



NMJ
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J.L. Moultrie



A Treatise (in two parts)

I

My oppressors can't be
the harbingers of my liberation.
Being human is a brief view
of eternity.
It's fading.
I'm left debating which
way I will leave.
This monologue often
turns remote.
The doting human
I am, often
sieved by anguish –
fluent in the language
of scars.

II

A shallow grave
in discarded earth –
my sight trails behind
youth's departure.
It's fading.
I languish
under waves, bright
and laconic.
Sardonic systems
are a bridge between
me and the long
stare of life.
When I am unhoused,
I surmise the worms
will solve the riddle of my corpse.

Dialectical

My mind is a red
bird – its coarse wings
often betray the nest
from which it came.

A long dormant pain
returns like an echo.
I'm impelled to excavate it
from the oak-scented earth.

Time renders my boyhood
translucent – an apparition
I no longer seek
to define.

The gusts of wind
that so radically pierced me
unfold and contort,
revealing irretrievable flowers.

Winter

The sky
is a scarlet
parody residuals
from a feeling
that seldom
leaves

I found
myself thirteen
barely able to
speak above
my own
racing heart

Loyal to some
dream I can't
betray to some
feeling I can't
prove will
remain

Knocking on the
door of sleep
gets tiring
so I find
myself staring
out of windows
hoping what I
feel leaves no
lingering bruise

The past spasms
from the
slightest touch
the wind is at
my back howling
like stray dogs
as we once were

Lunar Notes: An Interview with J.L. Moultrie



Why poetry/writing? What pulls you into the page? What poets/writers first inspired you?

I first began writing poetry as a makeshift form of therapy around ten years ago. I try to compose whenever I'm "feeling it." Now, I find writing to be useful as a mode of self-expression and as a way to decompress and process the intense experience of being human. When a combination of words exhibits a certain emotional quality tied to sincerity and strong images, I have to put it down on the page. It's difficult to define the impulse that compels one to write; the results are tangible when they manifest, but the origins are virtually inaccessible. The work of Fyodor Dostoevsky, James Baldwin, Rainer Maria Rilke and Hart Crane had and continue to have a profound impact on me. Their works remain relevant and deeply humanizing because they both unsettle and illuminate.

What are you currently working on, and do you have anything coming up that readers should know about?

I recently finished the first draft of my debut poetry chapbook. I'm currently revising and tinkering with it, trying to make it the best it can be. In the coming weeks, I'll search for compatible publishing presses to submit to. It's an exciting time.

What was the first thing you had published? How has your writing or focus changed since then?

The first writing I had published was five poems in *Rigorous Magazine*, around two years ago. Since then, I feel my poems have become more unified, focused and emotionally direct. I feel like I can get my point across in fewer words while adhering to the same creative DNA. I'm now more patient, restrained and detail oriented, which comes with time. Now, I'm more focused on not getting in the way of the words and just letting ideas and concepts flow.

What would you say is the center of your work? What motivates you? Where does a new poem or piece begin for you?

I try to keep sincerity and integrity at the center of my work. By that, I mean exploring themes, ideas and topics that I have a genuine interest in. When writing a piece, self-fulfillment is always at the forefront of my mind. As Baldwin said, "I want to be an honest man and a good writer." A new piece usually begins with an image, a short combination of words or fragments of both flitting around in my head. From there, I'll usually write the first line or two and see where the momentum takes me. It's a spontaneous and unique experience each time.

What space does or should poetry/writing occupy right now?

I think writers have always played the role of shaping public sentiments and deepening our collective understanding. I feel poets in particular have a great responsibility because they are the backbone of any society in that they teach us about what it means to be human. I feel writers are the last bastion of integrity, courage and truth-telling in any sustainable culture.

What advice would you give to a writer just starting out? If you could go back and tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?

I would tell them to try to be patient, hone their craft and trust in the development of their own voice. I would also advise them to read voraciously and broadly. I would tell myself not to lose heart and continue producing work despite any hurdles and challenges that may come.

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 would hope that it was *The Dhammapada* - it's a Buddhist text that contains hundreds of sayings the Buddha uttered. I often read it to gain clarity and insight concerning my own existence. I would hope it was the *Dhammapada* because I would solely have myself to contend with and I would want that relationship to be as strong as possible.

Seamus Fisler



Two Scenes with Foreword

The lakefront's waiting in the kitchen wearing my mother's clothes
The telephone playing with its fingers in my sisters' shadows
A persimmon never has to taste itself
I keep from suffocating.

This is a scene from childhood

here my mother has crossed out the landscape with a pen
and left it to reappear
here your hands fidget with the meanings
buried beneath my t-shirt's wrinkled lines
here my corpse becomes a window.

A scene from childhood

the night sky writes Why Abjection? under her eyelids again and again while
she watches her hair grow until it stops but instead it keeps going

Deux scènes avec un avant-propos

(translated with Yoanna Bolzli)

Le rivage m'attend dans la cuisine en portant une robe
Le téléphone tripote avec les doigts à l'ombre des sœurs
Il ne faut jamais que la grenade se goûte elle-même
Je refuse de suffoquer.

Ceci est une scène d'enfants

C'est là où maman a barré le paysage d'un coup de plume
lui laissant la tâche de réapparaître
C'est là où vos mains ont caressé le sens que j'avais enterré
sous les vers froissés de mon slip
C'est là où mon corps devient une fenêtre

Une scène d'enfants

la nuit étoilée écrit et réécrit sous les paupières Pourquoi l'abjection et
elle regarde la chevelure, elle attend qu'elle cesse de pousser mais elle ne cesse pas

Sarah Beddow



Dispatch

for: [redacted]

I do not do / emotions / well I am stoic and disinclined to touch when upset When doctors cut my
dead baby from my body / I woke up alone in a crowded recovery room shivering and crying and /
even if my husband had been there I didn't want / to be touched What would have happened / I
would have cried myself into / dissolution [] came to me during my prep to get something off
her chest and she only cried for / a few seconds the whole period / We talked about what / she
owed her friend /

now that they share / the manifold
/ / I do not want
do not want do not want cannot stand this world / for them So I touched / her and listened She
did not dissolve today but / surely she will / and / if I can I will be the nurse who notices the
silent shivering the silent tears and brings an extra blanket

Dispatch

to: Leah

Dear Leah I wanted to send this quick email / to let you know officially that I did not apply again for the curriculum / development pathway But I also want to say I fear you think I don't like / you I like you / fine I remember sitting in Miller's packed up / classroom two summers ago and we listened to Yacht Rock unpacking standards and mapping learning targets / on countless posters and the dingy whiteboard wall It felt like we / were building something Even if that thing promptly / fell apart in its first year Because what did we know about / how to write a curriculum how to write a learning target framework How / even the new gradebook software would work In my dreams last night you were my husband and we were / moving into a new apartment in New York City but it / was so big A railroad apartment with / a second railroad storage room along the side Old chairs and dust like you would expect / jumbled that storage room but the cubbies / So many storage cubbies and all / empty waiting to be filled In this dream we had two daughters and they / were exploring the storage rooms with me Beneath our feet the / gaps in the floorboards were just slightly too big and when / the girls bounced on their toes in excitement the floorboards / swayed and bowed I told you / reluctantly I don't think we can build here I'm afraid / we will all fall through

Savannah Cooper



Cicadas

I imagined these days
differently. Nights too.
Days where I wouldn't have to
fill the hours because there
would never be enough,
your cries and laughter filling
every corner, rattling
the dust.

Instead it's quiet, sipping
coffee on the sofa, listening
to the cicadas scream in the trees.
They're ugly things, too big
and too loud. I find their husks
everywhere, caught
on the railing of the deck,
hanging on the wood
like something alive, lying
in wait.

The dogs poke at dead ones
on our morning walks.
What would they do if
that monstrous thing suddenly
took flight?

I don't sit outside. I suppose
I'm waiting for fall, for everything
to die and the air to turn cold.
One day the trees will be quiet
again, and in that hush
I'm not sure what sounds will echo.

Midwest Suburban

Walking home by the fitful light
of streetlamps, here and then gone, orange
glowing and then plunging everything
into darkness, warm and silent—
I forget the way the world looks in daylight,
the stark blue of the sky and the trees burning
green against it. A bright green, almost
unnatural, like the lights framing the garage
of the house across the street.

I am not safe here. In sunlight, some people
stand in their yards, driveways, stoop on porches
but don't lift a hand. And in darkness,
a lit cigarette reveals their faces beneath
the moth-adorned porchlight. Sometimes they argue,
voices low and snarling. I sleep surrounded
by feral life.

The neighbors are old, attended by middle-aged women
who come and go, packing up trash bags of aluminum
cans to shove in the recycling bin. A different car
in the road every day, occasionally edging
into the space I think of as mine. I drive close
to the bumper, nearly striking it, scowling,
as though they might see and fear the helpless
look in my green eyes.

Emerson Wheeler



Night Sweats

The screams beneath the window grow,
Both in volume and in multitude.
All these voices, so much emotion.
All night long, as numerous as the stars.
Each voice with its own story,
Its own reason for existence.
They are all alone.

They lay outside this window, voices clear as the night sky
Looking up, screaming at the moon.
I know why they're here.
I follow, down the stairs, out onto the grass.
They cover the grass in sound,
The heat of unwavering emotion draped over each blade.
Groggy, I let myself float
on this blanket of sound.

Time passes, and the grass grows hoarse,
The voices gradually subsiding.
Early morning dew appears in their place.

I awake, bleary-eyed,
Cradled in a scalding nest of blankets.

Proprioception

weighted blanket on my lap,
my legs are attached.
more so than normal,
without looking.

which,
when you think about it,
is an assumption that
my legs are there in the first place.

I feel what I touch:
my skin to the fabric of my pants,
my slippered feet to the floor,
my back to the cold chair.

Where have my shins gone?

My back and arms
Burn
With desire for
pressure, security, grounding.

The world spins.
I breathe in.

Smother

I was born on the surface,
and will die at the bottom.
that's just the way
it goes.

is there a limit to this pressure,
this crushing of lungs and alveoli,
from the deep where dark
smothers the last of the light?
No End In Sight.

last thing I saw?
the sun, blinding from above.
now a small dim star against the black waters
which envelop us both.

falling, falling.

a once overwhelming star,
small and alone among unfamiliar bubbles.

Karen Poppy



Pebble

*On a swing
a pebble—
noon*

—Haiku by Itō Hakuchō

Moon, a pebble
On a swing, not
Noon, but full-sail
Midnight, glow

On a snail's shelled,
Back, glow on
His stemmed eyes,
Tentative in their
Starred reach.

We see none
Of this, hush,
Blanket, and walls
Muffling the world.

Windows want to
Let all in, but
Some triumphs
Are too small,
Too vast.

Connie W. Scott



Driving through Wheat Fields to Waitsburg

*You, road, I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here,
I believe that much unseen is also here.*

~ Walt Whitman "Song of the Open Road"

It is October. No rain will fall from this
blue platter sky. Gold wheat crops
checker the landscape. A few harvested fields
turn their blank faces towards me.
Their mouths are full of dirt clods
that won't let them talk.

The farther south I drive, the steeper
the hills. They rise
gradually, like grief, until I'm driving in a canyon
with no horizon, buffalo grass
lined up like soldiers on both sides.
I'm heading for Waitsburg
where I've never been. I don't know
the way and I'm out of cell range. No matter
how far I drive, he won't be there to greet me.
Sometimes a friend must die before you
realize he was a prophet.

I pull into the dirt lot below the cemetery.
The others have gathered on the hill,
dark coats like a murder of crows
looking down at an empty gum wrapper.
I join the family graveside. I know
only my friend's wife. We link arms
until I stand and read Whitman
to my friend who has become
the breeze that carries the psalm
I sing into the open hands of sky.

Hunter Gagnon



Quarantine poem #84 this tree on the edge is wounded and has grown around its wound like a folded hand

They took me in the yellow
tunnel of the end
7 pm before they start
the fire
behind the wood piles
and piles of t-posts

They kept the dogs
barking at me
hooking their claws
on the wire fence

This was in the northern
county
there was a white tent
a field of lettuce
a fence with a hole
where lions came through

This is at the tunnel's end
I have skipped
to the end
they keep a bowl
of my blood
in the kitchen

When my face is clean
when god has left
my eyes
and shown himself
in the trees
like a gold fork

They celebrate
they play old music
with a solar radio
make tea from nettles
worship the lightning
how it prods the ocean
the wet cliff prairie
of wind of
beetles of night

My long bones tell the future
stacked
in a prism
over the turkey field
on a green stump
where the sun
makes a red river
of its heart

Stella Hayes



TO THE LIVING, LIVING

I am hot in the lymphs. The soldiers
who dutifully fight off invaders

Those defenders of good against evil.
The upkeep keeps rising against the suns & moons

Descending on surfaces. A raised toilet lid,
Slicked in morning coffee,

Sliding down the esophagus like a single sun ray.
The cup contains the spill of the day

Against the good & evils
Spinning in the overheated lymphs

The beetle ascending the wall
Slides up & down as if on a surface of ice, leaving

An invisible trail of restlessness & despair,
I am helpless, as it is—

The other bugs in the hallway reform into moths,
Larvae in repose, gather around the source of the artificial light

That serves as a night lamp. Each morning
As in this one, we wake up to a massacre.

The organisms with long detached-like antennae,
Didn't make it through the shared night.

Their lives are as long as our night.
Is that why they huddle

Near the light, warming up to enlightenment?
At least they reached the light & died by morning

Kaylee Duff



DEFINE LEAVING

I.

I am inventing a word that means
falling in love with a specific place
at a specific point in time.

And all I have is this—

A town full of trash, but
beautiful somehow: a beer can
in a pine tree, a cigarette lighter
in an empty parking lot.

It storms for weeks, puddles
forming lakes in fields. People
walk around with umbrellas open
even when it's not raining.

In a big yellow house, I make
dinner out of laughter and grease.
And I'm crying because who
wants to leave a life like this?

But is anything actually permanent?
This feeling isn't like sadness,
exactly, but rather: looking up
at 5:30 p.m. to see the sun has gone

and the moon's not out yet,
and the sky is red and purple
with fog and something like
the promise to never leave.

II.

But is there a word for falling
in love with something that's neither
place nor person? A word
that feels like home when home

isn't a house but a feeling—
the ache in your bones
when you're too tired to fall
asleep, the pull of your muscles

when you're reaching further
than tomorrow. How can you explain
what it means to be yourself
when there is else nothing left?

Empty gyms so familiar
you can already hear the voices
filling these walls. I could find my way
back there, even after April ends.

How can I quit experiencing
life the only way I've ever known?
Rooms full of people I don't know
yet somehow know everything about,

looking into my best friends' eyes
and knowing exactly what we need to do.
Maybe leaving is less about going
than it is about rising from the ashes.

FROM THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

image after image, escalating:
lying in your arms, soft glow
of fairy lights & fire burning bright.
close up:
something fresh & unique,
a stroke & a sigh—
coffee brewing in the background—
hands & hair
& skin & sweat.
absence

of pain. stop:
pan out:
over there, something cliché? or familiar?
melting & scratching & freezing.
STOP—
AC kicks on, off—
red trickles up, darkness
swallows whole. eyes closed,
squeezed closed tight,
like my throat,
like the memory.
slow fade:
details blurring
& quickening, pulsing.

your palm on my heart
becomes heavy-handed.
shrug it off. cut to:
window, overlooking falling
snow against a black sky.
moonlight? streetlight?
(does it matter?)

image after image, de-escalating:
heaving in your arms, harsh light—
“jesus, how can I ever go on?”
pause:
step back. go to sleep. wake up.
life goes—

Contributors

J.L. Moultrie is a native Detroiter, poet and fiction writer who communicates his art through the written word. He fell in love with literature after encountering Fyodor Dostoevsky, James Baldwin, Rainer Maria Rilke and many others. He considers his work to be experiential abstract expressions.

Seamus Fisler (he/she/they) is a nonbinary poet born in Zhigaagong on the land of Niswi-mishkodewin, the Council of Three Fires and currently lives on the banks of the Illinois' Sea. Some of their accomplishments include having one piano student, knowing to quit their job at Starbucks when the time came, and learning to enjoy the company of goldenrod.

Sarah Beddow is a poet, mother, and teacher. She has written a lot of poems and essays about her body, rape culture, and abortion. Her chapbook *What's pink & shiny/what's dark & hard* was published by Porkbelly Press, and she is the founding editor of the Pittsburgh Poetry Houses, a public art project. Find her online at impolitelines.com.

Savannah Cooper is a Missouri native who now lives in Maryland with her partner and dogs. Her work has previously appeared in *Mud Season Review*, *Steam Ticket*, *Gone Lawn*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *Rust + Moth*, among other publications.

Emerson Wheeler (they/them) is a third-year medical student at the University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine, co-founder and President of the Alliance of Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses in Medicine (ADACIM), and Accessibility Coordinator for the Medical Student Pride Alliance (MSPA). Previously, they studied kinesiology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, conducting research on the effects of physical activity on pediatric concentration, memory, and academic performance. Their interests include psychiatry, pediatrics, LGBTQ health, narrative medicine, palliative care, and physician advocacy. Outside of the hospital, they can be found swimming, taking pictures of the beautiful Vermont landscape, writing stories and poems, playing with their pet rats, doing puzzles, and baking sweet vegan treats.

Karen Poppy has work published in numerous literary journals, magazines, and anthologies. Her chapbook, *CRACK OPEN/EMERGENCY*, is published by Finishing Line Press (2020), and she has another chapbook forthcoming with Finishing Line Press. Her chapbook, *EVERY POSSIBLE THING*, is published by Homestead Lighthouse Press (2020). An attorney licensed in California and Texas, Karen Poppy lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Connie Wasem Scott lives in Spokane, WA, where she teaches writing and literature at Spokane Falls Community College and enjoys the outdoors with her Aussie-American husband. Her first chapbook, *Predictable as Fire*, will be published this winter by Moonstone Press. Her most recent poems have appeared or soon will in *American Poetry Journal*, *CITRON*, *Streetlight*, *The Shore*, *CIRQUE*, *Minerva Rising*, and elsewhere.

Hunter Gagnon lives in North Berwick, Maine. He has worked as a State Park Seasonal Aide, a bookseller, and as a poetry teacher for elementary schools (before the pandemic). He holds a degree in Philosophy and has served in AmeriCorps and FemaCorps. He is a winner of the Mendocino Coast Writers' Conference 2019 Poetry Contest. His work has appeared in *7x7*, *Joyland*, *A) Glimpse) Of*, *Cabildo Quarterly* and elsewhere.

Stella Hayes is a Russian American author of the poetry collection *One Strange Country* (What Books Press, 2020). She grew up in an agricultural town outside of Kiev, Ukraine and Los Angeles. She earned a creative writing degree at University of Southern California. Her work has appeared in *Prelude*, *The Indianapolis Review* and *Spillway*, among others. Her poem "The Roar at Wrigley Field" is featured in *Small Orange Journal* anthology.

Kaylee Duff is an MFA candidate in Writing for Children & Young Adults at The New School. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in several journals, including *Superstition Review*, *Prairie Margins*, *Gertrude*, and more. She currently lives in Brooklyn. You can find her on Instagram or Twitter @kayleeplease.

