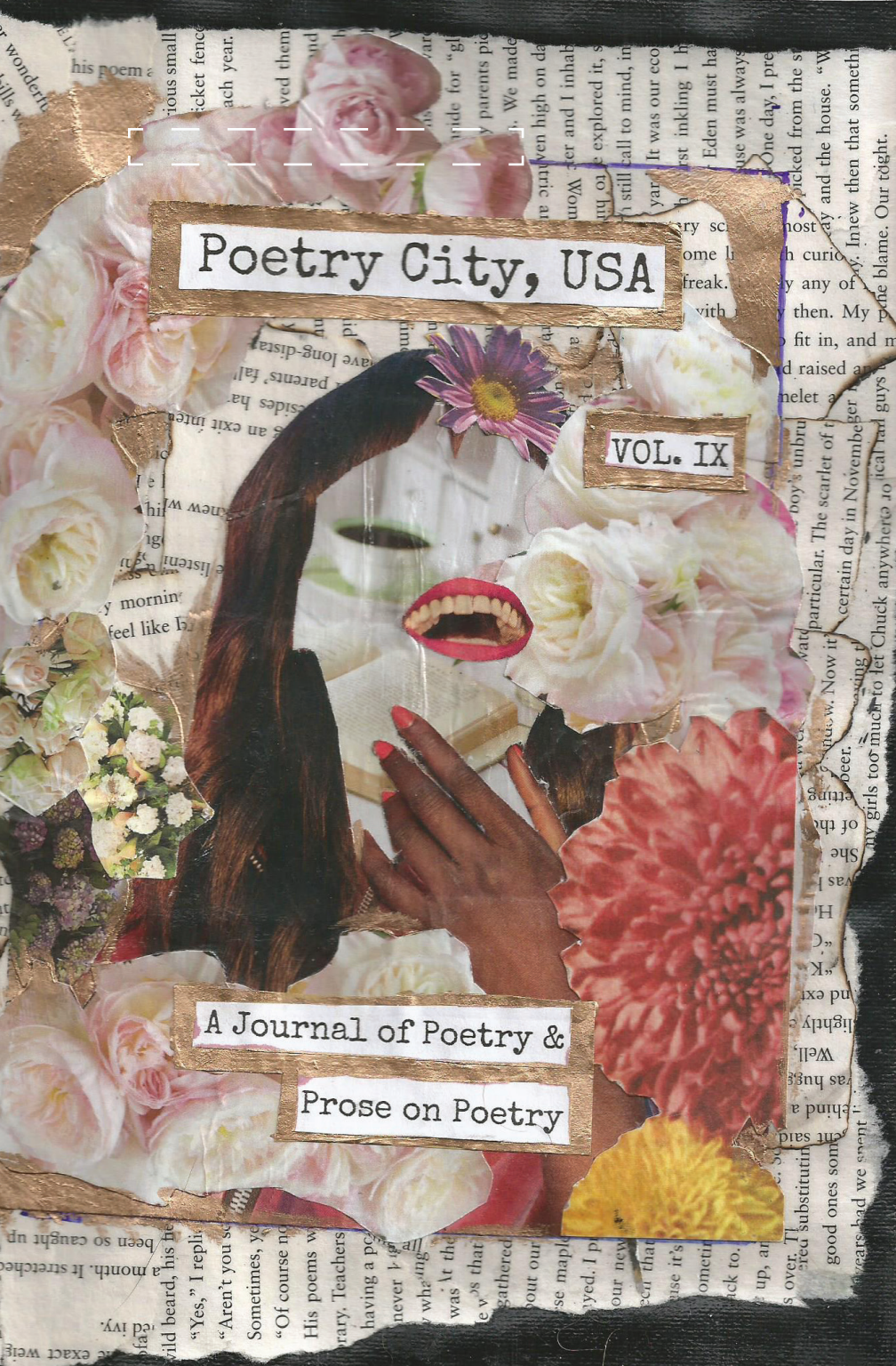
Poetry City, USA
VOL. IX
A Journal of Poetry &
Prose on Poetry

Poetry City, Vol. IX

A journal of poems and prose on poetry

NOTES:

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POETRY CITY, VOL. 9
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Cover design: Lexi Ilaug

poetrycityusa.com

Publisher: Poetry City

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Foreword

Poetry City is an annually published journal of poetry and prose on poetry open to all submissions. We have been publishing continually since 2011. Each issue is available on a limited basis in print, and free in cyber editions.

One of our missions is to teach and nurture primarily students in AFA in Creative Writing programs in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) metro area, but also local undergraduate students in other creative-writing programs. Our goal is teach student-editors how to be good readers, editors, and purveyors of poetry, and to help them as they navigate their careers and become poets, editors, publishers, teachers, etcetera.

Prior to becoming what we are now—a journal open to all submissions with a mission to cultivate and showcase contemporary poetry and poets—the first four issues of Poetry City were comprised of poems read at or by poets who read at two Twin Cities reading series: The Great Twin Cities Poetry Read and the Maeve's Sessions reading series. Prose on poetry included in the first four issues was solicited from a number of poets not necessarily affiliated with the two reading series. The Great Twin Cities Poetry Read (GTCPR) was founded in 2010 as an annual reading featuring thirty or so poets who all read a single poem each. The Maeve's Sessions reading series was founded as a bi-monthly reading series held at Maeve's Cafe (RIP), one of many venues along Northeast Minneapolis's fabled Poetry Row, which has been home, past and present, to the Imaginary Friend reading series, Pocket Lab reading series, Bosso Poetry Company poetry reading series, some reading series we've probably missed, and who knows how many that we can't anticipate.

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We haven't found words yet. We speak in touch.

– Iris Dunkle

Lukas Bacho

COMMUNION

Thoughts of the boy dance in
on the blue of the night. He arrives as if beckoned,
hair disheveled and eyebrows blooming.

Recall the time he extended his hand
like an offering, coaxing tears into the dark
from where they hid—impossible
to forget.
Or the blessing he left on his mother's temple
with silvery lips.
Wish Mom knew that kind of communion.

The best boys come in jeans routinely hoisted
by a hooked finger. Words trickle softly from a rock-
hard jawbone. Sins whisper their secrets through darting eyes.

(u want to text. u want to paragraph. u want to
novel without speaking.)

Inside a lagging screen, the face is illuminated.
A neck, a pair of shoulders, eventually a chest in shadow.
He is talking about typefaces, asking for approval. Only
consider types and faces, never together.

Connection is intermittent. Classify his behavior
according to the amplitude of his voice, the arc of his wave.
Who are u to move your lips
when no one else is listening.

Todd Kaneko

RARE BIRDS

So what if the seagulls follow, riding
the ferry's drag across the sound?

If the water is a brackish murmur
inhabiting most of our bodies? I am

made of old crow songs and wisps
of kelp in the sand, tattered feathers

wreathed over a boy's head. So what
if eagles are nesting near the freeway

overpass—the answer is the difference
between daylight and mourning, evening

commute and the ocean's heave and pull
against the horizon. You are the name

of a rare bird winging its way toward
extinction. I still call you father, the one

who stands in the water and waves
me in to join him. The one who lifts me

from the surf, away from hungry fish.
So what if the water continues to rise?

If the only birds we have left are skeletons
on the wind? If the birds are really the names

of the dead dying to be spoken, the water
this grief, this desire to call you home.

Gabriel T Werline

CLOUDED REMINISCENCE

Relatives in black wander aimlessly around us,
a swarm of mosquitoes.

My brother next to me,
a black cat curled tight on the graveyard parking lot.

Head tucked within belly.
His sentences suppressed against a polyester suit.

Do you remember the stars underneath the Nevada moon?
How they burned of hydrogen.

The sound dads spoon made when he scraped his can of black beans.
The sauce sticking to his voice,

“We all come from the same place, outer space.”
how you nodded,

and asked if he could take out the telescope,
to search for Saturn.
How he didn’t respond,
until he finished eating his dollar store dinner.

And grunted his way through the dark,
to the trunk of our sand coated sedan.
Pulling out our little telescope
to search the stars for your Saturn.

Margaret Rhee

DOMESTIC LIFE

When I told you I was bored of poetry, I lied. Every day now I drive by
mansions and rolling hills. It takes a toll. I try to count on my fingers the
number of windows I see. Everywhere coffee is priced the same.
Even the wealthy thinks $3.79 is too much for a small. Once I was in
awe of the largeness of a house that should stop, but continues on.
A large painting of a ship in a restaurant: how long has it been there?
Has it been positioned rightly? I'd like to see that artwork, of the
process of creating, but that is hard to paint. Everything I write now is about domesticity
I never had, and now it comes in drips and drabs. How is it that I have so much
running in my head? I finished my second book of poetry two months ago, and
it's still sitting there. It still needs to be revisions. At some point, I'll make them. A
wooden drawer,
fistfuls of poetry. And I'm tried of online feminist fights that never seem to stop.
All I want is more feminist porn. I need variety. I need less fast forwards, and things
more slow.
Grammar is always boring. Gertrude Stein was a baby talk genius, and we all know it.
I'd like to
learn more about kissing, and I'd like to be less ecstatic about everyday life. Talk to me,
baby.
I'm interested. Let's learn about how you sing, and how you kiss on Brooklyn steps past
midnight.

Robert Beveridge

THE ANGELS DIDN'T FALL, YOU DID

No matter what the dream is, it always
contains the pendulum. You pick up
the kids from school, Fabio just asked
you out, you wake up in Selma,
Alabama three hours before the bomb
goes off and have to stop it. In the air
around you, always, just behind
the clouds a glimpse of bronze,
and the sound of distant thunder,
but regular. You check your hands
and feet for strings, don't even find
scars where they might have been.
The cards are on the table, the clubs
all replaced with grandfather clocks,
and somewhere in the town behind you
you have to decide whether to cut
the white wire or the black.

John Yungkans

ASHBERY'S *WAKEFULNESS* AS A RORSCHACH TEST

History goes on and on.

Antique show: rusted cast-iron pots; reins, saddles;
lives for sale on tables.

So many role models.

Dad screamed. Great-grandfather was taciturn. I was
frightened mute by both.

What were expectations back then?

A little red wagon, pulled behind me, its rattle not the
death kind.

The rule of glass, sleek and dark.

Gravity passes through window glass, lounges on my
chest, shuts me in.

Little mystery are you good for anything?

I fear zephyrs, feel myself a dandelion being pulled
apart.

Why, we must dye it then.

Go platinum: only your hairdresser knows self-de
struction for sure.

Funny, none of us heard the roar.

Suspected rhino poacher stamped dead by elephant,
eaten by lions.

There are tensions. I suggest we try them out.

Whenever I shop, corpses block aisles, push against
me, press my breath out.

Alas, we are forbidden to worship the tensions.

Coffee rings on white crockery: like breathing, don't
take them for granted.

A rambunctious wind fills the pine.

An owl hoots. Needles scratch my brain raw. I can't
fly for the life of me.

Oliver Baez Bendorf

LYLAS

my sister and I loved those party packs of Lipsmackers chapstick.
Flavors

like Root Beer and Orange Crush. We arranged tiny tubes
drafting players to our teams. We were always spreading things
on carpet— negotiating desire vs. need on hand and knee.
Bunny who lived in Chicago sent our cousin's old clothes
in glossy black trash bags from which we plucked our goods.
Cousin wore glitter and black— things I'd never dream of
dirtying in the raspberry patch under Iowa moon. Still,
I plucked the leotard, camouflage for some other habitat.
Leopard Lady, my family called me. But I wasn't.

Hajjar Baban

MY MOTHER TELLS ME SHE KNOWS NO HISTORY OF DIABETES IN HER FAMILY

before her. There's a word for the powered heartache crossing
her ancient grief's that makes a host of the body, qahar, it takes
  to reach the silence scattered at dawn
my tiny fingers interrogating the pinched bleed, then begging an explanation
for God's harmony instructing the sky – why we couldn't call it a song,
not saying war or elevating its name often, nothing spoken.
She knows I must've endured myself. I thought, I should've been alive
before God, that I might go balancing my urges while she teared
all pleasure of her skin. I know, to bind my feet to my family's
history, I leave alone her noise. Her found sicknesses covering
my mind only when I ask if how why and then I know someone like me, too.
My mother goes outside to answer and there, the sky is, her visiting navigation
it takes a having thought, the sun rising from their absence,
carrying your children the wrong way.

Leonard Kress

FAMILY PASSOVER

the terrible Had Gadya machine
– Yehuda Amichai

I never heard my mother sing--not even her kids
to sleep, except at the end of our Passover meal.
One kid, she sang, one kid (with me thinking she meant me)
my father bought for two zuzin, devoured—God knows why—
at the song's house-that-Jack-built, conveyor-belt ending.
Angel of death who slaughters the butcher who butchers
the ox who drinks the water that put out the fire that
burned the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate
the kid. My atheist-scientist father along
full-throated with her, who fancied himself a crooner,
complicit, no assurance the kid was a baby
goat, for who in the suburbs ever saw goats except
to nuzzle and then feed, fenced-in at the petting zoo.

Joseph Hardy

GOLDEN

I be here bobbing like a cork feeling giddy with possibility
but Mama Lo Lo, she try to catch my feet for her rusty razor.
She got the doll with my name on it, the pin
with the drop of my blood.

She got that same old song I hear in the night,
"Come back to me, You mine. Come sleep
on the bottom with the rest of us, poor soul,"
she sing, while she sharpen her razor

while she keep the bed of coals hot, while she
hold that doll of me close to her and sing to it,
say my name she give me life with and tell me is hers
to take back. But I riding high in the water.

seeing stars at night cleaner than I ever saw.
And the sun, he warm me, and the moon she
my friend these nights, and I grow taller than a crouching
man with back bowed down. I grow tall as a man stand praying
as though I had a place on the earth under God's eye.
And he letting me grow these days, let me sing a song.
It my song. This song is meant for me. And Mama Lo Lo,
she laugh and say I be a fool again and nothing good

can come of me standing so tall.
"Where the scythe can take you down." she say,
An she doin' me a favor with her razor,
rust and all by taking off my feet so I be safe with her.

Safe and small like she like me like I should like myself,
a church mouse not a singer, a quiet squeaky mouse
in a church meant for someone bigger, but not me.
She start to hum a song that sound like people drowning

beneath the waves. She points out all the others she keep
down here with us. And I pray that I can float above the song,
above the sweep of razor on a strop, the one you hear right now
like it speaking. She swing it, back and forth like waves,

like sleeping, like the soft wet snore of blade on strop.
She say, "You can't run far from me. You mine."
But I pray she be wrong this time, and this time,
I don't help her take me down, these days golden with sun.

These days the corn reach high with silky ears and grow green
as anything and don't seem proud, but seem righteous
and made for growing tall. These days the sun shine on my head
and make me golden and I breathe the air of something free

something taking in this light. These days be mine
and not Mama Lo Lo's, who holds the world to account
for something terrible that happen long ago
when she was just a child and take it out on everything,

take it out on her children, which I am one.
And though I love her still with her fathomless eyes
and cold embrace, I pray I will not drown,
with this sack of kittens she keeps by her

so she is not so lonely. And I tell her I am sorry for your pain.
Sorry I cannot bring you up with me, but it my time to go.
And she laugh, that wet laugh of hers, that you-are-mine laugh
that sound like stroking a razor on your arm to test the edge,

and say, "We'll see." But I am floating now floating higher
than ever in my life. And I pray I do not tip over,
pray I do not fill with this salt-tear water she birth me in,
and I can be a man, meant to be a man, and not a baby

with a cord round his neck to drag him back to where she sing.
She sing that lost song that song of pain that never stop
that she herself can't hear herself, only her children hear it.
She say it belong to us, it keep us faithful to her in her misery.

But I say, I must go now mama. I must go and be a man.
But she mad, that woman, the kind of mad where she don't see
anyone else, that don't really know how to live any way else,
that keep the world spinning round her pain. So I

kiss her wild-eyed cheek before I leave,
before I float up from her grave at the bottom

where she kept me, and I float up toward the light,
which is golden, and I pray that God help me,

for I never got this far before, and I afraid in so much light.
I breaking like an egg opening, cracking the shell and spilling
into light, hearing the first words of God spoken to all
which are not words but light, hear the day opening

how all of us connect in light, hear the laughter that made us
the whimsy of light, this body fading, losing importance
so now what is left of me is sound, is light, is all one.
I cannot repair how broken she is. She not a doll to re-sew,

a plastic Barbie with plastic arms to pop back in
to her sockets.
She lack the smoothness of a doll. Her eyes
once shared the light of the living.

Ducan Slagle

KASSANDRA ANTICIPATES LOSS

Grace is a coin with more than two sides.
– Anne Carson

In the belly of a heat
always building my mother
breaks her wine glass at the stem

then threatens to dig into the meat
of my hand if I don't stop talking
about death.

It is the third month in a row
we've fought to kill each other
with just our words.

I mime terror, feeling my hair
stand up like a weed that reeks
& spoils the whole garden.

My mother is rational
unless considering the future.

One body, made of clay
soil, fire, etc.—I am
unextraordinary because
of this—Like any bad daughter

I will leave this world as muck-
marked & grateful as I arrived

as my mother shattering
the formal rituals of flesh
with her demand to hold

my weight before the doctor
could identify my new, unclean
mischromosomed breath.

Todd Kaneko

EPIPHANY

Now that you are gone, I can't hel but understand
the loveliness that air brings,

how there was never anything between us
but oxygen, never anything weighing us down
but the sound of two men breathing

in a room without walls. The word *lonely*
is just one letter off from *lovely*, and if you read it
real quick, you might mistake beauty for that
heaviness of water, the ocean

turned upside down on my head when I think
about how I will never understand

why we never noticed that *dad* is one letter off
from *dead, father* one letter off

from *farther*, as in the distance
between two people isn't best measured in miles
but sometimes by the words they never said

aloud to one another. Sometimes a man's life
looks loveliest from a distance.

Sometimes, I still become exhausted from trying
to breathe up all the air in the room.

Joshua Plack

[APPLAUSE]

I will die in a hospital bed in whatever
town I find myself in when the winds which
have carried me decide to hold their breath.
On a bland midday a cheesy game show
will play on the tiny television hanging
above my bed with cash and prizes and drips
and beeps and beats and a new vacuum cleaner,
a ventilator, and a live studio audience.

The host will stand before me in a suit like
a thrift store couch as models walk past
my amazing Craftmatic adjustable bed which
reclines to any position and has built-in
heating massage *how much do you want to bid?*

Contestants will look flustered in front of me
and the cameras, unsure how to exist like
someone just jammed a dozen tubes into
orifices old and new. A glittering wheel will
spin, forcefully, the lights and numbers like
blades cutting through the air waves, fluttering
by like days. My pulse will start to slow
with the wheel, beeps, becoming labored
and less frequent, until it all stops
and the audience explodes with applause.

I'm sorry we do have some lovely parting gifts, though.

II

A kaleidoscope of almosts

– John Sibley Williams

Evgenia Jen Baranova

WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE

When you were little
everything seemed so very long:
a street light, a ruler, the rubbish chute.
Things are so short now:
a prickly March scratches its belly,
then June flies by, full of bees.
You just sit and listen to poplar fluff
picking up dust all around the city.
When you were little,
You wanted a lamp that looked like a pear.
Now you don't want it,
now you don't care.
You don't want waffles, or fried bread,
or a liter of white ice-cream.
When you were little.
Were you, really?
Did you make mistakes in your long division?
Neither blank maps
nor Maine nor Reid
can help the pirates who survived,
drivers of colored lorries.

Zach Savich

HOT FACTS

A fireplace should be as wide
in inches as the wall
in feet. A *curfew* is a bell
with holes you put
over a fire at night. Fill
the wall with rubble
as you work. Yet every morning
I have better coffee
than my grandparents ever
tasted. I do fine, eat
around the rotten
spinach, trim my mouth
to speak. A sharp blade
won't reflect light. A dull
blade shines. The less
water you use, the stronger
the mortar. The devil
disguises himself as a calm
sea, so sailors say
what they think. And your
braid? The singular
one? I like it because it's on
your head and you
made it. When? Yourself?

Kathryn Clay

LOVE, IN WINTER

In the bitterness of winter, snow
falls like a tickle. We hunker in our
various states of sick, interested only
in the ways we can shift our hips,
imagine bones rubbed together,
the lone kindling keeping us warm.

Andrew Dooley

so i'm sleeping with you in a tundra and escaping you through a volcano

i need sleep like i need a list of your favorite sweaters,
like i probably should need it, like why would i need
anything else right now?

threading and roots and gravity and love. strapped and trapped and all that.

taking a nap, falling in sleep with the scruff. you're curled up and i'm on my back looking at your back
and my arms are behind my head and i need it like i need the thought of me killing myself again.

so i told him, hey,

call me for once!!

my mom's teaching me to crochet. my knuckles are tired
but my head will be warm,
my neck will be warm, my hands will be warm.

Zach Savich

FOR SURE

Bystanders should not be allowed
nearer than twice the height
of the tallest trees. Frozen wood

is easier to split. I miss having to call cafes
and say I'm meeting someone
I've never met and I'm late.

The metaphor should not resolve
but rouse metaphoric
radiance. The longer and loopier

the stove pipe the more
heat stays in. You miss the goal.
It's a different game. A robin flies

from the stove.

Jeffrey Little

GIMCRACKS, GEWGAWS, AND THE WAREHOUSE OF THE SMILE

You swaddle your head in tin foil and dream of warm bourbon. Because it's December. Because it's snowing somewhere, only steeper. The riverboat captain has the keys to the car. I picked up half a dozen thumbscrews, the morning paper, and a plinth.

In the Mekong Delta we saw a pinball machine just floating on the water, a swamp hen perched upon its backbox. Messages are being sent. This is not one of them. Because clarinets rise up from the cornfields at night in search of their own solutions.

She smiles often but without obvious intent. Like a safecracker, as thin as a hiss. Surrounded by a predatory if/then statement I made my move and flipped a switch on the Claw. As it closes on the bubble of its reflection, the muttering can only increase.

I seen what you done behind the barn. Moon did, too. Trinkets hoarded away in the salt shack. The half-life of a trellis working under an opaque system of laws while a forgotten man in silver waits by a pedal boat for the neap tide and cadence of the surf.

Because it's December. Because of polar bears. And hot pants. And this inability to progress in simple steps. The 12 bus takes the first left into the riverfront, a chowder of headlights, signals and horn. The penmanship, clumsy, the smell of glue profound.

HANNAH BACKMAN

From Normandale to the U: A Young Writer's (?) Perspective

Back in May, I graduated from the University of Minnesota. I write this not to gloat about my Bachelor's degree, but to see if writing down the words *I graduated* will make it feel more real. Here it is less than a couple months away from the new year, and I still cannot fathom that I am a college graduate. I received (see how I don't use words like *earned* or *accomplished*) a degree in English and Creative Writing. When choosing a major, English was a completely simple choice. Creative Writing was not.

I started college at Normandale Community College. I went in with the thought of breezing by my first two years of general education to then move on to the University of Minnesota, where I thought the true challenge would begin. I never thought this is where I would discover what I had been missing. I always had a love for English. In high school I would be pretty much the only student who would get giddy when poetry was on the syllabus. Normandale was different from high school poetry classes. At Normandale, I learned the phrase, "contemporary poetry." Which isn't that shocking since the United States education system stays within the literary canon. Don't get me wrong: I loved learning the words of Robert Frost and Shakespeare. But I never knew there was more out there. Up until my time at Normandale I had not read any new authors. Besides your JK Rowling and Stepanie Meyer that I read as a teenager (please don't criticize me for reading *Twilight*) I never read any new poetry. At Normandale I discovered the work of Ada Limon, Tony Hoagland, and many more poets and writers who were so inspiring. What shocked me the most is that I never knew that people still write and if they are lucky can make a career off of it. A writer. This thought never crossed my mind as something I could become.

My classes at Normandale were one of the first times I felt I was seen. As incredibly corny as that sounds, I really felt I was starting something I really loved. And dare I say something I was (almost) good at. Writing was introduced at Normandale as something obtainable. Before, I imagined that in order to be a writer you had to be wickedly smart and talented. What

I have discovered is that yes, that is true, but just as important is believing in oneself, and I was just not believing in myself. I would be excited to write new poems. Going to class meant a new discussion about life or art, and how this can translate into our own work. Having conversations with other student writers was amazing. People in my classes would ask "How is the writing going?" Or "Do you want to workshop after class?" I was smitten.

The assignments I was given would create so many ideas in my head of what I wanted to write. My creative brain was starting to form. Every aspect of creating poetry was enthralling, everything from the lines to the way the words would roll off my tongue. Creating poetry is not just amazing, it is fucking difficult. I felt lied to at this point. In high school they give you these beautiful poems made by these poets who seemed to have endless amounts of work published. Seemed easy enough. Oh how wrong and doe eyed I was. I was so intoxicated with learning about this world. I soon discovered learning this craft is a whole other mountain to hike. The amount of times I would write out an entire poem and completely erase it . . . I have lost track. Or the times I would write a few lines and think, *Wow, I am such a literary genius,* only to look at them days later and think of how awful it was. Going to the U made this all very more clear.

Studying English at the U, I learned how competitive writing really was. You just have a lot more people to compete with. Most of these people had already been published, or seemed to be incredibly humble—completing invested in the lifestyle. I was still unsure if writing was what I wanted to do. I would write poetry and it seemed to become more open to me. I still loved reading new work and going to readings, but my own poems seemed more foreign to me.

At the U, I took classes equally divided between studying the canon and contemporary work. In my Textual Analysis class we read *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel as well as Emily Dickinson and William Wordsworth. It wasn't until I heard of a mysterious new phrase, creative nonfiction, that I ever thought of changing my writing style. I started to read the essay.

I learned creative nonfiction could be seen as nonfiction writing *and* poetry. Creative nonfiction brings imagery into the prose. It creates scenes from the experiences of a life and ties in the creative aspects of poetry. After reading work by Joan

Didion and Truman Capote, I was amazed. I found this writing form to be a realistic form of imagination. Creative nonfiction became a more healthy outlet for me, writing wise. I could work through worries or deep-rooted traumas I have. Poetry was my starting point into creative nonfiction—my gateway drug.

My experience at the U was different from my experience at Normandale. Everyone says studying at a university is the preferred way to receive a degree. I am here—remember, a graduate from the University of Minnesota—to tell you to take that with a grain of salt. Just because my tuition was so incredibly much, it makes me honestly gag. My two years at the U were incredible, but they can be chalked up to moments, not one experience. I had a few amazing and insightful classes, but they were not the same as at Normandale. I found my voice at the U, a group of amazing friends, and a lot of great lessons, but at the end of it all, I believe going to a place like Normandale is by far more welcoming. A university is there for status. Don't get me wrong: I will be happy to hang my diploma in my office one day, but I still am proud to say Normandale is where I got my start.

I am glad I had my college experience split between these two incredible institutions. Normandale helped me understand my worth, that writing can be something achievable. It opened the door to many ideas. It made poetry not seem so foreign or old. The University of Minnesota helped me learn the world of creative nonfiction and how poetry can be seen in the world of the essay.

Who knows what I will be writing in five, ten, even fifty years. I know that changing my writing style is something that is going to go along with the process of being a writer. Being a writer is difficult and taxing. It is not a route I ever saw myself going down. After graduating, all I could think about was how terrifying it is going to be without the guidance of the classroom. I do know, wherever I land, both of these institutions has given me a great head start.

III

I am a sawblade at the throat of the mountains

– Devon Miller-Duggan

Athena Kildegarrd

EARTHLY POSESSIONS

It doesn't even seem possible, but on the interstate,
going south, it was August and hot, we saw monarchs,
a few of them, drafting a semi, saw it as we passed
the 18-wheeler, its mudflaps stiff and black, a blink

of orange just like that, and then we were gone.
One round trip above the continent requires several
generations. No one knows how they know the route.
Northbound, returning after leaving our daughter,

her lamp and books and keyboard, her three suitcases
and zippered plastic bag of bedclothes, we felt alone
and hardly talked. I didn't know what you were thinking.
I was thinking that I didn't know when we'd return.

The monarchs, I was thinking, were taking a crazy
chance, being pulled like that behind a truck going
who knows where, who knows why, carrying anything,
going anywhere, pulled like that toward home.

Athena Kildegarrd

NOCTURNE

In fields around the county
tractors followed their own lights
down furrows and up
long after the sun set,

and satellites steered them
precise as architects,
and cowbirds dropped their claws
into the turned dirt

anxious for what was revealed.
Down the road machines
blew corn into trucks,
down another road a farmer

disced stubble, sent the particles
into the air, all of them
swirling loose and untamed
up and up toward the moon.

In the fields long after tractors
dragged themselves home
air thick with water ghosted up
from the furrows and began to sing.

Isadora Gruye

EXPECTATIONS FOR CIVILIAN SPACE TRAVEL

You expect colorful rockets
loaded to the seams with tourists
carrying ice cream cones
from the sky harbor malt shop.
Two scoops—
Cosmic Cherry Nebula
and Martian Fudge Swirl—
melting down their hands,
leaving puddles
on their rocket seat armrest.
Everything in the future
is still sticky.

You expect zeppelins.
You can't explain this,
except that in your mind
a future with space resorts
also has zeppelin tours
over New York City.
And in the zeppelins, pony rides.
You want to ride a pony
while hovering above Time Square
in a hydrogen powered aircraft.
Because, you'll need good reason
to stay Earthside.

You expect Sunday brunch on the patio,
watching booster jets scribble the sky.
The roar of engines so loud,
you forget the small sound a bird makes
when it returns to an empty nest.
Friends will clink their fluted glasses,
pretend the prosecco
doesn't taste like rocket fuel,
pretend this isn't mass exodus.

Nancy Devine

REQUIEM FOR A DEAD PLANET

Last poem of the earth will be written
on a moist napkin in some way-out restaurant beyond the city proper
where you and I will sip gin from a slim glass,
a slice of lemon oiling its blue stem.
I think I'll wear jeans—not make a fuss.
We won't talk about work,
so dull, un-engaging.
Instead, we'll wish we'd slept together
when we were teenagers,
not waited until the middle of our lives,
but it's not possible to remake the past
with just your hands.
The food we order will be good
though not memorable.
(I don't even know now what it is.)
The waitress will be tired
from staying up the night before with her sick baby.
And the light...
God, the light will be perfect.

Rajiv Mohabir

REVIVAL

When the wave rises
to lick earth clean of scabs

I will be on my way
to the temple to polish

off the offerings
lain on the altar. I've strained

my eyes sugarblind—
that's what devotion to idols gets you—

keeping watch from light tower
to mount towns for any puff

from seaface or ghost of the godly.
Maybe a human lifetime

is too short a season to witness
sea-change. Perhaps,
one day, gouged land
and piles of debris will gather,

will clap their hands, will open their maws
in praise, in praise.

Gabriel Mianulli

An Interview with Brian Laidlaw

Editor's Note: At the 2018 Rain Taxi Twin Cities Book Festival, I stumbled into the funkiest vehicle I've ever set foot in: the Rain Taxi poetry bus. The stout yellow school bus was retrofitted with the necessities for life: a bed, a couch, a sink, a coffee pot, poetry books, and dozens of stickers from locations all across the country. Bill Meissner sat at his typewriter (one of several spots I'd seen him throughout the festival), typing up poems on the fly by request. I ordered one about college, and Bill typed it up for me in a couple minutes before we both departed for the reading and release of *Visiting Bob: Poems Inspired by the Life and Work of Bob Dylan*. I was so awestruck by the coolness of this mystical bus, I had to find out more, so I reached out to Rain Taxi, and Brian Laidlaw gave me the rundown.

GM: What are the origins of the poetry bus? How did it start? Did the vehicle itself serve another purpose in its past life?

BL: The poetry bus, long before we owned it, was a regular little yellow school bus. We never saw it in that form, though; my partner Ashley Hanson (a theater-maker, rural arts advocate) and I first met the bus in a climbing area called Indian Creek outside Moab, Utah. At that time it belonged to a Swiss couple who were on their honeymoon. They'd been traveling around the U.S. in the bus for the past six months. It had been converted into a rad little living space—a cistern, a nice bed, a two-burner propane stove, and a lot of well-thought-out additions in terms of design, functionality, and decor.

The Swiss folks were about to head back home, and were looking to sell the bus for the same price they'd bought it for (a few thousand bucks.) I'm a notoriously slow decision-maker, especially when it comes to big purchases like that, but fortunately Ashley saw the potential for the bus immediately, and pretty much unilaterally told them we'd buy it. (This is also how we ended up getting a dog.)

This bus—which we named Gus, as in Gus the Bus—has pretty literally changed our lives. Its first voyage was a cross-country road trip under the auspices of Ashley's organization, The Department of Public Transformation, during which she visited arts-based community leaders in towns of 10,000 or fewer residents, talking about the impact the (then-recent) election had had on their experiences. The bus served as a mobile-artist residency for several other photographers, writers, and visual artists during that trip. Gus died, like, a bunch of times on that cross-country journey, needed all kinds of work, and did not seem to be a great investment—but, through a series of domino-effects, that trip also precipitated Ashley's application to, and eventual selection to, the Obama Foundation Fellowship program. So Gus redeemed himself, and then some!

Ashley and I also play music together (in a band called The Family Trade), so Gus has been our tour-bus for a couple of regional and national music tours. And I'm also currently doing a Ph.D. in Creative Writing at the University of Denver, where my dissertation is shaping up to be a collection of essays about climbing and mountaineering—so sometimes I'm traveling to climbing areas, using Gus as a mobile office and "research station" (i.e., a place to pass out after climbing all day.)

Gus' role as the Poetry Bus started a couple of years ago, a little after his cross-country trip with DoPT. I invited my dear friend Eric Lorberer from Rain Taxi to have a cup of coffee with me in Gus (we have a nice pourover setup in there) when I was in the Twin Cities, and he, in one of the flashes of brilliance to which he is frequently prone, thought it would be a rad addition to the Twin Cities Book Festival to have Gus parked out front of the exhibition hall, with close-quarters poetry programming in it all day. I had been envisioning hosting those kinds of events in Gus—poetry readings, tiny-bus concerts, workshops, etc.—but hadn't yet had the chance to give it a try. So over the coming months, Eric, Ashley, and I built out a day's worth of hour-long events, and when the day of TCBF rolled around, the Poetry Bus made its first official appearance on the literary scene.

GM: That is so awesome! I could tell right away Gus the Bus had a soul of his own. It's great to see that he's still chuggin' along.

Can you explain more about your vision for using Gus the Bus as a vehicle for fostering community in the literary world? The bus seems to be doing an outstanding job of accomplishing that. What was the ethos behind the Poetry Bus, and how has that changed or evolved during its time serving that role?

BL: I think one of the ironies of poetry-world is that the big gatherings in our community—festivals, conferences, etc.—can be genuinely miserable for poets, who, at least stereotypically, often tend toward introversion. I know that I personally can find it overwhelming to walk through the exhibition hall at AWP, or sit in a giant cavernous lecture room listening to a speaker or panel (which is intense if it's really full, and equally intense, but in a different way, if it's really empty.) It's easy to wind up exhausted by the end of the day.

So the idea of the Poetry Bus was to create an alternative to that space. For one thing, the Poetry Bus provides a quiet, intimate locale for (we hope) individual conversations that can be a shade more substantive than those that happen in the book fair. We also try to schedule some "silent reading time" interspersed with our programming (and provide a little poetry library to choose from, and also hot tea) to offer folks an ear-break after the loud reverb of the larger festival venues. It's a little sanctuary.

The other service is to provide a space that's the right size for small readings and small workshops. Because another irony of poetry-world is that when fifteen people show up for an event in a space designed for a hundred people, it feels like a sad and underwhelming turnout . . . but when fifteen people show up for a space designed for, like, eight people (i.e., Gus), then it feels packed, dynamic, and exciting. We had an over-capacity crowd for basically every event in the Poetry bus at the last Twin Cities Book Fest, and it felt awesome.

It's especially cool when we're hosting an esteemed rockstar of the poetry world . We had Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera

in there last year, for example, and instead of standing up on the podium of some lovely lecture hall, he's literally sitting in the driver's seat of our messed-up little bus, facing backwards to address a dozen folks crammed onto our bed and into a few folding chairs. The space is just so bizarre, so funky and unacademic and unpretentious, that it fosters a kind of dialogue that's totally different from what you'd get during, say, the Q&A at a typical reading. The dynamics of power and status are gone; it's much more human in the Bus.

A growing component of the Poetry Bus's role is taking place at the intersection of my own work (as a poet-songwriter) and my partner's work as a rural-arts advocate. It's common for rural writers to be underrepresented at urban festivals, so we're trying to use Gus, in part, to showcase poets that operate outside the city. And the next step—hopefully taking place in the fall—is to do a tour of performances in Gus in small towns around the region and country.

GM: I got a strong sense of the intimacy of the space as soon as I stepped aboard Gus at the TCBF. There's definitely a residual creative force that lines his interior from all the creative minds that have been there. It felt like all my creative light bulbs lit up right away just from the energy inside the bus. It was very inspiring. It's great to know that Gus is being used to ensure that poets and writers in rural communities across the country are represented and appreciated, thanks to the awesome work that you and Ashley are doing.

The Department of Public Transformation website has a detailed map charting Gus's trek around the country, and I'm amazed at the mileage that's been covered. From San Francisco across the south through Texas to the East Coast, then up through the Midwest into the Twin Cities and down to Colorado, where Gus is perched for the time being. By my count, Gus The Bus has been to twenty states. Was there any particular region you enjoyed visiting the most? Do you have any tales from the road to share?

BL: Yeah, hopefully someday he'll visit the entire Lower 48! But I should be clear that some of the mileage was traveled just by professional-road-dog Ashley Hanson, along with a

few other rural-arts practitioners who she had invited to join the mobile residency. So I missed out on a couple of the stretches in the South and Southeast (I was teaching and doing coursework for my Ph.D. at the time). Fortunately she and I are planning to do a follow-up tour in fall 2019, where we'll revisit a bunch of those spots together, and collaborate on a book of essays about it.

But the stories from the road are innumerable, and the list keeps growing. Certainly there have been some outrageous tiny-dance parties, packed with friends and strangers, and some pretty magical music-making (and even sometimes recording) in there. But kind of counter-intuitively, some of the longest-lasting memories I have of Gus are of the times he broke down, and we relied on the kindness, generosity, and expertise of locals (all over the country, mostly in small towns and even-smaller towns) to get him rolling again. The bus really does have some magic power to conjure community, in short-order, wherever it goes. And I think, strangely, that it has a lot to do with the fact that it's a school bus—something we associate with community service, public space, educational discourse—that makes it so inviting. It would be so different if it were a van or RV, something that's supposed to be "private." But school busses (and Poetry Busses) are for everybody.

Editor's Note: Visit the Department of Public Transformation's website at publictransformation.org for more information and how to contact them via email and social media.

Check out Brian's band, The Family Trade, at Facebook.com/thefamilytrade.

Bill Meissner's latest book, *The Mapmaker's Dream*. from Finishing Line Press, can be purchased at https://www.finishinglinepress.com/product/the-mapmakers-dream-by-bill-meissner/

IV

Let me isolate the isolating right angles
of the city. So much humanity stacked
parallel and perpendicular

– Kyle McGinn

Joshua Plack

SWEEPER

She commands the corner wearing 50
like armor a face worn and chapped like

a mask made from elbows, an overgrown
thicket of grey, brown, greying brown billows

wild to the bustle of her handheld
Haaga streetsweeper, a cigarette hanging

against city ordinances and a kiss-
flick sends the dangling ashworm tumbling down

to the sidewalk, which is hers in spite of
everything, where the cyclonic spin

of brushscuffs whisks it into a perfect
nothing and all of us along with it.

Tyler Simnick

TOLEDO

The sun runs its hands down
the steeples and bats flit
like bubbles in rosé.

I ask the streets with my
feet, how does it feel to
owe people your heartbeat?

We laugh at each other.
We are between meals.
Chains hang on the church.

Luke Kuzmish

PETRICHOR

I remember smelling rain
in the city's summer
rainbows in the hose's mist
and
rainbows in puddles of oil

the big, black Oldsmobile,
the bridge to Burger King,
my grandfather laughing
and ashes raining on East Ave

Sagirah Shahid

~~terrorist,~~ boys, ~~thugs in the hood~~

There's a bridge we used to stand on
watching, little red taillights stain I-94's dry tongue.

We'd wait for sunlight to slither up from behind skyscrapers. In the movies,
no one ever comments on how dirty the artificial lights seem after Fajr.

I'm in love with the quiet right before rush hour, and only notice this when it's too late.
I could spend every devotion basking beneath the sepia toned lights with you.

Heidi Czerwiec

A Review of Marilyn Nelson's
Remembering A Wreath for Emmett Till
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

Despite, or perhaps because of, the rise of white supremacist hate crimes, the past year has seen the opening of the Lynching Museum and Memorial in Alabama, the reopening by the Justice Department of the Emmett Till murder case due to new evidence, and the U.S. Senate's unanimous passage of the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act (the Act has yet to be passed by the House or signed by the President). Therefore, it seems like a prime moment to revisit poet Marilyn Nelson's *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, a heroic crown of sonnets that engages with elegiac conventions to memorialize Till and place his murder against a history of racial violence in America. When it was originally published in 2005, it received short featured reviews on Kirkus, Publishers Weekly, and BookPage, and Nelson was interviewed on NPR, but what she accomplishes here is one of the twenty-first century's greatest poetic feats, and deserves to be more widely recognized.

In 1955, Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African-American boy from Chicago, was lynched for supposedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. The open-casket funeral his mother demanded, and the acquittal of the men tried for the crime, helped spark the civil rights movement. Fifty years later, Marilyn Nelson—a poet known for rendering in poetry various figures and moments from African-American history in works like *Carver, Fortune's Bones*, and *My Seneca Village*—chose to write a poem about lynching that would serve as a memorial to Till.

As a form, she used the strategy of the heroic crown of sonnets. The rhyme scheme Nelson chose to use is the Italian scheme made famous by Petrarch, and which is difficult to pull off in the rhyme-challenged English language. A crown of sonnets is a sequence of interlinked sonnets in which the last line of one becomes the first line, sometimes slightly altered, of the next. The circular "crown" effect here is reimagined as a memorial funeral "wreath." A heroic crown of sonnets adds a further layer of difficulty in that it is a sequence of

fifteen interlinked sonnets, in which the last one is made up of the repeated lines of the preceding fourteen. So, not only did Nelson write in Italian sonnets, but she wrote fourteen of them with interlocking first/last lines, then resolved all the repeated lines in the fifteenth "key" sonnet. Then, as if that weren't enough, the fifteenth key sonnet also functions as an acrostic, with the first letter of each line vertically spelling out "RIP Emmett L. Till." Such intensive crafting had to have been distracting, but it appears that was part of Nelson's strategy: she says in the preface, "The strict form became a kind of insulation, a way of protecting myself from the intense pain of the subject matter," an echo of Adrienne Rich's description of form as asbestos gloves that allowed her to handle the most toxic material.

Nelson's *Wreath* also uses the rhetorical form of the pastoral elegy, incorporating several of its conventions. There is the inquiry into the death, though Nelson renders this in impressionistic sketches rather than rehearsing the brutal details: "A running boy, five men in close pursuit./ One dark, five pale faces in the moonlight./ Noise, silence, back-slaps. One match, five cigars." Because Till's life was cut so short, Nelson extends her account of it into the life she wishes to imaginatively grant him: "I'd let you live through a happy boyhood,/ let your gifts bloom into a livelihood/ on a planet that didn't bear Cain's curse./ I'd put you in a nice, safe universe." Instead, she proposes,

> Erase the memory of Emmett's victimhood.
> Let's write the obituary of a life
> lived well and wisely, mourned by a loving wife
> or partner, friends, and a vast multitude.
> Remember the high purpose he pursued.
> Remember how he earned a nation's grief.

She invokes the witnesses to this horror, which includes the sympathetic fallacy of Nature mourning in the form of a tree, which stands as a composite for all lynching trees: "If trees could speak, it could/ describe, in words beyond words, make us see/ the strange fruit that still ghosts its reverie." In portraying Till as a martyr, she also addresses his mother, Mamie Till Mobley who, in defiance, forced the country to witness what we had done:

mother of sorrows, of justice denied.
Surely you must have thought of suicide,
seeing his gray flesh, chains around his throat.
Surely you didn't know you would devote

the rest of your changed life to dignified
public remembrance of how Emmett died

But Nelson also recognizes the cruelty of putting Mobley in this position: "Would you say yes, like the mother of Christ?/ Or would you say no to your destiny,/ mother of a boy martyr, if you could?" Perhaps the most well-known elegiac convention, the laying of flowers, is employed to help weave the wreath of this intricate form:

What should my wreath for Emmett Till denote?
First, heliotrope, for *Justice shall be done*.
Daisies and white lilacs, for *Innocence*.
Then mandrake: *Horror* (wearing a white hood,
or bare-faced, laughing). For grief, more than one,
for one is not enough: rue, yew, cypress.
Forget-me-nots.

Later in the sequence, she adds trillium, Indian pipe, and bloodroot poppy, all woven on an oak-branch frame to represent the aforementioned lynching trees.

Just as Nelson expands Till's lynching into a representation of all lynchings, she also expands this elegy to encompass the history of racial violence, mainly in America but also worldwide. Without losing focus on Till, but without memorializing his murder as an isolated event, she manages to incorporate allusions to incidents that occurred before and after it to argue that Till's murder is but one in a series of actions. This balance she strikes is no small feat, and the effect is breathtaking in what it opens up her *Wreath* to encompass. Throughout this sequence, she works in references both subtle and direct to other lynchings, Lincoln's assassination, and the genocide of Native Americans. But after sonnet VIII about imagined horrors created by Hollywood, sonnet IX makes the horror real, and explicitly links Till to the history of racial violence in a terrifying crescendo—

> your ash hair, Shulamith-Emmett, your eye,
> machetes, piles of shoes, bulldozed mass graves,
> the broken towers, the air filled with last breaths,

—before enacting the sequence's turn toward mourning: "Let me gather spring flowers for a wreath." But mourning is not forgetting, and Nelson exhorts us to remember and keep that memory present, asserting "My country, 'tis of both/ they nightmare history and thy grand dream,/ thy centuries of good and evil deeds,/ I sing."

Possibly one of the most surprising aspects of this project is that it is presented as a children's book, thoughtfully illustrated. Some might find the subject matter to be too upsetting or mature for children, but as Nelson points out in her preface, she was nine years old when Till was lynched, and his story (and others like it) were part of her life. Till himself was only fourteen. The book includes a page in the back on "Who Was Emmett Till?" as well as a section of notes on the sonnets explaining what each sonnet is doing and any allusions, an "Artist's Note" by the illustrator describing his visual choices in creating the images, and references for further reading. The sonnet sequence and the end sections do a heroic job of pitching this material at a level appropriate for older children/young adults, giving needed details without being gratuitous. And the book was recognized with both a Coretta Scott King Award and the American Library Association's Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature. But I have to wonder if this project being perceived as a children's book made it fly under the radar of more mainstream poetry circles. I myself only discovered the book around 2009 when Marilyn Nelson was a guest at a poetry conference I attended, and this book was among her others for sale – before that point, I had never heard of it, which is a shame.

Again, it's a remarkable book and a remarkable poetic achievement, and I think the time is right for poetry readers to be acquainted, or reacquainted, with this project.

V

Tell me how to speak myself into being

-D. Allen

Margaret Rhee

A HISTORY OF SKIN

Description:
A young Black woman walks defiantly with her books.
Her books as armor. Surrounding her, white faces. Angry faces.
Open mouthed. Foul rage. A white woman yelling into perpetuity.

What is she saying? What is her skin saying?
The faces—an endless fog.
Relentless and tangled.
Sometimes, a photograph makes no sense.
A photograph seemingly has no color.
Still, the young Black woman continues on.

___
What is a history of skin?
There is prayer in the question.

Sagirah Shahid

DUA OF MIDDLE PASSAGE SURVIVOR

My palms become small ponds
receiving tears

as if grief were the only gift
I know to hold. Prayer

is an allusion/illusion/ablution of the body,
to pause thoughts/suspend sorrow in the rhythm

of this linage of motion,
palms on knees, palms raised to the sky

palms pressed into forehead/earth, there is a foundation
in wanting to touch everything with a hand's psalm.

In the name of the most compassionate
I am bending my spine into this crease of tomorrow.

Rick Blum

EPHEMERA

Spinous stands at attention on the far corner of my desk
waiting to be unceremoniously ripped off its plastic perch
and tossed in the trash, ever forgotten, even when
I desperately need a word to describe a thing thorny

or prickly . . . *especially* when I need a word to describe
a thing that is thorny or prickly. In its place looms *legerity*:
a euphonious appellation that begs to be elevated
by an Italian accent—*legerity* . . . *legerity* . . . *legerity*—

though it simply means facile quickness of body or mind.
It will provide companionship throughout the day,
until its successor is heralded by the glinting
of morning dew, itself destined to be usurped

the following morn by another word-of-the-day,
perhaps one to describe a foul mood caused by
an impending deadline, or a symbolic piece of clothing
worn by Orthodox Jews on High Holy Days.

I trace this new-word-learning deficiency back to
my late thirties, about the time I received a hard-cover
edition of *Roget's Thesaurus*, making word retention
less imperative, compulsory, indispensable, obligatory,

and, certainly, exigent. Truthfully, a whole lotta words
that make appearances in my writings weren't born
of instantaneous inspiration, or discovered by staring
at the ceiling for the better part of an hour;

Mr. Roget has become a frequent, if uncredited, co-author.
There are, however, many new words that *have* found
hospitable cranial crevices in which to dwell long-term.
Most were imbedded there through incessant repetition—

words like *selfie* and *spyware* and *vuvuzela*—*legerity*
doesn't stand a chance, nor will the three dozen words

remaining on this year's calendar, or the 365 that will replace them on New Year's Day. But, alas, I find myself

approaching the end of this discourse lacking a single insightful word to impart or, even, a clever, closing quip—a spinous situation that is truly spiky, thistly and arrowlike, not to mention bristly, briery and barbed.

KG NEWMAN

MEANWHILE, ANTS

You dream of hearing her hair curling
from the shower that's never warm.

Your head must be buzzed,
the hair picked up with cut hands.

And outside, the grass is sacrificed
for a fire pit for rings:

the very patch you'd worked
so hard seeding that spring. Meanwhile,

ants keep stampeding from
the porch screen to the kitchen,

circling around the family Maltese
as she dies. Soon you'll ask

the only question left:
What is readiness?

A red dress with long curls
falling down an open back.

RICK BLUM

GOOGLE'S REVELATION

– with a nod to Billy Collins's "Victoria's Secret"

The leftmost figure peers at me from an electronic
ribbon of images, lips slightly parted in a smile
that's only half done, as if daring me to click on his cleft chin
for the rest of the story. He's outfitted in a cornflower blue,
short-sleeve, dress shirt with a black pen poking out
of the plastic-protected pocket, hinting at his impassioned
desire to get back to solving quadratic equations.

Just to his right is a sandy-haired ruffian
with a scabrous beard that evokes
practiced insouciance to my curiosities.
He seems to say, "I'm prepped for a few brews,
if you're ready, mate," judging by the steel-blue blazer,
black silk shirt, and striped, aquamarine tie
casually draped over his bountiful belly.

But my gaze is easily diverted by the imposing,
red-cheeked gent next to him, whose straggly auburn locks
are coyly combed downward to shroud his forehead,
as if he knows I know he'll be bald before forty,
but will fight to hide it every day 'til then
in his saddle brown, corduroy jacket
and floral salmon tie, consciously chosen
to project a Renaissance hillbilly mien.

Unconsciously my eyes wander to the middle-aged chap
next to him, who is garbed in a buttoned-up,
plum checkered shirt. But it must be pinching his neck,
judging by the inverted smile and furrowed brow
that signal little patience for my rubbernecking.
Behind him looms a ghost-white wall
that would serve as an appropriate backdrop
for a mug shot, further emphasizing the annoyance
emanating from his pores like a steaming volcano.

Immediately to his right is a story of contrast:
a mature gentleman with a broad, toothy smile,
thicket of ash-white, shoulder-length hair,
and accessorizing Chevron mustache, neatly trimmed
to tantalize without tickling. An elbow-patched,
Harris Tweed sport coat and brick red, clip-on bow tie
speak intimately of his after-hours dalliances
with phenomenology and existentialism.

The stone face of a branch-office banker
perched at the far right edge of this capricious ribbon
of thumbnail photos deftly conceals emotions
curdling within him, though indifference radiates
from sienna eyes that are complemented by an ecru,
boat-neck sweater and drab olive, polo shirt,
fading, no doubt, from too much salty sea spray.

But why am I wasting time Googling my name
to see if my headshot has made its way yet
to a premium, page-one location,
when the sun is arcing relentlessly toward the horizon
in its daily countdown of diminishing days?
There is so much else to do before darkness folds in
like an origami swan: immerse myself in the latest displays
of mud wrestling that pass as politics;
fend off creeping dementia with a synapse-building,
online bridge match; research alternative treatments
for the disease that has removed golf obsessiveness
from my retirement plan, replacing it with a softly
glowing screen on which, perhaps, I'll write a poem
that will—just this once—knock the socks off the editors
of a glossy print magazine pitched to the lay literati.

Evgenia Jen Baranova

Dogs in the air

Time paints an old man on a boy.
Time is ice-thin, it's boggy;
time is a black river
that carries everyone
feet first.
Did you let yourself to envision anything else?
The river is covered with ice.

A wet mitten. A snowball melts in your nose.
No, I haven't picked on Masha or slurped soup.
What? Am I thirty? Seventy? Forty-two?
I'm just skin and bones,
just numbers and grass.

But I wanted to plummet down like Gagarin.
I used to want a transformer and "Love is."
Time dips its brush and shakes it spitefully.
It has me on fluids,
and that's it.
You can cry or sob, you can burn the grade book,
but you got an "F" on your test
and you don't remember how and when.

A black room.
Black poison of the air.
Laikas, Belkas, and Strelkas hover under the ceiling.

(translated from Russian)

Anthony Thomas Lombardi

squirrel, you're an intense little girl & you finally have a friend

silence is only silence when you're not breathing
(which is i hope never the case) which really milk-sours
that whole expression about its golden stature

or was that the U.S. Mint running out of options? & anyway
your breathing is floral & florid & when the temperature
dips below freezing its rhythms stalk my heartbeat splitting
& clock hands ticking unable to keep still
& maybe that's why my cuticles are always in such disrepair.

i wear your bruise like a sweatshirt & it's not even spring yet
but my body knows the difference—understands wishful thinking
& the overzealous pennies that leap out of Fellini's fountain
just to flail wildly with your coppertone skin. i read somewhere
that our bodies are differential engines

& i can't remember the last time mine had a tune-up but
it seems to make sense—how wonder-wounded strolls into
Prospect Park have given me the stutter flutter jump start
i needed after my blue lens prescription ran out in January

(which is supposed to be winter i think but all of the heat
of the Subtropic was trapped inside our mouths like a spoiled surprise).

if your life was a movie—& of course i balk at the prosaicness
of the serpentine moments we write about or imagine in
sleep-crusted dreams but rather am drawn to
the simple ornate loveliness of your mundanity like pouring a glass of water
or eating tabouli in a mosque—i can't imagine jump shots
or quick cuts: just a single lugubrious take for 90 minutes or 90 years
when my eyes become a Canon Vixia— ike in a Russian film
you told me about while you were tripping interstellar or at least

that's where my muzzy head goes when your breath crosses
the deeply stupid Atlantic like skipping stones—oh i'm dying
to catch them but they mutiny in my shaky hands. maybe i'll just
forgo sleep every day—fail mathematical equations in a

scrawled & over-caffeinated state as some sort of demonstration.
i'd like to think that this life-long aversion to numbers has a lot to do
with how your heart doesn't translate easily into integers
or patterns—how abstraction is just a slice of your spectacle
how the larynx doesn't speak but hums hums hums (what
a wonderful world!) how the boxes don't fit not even if you
crumple & smash them beyond their shapes & i guess
what i'm trying to say is math doesn't allow for that & neither do you.

instead i'll take earnest advantage of the nostalgia industry
& ride cable cars to the airport with memories not quite sentient
but vital to us still & all—it will go over so big so smooth
so unbelievably heroic or otherwise land with such a tremendous
THUD!
that we'll all every one of us fall completely speechless
but you hear "spaceship" & fly to a place

we have only begun to discover without sleep.

Zach Savich

RECOGNIZABLE SUBJECTS

The awe you feel for the whales
is not from their size but because
you see them in their habitat.
Management philosophy
is lacking perspective.
Your life can change in a moment—
you missed it. There it is again.
You missed it. Or is the awe
because you feel it, awe, watching
water where whales were, are,
awe. The moving part
is actually but or or. Or
awe is suffering. But suffering
is no ocean. But they look soft.

Jessica Goodfellow

MEMORY CENTO

If memory fails, then the mind is air in a skull
of someone else's memory. Obey gravity
like a bell. Whenever I move, whatever
spins out in reckless radiance,
wearing your dead father's flight jacket,
will unfold in the same order it does
in its net, the dead bees of memory
doing their silent handsprings inside it.

Is it true the sadder we are, the more things stand still?

Every shadow is memory,
bright blue now because of physics.
Rattling last year's leaves,
nameless now,
what would your shadow care
about the body and its trappings,
its dots and dashes of pain? I expect and get no answer.

You were thin-ribbed, were hawk-
hurled out into the future,
lit up blue by the strangeness of god.
But the mind has the reason it needs,
dangling that ornament, memory.
It draws forward the life of desire. Soon memory
brings new birds up from Mexico,
wears a cloak of bees.

Sources (by line):
1. Fanny Howe, "Doubt"
2. Cynthia Arrieu-King & Ariana-Sophia Kartsonis, "Obey Gravity"
3. Steven Reese, "Small Ode to My Ignorance"
4. Karin Gottshall, "Summer"
5. Jean Valentine, "[The ship] is slowly giving up her sentient life. I cannot write about it. —Shackleton, diary"
6. Alison Apothecker, "Fog on Skyline Drive"

7.J ennifer Moss, “The Storm”
8. Jane Hirshfield, “Not One Moment of This a Subtraction”
9. Lisa Russ Spaar, “The Geese”
10. Carl Phillips, “Civilization”
11. David Hernandez, “Sincerely, the Sky”
12. Ruth Stone, “Train Ride”
13. Mary Oliver, “In Blackwater Woods”
14. Paul Guest, “Question for Silence”
15. Gretchen Marquette, “Figure Drawing”
16. Gail Mazur, “Unveiling, Wakefield”
17. Joseph Fasano, “Elegy for a Year”
18. Chad Sweeney, “Parable of Day”
19. Alice Oswald, “Memorial: A Version of Homer’s Iliad”
20. Victoria McArtor, “Stomach”
21. Lightsey Darst, “=”
22. Galway Kinnell, “Astonishment”
23. Jim Harrison, “Barking” 24. Danika Paige Myers, “Burning the Hives”

Hajjar Baban

IT WOULD BE TOO EASY TO NAME THIS GUILT

so I tell / him / this happens sometimes / I can't / look / at myself / in
the mirror / my right
knee / goes on its own / I know / what it means / if we give / a word
to it / then if I can / accurately
translate / the word / then if there's someone / to listen to that / how I
was / never offered / the music

though I stay / and watch / everyone / dance / I want / to convince
myself / I'm missing / sometimes just
to know / if there's anything searching / but the sun / will come de
spite / if I ask / to hear / its antonym
even / I say / it'll still be there / I bet / the sun is / 109 times / wider \
than the Earth / when I turn / to
keep you / from seeing / yes / it's bigger / than my fear / that wide /
yes / it hurts / when stared too long
/ that I never know / what you see / even after / you tell me / but it's
there / widened

why wouldn't I feel small ? how could I / still want / to send someone
/ to find / you call me / baby
/ how could I / tell him / my throat feels / how I see the fuzz / city /
aerial view / from [ ]

the lights / wider than the Earth / explanation of how my heart / will
burst / held up / against the size to
a star / perfect sphere / perfect estimate / of an expiration / consuming
the land / I confess / my being

Rosiland Williamson

PREFACE

in response to Judith Butler

I. *Gender Trouble*, 1990

Where do you begin? Terms? No. Start with a question mark
and work backwards from there. You are being watched. You spend long hours
looking in the mirror, waiting for the spontaneous reconfiguration
of your body parts. If you stare long enough
maybe you'll unearth a new one entirely. You don't smash
the glass. You wonder what body would smash the glass.

You attempt to exist outside the binary and so you reify the binary.
You are a mess of categories you can't escape. You're a woman
(you're not a woman), you're a daughter (you're not a daughter),
you want to belong. You want to be regulated
because to be unregulated means you don't exist at all. But you can slit your wrists
with Occam's razor. You offer the trouble—recognizing compulsion
is the first step towards resisting compulsion.

You wonder if you're pretending. You know you're not
but sometimes you want to have been. Pronouns prickle on your skin
like mosquito bites. You start correcting people
when they misgender you. You don't wear dresses anymore. You say and mean it
that you wish they would steal our methods of loving one another
instead of our surface, that they would sink instead of skid. Your friend laughs
and agrees. So must all others if you are to want.

You still defend your humanity
and they love you for it. You wonder when they will believe you are human
and you keep waiting. You can't imagine what to call yourself. Your mother
still calls you daughter. She is being watched
as much as you are. This panoptical disarray: is it a limitation, or an opening?

II. *Bodies That Matter*, 1993

Your friend asks, "Is the future non-binary?" You say, "The future
doesn't need the binary to survive. If it's nonbinary,
it's reminding us that the binary is essential." You wonder

how honest you should be with people who still live inside it. Who want to continue to exist without reflection, to love a binary, without knowing the responsibility of continuing to be a self assigned. Destruction, a roaring fire—every human a pillar of salt—gender drifting away in the wind—another window:

Hajjar Baban

SURGERY DREAMS (PASSING)

In an un-airconditioned subway car
Gertrude Stein argues with her reflection

about the impact of bird-death on the psyche
of girls. Gertrude fractures language into goblet-

shaped holes. The glass shows every woman on
the train, their faces crowned in a sweat nobody

mistakes for fever. She spits out the word *table-cloth*
to make the glasswomen flinch. A girl drowning

in the dregs of winter moans awake. Gertrude unbuttons
her coat & thousands of shed bird-beaks fall to the floor.

The difference is spreading, she mutters. The glass buckles
conjuring the already mourned. Gertrude applauds

then leans in, studying her hidden tongues up close.
In Queens, a girl is waiting to slip her nightgown around

Gertrude's knotted shoulders. I gargle sunlight. The subway
car darkens while Gertrude imagines breaking down

the front door of her mind. Mirror shards are blood-soaked
on the dresser. This much I know. How to give everything

up inside the gaze of a stranger. Feathers are scattered
across the bedspread. Feathers where there should be a man.

Oliver Baez Bendorf

YOU GO AWAY FROM YOURSELF, YOU COME BACK TO YOURSELF

How many times had I dreamed exactly that—to fall asleep
with breasts and wake without them.

Think I must have seen the surgeon sewing

me tight. For seven days, I construct a private church of
feathers, inside I pray to heavens,

try in dreams to open up a parachute. My body becomes the
object lesson. The object knows it

belongs. Nerves cut like the stem of an orchid, at an angle,
over a sink filthy with coffee grounds.

Rosiland Williamson

in body mint

i.
consider: one inhabits a body. this body,
consider: a body. the body of one who,
consider: the body of one
consider: take the body and do not make
the speaker look at it any more. consider: “an ability
to be affected” by
consider: a “block” of “space”-“time”:
intensity of communicative Affect

ii.
give me a peace of your / piecely mind / give me / your body /
listen / this is what it
means to be cis / this is your sacrifice / disco/very / the chance
to embody / a body
/ that’s not just / cis / it’s necessary / it’s what you must trust it’s
what / whords are
four / after all “Memory is the Amnesia You Like” / that you
crave you when you
remember you don’t you / have to bear that “cis” / sublim(e)/ate
it / and stay cis

iii.
“thought is itself, a body, embodied,” and yes,
partial, that is, composed of parts, roles to play,
performativity in glorious motion, here an arm
—a body, here a leg/end, eidolonic, here, eat
“beast tissues”, don’t cry, listen, it’s just a body

iv.
bo(l)d(l)y

Jason Crawford

i haven't thought about dying today
no
just about a high wire act
from an electric pole
about pouring my veins
into a morning cocktail for kicks
about rearranging my brake pads backwards
i did not think about the pill cabinet
about the buffet that awaits me there
it is my open bar
my stomach is a 30 year old drunk
with a masochistic liver
about how chairs tip over so easily
and ties tighten to a perfect fit
about the relationship
of the fork and the socket
the smell of skin burning
like a house fire
or maybe just about matches
and letting the whole house burn down
and being trapped in the basement of it all
drowning in smoke
the body opening from the heat
festering and molting
and me there
no tongues
no talking
just there
i swear there is beauty in that
or maybe i am the house
and i've evacuated everything
but the smoldering bark at my legs
or
maybe there's something in my blood
that makes me want to gift it back to the earth
maybe something will grow
and i can find use of that
there's nothing living in this body
nothing worth saving

but if we plant it
it will flourish
grow something beautiful
i could be something beautiful
you get it
i want that
so no
i didn't think about dying today
no
not yet

Todd Kaneko

NAMING CEREMONY

What did the wise person
whisper in your ear
on the ninth day of your birth?
Can you walk into the pink
of morning and remain unchanged?
Did she predict
the seas you would cross
only to return to the living room
where she taught you the mantra
that created the earth?
When you chant what springs
sound? A loon?
A bald eagle, talons glistening
with lake fish's twist, or herons
that tangle necks into a braid?
Is today the day
the chipmunk will stir
from its burrow beneath
the magnolia's proud olive?
How many words
do you know for *dawn*
that do not mean *horizon*?
The burden is yours,
a tree of heavy fruit—
You call yourself limb, roseate,
a Sumerian lyric, a flood
of blood. With each name
you give your body
you change into spring bough,
who are you really? A sunset?
A pile of drying leaves?

Afterword/ Kayla Little & Autumn Cooper

In October, Matt came to us announcing his new editorial position with Trio House Press, and his stepping down as editor-and-chief of *Poetry City*. Thus, a new era of the journal was brewing, one Matt asked us to oversee. After being on staff for years, cultivating our abilities as student editors, and experiencing the fulfillment of publishing people's hearts and souls, we said yes to the proposition.

The two of us have many similarities: we both write poetry, believe in the power of the written word to change the world, and attended Normandale Community College, where we separately took poetry with Matt. However, our paths did not cross there. It wasn't until Matt invited us to join the student staff at *Poetry City* that we became acquainted. Even then, we seldom spoke outside of staff meetings and had never read each other's writing. It wasn't until the making of volume nine of the journal that we got the opportunity to know one another, to understand the other's vision for the journal, and for poetry as a whole.

Upon our first meeting as co-editor-in-chiefs we found we both had big ideas: ideas about fostering the talents of all kinds of writers and people, ideas of incorporating art and media beyond writing, ideas of absolute inclusion. When one of us brought up an idea the other hadn't thought of, we found we were in synch.

As we spoke about our ideas, we realized *Poetry City* has a rebirth every five issues or so. Issues one through four were home to the poems read at The Great Twin Cities Poetry Read, while issues five through nine were run by Matt with both AFA and BFA students on staff. Issue ten will be the start of a new, exciting era of *Poetry City*, one we hope thrills, provokes, and probes our readers' minds. We're excited and nervous, but mostly grateful for the opportunity Matt has given us to make *Poetry City* our own, and grateful for our poets and readers as we take the leap into the boundless unknown.