“And he hasn’t said anything?”

“I mean, fuck, what’s he gonna say? Hey, you remember me? The guy you trust to give you normal, relatively unbiased news in a divided nation? Total liberal, but you know, who isn’t these days? Yeah, I started seeing horrible visions of zombie corpses filled with oil rising from the Missouri River, you know what I’m saying? And I think it’s high time we oust our current government and just let those clean energy science folks take over before it’s too late.” Jay stirred her oatmeal aggressively and tried to calm down. “No, he’s doing like I’m doing. He’s waiting. He doesn’t know what else to do besides that.”

“You’re not waiting,” Ellen said. “You’re actively trying to make something happen.”

Jay shrugged. Ellen sighed.

“What about the politicians?” she asked.

“What about the politicians? Cherie thinks they can feel it, even if they’re stupid as all get out. She thinks this whole bizarre Idiocracy I-R-L roleplay we’re stuck in has to do with this—this amassing of power. That they’re like cockroaches when you uncover their nest, all running to one corner to hide. Strength in numbers and all that. Except they’re not strong. Not anymore. That’s why they need each other, especially now.”

Ellen knew it was time, no matter what Jay said or did. She too dreamed of the Star People. In her sleep, she sang often to the watcher. She offered herself to it as a conduit, her human eyes in exchange for healing, her mind in exchange for the strength to continue on this journey at Jay’s side. In many ways she knew she held as much from Jay as Jay from her and that this was no way to maintain a relationship. There would come a time when they’d be forced to face each other for what they were.

Sam was at the front desk when Jay checked out. She expected an off-color comment or an excuse to smack him, but instead he handed her his book with a friendly nod.

“I’m glad you didn’t freeze to death,” he said, trading Jay and Ellen’s cards for his weathered copy of Stephen King’s Night Shift. “You’ll like this one, I think. It’s weird.”

They checked out of the Hampton Inn and were gone within the hour, their
station wagon ripping across the icy roads, heading south toward Iowa. Ellen drove while Jay rode shotgun, her seat leaned all the way back as she drummed her fingers against her cell phone.

Naked trees slipped past in a blur of black, skinny limbs with long fingers that reached into the stark white sky in an endless search. Jay could swear she’d seen a few of the shovel-heads here and there, peeking out between the slender trunks. She couldn’t be certain. Her neck hurt from craning and she slumped back into her chair. Just before the road left her field of vision, she spotted a green sign for upcoming cities. The usual near the top, Lime Springs, Cresco, and Saint Lucas—then a series of syllabics spray painted underneath with numbers ranging from miles to moments. The last row of syllabics indicated a place for Jay and Ellen specifically, telling them they’d come upon it in exactly two shared secrets.

Jay slouched as she contemplated telling Ellen this new development.

“I seen it,” Ellen said, as if she’d read Jay’s mind.

After a sustained moment of quiet, Jay unlocked her phone. She scrolled through her contacts until she found it. Not a name, not a number, but a single thundercloud emoji attached to a string of symbols in a language older than her carrier could handle.

Jay started to type her message, keystrokes nervous and careful. Every few letters, she’d backspace, and press her phone against her lips awkwardly as she pondered what to say, how to say it.

Her heart dropped when she saw three grey dots at the top of her screen. Then:

$$\sigma^a \cap \triangleleft \gamma' \zeta, \Delta^a \gamma' \zeta \frac{:-)}{:-)}$$

Jay let her phone slide out of her hands, blushing. *This is my normal now*, she realized, her heart pounding. *This is important. This road, this life, this love, these choices. This is how we’re gonna win.*

She lifted her phone and began to type her reply.
I could start with his hand on her mouth. Or I could explain how now that she's older she's intentionally arranged her life to be dull, so dull that the most daring thing she does is neglect to brush her teeth. How dullness is, to her, a luxury. Maybe start with how her appreciation of dullness came to be. Start with a mother, a street corner, and a man.

Would it have to be that bad?

I could begin with a glass of gin, the ice melted, a dead fly floating in the liquid—except it's not true, because this mother wouldn't allow even a drop of gin to go to waste. Maybe start with how after the gin, comes the Xanax, after the Xanax, the needle, the numbing after the numbings, layers of batting, protection for the mother's shrunken heart. But what about the girl? We don't even know her name.

Start with the man's hand running down the girl's skinny back as if they already know one another. Her mother winking and saying, “I'll see you in an hour.”
The girl wondering if she believes this. But no, back then she would have been too panicked, she'd only be wondering that now.

It was the speculation in his eyes that made him scary. A dusty fan swirled on the ceiling of his room. Afterwards, she was promised ice cream and sometimes even got it. Ice cream sundaes brought her real pleasure and still do. The sweet, cold, and creamy, the warm, thick fudge, the quivery red snap of the cherry.

Maybe her mother never sold her to men. Or perhaps she just did it once. Maybe it just looked like that to me forty years ago when I passed that street corner on my way to the bank and saw the mother, the girl, the man. Maybe I'm just trying to find reasons for the look on the girl's face, trying the reasons on her like outfits on a paper doll: the abused child complete with hunched shoulders, averted eyes. Should I just make her an aspiring cheerleader, ashamed of her mother? Could I do that? Because maybe it wasn't what I think, though I can't help it, I can't help thinking that it was.
Prayer Under Eyelids

Kartik Sethuraman

I am not a priest.
I am not a doctor.
My mother is a string of notes
she left me. My mother is my rosary.
I move her organs one by one
through my fingers. I find a recipe
for cooking pigeon peas, a letter
from my grandfather stationed
in Colombo, a warning to clean
the gutters before the autumn rains.
I lose track of the next word—is it
safekeep—is it keepsake. The flame
hugs the wick, burns low, is secret.
I hold the smoke in my chest, fall
asleep at the altar, catch fire.
I am a harpy. I will be killed when
I cannot trap the sloth. Our slowness
is almost virtuous. My mother wraps
her wing around me, promises me
there is warmth at the close.
This way, everyday, I lose some parts
of her. Our threads unwind. I need
to repair us, rebuild us. I trace her
footprints, now feathers, now
falling leaves. If in the expanse
I reach her, restore her—will she
be herself again—will I.
In the end, we are left with only each other. We can't help it. Our lives are congruent. The first image of us is an over-exposed photograph, light so blinding we disappear inside it and live there, basking in our own absence. We learn one another’s ancestries, and that is how we learn one another. Biology births anthropology. We are chromosomes. We tell the past *Come back*. What comes back is a snapped tree branch left to dry in a field without rain. We lock eyes at first because a newspaper tells us to, then because our locked eyes hold that silence of museums. We speak in bell tones. We kiss in papaya, tequila. We don’t understand the fantasy genre because things more fantastical exist in the crooks of our elbows, under the nails of our pinkies. We watch each other walk away because our body walking lets us feel nostalgic, lets us feel like we are opening a window and smelling winter in all its crisp and broken songs. We are not afraid when we cry. We love to cry. We practice making one another cry by pretending we are trained psychiatrists. We are most afraid of stock phrases. Even *stock phrase* is a stock phrase and we're terrified that we're brainwashing each other every time we speak. We would never say, for instance, *that’s the way it is*. We don’t know what *the way* is, how *the way* can hold all possibilities of *it* and *that*. There is a danger in saying *I love you*. We think it is thin and monochrome as paper and when we say it we shred each other and leave the strips of ourselves all over the floor. So we invent new ways of saying: *you are the crispest cucumber in the cucumber patch, you are the sneakiest cat, I am a bottom feeder and you are a lucrative spot for a bottom feeder*. We communicate best by way of quiet pangs from everything that’s ever left us. One day we are walking and we step into our origin, into the first pair of bodies warm and bitter as cloves burning. We're in the heart of a dark chokeberry and run like juice. We now know we are the most basic beings ever to be born. We begin making things. We make love. We make grief. We make all shades of shock, frothing relief. We make cadence. We make but cannot articulate this. It wheels into creation as devastation like hurricane or solar system. And in the space our making leaves behind, want wriggles onto land and fractures with breath.
(Previous) Stefana McClure, The Crying Game, 2010
Morgan Levy, We Stopped Listening, 2017
If from the mouths of archangels bitter words fell
if from your bitter words I conferred character upon
my discipline, if from your words disordered and confused
to the point that I couldn't help but remove every disorder from
my mind good things might be born, if from your hardheadedness
flowers might be again born! if from my tiredness a refrain
of love might sound, if from bitterness something new might
be born: if from my madness a new victory might flow
if from my disorder a new order might be born, if from
my prayer might spring a certainty...I would have
found you. If in the palm of your hand there were the
perfect coin—If from the love of discipline were born
the soldier's step that doesn't win but withdraws without
firing a shot. If from the light might spring a new
sun flaming with love and silences...

Amelia Rosselli, from War Variations (1964)
The lyric exploded. One of its pieces, the conjunction "if", gives birth to an obsessive ontological movement—one that will never find a solution, a resting certainty. The verses fall, and language inevitably shakes at every descent. Words are abnormal organisms that tumultuously filter the thinking flux, giving back a distraught image of it.

The subject's leaps will never prove effective in ascending towards the T/truth, and the poem is destined to follow the motions of a plethora of relentless, mundane thoughts.
Divinity and order are pure aspirations.

The “if”, in Rosselli, measures the space of the Self—its resistance, its existence—against language.¹ The epistemological afflatus can only turn into a hypothetical effort.

The “if” sustains the bundling of poetic images, which are here attending (as Hugo Friedrich would say) the “festival” or “the collapse of the intellect”.²

¹In Italian “if” is “se”, while the reflexive personal pronoun (third person) is “sé”. The difference lies in an accent.
Language becomes a pulsing, wounded body that finds its meaning only in itself. The absolute need for poetry does not hide the deformity of its progress.

A series of fragments: the scattering of the “if” speaks of a lyrical corpus that imploded under the weight of its own stylistic features. Each and every of Rosselli’s variations is the echo of a lost unity.

We participate, when reading Rosselli, in a stripping of the flesh of language. The pulverization of a hymn.

It is here, in a dark and rarefied space where perception can only be imperfect and tortuously deductive, that the enigmatic absence of a sole meaning becomes allegorical representation.
The immediacy of a possible symbolism has succumbed, and the page becomes the theater where Passion, Absence, and Disorientation are the only characters worthy of attention. In this difficult abyss, forgotten by meaning, Rosselli is not able to name the world and bears witness to the catastrophe language has had to endure. This lyric is deeply hers and irremediably ours—words are condemned to always say something else, to skid away from their objects, to modulate themselves on themselves.
Sugar Cane

Jasminne Mendez

Everything begins and ends with cane
Sugar fields water with the blood
Of my papa and my beloved again & again

But the machete cannot name
the spirits trapped beneath the mud
or anything that begins and ends with cane

It’s not the blade that causes these phantom pains
But my hands warm with loss & flooded
with visions of Papa & my beloved working the fields again & again

Wildfire will harvest the cane into flames
& infected wounds will splinter & split blackbuds
burning with everything that begins and ends with cane

Lostlimb, Boneash, and unburied Sugargraves
Rum the earth & hold a grudge
Against men like papa & my beloved again and again

If not the machete, then who is to blame
For why the soil swallows and tugs
at everything that begins and ends with cane
like papa and my beloved who fall with the stalk again & again
“For some months, I have traveled and traversed the border in every sense of the word. I have seen, investigated, and inquired about the needs of the population. To the Dominicans who were complaining of the depredations by Haitians living among them, thefts of cattle, provisions, fruits, etc., and were thus prevented from enjoying in peace the products of their labor, I have responded, 'I will fix this.' And we have already begun to remedy the situation. Three hundred Haitians are now dead in Bánica. This remedy will continue.”

-Rafael L. Trujillo
October 2, 1937
I walk through the west campus past the Identity Conditioning Center on my way to HR. The arrival of first-year students fills the summer air with a cacophony of excited prattle. Some arrive with their parents, who step out of four-door sedans, luxury SUVs, and sensible station wagons to assess their latest investment. Dieted, insurance-covered, and beaming with pride, they roam the campus with eager teenagers, surveying what they hope will be a stimulating, challenging, and, most of all, safe environment. Accomplished in parenthood, they’ll rest easy knowing their greatest achievements will be among like-minded peers, well-traveled citizens of the world on their way to gainful employment. A summer of (sometimes criminal) delights behind them, the new students unload bags and suitcases carrying all they’ll need for the months ahead. The latest personal devices and accessories, summer and winter wear, light and heavy garments for every occasion, (carefully concealed) juuls and pods, contraceptives, a wide assortment of (prescription) narcotics and stimulants, minimalist Japanese stationery, exquisitely curated bullet journals, consent conscious kits, museum tote bags, affirmation posters, drug purity kits, and the preordered institutional sports apparel. The only items not relegated to storage are the proudly displayed revolutionary ensembles, the latest in tastefully subversive footwear, necessary affectations of blue collar sensibility, signifiers of shared righteous indignation (ideal for virtue signaling at meetings, marches, protests, happenings, and other demonstrations of noncommittal political engagement). Some will major in Telegenic Reaction Studies with minors in Interpellative Solidarity, others will opt for the more practical correlates in Sublation Automation or Performative Philanthropy. My walk to HR is occasionally interrupted by
staff from the Office of Student Integration; identifying my off-brand skin tone, they engage in practiced expressions of compassion from behind eager smiles. Sweat dripping down my face, I nod and grin, slipping away before my (vague) accent arouses further commiseration. I pass the main building, the buzz of cicadas in the air, walk through beautifully manicured lawns scattered with red oaks, weeping willows, swamp white oaks, and cherry trees maintained with (obscene amounts of) locally-sourced water, the price of a green campus. I'm instructed to go around an affinity space where a self-love poetry reading is being held, the ceremonial gifting of flowers just underway. When I finally find my way to the beautiful collegiate gothic style HR building my shirt is almost soaked through. The relief of AC fills me with unparalleled joy. I approach the HR Specialist and explain my situation. I've been erroneously lumped in with global students and have received several notifications informing me that, due to my global status, I must make arrangements to procure a student visa and a temporary Social Security code, when in fact I am, for all intents and purposes, a US citizen. Her sensitivity training kicks in and her agreeable expression twists into a grimace of institutional guilt. Her sleep-deprived eyes are now wide with horror. Almost shaking with (self-gratified) outrage, she insists that the matter will be resolved with the utmost bureaucratic swiftness. I tell her that I don't mind the inconvenience, that unconventional status is the unifying ideology of my fading republic, that our too-ironic-to-be-sad designation of “commonwealth” has been successfully integrated into the post-national imaginary, that the countless humiliations and indignities have become normalized to the point of yearning. I tell her with grim sincerity that I wouldn't have it any other way, that anything less would feel like betrayal. She laughs an uneasy laugh—I laugh too.
Barring One
Thylias Moss

fuel rods
kept cool
as english cucumbers
for which these window bars
could be shadows
the shape and substance
of generalities
every block has access blocked
the same way

safety in numbers
power of plants
stalks, roots
tar pit
spines
haute couture girders
maximum altitude with them on
robotic marionette
from planet Erector Set

bride of Kronos!

bride of guitarra, alien guitarra
lover, lover
Señor Guitarra Extranjera es mi amante

my fingers swim steel rivers
once upon a time the metal was liquid
to get here

I measure with you
to measure you

¡MI GUITARRA IRREGULAR!
¡O mi guitarra irregular!

from here to where you striate Saturn

we danced in the same ring in Mount Airy and ever after were married to that idea about each other

this winter you are steed bracelets so big your curve is not visible

COSMIC HULA HOOPS

rings to stabilize my head keep it on straight

straight sections of curved strings

straight roads of curved earth
tonight the antidote is sonatas

an even bluer decanter of Listerine antiseptic

seen through a fresh bottle of Aqua Velva

Charlie Byrd’s Blues Sonata

she can look no further
Poetry & Politics
Brian Clements

a thin line between a song and a wail
da low stone wall between a park and the grave
da barb-wire fence between farm and killing fields
a broken yellow line halfway between
best word/best order
and a fist full of teeth
Boyhood with Holiness

Ugonnaora Owoh

I taste a boy when he is the holiest thing in the universe & get drunk & ask God to make me too as holier than the moon stares at me like an unredeemable sin takes a good wait in my soul & wants to get unleash & be the bitch.

O sweet God, I could still be that black scrapped ghost that signs the subpoena of the guilty. I could still be the holiest thing alive, you can touch me. I could be the newest saint.

I set the language unleash, mathematics can only be the dictator. I set the language unleash, God knows all the formulae for holiness. He could make me one of the angels, I could labor as the
church choir, I could sing, I could be the cherub. I could cry all day & forget I taste a boy’s cum in the surface of what harbors my language. I could forget he calls me bitch all the time. I could forget we didn’t say beautiful or love, they are overrated. I could forget I still pray like every tree in the forest pray for spring & spring pray for rain, & rain pray to God to give it freedom. To call it the miracle.

I press my ears to God’s mouth & listen to how silence is holiness. Something beyond us still mute, how the soul lives in the darkest silence & how God is silence & can only use the criteria for silence for holiness.
What is it to be I versus we. One of the axioms we gleaned from those who came before concerns the plurality of nature. Everything exists in more than one form—the hand, for example, repeated ad infinitum through the primate line. From the Carlito syrichta to the Chlorocebus aethiops we see these fleshy appendages of nerved muscle and bone. Variations on a theme. Twins, for most people, seem to be nature's exception. Whatever mirror image strangers see in us, we can feel the aberrations in our bodies.

Recently, we have been thinking about those people from long ago: our parents. They were teachers, of a sort. They raised us in the Northwest, the property line straddling two states. We remember the logging road that ran up to our childhood home. Thick pine flanked the sides of the cabin. A mat of needles crowned the roof; a tuft encircled the tin chimney pipe, black smoke corkscrewing into the air. Sometimes, we would sit on the roof and huff the smoke, breathe out wisps, half-choke, blacken our throats. Our heads would spin, our eyes water, but the worse came with the prickle in our throats, the eruption of vomit spat over the side of the roof. Our mother would scold us. Each time we climbed down and stood in front of her, she grabbed our arms, dragged us inside, pushed us to our knees. She pressed her thumbs against our closed eyes. The pressure, she always said, reset the behavioral section of our brains.

At night, in our shared bed, we signed our secret language. We touched each other’s palms through a series of taps and swirls of our fingertips, timing pauses as punctuation. We mulled over our mother’s words, her assumption we were disobedient. She believed we should be like her, part of the family unit—which, really, was our father’s cabal. He marooned us, said homeschool would teach
us everything we needed to know. His oft-repeated lecture on the degenerate art of Michelangelo usually devolved into misrepresentation: a father should never touch his son.

When our father crossed the property line for a supply run, we slipped out of the back of the cabin and charged through the forest. Our mother called after us, her words echoing through the pine. We spent the first night shivering on a bed of moss, the second holding each other down by the river. Eventually we found a dirt road and thumbed our way out of the state, then hitched a ride with some farmhands heading south for work in Texas. We lay in the bed of the truck, hidden beneath tarps. We heard one of the men explain he was from Michigan, the town of Port Austin, near the top of his thumb.

We rumbled into a truck stop. Some of the men were headed to Abilene, the driver Corpus Christi. We wanted to see water, the oceans that led to places beyond our country. Inside the diner, we talked with truckers about routes to Mexico. They hawed about transporting us across the border. They shook our hands and wished us luck. Outside the diner, we watched the traffic thunder past. Our logger rides were heading in different directions. We unclasped our hands, a temporary goodbye, allowed our minds to think I and I.
Rory Hamovit, Landscape Artist
Words I Would Use in a Sonnet for You

Deborah A Miranda

One-lane paw-paw pasture green graveyard oak
columbine forget-me-nots cardinal creek
deer water-cress blueberries May seeds smoke
acorns chanterelles cornbread hummingbird cheek.
    river leaf dawn tea wild roses dirt
garden red-bud scone sunflower harvest
braid kiss iris truck map wineberries flirt
mountain cabin dogs nasturtiums forest.
compost kitchen cast iron breeze nap kiss
jeans honey chiles loner tattoo stars
dilettante rhyme walk persimmon kindness
pomegranate promise cinnamon scars.
moon silence walk hand evening tender home
quilt Pinot indigo dove whisper poem.
Verse Drama Two: Surveyor, 1849

Kimberly Blaeser

Somewhere in the middle
of naming greatness
one nation tumbled
into the waters of history
or into the deep end
of an unfamiliar mythic pool
where lakeness too
finds something resembling
itself a semblance
brought about by
dissembled fragments
of assembled desire
in other words
someone son of hugh
or frankly
perhaps
a river himself
turned story
into some
thing simpler
chart or name:
mendota.
In Conversation with Simona Bondavalli

Simona Bondavalli, Associate Professor and Chair of Italian

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON? (UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS, RECENTLY PUBLISHED WORK.)

I am working on a series of articles that investigate the role of early television documentaries in shaping national discourse in 1950-60s Italy. I am particularly interested in the way in which television made possible documentary series: multiple-episode journeys that explored the country at a time of great transformation. With the declared intent to educate viewers and foster a sense of national belonging, these travelogues celebrated material and cultural progress. However, they also advocated for the preservation of local traditions endangered by rapid modernization. Food globalization and environmental change were emerging concerns, which moved filmmakers to work on television. I am finishing an article on what I believe is the first Italian food television show, a sort of 1950s version of Anthony Bourdain’s *Parts Unknown.* My next project is on eco-documentaries, another genre that received significant impetus from industrialization and urbanization in the 1950s and 60s.

WHAT BOOKS ARE YOU READING NOW? WHICH YOU WOULD RECOMMEND TO COLLEAGUES, OR STUDENTS?

I am reading Jill Lepore’s *These Truths: A History of the United States.* I am not reading it for work, but because I find it necessary at this time to go back and reflect on how our institutions were created and how they evolved over time. I have studied the history of the United States at various stages in my life, but now I am viewing it differently. It is both a factor of having lived in the US for over twenty years, and of being forced to reconsider, in the last two years, some of the truths and freedoms I had been taking for granted. Lepore’s book does not hide the contradictions in American history. Instead, it helps us see the current threat of authoritarianism in the light of a national history that is far from a triumph of democracy. I would recommend it to both students and colleagues. Despite its hefty size, it is highly readable.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BOOK TO ASSIGN AND DISCUSS WITH STUDENTS?

Lately I have really enjoyed discussing Clara Sereni’s *Casalinghitudine (Keeping House: A Novel in Recipes).* Given its unique format, which uses recipes to structure a first-person coming-of-age narrative, I assign it in food studies courses to discuss the relationship of food and memory, identity, subjectivity. As we discuss the text, we choose some recipes and cook together, to better appreciate the material effects of writing. These cooking sessions produce a deeper understanding of the narrative, and are a great bonding experience for the class.

WHAT IS THE LAST GREAT BOOK YOU READ OR RE-READ?

I recently read *4321* by Paul Auster. I am a fan of coming-of-age stories, and this one truly captures the notion that life is the result of choices, both our own and other people’s. The complex structure of the novel, where the protagonist’s life is told four different times, in parallel stories, each
explore the consequences of different choices, contributes to the pleasure of reading. I couldn’t put the book down, and when I finished it, I was ready to start over.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE FILMS OR TELEVISION SHOWS BASED ON BOOKS?

I watch a lot of films and television, so I find it impossible to pick a favorite. I am looking forward to watching *My Brilliant Friend*, the television adaptation of Elena Ferrante’s best-selling novels. I truly enjoyed the books, and I am excited to see an Italian series (it is the first collaboration between Rai and HBO) being successful on the American market.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE BOOKSTORES, IN THE UNITED STATES AND ABROAD?

I love and support independent bookstores wherever I go, and I particularly like bookstores that have a history as gathering places for writers. Shakespeare and Company in Paris, for instance. My favorite in the United States is City Lights, in San Francisco. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, its co-founder with Peter Martin, has devoted his life to poetry and activism, championing new authors both through the store and the publishing house. The Beat Generation, forever linked to City Lights’ history, is one of my life-long interests, and on my many pilgrimages to the bookstore I fantasized about their conversations. I also bought a lot of books.

WHO’S YOUR FAVORITE FICTIONAL HERO OR HEROINE?

I would have to say Cosimo (Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò), the protagonist of Italo Calvino’s *The Baron in the Trees*: a twelve-year-old noble boy who one day climbs onto the oak tree in front of his family’s house and never comes back to earth. Initially his rebellion seems just a childish whim, but gradually he enters a new dimension, a life which is determined by very practical needs, but also somewhat magical. I first read the book when I was twelve years old and was fascinated by Cosimo’s determination and by the respect that his non-conformist choice earned him in the local community. Later I came to appreciate him also as a beautiful metaphor of the writer.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE LITERARY MEAL (A DESCRIPTION OF FOOD IN EITHER FICTION OR NON-FICTION)?

The meals described in Pellegrino Artusi’s *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*. Originally published in 1891, “L’Artusi”, as it is commonly known, is arguably the most successful cookbook in Italian history, but also a concise encyclopedia and a collection of colorful anecdotes about dishes, cooks, and diners from different regions. Many of the dishes included are still part of the traditional Italian repertoire. Recipes and menu suggestions were intended for home cooks in middle-class families, with moderation and thriftiness in mind, but reading them today we are astounded by eight-course meals that included five different meat or seafood entrees.

IF YOU ARE ORGANIZING A PARTY, WHICH FOUR WRITERS AND/OR SCHOLARS, DEAD OR ALIVE, DO YOU INVITE?

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Italo Calvino, Clara Sereni, and writer and translator Fernanda Pivano. They are all great storytellers and conversation promises to be fascinating.
In Conversation with Eve Dunbar

Eve Dunbar, Associate Professor of English

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON? (UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS, RECENTLY PUBLISHED WORK.)

I’m currently working on a book on the power of monstrous behavior and radical refusal in African American women’s writing.

WHAT BOOKS ARE YOU READING NOW? WHICH YOU WOULD RECOMMEND TO COLLEAGUES, OR STUDENTS?

I’m reading James Hannaham’s Delicious Foods for an article I’m writing on the exception to slavery allowed by the 13th amendment. I’m always reading Saidya Hartman’s Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteen-Century America (1997) because it’s so important to how we understand freedom constant illusiveness for black people in the US. I’m also reading Sheila Heti’s How Should a Person Be?

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BOOK TO ASSIGN AND DISCUSS WITH STUDENTS?

I enjoy teaching Colson Whitehead’s Zone One. It’s a post-apocalyptic, zombies novel in which the US government attempts to reestablish human habitation in lower Manhattan. It’s a really bizarre text that asks readers to think about why and what we hold onto from our pasts.

WHAT IS THE LAST GREAT BOOK YOU READ OR RE-READ?

I’m not sure I believe in “great books”; all books have some sort of potential for analysis and discussion. That said, the last novel I really loved reading was Donna Tartt’s The Goldfinch. I was shocked how much this book would hit me. I spent a year telling all my friends to read it so I could talk about it with them. The novel struck me by forcing me to consider how we encounter the traumas of our childhoods and can we ever really recover from great loss…plus there is an art heist. The novel really has it all.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE FILMS OR TELEVISION SHOWS BASED ON BOOKS?

“Game of Thrones” is my favorite TV show based on books. I haven’t (and never will) read the novels upon which the show is based, but I am addicted to the show.
WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE BOOKSTORES, IN THE UNITED STATES AND ABROAD?

I love going to Square Books, which is located in Oxford, MS. It’s one of the best independent bookstores in the country.

WHO’S YOUR FAVORITE FICTIONAL HERO OR HEROINE?

It’s completely cliché but when I was a teenager I fell in love with reading Victorian novels, especially those of the Brontës. I especially found a kinship with Jane Eyre, as a child without parents.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE LITERARY MEAL (A DESCRIPTION OF FOOD IN EITHER FICTION OR NON-FICTION)?

As a kid, I always wished I was Charlie from Charlie and The Chocolate Factory, so chocolate is my favorite literary food.

IF YOU ARE ORGANIZING A PARTY, WHICH FOUR WRITERS AND/OR SCHOLARS, DEAD OR ALIVE, DO YOU INVITE?

I would, of course, invite Toni Morrison, Richard Wright, Kiese Laymon, and Zora Neale Hurston. It would be spectacular to see them all argue about the aesthetics and politics of Black American fiction.
Ekphrasis Hybrid: Portrait of the Mermaid in a Mirror

L. Shapley Bassen

What do you know about Modernism? The Process Art Movement? How do you feel about Modern Art? You don’t have to answer to see that MY OCEANOGRAPHY is a collection of excellent poems, but it helps to know something just as it does to wear those headphones in a museum or visit a gallery with cognoscenti. Harriet Levin has written the poems about and in the voice of major 20th century artist/sculptor Eva Hesse. If you know Hesse’s biography and work, you’ll be hard pressed to detect artist from poet. If both are new to you, the twin experience will be a journey to depths.

Some of the poems share their titles with Hesse’s artworks. They mirror this mid–20th century artist’s passionate rebellions in her art and marriage. As a child, Hesse survived cataclysm [Nazi Germany] and catastrophe [parents’ divorce, mother’s suicide] but soon found recognition and success before her tragic death in 1970 [at 34, brain tumor]. She had gone from Cooper Union to Yale School of Art and Architecture where she became Josef Albers’s favorite student. In 1961, she had her first show and met a sculptor she quickly married. Bradley Cooper’s latest incarnation of A STAR IS BORN may cause you to mentally cast Lady Gaga as Eva Hesse; she married a successful artist whom she eclipsed. Also as topical as #METOO outrage, many of Levin’s most incendiary poems describe Hesse’s 60’s marriage and breakup.

Two poems laid out as prose read like Furies on fire. Bumming a Cigarette describes Hesse watching her husband light up another “girl… They’re glowing, the two of them, they’re so attracted… Resting my hand on one of the power saws until I see how close to the blade I’ve placed it, I sashay toward him, pull a cigarette from his pack and snap it in half.” The six page Chain Polymers is a diary-like report of a trip to North Arizona where mushrooms and mayhem of various sorts ensue. “All I could think about was my husband cheating on me… I was a vagina with teeth, an evening person.” It ends with Hesse’s rebellious assertiveness: “I hid my hands behind my back, afraid of what I might do with them and why was I the only one who heard her father say from his seat in front of the TV, Can’t you walk like a lady? I was going
to clamor out of there, make as much noise as Devonian fish growing new fingers and hands from their fins to breathe in air."

By 1963, Eva Hesse had her first one-woman show, followed by an offer to her husband that took both of them to Germany where opportunity and anguish followed. She read The Second Sex. In Berlin, she saw the marble sculpture of lusty, punished rule-breaker Laocoon, whose title she took for her first large sculpture. Laocoon is also a poem in the collection, a flash summary in metaphor of the artist’s recurring process & material.

Laocoon
1966

All touch,
That which springs

back, how grass was invented,
strands and strands

and wind,
so that things could start moving on their own

without being detected,
free even as a gaze.

Something shadowed,
like a caterpillar feasting on leaves.

I wanted to be a boy
who sat turned in the direction of his mother,

felt his way into sleep,
played with her hair.

I fidgeted, couldn't map
the noises that pulled me.

I twisted a strand, coiled it
around my finger, like rope tied

to mooring, and tugged on it,
forcing it to break.
For Eva Hesse, the union of art/life was even more existential than aesthetic. She emphatically asserted no separation between herself and the art she created. Sometimes quoting from Hesse's Diaries [for the title/poem], always channeling the artist, Levin succeeds in honoring this fusion so much that she/her poems are indistinguishable from Hesse. Her life/work here become 21st century ekphrastic objects for poet Levin, joining a tradition that includes 19th century Keats's Grecian urn, Browning's Last Duchess portrait, and William Carlos Williams's 20th century's rain-glazed red wheelbarrow & white chickens that so much [still] depends upon. More recently, Rebecca Wolff titled a poem Ekphrastic [https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/90198/ekphrastic]. There's even a California journal: http://www.ekphrasisjournal.com/. Ekphrasis resonates in this new collection, but often obliquely enough to prompt a nagging question: where is the poet?

The book, divided into ten labeled sections, contains the title poem MY OCEANOGRAPHY in section V [“Deep Is Form”]. Though it was not a title for any of Hesse's work, it epitomizes the artist's manifesto:

My second impulse is to keep it [“a strand of algae”] as a totem of subterranean life, a scrap chiseled from things that are meant to sink. Deep is form, like a snail that burrows into silt, shell growing out of sludgy cravings.

The recurring images of Hesse's life/art in Smoke in X [“The Road Between the Rims”] are arresting:

If I could use smoke as a medium,
I'd have no trouble creating great art.
...
I tilt my head back and imagine
a cigarette pressed against my lover’s lips.

Three more left in the pack.
This is the last of him.

Smoke fills my mouth,
passes down my throat and into
my lungs where it infiltrates
every cell in my bloodstream.

I smoke past the redline on the tip,
his body’s imprint –

jawline, nape, neck –
tuck the stub into my jean’s pocket

for his scent to seep through,
linger, live in my pocket as a remnant,

as I throw open the car door,
step forward and out of him.
PBS recently devoted an episode of *American Masters* to Eva Hesse. Among cognoscenti, she’s to 20th century art what Louise Gluck is to contemporaneous/current poetry. I wonder what poet/critic William Logan [who described Gluck as “a stand up vampire”] might say about Eva Hesse/Levin’s collection. With an artist as young as Hesse was, the adolescent impulse is strong [and intentionally irritating], but of course the epochal breaks of the 19th-20th centuries inevitably found expression in all art forms, re-examining and avoiding assumptions and expectations. Artists can be canaries flying down into mines or diving underwater. Those who see/say/do differently offer possibilities tradition can’t. What survives redefines reality. Truth is Beauty, but it’s been Ugly for over a century now. We’re long overdue for a [Ferlinghetti] “rebirth of wonder.”

*MY OCEANOGRAPHY* makes me wonder about Hari Levin’s connection to Eva Hesse/art. Her predicaments and exertions move me, too. A lot of Hesse’s art looks like a predictable reaction to the forest fire/destruction that was the break the Modern Era had with The Past. Like the result of any major cataclysm [comet, forest fire, volcano, tsunami, war] the removal of the overgrowth [for good/ill] results in opportunity, a kicked anthill rush to rebuild. New things grow/evolve. Modern art retested basics, experimented with materials/process, all the while in various ways mirroring/expressing fragmentation, anxiety, of loss, change, despair, hope. Wrestling with received forms is always a Jacob/Angel bout that results in limping with a new name. But it also calls to mind what Picasso said when he first emerged from the Lascaux caves, “We have invented nothing.”
In the modern era, the [Romantic] emphasis on individuality/novelty ironically resulted in 'schools' of similarity. Much modern art looks like repetitive culs de sac. "Confessionalism" crowded 20th century poetry. Levin writes about and in the voice of Hesse, and while the poems are confessional in form/content, they are not Levin's confessions per se. They make you wonder where she is or isn't in the words. They are familiar modern lyrics, without meter, with emphasis on ellipsis and oblique comprehension. Modern poets often chose consciously or not to assert/write poetry like mathematics, as a foreign language that only initiates/adepts can speak, possibly to make readers learn to think in poetry as a unique point of view reality. "So much depends upon/a red wheelbarrow...rain" could be modern poetry’s $E = mc^2$.

Harriet Levin’s MY OCEANOGRAPHY is a voyage to surprising depths. You are called upon to think about [1] the artwork that shares the titles of many poems; [2] the biography of the artist, especially the crisis in her marriage; [3] the language/knowledge in each poem; [4] the motives/presence/absence of the poet; [5] your own reactions to the vivid metaphors and events of each poem ... maybe more, but that's more than enough. Most of all, the hybrid tension of Romantic self-absorption [by the artist] and Classical self-effacement [by the poet] compels reflection. It's a mirror of the artist, of the poet, and you.
Grief Sounds
Farisa Khalid, George Washington University


How does one give voice to grief? What can one say about the loss of a loved one? Years after his death in 1861, after nearly twenty years of marriage, Queen Victoria said that the loss of her husband Albert was like the “flesh being torn from her bones”. When Ralph Waldo Emerson’s son Waldo died in 1842 at the age of five, of scarlet fever, Emerson wrote that he felt so bereft that, at moments, he thought he had lost the capacity to feel altogether. “Some thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. . . . I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature.” In all moments of grief, there is the gap between the dreaded vision of loss and the actual experience.

In A Passing Bell: Ghazals for Tina, the American poet Paul Kane contends with the loss of his late wife, Tina, who, after a painful two-year battle with ALS, died in 2015, in Australia, at the couple’s beloved country home. A Passing Bell comprises of a hundred and thirty-three ghazals (including a prologue and an epilogue) that chronicle the passages of grief in its various manifestations: melancholy, despair, disbelief, anger, rage, frustration, crippling helplessness, but also, gratitude, warmth, and resilience. Like other modern American poets, like Adrienne Rich and W.S. Merwin, who have been fascinated by the structural clarity of the ghazal and its mystical roots and Eastern origins, Paul Kane uses the ghazal form to reflect on the lessons that death teaches us—its shattering truth that forces us into humility and self-recognition. “I am ashamed to think of who I once was,/drunk on the cheapest wine the bars served,” Kane confesses in “Ghazal 10” (7). “Now, what do I see? Your love of the pure act, innocence/at the heart of what passes for simple.” In “Ghazal 8” Kane ruminates on the familiar tropes associated with Persian and Urdu ghazals, the metaphor of intoxication, literal, spiritual, and metaphysical: “If I were Hafiz or Ghalib, I would get drunk/on wine, but I have only water in my home now.” His self-reflection is late Yeatsian in its lacerating scrutiny: “I cut a poor figure of a poet, my obscurity/well deserved. . . .I live in an oasis where the wells are drying up./Soon, I will have to venture out into the desert” (6).

At certain moments, when Kane reflects on a group of trees he had never noticed
before until after Tina’s death, or her garden in bloom, Australian bushfires, a slow-moving herd of cattle, or stars in the night sky across the bush, Kane’s melancholic vision evolves into transcendent reflections on the ineffable strangeness and largeness of life. Each couplet of the ghazal is an explosion of feeling and sharp, reflective thought, almost like an Imagist poem. The ghazal, often ending with a bayt that contains the poet’s (in the case of these poems, the deceased beloved’s) name, seems to read like a message from beyond the grave. Poetry can often forge an almost supernatural-like bond between the world of the living and that of the dead. Paul Kane’s ghazals, often addressed to Tina, constitute his eternal link to his wife and intellectual partner where his grief is expounded in the form of his restorative mourning.

Like the poets Galway Kinnell and Mark Strand, and in the tradition of Robert Lowell and Robert Frost before them, Paul Kane’s poetry is reflective of a certain American, East Coast meditativeness (Kane has been a poet laureate in Orange County, New York, where has lived for many years). Poetry, that I, for one, have always associated with an Emersonian flintiness and intellectual clarity. His other renowned poetry collections, _Drowned Lands_ (2000) and the remarkable _Work Life_ (2007), are filled with poems that unfold like complex, compacted structures of precision and craftsmanship, like Bauhaus architecture, or a resplendent modernist coffee pot by Ilkona Karasz housed at the Metropolitan Museum in New York (where Tina Kane worked as a scholar and conservator of tapestries), the subject of one of Kane’s poems in _Work Life_. _A Passing Bell_ is Paul Kane’s most confessional and emotional work; this collection of poems takes a breathtaking leap into the dark and clarifying realm of pain and hope. Reading _A Passing Bell_ within the context of Kane’s body of work is a little like being confronted suddenly by Mark Rothko’s _Black, Red and Black_ (1968, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, Spain) ensconced within a room of Richard Diebenkorn’s _Ocean Park_ paintings. But grief does that to you. It is difficult to capture all its despair and terror, but Kane manages exorcise his loss and frustration through his art, which makes the collection all the more poignant and powerful.

To end my review, I will share excerpts of some of Paul Kane’s ghazals that I found moving: a ghazal at the beginning of the collection and one towards the end.
Ghazal 16

Cut your hand with a sharp kitchen knife, shock, blood and bone take all your mind.

Then pain—stinging, then throbbing—an agony to touch.
At what point does the healing begin?

This wound isn't healing. It moves, seems to grow, taking on a coloration, a sharpening along the edges.

Time will heal. But if there is no time, only now, the blood doesn't clot, the ache aches.

In the late summer garden, morning glories proliferate strangling the roses, winding up, pulling them down.

Dear Tina, the garden's gone wild, with seed heads dropping in dismay, as if regret were a thorn under the skin.

Ghazal 94

There's nobody now between me and death, so I wait for it, counting my days.
My calendar on the wall, with its pretty pictures, is an actuarial table.

I've even ordered my headstone, so both our names can appear among the dead.
Those are my people in the cemetery, where I visit to tend your flowers.

Ungathered like a flower you were, so I fill our house with them to remember.
No, not to remember. You don't remember what you never forget. You don't need to remember to breathe or contract your heart, you just do, you're just done to.

Only the flowers show signs of remembrance. They wilt slowly and die.

Perhaps I should plant a cypress, as they used to, for a symbol. But what use have I of symbols when the thing symbolized confronts me continuously?

Dear Tina, my life is one long letter to you that's waiting to be posted, waiting to be signed and sealed, stamped, then dropped into a box.
Poetics in the Antropocene: Review of Adam Dickinson’s *Anatomic*

*Sara Santos, Stony Brook University*


Recently, writers and scholars have had to grapple with a massive representational problem: how does one write about the Anthropocene, the slow progression and phenomenal scale of which make it so difficult to interpret as an individual experience? Canadian poet Adam Dickinson’s collection *Anatomic* constitutes an effort toward answering this question. Looking into the ways in which chemicals, toxins and bacteria have penetrated his body, both damaging and becoming an intrinsic part of his biological being, Dickinson produces a biopoetics that attempts to deconstruct the relationship between the inside and outside, human and nonhuman, living and inanimate matter, revealing that there is no clear material or epistemic boundary between what is the self and what is other—because the outside has made its way in, and the human is now composed of “countless nonhumans who insist for their own reasons on making [us] human” (10). *Anatomic* is also profoundly steeped in and informed by the current culture of biomonitoring and surveillance, as each poem is the product of thorough testing: Dickinson drew blood, collected samples of his urine and feces, swabbed bodily orifices for bacteria, to assess the extent to which petrochemicals have penetrated and permanently changed our biological identities. The result is a fragmented and anxious composition that attempts to tease out what it is like to live in the Anthropocene, to experience ecological change at the atomistic level of one’s own biology.

*Anatomic* continues the project initiated in Dickinson’s 2013 *The Polymers*, a work that seeks to examine the relationship between poetry and plastics, to interpret, through literary signifiers, the role that plastics play in redefining the self in the context of our petroculture. However, *Anatomic* takes a much more personal approach to the subject: instead of tackling the Anthropocene and geo-ecological destruction as a global event, Dickinson’s collection makes this a deeply personal experience: the Anthropocene is not
only around us, showing itself in the rising atmospheric temperatures, melting ice caps and massive restructuring of ecosystems; it is a pervasive force that has reshuffled our bodily composition and, as a result, has changed our own ontological and affective sense of selves. How does one write the/in the Anthropocene? Through engagement with one’s own body and bodily functions, Dickinson’s poems suggest.

The composition’s form and organization reflects the author’s chaotic progress as he searches deeper and deeper into his biology for answers about the world around him. Dickinson uses the hormone as a compositional method, the homonymous long poem running throughout in sections, attempting to organize the fragments of prose, verse and image that seem to float unmoored and disjointed in each page and across the book. Appropriating extracts from other texts—Dickinson attributes the language of crowds he uses in *Hormone* largely to writings by Gustave Le Bon, Elias Canetti and Jodi Dean—which he then combines with autobiographical details and historical references, *Anatomic* plays with the notion of boundaries as conceptual and material spaces of exchange. The body is not a solid border that keeps the chemicals and bacteria safely on the outside, but is instead a permeable membrane under constant threat of infiltration and dissolution. The combination of words and image throughout the collection, particularly in the last composition titled “Metabolic Poetics” (129-144), signals the representational challenge of the Anthropocene, which only a multimodal, interdisciplinary project can tackle. Part of the book’s irregular form consists of an attempt to give the nonhuman matter inhabiting our body some type of linguistic signification; but much of it is also an effort to stretch out poetic language to its limit of intelligibility, leading to poems such as the one titled after a urine test result, “Monoethyl phthalate (urine): 6.46 ng/mL,” where Dickinson attempts to identify a unifying meaning in a series of homophones.

Dickinson’s empirical epistemology is evident in the detailed autobiographical prose, interspersed with the poetic assemblages, as he describes the chaotic and damaging process of harvesting his own bodily samples, his veins “a mess” as he draws seventy-six vials of blood “from both arms and yank[s] on the tourniquet with [his] teeth” (16). Each text in the composition denotes a tension between the violating external gaze of the “industrial powers” (9) and corporations that seek to consume and control the individual, and the subject’s own manic desire to fully know and interpret himself as a biological and affective
entity within a much larger event. In this context, the anatomic self becomes a metabolic text with a biochemical history that one must decode. In order to fully know oneself, and by association the human species, Dickinson seems to argue, we must first investigate what genealogies, human and nonhuman, constitute and are constituted by our bodies.

One such instance is the prose section titled “Δ” (delta in the Greek alphabet, which coincidentally stands for “change” in mathematics), which establishes a connection between the individual and current geo-economic structures through the fat that is in his body. “Fat is an archive of this historical moment,” Dickinson claims, providing stability to a body that is constantly “moving through climates and calories, catastrophes and capitalism” (31). For Dickinson, fat—but also the chemicals and bacteria in our bodies—functions as a sedimentary trace of industrial and commercial practices, socioeconomic divides, military and geopolitical relations, both containing a collective history of the human and integrating the human within a larger ecological narrative. The author’s use of the language of colonization and imperialism, which is especially present in “Mouthfeel” where Dickinson’s “sweet tooth” becomes intertwined with the history of sugar as an organic weapon of occupation and enslavement (26), positions our bodies within a medical discourse that is also social, economic, geopolitical and ecological. Contamination carries history into the body of the subject, making him both perpetrator and a victim of anthropogenic violence.

Permeating Dickinson’s composition is the tension between an expurgation of the contaminants that threaten to swallow up the individual and the recognition that this contamination is necessary to the condition of being human in the 21st century. “Galactic Acid” acknowledges the complete dissolution of the boundaries—symbolic and literal—that separate the outside from the inside, the subject from the surrounding environment, signaling a possible genealogy of belonging that connects all animate and inanimate matter. In this early section, Dickinson converts his mother’s vaginal flora into “an antenna” and “gram-stained parabolic reflector” (21) that diffuses his being into deep space and connects him to all of life. The conflation of subject and world, however, fills Dickinson with anxiety over the potential for further contamination: the recognition that the “outside doctors the inside” (9) results in an obsessive-compulsive effort to eliminate all traces of chemicals and history from his biological makeup. Dickinson develops an obsession with walking, a strategy to sweat
out the toxins, and starves himself to keep any more bacteria from traveling into his body. Even breathing becomes an act of violence to himself and the air around him: “Over the surface of a world whose merchandise circulates within my cellular respiration, each exhale was injuring the air. I didn’t consent to carrying these chemicals inside me” (75). Out of this conflict emerges a poetic form that is fragmented, disjointed, that both recognizes an empathetic bond between all contaminated bodies and wants to define itself as a single, unified entity against the microbial populations that inhabit it.

Dickinson’s strength lies in the palpable anxiety, the fear of contamination that leaks from every page, every fragmented thought, onto the readers, forcing them to reckon with the knowledge that their bodies have too become sites of sedimentary contamination, tracing in the composition of their blood and the radiation residue in their teeth (67) a historical record that places them both at the outset and deeply embedded in the Anthropocene. In the tension of the outside become the inside is the crux of Dickinson’s project: to write the Anthropocene is to accept one’s deep vulnerability to the forces outside of one’s body; to write the Anthropocene is be written—filled in—by the Anthropocene. Just as the human body functions as a permeable border that incorporates the outside into the inside, Anatomic constitutes an effort to encompass the complex and overwhelming current geopolitical and ecological conjuncture.

Does Dickinson successfully fulfill this project? Not entirely. The author’s effort to compose a biopoetic network of anthropogenic belonging, to tease out the individual experience within the global, sometimes fails to acknowledge the wide economic and resource disparities between developed and developing countries, as well as the irreparable damage that the history of colonization and the current neoliberal economies have done to the developing nations of the Global South. Although Dickinson is careful to position himself as a privileged white male invariably speaking from a limited standpoint, his claim that “the chemicals and microbes are in us all” (66) reads as ingenuous and is ultimately dissatisfying. Specifically, one of the sections, titled Specimen, sees “citizens of disadvantaged regions” as luckier in some sense, because their proximity to industrial pollution has made them immune to certain illnesses to which wealthier people, by virtue of their privilege, are vulnerable (66). Here, and in other sections of the book,
Dickinson’s project to produce a shared experience of contamination fails to tackle the deeply problematic power dynamics between North and South that inform discourses of the Anthropocene.

While *Anatomic* at times falters in its effort to contain and represent the current geologic epoch as a deeply personal yet global experience, its project remains a fascinating attempt at a biopoetics where the author, in trying to discover himself through the socioeconomic, chemical and ecological links that constitute him, thinks through what it means to be alive in the age of anthropogenic action. Readers interested in the Energy and Environmental Humanities, as well as petroculture studies, will find in this composition a starting point to considering what a poetics of the Anthropocene might look like. The Anthropocene, Dickinson argues, is within and makes up all of us, and in so doing, it connects all beings, human and nonhuman in a network of chemical and bacterial exchanges. *Anatomic* represents but one of many possible literary representations of this network.
Book Review

Anna Ciamparella, Florida SouthWestern State College


Slavery in the United States permitted slaveholders to treat individuals in bondage as a personal property. Because they were nothing more than human chattel, slaves were easily sold or purchased and arbitrarily punished and killed. The horrifying social dynamics characterizing the institutionalization of slavery, together with the ways in which slaves were appraised and their ideal market price, have been analyzed at length in many studies now available to us. Daina Ramey Berry’s *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* contributes to this existing literature, but finds a special place in it because not only she endeavors to delve into the slave’s monetary value—thus, supplementing researches dealing with “what enslaved people experienced” (author’s emphasis 4), but she also examines what she calls “soul value,” that is, the value of slaves after death. As it focuses on the inner experience of slaves, one can suggest that *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* attempts to illustrate the emotional side of slavery. According to Berry, “soul value” is “an intangible marker that often defied monetization yet... represented the self-worth of enslaved people” (6). It too indicates, however, that slaves were intimately familiar with their appraisal and knew that this latter did not necessarily coincide with their sale price, which rather “reflected the market value of a person at a specific moment” (41).

Berry takes pain to collect the testimonies of several slaves to exemplify the meaning of “soul value.” These first-person narratives help the reader to envision how enslaved individuals felt as they understood their fiscal value. The author explores “soul value” as a category that speaks to slaves’ inner (spiritual and personal) worth. Moreover, by
Berry’s analysis “hinges upon capitalism and commodification as well as human emotions and expressions of love, loss, and grief” (5).

The Price for Their Pound of Flesh comprises an introductive section followed by six chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter focuses on how the appraisal of young enslaved women was linked to their capacity to procreate (11). Slave women who were projected to carry multiple pregnancies and give birth to numerous children were generally appraised for a higher value because through them slave owners could gain additional labor sources. To maximize the exploitation of black women's body, slaveholders paid close attention to the gynecological health of the female portion of their property. Berry suggests that “[t]he field of gynecology grew out of slavery and, in particular, enslaved women’s bodies” (72). They tended to have children against their will, and when pregnant, they could be “advertised for sale or exchange due to breeding” (20). Moreover, enslaved women were often used as collateral for loans, became “the subjects of legal proceedings in ownership disputes” (12), and their public auctions were widely publicized in newspapers.

The second chapter of the book focuses on the commercial value of little black children. In 1854, Rachel, a one-year-old slave, was sold at a public auction for $140. The vendue experience was extremely traumatic and left such an emotional scar in their life that, even when they were sold at a very young age, slaves were able to remember their first sale. A case in point is that of Harriett Hill who recalls that she was sold for the first time at the age of three (34). It was likely that “by age ten, children understood that they were properties,” Berry writes (35). The third chapter considers the value of slaves during their mid- and adult life. Generally, the price of slaves decreased “around age twenty-six for females and early thirties for males” (94). According to Berry’s data, “between 1771 and 1865... the average appraised values for women and men age twenty-three to thirty-nine were, respectively, $52 and $747” (95).
Anticipating the investigation developed later in the book, in this segment of the text, Berry suggests, that even upon death—which in the nineteenth century may have occurred to enslaved around age twenty-five (130)—slave's bodies were used and commodified. Upon death, slaves acquired a “ghost value” and their cadavers were often dismembered and burned. Sometimes, samples of their body parts were even kept as souvenirs to remember events involving mob violence and public executions (94).

Chapter five investigates the value of the elderly and the superannuated, as Berry calls them. At this stage, slaves were so experienced that they knew exactly how to deal with their owners. Sometimes, they even dared to interact with potential buyers and interfere with their sale “to challenge and question their own soundness, casting doubt in the minds of potential buyers” (129). In their community, elder slaves were either treated with great respect or were forced to live in isolation and received almost no care (132-133). Those still able to work used to perform several tasks and served as cooks, nurses, midwives, gardeners; additionally, some of them were also healers and diviners (133). In some occasions, aware of their current value, elder slaves who could not be sold tried to buy their freedom. When, on the contrary, slaveholders decided to sell them, their appraisal was approximately $268 for women and $433 for men. Superannuated as they might have been, they still risked being separated from their family (135). The last chapter of Berry’s study explores slaves’ postmortem journey and how their corpses were used in anatomical studies as well as the procedure various doctors and universities across the country used to go through to obtain and preserve the cadavers.

*The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* sheds light on one of the most painful moments in human history. Recognizing the emotional baggage that slavery produced, Berry demonstrates that slaves had a great awareness of their predicament, monetary value, and surrounding.
Caesarean

Our time is thrust open
revealing at last to day
the famous secret finally conceived
in long rehearsals of loving.
Unripe for breath
and missing home's heartbeat,
can it brace its hobbled steps
to win the race
over every perjured god
and bend its tender arm to dig
their favorite sins a common grave?
I cannot say,
but looking through the prism
of its kiss of every color,
I think I see its history
in all of our tomorrows.

Laura Villaseñor
Dream I

by Lucy Ackman

In this dream I am
dead again apparently
I stumbled into a sharp piece of art
and it killed me, I can't help
but laugh at my own gracelessness
at least I've aroused the artist

And the economy
the tickets to the show
are now sold out thanks to my body
and the homicidal art
the security guard was about to shriek
Excuse me, Miss, no, don't touch...
but I was dead too fast to be

Confronted I got away
with it, all of me
touched the art
now I'll be known at least
I'll be daring, I remember
thinking I am
more daring dead than alive

In this dream my mom
is still waiting in line
for the toilets, we had gone
to the museum together
I had gone to the sharp art
alone, it was mirrors spliced
I saw myself cut
as if Picasso failed me
instead of rearranging my features
he shocked me apart

Annual Vassar Student Review / Vassar Review
Contest Winner: 1st Prize
ARTS

INBAL ABERGIL
Photograph
16x20, 20x24, 30x40"

Photograph
16x20, 20x24, 30x40"

Photograph
16x20, 20x24, 30x40"

Photograph
16x20, 20x24, 30x40"

ROGER CAMP
Sunbathers, 2017-2018
Photograph
16"x20"

YAELE EBAN
Against the Backdrop 2, 2017
Archival Inkjet Print
10x6"

Against the Backdrop 7, 2017
Archival Inkjet Print
10x6"

Against the Backdrop 14, 2017
Archival Inkjet Print
10x6"

RORY HAMOVIT
Interior View, 2016
Archival Inkjet Print
30x24"

American Dessert, 2017
Archival Inkjet Print
30x24"

Landscape Artist, 2017
Archival Inkjet Print
24x30"

MORGAN LEVY
We Stopped Listening, 2017
Digital Inkjet Print
20x84"

STEFANA McCLURE
Secrets and Lies, 2010
Wax transfer paper mounted on Dibond
39⅜x60⅞"  

Tokyo Story, 2010
Wax transfer paper mounted on Dibond
39⅜x60⅞"

The Crying Game, 2010
Wax transfer paper mounted on Dibond
18¼x28¼"

Redacted, 2010
Knitted paper
25¼x25¼"

TIM YOUD
Drawing of a Painting, 2019
Colored pencil and graphite on paper
14x17"
INBAL ABERGIL
Inbal Abergil is a visual artist and an educator. Coming from Israel, a culture where loss, conflict, and trauma are substantial parts of daily life, had a profound effect on her artistic vision. Abergil work has been exhibited internationally in museum and gallery exhibitions in the US, Belfast, Northern Ireland, South Korea, Amsterdam, and Israel. Most recently Abergil is the recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Grant (2018). She received her MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University (2011) and is an Assistant Professor of Photography at Pace University.

ROSALIEE BERTOLINO
After having spent most of her life just north of San Francisco, Rosaleen Bertolino is now living in Mexico, where she is the co-founder and host of Prose Cafe, a reading series in San Miguel de Allende. Her fiction has appeared in Gravel, West Marin Review, the Chicago Reader, Storyscape, the New England Review, and many other fine publications. She is currently completing two collections of short stories.

KIMBERLY BLAESER
Kimberly Blaeser, who served as Wisconsin Poet Laureate for 2015-16, is a Professor at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee and also on faculty for the Institute of American Indian Arts low rez MFA program in Santa Fe. Her fourth collection of poetry, Copper Yearning, will be released from Holy Cow! Press in fall 2019. Blaeser is Anishinaabe, an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and grew up on White Earth Reservation.

HANNAH BONNER
Hannah Bonner’s poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in So to Speak, Asheville Poetry Review, The North Carolina Literary Review, Tinderbox Poetry Journal, The Pinch Journal, and Two Peach. Her essays have been featured in VIDA: Women in the Literary Arts, Bustle, and The Little Patuxent Review.

ANNA CIAMPARELLA
Anna Ciamparella holds a Ph.D. in Comparative literature from Louisiana State University, an M.A. in English from Florida Gulf Coast University, and an M.A. in Italian Studies from Florida State University. Her areas of research are Modernist Poetry, Multiethnic American and European Literatures, Diaspora, Migration, and Atlantic Studies. In her dissertation titled “Development of a Literary Dispositif: Convening Diasporan, Blues, and Cosmopolitan Lines of Inquiry to Reveal the Cultural Dialogue Among Giuseppe Ungaretti, Langston Hughes, and Antonio D’Alfonso,” she (re)examines literary representations of specific ethnic identities to demonstrate that 1) they are osmotic cultural paradigms, and 2) they can be treated as cosmopolitan categories. As she interconnects the experience of the African Americans and the Italians in North America, she shows that we can understand the narratives of these communities as a 'connected history.' Her current investigation focuses on the involvement of the African American culture in the history of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean and the way in which African American culture connects with its African European counterpart. Anna Ciamparella teaches Humanities and English at Florida Southwestern State College.
**VALENTA DANI**
Valeria Dani is a recent recipient of a Ph.D. from the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University. Trained in Jerusalem and at La Sapienza in Rome, her research stems from the analysis of the rhetorical device called *anadiplosis* and traces its presence in a collection of Italian texts ranging from the Middle Ages to twenty-first century. Her work posits a new configuration of the relationship between poetry and the field of rhetoric, one which sets Italian literature in an innovative dialogue with Jewish and Christian mystical practices. Valeria Dani is currently a Visiting Lecturer of Academic Writing at the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines and a proud and active member of Cornell’s Prison Education Program.

**GION DAVIS**
Gion Davis is a poet from northern New Mexico where she grew up on a sheep ranch. Her poetry has been featured in *Bad Nudes Magazine, Five2One Magazine* and *Sybil Journal*. She has received the Best New Poets of 2018 Prize selected by Ocean Vuong as well as being shortlisted for the *Peach Magazine* Gold Prize selected by Morgan Parker. She is the co-founder and co-host of Dead Bird Reading Series and she currently lives in Northampton, MA, where she is seeking her MFA in Poetry at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Gion can be found on Instagram @ starkstateofmind.

**YAYL EBN**
YYael Eban (b. 1985) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She was born in Israel and raised in Indiana. She earned an MFA in Photography, Video & Related Media at the School of Visual Arts in New York, and a BA in Art History from Indiana University. Her work has been exhibited most recently at the Cleveland Print Room (OH), UrbanGlass (NY), and Angell Gallery (Toronto, ON). She has been featured in *Hyperallergic*, *Artsy*, and *The FADER*. Eban has been an artist-in-residence at the Studios at MASS MoCA, The Wassaic Project, and Vermont Studio Center. She is a member of Tiger Strikes Asteroid, a non-profit network of artist-run spaces. Additionally she has spent the last six years as archivist of the Peter J. Cohen collection of vernacular photography—a dream job of cataloguing over 50,000 found photographs.

**RORY HAMOVIT**
Rory Hamovit is an MFA candidate for photography at the Yale School of Art. He received his BA in photography from Bard College and has since shown his work internationally.
**FARISA KHALID**

Farisa Khalid (Vassar, Class of 2005) is a Ph.D. candidate in English at George Washington University. She specializes in late nineteenth-century, twentieth-century, contemporary British literature, modern drama, and postcolonial literature. Her work has been published in *The Journal of Popular Culture, Animation, The South Asian Review, Asymptote,* and *PopMatters.* She has a Masters in Art History from New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts and writes essays on nineteenth and twentieth-century American art for Khan Academy.

**EMILY JONG**

Emily Jong grew up in Seattle, before moving to Berkeley for college, where she studied public health and creative writing. She currently works in San Francisco in the healthcare industry and writes on the side.

**CLEO KEAHNA**

Cleo Keahna is a writer, visual artist, actor and 2019 Native Filmmaker Initiative fellow from the White Earth Nation of Ojibwe. His stories tell of fearsome figures, the concept of home, what it means to be a wasteland, and indigenous survival. Cleo currently resides in rural New York with his family.

**CHRISTOPHER LINFORTH**

Christopher Linforth has recently published fiction in *Fiction International, Notre Dame Review, Day One,* and *Descant,* among other magazines. He has been awarded fellowships and scholarships to the Sewanee Writers’ Conference, Vermont Studio Center, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

**STEFANA MCCLURE**

Born in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, in 1959, Stefana McClure received her BA in sculpture from Hornsey College of Art, London (1980—1984) and continued her studies in papermaking, with a Monbusho Scholarship, at Kyoto Seika University, Kyoto, Japan (1993—1995). Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Josée Bienvenu Gallery, New York (2008, 2011, 2015, 2018); Bartha Contemporary, London (2009, 2013, 2017); Sleeper, Edinburgh, Scotland (2017); and Arróniz Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City (2015). Her work has been shown in many museum exhibitions and is included in numerous public collections including The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, MA, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany, and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

**JASMINNE MENDEZ**

Jasminne Mendez is a Dominican-American poet, educator and award winning author. Mendez has had poetry and essays published by or forthcoming in *The Acentos Review, Crab Creek Review, Kenyon Review, Gulf Coast, The Rumpus,* and others. She is the author of two poetry/prose collections *Island of Dreams* (Floricanto Press, 2013) which won an International Latino Book Award, and *Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e: Personal Essays and Poetry* (Arte Publico Press, 2018). She is a 2017 Canto Mundo Fellow and an MFA candidate in the creative writing program at the Rainier Writer’s Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University. You can find more info about her and her work at [www.jasminnemendez.com](http://www.jasminnemendez.com).
DEBORAH A. MIRANDA
Deborah A. Miranda is the author of *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* and three books of poetry; most recently, *Raised By Humans. The Altar to Broken Things* is forthcoming from BkMk Press. She currently teaches literature of the margins and creative writing at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. She is mother to Miranda, Danny and Megan; grandmother to Georgia, Jhonathan and Malia; wife to Margo; and member of the Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation. Deborah blogs at [www.badndns.blogspot.com](http://www.badndns.blogspot.com).

A.W. MORENO
A.W. Moreno was born and raised in Iowa. He currently lives and works in Beijing.

THYLIAS MOSS
Thylias Moss is 65, has had 14 books published and has won some significant awards, including a MacArthur Genius Grant and two nominations for The National Book Critics Circle award, but she is most proud of *Falling in Love with the man*, a Spoken Word Artist, who the poem is about. He is 71 and has 16 books published. Love is not just for the young. Forthcoming is a collection of Poetry “Shawsheen Memorial Broom Society” in which he is My Primary Collaborator.

UGONNA-ORA OWOH
Ugonna-Ora Owoh lives in Nigeria as a poet and model. His poems has been published or are forthcoming in *British Confingo* magazine, *Matador Review*, *Pangolin Review*, *Stockholm review of literature* and elsewhere. He is a 2019 Stephen A DiBiase Poetry prize international award winner & a 2019 *Blue nib Chapbook* Commended. He is recently featured on *pride magazine* & *Puerto Del Sol* black voices Series.

ROMEO ORIOGUN
Romeo Oriogun is the author of *The Origin of Butterflies*, selected by Kwame Dawes for the APBF New-Generation African Poets Chapbook Series. His poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Connotation Press* and *Brittle Paper*. He was the 2017 winner of the Brunel International African Poetry Prize, a fellow of the Ebedi International Writers Residency and currently a Du Bois Fellow at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, and also an IIE-APF fellow at Harvard University.
KHALIL ANTHONY PEEBLES
khalil anthony peebles is a poly-math, a multi-disciplinary artist working with varying mediums and media. his work investigates the relationships between spirit and space, the black body, sexuality, society and the urban experience. weaving together these artistic intentions through writing, dance, movement, acting, painting, arts-admin, education, and song; his work speaks to a diverse audience and varying communities.

EDUARDO RODRÍGUEZ SANTIAGO
Eduardo Rodríguez is a freelance translator and occasional writer from San Juan, Puerto Rico. He is currently the Spanish Language Fellow for the Hispanic Studies Department at Vassar College.

SARA SANTOS
Sara Santos is a PhD candidate in English at Stony Brook University, and holds an advanced certificate in Teaching Writing. Her work focuses on posthumanism, biopolitics and ecocriticism in late 20th and 21st century literature. In particular, she examines the boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies, and the way contemporary narratives work to redefine the concept of the human through the intertwining of capital, technology and environment. She is currently working on her dissertation, which traces trajectories of becoming post/human in Global North/Global South literature in relation to the proliferation of spaces of security in neoliberal discourse, that work to redefine the distinctions between categories of life and being.

KARTHIK SETHURAMAN
Karthik Sethuraman is an Indian-American living in San Francisco. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in sPARKLE & bLINK, Kestrel, Hematopoiesis, Berkeley Poetry Review, and New Southerner, among others. Recently, he was shortlisted for Glass Poetry’s 2019 Chapbook series. Along with English language poetry, he spends time reading and translating poems from the Tamil diaspora.