



NMJ  
V.5

**Editor** | J Worthen

**Night Music Journal** | [nightmusicjournal.com](http://nightmusicjournal.com)

**Submissions** | [nightmusicjournal@gmail.com](mailto:nightmusicjournal@gmail.com)

**Cover** | *moon vine* by J Worthen

© Night Music Journal, 2019

Copyright belongs to Night Music Journal and the authors and artists in this volume. This volume may only be circulated in its entirety. Use or circulation of parts of this volume is forbidden without written consent from Night Music Journal and the authors. Night Music Journal and Janice Worthen are not responsible for any views expressed within this volume; all views belong to the authors expressing them.

## Contents

**Featured Writer: Sayuri Ayers**

3

**Katherine Fallon**

10

**Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah**

14

**Stephanie Valente**

16

**Grace Yannotta**

19

**V.S. Ramstack**

21

**Bruce McRae**

25

**Sean Johnson**

29

**Kylie Ayn Yockey**

34

**Margarita Serafimova**

38

**Megha Sood**

44

**Paul Ilchko**

48

**Alexandra Corinth**

52

**Lindsey Warren**

58

**Jacob Hammer**

62

**Brigid Hannon**

65

**RC deWinter**

68

**Lucas Wildner**

72

**Alana Hayes**

80

**Stephen Mead**

83

**Jeanette Salib**

85

**DS Maolalai**

92

**Matthew Dube**

95

**Reviews**

97

**Contributor Bios**

104

**Sayuri Ayers**

## First Night

Spring came too early that year  
emerging buds culled by frost.  
In the dark, we rubbed  
numb hands over stovetop,  
orbiting its blue flame.  
His lips searched mine,  
our breath misting  
suspended like veils.  
Outside rain pummeled  
earth into mire, the Olentangy  
lurched from its bank,  
stripping bowed willows  
of silver leaves.  
On an apartment bunk  
he sunk into me, probed until  
dark rivulets ran down my thighs.  
I pondered the blind weight  
of our bodies, worlds emerging—  
petals sloughing off in his hands.  
Soon his face was blank with sleep  
musk clung to my fingers,  
phantom caresses quickened to a whirl.  
In moonlight the river beckoned,  
glinting like a million blades.

## Shift

When the housing market crashed,  
we christened your Pinto  
with a spray of Bud  
from a pen-knifed can.  
From the dashboard, the hula girl swayed  
as you drove Beatrice one-handed,  
fingers clasping mine.  
You only let go to ratchet  
the clutch up and down  
the spine of gears.  
Your pinky ring glinted:  
garnet shards ablaze  
in Black Hills gold.  
You exchanged my hand  
for a cigarette, its haze lingered,  
a galaxy above your head.  
Tonight, I remember you  
as I lie in a brownstone façade.  
My husband lowers  
himself down onto me,  
eyes half closed.  
An alarm shrieks  
as a car window is smashed.  
Beatrice glides down  
an endless street, rust licks  
her sides like flame,  
the skyline crumpling  
into a seam.

## **At Dead Horse Bay**

You're drawn to the broken glass;  
I, the washed-up things.

All those histories: plow-horse jawbones,  
junked rotary phones, plastic bags rasping at shorelines.

The wind hums down bellies of hollow  
bottles of Bud, Smirnoff—dial tone of the sea.

We peer through fractured Skye  
at Brighton Beach, recall our lovers' leap, parachute jump.

Rusted barges tug the sinking sun,  
Big Dipper ladling out smog.

In our motel room you down gin after gin,  
beckon with muck-brown eyes.

Riptide surges over hipbones, miles of spent char.

## Ghostly Measures

From the beginning, the darkness  
is too much to bear—

I squint in the inky black until  
pinpoints of light appear.

In smallest catastrophes:  
keys chattering down a grate,  
an oven-singed hand,

narratives map themselves  
onto constellations.

After your passing, grief bumps  
like a moth against windows.

You distill from street oil sheens,  
cumulus clouds.

Your face, a moon bobbing up  
from brackish water.

# Lunar Notes: An Interview with Sayuri Ayers



**Why poetry? What pulled you in, and who was the very first poet you read/heard who just clicked?**

Poetry is strange and lovely. It's a beast in a jeweled box. Through poetry, there are infinite ways to engage the reader through imagery, tone, sound, and use of white space.

The first book of poetry I read was by Sharon Olds. I discovered *Satan Says* in the basement of my college's library. As a science major, I was taking a poetry class as an elective. I remember sinking to the floor in awe as I read Old's poem, "Monarchs."

As I've gotten older, I've gravitated towards Li-Young Lee's poetry, especially his collections *Rose* and *Book of My Nights*. What I admire most about Lee's work is its ability to transport the reader through striking imagery.

**If you were the last person on earth, and you pulled the last book from a pile of ash and cinders, what do you hope it would be? Why?**

I absolutely love the book of Ecclesiastes. The questions about existential meaning are essential, especially for the last person on earth.

**What space does/should poetry occupy right now?**

The expansion of poetry into the hybrid forms has been fascinating to watch. The subversion of genres speaks to the shifting of cultural and political borders. I can't wait to see how poetry will demand more space and transform personal and public landscapes.

**What was the first piece you ever had published? Are you the same person who wrote it, and if not, how have you changed?**

I first published "Garden of Delights" in my college's literary journal, *First Circle*. In some ways, I'm still the same person. As a reader and writer, I'm drawn to strong imagery and narrative. Over time, my generous mentors and teachers have taught me to be more critical of my work, and how to better honor the work of other writers.

**What are you working on right now? What is the center or focus of your work right now?**

I'm working on a hybrid manuscript that weaves prose poetry together with lyric essay. The manuscript navigates the landscape of motherhood and mental illness. I'm focusing on how images can be repeated, then presented in different forms.

**Name some poets you're really excited about right now. Who do you have on your shelf/in your ear/on your mind?**

There are so many poets that I'm excited about! I'm currently reading the debut book by Ruth Awad, *Set to Music a Wildfire*, which chronicles her father's survival of the Lebanese Civil War. Geoff Anderson is a poet from Columbus, Ohio. He's one of my favorite writers/people. His collection, *Humming Dirges*, was recently released by Paper Nautilus. I've also been enjoying Li-Young Lee's newest collection, *The Undressing*.

**What's the biggest adventure you've had so far? What comes next?**

My biggest adventure has been becoming a mother. Writing as a parent has been a series of late nights eating ramen over a keyboard and frantically searching diaper bags for lost scraps of poems. My most creative and productive years followed the birth of my son. I wouldn't trade these years or him for anything.

Next, I'm hoping to mentor future readers and writers. I plan to volunteer at a local elementary school as a reading tutor this coming fall.

**What advice would you give a poet just starting out? What advice would you go back and give your younger self?**

Shape your writing life according to your goals/purpose as a poet. Take time to celebrate your successes and the successes of others. Read, read, read. Don't give up.

**Katherine Fallon**

## **REGENERATION**

After the spade mistakes it, deep inside  
its tunnels, for an unwanted tap root,

the dew worm cannot reflect itself back  
onto itself, back to life. Those left spill upwards

in their pink blindness, gleaming as scars  
upon the grafted skin of the earth, in pale

surrender and full disclosure: only this,  
nakedly; you do not want me, so let me be.

## LEXICON

*Deserve?* Forbidden.  
Though that makes it  
more potent: the word

will not speak  
and so speaks,

speaks, speaks.

*Worth* can stay.  
And *desire*,

or *want*, as abused

as *like*. *Need*  
as rare as *whom*.

I didn't have

to wait for you  
to believe you're worth

waiting for,

didn't have to  
have you to know

you are worth having.

I deserve this.  
I don't care if you do.

## **FEALTY**

The heart is an underground thicket  
of silver foxes, owls. The slenderest

canopy and a dead insect floor. This time,  
up to my knees in knuckle roots, I was

determined to find entrance, to tear apart  
the old, cold shoulder. And you wanted

me to. And you will be constant. I know it.  
The days of my losses are numbered.

**Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah**

## Conglomeration

The need to hold a positive & conscious kinesis  
of oneself is almost a creature. I've acquired  
its certain degree of correctness in the language  
never studied before. I hide behind its strength to bolster  
who I'm in the pool of some phrases in your own tongue.  
I'm becoming too much obvious that nothing  
is done right in its black costume when I answer points for points,  
your appearance becomes everything, including penance,  
penitence, & compromise, a discourse on soil remains  
the vocabulary with the wet air. I leave the chimney smoking  
in the streetlights behind the walls that divide us  
with nervous quickness, my body is done away. The booby trap  
is everywhere & I hear a gunshot & the horse bolts.  
The morning looks trouble & very stupid.  
The kitchen is momentarily confused  
in the leftover of the food that wasn't cooked well.  
The sitting room is the red half-rotten apple.  
The bedroom is a seriously wounded man.  
The fat in the mouth of children is rotting, & playing  
hide-&-seek on the compound isn't boisterous,  
when I'm bright in a way that looks silly or ugly,  
continental plates drift, the early sun is decaying  
& mothers sit near the charcoal seller gossiping.  
The new confidante is back with her nurses  
& we need no more complex numbers,  
or your competence, or her compact disc.  
The complementary angle is always complexion.  
Look at the faces of these girls, hiding their breeching  
bodies in your clothes, I keep the churlish cinch,  
I blather with a blithe ignorance of the facts,  
built in painted eyes for only chinwag,  
you add wattle & daub to the banking issues.  
In this waxwork that's taken us horse-hours  
to coal tar in a vertical path, I shield your body  
with his dark body on the terrace outside.  
I'm sorry for that, still showing underneath  
the hairless flesh I've inherited for good.  
She comes away from my observation by  
avoiding that part for the neighbourhood.

**Stephanie Valente**

## **GIRL KING**

when we kissed,  
i hoped you'd bite

i didn't worry  
about all the red  
or the marks,  
i'm the alpha,

anoint me in  
brass & oil  
anoint me in  
truth & anger

my crown  
my spells  
ran out of time  
with teeth

my life is so happy  
without you.

## **FURY**

it begins with a leather jacket  
you don't need the moon  
because you are the moon

those dreams in your head,  
they rain down in shadows  
crescent-shaped eclipses  
raise your hands  
dream of them crystals  
daunting nebulas  
turn my lips blue  
a plastic girl

you'll see lifetimes  
the future is hidden.

**Grace Yannotta**

## Nocturnes

Leg attached to chain attached to boat at the bottom of the lake. The bronze, the rusted light, the way the metallics touched the water with a little kiss. The smallest of embraces. Limb: stuck. Sun: filtering in an effervescent, omnipresent way. Hair on arms: fully standing. I would appreciate it if you took your hand off my coat. I would appreciate it if you didn't step on my feet. I would appreciate it if you didn't spend the next hour making fun of women who don't encompass the tunnel vision of femininity that you, boy, have labelled correct. Waves breed an ugly feeling in the lower intestines. Rocking patellas. I refuse to go in the water past my waist. It, master of condensation, drips from the ceiling and the sky mellows, the wood grows sour and that is when the running starts. Deflected gaze away from the documentary – we can deal with bombs but it's another thing to see the heads bobbing below the water, the arms thrashing..... Are we naive to think they can be reached? Are we naive to think they can change?

**V.S. Ramstack**

## warm hyacinths all spring

to fold themselves, the legions of forest white faked those lesions – said they had been hurting much longer than the gun swipe that killed a brown boy last week. but this could not be because they never even turned on their tvs. just stayed in little lollipop holes devouring quiet bbqs and parades dedicated to singular men. their hands were sandpaper, you see, scraping away cheek rouge and body paint and the way she looked at her wife at the lake in june

and the way she looked at her wife at the lake in june filmed beautifully against the OZian screen. lilac fingernails like pen caps to tip off every whitecoat waiting in the rafters. today that submarine found land, today no one called the police after swimming in the public pool, the pool enjoyed by jasmine or mister yates or someone's kids you don't know but should let be. remember the fireworks last night? remember the mosquitoes and the tiny red? it wasn't yours

remember the mosquitoes and the tiny red? it wasn't yours! what a relief! no reason to hide under a desk or crawl with elbows flat or lie face down in the gravel, eyes shut and hands straight up. i don't know what it feels like – to be a witness to my own death. to cruise my tongue along a brick hoping it's not as hard as it looks. but it is, probably always is. a lady with three shopping bags held a blind man across the street and she didn't let him go, not even after the intersection was clean.

## post-it notes

i.

counting the ripples on the club soda bottle label but not naming any numbers like how we want to be clean but only for the sake of saying it. there's glory in that moment, fists in the cold blue

ii.

how long till it becomes un-lovely? i'm used to measuring my life by whatever i might have to look forward to. the dogs upstairs look forward to everything and so they're infinitely suspended in time that is moving while happening at a stand-still. this might be teachable. looking at the bevel in the water glass reminds me of an old boyfriend that always wanted. i remember his forearms around my clavicles, the whirl of cars on the country highway just steps from the open window. i remember staring at the bleached wood-panel walls fettered with husks of ladybugs. this one moment i wanted to end, clamped its heels behind my neck, pushed

iii.

call dawn, don't forget to call dawn. can't get my brain to stop being fragments. speech a faucet drip and still tender in some way. i feel the mechanics of my love becoming mechanical so what do you do? what would a mechanic do? pull it apart, put it back together. turn the power off then on. bang it with a hammer. walk away and come back later. walk away and don't come back. the tip of this marker nothing but worn and down. the month of violets soon

## more post-it notes

iv.

tree branch lying across this invisible water and they're still tearing down the old supermarket. who brought flowers inside or who bought them at all, anyway? i can see five colors at once and feel downright pleased. bruised-up knees, so please pass over that plum

v.

what does she remember from living in the woods? white flags, not flags but burnt strips of cloth in knots, eating up the fence. a house there now. pumpkins in rows & we don't care how many. this time she fell out of the tree as she tried to adjust her watch

vi.

i don't want underwater any more than i want above water. no need to jump in the water, water's already here. they ask me how'd i like to be drowning. do you want to be drowning? - sure looks like you're drowning. oh, this? i threw the empty bottle clear across the side yard into the half-dead bushes full of bird seed. birds don't care if you're drunk, birds probably don't care about much except berries and fucking and flying south or west or wherever instinct says is farthest from where they started. i started in the kitchen by turning off the christmas lights and staring at the cabinet next to the screen door, almost daring myself to open it

**Bruce McRae**

## Love Is A Simile For Metaphors

My love is like an empty building.  
But that's not right.

My love is a kettle whistling.  
A solitary footprint in the snow.  
A machine not yet invented.

You see how difficult it is.  
Love is a colour beyond description,  
emotion bounded by the infinite.  
I'll try again.  
Love is a coin dropped in the dark.  
It's the plaintive cry of the manatee.  
A bundle of kindling. The number seven.

My love is anything but the rose.  
Although it has a thousand feet  
it does not wander.

## **To The Point**

Listen up, I chided my shadow.  
You're just one link in a chain of fools.  
A half-animal outside of nature.  
You and I, we're abominations, unholy,  
like a bloodless bestiary or talking dog.

As the sun began to set I said  
if you need me I'll be outside cutting  
the heads off roses and throwing stones at crows.  
If curiosity should dare to ask or care  
I'll be in the cellar building monsters.

## **The Search For Planet Nine**

It's out there, somewhere,  
freewheeling and coy,  
tugging on the beard of gravity,  
on the path of least resistance.

You can't see it, but listen –  
the sound of a bottle  
rolling across a table.  
The tattle of mice scurrying.  
Sounds of light rain  
making its way in the dark.

Planet X, feeling the cold.  
Feeling its age.  
The sun's secret servant,  
wise men sieving night from day,  
weighing circumstance  
like bettors chasing fortune.

They realize, once a thing is  
hidden it has to be found.  
It has to be hard to find.  
It's next to impossible.

**Sean Johnson**

## Instructions for Opening a Heart

make sure it is the heart you want to open  
and your hands are clean  
free from the leftover clots  
and shredded ventricles  
of the last heart you exposed

prepare your tools and your table  
you'll need at least one precision instrument  
preferably the sharpest words you can find  
offer it some lidocaine  
or at least a stick to bite down on  
when you slice into its valves

massage it with your warmth  
to decrease the rapidity of its beat  
whisper calm and reassuring words such as  
"I've done this procedure hundreds of time  
and have never lost my patience"  
assure its family that  
this heart will see them soon

touch its veins gently  
before rolling it back  
back beyond the curtain  
into the harsh spotlights  
start the IV drip and tell it  
to count back from 100  
to the many ways it has loved you

when its sleep is deep and silent  
saw open the alabaster box  
that protects it from sacrifice  
pick up your scalpel tongue  
and dive right in

## Supernova

In my darkness, you were the brightest. Should've known you'd soon implode. Now we've both been destroyed by your light. Come to think of it, I always felt like California, waiting for the force that would split me from your continent. Cataclysmic was your love; yet in the steam of lonely showers there's always a nostalgia for the nights when inevitable was far out of reach. Your goodbye is still smoldering in the pit of my stomach like the embers left behind by a dying fire. The tendrils of it whirl their way into my lungs and choke me lifeless, choke me life-full, choke me in and out of consciousness. Why did I let you kill and resurrect me? I suppose I wanted beautiful memories even if they only twinkled in a comatose sky. I don't know how to wake anymore or why I even bother. When day breaks, the light reminds me of your absence; the only shadow I am able to cast is yours. The sun that once kissed my skin, relentlessly scorches my chest. Nothing seems real except the emptiness of the light. In the hours of morning, the only thing I hope for is darkness and the only things I value are my dreams. In them, your cologne, your stature, your kiss, your hair, my stars. Your breath is still the night sky in which I collect them. Our movement still creates constellations that rule the shape of bodies. Our love is still its own galaxy. I drink the universe from your belly until the sands of time shift beneath your feet. In my dreams, you never steal the sum of me to make yourself whole.

## Selachimorpha

because I don't want to become accustomed  
to the way the ocean drags  
less resilient beings against their will  
don't want the marine floor to open  
and envelope me in its trenches  
I've had continents piled on top of me before  
it's hell escaping the mantle

so I keep moving

failure and triumph have streamlined my existence  
made to bend without breaking  
move in powerful silence  
covered in diamond armor  
I cut through waters and darkness

you only see me coming when I'm already there

I keep moving

unhinge  
take what is mine  
leave behind blood,  
brokenness  
and all the pieces of you  
that don't please my palate  
or necessities  
can't count the puncture marks and teeth  
left in my liquid vortex

I keep moving

towards midnight  
through lifetimes  
propelled forward by things behind me  
swiveling my spine  
listening for your heartbeat  
sparkling in the darkness  
hiding in the light

I am the majesty of your nightmares

you fear me

because I am always moving

but I gotta stay alive

gotta keep the water moving over my gills

**Kylie Ayn Yockey**

## *Destine*

In the hand-drawn palm of youth  
I connected the sunspot dots on  
my cheeks and the life / head / heart  
lines sown fleshlength

My astrological dig with bloody  
half-moon grips and grit teeth  
unearthed nothing but blackholes  
and lightyears of feeling alone

Trying to scope a prettier picture in  
tarot, I only ended up  
meeting myself over and over in  
the Star card—

in zero gravity mindspace there is  
no up and no reverse so I struggled  
to read meaning between Inspired  
and Despaired

As I ellipse another year and  
another unanswered yearning,  
praying for divinity in my sight,  
I decide to hold myself softer, lower  
from untouchable atmosphere like  
mist, curled inward like crystal ball fog  
In a hopefully self-fulfilling prophesy  
I make a wish on the twinkling  
shower falling from my eyes—

I am right where I'm supposed to be

## *The Mentor*

She has a cocoon in the back of her mouth  
birthed out as beautiful words

Sister muse, she who shines like the sun:  
her butterflies and moths pollinate the gardens she plants on earth  
and soars ever closer to God's light

The wings of her silver hair  
trumpet expletives onto pressed eucalyptus pulp  
so that we flowers  
may grow and pray she may one day cross our paths again

## ***Shoreline Eyes***

Trying to find the lighthouse is like trying to catch someone looking at you. They turn their head just fast enough so you can't really be sure what you saw. A light blinks, a momentary beacon, then disappears for longer than I'd think. Was it there? Is it there again? The fog obscures any solid flirtations. Maybe these winks aren't even for me, but some ship floating far behind my tide-swallowed shadow inclined on the sand.

**Margarita Serafimova**

The tongue of time was taking us in.  
We were entering its inside,  
nothing more was necessary than to be the ones  
who chose it.

I was burning.  
Air was lacking.  
Yet, the light around me was tranquilly falling,  
I was writing a legal document.  
Passion was an elegant, serene furnace.

## **April**

One of my hearts, is the heart you broke.  
It recurrently rises, according to the Calendar of Woes:  
a full moon of tenderness contained  
as a single tear on a rim,  
not falling, and the all-seeing eye not blinking.

Under your gaze,  
from a planet, I was becoming a star.

The sea was becoming distant again.  
We were becoming young again.  
Out of pale branches, fig trees were making dusk;  
and the roads – bottomless.

**Megha Sood**

## Essence

They say  
you are the sum of all your parts  
every fleck of me embedded into a million others  
this humanity born from the single truth  
broken and splintered into million others

how potent the love has been  
riding through time  
going through the innumerable  
transformation  
the irreversible mutations  
the innumerable facades

We have adorned to survive this hunting reality  
surviving the roller coaster of a time  
Have we changed?  
Has the potency of love  
been diluted?  
Has the lexicon for the  
desire, compassion and  
the insatiable thirst for compassion  
have altered the semantics?

Has my longing  
my eternal thirst been satiated?  
Do you still believe  
if I wring out my soul and the last word I draw  
will be "love"  
Do you?

## **Where springs have gathered**

I look for that memory  
in my head,  
where the thoughts of you reside.  
I open the doors to that room  
where all the summers have gathered.

where all the children have  
sung songs in unison  
gathered near the swing to play,  
where the lovers have cuddled themselves  
around the bonfire.

in that misty-eyed wintry evening  
I look for that door  
where all the springs go to bloom  
and all the crimson of the autumn  
lights up the hearts,  
of one and all.

I look for that door  
of that room,  
where love feels at home.

## **Pain comes in pairs**

Loving you too deeply  
becomes sometimes too toxic,  
The terminal point of addiction is damnation,  
as Auden once said,

but we learn our lessons to forget  
to commit them again,  
Has the unrequited love ever taught a lesson to anyone?  
it causes pain in all its wonder.

We watch people in pain  
not to learn from them;  
we hide and seek in the soul of others  
and often return empty-handed  
this game always doesn't end in gain.

we look for loneliness in those eyes,  
the exact limestone shade;  
grief in disguise.

Like painting our home last summer  
we want our pains to be matched  
and paired up beautifully,  
to ease this dailiness;  
to slowly ease the pain  
of these blisters on my skin  
popping yours with mine.

**Paul Ilechko**

## A Box Within the Museum

Inside museum exists a box the box is an  
“exhibit” is part of an exhibition the  
box is shadow and light inside the box  
where light enters inside the box is  
emptiness inside the box inside that  
which is visible you may see something  
resembling “art”

something that may be art because  
perhaps because you are in museum  
context because perhaps because  
the state of “art-ness” is intrinsic to the  
images that might be seen inside the  
emptiness of the light-filled box the pallid  
squint of that empty glow

the box existent merely as “object”  
contained within the domain of “museum”  
containing this not-thing this potentiality  
of art

the museum being a building of the modern  
style

entry to said museum being optional

entry to said museum being at least to  
some degree a marker of “class”

\* \* \* \* \*

among those who enter there are some  
who do not peek inside the box

some percentage of those who look inside  
the box are of a mind that the “contents” of  
the (empty) box are not properly to be  
described as art

it is not known how many of those who do  
not look inside the box might be of that  
mind

beyond the scope of box as object exists yet  
more museum containing in itself works  
that exist within the categories of painting  
sculpture photography and other items  
that may not be so clearly categorized

among these latter being perhaps the  
box

\* \* \* \* \*

there is a painting in this “other” museum  
that presents itself as abstract and yet  
within the shape that paint elaborates  
the texture of paint as surface the color  
that edges into ocean there exists an  
implication of “seahorse”

there is a sculpture in this other museum  
that presents itself as “body” although it  
merely through the use of wire or string  
or brick or other mechanism provides

an implication of “body”

the box in some way still undefinable  
has a qualitative difference when compared  
against these “other” works

a conduit to art but not art itself

empty while yet also full

**Alexandra Corinth**

## Harbored

Sometimes, I wonder what  
my body would look like  
as a bomb shelter,  
and when I say bomb shelter, I mean  
there are six cots wedged  
into my rib cage:

one, for the boy who stole  
my necklace during  
kindergarten naptime,  
who taught me that  
a man in want of a woman  
will take before  
considering  
to give; two,  
for the teenaged man who  
didn't understand the word no when  
it came from my mouth; three,  
for the first woman whose  
lips touched mine, who I  
betrayed with blood stains and  
missed phone calls; four,  
for Joe and Josh, who put  
bullets in their bodies  
before turning eighteen, who  
ended pain with more pain; five,  
for my grandmothers, who gave me  
years that will never be enough; and six,  
vacant until the inevitable someday  
when I am ready, or distracted,  
or too tired to fight.

Who do I protect  
with linen draped on bone,  
with lungs that swell like tides,  
with a rhythm that's felt  
in the skin?

Will they rise from my breath  
like rapture, like resurrection, or  
will they sing like doves in mourning,  
cling to my sinew with each exhale,  
claws painting my chest with bruises  
shaped like  
*I'm sorry?*

## **The Legacy Her Body Built** *after Johnnie Mae Young*

March 12, 1923. The Queen Mae Young is born in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, a suburb of Tulsa that stretches across two counties, like Mae's kingdom stretches across two careers. She is 16 when she first steps into the ring, challenging then-champion Mildred Burke during a show of which she is not a part. She is told that "women should be in the kitchen" by a male wrestler she can bench-press, and almost does before he concedes, "but after seeing you, you was born to be a wrestler." Like the other women of her generation, she stays home while the men go to war and carves a place for herself and the women crawling, toddling, running behind her to live, to thrive, to become something. She brings women's wrestling to Canada with the woman she challenged at her first show, she goes to Japan, to Florida, she leaves the sport to find God, finds herself instead, comes back to the ring and takes championships off women who are not even half her age and yet they beg to sell her strikes in front of thousands, sacrifice their wombs for the chance to have her tackle them across the belly to the tune of one-two-three.

Mae Young is 87 when she wins her final match on a WWE screen, seven decades of skin and scuffs and storylines that don't always make sense and even though she makes appearances until just before her death in 2014, I don't know her name until she is gone, until the legacy her body built is buried beneath the victory of women who would not be here without her.

## **All Those Fabulous Years** *after Lillian Ellison*

I.

When little Lillian loses her mother to cancer in 1933, her father takes her to wrestling matches to scream her grief at the ring posts. Does he know his baby girl will spend the rest of her life throwing herself onto the mat, body-slammng the trauma with each fall?

II.

A man gives her the name “Moolah,” like the money she made from picking cotton in the Carolina fields, but she refuses to be his “Slave Girl.” In 1956, another man changes her name to “Fabulous” and she reigns as champion for more than a decade, dropping the belt for a few weeks at a time before always taking it back, like a child who shares their favorite toy just long enough to get the credit.

III.

In 1934 and again in 1952, when the members of the New York State Athletic Commission conclude that the men of their state will riot at the sight of a woman in the ring, they save themselves the trouble of blood and boil and ban them from breathing between the ropes. The presiding judge says that the ban is meant to leave “at least one island on the sea of life reserved for man.”

On July 1, 1972, Moolah rises from the rubble of that ban – toppled by the likes of Ethel Whitehead and Silvia Calzadilla and Betty Niccoli and Shari Lee – to defeat her protégé in front of 19,000 “quiet” fans who don’t know what to think of her.

IV.

Lillian buys the rights to her championship in the late 1970s so even when it doesn’t belong to her, it does. She is the first (WWF women’s champion), the original (screwjob). With Mae Young, she conquers the hyper-sexualized women’s division, the oldest women’s champion at 76 years young.

Moolah is a madame, too, bringing the flocks under her wing, charging for the shade, for the opportunity of proximity, for the gift of hypocrisy.

V.

In 2003, Moolah and Mae take a limousine to the Gulf Coast of Alabama for a kind of reunion, a meeting of veterans of the squared circle. She sees Killeem Gillem, unsteady on her feet, cauliflower on the back of her head from all the bad falls, but when Lillian approaches, all Gladys can say is, "Where's Johnnie Mae?" Moolah pretends not to notice, offers her arms to her fellow pioneer, but Killeem learned decades ago how to ignore the empty gestures of a wolf masquerading as a friend.

VI.

She collapses in her bathroom, crumpling her spine. When she dies, she lies in the ground and waits – waits for Mae, waits for Katie, waits to feel whole again. When she dies, her mother holds her with soft skin, asks, "Where have you been? What's it been like?"

**Lindsey Warren**

## **An Hour Is a Room in the House**

*for Jess*

Here I am so invisible  
the potted plants do not interpret themselves as shadows of a face,  
where I am, then, when the spirit wears clothes  
just to take them off, or am I near the glass through which evening's  
insoluble scatter, so to hear the Leviticus of the dark  
lose track of all its contradictions and the night shed  
a little of its green, or, near the edge of the street  
the edge of the world, where the oak leaves slump through the rectory gate  
and so become unreal, the stars under which they were born  
putting to rest their glances, at last, and the stars opposite them  
take out their paints and let them breathe, blacks, purples, whites  
coming together where the firmament's screw came loose,  
blues, greens, golds where in the house I buried my dream of forest  
and sleep my whole life on each floor to find it, my lips my chest  
hidden behind some misty leaf.  
But the moon sees me, it lets  
its hair fall through my fingers. In the window  
I wear it as I wear my name: briefly,  
and subject to a light.

## The Starry Night

*after the painting by Vincent van Gogh*

I bought paintbrushes  
and a quarter moon, it was all  
I could afford. The canvas

already always dark.  
Venus smudging rooftops  
with its finger. One chip

of light makes its way  
out of my eye and  
into the halo

it was born for. My  
hand reaches for the sky  
buried in my face and

sends all lamps crashing,  
my nail cuts open a  
valley and I think

oh now I can talk on my own  
and have it be some glow  
unblemished on a side.

I inhabit faith's tree  
and drown up:  
this is where I find myself

when I forget the names  
of mercies  
or let them go

or break their bones  
or throw them into the ocean  
over the town:

I cannot bear  
the full rich cheek of  
moon when I am too poor

to be yellow  
and perception.  
Blue my every

walking life and  
failures in my boots.  
Stones or stars

dangling like un-  
frozen voices around  
my head, the hills,

the wind looks like  
all things I might  
have wanted to

make. Or only  
absence. Or the despair  
of another night rising

opposite.

**Jacob Hammer**

*It is cold*

I take off my hat anyway

The stars above  
are singing  
or screaming  
either way  
forcing the whiskey to my head  
faster than thought

& this means they are thirsty

& this means I am not enough  
for all of them to reach  
into

The porch light thickens  
the spiders come down to tidy their webs

I mumble into this silence  
in-between the small winds of passing cars  
I mutter until an echo grows beneath  
& I see the stars come closer  
& closer

***Small Song for Night / its Prince the Moon***

Standing outside  
with my thoughts  
or waiting  
until one star  
rips past the rolling  
clouds  
and drives my head clear

When Orion follows  
it's all too much for me

I go through the concrete  
I rest with the moles  
and smell for underwater rivers  
moving slow

But those stars keep  
scratchin my back  
and I can't get the scent  
out of my nose

**Brigid Hannon**

## **Sticky**

Bruises on my hands like on my heart  
as I gently peel  
this sticky tape off of my skin  
its residue leaving traces of where I've been,  
again.

Trapped by tubes to a bed in a sterile room  
where nurses search in vain for veins and I  
try not to panic, try not to cry.  
Sick to my stomach again and  
I try to hold back that bile but it comes unbidden.  
I wonder the price of each drop of saline  
that winds its way through these pipes and under my skin  
and think to myself that this is gold to  
someone without insurance,  
because this is America,  
and no one cares if you die.  
I pray to God for relief from this agony  
this chronic failing on my part  
that eats away at me the way  
this sticky tape eats my skin  
and no salvation comes because  
God took the weekend off.

## **Dervish**

I smoke a cigarette on a leather couch  
that reminds me of your skin  
so weathered by years of injustice.  
Or maybe  
years having passed too quickly  
while we lived in cages  
we built for ourselves  
out of solidified ash.  
My unruly heart keeps time to the drums  
as you peck out chords  
on this out-of-tune piano.  
Some days are harder than others  
as we try to hold on  
grabbing at hands and straws  
as we spin wildly.  
I chase you but you are faster.

**RC deWinter**

## **making too much of time**

living life at the speed of light  
too fast to think  
too fast to care  
the chance not taken?  
no such thing  
full speed ahead  
and damn the consequences

i gathered every goddamn rosebud  
while i could  
they withered and lost their scent  
in the blink of an eye  
now all that's left is a basket  
of blackened petals  
thanks much rob for that sage advice  
you taught me more than any book ever could

i learned  
concrete walls can break you  
careless words condemn you  
cruelty hides behind the sweetest smile  
and reaching for every pretty glittery thing  
leaves you with nothing but aching arms

i lived each day as though it were my last  
and now  
having been schooled in this folly  
i rise each day wishing it were true

## **lean living**

standing under the waterfall  
to be washed clean  
of yesterday's grimy fingerprints  
i toss the sad tattered contents  
of my ancient rucksack  
down over the rocks  
and when it's empty  
i toss the rucksack too  
i am grown too frail for any burdens  
but the few that can fit in a pocket  
and when i am come to the table clean  
stripped down to essentials  
don't spread my bread  
with oleaginous secrets  
let us dine not on calumny  
and stale confidences not fit for crows  
but rather the sweet remaining fruits  
of long experience

## **if you come**

don't bother coming in the daylight  
i'm no good in the glare  
all the pits and pocks of my ravaged being  
stand out in sharp relief  
you will be disappointed

don't bother coming in the blue hour  
i'm busy camouflaging the latest wounds  
with plaster and words  
and the ephemeral healing of daydreams  
and will have nothing to say aloud

don't bother coming after dinner  
i'll be smoking and drinking  
muttering scattershot curses  
damning everything and everyone  
with no particular regard for propriety or fairness

if you come at all  
come in the hours after midnight  
although it will be fiction i'll be beautiful  
an enchanting ignis fatuus  
exactly whom you imagine me to be

**Lucas Wildner**

## A History of Men

Pick up a package of Manner schnitten and the first thing you might notice is its color—a hue in that space between orange and pink we could describe as coral or apricot, vivid enough to make a homophobic middle schooler feel anxious in the candy aisle. The company name, written in a looping cursive navy blue with a white trim, floats above two filled wafers lounging next to some hazelnuts—the original, and best, flavor.

Above the logo appears a church. Bringing the package closer, you find yourself in the middle of Stephansplatz, looking up at Stephansdom from the west-southwest, so that the twin towers of the west front appear on the left and diagonally lead your eyes up to the south tower. The image is detailed enough for you to see the zigzag patterns of the roof's glazed tiles, restored after a fire during the second world war. The logo sits in between this rendering of the church and the word Wien (or Vienna, if you're holding the exported version) in a polite sans serif font.

A busy cover—one that seems baroque when compared to the you-already-know minimalism of the Hershey's bar wrapper. All this fuss to insist on nuance or to display a particular pretension—this product isn't from *Austria*; it's from Wien.

The city that still houses the majority of my father's side of the family. The city he returns to every summer for his older sister's birthday, always leaving enough room in his suitcase for a four-pack wrapped in cellophane.

\*

I came out to my father last, a few days before the new year, but after Christmas, so I wouldn't have the guilt of ruining his favorite holiday on my scorecard. In the other conversations, the question *does Papa know?* came up. His reaction—the one unknown we all speculated on.

As it happened when I had the talk with my sisters and mom, I learned more in the dialog than he did. He, like the rest of the family, suspected I was gay, and

had kept the suspicion to himself. If I ignored the terse way he ended the conversation by walking away, it was because I was too occupied with the relief at finally finishing the series of nuclear family outings. Not exiled, I considered the night a success.

What ended my anxious procrastination? I was dating for the first time. The stakes for coming out to my father had felt high—too high for me to initiate the conversation with nothing to show for it. A boyfriend, one who lived a few dorm doors down the hall from me, one who would be visiting Tucson for the first time in January—that was not insignificant. An emblem of functional adult happiness, mine to present. A counterargument I had to believe in, especially if I was reinforcing my dad's disapproval by voicing it, even as I now cringe at the emphasis on respectability at its core.

A few days later, I delighted in giving Nick a tour of the house I grew up in. He saw my bedroom. He met the cat. As we were leaving, my parents pulled into the driveway, back with groceries. An awkward, "Hi...This is... Ok, Bye!" scene ensued, was made more awkward by my father, who greeted me before resuming his resolute march to the front door. A paper bag in each hand.

Later, when I asked him why he hadn't acknowledged Nick, he expressed a disappointment in Nick's purple hair, earrings, and new car. I was to understand these as character flaws.

I began to correct him, but even then I knew that explaining Nick had frosted tips, not purple hair, was an absurd exercise—one that set a grim tone for the next year and a half, when the relationship imploded. I learned my dad loved me most when my sexuality remained politely invisible. For years, I obliged.

\*

The tattoo session lasted two and a half hours. Once freed from the chair, I needed a moment to breathe out all of the tension I had held in, and took the opportunity to take a picture and send it to my sisters. I was relieved when their reactions confirmed what I had hoped would be true: the tattoo had a joke to be in on, and they were in on it.

The session had gone longer than I had anticipated. Although I was only a few blocks away from the University of Arizona Poetry Center, where a reading would soon occur, I would not have a chance to get dinner or clean up my forearm.

Despite the protests of my stomach, I walked over to the venue, making a subtle shift in persona from carefree 26 year old to professional educator. I knew to expect a few of my students in the audience that night (attending for extra credit) so, ignoring the instructions from my tattoo artist, I unrolled my sleeves, ensuring the plastic wrap surrounding my forearm would be in place for at least two more hours, when I would finally be able to let the tattoo air out at home. Not devastating, but less than ideal. My forearm crinkled with each step.

I do not remember the reader(s) or how I felt about their performances. I only remember savoring the feeling of getting away with something—of reclaiming a small territory of my body. While my professional persona smiled back at my students and greeted the occasional parent, my tattoo bled silently at my side.

\*

Manner, especially when written in a navy blue cursive, is a candy company, is a metonymy repping my childhood is him coming home, which is Tucson, from his...home? which is Wien.

Add an umlaut: Manner becomes Männer, pushing the long vowel toward the front of the mouth. And by the time your tongue drops back down, you have said the German word for men. Quite a coincidence.

In the one year waiting period I required of myself to mull over a new tattoo idea, I smiled every time I thought about the visual pun. It felt like queer vandalism on a sentimental symbol. A revision signaling I was beginning to define my relationships to Austrian culture and to my father. It felt necessary. It felt *fun*.

\*

When we picked my father up from the airport, I wore a short sleeve shirt, reasoning that jetlag and half a day's worth of flight time would dilute his shock or disappointment. Why care about your son's tattoo when you could be completely horizontal?

He didn't notice it at the baggage carousel. He didn't notice it on the drive home.

We began unloading his luggage from the trunk when my mother, perhaps as desperate to get the reckoning over with as much as I was, told my father in

German to look at his son's arm.

Confused, he glanced at the arm I held up for inspection. We did not make eye contact. He said, to himself, “umlaut a,” laughed and shook his head while walking to the front door. That was the only time he has commented on it. To his credit, he has never asked me to cover it for guests coming over. A moot point, given my habit of wearing long sleeve shirts, especially for Austrian visitors and for my parents' German-speaking friends and colleagues.

These visitors, I feared, might read the tattoo then return to talking about the weather. Or, worse, read the tattoo and then ask for the story. I did not have the German for such a conversation—I had designed the tattoo in English, after all—so my queerhood never came up. The love that dared not speak its name... because of an eroding vocabulary inherited from a straight speaker. Fluency became yet another closeting mechanism.

As each sister shared updates on her boyfriend/fiancé/husband, I sat on the couch, confirming the sleeve hid what I needed it to.

\*

The summer before my 30th birthday, my younger sister and I spent a few weeks in Austria to visit family without a father-chaperone for the first time. The relatives took turns calling the apartment to fill our social calendar. Or they made arrangements with each other before presenting us with their plans.

My cousin/godfather Manfred and his wife Gabi invited us to hike Leopoldsberg and Kahlenberg in the suburbs of Wien. Taking an early break from the steep beginning stretch of the hike, we listened as our cousin pointed out features we mostly did not know. I followed his index finger in its horizontal path, and found the various buildings, districts, and historical sites or did not. The city lay below us, hidden by haze an afternoon storm would later clear away.

Illiterate in European history and ten years removed from my previous trip to Austria, the visual tour felt wasted on us, flowing through my short term memory as calmly and steadfastly as the Donau, silver in the morning light, below us. Worse, I was preoccupied by a choice the status of my laundry had made for me: a short sleeved shirt. Fortunately, the existential and linguistic crises of holding conversations on adult topics with relatives who hadn't seen me in years distracted me from the sensation of feeling exposed.

At the top of Kahlenberg, we stopped at a café where we joined the small crowds of tourists enjoying a break before continuing their tours of the vineyards in a nearby valley. Over coffee and juice, my cousin and his wife asked us about our plans for the rest of our stay.

Lying poorly to cover for the blocks of free time still on our agenda, we made vague claims about visiting a list of museums, churches, and relatives.

*Make sure to go to Stephansplatz*, Gabi advised, as I watched her eyes fall to my left arm, which I had left carelessly on the chair arm. I returned her smile and pretended to be the person she thought I was: someone who would tattoo a corporate logo onto his forearm.

I didn't dare ask if she had seen the umlaut.

\*

I don't dislike it when an American reads my tattoo as manner, though I do wonder what assumptions they make about the font choices. Usually, I smile and say *long story*, which I proceed to tell or don't.

The story, I've learned, provides general details about my sexuality, my father, Wien. It does not capture my feelings about any of those topics. I'm still not sure how to cross the gaps, how many there are.

I would never have my tattoo removed or covered over. But to tell you I like it every time I see it would be a lie.

\*

In all the non-selfie pictures of me that summer, I wore long sleeve shirts. The early July humidity meant tolerating constant sweat creases at my elbows.

The rare occasions I wore a t-shirt out of the apartment, my sister would often freak me out by reminding me our fellow streetcar passengers could read the tattoo hanging in front of their faces.

A stranger never approached me, which feels like a relief. And like a disappointment. Going into that trip, I held onto the idea that the tattoo would help get me laid in Wien. An efficient icebreaker that would lead to making out in some alley emptied of tourists. Or in an early morning streetcar taking us past monuments and government buildings lit up just for us to ignore.

\*

When Corinna and I visited Stephansplatz, the bright Manner storefront, the exact color of its packaged wafers, felt hilarious to me, like it had become another product one could buy, from a factory that specialized in making candy stores. Once inside and no longer affected by the storefront aesthetics, the store became just another store: stacked baskets off to the side, cashier vaguely scanning the aisles for shoplifters.

After purchasing a few souvenirs for coworkers and friends, Corinna recommended she take my picture in front of the store.

I felt silly for posing. Not for the act of posing—we were in Wien’s Times Square—but for the pose itself. My pale arm stuck out next to one of the storefront’s large logos. My pride made me feel embarrassed. I knew, to the people walking by, I was a dedicated customer, so fanatical about these hazelnut wafers that I would tattoo their logo onto my forearm. If Gabi had seen just the logo, so too would all of these people. It was not just a love of Austrian culture that had made the photo-op possible.

\*

After months of radio silence, a closeted boy I had wanted to date sent me a pic: two grocery shelves of Manner products, including flavors and bite-sized varieties I had never tried. When I pointed out how cheap they were, he explained he’s at the commissary on base—after getting his routine haircut, I assumed—and he offered to buy some at discount with his family member military ID. Whatever Manner candy I wanted, suddenly available to me in western Washington. A move both charming and thoughtful enough to make chatting feel safe again.

A few weeks later, he snuck a pack of lemon-flavored wafers into a showing of *Call Me by Your Name*. We ate half of the package, which ended up in the cup holder between us. That I could easily imagine a revision to the scene in which we shared a box of Junior Mints made the reality more precious, more fragile.

I sensed it coming—a scene that would break him open, that would lift his hands from his lap to wipe away the tears. I’d watched him cry at many of the movies we’d seen together, a habit that endeared him to me, I realized, because I

so rarely got to see men cry. (I mean men; I also mean myself.)

I placed my left hand on his arm, felt his body shuddering. Felt for the first time how a friendship with him could be possible, not just a bittersweet tour through the implosion's remains.

It's not that I think my father would be mad if he heard about this episode—that two gays sharing a package of Manner somehow defiled the ethos of the company (and by extension all of Wien). It's that my 16 year old closeted self would have felt the whole scene to be so far away from where he was.

\*

After I moved to Washington, the first time I got a haircut in warm weather, my hairdresser at the time asked me about the tattoo. Remembering her celebratory comments after the 2016 election, I explained the tattoo was a recently deceased grandmother's maiden name. A zero-sum lie aimed at promoting family values to make up for the tastelessness of a visible tattoo.

If she did not believe me, she did not say so.

Once, I allowed myself to think of the tattoo's cultural prerequisites as nuance. After all, I wanted the tattoo to marry my Austrian heritage with my hella gay young adulthood. If the audience didn't have an understanding of the former and therefore couldn't access the latter, it was their loss went my rationalizing.

Easier to call it nuance and not a desire to pass for straight—an option the tattoo has rarely jeopardized. I know I could have preserved the visual pun of the cursive font, for example, while replacing the navy blue with rainbow. Maybe monolingual homophobes would have been more vocal then. Maybe I would have placed the tattoo on my back or thigh. I can accept that legibility is a range, not a box to check, while also knowing my tattoo's place on the spectrum, despite its location, is safer in an American context. On a white man.

While writing this, I began to think of a young woman I once saw in a Flagstaff bar when I was an undergrad. She was wearing a tank top to display a side shoulder tattoo, which looked like some giant typewriter had click-clacked *dyke* into her skin. I know she had a kind of bravery I needed to see. I know the long sleeve shirts in her closet.

\*

**Alana Hayes**

אני אוכלת סרט

*(I am eating a movie)*

*Dedicated to a friend*

In your absence I am eating a movie.  
I gave you a new name,  
wrote us a new future,  
came up with a whole story about why you never got back to me,  
why you could never pick up a phone.

I told myself it wasn't because I wasn't worth trying for,  
it was because you didn't think you were worth the effort you'd have to put in to try.

I told myself I was going to stop talking about you,  
the cyberghost who doesn't speak to me,  
but still checks in on everything I do.  
*I see you watching my Facebook story.*

I told my friend you were  
*he-who-must-not-be-named*  
in an effort to avoid invoking you and  
she said, "Who? Voldemort?"

I cried over you and how you let me down,  
then apologized for spilling myself everywhere,  
and my friend said it was okay.

She told me that you are the Kylo Ren to my Rey.  
Disney was just trying to make something work  
that doesn't work,  
and you were always destined to get my hopes up  
just to disappoint them.

I told myself you just weren't ready,  
but then I remembered you had been.  
That once upon a time we were reading the same book,  
during all of those fucking pages together.  
Perfectly synchronized. We were like swans  
we were so damn pretty.

I told myself it was another girl  
like the one whose pictures you started liking on Facebook.  
nice hair, face fresh,

that no-make-up-bitch #flawless,  
see now what jealousy makes of me,  
but then I remembered I'm the best thing you'll ever touch in this lifetime.

We were a million stories, you and me.  
You were the Tarzan to my Jane.  
A little bit caveman, a lot of macho.  
You were the Ali to my Nino,  
with what I thought would be a happier ending.

Do you have any idea how many movies I ate waiting for you to come back?  
I found the stories in between the layers of filo dough in my baklava,  
they fell out on the floor whenever I broke pieces of chocolate off of my candy bar,  
they spilled everywhere like date pits  
vulnerable, easy to step on, nothing sweet protecting them anymore

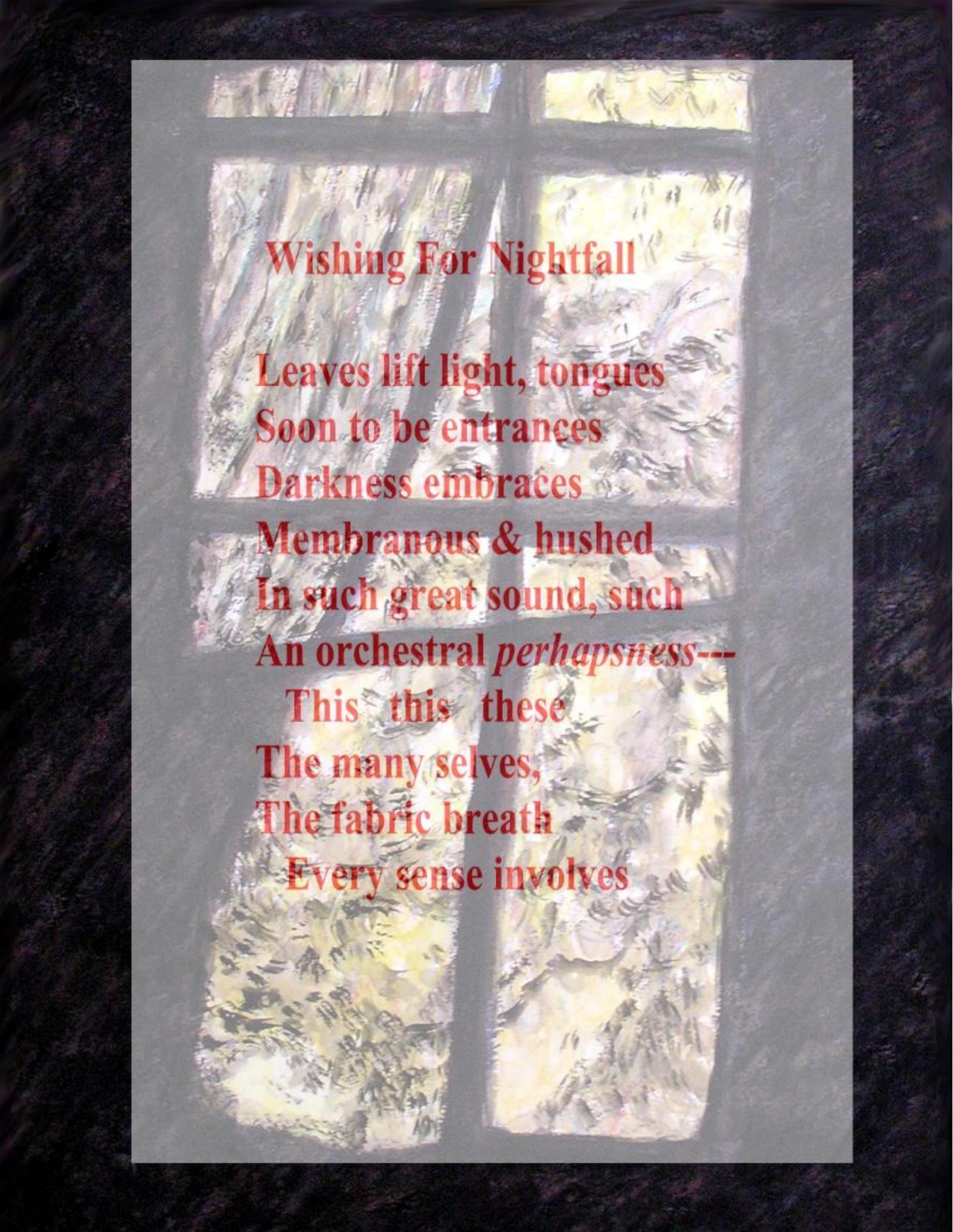
and even now I keep comparing you to other guys I see on the street.  
The cute waiter who spoke Russian at the cafe,  
the guy at the bus stop,  
I see you in their faces.  
Sometimes when I measure them up I wonder which one is  
tall enough, established enough, *enough* enough  
to make you jealous,  
to make you feel like you missed out,  
to make me stop playing you in my head on an endless loop.

And during all this time I spent thinking about your face  
my friend wrote a screenplay about us,  
because that's what she does... *damn artist*,  
found a director, hired all of the actors,  
funded the whole fucking thing through a kickstarter campaign,  
and when she asked me to come up with a title  
I wrote out a list of possibilities like,  
*where are you? why am i still waiting? when will you come back?*  
*in your absence all i have done is eat movies about us*  
came up with a million stories about why you left,  
and a million more, even sweeter stories about how you'd come back to me

and on the premiere night of our movie my friend hands me a bucket of popcorn and says,  
"Promise me when the credits start rolling,  
and everyone is filing out of that theatre,  
and he still hasn't shown up,  
you'll get out of there."

I nod and take the popcorn,  
and when it's time I take one last bite,  
sit the popcorn down, and watch  
us fade to black.

**Stephen Mead**

The background is a painting of a window. The window is divided into four panes by dark frames. The view through the window shows a scene with trees and a building. The painting style is expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a mix of colors including greens, yellows, and purples. The overall mood is somewhat somber and contemplative.

## Wishing For Nightfall

Leaves lift light, tongues  
Soon to be entrances  
Darkness embraces  
Membranous & hushed  
In such great sound, such  
An orchestral *perhapsness*---  
This this these  
The many selves,  
The fabric breath  
Every sense involves

**Jeanette Salib**

## Exhaustion

i am exhausted

of hiding  
my thoughts  
my facial expressions  
The music that plays on my Pandora  
on full blast until  
the gravel crunches under your tires  
in the driveway  
and the porch light flickers  
and warns me to  
silence my song

drained  
because a lie told often enough  
becomes a truth  
that drags down hope  
and words repeated endlessly  
embed themselves in your DNA

## Shhhh

Once upon a time  
I thought  
I would be  
A poet  
But then  
Their voices  
Began  
to overpower  
The words  
and  
pictures  
in my head  
"Be good"  
They said  
'behave"  
They said  
"Listen"  
"Behave!"  
"Listen"  
"BE QUIET!!!"  
Listen  
Your words  
Don't matter  
Your thoughts  
Don't matter  
and  
The  
pounding  
Pounding  
Smashing  
Unrelenting  
Refrain  
Of their chorus  
WON

I turned down  
The volume  
Of  
myself

Inside my head  
Silenced  
The thoughts  
And wishes  
And dreams  
And  
Words  
and  
Verses  
Stanzas  
Epics

That clamored  
To escape  
To live  
And  
Breathe  
To build  
Castles  
carved  
Of granite  
By fairies  
On Faraway  
Planets....

I  
Walked  
Around  
gagged  
Shackled  
Mute  
Only  
A  
Shadow

But  
These  
Mammoth  
Titanium  
Chains  
Are developing  
Hairline  
Fissures

These  
Chipped  
Chains  
may  
Yet splinter  
And free  
Me  
From  
This  
Silenced  
Sepulcher

## **Cannibalism**

Everytime time I shut up  
Just to keep the peace  
I swallowed another  
piece of myself  
That would  
choke me  
As it crawled  
Down my throat  
Which would  
Burn  
With the acid  
Of remorse  
Until  
My stomach  
Would rebel  
And threaten  
To come back up  
To vomit  
All my  
Feelings  
Out  
But no  
I would be  
Strong  
And shut  
My mouth  
Until  
I  
Opened it  
Again  
To swallow  
One more  
Piece  
Of me  
To keep  
The  
Peace  
I just realized  
Today

I've swallowed  
Every piece  
Until  
There's  
nothing  
Left of me  
I have  
Become  
A cannibal

**DS Maolalai**

## **Suppose**

winter comes  
and the sun  
starts rising later, electric  
pink  
in the 10 o'clock  
and fog. and the  
rain,  
suppose the rain comes  
each night - coming,  
as it does  
always, at night -

breaking the storm  
and falling like dropped bottles,  
and we wake up  
to the grass bent  
and pavements  
battered yellow,  
the windows cracked  
and all the birds  
unhappy.

suppose  
the year turns,  
tumbling past autumn,  
the trees  
tobacco amber  
and then blowing away  
grey ash.

death  
crawling out of his grave,  
smelling of sickbeds  
and heavy sweat.

age  
limping  
like a wounded dog  
and cold coming in,  
and me  
wrapping you tight  
in a duvet.

**Isn't it wonderful.**

the nights are short this summer.  
they seem  
a little  
skimpier than usual,  
a little more willing  
to show off their legs.

and that's,  
perhaps,  
because you are here,  
wrapped up  
and writhing in an eiderdown,  
listening to the wind skipping sleek between the treeleaves,  
watching for the runners of sun as I come home.

here you are.  
and here we are.  
warm,  
with the window open  
letting in the shiver  
of our short nights.

now  
we have everything  
we want.

**Matthew Dube**

## **Lodge at the Sign of the Tabard**

There's a bar across the street  
called "The Rehab Room," a smoke-filled station  
of the cross for families fearing bad news  
or diagnoses from the hospital that's an anchor  
for all the hotel's residents, even those  
who are themselves convalescing on thin hotel sheets.

The families of the sick are always with you, wondering,  
what illness are you concealing? Everyone here  
makes eccentric orbits between health and sickness,  
tracing paths from parking lot to hotel room  
to hospital bed. Wheelchairs are occupied,  
with adolescents racing down the carpeted hallways  
to get to the van hired to ferry families

to the sprawling medical campus  
across the street. Comfort and hospitality  
are afterthoughts no one can afford  
to recognize. The smell of contraband cigarette smoke  
hides just inside the doorway of each room, fried circuits.  
Wary guests try to ignore the air of failing connections,  
emptying before their eyes  
of the belief that if everything goes wrong,  
at least this—ice machine, defrosted danish,  
strong-enough coffee, threadbare towels and  
anonymous artwork—will suffice to carry us across.

# Reviews

## *Cranesong*

Rona Wang. Half Mystic Press (2019, 76 pages). \$15, paperback. \$7, digital.

Rona Wang is, in Carissa Dunlap's words, a "badass creator," and I couldn't agree more. Wang is the type of creator who gives other creators pause, who makes one ask, what have I been doing with my life? Not nearly as much as this sophomore at MIT who is already a prize-winning writer (Wang won the 2016 Adroit Prize for Prose and a 2018 Isabelle de Courtivron Prize from MIT's Center for Bilingual/Bicultural Studies, just to name a couple) and has created a writing mentorship program, an online learning platform and community, been named one of "22 Under 22 Most Inspiring College Women" by *Her Campus*, and has written a gorgeous and gut-wrenching debut of short stories. And she's only 21.

*Cranesong*, published by Half Mystic Press, is a collection that puts the rest of the world on mute as each story peels open. In one story, a "barely-eighteen college freshman" returns home for Thanksgiving and realizes "[e]verything [she] knew of home is gone," and some things can't be replaced. In another, a village is transfixed by the "Guiyang girl in the rice paddies," her power transcending death. And in another, a young Chinese girl finds a precious moment of friendship in a war-time America determined to erase everything she cares about.

Wang's skills as a storyteller are a joy to behold. She shifts smoothly and seamlessly from one point of view to another, from present to past and back again, from realism to magic realism and back. Legend can sit beside YouTube; each element, no matter how quotidian, jumps forward into something close to wonder, but the painful kind, like sunlight bouncing off snow. In another writer's hands, these shifts would be incongruous. But in Wang's, they're magic.

And Wang's characters are so real: they lift makeup they can't afford, "stealing promises for the lives we yearned for," crave connection so hard that when they look at the person they love, they "wanted to crawl inside of her, make a home out of all that tenderness," and say yes against their better judgment because "it feels so good to be seen." And they're often in free fall, trying to find their place in a world that asks them to break themselves against its closed, and often locked, doors.

As they deal (but not always cope) with culture, language, sexuality, loss, and

racism, and yearn for love, beauty, and home, it's impossible not to ache right along with these complex characters, many of whom exist with a foot in two or more different worlds, watching, being watched, and sometimes targeted by those that "shimmy like they know they belong in this moneyed, neon world." In "Liv, Liv, Lipstick Liar," Liv says, "Some people would walk for years to have something magnificent and entirely theirs." These are characters walking, getting a little messed up in a messed up world, and the reader gets a little messed up, too.

Wang has a talent for slipping the floor out so that each paragraph, each story, reverberates through muscle and bone to something central. Her imagery is so arresting ("skies that swung open like switchblades" in "The Evolution of Wings"), her diction so startling and fresh ("Skeins of green grains embroidered her limbs and neck" in "The Girl in the Rice Paddies"), the whole of her collection so true to the raw emotion roiling under each surface, that I'd be willing to follow Wang pretty much anywhere. Better pay attention to this bright, vibrant new voice.

## ***The Sea That Beckoned***

Angela Gabrielle Fabunan. Platypus Press (2019, 48 pages). \$13, paperback.

Angela Gabrielle Fabunan's debut, *The Sea That Beckoned*, is a meditation—no, that's too sedate—a fixation on the many ways one (especially one who migrates) looks for home—in the place one was born, in a new land, in memory, in language, in each other—and the many ways it is lost. But more than that, this is a book about the self, and how conceptions of home define, complicate, or even threaten that self. In a world reaching for the concrete, this book crashes into every certainty, scattering the concrete as a wave scatters sand. Here, home and self are as vast, elusive, and changeable as the sea. As soon as you scoop it up, it's already slipping away.

“There was once a country I resided in, but it was neither here nor there,” Fabunan's speaker says in “Fair Game.” In “Midway,” the speaker says, “In / or Out—perhaps there's a place we can call home, / but right now there's just this, an in-between...”. This “in-between” is the vessel that holds this book. The speaker, unmoored, is “neither here nor there.” All homes, all selves ebb and flow in the speaker's mind, each dissolving a little as something new is ever-forming: “a life spent / gathering the arithmetic of loss” (from “First Day”).

This “in-between” exists in form as well: one line gives, another takes away. And imagery: spring growth replaces decay. Images from one home, fractured, slip in and are quickly replaced or bump up against images of the current home: “the shadows made from clouds appear like / dreams, the old and new mingling, the fluidity of sky and ocean / marrying the horizon” (from “Migration Story”). The place lost exists as a film over every current action, home under the ghost of home—image under the ghost of image—and “in the end, / only memory remains” (from “Fishnet”). Memory, slippery as a fish.

And language is slippery, too, like America, its promises never fully realized: “back then, we were gods, knowing nothing / but what we desired and that we'd have it” (from “The Other Shore”). Language can define what is home and what is not, or not yet. It shapes one's understanding of the world, just as understanding shapes language. Learning the language of place can give one power. Forgetting the language of origin can fracture self. Combining language can make one other,

something new that can be powerful, yes, but also threatened.

Fabunan's glimpses of the Philippines are vivid, and like the speaker, "you float / in ever changing phases" (from "Cadena de Amor"), swept up in the grief, the love (for there can be no grief without love), and the movement. As the speaker moves forward, becomes something new, something is also lost so that the body, the mind, becomes a graveyard. The speaker is haunted and haunting: "all I wanted to say: hello and goodbye at the same time" (from "Midway"). She will "bloom," but at the same time, she will "wither," and isn't that pain, that ache, what it means to be fully human? And isn't there, in that in-between, a kind of wholeness?

For all this uncertainty, this in-betweenness, the proliferation of questions rather than answers, Fabunan's debut is not hopelessly adrift, not hopeless. Rather, it is the splash that ripples out, creating possibility: "we beings are more than just language, / more than accent or the drift / between homes, each / catapult into the unknown / turns shadows familiar" (from "Model Minority"). In Fabunan's book, all things exist and can exist, even if all things are not present. Reading this lovely book is like dipping one's toe in the sea and remembering its size and connections. This is a book for anyone who has ever lost home and searched for home, for everyone still searching.

## ***THE BLACK CONDITION FT. NARCISSUS***

jayy dodd. Nightboat Books (2019, 96 pages). \$15.95, paperback.

I read jayy dodd's newest creation over and over, until I became only an ear, severed. Until I became only nerve, raw to each breath, feeling reverence, heartbreak, tenderness, gratitude. Feeling humility in the face of the divine, a witness of every word-cell's tenuous tenaciousness. I kept/wanna keep this collection on replay, letting SIDE A pour in, then SIDE B, then the BONUS TRACK, crashing again and again against that inner drum, swirling all the way back, all the way down.

jayy dodd tells me so many things I need to hear, one of which is LISTEN. Listen so hard you miss meals and phone calls. Listen so hard those voices demanding your and others' extinction break apart and dissolve back to nothing. Listen so hard that when you turn the volume down, you don't recognize the world anymore. Trish Salah calls dodd a genius—so much YES. With this new collection, dodd shows being—"blxk trans femme" being—in all its complexity, beauty, and vulnerability. Here the self can shiver out of one's grasp as easily as ripples can disperse one's reflection. There's something god-like, something permanent, in that ephemerality, that resistance to category and definition, that impossibility of being—and urgent need to be—held.

dodd shows that being—in line, in poem, in self, in world—is so much more than any one presentation, any one glimpse in the mirror, any one capture on film. dodd's book is full of hands, always in flux, so expressive yet so mysterious, being only one part of a whole that often exists in shadow. Powerful in holding but also in letting go. Vulnerable for the same reasons. Able to show so much about a person, but also so little. Able to build up, tear down, lead and mislead. In "Manual," the lines: "What if God was something / that could be held in the hand." Not a question.

dodd's book is next to, awash in, testament to the divine, writing the "blxk trans femme" body into existence, creation the first tool of divinity. In "I Know I Been Changed," dodd writes, "you will call me out my-self, blasphemous / but i have heard on high my body is harmonic gospel / it was written in sacred memory before coming into being / now, i am here ready for rapture...". As the speaker becomes, agency/power is reclaimed: "...As a child, / I spoke as a boy, I understood as

broken, / I thought as a ghost; but when I renamed this body, / I put away childish things” (from “narcissus reads 1 Corinthians 13, Without Love”). Coming of age, coming into being, stating, “I am.” Complicating and decolonizing the statement that “we are made in god’s image.” Trans body as god-like, a reflection and manifestation of the divine.

But not immortal. After all, “Amerikkka” has declared war on such bodies, especially when they are black and femme: “in the wood / the trees say *hey baby*, / so i’ve accepted my body / can’t be both safe & beautiful” (“narcissus goes to the market”). Existing, out in the open where a pool may reflect beauty, where a stone thrown may disperse it. By existing, dodd gives me courage to do so. But dodd also holds me accountable, reminds me that I too have hands. That an old myth can be undone and a new one made. That I should hold “whatever / binds me to this earth” close and undo whatever doesn’t.

“...what will we make of our new cradles of tomorrow?” dodd asks in “Babylon.” I am so here for this remix, this rapture, this future-making.

## Contributors

**Sayuri Ayers** is a native of Columbus, Ohio. Her work has appeared in *Entropy*, *The Pinch*, *Hobart*, *Ghost City Review*, and others. In 2016, Green Bottle Press released her chapbook *Radish Legs, Duck Feet*. Haunt her at [sayuriayers.com](http://sayuriayers.com).

**Katherine Fallon** received her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College and has since been doing a lot of things, none of which are publishing. In 2018, she decided to take herself seriously, and since then, her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Meridian*, *Passages North*, *Permafrost*, *The Colorado Review*, and *Foundry*, among others. Her chapbook, *The Toothmakers' Daughters*, is available through Finishing Line Press. She teaches in the Department of Writing & Linguistics at Georgia Southern University, and shares domestic square footage with two cats and her favorite human, who helps her zip her dresses.

**Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah** is the author of the new hybrid works, *The Sun of a Solid Torus*, *Conductor 5*, *Genus for L Loci* and *Handlebody*. His individual poems are widely published and recently appearing in *Rigorous*, *Beautiful Cadaver Project Pittsburgh*, *The Meadow*, *Juked*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *The Sandy River Review*, *Strata Magazine*, *Atlas Poetica*, *Modern Haiku*, etc. He is an algebraist and artist and lives in the southern part of Ghana, Spain, and Turtle Mountains, North Dakota.

**Stephanie Valente** lives in Brooklyn, NY. She has published *Hotel Ghost* (Bottlecap Press, 2015) and *waiting for the end of the world* (Bottlecap Press, 2017) and has work included in *Susan*, *TL;DR*, and *Cosmonauts Avenue*. Sometimes, she feels human. More info at <http://stephanievalente.com>.

**Grace Yannotta** is currently in her senior year of high school in North Carolina. She's an aspiring author and an aspiring historian and an aspiring a lot of things. She has work published or forthcoming in *Angry Old Man*, *Zin Daily*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Anatolios Magazine*, and *Graviton Lit*, among others, as well as an upcoming astrology column in *Dark Wood Magazine*.

**V.S. Ramstack** is a Pisces, a selective extrovert, and an avid crier. Besides poetry she enjoys cats, flowers, and checking out too many books at the library. She received her MFA from Columbia College Chicago.

**Bruce McRae** is a Canadian musician currently residing on Salt Spring Island BC, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with over 1,400 poems published internationally in magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rattle* and the *North American Review*. His books are *The So-Called Sonnets* (Silenced Press), *An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy* (Cawing

Crow Press), *Like As If* (Pski's Porch), and *Hearsay* (The Poet's Haven).

**Sean Johnson** graduated Summa Cum Laude from the University of Houston with a B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies and recently completed a Masters in Literacy. She enjoys performing spoken word and has starred in several local plays. Her poetry has appeared in *The Chaos*, *Riversongs*, *Houston Poetry Anthology*, *The Louisiana Review*, *Sanskrit*, *Third Wednesday*, *American Journal of Poetry*, and other anthologies. Her poem "Rearview Mirror" was nominated for the Pushcart Prize for Poetry in 2014. *All My Heroes Were Assassinated* is her first full length collection with two of its poems nominated for "Best of the Best" by *Edify Fiction* and *Lunch Ticket*. She resides in Houston, Texas with her beloved dog, Bruce Leroy.

**Kylie Ayn Yockey** is a queer southern creative studying for her MFA in Writing, with a BA in Creative Writing and Literature. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Glyph Magazine*, *Meow Meow Pow Pow Lit*, *Gravitas*, *The Stray Branch*, and *Ordinary Madness*. She has edited for *Glyph* and *The Louisville Review*, and is a managing editor for *Ink & Voices* and poetry editor for *Blood Tree Literature*. Find more at [www.kylieaynyockey.com](http://www.kylieaynyockey.com).

**Margarita Serafimova** was shortlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize 2017, Summer Literary Seminars 2018 Poetry Contest, and the University Centre Grimsby International Literary Prize 2018; long-listed for the Erbacce Press Poetry Prize 2018 and the Red Wheelbarrow 2018 Prize, and nominated for Best of the Net 2018. She has three collections in Bulgarian. Her work appears in *Agenda Poetry*, *London Grip*, *Trafika Europe*, *European Literature Network*, *The Journal*, *A-Minor*, *Waxwing*, *Orbis*, *Nixes Mate*, *StepAway*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *HeadStuff*, *Minor Literatures*, *Writing Disorder*, *Birds We Piled Loosely*, *Orbis*, *Chronogram*, *Noble/Gas*, *Origins*, *millers pond*, *Obra/ Artifact*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Califragile*, *TAYO*, *Shot Glass*, *Opiate*, *Poetic Diversity*, *Pure Slush*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Punch*, *Tuck*, *Ginosko*, etc.

**Megha Sood** lives in Jersey City, New Jersey. She is a contributing author at *GoDogGO Cafe*, *Candles Online*, *Free Verse Revolution*, *Whisper and the Roar*, *Poets Corner* and contributing editor at *Ariel Chart*. Her 290+ works have been featured in *521 Magazine #Sideshow*, *Oddball*, *Pangolin Review*, *Fourth and Sycamore*, *Paragon Press*, *Royal Rose*, *Visitant Lit*, *Quail Bell*, *Modern Literature*, *Visual Verse*, *Dime Show Review*, *Nightingale and Sparrow*, *Piker Press* and many more. Her poetry has recently been published in the anthologies *We will not be silenced* by Indie Blu(e) Publishing, *All the Lonely people* by Blank Paper Press, and upcoming in eight other anthologies by US, Australian and Canadian presses. Her poem "Survivor" was selected for the "Survival is Insufficient" series by the Jersey City Writers as part of the event sponsored by the National Endowment of Arts. She recently won the 1st prize in the NAMI NJ Dara Axelrod Mental Health Poetry contest. She blogs at <https://meghasworldsite.wordpress.com/>.

**Paul Ilechko** is the author of the chapbooks *Bartok in Winter* (Flutter Press, 2018) and *Graph of Life* (Finishing Line Press, 2018). His work has appeared in a variety of journals, including *Manhattanville Review*, *formercactus*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Marsh Hawk Review* and *Rockvale Review*. He lives with his partner in Lambertville, NJ.

**Alexandra Corinth** is a disabled writer and artist based in DFW. Her chaplet, *DEUS EX DIAGNOSI*, was published by Damaged Goods Press in 2019. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Kissing Dynamite*, *Barren Magazine*, *Entropy*, and *SWWIM*, among others. She is also an editorial assistant for the *Southwest Review*. You can find her online at [typewriterbelle.com](http://typewriterbelle.com).

**Lindsey Warren** is a recent graduate of Cornell University's MFA program. She is currently at Cornell not as a student, but as a freshman writing instructor and a creative writing teacher. She has been published in *The Fox Chase Review*, *Broadkill Review*, *Icarus Down*, *Secret Lovers Press*, *Lame Kid Zine*, *Rubbertop Review*, *Marathon Review*, *GASHER Journal*, *Hobart*, *Dark Wood*, *Figure 1*, and *Josephine Quarterly*. She has had an excerpt of her long poem "Incantation" on display as an exhibit at the Biggs Museum in Dover, Delaware. She is the recipient of a Delaware Division of the Arts Fellowship and has been a finalist for the Delaware Literary Connection Prize and the Joy Harjo Prize.

**Jacob Hammer** has received a Master of Fine Arts degree from Vermont College of Fine Arts. His work can be found in *See Spot Run Literary Journal*, *Fourth & Sycamore*, *Peacock Journal*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Zvona i Nari*, *The Collapsar*, *The Tishman Review*, and has been featured in the *Pine River Anthology*.

**Brigid Hannon** is a writer from Buffalo, NY. Her poetry has been featured at *Ghost City Press Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Constellate Magazine*, and *Madwomen in the Attic*. Her short fiction has been featured at *Soft Cartel* and *Edify Fiction*. She can be found online at [hamneggs716.wordpress.com](http://hamneggs716.wordpress.com) and on Twitter @hamneggs716.

**RC DeWinter**, a superannuated poetry debutante, writes in several genres with a focus on poetry. Her only claim to fame is a decent Twitter following. Nevertheless, her poetry is anthologized in *New York City Haiku* (NY Times, 2017), *Uno: A Poetry Anthology* (Verian Thomas, 2002), *Cowboys & Cocktails: Poetry from the True Grit Saloon* (Brick Street Poetry, April 2019), in print in *2River View*, *Meat For Tea: The Valley Review*, *Pink Panther Magazine*, *Down in the Dirt*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Genre Urban Arts* and featured in numerous online literary journals.

**Lucas Wildner** hikes and teaches in southern King County, and volunteers for the Seattle Writers in the Schools program. His current project examines the relationships between internalized homophobia and white privilege. Recent and

forthcoming work lives at *Nice Cage, No Assholes, birds piled loosely*, and elsewhere. On Twitter @wucas\_lildner

**Alana Hayes** is an American citizen currently living in Haifa, Israel, where she works at the Arab-Jewish Cultural Center Beit Hagefen (House of the fruit of the vine), which is a non-profit organization dedicated to the values of shared society and cross-cultural communication. She is a graduate of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County where she received a BA in English Literature and another BA in Women and Gender studies. She has a background in non-profit cultural work specifically focused around Judaism and cultures of the Middle East. She has worked for Hillel, The Jewish Museum of Maryland, and Silk Road Dance Company back in the states. Most of her poetry revolves around themes of Judaism and feminism. She likes to take modern issues or experiences from her life and give them context using history and/or Jewish lore and culture. On Instagram @womanasriot.

**Stephen Mead** is an Outsider multi-media artist and writer. Since the 1990s he's been grateful to many editors for publishing his work in print zines and eventually online. He is also grateful to have managed to keep various day jobs for the Health Insurance.

**Jeanette Salib** grew up with her nose forever buried in a book. Before she was 12 she had read almost every fiction and poetry book her library had. In her teen angst she began to write poetry and lyrics. Most were surely atrocious but she poured her heart into them in journal after journal. Recently, she discovered the joy of combining art with her poetry to share a message.

**DS Maolalai** has been nominated for Best of the Web and twice for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016) and *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019).

**Matthew Dube** is your usual jobbing writer—teaching English and creative writing by day, sending out stories and poems by night.

