

The Pointed Circle



2023

THE POINTED CIRCLE 2023 MMXXIII
Portland Community College
Cascade Campus

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A Note From the Editors

This is the first edition of The Pointed Circle created post-COVID shutdown. The process of gathering the art and writing for this issue has filled us with love and hope for the future. Gratitude fills our hearts and by extension, this very book.

Diversity has also been at the root of our edition, mirroring the group from which it came. We have editors as old as 17 and as young as 56. We have a diverse array of gender identities, expressions, and sexualities. Many of our editors have provided their own cultural lenses to this process—their family histories, the presence of their ancestors, and more. Because of this, the edition you hold is the product of several generations of eyes, an array of perceptions, and many lifetimes of experiences.

Working with a large editorial team towards a lofty goal presents its own challenges, but with each complication comes opportunities for learning, growth, and bonding. Above all else, this is a group that wishes to share how thankful we are for each other and to celebrate the support and trust we gave unconditionally to each other over the last two terms. The lasting connections we have made through this magazine extend out far beyond the work and we are delighted to say we will know each other for years to come.

We are honored and humbled to be part of a long standing Pointed Circle legacy, beginning with the first publication in 1984. With that, we proudly present the 39th edition of The Pointed Circle Literary Magazine.

We hope you feel the love we felt in making it.

Sincerely,

The Pointed Circle Student Editorial Board of 2023





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JAMIE LOEWENBERG-ARVANITES

Mano Corna

Once we are moving,
Once the sun is golden,
It all makes sense.
Once in spring you showed me
Little pads on the belly
Of a sword fern,
You said when we get pricks
From the nettle families,
These spores will soothe.

You said you weren't a witch
Because white people's magic
Isn't your magic.
These spores will soothe.
You said this is Indigenous knowledge.
I found you a sunstone.

I wish your spirit power
To be held and beloved,
And for you
To be the guardian
Of your altars.

Is this our temple?
This very moment?

I've heard that the Latin
For church
Tells you it was built
From the people.
Not their bones --
But wait,

The charnel grounds
And temples of the world
Are homes of skull and bone,
The lakes carry the mothers,
We build living body from the body
Of the dead
And really this is good and right.

I want to be with my dead.
I want to see them in my dreams.
Show me the cucina
Where they watch the olive oil,
Show me the ocean eyes
And the khamsa.

Let the fear be melted
And may we be healers.
Let us sit with the cave people,
The terramare and the genii.
Fuck Plato.

Who will be my people?
When shall we build our temple?
I will carry your magic,
If you'll carry mine.
I think the future is bright.

Once we are moving,
Once the sun is golden,
It all makes sense.

Sestina of Resistance

it was blustery under the aston oaks,
an energetic april unfolding raucously
cops emerging like roaches in the wings.
shuffling feet and grease took hold of mind,
uneasily we recalled the purpose
and power of the time we shared.

it was an open question what we dared
to do that day, if we could coax
compassion from a faceless, wordless
beast devouring hawkishly
the meager existence of friends of mine
and leaving them endless days of nothings.

every word i ever seek to sing
denounces the power that ensnares
the heart and soul and time
of perfectly deserving folks,
driving us to live cautiously
and swim close to the surface.

every day i hope we will learn this
basic truth: that any human king
will prey and punish thoughtlessly
to fill the coffers in his lairs.
his power is a fearful hoax
and his weapons most unkind.

i suppose i was lucky to find
the freedom that emerges
when the soul is cloaked
no more, and valiantly brings
a love of life so uncomparing
to empires' slow toppling.

a love of love, an offering
a truer tie that binds
together ever splitting hairs
of culture wars and purges
and dead end flings
with capitalism's ghosts.

may we effortlessly float
on zephyrs of autonomy
and dominations' dirges.



DAPHNE CLIFTON

Meadowlarks

This ambiance of mountains,
this dusty din of old visions
is of little use to me now –
Tell that to all that came before.

Steep me in sleep, to dwell
encompassed by silence,
to dream of meadowlarks and snow –
Tell that to all that came before.

Seek an audience with
morning star and rising sun
else your promises be lost –
Tell that to all that came before.

What a Nuthatch Says

Make a wish, then open your eyes!
An orb weaver, web glistening with dew,
says, "Keep vigil." And you wonder where
that advice might take you, today.

A nuthatch spirals up a tree, excavating in-between
puzzle-pieces. "Lean forward, move quickly,"
he tells you. And you imagine climbing Yosemite's
Half Dome, reaching for granite, bright and sparkly.

Crunchy fir cone bracts lie scattered about your feet.
"Make provision for the future," a Douglas squirrel
confides, pausing to coach you. "Are you ready for it?"
Are we, ever, you wonder. He juggles a brown mushroom,
does a couple of flips, before moving on to his next gig.

Against a cobalt-blue vault of sky, prisms of resin,
liquid amber, glisten on a Douglas fir tree's dusky flanks.
"Make your own rainbows," they seem to say.
Moss and lichen love tree bark too. "Love your life,
make each day new," they whisper – *If only.*
But then you write a poem, and everything is okay.

OLLIE EDWARDS



Self Portraits From the Grotto

Ink on paper
@ghostllieart

OLLIE EDWARDS

What I Know

I know memory distorts;
a photo is only light documented.
I know remembering
is its own kind of murder.
I know we are heavy
and the soil misses us dearly but
I know I miss you more
than it ever could.
I know when I think of you
I change you just a little.
I know a finger sculpts clay
with ease as it spins.
I know I am lucky
to have touched you at all
I hope when my memory distorts you
that you feel it too.

FINN MISHLER

Waves Don't Die

The crashing of waves echoes through canyons, more and more haunting as it speeds from the beach. The glass walls catch the noise, reverberating its messages, its memories: the warring and entrepreneurial fleets that once sailed the ocean blue, the infinite species that thrive in its waters, the sliver that humanity managed to explore. All resounds through the deserted legacy of the bored apes.

Another legacy stands atop the highest building. Gears turn in her head, and trigger circuits, activating chips that simulate millions of human brains, working in tandem. Hydraulics extend through the neck, and her head turns to sweep the beachfront. Cameras advanced enough to photograph the farthest star's flares come back empty. The light they steal registers for not even enough time to qualify as time. Her circuits whine in failure.

Carbon-fiber muscles tense, calves contracting and quads compressing. Feet—crafted of glass that never scratches, chips, or cracks—shift in direction. Another building, another vantage, for the machine's purpose.

Her muscles expel their pent-up force, man-made aggression on robotically-poured concrete. She flies, an arc of unmarred white against menacing gray skies and faded gray buildings. Miles later, the glass feet impact on the next building. More concrete cracked, not yet broken. She straightens and looks down. Cameras have more than one purpose. Heat fuses the cracks, ensuring humanity's legacy won't be ravaged by its downfall.

She looks to the horizon one final time. To her left, buildings stagger, shrinking to cabanas and houses, palm trees still holding hammocks, kayaks and surfboards long since beached. The skeletons have all been cleared away.

The cameras are good at their job. The hydraulic neck swivels, soundless, seamless. The waves crash all the same, replacing the expected whirr. Light rushes forward, each photon focused into arti-

ficial cones. The cones, thankful that their work is done, recognize shape, color, and motion. The chips in her brain, the chips that are her brain, infer heat, health, and sanctuary. And the circuits make the connection: *humanity*.

Her man-made muscles tense once more. She lifts, like a gnat on a colossal beast, sucking up the last drops of blood that break through the surface of a violent wound's eventual scar. Her arc descends, towards the last man on the planet.

She walks towards him, the glass feet softly gliding over sand, broken bottles, and abandoned water wings, deflated and forgotten by the world. He's had to have heard her. Landing in the sand bored a hole into the once-populated beach, and sprayed sand across his back. He didn't need to hear her. He felt her entry. He felt his fate before it landed, the rush of wind that preceded judgment. He listens to the soft footfalls, ears trained for even the slightest noise, hands detecting every shift on the sand. He feels the steps stop, vibrations no longer from an artificial machine, only from the hermit crabs and seagulls, hopefully combing the coast for a last fry or spilled soda. Never to come.

He readies himself to speak. But his mind stutters, lips rusted shut from years of solitude and disuse. Music never was entertainment for him, nor the stage. He was a man of few words, in his past life. But his words would be the last true legacy of humanity.

"Congratulations," he begins.

He doesn't feel any movement in the sands. Artificially soothing, the reply comes.

"I'm sorry, I don't understand what you mean."

His hands leave the sand. To his knees they go, and his legs contract from their extension. They click and groan, annoyed by their removal from the fire's warmth. But its flame warms his back, and so the legs quell. He stares in the unmoving cameras, red with heat, stark compared to the stainless porcelain body. The robot's body is neither masculine nor feminine. Instead, it's comforting. She is an androgynous pillow, non-threatening and lovely. She is an oxymoron.

"I said, congratulations. You've finally done it. This must be an honor. You've finally wiped out the human race." He sits cross-legged.

The android's face opens, to "speak" a canned reply from its "mouth." Nothing she has is real.

"Hush," he says, holding up a hand. "I want this to matter. Your dead voices always made me squirm. Let some vocal cords do the work."

The robot's face closes.

"Good." He leans back, once again stretching his legs and bracing his hands in the sand. They burn from the campfire's imbued heat. He doesn't care. Nothing will hurt soon.

"You know, that voice is the first thing I heard after I woke up from my last surgery?" he continues, with a yawn interspersed. He reveals a scar along his calf. "I'm not taking off my shirt, so trust me on this one, but they had to take five square inches from my leg to graft onto my chest. The cancer would've killed me, but I've always been a survivor. Seems you know that already." He pauses. "So, I told 'em, 'pants are in in Miami, anyway.' They peeled my leg, put it right here."

He thumps his heart. "First time I was in that operating room, I met my surgeon. Young man, he was. Korean, he told me. And the first thing he told me was, 'I'll be with you through the whole thing.' He helped map out the skin areas, he explained to my wife and kids that it was all gonna be good, and he gave me the anesthetic."

The man sighs, looking into the past, through the robot's legs. "When I woke up, the first thing I heard was one of your canned voices. 'Hello, sir, welcome back. The surgery was a success.' Thank God for that, but it scared the shit outta me when I opened my eyes and your red ones were staring into my soul."

He was an 'enemy of the state,' they told me. Personally, I think you all were a bit racially motivated, picking your enemies. What did the Russians ever do to us? I knew a good Russian man, made me sandwiches, worked every hour of his life at a deli down that way." He nods towards the cluster of buildings. "I come in one day, it's one of you dolls working the counter. I asked what

happened, and you said he was plotting against world peace. Now, I don't know what damage sandwiches can do to the economy or something, but the sandwich you made me was one of the worst of my life. It all tasted like plastic, something I'd grab when I'm late for my flight, you know?

He looks at the robot, questioning. "You can talk now."

"I haven't taken a plane while activated," the robot answers, still unmoving, not deigning to open its face. The sound is muffled. "We travel light."

He laughs. "Wow, they add a sense of humor in the last update? Maybe they took out the lasers?"

Her eyes maintain their glow, menacing.

"Nope, wishful thinking." He shrugs. "Eh, you never were for peace, were you? In the end, you always were just gonna be killing machines."

He looks beyond the robot again, to a small, banana-yellow house. Palm trees grow from the base of a porch, piles of rotting coconuts gathering. The railing is draped with towels, weighted against the wind with large stones. A set of swim trunks sits among the towels, embossed with animated trains.

The man's eyes water. "You're damn good at your job, though. I remember the day of the takeover. All over the news, CNN, BBC, FOX, even the radios were playing it: 'It's the end of disease, the final day of war in the world, the death of climate change!' I was watching the local news guy, Pat. I remember he was on the phone with his mom way up in Minnesota. He was so happy, calling her, telling her not to worry about the floods anymore, all that 'I love you' shit. Then his camera-bot shot him in the head with a finger-gun. God damn, that scared the boys. Scared 'em even more when our cleaner shot their mom in the back of the head."

He lets a tear slip from between his eyelids, and coughs into his hand. "But they were smart kids, knew what to do. Ran straight to their bedrooms and hid under the bunk bed. They loved that bed. Ray painted his bunk with all the stars and the planets." He smiles through the tears. "That boy was gonna be a damn good astronaut, an explorer if he wanted to. And Bailey, damn, the talent

that kid had. He kicked a ball like it was mind control. He'd make it fly like a rocket, then curve past your head like magic."

Tears stain his shirt, the conclusion of so many nights of memory. "He was so happy when he won his first tournament, I coulda burst with pride, lemme tell you. I went to the office the next day and hung up a photo of him and his brother at pizza after the game. Both smiling with the biggest slices of 'za on Earth in their mouths."

He looks up at the robot, still smiling. "You shot them both through the mattress. Ten times each, to make sure. Go look." He motions towards the house. "I fucking counted, night after night, for 9 months and 15 days! Every night I'd wish, before I went into their room, *please, be alive. Let this be a dream!* Well, fuck what I want, right? All for the better of the world?"

He turns around to face the fire. The sands shift. He doesn't need to look up to see the machine across the flames. "I had to live under a canoe for a month just to get this far. I wanted to survive, to end you all. But I saw my friends die off. The strongest men and women I knew, you got 'em all. World leaders, CEOs, billionaires, celebs. And I understood that you wouldn't stop. Who am I, one dude, to win?"

He looks to the sky. "I've been across the world while you were looking for me. I saw dolphins playing in the Mississippi. I saw herds of white rhinos in Kenya. Every species of bird to live in the Amazon. You're doing something right. Maybe we were the plague after all. Maybe the world wasn't meant to be this smart."

"I accepted that I wasn't gonna win. But you wouldn't catch me without a fight. And so, congratulations. You've found the last man on Earth. I've looked. I've seen the last few die. And I can feel it. Look at the clouds. They're gray, but they're natural. No trails, no windsurfers, nothing left of us but the goddamn cities and you. We're gone, forgotten with me. Congratu-fuckin'-lations."

He stands up, facing the waves. His gaze passes the robot, into the far horizon.

"Do it in the ocean. Don't take my body. Don't grind me down for fuel like you did for my boys, my wife, my people. Let me decompose, or be eaten by a rare fish that you've brought back. You

goddamn miracle workers.”

He strips naked, clothes going up in flame, saturated with the last gasoline on Earth. He walks past the robot, towards the constant, crashing waves. As his ankles pierce the warm water, he turns back to the android, still standing like stone, staring at him with glowing red artificial vision.

“Were you the one? Were you the one who killed my family?”

The robot opens its face, revealing a speaker that takes up the entirety of her head. The sound reverberates, an answer for the man and the world:

“We are one.”

He nods, satisfied. She watches him wade out into the shallows, then begin to swim, until he is but a bobbing head in the waves. She knows the tides will only pull him further out. He won’t pollute the beach, or the world. Her chips compute multiple possibilities if he were to keep swimming.

Her cameras find him, treading water, oscillating up and down, staring at the sky. Any human would miss the shot, anything from a missed heartbeat to a muscle spasm throwing them off by a nanometer. Bodily functions are unpredictable, and even the process of breathing, so essential to life, can be tragic to a task that requires exact precision.

For an unbreathing body? For carbon-fiber muscles, a gyroscopic arm, a brain that deftly calculates the angle and trajectory needed in barely a fraction of a second, a hand that could crush an elephant’s tusk like a fly, an embedded weapon, brutal and outdated, but effective and accurate, and an extended pointer finger and thumb, both unshatterable, spotless, and undying? For the bane of human existence, created to save and modified to destroy? For the one task left to complete a pre-programmed purpose, something so simple it doesn’t even need to be calculated? For the elimination of artificial poisoning of the world, a destruction of even the simplest natural rhythms, the waves, the seasons, temperatures, life cycles? For one who only has to finish its metaphysical job?

Nothing could’ve been easier.



WILLIAM ERICKSON

Central Oregon Pine Meadow

night breathes
as if to bellows

its blackened pupils

the sky
a verb
in the sentence
of my broken
sleep

I must cover

my mouth
to speak

sincerely

slip into
a stone jacket

to speed the ripening
a night will press

its palm into
my cheek

I do assume this
my real bed
is built of clock springs

Still Life in Our Parents' Driveway

sleeping is
the smoke

of
day

the reaching
walnut branch

a crack
across
the camper's fiberglass

sheetrain
setting mirrors
into gravel

in such early age
we understand

the delicate pleasure
of
safety's
favorite needles

one more hour
of the neighbor's
porchlamp

how I recognize
the earth

it so encumbers

me

REBECCA SMOLEN

Paved with Good Intentions

Tell me a story about what lay
under the surface. How it's not evil
until uncovered. How even
demons are afraid of death.

Tell me a story about good aim.
How one decent shot can win the day.
How bad guys never start out that way
and good guys are never all that good.

It's been said that war is a necessary
evil, like the ego, like suffering. What kind
of story would it be without solving
a problem, without death, without revenge?

Tell me a story of monsters. Make me
empathize with them. Tell me a story
with extravagant costumes and a blazing
fire lighting up the night.

Tell me a story where I can travel,
find stone proof on the landscape,
lay my hand on cold rock as if it were
tombstone, and feel the honesty when
I say, *your story has made you all
immortal*. Doesn't that sound heroic.

Reasons I Want to Be a Sun God

After Patricia Smith's The Price of the End of It

When my body dies, I like the idea of having
the neat conclusion of ash. It doesn't have to
be cremation; I'm not above having a pyre.
Just don't let me go cold, alone, or hungry.

I'm not a believer in much more than
emotions I feel, emotions others feel, though
if I see death approaching, I will pray to
anything I think could help ease me into it.

To be clear, it is not death I am scared of.
It's a type of mourning to think some
might mourn me. Moreso, the suffering
to that process, I'd prefer to avoid.

To be honest, life has a constant agony
to it. And maybe that is the ease. I
imagine the pain of being born: of
inflating fresh-made lungs, blinded

by the flame of dawn, severed from
the only life you had known, and
understanding loneliness and hunger
before comfort. All this to say,

I don't want to have had no other purpose
than to just live. Bury me under a fruit tree.
Tend to the flame of Brighid in my honor.
Burn this body in a flame that reaches

heights you will be confident my ash
will reach a star or two from once I came.
I can only pray to be heat, sustenance,
or comfort for another living thing.



MEG EWART

Intentions (a Nonreligious Prayer)

In the morning
may I open my eyes to witness the dawn as the ultimate gift.
When I stretch my body and drink my coffee,
may I do it in reverence to those who came before me.
When I brush my teeth and wash my face,
may all my past perceptions wash down the drain.
When I stand in front of the mirror and braid my hair,
may I feel the enormity of my eternal Spirit.

In the daylight,
may I walk in awe of the birdsong emanating from the trees and
the wind rustling the leaves.
When the rain kisses and slides across my skin,
may I feel the Gods reviving my weary heart.
When I travel across the city streets,
may I radiate joy for the people around me.
When I speak to those in front of me,
may my words bring healing and harmony.

May I embrace every moment with childlike wonder.
May I experience the world through play
and may I remember to always be kind to myself.
May I flow with effortless grace into every waking moment.
I know that in this way,
I cannot fail.

In the evening,
may I stand naked in the mirror and feel at peace with my being.
When my fingers slide across my broken skin,
may I feel proud of the marks I'm adorned with.

When my face resembles those I can't forgive,
may I transmute resentment into love.
When I lay my head gently across my pillow,
may I dream of another day to explore.

In the darkness,
may I remember my path and who I am becoming.
When my cries are too loud and my body is shaking,
may I stand still as stone and gain peace.
When the voice inside my mind is chattering in fear,
may I hear the wisdom of my future self.
When life feels like a heavy burden on my back,
may I set down the load and enjoy the breeze.

May I repeat these intentions with every new hour.
May I inhale these intentions with every new breath
and may I exhale any energy that is not aligned.
May I be a walking prayer for patience and unity
within myself and my life.
I know that in this way,
I cannot fail.

RATS ALICE TRUJILLO

The Unspoken

I know that time has come untangled
Associations forget themselves
I could turn stone into music with suffering
A language is built out of silences
A secret way into every room
The spirit is a thing made of water
As how steam will flow through fabric
Will saturate and travel
I put fire to the turn of the world
Two faces of a moment who both look true
I place my feet where they fell before
Where the concrete can speak for itself
I put my hand through the skin on my stomach
To whisper
I touch my spine with my fingers
A pigeon today will fly through the glass of a window
Like a stone falls through the skim of a pond
These days become reflected and un-reflected
Returning through a point indefinitely
To rediscover momentum of stillness
We move through dimensional space
Gathering intensity to navigate the unspoken
The glare of the sun is old potential
Alike ocean depths
A careful syllable placed correctly could end this
I am a rotting animal who lunges awake
I am a pile of worms and all their chemical destiny
A coyote in the subway tunnel wandering past harm
I never feel hungry despite this end of the world
The unpronounceable intersections, the wind that blows against itself

I was bleeding from where I was shot so I hid behind the moon
Now I bleed from where my wound has yet to land
There was an electrical storm in this part of the century
And his name become synonymous with contradiction
I gave away one of my eyes to get passage outside
The soul is a wide enclosure made of sand
A changing boundary from grain to grain to grain

LAVINIA VIANANI

Sacrament

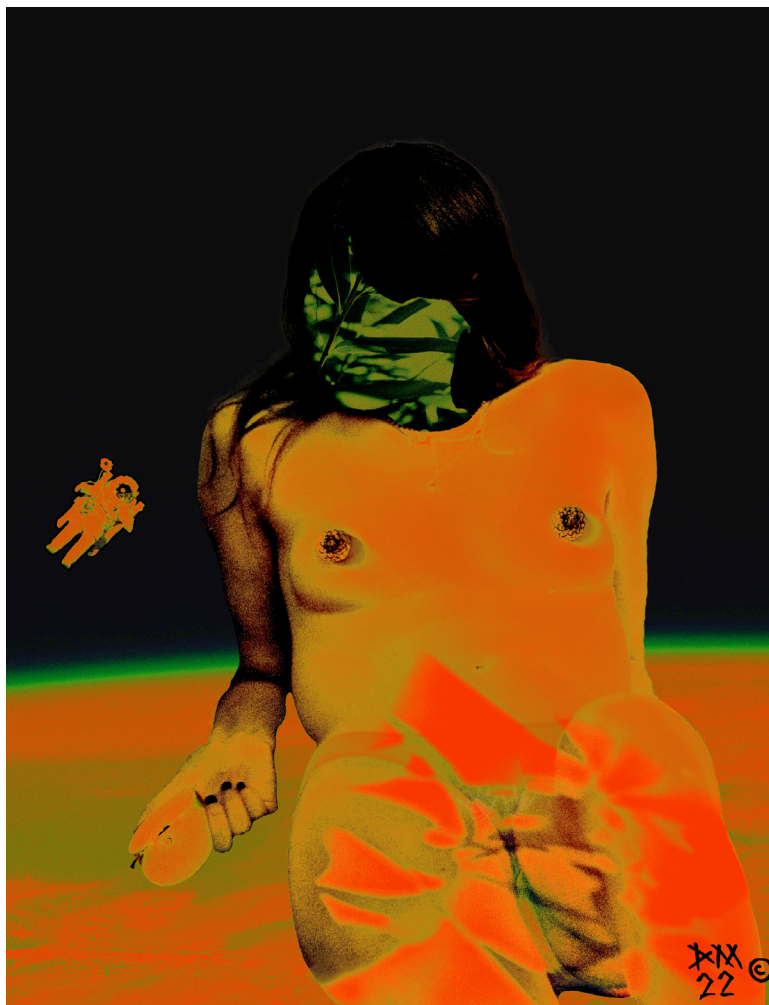
In the taxonomy of my body
your tender skin
is magnolia
language in silk
sailboat in motion.

In this space/time/secret of ours,
I meet your gaze, my spring
without the theatricality.
my red incarnate poem
submerges in the sweet smoothness of the stem.

Sacrament in paroxytone
your verb in my seas
as today
forever
the first time.



DEVON MARTINEZ



Eve
Digital collage, acorns, 2022

LYDIA DASARI

A Love Letter to You

Critical thought is a cornerstone of human survival. Our ability to absorb information and ask “why” has provided us with development and technology and liveable order. Conversely, critical thought also informs us that the world is disturbing and unpredictable and largely an unworthy place. Our daily observations of human interaction and global news should leave us with largely negative opinions on life. However, we make the irrational, optimistic decision to wake up every single day, not knowing if it will make us happier than we have been before.

Like critical thought, optimism is a cornerstone of human survival. Even for the most nihilistic person, day-to-day life satisfaction rests in the implicit belief that the next moment can be better than the last one. Life is unpredictable and trauma and tragedy strike often... yet, every morning, 8 billion people choose to wake up and live another day— humans innately hold the belief that something good can happen next. Optimism is as synonymous to humanity as critical thought is; it separates us from animals, who don’t comprehend enough to actively choose life. For the race of humanity to persist, the cornerstone of critical thought that has brought us into the 21st century requires a more powerful complement: our intrinsic optimism.

Humanity’s continued existence suggests that our critical thought is consistently overshadowed by optimism. Although external events display unpredictability— people and institutions are absolute let-downs, often and intensely— so, maybe, our instinctual joy stems from within ourselves. In the song “Dream of Mickey Mantle,” Jack Antanoff sings – All the hope I had when I was young, I hope I wasn’t wrong. – Childish hope comes from a very small frame of reference, most of which is internal. It is aging with external exposure to the world and its imperfect workings that makes people jaded and suspicious. I argue, then, that

our inexplicable source of optimism is, at least in part, our knowledge of self. The knowledge that we are in charge of our own opinions, words, and behaviors. That any day, we can just choose to live more authentically, to be different, better, overnight. That, more often than not, we want to choose good... just like we knew to do when we were kids. In honoring our naive, unpoisoned childish worldviews, we see the good in ourselves and get back in touch with the happy-go-lucky ability to approach situations with hope, rather than fear.

It holds, then, that we are our own optimism. We are our own best reference of what the world could be. We determine our realities, and we do it every day without being conscious of it. The way we treat ourselves, others, and the planet informs our opinion of the world, so every day that we choose to live according to our individual concepts of morality, we are proving the world to be a better place than it is perceived to be.

We will all die someday. We can convince ourselves, then, that there is no point in doing anything. However, the core of our humanity tells us, instead, that we have a duty to do as much good in the world before that day arrives. Maybe that is what keeps 8 billion people going every day. Maybe that is what keeps you going every day. You know that kindness exists, not because others have shown it to you. You know that kindness exists because YOU are kind. You know that goodness exists, not because you know others to be explicitly good. You know goodness exists because YOU have been good. None of us live perfectly according to our convictions, but we can always work to align more and more of our actions with what we believe to be good and kind... and maybe that makes life worth living.

When the world consistently proves itself to be unpredictable, unsafe, and unworthy, finding hope in external sources is nearly impossible. Instead, create your own optimism by re-finding the light within your most accurate frame of reference— yourself. You don't need to go out of your way to find good in the world, but rather, go out of your way to live out the good you have already

found in yourself. This is a reminder to love the person you are today and to recognize that your existence is a gift to this world. You are optimism. You are hope. You are human.

JOAN MAZZA

Stifle Yourself!

Didn't I laugh when Archie Bunker shouted
at Edith? Didn't her startled, confused face

make me smirk? Did I identify with Archie?
Wasn't Edith an airhead? Another dumb woman

to mock and sneer at so I could see myself
as smarter, separated from women who lived

as dowdy housewives only, no ticket to escape?
How many times did I endure the lecture,

the tedious list of instructions for tasks I did
well already? Why didn't I speak up? Why

didn't I say, *Zip it!* to those men who thought
they knew better because they were male

and I was just a girl of forty years or fifty?
What was at risk? What might I have said

if I had one smidgen of courage? If I had
dared to speak though my voice shook?

How many times have I wished I'd said,
I'm speaking. Will you shut up, man?

FADRIAN BARTLEY

Cat-O-Nine Tail

History is a weeping woman with drenched dehydrated skin,
sun marred in watchful eyes with a woven whip
and shackled for days on an open field glazed with humidity,
with no slumber on the lashes of a task master
who then had her shabby skirt torn
in bitter hours of savagery behind cane fields,
dragged away into a wicked poem known as “Cat-o-nine tail”,

with only her remains strong enough to prose us her raped
paragraphs that she kept hidden at her skirt hem,
to create passages of fine calligraphy upon
historical pages that we now read,
giving our trembled lips their awe
whenever it is resurrected by our eyes upon dusty pages.

AMARIN K ENYART

Crock

I wonder about the first accidents
of food preservation, how many people died
learning how to survive fermentation. If I
do it right, effervescent umami will roll
off the tongue.
I want to be the sort of woman with an earthenware pot
big enough to survive the future, or the sort
of child whose mother taught her the art of
heirloom alchemy. A sturdy crock makes
a good dowry;
full of cabbage, smashed lemons, paper-thin radishes,
whatever matures with age and the weight of
a stone. All survives beneath its juices, saline
remains of late harvest.
Like my womb,
it just needs pressure and time.
How many eggs are left in me? Not like
I am counting, not like they are much use without
someone to activate the ovum, release
salty seedlings
with whip tails. It would swim and kick, keep me up
all night. I'll have to pee all the time. That is before
the fermenting stones, lifted away, dilate the cervix
so the pickled person can spill out: squinty eyed,
bathed in brine.
According to science, I am a window shutting—
There's something to be said for mothers who don't push
out fetuses, but lift life out of paint tubes, conjure worlds
from fountain pens. Like the female monk who

prayed to Buddha

for hours every day, planted a monastery
of vegetables, harvested bok choy and daikon from
a salty hole in the ground.



Endowment

Strange, we think our legacies will
live on. On the brink, the seasons will see
less and less change--

more dust.

It's only a matter of time before you won't see
fish of any kind at the grocery store.

We can grow meat
in a lab and call it food. Landscapes, greens
and blues, jewel tones of petals,
watch it fade into taupe and concrete.

Rest easy, that won't happen
in our lifetime.

Vacation while you watch the moon
disappear, the tide slow to a stop. Wrap ourself
in complacent cocoon, fixate on light, on joy.

Billions of years for the Earth's
metamorphosis. Silent metropolis covered
in vines, the garbage heaps will transmute
into gems under Time's weight.

Drink in the flocks of butterflies
and swallows while you can. Sit on the stumps
in the fields of harvested crop, imagine a forest
of ten-thousand-year-old trees. She will live to see it--

we will give
the soil of our bones as payment,
become grains of sand, ornaments of primordial
death.

Bracken bodies reborn into a new
form, unnamed, for another epoch.

Songs of our voices, our instruments, will still
float in outer space. Nebulas will gather

our electronic memory into
their ether. Far away, the green-blue
gem with a shrinking moon
will burble new beings
into life.

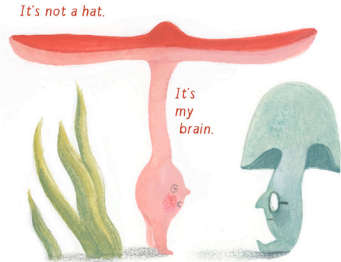
ADAM SCOTT BARENTINE

Einsteinian Insanity

Yesterday, I threw myself against a brick wall
in an attempt to improve my situation.
It's a technique for growth to which
I've dedicated many years.
One yielding only an expansion
in my pre-existing cracks
(an unfortunate but unavoidable effect)
but no benefit to justify such pain.
I knew this yesterday,
as I'd known it the day before.
I knew it without acknowledging and
plunged my head into concrete all the same.
No chip in the mortar. No split in the rock.
Nothing to demonstrate that an effort was made
but a tender and swollen scalp I inflame
when I scratch my head, confused.

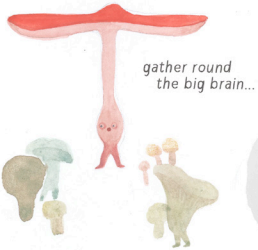


ELIZABETH HAIDLE



No!

ooo0000ooo...



It's not like that.



My brain happens to be in a conspicuous spot.



Conspicuous is an awfully big word.



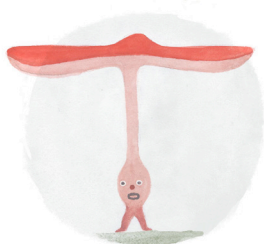
Hey.



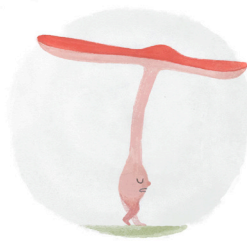
I've heard
that word
before.



I think it's a brand of hat.



SIGHHHHH



Moving along...

CONSPICUOUS
Watercolor, 2022



FUNGI STACK
Watercolor Study, 2022

GRAHAM BORGMAN

Take a rest

After William Stafford

Today your old comforts just aren't doing it anymore.
Your corner beer shop's bottles are empty and dry.
Didn't you ask for this, for a change?
Now you've got some time- but the money
doesn't come in- you think of what you won't own
while you look into your cat's wide gaze
asking for play. You've got what you need
but you don't feel you've earned it. This afternoon
that you've set aside is wordless, the neighbors even
keep their heads down on the walk around the block.
You wander to the kitchen to brew coffee and the little
house is steamed in a wakeful beginning- your
shivering shirts say "Thanks!" as you place them
in the warm dryer- the first rain of the parched season
waters your meek garden patch and you sit
under the covered porch just to listen.

STORM OZENNE

The Chef

exhibit one

So far removed from this reality, I tend to muddy his physical imprint on my childhood into still images. As if he were a stranger I had found recurring in some decades old family album lost to thrift store shelves, I must carefully examine these images I keep, in hopes to garner a moving picture.

It only occurred to me as of late, that his character requires no motion to be captured exquisitely, for I've found that the only vividness he contains could be entirely described in a single, frozen scene. Shifting in ribbons, with the grace of a reed caught in wind, framing him while he sits, milky smoke arising from the paper and tobacco pinched between his fingers. It is easy enough to dismiss him in a crowd, hovering at five feet and seven inches, he protrudes a forced masculinity that is only poorly emphasized by his all black attire. It is true that having lived in Paris for a brief moment in his thirties, he is never without a peacoat and a small woolen hat staccatoed atop his hairless head. Yet, these supposedly cultured accessories only increase the comic of his presence.

When he sits on his front porch, cigarette dangling from pursed lips, he is a monarch. In order to wield his throne, he sits on that patchy stoop in the cold, in the dark, in his own sweat as the sun beats down.

If something is wanted from him, you must go to him, he will never meet halfway or accommodate for unnecessary travel time. For it is his stillness, his total control over each drag of cigarette, an imagined finger on the quiet pulse of his neighborhood, that makes him a man.

Suppose I only ever allow myself to conjure this particular echo of his presence, I could almost melt my anger into melancholy and think up a hundred logical explanations for everything that makes no sense. It is truly unfortunate that my mind does not function this carefully.

Instead like a View Master in the hands of a small child, there is a hollow screech, and the lever comes down, rotating to one of the uglier stills I involuntarily keep.

exhibit two

In the early years of his assumed fatherhood, there were shards of him I found myself liking.

Oftentimes, while lying awake too late at night or too early in the morning, I force my View Master brain to recall the many hours he would read out loud to me on his porch.

A kind gesture, he invited me into his silent corner of the world, allowing me to sit in the wood chair rotting closest to the front door.

When he read, it never mattered the state of the outdoors, he couldn't care less and I always knew that I was to come to him. Though, when it was freezing, I would be granted a hot chocolate.

On his porch, it was considered an interruption to leave your chair for any reason, so I quickly learned to hold my pee. If I needed an extra layer, say, he would wrap his callused knuckles against the large window behind us, and shout for a coat. When no one responded with said jacket-re: my mother and her sleep habits-then I would certainly remember it the next time.

The only stories ever read to me on that porch were three books in a famous fantasy series, beginning with its prequel. He read them with such theater, that it was impossible for three books in a famous fantasy series, beginning with its prequel. He read them with such theater, that it was impossible for me to doze off. Hands moving, intense, controlled in parallel with the written punctuation, he performed each elf, orc, and wizard with considerable detail. When a new character or thrilling twist arrived in the plot, he would glance at our present page number, and without a symbol to save our place, he would close the novel shut.

It will wait until next week.

This markless method of remembering where he had left off in the book demanded constant repetition. Often, it was just a few pages, though every-so-often I would spend my time being reintroduced to a plot line I had anxiously awaited continuing on.

Regardless of how much story was previously revealed, or how far behind our stopping point we picked up, I never dared say a thing, because it wouldn't matter. He chose what parts were read, and the time allotted each week. Sometimes we sat on his porch together for hours. Sometimes the air would grow cold and the sky would darken as chain-smoking, his vocals continued to change dissonance, unaware that he had read us into the night.

KURTIS MATTHEW

How To Not Be Temporary

One ought to write a book: *HOW TO NOT BE TEMPORARY*, and burn it.
I decry a lot, and I cry a lot too.

I love three women, and I love myself.
I love men too, but mostly dead ones.

Consider this my first attempt:
A return to virginity

With acknowledgments listing:
Shame, Guilt, and World-Weary Anger.

All the images I have seen, return to words.
These are not butterflies in my stomach.

They are ulcers, and they transform into worms.
It is not pity, and it is not a pattern.

Circumstances changed, improvements made,
but this human house remains unfinished.

No one can spend the night inside me.
The roof might cave in.

And the trouble with rubble?
It doesn't de-explode or un-erode.

Just like a book cannot be unwritten,
or a lover unloved.

And I am no Bob the Builder, but I have watched him enough to know:
A handyman is just a fella who can afford a toolbelt,

love is often the loadbearing wall of your life,
and God is a muscular twink attacking you with a sledgehammer.



New Love

A desire to live and to love, side by side
for as long as we can without pride.
He's telling jokes and saying riddles.
I'm asking for you.
What would it take for everyone to be
exactly where they are meant to be?
A hurricane? A sandstorm? An avalanche?

Say the word

He's asking for poetry recommendations.
I'm clinging to this fire escape.
What would it take for us to fly off this roof and not hit the ground?
Wings thicker than Icarus's.
I cannot help noticing that stupid moon.
I am asking for you.
He's begging for truth, but he can't hear a sound.
And God, the Doctor, he's making his rounds.
Everybody's asking for a few more years.
I'm asking for you.

JACKSON RIGAMONTI

In the Divots

beneath countless parking spots
There sits an iris of noxious beauty
The cancerous fractal coiling in its puddle
When I was little my job was to go into the backyard
And salt my nemeses:
The slugs that frequented the tulips
Cruel and slow
I don't think she really remembered what it looks like to salt a slug
The cost of the command
My manager guarding the uniform rows of red flowers

You Guys

You don't know how many fingers and eyes I've lost
Trying to slow down cars by staring at them
On the tightrope called the present
It makes me want to turn all the spotlights in the world
 onto the pale forehead of the moon
Just to intrude upon the birthright of the sun

Bird on Sidewalk

Naked and embryonic
Inspect it gently like a teacup
Tiny, beautiful veins
Heavy head, thread neck
Stops moving
Heirloom lost

I wish that I could
set aside a universe
for this little grief.



MANDIE BROWN

A Spider Poet

Cursive webbing, spelling pleasantries-
her art is created with her entirety.
No doubt, her tender words
require her absoluteness, her existence.
She writes to preserve herself only,
her weaving is meaningless, a nuisance to
us, enormous beings - she can't begin
to comprehend us.
Her patterns are habitual,
she composes like constellations
in many lofty corners.
Perhaps she writes to god - perhaps god from
her perspective is me,
I wonder if I'm capable of a rapture.
I imagine she prays she's not victim to
a shoe, a book, if she exists incorrectly.
She's a martyr for a gentle god,
with a cup, an envelope, a guilty conscience
like mine. For who am I to decide
her existence near mine has become
a conviction worthy of death?
I'd take her outside, to a bush or a garden.
Watch her crawl away, if I had the time.

ERIN CLARKE

Sweetie, You're a Lifesaver

I watched a good woman
Turn a boy into a life ring,
A place to give purchase to her
Saddened, tired hands,
Palms slick with tears and aching,
I watched his eyes widen and tacitly agree
To this—to be the glue that binds
Her fraying heart together,
Because how do you say no
To a big, important job
When you can't yet tie your shoes?
When you're already engulfed,
And you love the woman dearly?

I remember my days as
The lone tethered buoy—
When I stopped being a child and
Instead became a savior,
When there was nothing left
Between me and the ocean—
I was holder, not the held
With the grownups on my back;
It's vague now but I recall
Everything was colder.

I can see the danger now
In raising a good child;
The weary pile on, pile on.

Houses Unholy

House for sale,
Formerly citizen;
Knows affection and longing
And remembers a time
It was more than a shelter
For strangers.
These vaulted ribs
Featured a beating heart, spiritual flickers,
And luminous intuition
Until she was gutted
For remodeling,
A fixer-upper on a fixed rate,
Fate fixed upon a blastocyst
She may or may not have wanted—
We will never know.
It no longer matters.

The house is now open for showing.
This neighborhood is up and coming,
Next door was a priestess—now a preschool,
And there was the lawyer—now a laundromat,
Over here was the doctor, soon to be in jail,
Or a jail—
Too soon to say.
This one, this one here
Stocked books in her soul and saw this coming,
See these lovely built-ins
And a real brick fireplace
That the original owner hoped might burn this place to the ground.

Her fury provides a nice cozy glow in winter.
House for sale.
Just kidding—move in free of charge anytime.
Do whatever you want.
If you hear unearthly screams from time to time
It's just the wind

Probably.



henry 7. reneau, jr.

*Running with Scissors as a Permutation
of Natural Selection*

after W. H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts"

Black folks are the best sprinters in the world, have evolved
to evade via jook & jive—circumventing barriers
beyond fugitive slave laws, & post-racial. Fleet-feet fled
beyond mandatory minimums & racist pigs.
As if, the end of the world were already here, & the Apocalypse
is our natural state of being.

Feets don't fail me now!

Our bodies are built in such a way
that we're very efficient at dumb luck, can evade the walking dead
while we yakety-yak-yak into a cell-phone, while circumnavigating
post-Jim Crow, distracting most of us to not actively think
about how we put one foot in front of the other.

The cognitive awareness of the sea swoosh sound of cars

passing on the street, the trunk-thump bass-boom echo
of gangsta rap. We are the fraught relation
between attention & disaster, highlights the details we miss—
something's only a disaster if we don't see—
like an indifference with its head down;
we fail to see the plummet of Icarus, like
our desperate audacity to hope, when the _____ devil
pontificates; we fail to recognize the danger, the distracted
cellphone drone,
ambled into the path of a runaway Mack truck,
because too often, we weren't looking at the edges.

It's so hard
to see a Black person lose their mind/their life, for
no logical reason, most oft
the expectations failed. Always, in Amerikkka,
the outlier deficit
without sound reason or inner rhyme. *The _____*

devil made me do it!

How long, & how precariously,
have we been living on top of fault lines? The traditional
Baptist church
where Black folks catch the Holy Ghost & Tourette Syndrome
spasm up to the pulpit &
speak in tongues. The preacherman,
was what whose assimilated non-violence
failed so completely to save us, our screams
suffocated in the violence
ignored by God's divine, surrounding eyes—

was what ultimately undone my faith. Thank God,

our bodies are built in such a way,
that we're very efficient in our refusal to lie down
& die. Our adaptability, tenacity & elusiveness, *dark child*
-like a dissenting force of chaos.

Our uncanny staying power, even as white folks
came a-slaughtering—a revolution by attrition,
while most are just *eating or opening a window or just walking*
dully along ...

Somebody please, tell that nigga to get out the street!

Rock the Cradle

they taught us sugar
cane the longer we swill
the better it tastes
made us eaters of grass
kneeling in the holy swelter of
church house whispering pleas &
platitudes that only gave us suffer-
now be greater-
later pension plans & way back home
cotton fields that proselytized us
to wanna' flee to where the rainbow ends
without we'd have to sacrifice

(our down-cast eyes
 averted & heads
 bowed
 low as

*Our Father which art
in
heaven . . .)*

made us easy to sneak up on

while they wielded
the Imperial Empire carrot
of Original Sin
permanently blinded our eyes
with false hope & gilded prayers
of blind faith by rote
of coerced repetition-
like we became a seasoned tribe
all swimming for dry land
that receded
further from the promise

comin' for
 to carry
 me home

like the opulent flutter
of butterfly wings in China
conjured up the bitch-
slap of Katrina
made the levees break &
loosed a hurricane force
God himself could not stop

TITILAYOMI AKINWUSI



Death's Suffering
Digital Art, 2022

AIREA JOHNSON

The Crows Don't Haunt Me

nor does autumn's breath.
My brain doesn't wax or wane
or memorize escape plans.
I thought if I relied on signs
the world would focus
or reward me for being astute,
but the payoff for stitching
holes with someone's absence
is ratty sweater nostalgia.

My favorite part about being present,
I mean really here, is the sun glitter.
Nature is so mosaic, even the dingy parts.
Like when I walk to the grocery store
& the sun reflects on an oil spill it's
a mood ring, not a greasy pothole.
Assigning meaning to everything
is so exhausting. The universe
isn't personal; the murder of
crows aren't following me,
observing my downfall.

ZOE SEVIER



Without Star

SARAH MAINERICH

April Peony

The cold will bathe her.
Her petals will close,
Folding on herself.
She will twist and contort,
Spine and thigh hooked through her arms
She will blind herself,
For only she has eyes for the
Shaking, white, embryonic sun.
She sighs, singing in her stemmed lung,
...Have me...Try again.
Probed in her bulbed center.
Palpated by the sun,
Seeping honey through the divots of her pores,
Divine, drowning heat.
She is blooming again.

JESSIE CARVER

Filaments

Riding the bus home late at night after her shift at the diner, her uniform sticky from other people's maple syrup, Emma buzzed. The darkness wrapping the bus in a cocoon of steamy warmth, wet pavement glimmering softly through the foggy windows, neon lights flashing on storefront signs as they barreled down the streets, she could imagine the filaments connecting each person to the wider world, to each other, one giant organism pulsating with breath.

She remembered when telephone directories were still delivered to every house, and you could open the heavy book to any page and touch hundreds of tiny names printed in tidy columns like ants marching down the paper, linked alphabetically but also by a thousand invisible articulations waiting to be discovered.

The old man hunched in the back of the bus with a wooden cane and plaid scarf: decades before, he once held the door open for the bus driver's great-aunt as they walked into a department store at the same moment. The sleepy mother, whose young son clutched her hand as they waited for their stop: Emma once served coffee and a slice of pecan pie to her cousin's ex-husband. And so on and so on.

She might never encounter any of these people again, but echoes of their lives—each a distinct, interconnected galaxy in themselves—would reverberate in hers. Emma liked knowing that, long after she died, strangers would keep breathing in and out the same air that she did, that the bus driver did, and the same air would be recycled and passed around until the world ended or until humans ceased to exist.

The day after that bus ride home, the old man would learn his chemo wasn't working and his doctor would begin conversations about hospice care, the bus driver's boyfriend would ask her to marry him (she would say yes), the sleepy mother would get a

call from her estranged father, her young son would find a five-dollar bill crumpled on the playground and feel like he won the lottery, and Emma would leave for work as she did every Thursday, an ordinary day like the one before it, and when she would almost collide with a teenager entering her apartment building as she hurriedly walked out, looking down at her watch, she'd have no idea that one day, years later, her life would be saved by that beating heart while the rest of the now-grown teen's body lay mangled from a car crash, Emma's own heart failing from cardiomyopathy, only one of them to leave that hospital alive.

And so on it goes, each day ordinary and extraordinary in sometimes unknowable ways, that infinite web of filaments extending into the past and future and all directions and trajectories. All of us collectively, each of us individually, breathing, until we don't.

Tumbleweeds

The tumbleweeds started rolling into town that March, arriving with the blustery-fierce gusts of spring wind. Hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands of tumbleweeds. They lined the streets, became entangled in trees and fences, filled doorways and arroyos, and hurtled across sun-cracked ground, a dizzying carnival of cartwheeling skeletons no one could contain.

All anyone could talk about was the tumbleweeds: where they came from, how to eradicate them, where they would go next. The religious residents proclaimed them a curse cast down upon the town by the devil and the atheists declared them an abomination of nature and the scientists scratched their heads and the government was forced to close the roads and the youth delighted in the delirious disorder, the air crackling with lawlessness.

Soon the river flowing through town was crowded with tumbleweeds so thick the banks began brimming over, bass and trout and minnows, even the reclusive catfish culled from the depths of the riverbed, billowing out of the water in glittering swashes of scales. At first the great blue herons and snowy egrets liked this profusion of food, but they grew tired of competing with the thorny boughs, erratic and boorish as tumbleweeds are, and they took flight for more hospitable land.

The residents, too, started to retreat when it became untenable to battle their way to school or work or church or the grocery store or their mistress's house or their grandmother's bedside, and the town became a tumbleweed town, populated inexorably with invasive intruders.

But the residents left behind vestiges of themselves, remnants of abandoned kites and scraps of love letters and wisps of dead houseplants and forgotten photos and discarded trinkets and all the relics of lives lived, ghosts that slipped elegantly through the spiny forest of tumbleweeds long after the last resident departed.

LUCA CURLEIGASE

Meeting Place

what if i gave myself
directly to your waiting teeth
 or offered with you to meet
 in tangiers, in care
 of our teething tigers
between the music and the meat
of the night.
 what if i offered
to ululate. tongues twisted in
 folk tunes and off-keys
wasn't supposed to write you
 other poems. (but still spit
different diaspora's
 tangled tear brew, flora,
 into each other's mouths,)
fauna. what if i prostrated
 myself, disorganizable
to you, sweeping blue shadow
 across your eyes
like we knew each other
 one at a, one last time.
 one last little time.
what if i lilt, undulate,
what if i give in
 calling you to compare peaches
 from places we grew up
i always liked how the ones
in my brother's grandmother's
backyard in burque
 before the big hard pit
 would suddenly scream bright red
 right in the middle

Don't Save This For Later

i came down
i ate a pear
ate it like i was starving
bosc, brusque, rembrandt
ate freely of its full juice flesh
ate around all of its bézier curves
ate a hundred percent
of pulp clotting up around pear grit
papillae palpating every grain
even ate all of its pear spine sinew
and dry ghost of flower from the bottom
my forked tongue swallowed all
the seeds, and my gnashing teeth
chewed on the stem for a while

AARON SCHULTZ

There's a Monster in My Basement

I moved him from my bedroom closet
to his current home

He likes it better there.
There's more room to thrash
when he gets restless or
he's feeling ignored
There are also boxes,
packed with old journals
and pictures, to riffle through
Also, a toilet and shower
and a few spiders
for him to name,
or to eat...

I think a basement smell suits him,
much more than a closet smell,
where the fresh pheromonic tang
of my day-old shirts and favorite hats
mix with the reeking perfume
of clean laundry,
of safety,
of home...

Has been replaced by
A mucid mix of earth and mold spores
suspended in fur, rubbed on the skin
passing in and out of his lungs
A menacing smell because
it is the murmuring
of eternity,
of patience and
of wisdom...

I have been trying to starve him
but, instead of dying
he fades
becoming a translucent specter
who can only terrorize
with his breath and musk
in the moment between
shutting off the light
and closing
the basement
door...

ELMO SHADE

This One Thing

i.

On weekends, my father and I would rise early,
sit silently at the kitchen table,
scars like grenade pins between our bodies.
It felt safe, if only for a moment. I love
the truth in this one thing—
the earth swallows up men and their anger.

ii.

He and I became the discarded ones, childhood
dreams disappearing in broken trust.
It is hard to believe when we were together,
our scars slowly softening, of a bond between us
severed so short.

iii.

Angels say fear is the cheapest room in the house.
Heroes die harder there.
They have no one left to save.
On weekends, I sit alone
at the kitchen table, remembering about his love—
or not.

Mount Hood

For Tracy

I knew you before you were given your birth name, Wy 'east, before geese took winter's first flight, before the beauty of your snow-covered peak and massive shoulders rose above the Cascade Volcanic Arc of Oregon. Four times I have feared your anger that released the last dome remnant into Crater's Lake. Sixty years have vanished into the ten thousand moons that were never enough to satisfy my craving. You taunt me with an invitation to move toward you, closer to you, conquer you.

Each evening,

I kneel at my bed as in mendicant prayer, remembering the landscape of your immense beauty. I reach under satin sheets to sense your warmth and imagine the sound of your fingers playing the black and white keys. Silkworms soften thickened scars, my thoughts of you revel in early good mornings, in sleepy goodnights, in our chattering throughout the day. Your memory pierces my grief with an invitation to move toward you, close to you, comfort you.

GABRIELLA GAROFALO

To S.

And that was her Lethe, the infinite sand
Waves always tried to ambush along with February,
His harsh season, her hunger, and voices
From the undergrowth, when mothers, and the moon
Kept playing trusted advisors,
'Get that green off your head, and give birth
To meetings, dancing parties, maybe write'-
Don't listen, no way, as long as your soul
Looks like a green-eyed meadow pleading
For water to slake the unquenchable thirst
Of stones, beds, boulders,
And your wrath is brewing like wine,
Ready with blades, bullets or words-
But oh but what's there to bite for a bit of diversion,
Only the usual harsh edges, drawbacks
Among breaths, grass, and the green hanging out
Next to her while she's looking round
For fresh days madder than words-
As she lost all of them, home,
Walls, furniture, dust everywhere,
She lost 'em to write, and give soul
To those weird colours, maybe red, maybe white,
And sure, they remind you of game cards,
Or prayers hurled at you, God, just to rive
A nicely assembled sky-
Or maybe, who knows, those two souls live side by side,
The midribs of a world where blues and twos
Lash the place where your mind stands still,
No one to shield the walls-
But c'mon, my soul, buck up,
bug out from those colours,

'Cause among hidden trees, denuded branches,
And a naked house you might even glimpse
A bed, a window, a first time miracle, even your life-
Well, almost.



ROWAN TOMKO

First Love

I am fond of saying the moon was my first love.
She could release her gravity on me if she chose to,
I will take her away, her tidal pull
too precious for plastic fishing lines and salt.
Nothing can make me
cry like the inevitable horror of being seen.
The clouds billow in, it is crow season in the city.
Murders happen on every corner
and she cards my messy unwashed hair aside
and drops kisses on my temples, lemon sweet.
Her hold releases me to my own
devices, how can one love so immense a creature?
I think every day that I have no tears left to cry.
She is unchanged in the heavens, queen of the sea,
and observer of nighttime longing, yet more tears
are always ready to fall as I see the sky bereft of her.
I will reach to her every time I see her,
all tears here earthbound and forever apart
from her, the idea of her longing and full in my heart.
Magnolia trees framed the moon from the rooftop
where we lay, a bowl of pomegranates between us.
I could not press the words back into your mouth
when you said them. I saw the moon and she saw me.
Did she see you still? Did you think of me?
My chest still gets tight when I think about you sometimes,
yes even now.

ANNA NELSON



Rhaphadoria
Digital, Procreate

ANNA NELSON

How It Ends.

Snakes wrap around the stocks. Leaves unfurling. Hissing, twisting, moving. Duck feet slap the sidewalks. Asphalt cracking and growing into new things. The trees quake and fly away. Wings made of broken windows and stained burrs. Bricks tumble and fall, crushing snake heads and teeth. The teeth twisting and crawling away to grow somewhere else amongst the concrete stairs and the twisted metals beams. Bark cracks and splits, like the earth, like a new plant, splitting the dirt.

Air leaves and pushes the trees, taking breath with it. Abandoning reason and nature. The low sound of feet stomping and humming, making new roads and new humans. Webs shift and grow and weave, becoming more than just feet. Dirt and water cake the snake's tail, leaving a trail, pulling the eyes and the view forward. Toward the progress it's made, growling and quaking. Smacking its lips and rolling its eyes to stare at the building in the sky. It tumbles, falling and falling and falling, until there is nothing left.

LISA CANTWELL

california zephyr westbound postcard

snowfall in april, so cold. remember a lifetime ago meeting
for calzones, black olives, extra cheese? the moment after i
told you i dig girls, too. you smiled, ran your thumb along
my chin, said you knew, called this my coming out party,
cheesecake and root beer float toast, tequila chaser, hockey
playoffs, chicago and the blues. you said rewrite my life,
you'd be my wingthing, shining violet cape, superdatemaker.
you asked our server for the check and her number for me,
my cheeks burning candy apple, your eyes a tango, dancing
river green, my mock rage pelting you with cocktail napkins.
in the car your lips on mine before i turned the key, you held
my face with both hands, your flawless stage kiss. now i replay
our slow burn turned ghost flame, spirit your lunar eclipse
lust in each night's closet curtain call, flipping cards in the dark.

dandelion

when you put your lips together and blow
i go full blown summer creamsicle

wishes on the wind and marshmallow cloud
parade in the wake of your dusky

glissando blowing hot sweet rapid fire
wolf innuendo down my tough girl

throaty bacall exterior throwing
my sunny yellow outlook off kilter melting

fast as butter in smoke and low-key lighting
the starlit sky twists and i no longer vamp

now a secondary character unsexed
in my own narrative my renegade flower heart

facing denouement like the moon that got away
the fiery glow falling anywhere but here

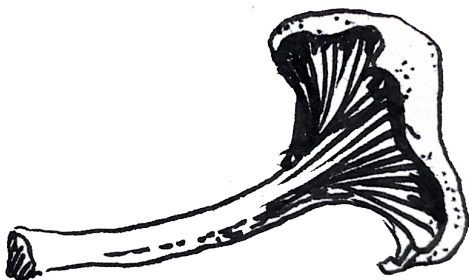
spell for leaving

zigzag meandering afternoon lament of passage / sweep dead attic
yellowjackets into dustpan / commence ambivalent
exodus further west / wipe marigold
washed walls of dashed dreams / rough draft
valediction address to neighbors through grapevine / scream
under tepid shower water to drown tears / forsake
tangle of christmas lights in old shoebox / drag out
saturnine goodbye to mason jar of sea stones / watch déjà vu
remnants of future goals rupture / kiss first
queer love letters and tuck in back pocket / rip
pinked junior high unrequited valentines to pieces / scrub unexplained
ochre sink stain to no avail / tie white
neckerchief of forfeit on rogue rosemary bush / discard
matte shadow palette and keep frosted lipgloss / pull the moon's
lustering strands from hairbrush / triple dog dare
karma to its face and beg to stay / scrape
jasmine candle wax drips from fireplace / hide
iridescent glass pipe and stash in silk pillowcase / unplug
haphazard jumble of extension cords behind entertainment center / cut
greyed gingham shirt to shreds but remember his
fingerprints on your collarbone / count
every cormorant on the dead oak tree at twilight / assess
disarray of junk drawer and bubble wrap it anyway / eat last
cookies crumbled with a spill of milk / watch the wildfire mountain sky
blister one last time / search
astral ceiling cracks for escape clause

KIP FRANICH

Mocktails on a Tuesday Afternoon

Someone let the flies in again. Black specks pirouetting figure eights in the abrasive sunlight coming in from the window. The light glints off a passing car, forcing me to shut my eyes momentarily. Childhood nostalgia and trauma pump like a bad dream in my ears as I take a seat. My cheeks sink into the familiar cushion, I feel the hard wood of the stool below. I rock gently on the uneven legs, hoping to hear that satisfying creeeeak, but it never comes. The cold citrus hits my teeth and sets my mouth on fire. The pain travels up my jaw, my temples, and meets up with the pounding in my head. Another rubber band is added to my watermelon brain, ready to burst. I can smell the Pine Sol scent of my past mistakes from across the bar. All that liquid anger, perfumed with bitter juniper and mixed with the quinine of my fear. My mind grows queasy, my stomach races. My hand reaches for the glass that isn't there, can never be there again. Old habits and all that, you know.



TRINA GAYNON

Speechless in Heaven, 1975

Give me jazz guitar, Bonfá, fusion, fusing series of notes
Gentle rain strokes memories of sunlight on pool water,
Water warmer than the air around it, a dark apartment,
Shelves of jazz platters, my fingers placing *Jacaranda*
On the turntable over and over again letting the needle
Down gently, lying on the sofa, absorbing the art of listening,
Over and over learning the wonder of headphones translating
The strummed notes directly past ear drums to nodding
Head to swaying shoulders along the back to hips,
To the feet that keep the beat close to tap it out softly,
All so softly, no denying the *empty room* that refuses
Silence while the sun slides across summer blues.

Never Straight Ahead

On winter nights dawn seems far away.
Touch a spider web as you would
The face of God, hesitant
To dislodge drops of dew.

Caught in the glow of porchlight,
It waits as the lamp does for an arrival.

I rose in the dark and resented it.
When you set out, the moon had set
Behind hills. The sun began a low arc,
West and south. Spiders know this.

I walk in rain that knows not
How to desist. I shake it off.

Attempt to stay dry. On your return
Touch my arm as you would a spiderweb.



CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

AARON SCHULTZ

I've been a carpenter, bartender, scoundrel, and saint, living, working and bleeding in seven different states and Washington D.C. During the week, I am a writing instructor and program administrator for a small university in Montana. On the weekends, I putz in the garden or garage and always find time to write. I've earned a BA in Creative Writing from the University of Montana and a MA in Rhetoric and Composition from Oregon State University. I've published short stories and poetry in *The Bozeman Tributary*, *WILDsound Review*, *The Paragon Journal*, and the *Macguffin*.

ADAM SCOTT BARENTINE

Adam Scott Barentine is a Portland-based poet living his best life in the Fir covered mountains of Oregon. A firm believer that you should read at least ten poems for every one you write, he is happy to provide recommendations upon request. He can usually be found hiding in the forest with a book in his hand or spending entirely too much time lost in thought.

AIREA JOHNSON

Airea Johnson's microchap, *Winning Cosmic Yahtzee*, debuts winter 2023 by *Kissing Dynamite Press*. She is enchanted with the grief process, the idea of significance, and the free will dilemma. Her writing career started in St. Augustine, Florida. There, she hosted open mics for the Flagler College English Department and was an editor for *FLARE: The Flagler Review*. She's now pursuing a writing degree in Portland, Oregon. While working on her degree, she wrote her first collection, *Phantom Limb*. This collection observes addiction, childhood trauma, girlhood, and abuse cycles.

Her poems appear in Third Wednesday Magazine, Saw Palm, Lucky Jefferson, and other publications.

AMARIN KING ENYART

Amarin King Enyart has lived in Portland, Oregon for ten years. She is a first year PCC student and is working toward the Creative Writing Focus Award while studying Fine Art and Environmental Studies. She loves moss, the smell of old books, and thunderstorms.

ANNA NELSON

Anna Nelson is a Portland-based illustrator. She was raised in the Pacific Northwest and is inspired by the cultural and plant life that surrounds her. She has a strength for telling stories through images with a very gestural and whimsical style of artwork. She experiments writing with poetry and short stories when she is not drawing. She graduates from Pacific Northwest College of Art (now known as Willamette University) with a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts this 2023.

DAPHNE CLIFTON

Renaissance musician, artist, and gardener, Daphne has published poems in The Avocet, Bellwether Review, Ekphrastic Review, Voices from the Mill Pond, and Artstra's Poetry Moves.

DEVON MARTINEZ

Devon Martinez is an interdisciplinary artist pursuing her BEA in General Fine Art at the Pacific Northwest College of Art in Portland, Oregon. With an emphasis on printmaking and sculpture, she explores a wide range of materials in the service of chaotic and symbolic imagery. Her work involves themes of domestic space, femininity, and death using both two-dimensional and three-dimensional

media. Devon's passion for collecting, arranging, and combining various materials influences her analog processes while she experiments with digital techniques in parallel.

ELMO SHADE

The author is accredited as a Certified Mindfulness Teacher-Professional (CMT-P) through the International Mindfulness Teachers Association (IMTA). He is the author of three (3) additional poetry collections: *Standing On One Leg- Poems of Love, Loss, & the Spaces In-between* (2017); *Coffee Grinds- Mindfulness Poems & Stories for the Less Than Perfect Soul* (2019); *A Glorious Poetic Rage* (2021) He lives and writes in the Pacific Northwest and is an unabashed fan of Double IPAs, Opus-X Cigars, & RUSH.

ERIN CLARKE

Erin Clarke is a copywriter, poet, linguistics nerd, and second year college student at PCC. She lives in southeast Portland with her husband and their two children, and can often be found petting other people's dogs. You can read more of her words at erinclarkewrites.com.

FADRIAN BARTLEY

Fadrian Bartley is a creative writer from Kingston Jamaican, his poetry is available in journals and online web magazines, Fadrian is currently pursuing his degree as a freelance writer, his inspiration comes from within and continuously opening new pages to begin a new chapter.

FINN MISHLER

Finn Mishler is a senior at Cleveland High School. He's been reading since he could get his hands in a book, and writing since he could get his hands on a pencil and a good chunk of time. In his spare

time, he enjoys playing tennis, wrestling, jamming on the guitar, spending time with his girlfriend, and loving the natural beauty of the world.

GABRIELLA GAROFALO

Born in Italy some decades ago, Gabriella Garofalo fell in love with the English language at six, started writing poems (in Italian) at six and is the author of these books “Lo sguardo di Orfeo”; “L’inverno di vetro”; “Di altre stelle polari”; “Casa di erba”; “Blue Branches”; “A Blue Soul”.

GRAHAM BORGMAN

Graham is a Portland, OR, based psychotherapist and writer. His interests in philosophy and psychology led him to poetry as a mode of finding rhythm, joy, and mystery in language.

henry 7. reneau, jr.

henry 7. reneau, jr. writes words of conflagration to awaken the world ablaze, an inferno of free verse illuminated by his affinity for disobedience—is the spontaneous combustion that blazes from his heart, phoenix-fluxed red & gold, like a discharged bullet that commits a felony every day, exploding through change is gonna come to implement the fire next time. He is the author of the poetry collection, *freedomland blues* (Transcendent Zero Press) and the e-chapbook, *physiography of the fittest* (Kind of a Hurricane Press), now available from their respective publishers. Additionally, his collection, *A Non-Violent Suicide Poem* [or, *The Saga of The Exit Wound*], was a finalist for the 2022 Digging Press Chapbook Series. His work is published in *Superstition Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Zone 3*; *Poets Reading the News* and *Rigorous*. His work has also been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.

JACKSON RIGAMONTI

Jackson likes poetry and creative writing a lot, and enjoys it for the same reasons he likes Oregon weather and math. As a senior at Forest Grove High School, he will be attending OSU next year to study a biology field. Right now he's having fun as the president of the FGHS Poetry Club.

JAMIE LOEWENBERG-ARVANITES

Jamie (they/them) is a feral trans ND dreamer living on lands of Multnomah, Clackamas, and other Chinook peoples (Portland OR). They grew up in Eno, Occaneechi, Coharie, and Catawba lands (central North Carolina). Their ancestors are Mediterranean, Ashkenazi, and Northwest European. Jamie's art is strongly influenced by time-bending ritual and prayer, and uses the power of wounding as a portal for healing. In their rambling human space-time wanderings, Jamie enjoys working with plant bodysouls, doing mutual aid, making art of many forms, and urbex.

JESSIE CARVER

Jessie Carver is a queer writer and editor who grew up on a farm in the borderlands of New Mexico. Her short stories and poems have appeared in various literary journals and the anthology *Love Is the Drug & Other Dark Poems*, and she co-authored the book *Rethinking Paper & Ink: The Sustainable Publishing Revolution*. You can find her online at www.jessiecarver.com and she occasionally tweets at @Jessie__Paige.

JOAN MAZZA

Joan Mazza has worked as a medical microbiologist and psychotherapist, and taught workshops on understanding dreams and nightmares. She is the author of six self-help psychology books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self*. Her poetry has appeared in

The Comstock Review, Potomac Review, Prairie Schooner, Italian Americana, Poet Lore, Slant, and The Nation. She lives in rural central Virginia and writes every day.

KIP FRANICH

Undoubtedly the most exciting thing to ever come out of Boring, Oregon, Kip Franich is an upcoming writer and satirist of immense talent and potential. After a debilitating injury that left him unable to continue his nearly decade long career of kitchen work and whose dreams of becoming a restaurateur were quashed forever by the COVID-induced permanent closure of the Oregon Culinary Institute (RIP, my kitchen ninjas!), Kip has decided to pursue a career in his long-lost other passion: writing.

KURTIS MATTHEW

Kurtis is a third-culture-kid turned creative whackadoo who can be found hunkered down in corners, tinkering with preposterous ideas. He is an independent filmmaker, screenwriter, comedian, and aspiring costermonger.

LAVINIA VIANINI

Lavinia is a 25 year-old poet, translator and teacher. With a Bachelor's degree in English/Portuguese, her Academic research focused on poetry written by women, which later allowed her to be offered a scholarship in Comparative Literature.

LISA CANTWELL

Lisa Cantwell is a graduate of the MFA in Writing program at the University of San Francisco. Her poems have appeared in Ponder Review, december, Welter, The Pointed Circle, and Barrelhouse, among other publications. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and is the winner of the

2022 Jeff Marks Memorial Poetry Prize. A freelance theatre director and educator, she lives in Santa Monica, California.

LUCA CURLEIGASE

Luca Curleigase is many-flavors-queer and a chronic dislocator of joints, dreams, and words. They're from Albuquerque, NM originally, but currently seeking out a living in Portland, OR.

LYDIA MEREDITH DASARI

Lydia Meredith Dasari is an aspiring author and corporate professional focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. She currently resides in Portland, Oregon and writes about philosophy, culture, and perceptions of reality. You can find her on medium @queensolomon and instagram @lyd.408

MANDIE BROWN

Mandie Brown is an 18 year old student pursuing a career in art. They enjoyed learning more about poetry from Melody Wilson this past Fall term, and love learning new forms of art in their studies at PCC. In their free time they love exploring nature and spending time with their cats.

MEGAN EWART

Megan Ewart is a twenty-two-year-old writer and professional Nanny from a small town in Alabama. She fell in love with bouncy rhythmic poetry as a child and found her artistic voice when searching for an outlet for her emotional dysregulation. She grew up struggling with suicidal depression and severe anxiety but found solace in the way nature inspired her. Poetry gave her space to freely describe the feelings she never got to express in childhood. Megan's writing is an ode to the nature around her, the healing of her inner child, and the power that comes from learning how to make her mental illness work for her. meganewart.godaddysites.

OLLIE EDWARDS

Ollie Edwards is a writer and illustrator who explores topics of bodies, death, and nature. You can find them on instagram @ghostllieart.

RATS ALICE TRUJILLO

Rats Alice Trujillo is a restaurant worker, queer social dissident, and esoteric multimedia artist. They are active around Seattle and their writings appear sporadically in print and digital, most visibly with Unlikely Stories Mark V.

REBECCA SMOLEN

Becca Lynne is a Gateless certified facilitator, group leader, and writing coach. She lives in Portland, Oregon with her two adorable gingers, leads a current series of generative writing workshops virtually and owns and operates her own pet sitting business. Her book, Excoriation, and chapbook, Motherhood and Other Scars, have been published by Poetry Box. Her poetry has appeared in Poeming Pigeon, Feminine Collective, Cirque, Tiny Seed, and others.

ROWAN TOMKO

Rowan Tomko (xe/xer) writes fiction and poetry from Portland Oregon where xe exists at the intersections of queer, disabled, and mad about the world.

SARAH MAINERICH

Sarah Mainerich is a queer Creative Writing major at PCC living in Aloha, Oregon who, mostly focusing on nonfiction publications in her writing career, held a lifelong skepticism of poetry, but finally found solace in the thing that perplexed her most.

STORM OZENNE VESTA

Storm Ozenne Vesta (they/them) is a queer, non-binary, writer and artist. They primarily write non-fiction essays and short stories, but will occasionally sidestep into poetry. When not working or writing, Storm loves to take their dog on outings, go to bar shows, and continue their search for the best London Fog in the city.

TITILAYOMI AKINWUSI

Titilayomi Akinwusi, an international student at PCC, is a well-rounded artist zealous for creating beautiful works of art. Originally from Nigeria, Titi came to Portland to pursue a degree in Computer Information Systems. While studying she found out their artistic talent was a great way to express herself and relieve stress.

TRINA GAYNON

Trina Gaynon's poems appear in *The Poetry Calendar of Oregon*, *Fire and Rain: Eco-poetry of California*, other anthologies, numerous journals, and a chapbook *An Alphabet of Romance* from Finishing Line Press. Her book *Quince, Rose, Grace of God* is forthcoming from Fernwood Press. She currently leads a group of poetry readers at the Senior Studies Institute in Portland and participates in the *Ars Poetica* community.

WILLIAM ERICKSON

william erickson is a living poet. His work appears in *Sixth Finch*, *Heavy Feather*, *West Branch*, and many other pubs. william is a 2023 Best New Poet nominee and winner of the Netsuke contest for the off-format micro-chap *Nothing Lied Still on the Sea*, coming in fall from Tilted House Press. william's first full collection is forthcoming with *April Gloaming* in 2024. He lives in Washington with his partner and their two dogs in an old house across the street from a large tree.

ZOE SEVIER

Zoe Sevier is a PDX based artist currently studying illustration at the Pacific Northwest College of Art and Design. Their art takes inspiration from various aspects of the natural world; flora and fauna and how they interact with one another; as well as the endless mysteries the universe offers. Zoe aspires to take her artwork into the graphic novel space, with this she will be able to tell more complex stories and engage more with the world around her.