

lullwater review

volume xxxiii



a journal for the literary arts

lullwater review

VOLUME XXXIII

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VOLUMES XXXIII & XXXIV

Editor's Essays | 5-6, 30

Noah Anthony Mezzacappa "Gemini Sun" | 7

Marie-Andrée Auclair "Several Moments in a Row" | 8

Rachel Aguirre "Fiesta" | 9-10

Katie Nelson "New Generation" | 11

Brian Ji "Rubber Bits" | 12

Cody D. Jarman "Gas Station Poetics" | 13

Mario Loprete "Fabri Fibra" and "Coca Cola" | 14

Holly Day "No Place to Hide" | 15

Laine Derr "Origin Story" | 16

StarShield Lortie "Newspaper Walls" | 17-18

Holly Day "From the Evening Before" | 19

John Cross "Smaller Moments" | 20

Mark Katrinak "Altitude 6200 Feet" | 21

Samantha Landau "Not the End of the World" | 22

Robert Tremmel "Father" | 23-25

Katie Nelson "Short Talk on the Present" | 26

Robert Tremmel "MEN STANDING AROUND IN KITCHENS" | 27

Audra Burwell "Germination" | 28

Leila Bilick "The Ones With Flowers" | 31

Darren C. Demaree "Emily as the Pond Shivers" | 32

Darren C. Demaree "Emily as Red Paint" | 33

Daniel Lusk "Idle Talk" | 34-35

Connor Arterberry "Shadows" | 36

George Payne "Samsara" | 37

David Sapp "My Blue One Hundred Percent Polyester Leisure Suit" | 38-39

Leila Bilick "We Were 5th Grade Girls" | 40-41

William R. Miller "Porphyria" | 42

Timothy Gavin "DIVINE PROPERTY: THE GOONS AFTER VISITING HAITI" | 43

Justis Ward "Discipline" | 44

Sarah Lyons "Fallout" | 45 - 51

Contributor's Notes | 52-56

Editor's Essay

Eleanor Byers

To our readers:

My co-editor, Nico Mestre, and I walked into a Lullwater Review meeting for the first time in August of 2021. It was both terrifying and electrifying -- and we vowed to continue going, even if we were intimidated by the world of the literary magazine. Over the course of undergrad at Emory, Nico and I had our ritual of going to Lullwater. Every week for an hour we would get a chance to see each other, catch up, and discuss the beautiful writing we got to see so much of in our time at Lullwater. It was always a treat.

We both have immense gratitude to convey - and likely to the same people. Thank you to all of the amazing editors who came before us: Emma & Kelsey, Annika & Sarah, and Tori. All of these amazing editors taught me so much about writing and art. They have all made this issue of Lullwater possible, even years after their tenures as editors.

Thank you to our editorial board: Ivy, Dani, and Tanvi. A massive thank you to our managing editor, Victoria, for being hardworking, brilliant, and an all-around radiant presence. There is no one more capable of this position, and I know you will do a magnificent job. And to Eliot -- you two are a fantastic pair.

My deepest gratitude for Nico Mestre, who has been an absolute lifeline across the past four years. Your perspective on writing is ceaselessly creative, fresh, and beautiful. I will miss being around it, but I know that I will be reading your writing in publications for years to come. I love you.

Above all, I am indebted to the wonderful and dedicated staff of *Lullwater Review*, who dedicate their time, energy, and perception to create Lullwater. This issue is proof of your hard-work and insightful discussions, and it is a testament to all of your unique perspectives on writing.

Every year, we get asked if Lullwater Review has a "theme," and the answer is usually "no." But I think the answer is more complex than that - we don't have a theme, but through these pages you will see striking vulnerability, evocative imagery, and tender moments. There is no theme, but there are throughlines that bind this work together. As you take in the following pages, take notice these throughlines. We hope they stick with you long after you put the magazine down. '

And to you, our reader, thank you for being a part of the Lullwater Review community.

Warmly,
Eleanor Byers
Lullwater Review Co-Editor-in-Chief

Editor's Essay

Nico Mestre

Dear reader,

Eleanor and I know the power of Lullwater to unite lovers of literature and art. In fact, we met in Turman Hall our freshman year—we lived a few doors down from each other—but we met again in the conference room above Cox Hall, where weekly Lullwater meetings were held our freshman year. Our impressions of submissions were a way of getting to know each other's artistic sensibilities, and through editorial conversations we became friends.

This issue contains pieces we are truly excited to share with you, words and images and ideas that revealed something new to us about artistic expression. The most emotionally-charged gas station receipt we've ever read breaks open "Gas Station Poetics." We've never witnessed descriptions of a party shimmer and sing the way they do in "Fiesta." And the poem that opens this magazine, "Gemini Sun," just four lines, acts as a sort of welcome. We are thrilled to have you browse through this brilliance, this exceptional creativity.

I have so many thank yous to say upon releasing this magazine. I would like to start by extending my sincerest gratitude to all the editors who came before us—Emma, Kelsey, Annika, Sarah, and especially Tori, who was my incredible co-editor last year and who is a remarkable reader, writer, and friend. I also want to thank our editorial board—Dani, Tanvi, and Ivy—for everything you did to make this magazine a reality. And thank you Victoria, our fantastic managing editor; you have been an essential pillar of this magazine, and I can't wait to see the great places you and Eliot take Lullwater next year. It's a genuine privilege to pass this magazine on to both of you.

And thank you, thank you, thank you, Eleanor. From the moment we met, at the carnival on McDonough Field our freshman year, I knew I was lucky to have you as a peer and that Emory was lucky to have you as a student. Watching you transform Emory arts throughout the past four years has been a wonder to behold, and I'm honored to have led alongside you at Lullwater. I know you will continue to be a bright light for the Emory community, and I can't wait for our paths to cross again.

Finally, I would like to thank our readers, both our reading staff and you, the people reading this issue right now. I believe that people who love to read are also people who delight in noticing. And thanks to our reading staff, so much noticing has happened this past year at Lullwater, so much interpreting and analyzing and appreciating. Together, readers, let's bask in this act of noticing, this act of seeing our world through the magnifying glass that is art.

Sincerely,
Nico Mestre

Gemini Sun

Noah Anthony Mezzacappa

for Isabel

I think you're right. You must be the one who
came first. You were

the pinprick the light of my life shone
through.

Several moments in a row

Michael J. Galko

The cormorant
floats on the bayou.
It dives,

now become
un-cormorant.
The water-kiss

of its exit from air
reseals itself.
The water is too black

to follow it below.
The sun burns a bit.
Mice stay in the reeds.

The black bird rises
a long breath later—
over there by the bank—

one less fish
kissing goodbye
to the world.

Fiesta

Rachel Aguirre

¡Ándale, Alamo City!
It's April, it's Fiesta
in San Antonio.
In April, even gringos
are proud Mexicans.

What are you here for?

Churros, chicken on a stick,
street tacos, flautas, funnel cakes,
gorditas, and deep-fried Oreos?

Or frozen margaritas
in skinny plastic tumblers
that run from your chin to your hips?

You've come to watch folkloric
skirts churn like large,
candy-colored waves

and to dance rancheras, to hold someone
and spin to the throb of trumpets,
the grinning accordion,

or to collect tinkling medals etched
with cowboy boots, calaveras, the Alamo—
so many chests glittering like decorated soldiers.

You're here for the Battle of Flowers Parade
with its JROTC, charros, mariachi,
marching bands, pageant princesses,

and abundance of flowers:

floats freckled
with tissue paper, tinsel,
and styrofoam blossoms;

countless heads crowned
with bright paper blooms
that spill curled ribbon;

wreaths on the Alamo lawn—
yellow roses and white lilies
for James Bowie, William B. Travis,
and Davy Crockett.

During the first parade, in 1891,
the Daughters of the Republic of Texas
pelted each other with flowers
in remembrance of the Battle of San Jacinto¹

Fiesta is fabulous
camouflage;
flowers are prettier than bullets.

¹ The Battle of San Jacinto was the final battle in the Texas Revolution, which marked the victory of colonists over the Mexican army. As a result, México ceded the state of Tejas or Texas.

New Generation

Katie Nelson

in psychology the girl next to me writes IBS equals PTSD which stands for petrified of talking in silence disorder but it's more like phi transforms sigma in the delta sphere of 'bama rush or that common app essay won't complete itself. where blackfoot daisies grow there's blood on the bill of a seagull the beak pecking into iced matcha how millennial mothers like it plucking worms plucking brain matter swollen in my skull. U got a brain? or advil? or chewing gum? so I can fuck it up and spit it back out on ur bullseye. last hurricane season my baby cousin hibernated through thunder with her headphones on and we haven't heard a word since. teachers be calling they be telling ~~me~~ her to pull that skirt down to snap out of it meanwhile the mother's saving for harvard tuition. they'll be lucky with pennies, whole lot of maggots feasting on aged capitalism. twenty scholars in a day said there'll be debt covering their coffins from a grad school lunch or that bridesmaid's dress for some bitch's wedding. when married ones whisper wut luv is I remember to not remember. remember to score high on those ap's. remember that girl in psychology isn't IBS plagued for nothing.

Rubber Bits

Brian Ji

I'm painted, made up,
simultaneously lightly
sketched and stretched
thin. Afraid of smudging,
of being mered like
bits of rubber, brushed
off paper onto the floor.
And barely bouncing
upon landing to sit
unnoticed, I'm relieved
to no longer be
employed or illused.

Gas Station Poetics

Cody D. Jarman

*It still smelled like hot dogs
after two months displayed about five feet
from a rack of slowly rotating meat lit by fluorescents
and the erratic glow of an always-on-never-watched TV.*

*He took it out of a plastic bag about thirty seconds ago,
still crinkling in the hand behind his back
while this hand extends
a stuffed action figurine.*

*A Pokemon?
Or something he'd heard you talk about but never actually seen.
He hopes it could buy time he has already sold,
so, he offers a gas station Pikachu for you to hold.
A roadside mea culpa for every night he wasn't there,
a bargain at \$5.99, printed on a receipt alongside
--Diesel \$45.78
--Marlboro Red \$6.33
--B.C. Powder \$2.25
--Coca-Cola \$2.50*

*now crumpled on the floorboard of his truck,
streaked with mud and gasoline,
signs of nine hours intermittent stomping by boots
that had tracked across six station parking lots,
waiting, not only for the last on the road back,
but for the only station with the word Pokemon?
zip-tied to the rack.*

Mario Loprete



Fabri Fibra



Coca Cola

No Place to Hide

Holly Day

My husband bought a sofa so low to the ground
I couldn't hide under it, there was no way to slip under it
I could barely even slide
a slip of paper under it. I asked him

why we got a sofa so close to the ground and he said
it was more stable that way, I wasn't sure
if he was talking about the sofa
or the overall atmosphere in our house
or just me.

Origin Story

Laine Derr

I learned to kill
inside the womb,
no laws against
my preborn hands
wrapped around
a name gurgled
then gone, unborn
from a body not
my own, eyelids
like freshly picked
berries tasting of
sweet skin, fingers
porcelain pale
pushed in a pram,
a bonnet blue
and beautiful
bearing a bow tied
around my yellow
hair, reminiscing
in advance of being
eaten, I ate my twin.

Newspaper Walls

StarShield Lortie

She walks me over to the empty cabin,
her stout legs stirring the dry clay
she has traveled down a thousand times.

The air is bright and filled with ghosts
that buzz like the summer locusts. She slows,
points arthritic fingers through glassless windows.

The interior walls of the tiny one-room building
are covered in newspaper so old it has lost
any strength it once had, and the news she still cannot read.

I raised your mama here alone. she says,
her clouded eyes follow the memories around
the room, and when I assume more

than I should, she pats my hand and chuckles, Them
were different times, we did what we could
to survive, husbands left and sometimes they didn't

come back. The walls told her stories that she heard
in her sleep. She watched their shapes sculpt a life
she knew she would never touch. During the day

she would whisper those dream-stories in her baby
girl's ears, hoping one would reveal the delicate price
of their freedom. She said she could tell the walls knew,

but refused to tell, what happens when you give up.
So the two of them rocked their days away, waiting
for the unknown to appear. For a time she floated

between watching her girl play on the raw floor
and staring at those walls. I had forgotten she was the future
those stories wouldn't let me see. She pauses, searches

my face for understanding, brushes away my tears,
and swats at those old stories with the twilight mosquitos.
Child, your mama don't talk about those days, but it's good

to remember your story is yours for the telling. I smile,
help her up from the crumbling stoop and we stroll
back to the house, the new house, our house.

As we walk, I hear the wind whip
through the open windows and watch one
of those old stories fly over the tops of the trees.

From the Evening Before

Holly Day

The morning after the storm, dead cicadas cover the streets and sidewalks
spread-winged and tragic, as if vanquished in some terrible battle.
I carefully reach down and pluck first one, then another delicately-veined wing
from a drowned body, hold them up to the light
marvel at the tiny rainbows caught in each transparent, black-rimmed cell.

I collected several dozen of the wings, I don't know why.
It seems like such a waste to just leave the little corpses lying there, in the muddy water
purposeless, their beauty left to spoil in the sun. I set them out to dry on the counter
making up stories about where they came from
to tell my daughter when she comes down for breakfast:

that they were left in a corner by the mice that live in the basement
that mice use them to flutter up to the ceiling, and that's why
we can hear them run around up there at night,
or perhaps they were left by a family of fairies who didn't need them anymore
who decided our home was so comfortable
that they could simply remove their wings
leave them for us to find so that we knew they'd chosen our home.

Smaller Moments

John Cross

Last week I read
a novel. The man longed for
another's touch,
but it was the 30's then
and even now
I'll never touch you.

Still, I wish I could
become someone else. Like
you. And your thoughts
I'll never understand
how you see into me
so easily.

Only a month ago I
stared straight into the Sun
only to see dust
in the air. I haven't breathed
the same since.
Maybe we're all

tired. Of seeing all the same
constellations in the sky as if
they'll change anything.
They always made your eyes roll
to the back of your head.
And I kept it all to myself.

I linger in your absence. There's
more than one way to sin in our case.
The red marker on the calendar
marks our end. Tell me
See you next time, all while I linger
in your absence.

Altitude 6200 Feet

Mark Katrinak

Moving here was a wind-wind situation.
Wind at noon, wind all spring and meditation long,
anytime I log-in. Though in the middle of the night
it's often gone, vacating junipers
and pinons, cacti, tangled vines of gourds
while we're asleep and catching up on dreams.
Wind's uninvited company brings thought to lives
living a mile below, lives wishing for a breeze
come June or August, any Sirius hour.
There's stratospheric gossip one catches wind-of,
mind changing its direction like the wind
at seaside, shores adventurers imagine.
The South's the dominant direction here
indicated by wind rose and love's flow
overflowing, peach trees blooming prematurely.
Air's thin, this altitude. By ice-cold streams
and breezes, be selective in your breathing.

Not the End of the World

Samantha Landau

My mother isn't one of those who buy for the apocalypse
when a storm comes. We trekked
to two Acmes and the Pathmark
ahead of the 1992 Nor'easter,
to find one lone plastic half-gallon of 1% milk,
a solitary bag of Golden Delicious apples,
but there wasn't any toilet paper.
Bare shelves all down the aisle.
Canned chickpeas gone and boxed cereal shelves empty,
she grabbed the last loaf of whole wheat.
And when I whined for Lucky Charms she said,
"It's enough to be at the store,
bad weather coming."
I knew not to make trouble.
Her shopping list was comprehensive,
her survival instinct refined.
She grew up in the same house as her
Great Aunt who escaped marauding Cossacks
And later, the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire.
What are snowflakes, compared to exile and conflagration?
Vagaries of volatile weather might end the world
but like my mother, list in hand,
I'll probably go to ten stores looking for toilet paper,
unruffled by the approaching storm.

Father

Robert Tremmel

I.

The organic grocery
and health food store
is out of dried
shitake mushrooms

again.

The young guy
I ask about it
is dismissive
and tries to blame
the distributor.

The breeze he blows
through his excuses
pisses me off

again

and I notice how
I tighten my lips
in that tough
German way
my father did

although in his whole
lifetime he never heard
of shitake mushrooms

never got the news
they could be dried

and was truly
way too tough
to give a damn
that he did not.

2.

Once, when I was back home
he took a can
of navy beans

out of the cupboard, said
the doctor had told him
to eat more fiber
and suggested beans.
What the hell
he said, staring
at the label
is fiber?

3.
Another time
the commander of the local
VFW stopped by
to convince my father
to have a military
funeral, and after
he left, all the old man
would say was
I won't have those
sunuvabitches
blowing a bugle over me.

4.
Another time, all
of a sudden
he had me drive him north
out of town.

It was spring, the grass
was green and the fields
dark black loam, pairs
of Canada geese
in the air, sky
heavy with mist, clouds
and low, drifting
strands of fog.

I remember this clearly.

We ended up
at the cemetery
where his father
and mother, aunts
and uncles, cousins
and brothers and sisters
are buried

a whole, nearly
independent, low-down
territory of farmers
bootleggers, blacksmiths
and bartenders reaching back
to 1875.

He took me
to every stone
and the lone
granite boulder
with the purple heart
placed in a tiny
square niche, sealed
behind a plug
of thick plastic
and underneath the
the inscription read
Lost at Sea.

5.
On that same trip
we also drove out
to the abandoned house
on a gravel road
halfway between two towns

rotting kitchen
with the sink still hanging
from pipes in the wall

small room he slept in
with his brothers

parlor, with remnants
of stained glass
still in place

stained glass fragments and rocks
scattered on the floor

hogs squealing and banging
in the lot outside
and empty space
where there used to be
a half-mile row
of cottonwoods, now
only a crumbled fence line
like broken teeth
and slack-jawed shadows
etched into the ground.

Short Talk on the Present

Katie Nelson

Ribs of a child, sunken. Mother holding boy's hand holding boy holding baby. Eyes shadowed in phthalo crescents, see her, see the face like darkness around the moon. I wander down the road and a woman sings on stage, hoarded by flies unzipping legs, tipping workers, strip the suit and blue neon bra. When the bills slip under her door, she tosses them up to the fan, faded azure paper shredding into the country she never asked to be born in. She says her daddy is blue, the blues keeps her wandering down the road, she says when the bonus comes the boys nibble on blue feasts. I walk back, three and a half steps behind, digging lapis lazuli from the imprint of her footsteps. These are the payments that don't come. I didn't know it then, the banging of the drums, the mud's cry, I only saw three boys with the bruised lips of water's enemy and looked the other way.

MEN STANDING AROUND IN KITCHENS

Robert Tremmel

When the old man
got all dressed up and ready
to go out, he used to stand
at the kitchen counter
lifting a small glass
of brandy and sipping
and setting it down
with his arm at an angle
that he, or his old man
invented years before
and deeply imprinted
in the bones for the single
purpose of standing around
in kitchens, just looking
at generations
of stoves, sinks, shining
angles of light, lengthening
shadows, toasters, shelves
and the robins
outside, bird baths
and deep shade, lily-
of-the-valley, heavy
dark pine boughs, just
lifting and sipping
and looking, and yesterday
I caught myself standing
and waiting all alone
with a small glass
on the counter, my arm
at that same angle, alert
for rustling sounds somewhere
deeper in the house, gleaming
fixtures, the same bird outside
jumping up and down, up
and down on a branch
that I know now
one day will break, sun
declining and the angle
of light and shadow
still shifting, piercing
deeper and deeper.

Germination

Audra Burwell

	<i>To Love</i>	<i>To Grieve</i>	<i>To Empty</i>
<i>Past</i>	satin pink tongue stained strawberry scarlet/ candyfloss lips dripping honey-soured jealousy/ the taste of cooked carmine	bark of persimmon poured down parchment needle throat/ crushed rose water boiling fractured bone sliver shards/ loss a foreign lover	charm-candles cast upon Yuletide/ an altar seeping souls & crystal blue stripped velvet/ worship atonement of wood-splintered knees
<i>Present</i>	glass-cut eyes swollen with radiance & salted thirst/ sea-snarled hair swept asunder/ equinox nights a burning sky of broken bedrock	acid-bathed blades scissoring terracotta flesh/ lungs eviscerated/ a butterfly ambered mid-flight/ blood-bleached brains beating still	slit the belly of Jupiter & bite gristle-pork entrails/ bowel your marrow's hate & expel sustenance/ impregnate pain with primrose sap & lust
<i>Future</i>	rooms drowned in moth-eaten cloud-skin/ cotton throats stitched with oleander & pearls/ your hand to light my funeral pyre	gold-veined acrylic tears weeping rusted canvas/ tongue threaded through sweet-rot burial soil/ the scent of sun-starved onion saplings	cup smoldered silver in spleen/ let life gush from iron-gouged thighs & tuck death beneath tamarind tongue/ breathe blighted beauty

lullwater review

VOLUME XXXIV

Editor's Essay

Victoria Maza and Eliot Vaughey

Dear reader,

Eliot and I met our freshman year in a small, stuffy room on the bottom floor of the Callaway Memorial Center. Our first Lullwater meeting was horrifying and unimaginably scary. Of course, the other members of Lullwater were not monsters, nor, as we came to find out, our executioners. So, we kept returning again, and again, and again. Lullwater became our hidaway, where for one hour every week we got to catch up and revel in the talents of others.

We have an immeasurable amount of gratitude for the editors that came before us, most notably Eleanor and Nico. Both of them have been such constant, reassuring presences during our tenure, and we cannot imagine having completed this edition without them.

For us, the best part of Lullwater has always been the opportunity of meeting new faces. A deep, heartfelt thank you to our editorial board: Madison, Mikennna, Aricka, Bernie, Sheps, and Mira. Getting to know you all has been an absolute privilege.

Finally, we would like to thank our fearless managing editor, Greyson Morey. You are endlessly gracious, positive, and hardworking. We are so excited to see what you accomplish in the future. To Ethan, who has been a bedrock member of Lullwater these past two years, thank you for always being your intelligent, earnest, curious self. You two will make a wonderful team. Lullwater is lucky to have you as Editors-in-Chief next year, and we look forward to seeing the places you will go.

At club fairs and recruitment events, we are invariably asked whether Lullwater Review has an application process to join. The answer has always been a resounding “no.” Lullwater is, for us, a place of growth, not a destination. We see our members improve weekly. Perhaps even more spectacularly, we see our submitters grow each year as they continue to share their art with us. Reader, we hope that within these pages you can see and join us in that growth.

Warmly,
Victoria Maza and Eliot Vaughey
Lullwater Review Co-Editor-in-Chiefs

The Ones With Flowers

Leila Bilick

This one's been crying all day.
She shuts her eyes, tries on sentences for size:
I will break up with him and I will spend my life with him.
How does each one feel, we ask, as she rocks her body
to the song of the yellow-bellied bird alive
inside her and this one
bares her head for us for the first time
after treatment, a slight flourish
as she removes her scarf, the one with flowers that bring
forward the green
of her eyes and this one
who wants a baby, Lord she wants a baby
on a Biblical scale,
she will sleep with a man tonight a man
without potential because she has other needs, they all do
an impromptu clothing swap, oh
to be girls, to be girlish, to be inside each other's clothing
trying on this heart for that.

Emily as the Pond Shivers

Darren C. Demaree

It began as wet petals,
lost in the rush
of a February wind

& now the moan
of a water that wants
to unbalance

but is frozen there,
leaves, animal fur,
a large branch

like an arm, stuck
in the first moment
of drowning. Sculpture

in nature always has
wings, but the one I love
keeps everything,

all of it. Each spring
a splashing. Each summer
a brief swim

& a hundred memories
of what she is now
& what she was then.

Emily as Red Paint

Darren C. Demaree

I said yes when Emily
wanted to paint the front
door red. I said yes
when she told me not to die
at thirty. We are so easy
to spot from the roadside.
You'll see the sunshine
stalking us, looking
for real warmth, our bodies
flexed by one more yes.

Idle Talk

Daniel Lusk

—“...a few small sounds which a sad man
would have called moans, and a happy man, laughter...”

Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Today with my Mascaron.

Naked as usual, nestled in my hair,
she peers down at me. Smoothing lines
of my forehead with her tiny fingers,
she sounds my condition.

You worry too much, she says,
kneading my eyebrows.
Stretches to wipe sleep from my eyes.

Consider visiting your sister, Happenstance.
A nurse for your root ailment.
Hands, foot soles and heart—Shiatsu.

Remember, you were face down
on her pallet, immersed in the voluptuousness
that pervades undersea places. Yes,
you were a diver then, a daydreamer
freed of your own weight.

And I do remember--that domain of intimacy
where every unspoken nuance of touch
aroused muscle memory. And didn't I become
no one and that one, soul and bones in her hands.
Cadence of my breathing enjoined with hers.

Even so, I crossed a threshold
into a room without walls, aware only
of fading shadows, shift
of curtains recently drawn—yet
there must have been night wind, owls, bats, stars.

Fingertips, elbow, thumb, singular
pressures descending—from the bracelets
of bone at the base of my brain,
resounding on my heart like footfalls,

each by each, rungs of vertebrae to my pelvis,
gluteus maximus, the vestigial tail. Exhale.

Here is the sudden outburst of speech
apropos of nothing in the moment—
my mother, near death, her random erudition
as though she spoke in tongues.

How this one kept in touch, always a hand
or elbow or thigh at my thigh
as she leaned back on her heels to pause,
breath held and my own in its net.

Then another as the hands resumed.

You were supine, says Mascaron, tracing
the length of my nose. Your eyes were closed
just so, your head cradled, her hands
between her knees. True, her thumbs were light
at my temples. I was the killed birdman
shaman on the cave wall at Lascaux.

In Wagner's Tannhäuser, after the seduction
of the violins, two beats of rest,
then the crux of a heart-stopping chorus of horns
—so my breath, bursting forth out of cadence
as when the spirit first came in.
The little rift of silence that followed.

Mascaron: What did you see then?

At the rim of the Carina Nebulae, far
into the night and the ghost constellations of the past,
the figure of a man running away from a burning house,
and I am peering into the dark below.

Mascaron tugs with both fists at my hair.
You keep too many secrets.

Would that were all, I say. Once when
I lay abed, her figure in the half-light over me.
Each of my hands yielding to her hands
as if she could read ligature and bone and lifeline
and know where I lived and also died.

That was a different nurse, muses Mascaron.
One with bells, sounding the hallways
of your past, who struck tuning fork to heel
of hand, to elbow and knees, hers
and yours. One with hands like a savior.

Shadows

Conner Arterberry

I sit now in in a metal chair listening to a mesh speaker
Play Schumann and I think to myself how beautiful the light is
in here

The warm glow of the lightbulb casts shadows on the wall
As the warm glow of the music casts shadows on my mind
As the cold rush of the wind casts shadows through the trees
As everything casts shadows on whatever they touch.
And somewhere deep in the coil of flesh

Inside my skull

Rests a beautiful home,

My home,

In which sits a string quartet gathered around a grand piano
Playing Schumann and I think to myself how beautiful the
shadow is in here

Samsara

George Payne

In the electric tangerine glow of sunset,
a royal procession of geese—

they announce themselves, then vanish.
Between birth and death,

they glide across the pond—
seconds so thin they tear,

the now flickers, weightless,
a breath with no width.

It is the middle of March, at last,
and nothing holds for long.

My Blue One Hundred Percent Polyester Leisure Suit

David Sapp

I looked good, really good, in my blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit. Aunt Jane took up sewing pants for my cousin Jimmy and Uncle Pat. After they were adequately garbed, she thought of me. At first, I was skeptical as I never imagined handmade clothes would ever look cool enough to wear anywhere, never mind passing scrutiny in the halls of my high school. But after I was happy with one pair of pants that fit perfectly, she proposed a leisure suit. I said sure. I picked blue as the color, and Aunt Jane found the perfect hue. It wasn't cobalt or cerulean – which resembles sky blue. Definitely not navy. It was somewhere between midnight blue in the Crayola crayon box and ultramarine blue, an oil paint color I was learning to admire in art class. And a few years later in art school, when I discovered Prussian blue, that exquisite color that created black holes of depth in paintings, I thought of my blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit. Then there was Yves Klein's blue. In his *Anthropométries*, at a Paris gallery in front of a well-dressed and well-coiffed, champagne-toting audience and accompanied by a string orchestra, nude women slathered his patented blue paint on their bodies and made impressions on white surfaces around the room. My blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit wasn't quite that blue, but it was close.

I wore my blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit to the Valentine's Day dance. This was the same year disco took off with "Saturday Night Fever" and John Travolta in his white, big pointy collar, tieless suit. The disc jockey was preoccupied with Bee Gees, ABBA, and K.C. and the Sunshine Band in the school cafeteria. Disco was composed for dancing; however, I do recall some difficulty dancing to Wild Cherry's "Play That Funky Music." I enjoyed how the cafeteria was transformed as during the week it was a socially dangerous minefield of cliques, a confusing landscape of acceptance and rejection. I was at ease dancing anywhere. I was confident that my blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit would fit right in, garner notice, or even be discussed. This would redeem my poor performance as a freshman: as I did not drive yet, Dad chauffeured my date and me; I was not aware of the protocol of corsage and boutonniere so neither of us had the required flowers; and my attire was a miserable sweater vest. We sat silently and sullenly through most of the dance. Now as a junior, I was wise to the way of the world. I brought my girlfriend, Barb. I drove and we exchanged flora. And of course I was wearing my blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit. Barb was a silly, giggly girl who laughed at everything I said. That's why I was so taken with her, I suppose. She was a mediocre clarinet player, and I was a mediocre trumpet player in concert band. In identical uniforms which included white spats, we got to know each other during football games and marching band, talking and teasing between fight songs and ignoring the Mount Vernon Yellow Jackets. I don't recall ever seeing her without her vivid blue eyeshadow (a shade somewhere between cobalt and cerulean). She sewed and embroidered matching blue denim

shirts for us to wear while walking around the mall. On our first date, after Jaws at the Knox Drive-In, I put my hand on her thigh while we cruised up and down Main Street.

Two years older than me at the time of the Valentine's Day dance, Barb was out of high school and working as a teller at the First Knox National Bank downtown. She made her own gown for the dance. From her neck to her ankles, it was a solid red. Just red. As I worked at Ron's Pizza, I could not help but think of a large tube casing of uncut pepperoni or salami. We had fun. We danced every dance though her long dress obliged her to take only tiny furtive steps. Entirely sheathed in synthetic petroleum-based polymer thread, my blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit did not allow for any breathability and half-way through the dance, the accumulated sweat became rather uncomfortable. But that was fine as everyone at the dance was encased in the same fabric and suffered equally. I later learned that heat releases chemicals in polyester which are known carcinogens. I don't recall wearing my blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit anywhere other than that one dance. My blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit is buried in a landfill somewhere, hidden off a back road in Knox County, Ohio. Researchers state that the color in polyester will not fade over time and that it may take 300 years or more for the fibers in my blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit to decay. My blue one hundred percent polyester leisure suit turned out to be my best chance for immortality. I asked my wife about her experience with polyester, and she recalled her date, Willy, wearing a lime green one hundred percent polyester leisure suit to Homecoming. Not forest green, viridian or chartreuse. Lime green.

We Were 5th Grade Girls

Leila Bilick

Rabbi A. had a shock of red hair. He taught us
Talmud, conversations among rabbis across generations, men
making meaning
in caves, bare rooms, candlelight,
beneath a moon.
Like when to descend from the camel
to race toward prayer against
a setting sun
or the question of purity
or how to hang a string around a town.

Rabbi A. said: On the matter of sounding the shofar, women
aren't obligated to fulfill it.
We, the girls, daughters of doctors, social workers, teachers,
responded: why is this so?
Rabbi A., red spreading down
from his hair to his cheeks, said:
Anyone who wants to know
gather after class and I'll tell you.
We formed a small circle around our Rabbi
whose hair was a flame.
In the words of Rabbi A:
Each month women, like the moon,
cycle and in this way know God.
Women don't need
an external clock, a prayer shawl,
a circle upon their heads.
You will have your bodies
as constant reminders of God's holiness
and of your own. It's beautiful,
in fact, it's a blessing.

We were 5th grade girls orbiting
our teacher, teaching us about our bodies
what they would become, what they would mean.
That day in school we carried in us
a heavy secret.
We couldn't understand
the shared vision that didn't so much as appear
but drop like a small animal to earth:
wild-haired women, full moon,
dances with timbrels, fire in bloom,

a song whose words were not our own
but in a language we seemed to have mastered,
low and primal like a ram's horn
like a birthing cry.

We couldn't say
whether we'd inherited
or wrought this scene, suddenly
part of us as if there all along
like the millions of eggs,
so we'd learned, we were born with.
In whose words, passed down from whom?
We didn't even know
to wonder. But we knew there'd be blood
and we'd have to fight
to keep it.

Porphyria

William R. Miller

What a slimy, old creep!

Sure, I sat on his lap,
let him feel me up,
twist my hair,
imagine he strangled
me to death.

Ridiculous!

In my business, you come
across all sorts, go out
in bad weather,
terrible storms.

In the end, they all
want the same bloody thing—
get off, kill someone
at the same time:
mother, ex-wife,
old girlfriend.

What matters
is cold cash,
pound notes for
the bump and grind,
the old in and out.

Three a night's not bad,
a cup of hot tea,
biscuits before dawn...

*DIVINE PROPERTY:
THE GOONS AFTER VISITING HAITI*

Timothy Gavin

The goons are leaving. Their Saving Haiti t-shirts
still cling to their backs, damp from the heat
but not from the work, not from the bending
and lifting, not from the sweat stinging their
eyes, but from the exhaustion of the well-fed,
the well-meaning, the ones who have already
patted themselves on the back
before boarding the plane, the ones
who say, "We have delivered Jesus,"
as if he were lost, as if he had wandered off,
as if they had found him folded in their luggage
next to their sunscreen and malaria pills.
And they parade him, without grace,
their Jesus with blue eyes and sandy hair,
with an Aryan nose sharp enough
to cut through centuries of suffering.
They show him and say, "This is the real Jesus,"
while the villagers in the Central Plateau
wipe their faces with the backs of their hands,
watch their children disappear into the fields,
sit beneath the empty arms of a mango tree,
dream of luck, dream of money, dream
of anything but this. The goons do not hear
the hissing hearts, the silent jeering souls.
They do not hear the weight of their silence
settling in after their voices have left,
after the gospel tracts flutter in the dust,
after the promises rise like steam
and vanish into the thick, humid air.

Discipline

Justis Ward

Whack!

Body crumples.
Bones break.
Boy brown.

Whack!

Skull cracks.
Skin splits.
Sky blue.

Whack!

Chest heaves.
Chariots descend.
Chickweed red.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Mouth ajar.
Mortal made.
Moss red.

Spit.

Body limp.
Boy dies
Born brown.

Fallout

Sarah Lyons

So there they were: lazing on the couch with Thai takeout while a film on Hiroshima illumed the living room. Clayton licked grease from his fingers, plucked a spring roll from his tray.

“My work’s having a party,” Thea said.

Her legs were in his lap, his arm around her shoulders, pretzeled and inseparable since the day she discovered him in the waiting room, dozing. He had waited for two hours to see her, she was told. Clayton, who waited and wanted for no one, who teased his affections only after they had parted their formal visitations in sterile-white rooms where machines blipped and droned, asked her to coffee. So it goes.

Since the start, they had organized their lives around each other: he was steady-state Pentagon; she swung between hospital shifts—and for graveyards, she would sneak in and slip beneath the covers, afraid to wake him. He had nightmares, he told her.

Clayton had an apartment in the heart of D.C. with a fifth-floor city view and blackout curtains. There were trinkets from his track days on the living room walls; in the bedroom, a California king with silk sheets; in the kitchen, an espresso machine he would fuss over, checking moisture and grind and aligning the pressure with fanatic precision—though, Thea would drink caffeinated swamp water, which was criminal to him.

She had all but moved in with soap and shampoo in the shower and strands of her hair on the counters and floors. Then his clothes became hers. She took a side of the bed. Expanded her conquest to the closet and drawers. And he made no remark, though he offered her a toothbrush the evening she forgot to pack hers.

And they had crystallized whatever they were calling themselves into a simple and effortless *something* conveyed by the lilt in Clayton’s voice or the laughter on his lips that he only seemed to share with her.

He was mid-bite, lips glossed from spring roll wrappers.

Cloud cover less than three-tenths at all altitudes.

“New Year’s Eve,” Thea added. “The party.”

Bomb the primary.

“Who will watch the patients?” Clayton said.

“The night shift,” she said. “Volunteers.”

“Not you?”

“Not me.”

“You didn’t volunteer?”

“Not this time, no.”

Clayton chewed slowly, fixed on the screen. The bombardiers primed the weapon for release.

The thing we were most concerned with was whether this bomb was going to work because this bomb had never been tested—this uranium-235 bomb had never been tested—

“You hate parties,” he said.

“Not all parties.”

“Most parties.”

“I never had a reason to go.”

Clayton stopped chewing. He eyed a javelin on the wall. His lips pulled taut.

“I see.”

Thea lolled against his shoulder. "It'll be fun. Come with me." She looked up at him, his bristled jaw. "Please?"

He lifted another spring roll from his tray. "You're not concerned about what people will say?"

"What people?"

"Your people." He bit into the roll. "Dating a patient."

"Former patient."

He frowned. "I don't know."

She nuzzled against him; he bit back a grin. All but sitting in his lap, she lay her head against his chest. "Why not?"

"I don't dance. Not before. Not now."

"No dancing."

"I'm terrible company."

"I like your company."

"I don't like people."

"Not all people. You like me, I assume."

And Clayton resigned. "I do."

He dropped his half-eaten spring roll and rolled his head in her direction. He tugged at his sweatshirt that hung from her shoulders. "What are you planning to wear to this... party?"

"Maybe this. Or a dress, I suppose."

Slowly, he said:

"Do you have a dress in your apartment?"

Thea laughed.

"It's a valid question," he said.

"What's your fascination with my apartment?"

"It's unknown. Cryptic. Mysterious."

"No, it's anticlimactic. Underwhelming at best.

"Says you."

Clayton tipped back his head. His eyes danced from ceiling to javelin to curtains, mind seeming to wander. "I'm just saying that we haven't been to your place. Like you're hiding—"

"I'm not hiding anything."

"No skeletons in closets?"

"Just lab coats and dresses."

He sat up. "Dresses, plural?"

And Thea laughed again.

Why was it kept secret from the public for so long? Where were the bombs—

He turned off the film. "I'll help you choose."

"So you'll come?"

"To the party or otherwise?"

"Stop."

He smiled. "That depends on you."

Sad how it triggered her, the shape of his teeth like his dossier picture in the earlier months. It clashed with the form she recalled from the hospital: half-dead, stitched, and bolted together.

"Please?" he said. So gently he had said it.

"Fine," Thea said. "Let's go."

He finished his spring rolls, cleared their Styrofoam containers. She found her light jacket; he grabbed his heavy coat. She teased him for the scarf he insisted on wearing, though the temperature had barely sunk below freezing. He had Georgia roots; she had Minnesota blood. He told her he hated the snow.

When they went to leave, Clayton paused by the door and stared at the crutch he kept stashed in the corner.

“Do you want it?” she asked.

“No, I’ll be fine.” He hesitated briefly, then moved on.

They took the elevator down to the garage, and their fingertips touched and eyes raised to the ceiling. She grinned at his reflection; he smiled at hers. This was how it started in the weeks before: She shoved him to the wall, stood on her toes to reach his lips. He smelled like sandalwood and tasted of mint. He seemed petrified, stunned. She laughed, and he laughed. It was her favorite sound in the world.

And when he reached for her hand, grabbed it, and squeezed, she knew he thought of it too.

They descended in silence until the elevator chimed. Since Clayton didn’t drive, Thea parked in his spot. And her Audi Q7 was samurai gray with four-zone climate control and heated seats, which she knew Clayton liked by the way he would toggle the buttons and warm his hands by the vents, though she wondered how much of it reminded him of cockpits and switches—maybe the heads-up display was enough—but he tensed when they pulled onto the road, rife with black ice and snow flurries.

“I’ll drive slow.”

When they reached her apartment, she parked near the front, avoiding the patches of ice on the lot. And she grabbed his hand because he didn’t trust his balance—because she liked how his hand felt wrapped around hers—because she liked how he warmed her, how he gravitated to her despite all that he had been through before.

The elevator slogged when Clayton called it. He puffed. “No wonder you come over to my place.”

“I usually take the stairs.”

“Then let’s take the stairs.” But when he turned, she grabbed his arm—and how he froze—and how he looked at her hand, at her face; what horror crossed his own.

Then the elevator chimed. He was breathing heavily, swallowing hard, the old threats still beneath. Thea released him, stepped in. He followed, reluctant, but took her hand as the door slid shut.

Third-floor apartment. Sinuous halls. He walked slower than he had before the crash, so she was told. Though he walked as if nothing had changed with the military posture his father beat into him years ago. And he met her by the door where she wrangled her keys, where he seemed to inspect the lights in the halls.

“So this is you,” he said softly.

“This is me.”

Key in the lock, Clayton’s breath against her ear as if marveling at the mystery veiled behind the door. There was hesitation in how she approached, aware she was razing her final bastion of privacy—and he had razed his own in ways, but there were still locked doors, still chambers within him he would never let go. His apartment was free rein, his mind a locked vault that sometimes exposed itself and let a truth slither out. Nevertheless, Thea turned the key, the knob; she cracked open the door and flicked on the light.

The walls were bare, and there were boxes stacked in towers—some shoved in corners, cracked open and searched. There was a modest couch, a coffee table, a small-screen television Thea barely used when at home. At the far end was the kitchen used less than the

television, a window with a view of the slosh-grime street. To their right was a door to the laundry, then a door to the bedroom. End of tour.

Clayton removed his shoes and walked past her. He peeked in boxes, read spines of packed books. "Did you just move in?"

"February."

"Well."

He opened the refrigerator and frowned.

"What is it?"

"Nothing." He shut the door. "No curtains?"

"Eventually. Maybe."

"Ah."

"It's terrible, I know."

"It's not terrible."

"You're too kind."

"I'm honest. Besides," he said, "who am I to judge?"

She didn't know what he meant, not exactly. He had buried so much of himself—like the accident that brought him to her hospital, the torment he endured, the history he would scratch at but never rip open. Sometimes, while watching their disaster documentaries, like prisoners in Vietnam or World War II, his hand would find hers—and she knew he was thinking of the people he lost, the ghosts he carried—and then the sight of the helicopters and crackle of radios and whipping of rotor blades, the way his eyes would flicker, throat ripple. How his hand would find his leg and remember...

Do you think it was right? he had asked her that evening.

What?

Hiroshima. Nagasaki.

I don't know.

He said nothing for a while.

What do you think? she had asked.

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

Clayton took off his coat. "Show me these dresses."

"They're in the bedroom."

"With the bed?" He doffed his scarf.

"With the bed."

"I'd like to see it. The bed."

Thea smirked. "A bed is a bed is a bed."

"Says you."

"I don't have silk sheets."

He took her coat.

"I don't care about the sheets."

He removed his shirt.

His hand slipped up her sweatshirt—*his* sweatshirt.

"And the dresses?"

He melted against her.

"They can wait."

Later in bed, her legs wrapped around him, her ear to his chest, and she listened to the rise and fall of his breath so still she would have thought him asleep, but he was staring at the ceiling. She touched his face, and he flinched as if startled or dragged from the past to this distant present. His heartbeat skittered, then settled again. He took her hand and kissed each

finger.

A siren from an ambulance blared outside.

"How's your leg?" she asked.

"It's alright. Don't worry about me."

"You like that I worry."

"I like that you like me despite it."

"Maybe I like you because of it."

He pulled away.

"Clay?"

"You should wear your green dress."

"I didn't mean it like that."

"I just... I don't want to think about that."

"Okay."

"Let's talk about you in that dress."

"You haven't seen the other dresses."

"I don't need to."

"Then why that one?"

He shrugged. "It has more charm than your walls."

"All my dresses have more charm than these walls."

"They're a crime against humanity—the walls, not the dresses."

"You think you're clever."

"I think you deserve nicer walls."

Thea sighed. "Fine, I'll hang a picture. Or curtains. I'll hang a picture and curtains—"

"Or move in with me."

Thea propped on her elbows and looked at him, but Clayton was focused on the ceiling and swallowing hard.

What did you say?"

Hesitance surfaced with his parted lips, his flexing fingers, and the shrug of his shoulders. She hadn't seen him so wounded since the start of their story: TBI, polytrauma, aversion to touch.

"I sleep better when you're beside me," he said. "And you won't have to look at these walls anymore."

"Be serious."

"Seriously. Move in."

"Clay, I don't—"

"Please, just... just think it over before telling me no."

Thea lowered herself back to his chest and drew circles on his arms with her finger to steady her thoughts that swerved over what he was asking, what he meant, and what she feared to lose. Four walls formed her static-white haven, her proverbial room of her own—no matter the kitchen was accessory aside from the microwave and fridge, ignore the deathtrap of towering boxes, the unfolded laundry heaped on a chair, the takeout containers, the walls.

"What if I don't like your toothpaste?"

"You don't have to use my toothpaste. We can have separate toothpastes."

"Where will I put my dresses?"

"I'll make space in our closet."

"Our closet?"

"You're already packed."

"What if we don't work out?"

"Don't say that."

He pulled her against him, and Thea listened to his heart thump faster, louder—and she couldn't guess his thoughts beyond the burgeoning fear that wedged between them, the doubt between the seams of whatever they were.

"It's a nice apartment," Thea said. "Your apartment."

"Our apartment."

"Does that mean it's our javelin?"

"Sure. And the pictures and curtains."

"The espresso machine?"

"That's ours, but the bog water you make is yours."

"And your favorite sweatshirt?"

"It looks better on you."

"Your slippers?"

"I draw the line at the slippers."

"No deal."

He sighed. "Fine. Our slippers too."

"But seriously—"

"I am incredibly serious, Thea. These walls—"

"Enough with the walls. They're my walls—my terrible, godawful walls in my godawful apartment."

"It's not godawful," he said gently. "You just don't have time for it. And if you're here, you're not with me."

They said nothing for a while, but he wouldn't let her go, maybe afraid to let another thing go.

Clayton pulled the blankets tighter around them and rolled on his side to face her. He brushed the hair from her eyes like he had that first night when they lay in his bed—new, electric, and unsure.

"You don't have to move in," he said softly. "But I like the green dress."

"I like it too."

"I can be festive."

"But no dancing."

"I can shuffle."

"That's something."

"You're something. And I'll dance if it means dancing with you."

Thea stroked his face. "You'll have to deal with doctors."

"You're a doctor."

"I am."

"I like dealing with you."

"You don't like people."

"Most people. But I like you."

"So you'll go?"

"If you're there, I want to be there too."

Then he opened his mouth as if to say more, perhaps to underline the small print of their relationship or ponder deeply on his sacrifice in want of a similar sacrifice, but he said nothing.

Thea settled against her pillow, and they stilled, eyes shut. She thought of the film, recalled a crew member from the *Enola Gay* who experienced the shockwave, the boiling earth, the cloud of destruction, the ruins—when asked if he had regretted the mission:

Do I regret it? I regret we had to do it.

But would you do it again if you had to?

It was never the merging that troubled her—the box-shuffling, the too-many-spoons, the too-few-drawers, the making-space-in-the-medicine-cabinet sort of problems rending couples before ours could ever form. And it was never their differences on thermostat settings or separating darks from lights in the laundry or perceptions of physics when loading a dishwasher (even if he'd rearrange it five times to get it perfect)—and it had nothing to do with how she nestled in the crux of his arm or how he'd fill the void within her that no one else could, and how she'd fill the void within him that he never voiced with words—and they could be happy. They could be happy.

Still...

She wondered if they regretted it: the work that went into it—the years in their laboratories sparking the chain reaction, fission, and splitting of atoms to reach the critical mass until the flash that changed the calculus of war. And she wondered if they ever stopped to question not if they *could* but if they *should* or what remorse—if any—they would have. And would she be wracking her mind in the same way—to wait or to leap without tangling themselves in the what-ifs and allowing this *something* to exist without so much calculation?

It could be great, she knew. And it could ruin them too.

“Clay?” she whispered.

But he had fallen asleep.

2024 contributors

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Michael J. Galko is a scientist and poet who lives and works in Houston, TX. He was a 2019 Pushcart Award nominee, a finalist in the 2020 Naugatuck River Review narrative poetry contest, and a finalist in the 2022 Bellevue Literary Review poetry contest. In the past year he has had poems published or accepted at *Talking River Review*, *Epiphany*, *Gargoyle*, *Louisville Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Noon: journal of the short poem*, and *The Paterson Literary Review*, among other journals.

Rachel Aguirre is a poet and Spanish teacher from San Antonio, Texas. Her work appears in *Passages North* and *Poetry South*, and she was accepted into Kenyon Review's 2025 Winter Online Poetry Workshop. Rachel has a B.A. in English and plans to pursue an MFA in poetry in the near future. When she's not writing or teaching, she likes to cook fare from Veracruz and locate the resident swan in the small, nearby lake.

Katie Nelson is the author of the short story collection, *Parties All Around*. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Eucalyptus Lit*, *Girls Right the World*, *Intangible Magazine*, and the *Alcott Youth Magazine*, among others. She was shortlisted twice for the Bridport Prize and was a finalist for Frontier Poetry's 2024 Award for New Poets. Katie is a freshman at Rice University, studying Business Finance with a minor in creative writing.

Brian Ji is a student at Seoul International School in South Korea. As an accomplished artist and writer, his artwork has won awards in various competitions. With a deep passion for creative writing, he has been an active contributor to literary magazines both inside and outside of school. His dedication to writing includes participating in numerous creative writing workshops, including the Kenyon College Writing Program. Recently, his focus has expanded to explore the intersection of AI and creative writing, driven by a strong interest in enhancing creativity in today's technology-driven world. In addition to his artistic pursuits, he is an outstanding racquet sports player, serving as the captain of his school's tennis team. He also founded a club to promote pickleball among Korean youth.

Cody D. Jarman is a teacher and writer currently living in Pikeville, KY, where he is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Pikeville. Cody was raised in Tennessee, and his poetry is principally about that fact.

Mario Loprete is an Italian artist who has distinguished himself in the contemporary art scene through innovative use of materials and a unique vision of urban art. His work lies at the crossroads of painting and sculpture, exploring themes of memory, identity, and urban transformation. Loprete uses raw materials like cement and plaster to create works that evoke urban architectural structures. This choice is not only aesthetic but also conceptual: cement, with its hardness and permanence, becomes a symbol of collective and personal memory, fixing the traces of our urban existence over time. Plaster, on the other hand, with its fragility, represents the vulnerability and transience of human life and experiences. One of the distinctive features of Loprete's work is his ability to transform everyday and banal objects into meaningful works of art. His pieces often incorporate elements of graffiti, echoing street art and the ephemeral messages that populate cities. However, through the artistic process, these messages are fixed and immortalized, creating a dialogue between the ephemeral and the permanent.

Holly Day's writing has recently appeared in *Appalachian*, *Day's Analog SF*, *Earth's Daughters Journal* and her recent book publications include *Music Composition for Dummies*, *The Tooth is the Largest Organ in the Human Body*, and *Bound in Ice*. She teaches creative writing at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis and Hugo House in Seattle.

Laine Derr has published interviews with Carl Phillips, Ross Gay, Ted Kooser, and Robert Pinsky. Work has appeared or is forthcoming from *LIT Magazine*, *J Journal*, *The Amistad*, *Full Bleed + The Phillips Collection*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Portland Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Chapter House*, and elsewhere.

StarShield grew up among the beautiful mountains and Pine trees in Oregon and now makes her home in Tucker, GA. She is a student of Native American Shamanic and Toltec traditions, and her poetry explores the shifting nature of identity and how the natural world is both a teacher and reflection of that work. Her poetry has been published in *Collage*, the *Nashville Arts Magazine*, *Raw Journal of Arts*, *Sunbeams*, *Lullwater Review*, and the *Atlanta Review*. She has won two Creative Expression Awards from *Collage* and was selected as an International Merit Award Winner by the *Atlanta Review*.

John Cross is a poet and playwright from Durham, NC. He has had dramatic work recognized by *YouthPLAYS* and the Educational Theatre Association, as well as poetic work in *Eunoia Review*. He works as a poetry reader for *SUNHOUSE Literary*.

Mark Katrinak has poems published in *Bayou*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Slab*, *Pinyon*, and other literary publications. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, he is now a resident of Golden Valley, AZ, and works for a behavioral health agency. He enjoys cats, birds, fine wine, and spending time with my family.

Samantha Landau is an academic, classical vocalist, translator, and writer who resides in Tokyo, Japan, where she has lived for nearly two decades. She works as a professor at The University of Tokyo and is a co-founder of the Gothic in Asia Association and Tokyo Humanities Project. She is currently co-editing a volume of essays on poetry and the Gothic. Her poems have been published in *The Coop: A Poetry Cooperative* and in *Dust Poetry Magazine*.

Robert Tremmel's most recent books are *The Records of Kosho the Toad* and *The Return of the Naked Man*, which won the Brick Road Poetry Prize.

Audra Burwell is a dedicated writer, poet, and communications professional with a passion for creative expression and community engagement. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing from California State University, Fresno, and is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with a specialization in poetry. In her professional role as Communication Coordinator at College Bridge, a nonprofit organization committed to increasing college access and success for underrepresented students, Audra combines her love for storytelling with her commitment to making higher education more accessible.

2025 contributors

Connor Arterberry spent his youth split between Tulsa, Oklahoma and Goroka, Papua New Guinea. His poetry often deals with themes of loss and isolation, but also with the beauty that may rise from their ashes. Poetry is a pastime second to his primary passion, music composition, though the two go hand in hand in many of his artistic endeavors. Connor resides with his wife in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he is currently finishing his bachelor's degrees in music composition and theory, studying piano and modern neoclassical writing techniques. He aspires to one day become a professor of composition.

Darren Demaree's poems have appeared, or are scheduled to appear in numerous magazines/journals, including *Hotel Amerika*, *Diode*, *North American Review*, *New Letters*, *Diagram*, and the *Colorado Review*. He is the author of twenty-three poetry collections, most recently 'So Much More' (November 2024, Harbor Editions). He is the Editor in Chief of the *Best of the Net Anthology* and Managing Editor of *Ovenbird Poetry*. He is currently living and writing in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

Tim Gavin is an Episcopal priest. In addition to his most recent publication, *A Radical Beginning* (Olympia Publishers, 2023), he is the author of *Lyrics from the Central Plateau*, a chapbook of poems released by Prolific Press in November 2018. His articles, essays, and poems have appeared in *The Anglican Theological Review*, *Barrow Street Review*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Cape Rock*, *Chiron Review*, *The Cresset*, *Grow Christians*, *Digital Papercut*, *Evening Street Review*, *Library Journal*, *Magma*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Poetry South*, *Poetry Super Highway*, and *Spectrum*. He lives with his wife, Joyce, in Newtown Square.

Daniel Lusk is author of eight poetry collections and other books, most recently *Every Slow Thing* (Kelsay Books 2022) and *Farthings* eBook (Yavanika Press 2022). Native of the prairie Midwest and a former commentator for NPR on small press books, he now lives and works in Vermont. He is pleased to note that besides *Lullwater Review*, my poems appear in recent issues of *Crosswinds*, *The Cumberland River Review*, and *The Ravens Perch*, the current edition of *Live Encounters* and *Sonic Boom* and forthcoming in *Qu*.

Sarah Lyons divides her time between analyzing global threats, supporting personnel recovery operations, and writing. She is an alumna of the University of Virginia and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and an MFA candidate at Wilkes University. She is the 2024 recipient of the Etruscan Prize for her flash fiction, "These Ghosts We Carry." "Fallout" is her first publication.

William Miller's eight collection of poetry, *The Crow Flew Between Us*, was published by Kelsay Books in 2020. His poems have appeared in *The Penn Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Prairie Schooner* and *West Branch*. He lives and writes in the French Quarter of

George Cassidy Payne is a poet, journalist, and essayist whose work explores love, loss, memory, ecology, and the strange holiness of ordinary life. His poems often braid intimacy with cultural observation, moving between the domestic and the cosmic with a voice that is wry, lyrical, and quietly philosophical. Influenced by writers like Billy Collins and Mary Oliver, Payne's work favors clarity over ornament and wonder over certainty. He is also a longtime crisis counselor and suicide prevention advocate, experience that deeply informs his writing about vulnerability, survival, and what it means to stay. His essays and reporting on politics, culture, and local issues have appeared in both regional and national outlets, while his poetry has been shared in literary journals, community spaces, and performance settings. Payne holds multiple graduate degrees in the humanities, has taught philosophy and ethics at the college level, and lives in upstate New York, where rivers, weather, and silence continue to shape his work.

David Sapp, writer and artist, lives along the southern shore of Lake Erie in North America. A Pushcart nominee, he was awarded Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Grants for poetry and the visual arts. His poetry and prose appear widely in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. His publications include articles in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*, chapbooks *Close to Home* and *Two Buddha*, a novel *Flying Over Erie*, and a book of poems and drawings titled *Drawing Nirvana*.

Justis Ward a Georgia native with a passion for teaching and songwriting. The latter served as the foundation for his pursuit of poetry and led him to minoring in Creative Writing in his undergraduate studies. He is currently pursuing an MFA in Writing from Lindenwood University and hopes to become a Professor of Creative Writing following my graduation.