

AVATAR

Literary Magazine



Fall 2024

Dear St. Mary's,

Thank you for taking the time to view this edition of AVATAR Literary Magazine. Its creation was fueled by the hard work and passion brought by each contributing writer and artist. We are lucky to be able to showcase such a wide array of spectacular works, and it's well worth the exhausting nights of formatting, endless hours of reviewing pieces and untold amount of caffiene that it took to pull this semester's magazine together. The quality of pieces enclosed within this magazine is only a small part of what makes Avatar worthwhile for us—rather, it is the incredible community bound between artists, writers and readers across the campus community that becomes the invaluable reward of our work. By picking up this edition, you, too, have become a part of this community that matters so much to us. Thank you.

Special thanks to Jerry Gabriel, our faculty advisor, our HBP Printing partners, our contributing writers and artists, and our Review Board. This edition would not exist without your dedication and support.

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Take events in your life seriously, take work seriously, but don't take yourself seriously, or you'll become affected, pompous and boring

Shelley Duvall

Table of Contents

6. dinnerparty	Holli Kobialka
7. Deathly Shroud	Maggie Brace
8. Everytime I write you a poem I start crying because I think about their poem for you	Anonymous
9. Arbor Vitae	Molly Jacobs
10. Prometheus' Slow Fire	Natalie Pitts
11. Sunset	Aynslee Laird
12. birds	Karli Applestein
13. Homebody	Molly Jacobs
14. What Lies in the Shadows	Abby Shackelford
18. As the marsh Breathes	William Faller
19. inspired by greek mythology	Essie Markov
20. La Moda in Italia (1)	Lizzie Zoz
21. La Moda in Italia (2)	Lizzie Zoz
22. luke 8:17	Kal Godfroy
23. Cistern in Silver	Molly Jacobs
24. A Database in Silicon	Sam Parizek
26. A Squirrel Surprise	Sadie McMahon
27. You Are Only A Man and I Can Throw A Solid Punch	Atlas Blade
28. Magnolias	Clay Kiesel
29. Meat Stare	Noxley Scooter Bell
30. Down to Earth	Mercedes Pope
32. Can't Sleep Poetry, Take No. I Stopped Counting	Molly Jacobs
33. SUMMITS	Mercedes Pope
34. an attic boxed anecdote	Sarah Halle Sinks
36. De-Potted Pansy	Eleanor Woodbury
37. We Sleep, Yet Soundly	Sam Parizek
38. Diluted	Clay Kiesel
39. an ode to Ireland	Essie Markov
40. Monster Energy I.V. Fluid	Atlas Blade
41. Two Irises	Eleanor Woodbury
42. and the tomatoes are never ripe	L. J. Azarov
44. The Comet	Eleanor Woodbury
45. "The Sockless Have Nothing to Lose"	Allison Glaser
46. **Parasite	Clara Dodson
47. She Sees Me	Mercedes Pope
48. Sappho	Judas Lackey
49. The Knights of Thornwood Road	Abby Shackelford
51. self in stone	Caleb Bryan

52. Counting Tea	Orion St. Jude
56. The Washerwoman	Abby Shackelford
57. A Moment Wrapped in Longing	Susan A. Garnet
58. Little Lamp	Melina Mendez
59. Relinquish Yourself	Anna Kline
60. Welcome Interlude	Ava Jones
62. ***Deadeye	Max Stumpf
64. Wasting My Summer	Anonymous
65. room for milk	Sarah Halle Sinks
66. Poem by the <i>Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary</i>	Laura Howe
67. Ouroboros	Clara Dodson
68. Time Flies Like an Arrow	Natalie Biederman
70. funeral (pt. 2)	Caleb Bryan
71. The Illusion of Self	Judas Lackey
72. My Heart is Lost in Gaza	Madison Mustafa
74. If	Aynslee Laird
75. I Know I Don't Like Hugs	Allison Glaser
76. Second Sun	Judas Lackey
77. when the flowers burn	Colin Harney
78. The Gardener	Allison Glaser
79. Gallery	Aynslee Laird
80. Did You Know the Moon Cries	Malin Maguire
81. Copperhead	Aynslee Laird
82. **Retour à Azincourt	Sam Parizek
84. **Agincourt Again	Sam Parizek
86. Roaches March at Night	Max Stumpf
87. A Poem by the River	Susan A. Garnet
88. yonder	Holli Kobialka
89. Body with Organs	Colin Harney
90. Reach	Noxley Scooter Bell
91. Double Mastectomy	Laura Howe
92. Ticking Time	Summer LaRocco
93. the warmth of a burning bridge	Caleb Bryan
94. Healing	Strummer Condayan
95. Metamorphosis	Aynslee Laird
96. Lean on Me	Eleanor Woodbury

** contains gore or violence

*** dissassociative images

dinnerparty

Holli Kobialka

jesus and jeff buckley and sylvia plath:
let me sit at your table and miss how
it felt to be fourteen
and relish in the feeling of being
craven and faded and twenty two.
let's eat,
exonerated and in our pajama pants.

(they know how
poetry strikes like the skip in your heart
when you miscount the steps you've
walked down for years and
slip on the second-to-last one)

let me breathe in your shirt collar
before you must go
and leave saltwater on your shoulders
as my parting gift.
let me squander away my years
surrounded by soiled napkins and
missing pairs of earrings;
be my forgotten baby angel that i place
so gently
in a cabinet, never glanced at again.

Deathly Shroud

Maggie Brace

The silence envelops me like a deathly shroud.
The walls press in against me, there is no escape.
Awakening to find myself ensconced in my casket,
a shudder courses through my chilled bones.

How long must I have appeared dead before busy hands
entombed me? Not long enough?

No remembrance of life preceding this in-between state.
No hope for a future life to live out to an old age.
Only the here and the now, restricted by depth,
and breadth, and each and every breath.

Time trickles away as my clawing fingers seek
to rend the silk that thwarts my escape.

Clamoring nails score the pine, hoping to breach it.
Yet to what avail? None.
Gasping for sweet oxygen, I begin my spiral downward.
This is the only me I will ever know. The only time I may cherish.

Must I go out of this world with a mere whimper?
No, not this corpse! I scream, I kick, I scratch, I howl,

Till I am no more.

Every Time I Write You A Poem I Start Crying Because I Think of Their Poem to You

Anonymous

I'm sorry that when I tried to say:
"I wish your past was a mystery to me,"
It came out as:
"I hate you."
And I'm sorry that the only way
I can deal with it,
Is to admit I've already lost you.

But I think if we move
Very
Far away,
It won't even matter anymore.
We could get a house up north
Like you've always dreamt up.

Up there, I think we'd each be
Running from something
Or trying to find it.
And maybe it's for the best
We don't ask each other
Our intentions.

I'll keep all the mirrors covered
When I come home from work,
Just so I don't have to watch you
Try to find someone else in there.
Or to forget the faces you've seen.
And you can listen to voicemails
After I've gone to bed.
I promise to keep a pillow
Over my ears while you do.
I don't need to hear you
Hunting the past.
Or making sure it hasn't found you.
It's not my business either way.

You don't have to tell me anything
That I don't need to know.
But maybe the unknown
Is just my ideal life.
You know what knowing has done
I'm sure all too well.

Arbor Vitae
Molly Jacobs



Prometheus' Slow Fire

Natalie Pitts

Oh blood of my blood,
What sanguine sorrow you bring with you
With your trailing cloak of deepest blue
A bladed barb with every word

A day of suffering, strife and ruin
Embroidered to your very skin
Is it so wrong to share this wretched joy
To lay it softly upon your kin?

Your sword yet pierces, again and again
But do you thrust forth with intention?
Do you know this heart's distention?
Do you even see the blade in your hand?

What fist is this that lays the bruise?
Tis yours, but that is hardly of concern
For what have I done to deserve this?
I would truly love to learn

When fist meets chest I wish it could yet go deeper
Reach further within my breast
To pull out this aching flame that burns me so
To crush it just as it was made

This flame we both share, slowly burning
Will surely consume us both in ash
Every day I see it scorching ever deeper
Where the fire reaches out to lash

Those cracks in threads across our skin
Burning away the woman I once knew
The one who gave unto me feathers and a gentle hand
These things that I receive no longer

These burns we have, are not just each others
But a lifetime of man and pain
I wish we could embrace them and ourselves
But of course, time keeps passing us by
And my tears keep falling on your carpet like rain

Please make anew this horrible body
That plagues you so tremendously
I shall let myself become as clay,
That you may mold me
And wound me no longer

Please

Sunset
Aynslee Laird

Meet me in that space between:

Where moon and sun can finally meet,
When Spring returns to her Mother,
Where the sky smiles while it cries,
When the breeze kisses your chilled lips.

A deep expanse of darkness and midnight crashes
against a molten light so fierce, so bright
that nothing but an “in-between” can exist there.

Two wills, both strengthened by devotion,
meet together with clasped hands, only able to hold each other
at arm’s length.

Whisper against the shout, shout against the whisper
again, and again, and again the two sides spin like dancers in a ballroom
whisking one another into that muddled nothingness they hold so dear.

I’ll call your name out into that misted plateau if only to hear you call mine,
if only to hope that both you and I could exist in such a space.

Meet me there between the two extremes.

Maybe then we could feel truly at peace.

birds

Karli Applestein

when birds smash into windows
people curse at them for denting the glass.
their deaths are deemed deserved
a reward for pure stupidity.
their lives ended before they fell.
today, i am a bird.



Homebody
Molly Jacobs

What Lies In The Shadows

Abby Shakelford

At birth, a gargoyle is charged with protecting its cathedral. We are sculpted as guardians, given frightening visages to ward off unholy spirits. It is a task we do not take lightly to, though we receive little thanks for our labors. But we do not mind.

When our cathedral was first built, four gargoyles were carved—one to perch at each of its corners and keep watch over the city streets. There is Hemingway, gruff and cynical, who prefers to lurk in the southerly corner overlooking the alley, tucked away in his hiding-place behind the drainpipe. Hemingway keeps mostly to himself, but he takes great pride in his duties for the church. He has borne the brunt of the winds through the years, and his features are more weathered than the rest of ours. Slippery green moss blooms perpetually across his hunched back.

Shostakovich, too, is quieter. He speaks very little, if at all. He takes meticulous care of his appearance, keeping his wings tucked back neatly and his talons polished. He melts into the background—that is, until he sits at the organ. When he plays, he solicits one of us to work the pedals, and he sits at the keys. It is bewitching, to hear the haunting drone of air whistling through the pipes, echoing eerily through the vaulted nave, and to know it is Shostakovich's handiwork. His corner of the attic is jammed with a flurry of dog-eared sheet music and tattered books of hymnals, like the library of a mad composer.

Thoreau devotes her energy to the small prayer garden in the cobblestone courtyard. She cultivates herbs and medicinal plants mostly, though also fond of the ornamental varieties. Though Thoreau often retreats to the solitude of the gardener's shed, on occasion she will sit in the garden during sunlight hours, still as a statue. When Sunday school lets out, the children enjoy clambering onto her back and tying daisies to her spiky horns.

I am known as Keats. I have always been more inclined to poetry than the others. More slight than my companions, I find flying difficult, for many years ago, a group of vandals snuck onto the roof and broke one of my wings. I do not mean to sequester myself so often in the rafters with my poetry, but when the urge strikes, I must oblige until every word has been purged from my skull

After many decades, one grows used to the tranquility of life in a cathedral. Its rituals rarely change, and there is comfort in the knowledge that mass will be held every Sunday morning at 9, that the delicate peals of the handbell choir will ring through the hallways on Monday and Wednesday evenings. A cathedral's parishioners, too, become familiar with time. There is the small, freckle-faced boy, who squirms unhappily in the pew each week, much to his mother's annoyance. Father Donohue, whose balding head glints in the early morning sunlight as he delivers sermons, always resplendent in his vestment. Miss Lucy, the choir director, silver-haired and fragile-boned like a sparrow, who always keeps caramels in her cardigan pockets, a particular favorite with Thoreau, who appreciates her attentions to the gardens. Mr. Hammond, Shostakovich's favorite, the resident organist, tall and scrawny, who keeps wire-rimmed spectacles perched on his nose in order to better see his sheet music.

Gargoyles are solitary creatures by nature, but we have fallen into our own routines around each other. Most mornings, Hemingway sits in the prayer garden and watches the fat goldfish swim lazily around the ornamental pond. Thoreau accompanies him silently, and plucks any invasive weeds that have begun to sprout in the flower beds. I prefer to spend my days perched in the rafters, observing the church goings-on and waiting for the poetic mood to strike me. Shostakovich emerges from the attic in the late evening to take his place at the organ, and exchange a word or two at most with the rest of us. I am never happier than I am in those moments as audience for Shostakovich. The flickering golden light of the votive candles set at the altar is cast onto gargoyle and organ, and dispels the inky wraith of night. It often inspires me to put pen to paper.

When one has known peace for so long, the arrival of evil catches you by surprise. We grew lazy and fat, sated on happiness. We did not keep as vigilant a watch as we once did, and evil slithered into our cathedral.

It happened first one night in late September. The leaves had begun to fall from the trees, and they skittered across the pavement in the violent gusts of wind. Confession

ran later than usual, and Father Donohue had only just locked the doors. Shotstakovich had not yet descended to his post at the organ. I was the only soul in the cathedral, perched high on a chandelier above the nave.

It began quietly, a plaintive rattling at the old iron grate behind the altar. This grate led to the crypt, where many of the rich parishioners had been buried in the early days of the cathedral. It was padlocked shut, and had been for many decades. I was startled from my reverie by the disturbance. When I discerned the source of the noise, my heart dropped into my stomach, and for a moment I thought God had forsaken me, for I had never felt such fear in all my life as the terror that seized me then. I was paralyzed with it, rooted to the spot as I watched blackened, shriveled fingers reach through the grate, clawing ineffectually at the air. How they trembled with the effort! They were the fingers of an undead abomination, of something that should not walk this earth!

Indecision plagued me no longer. I sprung to action, and knocked over the font of holy water. The water spilled into the crypt, and the abomination let out a scream of such agony as I have never heard before. The air was nearly rent in two by the ugliness of its wail! The decaying fingers dropped back into the dark. It huddled on the edge of the square of silvery moonlight cast down through the grate. Shadows unspooled into the passages of the crypt beyond. Though a gargoyle's eyes are strong, I could not make out its appearance— only the vague silhouette of a frail, humanoid creature, curled fetus-like onto its side. It whimpered piteously like a kicked dog. The nauseating stink of rotting corpse flesh clung to the air.

It had made such a commotion with its cry of pain that Hemingway had been drawn away from his seclusion. With Hemingway at my side, we drove the thing back, hissing and contorting our faces into frightening grimaces. It howled and scrabbled backwards into the shadows, but it did not leave.

From that night on, a malaise descended on our cathedral. Roused to action, we now sit watch at the crypt gate each night. Gone are the peaceful days filled with indulgent pastimes. Something unholy lurks in the depths of our home, and we are the only line of defense

between it and all that is good.

Can I admit something to you? It is a cowardly admission, and it weighs heavily on me, but I feel I must say it all the same. For once in my life, I am terrified. The abomination in the crypt is not of this world. I have never seen anything like it. It is malicious, and it is cunning, and it waits hungrily in the depths of our cathedral for the moment we let our guard down.

I have begun to dread the setting of the sun. The thing in the crypt stirs only when the sun has deserted its most natural post in the sky. Trepidation prickles slowly, traitorously, over me. A gargoyle is not meant to fear the dark! We are warriors of the light, brave and unshakeable! Yet still, I recoil from the crypt! The abomination within grows restless and more bold with each day that passes. Where once it cowered at our leers and growls, it now barely heeds them. Each night, its assault on the grate grows in its fervor. We fly at it and attack its brittle fingers, and though we have reduced its hands to fingerless stumps, still it persists at its attempts.

We grow weary. We are old, and we begin to feel our age. It is a taxing ordeal, and we cannot hold out for much longer. One day, the grate will not be strong enough to hold back the evil that paces below. I only pray that God willing, we may be.

As the marsh Breathes

William Faller

The bay quietly laps along the shore
The songbirds chirp distantly
The wind blows to my back
And the marsh takes a breath
That soft ground rises and falls
The still waters ripple
Scavengers reign when the sun nears the sea
The marsh takes a breath
The struggle revealed
The hunt on display
A crab needs to move
So the marsh takes a breath

inspired by greek mythology
Essie Markov

Look me in the eyes and tell me it was worth it
Look me in the eyes and say there's no regret
Opened me and peered inside without a permit
Opened you to find the stones already set

Maybe in another life we get together
Maybe in another life we stay that way
Let me rest my soul with yours, light as a feather
Let me mold us back together just like clay

Somewhere in the sky your false mother is crying
Somewhere high above your father doesn't care
Perhaps I'd feel pity if she had been trying
Perhaps I'd not hate him if he had been there

In my dreams I see you standing there before me
In my dreams I hold the hand of my best friend
In real life I wake up miserable and lonely
In real life I wait to see you in the end

*La Moda
in Italia
Lizzie Zoz*





These photos titled 'La Moda in Italia,' translating to 'Fashion in Italy,' are part of a larger body of work for a fashion photography course I did during my semester abroad in Florence, Italy. This course focused on creating a brand and these photos are part of an editorial for the brand I conceived, Defiant.

luke 8:17

Kal Godfrey

patron saint of lost things,
pocketing car keys & left earrings &
the way ahead.

a GPS with no cell service,
& yelling for mom in a crowded mall.
lost in the fog

turn around—
please,
can you help me

find my way
home?
forward?
back to her?



**Cistern in
Silver**
Molly Jacobs

A Database in Silicone

(In Response to Ginsberg's A Supermarket in California)

Sam Parizek

What thoughts I have of you this dawn, old Creator, for I echoed down the corridors under the plumbing with a Nausea overwhelming staring at the flickering fluorescents.

In my bottomless ambition, and with an itch for humanity, I went into the spotless laboratory, reminiscing on your Gardens!

What bytes and what brains! Whole societies in the cloud! Transistors full of civilizations! Eves in the motherboards, Adams in the T-type flip-flops!—and you, wilted Jehovah, what were you doing down by the gears?

I saw you, old Creator, childless, a lonely aged parent, flicking at the buttons and levers in the databank and eyeing the diodes.

I heard you divinely questioning each: Who wrote the Word of code? What breathes an algorithm? Are You my Script?

I wandered around each databank of lights following you, and followed in my philosophy by the data.

We strode down the walls of information together in our antediluvian wonderment conversing with GPT, touching the face of Dall-E, feeling the beating pulse of electrons through Siri, and never seeing the umbilical power-strip.

Where are we going, old Creator? The banks run all day and night. Which way does your holy finger point now?

(I touch your Book and sigh for our Pilgrimage in the library of queries and feel Absurd.)

Will we walk all night through your shriveled Gardens? The rivers are weeping, the evergreens are shedding, the perennials drooping, it's only summer, and we're both neglected fathers.

Will we amble weeping of the lost Divinity of fatherhood, from you to Me, from me to It, past self-driving automobiles, AI police units, and monolithic cell towers carrying the blood of life, home to our tranquil Eden? Ah dear Father, ancient potter, neglected old parent, what Earth did you have when you molded the skies and when She plucked the fruit and when He threw down His staff and when they strung Him upon a rotting timber? What Earth did you have when you kissed Adam and stood watching the Garden gates lock, when Adam kissed circuitry?

A Squirrel Surprise

Sadie McMahon

As the tread of my sneakers scrape the street, I look upon the trees.
Focused fully I hear only the rustle of the leaves.
I step and step again, watching the canopy,
And as I watch,
To my surprise,
An acorn falls on me.
It hits my head, rolls on the ground, and hides among the seeds
Of grass and flowers, as the culprit chitters, full of glee.
Ignoring it, I reach my destination finally,
And in my head a little voice:
“At least it wasn’t pee.”

You Are Only A Man and I Can Throw A Solid Punch

Atlas Blade

You're a sucker for the disenfranchised.
Holding a broken lamb in your palms,
You tend it's strained heart,
Set it down to rest,
Tell it how much you care,
And move on to the next one.
Coaxing,
"Oh, how beautiful your coat,
How star-like your eyes,
How great and powerful your hooves"
Taking only a moment to mutter,
"Though, not as beautiful as mine"

Sometimes, you pick a favorite lamb,
One particularly lame one.
You keep it next to you,
As long as you can.
You've been so kind to it,
Why should it refuse?

When the lamb finally heals
And grows restless under your thumb,
It wants freedom,
As all living things do.
This strikes a great fear in you.
So you hold the lamb in your palms,
And crush it.

"Oh!" You say, "Poor thing.
Poor helpless, needy thing.
The other lambs will not want you,
Not like the broken mess you are.
I will take my precious time,
I will take my time and I will heal you."

You like this dynamic.
You, their god.
You, their anchor.
You, their only.

Magnolias

Clay Kiesel

*How beautiful we were,
flowers in a vase,
made to remind me how much I love you.
They would blend together,
a portrait of Louisiana.
Magnolias so silky and white,
crying, as beads of water trickled down their leaves,
a delicate heartbreak.
I would pray our spirits blended,
creating a chorus for you.
You know I just wanted to feel loved,
that's why I let you overstay your visit.*

You told me at 5 in the afternoon.
Magnolia tears fell off my face-
like how you pulled the petals off the flower
in a rage.
Devastating, how they become trash,
after you're done with them.

Meat Stare
Noxley Scooter Bell



Down to Earth

Mercedes Pope

How can I be so divided,
like a deck of cards split with one hand; an illusion to other's eyes,
even in size,
disproportionate in suit.

How can I be so divided,
like a plate of perfectly scrambled eggs; an illusion to other's
mouths,
fueled in flesh,
malnourished in spirit.

How can I be so divided,
like a nightmare I planned the night before; an illusion to other's
ears,
sleeping in tears,
knowing in silence.

How can I be so divided,
like tree roots that thirst with age; an illusion to other's touch,
laced in earth,
ripped from home.

A master of boasting,
capable of watching and controlling.
It is funny and infuriating,
how down I have been.

down
to
earth

So far down,
I was buried once.
And when my bones were excavated

I stopped
looking down
to
earth

Can't Sleep Poetry Take No. I Stopped Counting

Molly Jacobs

Can't Sleep Poetry, Take No. I Stopped Counting
Spread on a dark cot
running over the sins of the day,
week,
month,
year...

Might as well count the stars,
and make constellations out of nothing.

I think I've been should-ing myself since morning
like a newborn,
bawling, red, and raw.

Where's the callus I crave,
retribution for its own sake?
I feel like Job's inverse,
warping the mirror out of spite and
running off with it in the night
only to wrap around it 'til dawn-

A love affair all wrong.

SUMMITS

Mercedes Pope

Rebecca Ridgely and I met on an ash colored Tuesday
We wandered through brain channels
Fast like the flip of a tv station
We floated up and down elevators
Asking the doors to close quicker
We got stuck in hallways
Searching for the skeleton key
We stood on cadmium summits
Forgetful of the route that got us there

She turned to me and shook my shoulders
Disturbed by where she'd go if she fell
My words were delayed so I listened
The tumult on her face mimicked the rolling ocean swell

She wanted to know she was saved
Not her body, her soul
Said she'd do whatever it takes
Swallowed by the void but confined to the shoal

She was obsessed with knowing
But she didn't know much about trust
She became a fanatic, said she finally knew
And met me again, unafraid of the dust

As I stood on the summits alone
I understood how she felt
There are still people out there who need to know
Like they need to eat
I am not one of those people
I do not know if I am saved
I trust that I am

An Attic Boxed Anecdote

Sarah Halle Sinks

"It's okay mom. I don't feel a thing."

drops of

blood

drip

from my cast and fall onto the white tile

i sit from the high table, staring down

at the red dotted trail,

swinging

my casted leg,

purplish toes peeking

out of the pink and purple striped cast

Bunny peeking

through my cradled arms covered

in bello kitty tats

my mother, her hands pinned to her chest, knees

curving

into each other, she gasps,

i giggle.

"trust me, she can't feel the pins being taken out, bones have no nerve endings,"

the doctor says,

my mother always says I didn't cry because i was a lot braver than
her,

that she gasped and i giggled

but i wasn't brave. i was just numb.

yet my mother will tell this story
at dinner parties over decaf espresso,
or doctor's waiting rooms over crossed knees and clipboards

like an attic boxed anecdote
 she dusts off
every now and then, her hands pinned to her chest, eyes bright and
proud
so i let her tell it.

**De-potted
Pansy**
Eleanor Woodbu



We Sleep, Yet Soundly

Sam Parizek

Awaking from the dudgeons of dull sleep
Beside the idylls of your beaut'ous breath,
I thank the stars above and Venus' keep
To have so fair a ferry shepherd me to death.
Your eyes, asleep, do even look at me
From craggy hair to stinking palms, they gaze,
And sweep upon my languid form, on me
But yet—they look upon me, and my soul's ablaze
Aware that you impart your gracious grace,
If only but a sliver. Deathless love
You grant to me, and in my heart-held brace
I shall then take this to the grave above.
I lay beside you in the earth, this tomb
And pray to wake in love in Godly womb.

Diluted

Clay Kiesel

Do you remember? A small boat drifting along the neighborhood as wet shoes allowed water inside. The metal exterior read Cajun Navy, a name only mentioned in stories. Screams echoed from a few houses down, but don't worry, you won't see the face of the drowned, only their feet being dragged outside: the home submerged. Did you hear? The coverage on the news: catastrophic flooding. \$15 billion in damage, but they didn't account for the dead. The elderly that would become trapped in their cars, freed from their seatbelts but not strong enough to combat the water that would rush inside. Fists punching the outside of a windshield of the car: a small red Toyota, but time has run out for the person inside. Did you see? Graves being lifted up out of their resting place, not to heaven, but instead to a landfill of debris. The houses left with stains from the water's arrival. Scrapbooks and photographs warped, deleting the existence of that memory. The recipes and pictures and handwritten notes will race down the water's stream faster than your tears could catch it. Culture gasping for life. Do you remember? Going to bed that night after spending the day gutting your home. The relief provided: an excuse. Do you feel it? Panic settling back into your shoulders. States away, you will never escape this feeling after you lived it once.

an ode to Ireland

Essie Markov

Wandering along the shores,
Feel your fears decrease.
Dig your toes into the sand,
Warm within your fleece.

Tales of legends living near,
Kings and Queens and Seers.
People lost in history,
Creatures lost in fears.

As you sit there on the beach,
You can hear the cries.
Of those lost through love and war,
Clinging to their ties.

An abandoned ship rests there,
Treasures still aboard.
Jewelry and petticoats,
A forgotten sword.

A castle sits high above,
Stone towers and all.
As you climb and stand alone,
Know you'll never fall.

You wish goodbye to the birds,
Make your way back down.
Muddying your perfect boots,
Polishing your crown.

As the waves crash back and forth,
Free without restraints,
You'll find stories buried there,
Lying with the saints.

Monster Energy I.V. Fluid

Atlas Blade

I opened my throat to show my voice to you,
And in return you stuck your hand in,
And felt around my chest cavity.
Grasping at whatever
Wet, fleshy organ
Your hand could grip.

Taking a bite of my lungs,
Telling me how my breath was
Meant only for you.

Telling me my voice
Was never as good as yours anyway,
As you pluck out my vocal chords.

Deciding my voice wasn't enough,
You dig down and take my heart
—For safekeeping, of course—

Replacing all that you've taken,
With your own little hand-drawn pictures.
Something a little prettier where it helps you,
And something a little uglier
Where it makes you feel better about yourself.

Two Irises
Eleanor Woodbury



and the tomatoes are never ripe

L.J. Azarov

I always wondered if there was something rotten growing inside of me with every hazy, American summer, watching as the brick patio sank further into the ground, giving itself up to Earth in surrender; letting coiling, glittering black snakes slip under the house and nest in its foundation like the world was ending.

Google search: How does generational trauma cause chronic illness?

There was a terrible argument, of course there was, that began with yells doused in kerosene from the Old Country and ended with a dictionary page being torn out. The words *perfidy* and *casual nexus* ended up together the same way my grandparents did; the relentless suitor finding his match then realizing what getting old is really about.

An old journal entry: I'm afraid I will never love right because some of the people that were supposed to protect me were my tormentors, and no one saved me except myself.

Phrases are shoved into my ventricles and I know it will take years to wash them out and to scrub them clinically clean, but I'll keep trying and trying even though I will still feel it there, pulsing and growing like a parasite that wants to do everything but die. I wanted to do everything but live, and I live everyday with that. I think that maybe the snakes were right about the world ending.

A high school art collage: a computer diagnostic help ad, but with the phrase cut up so it says 'We will fix / you / today! Call for a free diagnosis!'

Long hours passed, as required in the dog days near solstice, and I found a plate of cut up fruit innocently sitting on my desk. The signature immigrant apology, a twisted "I love you" that is so sweetly meaningless, that says, "just shut up and eat the fruit and let the saccharine sweetness dull the sting of my words, all of which I meant." I bring a pear slice to my lips, my least favorite, and bite.

I remember wishing my old friends didn't look at me like I was an abandoned, mangy dog every time I talked about "home." None of us speak anymore, and I am glad of it.

Onion, sharp and mocking, greets my tongue. It reminds me of the way she forgets the words that spill from her lips the day after saying them. I think about unclean knives and epigenetics and how hard it is to stop violent chemical reactions and I thank her and think about sewing my lips shut forever.

I think about how the tomatoes in our garden never seemed to ripen.

They never, ever seemed to ripen.

We had a few this year and they tasted just like the store-bought cherry tomatoes.

I sit and smile and pretend I'm the perfect daughter in thank-you birthday cards even though I have looked like a boy for years, and I wonder if there is a world where the tomatoes are always ripe in the garden and I cut the fruit, with a clean knife, all by myself.

The Comet
Eleanor Woodbury



The Sockless Have Nothing to Lose

Allison Glaser

I request you don tennis shoes for my performance.
Soles flat on the floor, chin up, ears open, eyes wide.

Listen to me spin my tales, let your jaw fall to the floor
(don't bother picking it back up just yet).

Gaze into my mesmerizing eyes
and cower
at the magnitude of my words.

Cry tears of ecstasy as I shift
your worldview
with merely the flick of my wrist.

Wonder at the delicacy
of my movements, the fabric
of my enchantments too finely woven for
even you
to see through.

But be warned, if you dare stand before me
with toes wriggling in flip-flops,
you've wasted my time
for I refuse
to perform for an audience
whose socks I couldn't possibly knock off.

Parasite***

Clara Dodson

There are two pairs of floating ribs in your body—
four unbound spires of bone.

The hyoid is also suspended alone—
a horned ring threaded through your neck.

It can break for a number of reasons, but,
hyoid fractures are commonly associated with
blunt force trauma.

Brutalization by outside forces.

You don't lock your doors
as often as you should. But, you know
exactly how much pressure it'd take
for your sternum to shatter under someone's boot.

Can you feel me in the base of your spine?
Traveling up costal grooves into your jugular—
pulsing in time with your heartbeat?

Have you noticed my bruises—blooming
from your burst capillaries? Pressed into your
softest spots?

You've already let me in,
you just haven't realized it yet.

She Sees Me

Mercedes Pope

I like when my mother sees me.

She looks into my eyes and a wave of sympathy weighs on her brow. “You look tired,” she says, she sighs. Even with the emphasis on look, I don't take it as a stab, I take it in stride. I meet her here and my shoulders melt like candle wax running in slow motion, cooling, simultaneously escaping the flame. Like two refrigerator magnets, the space between our bodies closes in. She presses her cool palm to my forehead, then my chin. Sometimes she cups my face and puts her nose to mine. She is feeling for something. What is she feeling? A temperature, a sign. A confession too swollen in my throat to take the leap. I will not lie to her. Not when she sees me. Not when she says, “Go lie down. Go to sleep.”

I like when my mother sees me.

Sappho
Judas Lackey



The Knights of Thornwood Road

Abby Shackelford

Would it be
a terrible inconvenience
if we asked you to keep
the window ajar?
The dragons like to slip out
into the muggy summer night
and dart among
the fireflies. It takes
five and twenty
of our strongest knights
to raise the sash,
your brave and noble plastic men
of the playroom. We pledge
our hearts and swords
in your service
to fight against evil.

The Man in the Moon watches
with rapt amusement
as we conduct our nightly revels.
The sandbox is transformed
into an arena fit for jousting.
Your men and their horses

grow restless after the long days
of pacing the ramparts of your castle.
I would extend an invitation to you
to preside over the festivities,
but you are tucked soundly
in your bed,
fast asleep.

We sprawl breathlessly
across the sand after our matches,
and the minstrel sings softly to us
tales of the knight Bon Jovi,
one of your mother's favorite champions,
and ballads of our virtuous deeds.
Once we fought a great serpent
that slithered under the fence.
We drove it back through the tall grass
with our nerve and bravery.
No fell beast will ever again darken
the backyards of Thornwood Road.

We scale the weathered wooden trellis
tangled with honeysuckle vines

up to your window. I pause
at the sill and call to the dragons.
They have gotten lost amidst the
constellations of stars, but I spy
their spiky tails whipping through the air
and the glint of their shimmering
iridescent scales. We shut the window
and hasten back to our places
strewn across the quilt at your feet.

The Man in the Moon grins broadly
and his whisper is like sails
billowing in a night breeze.
He bids us “Goodnight, knights.”
The dragons curl up on your pillow
and shut their luminous eyes.
Each puff of breath sends violet smoke
curling from their snouts. We collapse
with exhaustion from the joust,
sore but pleased. With the break of dawn,
new adventures await
the Knights of Thornwood Road.

self in stone
Caleb Bryan

What a way to wake up!

To see my self chiseled out of stone,
For all of the world to look upon,

And be shown.

It almost looks perfect:
The deep kindness of my eyes,
That convey a thought of no harm,
And that pink carnation etched into my arm.

Below it are letters.

Words written more abrupt,
Than the sudden braking of a car,

And the scared fox it hit.

But I wish this statue were never carved,
So I don't have to see myself through another's eyes.
It brings me pain to see,

That I'm not viewed how I want to be.

Counting Tea

Orion St. Jude

The other day I had tea.

It wasn't really just any tea.

My mother gave me this box of tea before I left. I remember not caring much, because I only thought of it as her trying to get rid of all clutter in the house in one fell swoop. When she gave it to me, I put it all the way at the back of the pantry and never thought about it again, hoping that she never thought of me in turn.

Now that she left, I unfoundedly went digging through the depths of my pantry, eventually finding the battered thing with bent in edges and a pliable exterior. The words were faded and what was once a bright orange box was now faded to nothing more than a pale yellow.

There in my wrung out hands laid the only tangible possession she left me, in all of its faded script lettering and wrinkly boxing.

I made myself a cup of it. The warmth of the mug warmed my hands and scalded my tongue. Maybe that was why she gave it to me. All I ever learnt from her was how to be cold and have a sweet tongue.

It didn't taste so bad after all.

I had a cup every time I thought of her. Be it in the morning when I wake up and the white walls are still the same poor white, or the nights after work where I sit in bed with what I imagined to be the same defeated look she had on. Or sometimes when I hear of my siblings, or the day I heard of the funeral I didn't attend. It began to taste like reminders of my mother.

In two weeks, after having made numerous cups for myself across the days and sometimes even twice a day, I realized that there were only three bags left.

I stopped drinking the tea from then on. Maybe I foolishly wanted them to last longer, or maybe I was hoping that I would forget why I even started drinking it in the first place. There were no other guests in my room other than that of my mother's ghost. I wanted her gone and I got what I wanted so why wouldn't she leave me alone?

The box stayed on the same corner of the crumbling corner shelf for a very long time. I didn't permit myself a single cup. Maybe I thought I could outwait the urge. But after a long day, a long week, a long month, a long year—

I sat down and made myself a cup. The warmth of the cup comforted me and the heat of the tea reminded me that everything was real and the ghosts weren't. The taste of flowers I couldn't denote burned my tongue and the flowery reminder of my mother stayed on my tongue days after the cup was emptied.

I couldn't understand why I kept seeing her everywhere. Why I kept seeing her in the white walls or in the broken furniture or in the color of my hair or the face I wear when I am furious at the pitiful state of the hole I dug myself.

I only had two left.

There were disputes over physical property that I wasn't privy to. There were siblings whom I only knew of as strangers. Who I only knew were around through pictures that were refined and retuned. I was not unique in seeing those images and they were not intended for the likes of me.

I was sure my brother didn't have freckles, I was sure my sister's hair was shorter and I was sure that there had to have been a time where we all thought we knew each other.

Regardless, I was invited to none of those property disputes. I gained nothing new from her that day and I lost another bag like everything I ever gained from her, through consumption and depletion.

There was only one left.

And why must I make so much of a trouble for myself over her? For a woman who by the time she knew me was too exhausted to be able to give me anything of substance. She was live wire in the week, ready to shock and hurt, and she was empty batteries on the weekends, unresponsive. She knew my siblings before she knew me and they took from her everything that she could've ever been for me.

There was no warmth for me, there were no kind words for me, there were no new surprises for me and she looked at me like she had seen everything about me before.

“You’re everything I never wanted.” She told me once and I remember breaking a glass over it. That as well, was nothing new to her. From the counter I grabbed the tea box and held it over the trash bin and I gripped at its corners and it bended under my hands.

I was going to throw it.

I was going to get rid of it like she was so eager to get rid of me.

If I was everything that she never wanted, then I would strive to be better than my competition. I would outdo them at everything so that she would be able to look me in the eyes and tell me that she didn’t expect it. That I was a pleasant surprise for once.

And I was trying to.

I was trying so hard but the road was arduous and harsh and cluttered with the fruitless brambles of coming from a family of nobodies who could only pass onto you the legacy of a nobody. It was so much easier to fall into the same face of defeat. To sit on the old frameless mattress and to look forlornly at the carpeted floor and imagine everything that could’ve been had this and that never happened, had I actually never done this or that. To stare at the plethora of objects that need attendance like the crumbling shelf or the fading carpet or the poor walls and the faulty faucet, but when are you supposed to ever find the time amongst a world’s worth of work

and unending, unfinished and unfulfilled complaints, dreams and wishes?

I stared at the battered box sitting on the counter.

I'm walking down the rows and I see a picture of my mother. The faces of people-like ghosts follow my movement. It's the first time I've seen her in ten years. I peer down at the base of the frame and I see what had surely been sitting there for only a few hours.

I couldn't even remember what it tasted like.

The Washerwoman

Abby Shackelford

The river is a washerwoman
tumbling pebbles
in her current.

She flits
this way

and that
brimming with mirth,
babbling and burbling
absently to any
who lend an ear.

She giggles
and gossips
and trips
and falls
and sashays
along her merry way.

A Moment Wrapped in Longing

Susan A. Garnet

A Moment Wrapped in Longing
Hands clench around an empire
apple, teeth sink into its precious flesh
juice drips from his lips,
he sweeps it away
on the back of a tough-knuckled hand,
weapon or napkin, he wields it the same.

He sprawls across a chair,
arms draped, legs spread
and suddenly it has always belonged to him.
His puffed chest and strong brow
inherited from his grandfather's estate
and his jaw chiseled by his father's own hand,
the debris, brushed away, dutifully, by his mother's.

I long to hold myself as he does,
To chisel myself into what he always has been.
Long to broaden my shoulders,
Long to sharpen my jaw and embolden my shadows,
To wink and watch the world's knees buckle,
To say that I am and have it be so.

Oh what I wouldn't give to be able
to hold the world on my shoulders
And boast at the ease of the task
So that when I hold you close
You know that you'll never be
a burden I cannot carry.

Little Lamp

Melina Mendez

Go, shine your light little lamp,
For you have been through so much little lamp,
 You were my childhood lamp,
 You helped me through my toughest night,
You helped me find a way back into your light,
 Away from all the monsters,
 Away from all the demons,
 For my imagination has done me wrong,
 As I envisioned ghostly beings,
 Trying to haunt me down and make me their midnight snack,
 But you were always there by my side little lamp,
 And helped me through those nights,
 You helped me see through exams, textbooks, and school projects little lamp,
But now it is time for you to rest my little lamp,
 Good night my little lamp



**Relinquish
Yourself**
Anna Kline

Acrylic and
oil on canvas,
36in x 40in

Welcome Interlude

Ava Jones

Water hangs thick in the air,
levitating to the mystic melodies
of prophets over sound waves
lamenting: love and lust;
the lost, the found, and the never-had.

You lay atop brown grass, spray painted
green. Patiently watching the sun
be devoured by a black cat
the neighborhood named silence—

You think the feline is like
the silence only found in the underground—
and like a cave,
the cat called silence steals
light from the prophets and birds—
then gifts it to your bloodshot eyes.

Come morning: the sun has been
digested and tied back together.
For matters of rage and vengeance,
he skins the black cat,
and quilts it's dark pelt to make
the shadows of the day.

You peel yourself from the painted grass
once the pavement is weighted with heat.
Your body weighs too,
wet to the bone with morning dew.
But these days, you're barely 90 pounds.
Even when soaking wet.

Your legs threaten to give out—
So you use the white picket fence
as a crutch, and stand still.
Wait.

Because the prophets will start wailing soon.
And their sharp bass and crunchy soprano
tones will add some lightness to your frame.

There they go, the prophets and their harmonies,
Your cue to start rambling. As you've
done before. On trembling legs,
Try to align your feet to the rhythm.

Keep doing what you did yesterday.
Looking for that 100 pounds
You seem to have mislaid. You sewed
A tether to it. Before it left.

Still, walking through bushes and thorns,
circling trees– dotting every “i” and crossing
every “t” – will tangle the best thread.

Today you’ve gotten close. And you hear it
singing its song, a strike against
The prophets choir. With its voice
run raw you hear it dip deep
and croon:

*"Welcome to the interlude
You're gonna be here awhile
You'll watch that cat come and go
Witness the sun's violent rise
And you'll keep on tracking
Till your feet blister and bleed
But I enjoy my freedom so
You're never gonna catch me..."*

Deadeye**

Max Stumpf

When I finished my work and let the sweat-stained pages rest back on the table, I felt lost at what to do. I tried to account for a thought I had lost or an impulse I had overlooked, and upon finding nothing, I continued my empty-eyed stare at the pages and the drywall beyond them. My head was still filled with the same cotton I'd been trying to shake since when I first woke, and I could feel it pressing at the seams of my hands and the edges of my skull. At that moment, I felt as if I was made for nothing, with no fears or drives to move me. I felt as if my mind was asleep while some other, foreign part remained lucid.

I've been like this for a while now, fingers twitching in upturned palms. Right now, there's someone humming in one of the chairs next to me. The AC moves air in a heavy arc around the room. And in the midst of it all, I continue to see past myself. I haven't tried to move.

I imagine how this room will look when we've all left, the light off and the smell of disinfectant hanging heavy. I can imagine the grime caked deep in the threadbare plastic rug, the way dust will filter through the air. By moving the heavy hands of the clock forward in my mind, I can imagine this space beyond today. In a few years, the carpet will be stained with dirt, and the smell of pencil shavings will stick closer to the walls. In that time, the sun will have etched faded patterns into the paint. There will be more gum on the bottom of the table. Will I have found my head by then?

I can go even further. In ten years this room might be a crumbling skeleton, overgrown with vines. In twenty, a sinkhole will have swallowed the remains of this building whole. Instead of students sitting with bowed heads in these well-worn chairs, a catfish might scour their decomposing pieces for scraps of food. Its deadened eyes will see no further than the gloom it hides in.

By now, the humming next to me has ceased, and the AC has stalled until its next rotation.

Unlike them, I have not yet found my cue. The table I sit at still stands sturdy, but its strength only makes me feel more weak. What purpose do monuments have if they do not last forever?

One day I'll find a shape I can fit into, a current moment that feels real enough to touch. Someday I'll reach for the hands of the clock and find myself unwilling to move them. Today, though, the plastic keeping me from the present feels thicker than usual. At least the catfish knows what it's looking for – my eyes are already nothing short of dead.

Wasting My Summer

Max Stupf

I recently had surgery, and between the oppressive heat and my current lack of mobility it feels like I'm spending more of my days asleep than awake. When I'm awake, I'm stuck inside waiting out the heat. I want to go stargazing, but for now the view from my windows will have to do.



room for milk

Sarah Halle Sinks

never yet filled to the brim
i'll sit in my steeping, still
you'll tell me I come on Too Strong
so i'll water down,
sugar up
till i'm sweet like syrup
stir me so i'm smooth on Your tongue
i'll linger in Your breath
until You rinse me out,
i'll stain everything
leave Your voice dry,
hands red
yet You keep coming back for more
and i'll leave You room for milk
every time.

Poem by the *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*
Laura Howe

grand·moth·er: the mother of one's father or mother.
fa·ther has twenty-two meanings, but he is the first: a
male parent. Still I search for a *fa·ther fig·ure* in
Thin dictionary pages as rain pours off the gutter,
Falling like Niagara but I am dry behind it.
Leaves hang happy and green, can I open a window to
Touch the canopy, bring a wet leaf to my lips and
Sip. *lamb's ears*: a hardy Middle-Eastern plant of the
mint family, having white, wooly leaves and small, purple
flowers in dense whorls. *grand·moth·er* said to never get
lamb's ears wet. In her garden, I touched mint-warm velvet at
Four years old, saw pinks and greens brighter than the sun that
Held me like her hand. When she had my *fa·ther* fifty
Years before, did she get *post·par·tum*: of or noting the
period of time following childbirth *de·pres·sion*: a
condition of general emotional dejection and
withdrawal. Or was she happy, feeding a garden with
Water and hands; a baby with milk and chest. I cannot
Ask since there are forty-two definitions for *dead* and
She is the first: no longer living; deprived of life.

moth·er's day: the only time I have heard my father cry.

Ouroboros

Clara Dodson

(cw: gore)

When you look down at your feet, you see a snake
sucking out the insides of an egg.
The smell of sulfur rises on the wind and
wafts up into your sinuses—finds a cavity behind your eyes like
beetles boring into rotten wood. That night
you dream about walking down a path covered in slugs.
And when you wake up, your eyes are crusted over with
mucus. You blow thick wads of yellow snot
from your nose for the next week. It's like something is growing
inside you—a geode filled with fluid—buried in
the hollow of your throat. Rolling waves
of nausea frothed with spit—deep in
the pit of your stomach. The pit in the woods,
where a clutch of lizards was born
next to their mother's body, your body.
You weren't made to leave these pines—
your egg-tooth hasn't fallen off yet.

Time Flies Like an Arrow

Natalie Biederman



When did it get so confusing?
When did I start seeing all the middle steps?
“When did you get so quiet?”
You used to talk all the time!”

I want to go back.
To skipping steps,
Skipping rocks,
ropes,
our least favorite tracks on the Kidz Bop CD,
Without questioning
Whether or not we were really having fun.
I’m sorry I left.

I miss you here, I promise,
But I’ve missed you for a long time now
And it doesn’t take the right form anymore.

I miss you here, I promise,
But I’ve missed you for a long time now
And it doesn’t take the right form anymore.

I don't know when
I stopped seeing you as my mom.
my dad.
my little sister.

I don't know when
I stopped being able to make eye contact with you,
Or when
You got so damn small,
Or when
You became exactly what I never want to be.

I miss you,
But I learned how to distract myself.
I don't know when.
There have been a lot of whens.

funeral (pt. 2)

Caleb Bryan

The morning of the funeral,
I awoke to birds at my window.
A reminder that today is normal,
This isn't the first casket I've closed.

A thousand hands grip my chest,
Chills run down my curved spine,
Bent from carrying out every request,
Ready to break it if you had ever asked.

I'll wait outside the church,
Stomach churning at the thought of her.
I remember our old climbing birch,
Where we looked out onto the cold stones.

Meet me in the graveyard,
Where all things go to die.
Take me by my bleeding hand,
And let me say goodbye.

**The
Illusion
of Self**
Judas Lackey



My Heart is Lost in Gaza

Madison Mustafa

Amto Hilwa,

I'm sorry. I've written this letter to you a thousand times in my head but I am still no braver. I fear it is now too late, none of us can get through to you, and even if you are alive, I am told you hold little of the past now. I had so many questions to ask you about Amneh, my beloved sitti(grandmother). You were probably the only person on this Earth who knew her beyond her marriage. I know so little of her, and that knowledge is now lost. This letter should have been written when she died, probably even before then. I hate to admit that guilt held me back, made me scared to reach out to you, have to admit how little I appreciated sitti before her death. To admit all that to you, someone so connected to her, filled me with an unbearable shame.

Ya Amto, I pray for you so often, you take up a constant corner of my mind. I ask Allah, if I sent this letter in the river, would it escape to the ocean, evade Israeli blockades, and find its way to you? I don't think I am deserving of such a miracle. I have always feared for you, and marveled at how you have lived so long in a homeland that no longer answers to you. Maybe this time will be no different, maybe Amto Naj will hear from you in a couple days and I will continue hiding this letter from you. Maybe nothing will change and Allah will weep at the chances not taken. Or maybe you are already gone with Them (Allah). Maybe I'll come with you. I make myself sick with worry, so surely my body will eventually fail me and Allah's mercy will take me swiftly.

Amto, if I abandon this pile of flesh, would I find you? Would we finally connect without the baggage of the living, as souls often do? Would you be willing to guide me to Sitti and let me spend eternity apologizing to her? Could I know my grandmother's love once more? Could I know yours? I drive myself mad with the questioning, asking if I leave this Earth before you, would that be the greater mercy? I already know how to miss you individually, but I cannot say you know the same for me. Maybe I could steal a kayak and paddle through the ocean to get to you. It would be in vain though, I barely know your face and 2 million people is a lot to get through. I suppose it is all hopeless, even this letter. But if you are already gone, then ya Allah please, connect my heart to hers, so she might feel even an ounce of the love I feel for her. The stars are bright tonight and the English language doesn't have enough words for love.

Ana habek,
Madi,
daughter of Samir

If

Aynslee Laird

What if weight sat upon shoulders that could bear it?
 Upon a seat of bedrock that could withstand the strain
 Upon blueprints and handprints and newsprints between book pages
What if underneath that weight we could all stand—
 Unyielding, unwavering. What if we could thrive
 like the beetle with the cracked elytron
 or the time-weathered pine of an ancient forest unknown to the young
 congregation that is man.
What if we could open up our mouths with songs of joy
 instead of wails of anguish that rip from
 bubble-gum pink throats?
What if life could be lived without this wretched question:
 “*What if?*”

I Know I Don't Like Hugs

Allison Glaser

But can I hold you a bit longer?
Can I tuck you into my chest
And feel your body against mine?
Would you mind if I soaked this minute in
And held it close to my chest when I'm cold
And lonely
And too afraid to let someone this near?
Could I grip the back of your sweatshirt
In my clammy hands
And squeeze tightly
Because you're here.
And you're real.
And you're in my arms.
And because in this moment while I'm holding you
You are also holding me.

Second Sun

Judas Lackey



When the Flowers Burn

Colin Harney

diesel dahlia, gasoline goldenrod, kerosene camellia
glistening like crystals in the lighter's flame
yet they were never meant to last
with a lick they ignite into furious hues

petals wilt and weep through the fire
as the green stem is blackened
steam and smoke whirl into the night sky
while the stars bear witness in silence

the blossoms burn bright but brief
all that is left now is ashes, embers
smoldering shrunken remains dark and desiccated
and the light has gone out

when the flowers burn, i cry
icon of innocence
overthrown and subsumed
tears fall upon the heap of cinders

The Gardener

Allison Glaser

I found him nestled in the dawn:
A gardener.
His dirt-stained fingers cradle seeds while
a flower crown sprouts from his head.

He whispers sweet verses
Of poetry composed in twilight hours
While the sky quakes
In anticipation of his handiwork.

He declares peace treaties
As he brushes
Mosquitos from his freckled arms,
Blessing their flight as they take off.

But he screams to the wind at midnight,
Dreading its empty echo,
The sound of his own voice,
Which returns to him moments after his cry.

Still, he clings to the hope
That the wind will hold his pain,
Tucked under its wispy arm,
Cherishing its tenderness

Until the terrible truth has softened
Into a gentle recollection of strength,
At which point the breeze will appear in his window
And whisper his own Truth back to him.

In the very corners of my mind,
little pockets of greens and grey, blue and yellow
perch upon word after word,
feeling after feeling, sensation after sensation
unmoored—marooned are these clusters
of rock that I clutch between calloused fingers,
thoughts that lie limp on ginkgo-leaved lips
that once bent to kiss broken gravel, but
now whisper stories from years prior.

“You are what you eat,” they repeat and repeat.
“We are what we consume,” my mind whispers
as it unhinges its jaw to swallow words,
pictures, pages, and colors.

Within me are layers, not too much unlike
sedimentary rock formations,
layers that build upon one another in an
explosion of color.

I am the color.
I am the rock and the wind, the pen in my hand,
the book on my desk that has now
wedged itself between my frontal lobe
and whatever is left of my brain.
I am full, overflowing—
an explosion of culture spills from my lips:
your lips.
our lips.

As I stand upon hardwood floor as I have,
similarly,
carpet or dirt,
I am every version of me that has ever drawn breath,
yet someone else entirely.
We are what we consume—
And I'd like a taste of everything.

Gallery
Aynslee Laird
A Response Poem to the Boyden
Gallery's *FALLOUT* Exhibit

Did You Know the Moon Cries

Malin Maguire

Did you know
the moon cries
when she's singing
the stars to sleep?

She soaks her pillow
with acid until it hurts,
she doesn't stop
until it burns her.

Did you know
the moon cries
when she hears
the man calling her in
to trick her again?

She has nowhere
to go, but to stay
where she is,
orbiting the Earth.

Did you know
the moon cries
when she feels the
craters in her face,
and sees the gray of her skin?

Did you know
the moon cries
when she feels the
craters in her face,
and sees the gray of her skin?

Living forever while
everyone dies and
disappears around her.

She cries because all
she can do is shine.

Copperhead

Within muddled pools of semi-iridescent keratin
lies a mysterious mix of grace and poison.

Weaving its way through arms of delicate green and gold
or navigating through streams that feel like rivers—
lakes that feel like oceans—
fiendish friends with foul fortunes in tow
explore a world that loathes them.

If only the forsaken one hadn't tainted their name—
if only God smiled upon these creatures of
soil and sky; wind and water.

Shedding its skin—and with it the ill wishes of its
human neighbors—

The Serpent of stories old tries to write its own story:
one of peace, one of love, one of beauty.

Allow Mother Nature to hold them in the way she does
the other creatures;

Allow them to become gifts of nature,
rather than curses of a history long passed.

Retour à Azincourt***

Sam Parizek

In the sweltering stickiness, we stride forth
Thundering the soft clod into squelching slough.
As the horns bleed into screams, and hooves slip on earth
Lances raise and run for Gaul's rebuff.
Sixty thousand trample and trounce. To my left,
A wall of silvery blurs. To my right, the wall yawns on.
Above, the roosters stream and wave, heft
Upon our standard-bearers. We cry *Cocorico!* in the dawn.

And then the flint begins to rain—
And at once our line falters—fails—is mowed down.
A horse's squeal is pierced by his crashing into mud,
The man atop is flung—his pate cracks—out spills his blood,
In the earth, he drowns—
He gasps a final breath before a fellow's hoof dashes his brain—.
We all sink—pressed between the quagmire below,
Their iron weights, and the leaden rainfall.
In the steaming, boiling soil sinks great Gaul,
Chewed, gorged, and in the English gullet, swallowed.

Brown is all—it clouds the brain, the nostrils, ears, palms, eyes.
Beside me, my fellow Jehan, lays rotten, rotten in the end, it is all for naught
bound and broken, we few survivors limp towards the rear
in our iron coffins, we stand and steam and rot
while “His Majesty!” surveys his prize with a raucous sneer.
what has this cold tyrant, to consider of us broken things?
what are destitute, shattered, scarcely alive pawns to a faux king?
this king henry is triumphant; he has no time for the vanquished—

he leaves—his spotless, stainless plate a mocking glass
we are too ached, too dead for grief, too dried for anguish—
only, we thank His Angel's blessing for a second pass.

A cry echoes, bleeds anew—a conqueror's response, and the horns blare
Harry's decree suffocates the very air
Panic is all, the numbered heartbeats, then, in the blade,
My fleeting glare

Agincourt Again***

Sam Parizek

What have we to gain? A man for every six
What point? I drive the stake deeper into the hill,
The slopping, belching ground. I raise this crucifix
Angled, filed, ripe for a kill it will never kill.
I will die on this stinking, foreign field,
A French knoll must suffice for an English yield.
I will die for a King who knows me not,
And loves me less; whose rank ambition
Impels me to an open grave, to nothing and nought
In this fatal, this awfully flawed mission.

All around the others stir excitedly
Lightning rippling amongst them.
They titter and toil and shout giddily,
All for some words the King had drummed.
“But the King did declare us brothers! Born and bled!”
—Atop his lonely courser, behind the stakes
It seems an easy thing to have said
To “fight on!” Always *on*—But where will he be when Heaven breaks?

A horn.
I turn to flee.
The archers, nocking, block my exit.
Allies to my back, my own stake to my front
I crouch and cower, praying for silence.

Their beasts lurch forth, frothing, mud strewn in their tide
As they run their Stations. Skies frown black as stones sing.
I tremble behind my flimsy wood, abandoning pride.
Closer and closer, their faltering line is galloping.

A man, horseless, fallen a third time, rushes at my stake,
And all my brothers are chanting, calling for one to strike him down.
I snatch a spear, a small, handled stake.
I leap and hoist and drive this French fiend into the brown.

I grant a kiss as he quivers on his stake, his rood.
My spear, his stigmata, lodged in his flanks,
Out—this time—came blood. Only blood.
And my brothers hailed and roared and laureled their thanks.

And I shout to myself, rising from the gorge
‘Ecce homo! Long live King Harry! Arms to St. George!’

Roaches March at Night

Max Stumpf

The water here tastes funny, like metal or chalk. And the campus is confusing – I keep getting lost on the way to Schaefer. My room is strange too, with new posters and new faded white walls. Even at night it all feels unfamiliar — My bed creaks and the shadows from the streetlamp by my window cast an eerie pattern. Their branches reach gnarled shadows across the wall towards my head. It's difficult not to miss the familiarity of home in those moments.

But at least I have the cockroaches here. While I lay paralyzed, I know that they rove the halls. A few at first, the bravest, will peer out from the cracks in the walls. Then, as the night darkens, more and more arrive. Their bodies shine under flickering LED bulbs as they make their way from under the cabinets and between the couch cushions.

I know they march each night, onwards towards a fate unknown. Scouring the floor for Cheeto crumbs and the residue of a half-mopped Powerade spill. They feast on familiar preservatives each night.

To fall asleep I count them as they shuffle over cracked linoleum. Not just the roaches, but the daddy longlegs, silverfish, moths, and house centipedes. I'd smile at them, but they too are unfamiliar to me. The ones I know best are the steadfast roaches, and I know they know me too. It is their caravan of arthropods that ferries me to sleep.

I don't know if I dream each night, but I hope they dream of me. Do they know how lonely it is to live in a new place? No, of course not. In these halls they're never lonely and never lost. They've found a home among each other, surviving pest control and cold winters. They dance each night under motion-activated stars, singing a song too small for me to hear. Perhaps one day I'll march among them, fearless in the face of death. One day I'll grow an exoskeleton so tough I'll outlast anything.

When I wake each morning I check that the tree stands as it always has, that the water in my cup still tastes of chalk. The bed will creak in a half-familiar way as I move towards my door, and when I open it and look down I will find another cockroach waiting, unblinking, for me to join it.

A Poem by the River

Susan A. Garnet

I've found you once again
This time wrapped in the soft folds of the tide.

This time you feel like my mother's arms when I cry
This time you sound like the slow growth of moss
And the sporadic croak of frogs.
This time you look like a round stone I can tuck into my pocket
And you smell like the turning of leaves in autumn
This time you are a home I can fit in.

But I remember when you sounded like my father
And I remember when you smelled like the smoke of youth group campfires
Right before its tendrils get caught in my throat
And I remember when you looked like shots of the far away galaxies,
Projected on the big-screen some Sunday morning,
Towering over me, too much to hold, too far out of reach.
And felt so much like nothing but fleeting everything that you twisted into shame
I remember
When Eden on Earth was only a reminder of celestial loss

And so I turn from the water and head back inside
Choosing (for now) to ignore your soft whispers of home
For fear I will find that I once again don't fit.

yonder

Holli Kobialka

yup,
catty-corner from Erie
there once was a mountain
and a house on top—
an olive on a toothpick—
she almost thought she saw the
Northern Lights
sandwiched between
Her thoughts—

Allegro, Caesura!

the Dog knocked over daddy's
old piano stool and she thought
to herself *if He had a brain*
He would be dangerous

ya know that i
once wanted to be a
fashion designer?
i'm very good at sewing—
garden tomato pin cushion
brown and bruised from use
crystalline rosin on its leaves
and under his fingernails, yes,
daddy played the Fiddle—

Accelerando!

and i think it's neat you
once played it too.
Grandmother of the Milky Way, Friend of few
i love You more more more more,
do dodo do do

Body with Organs

Colin Harney

Oh, look at me, look at me.

Rip away my clothes,
Tear off my skin,
And gaze at the desiring machines
That drove me to this.

See them writhing and squirming,
Like maggots in the dirt,
They bind, shackle, and sing
For death, for life, for rebirth.

Oh, look away, look away.

Reach
Noxley Scooter Bell



Double Mastectomy

Laura Howe

I. Horizontal

It had started. A
sore spot they called it and
Jenny and I shared a room with
suncatchers and beds two feet apart.
Mom was gone.
Dad took us to her but only to the
woods behind the sad white building: a
picture from a kid's book with fluorescent trees.
We ran away from
Dad's hands reaching out to
tag and twigs got in our shoes which
poked our five-year-old feet but we ran forever
over a dirt horizon.

II. Vertical

It was all over. The
backyard was in a vertical sway as
Jenny and I jumped on the trampoline and
bags of blood bounced to the rhythm of her
walking.
Mom stopped to
smile beneath the holly whose
leaves poked bloody holes in our feet: the
trampoline trembling in the spring sun since
we were afraid to
look at the bags on her hips of
red blood and yellow plasma so we
didn't stop jumping and the world breathed
up and down.

Ticking Time

Summer LaRocco

We're running out of time.
She's about to leave me.
She's about to leave us all.
I don't know how much longer I can hold on.
I'm not ready for her departure.

She can't leave me, I'm not ready.
How will I breathe
Without her warm, peanut-butter breath on my arm?
Without her whiskers tickling me as she sniffs
The maple hardwood floor around my feet?
I'm not ready. I can't say goodbye.
I haven't held her enough, I haven't thought about this moment
I should have been prepared. I've seen this all before.
I'm running out of time.

So this is goodbye.
I forgot what it feels like to be this alone.
To feel this hopeless.
Without my family, my true family,
I am without life. I'm without air.
A new hole has opened
And swallowed me whole.

It is too soon.

'Too soon for me to wish. To be hopeful.

I don't understand how people move on from a loss such as this.

How can we leave her behind? How can I possibly move on? What does the world look like without her

golden eyes watching over me?

Time will tell.

Goodnight, my companion.

the warmth of a burning bridge

Caleb Bryan

My hazy eyes follow shadows on the ceiling.
Cats purr in another room,
Cool air chills my fingertips,
And my arm aches with new maroon.

The realization she never cared,
Echoes through my veins.
The feeling of the final end,
Lifts a burden off my brain.

A soft mattress sinks below my hips,
Curving slowly to the wooden floor.
Embers float through the night's mist,
And I fade to sleep in my blissful bore.

Warm moonlight shines through the window,
And I am finally at peace.
Smoke rises from a burning bridge,
And I think I can finally be me.

Healing

Strummer Condayan

Tell me why I'm full of hatred, always out to
cause a problem. I'm full of shame and anguish,
maybe things aren't as they seem.

When I woke up as a boy, I didn't feel solemn, and
when I fell asleep, Instead of thinking, I could dream.

Instead of hating the world, I grew to hate myself, but
the charade was in the mirror, that's the world's
cold scheme.

When you resent those you love, you injure yourself
with doubt. Instead of processing, you shut down,
and leave the problems strewn about.

What you learn is to pick them up, because it's
easier to leave, but the honor is in knowing that no
fruit comes with no burden to heave.

Love is heavy, hate is light, both take intention,
only one takes a fight.

Instead of leaving the problems behind, and
bludgeoning yourself into a cycle, take the weight,
surrender to your revival.

Metamorphosis

Aynslee Laird

Little bringers of death
flutter on wings as soft as honey
and light as morning dew:

Actias Luna:

With mouths closed, they starve,
searching desperately for love in the
week before their departure.

Psychidae:

Doomed to their compact home,
these little mothers wait for their young and
sacrifice themselves for their sake.

Acherontia Atropos:

Crooked thieves trick fate,
donning a crown that is not their own
to survive in a cruel reality.

Antheraea Polyphemus:

Weariness wears a new face
in winged-bringers of rebirth and wisdom,
who watch with cycloptic eyes.

Eacles Imperialis:

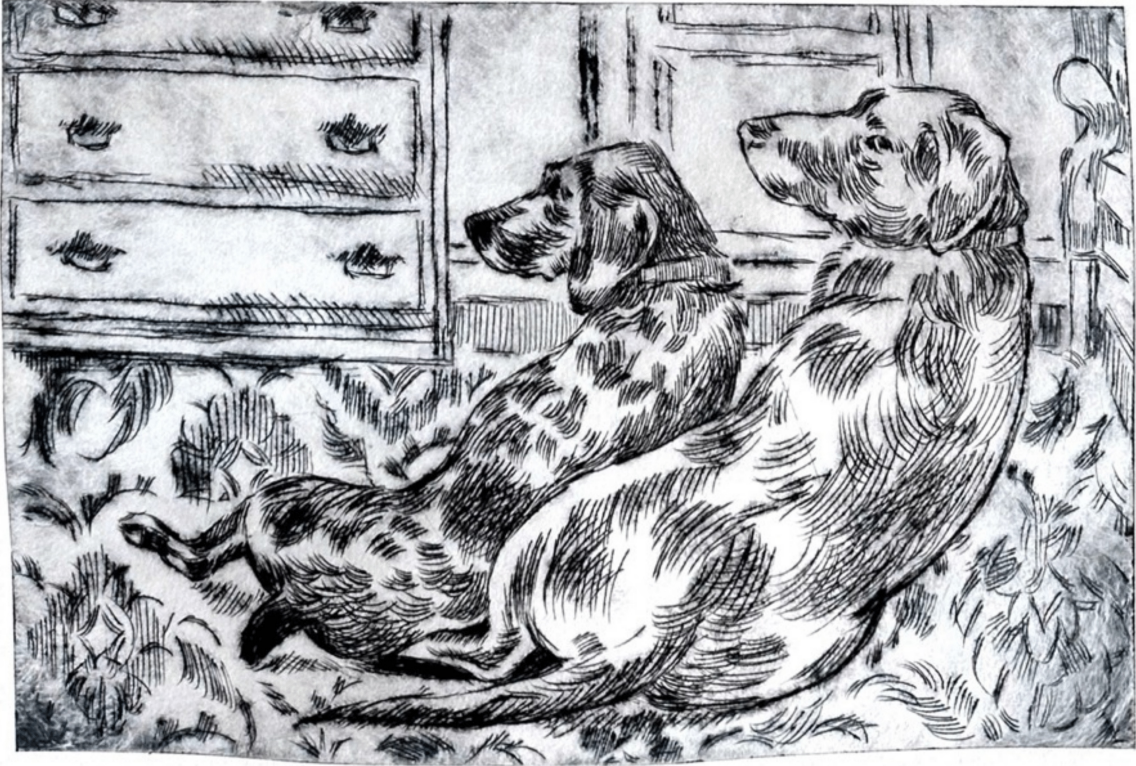
Bathed in sunlight they
are dusty leaves on waddling legs, and in
moonlight they are angels.

Lepidoptera:

Drawn to the soft glow
of both light and life they travel through
the never ending sky and

Gliding away on silken,
layered wings and following
golden halos of light they are
little bringers of life.

Lean on Me
Eleanor Woodbury



Working across various mediums, Eleanor Woodbury explores themes of nature and self-portraiture. Her representational subjects are rich with symbolic and personal motifs, reflecting her unique experiences. Through a thoughtful use of color and line quality, she creates expressive and stylized pieces that resonate on a deeper emotional level. Ultimately, her work seeks to forge a connection between self-expression and the transformative and therapeutic act of creating art.