

NOO

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## FRONTSPACE

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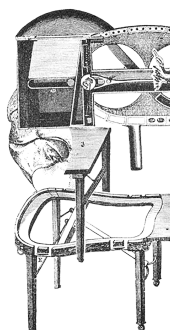
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## Editor Notes

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Nick Sturm — Poetry Editor

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## PROSE

Austin Hayden (austin@noojournal.com)  
Gene Kwak (gene@noojournal.com)

SEVERAL FRIENDS I have won't say his name. No shame, it's called coping. One friend, though, bold they are, has to just blurt it out. Prints an antifa zine. I picture prints stapled to trees. Now that's showing up. Brass belting. War horns. We've all got teeth to show. Yet I am writing a story about a young football player. Suffice to say I feel easily fangless in the face of. At a recent rally for immigrants a speaker said, "You don't have to go to DC when they're right here at home." What do you make of that? They were talking about our politicians, but they could've meant illness or sadness or bad music. It's all everywhere. And I'm stuck on a story about a young football player. Eventually we'll see everything get smushed under the hydraulic press in those YouTube videos. In some other post I saw the inside of a magic eightball. Saunders penned that Paley piece, so what else is there? In an email to a friend today I said, regarding an unnamed short story, it doesn't hit guts or heart; it's just comedy. That's weird. Reminds me. Could've been two or three months ago now, I was getting ice out of an ice tray, and a cube stuck to my finger. I texted my brother a line from *Dumb & Dumber* — "Say kids, you wouldn't happen to have a cup of warm water would ya?" — and now, each time that small thing has happened since, I don't think of the movie. I remember the text. I hope I always will. Without a doubt, this piece I'm working on, the football kid, it bows down to every inkling of power from my couch to the capitol. Without a doubt, everything lines up to get squashed. Fiction is a stupid thing. I doubt it's worth the staple or the tree. Any of it. This is the inside-glimpse. The guts and heart of this issue. Somehow, by some glue, by some glia, it all matters and doesn't at the same shitty stroke. Stories are only stories until you line your whole cage with them. Start with Paley. End with mud. These pieces Gene & I collected here will do you well for now. Thanks for reading what you can.

## POETRY

Carrie Lorig (carrie@noojournal.com)  
Nick Sturm (nick@noojournal.com)

THINGS HAVE NOT been okay. We have been calling friends, weeping, having strange, disturbing dreams. These poems are the bones of another dream we insist on gargling. Dream gossip against a casual nightmare. This is a mirror, or hair, a lyric (or not) shed (or archive) to betray a line. We'd prefer to hear all of these poets reading their poems and to talk to them about those sounds because we prefer the sound when it happens together. We imagine inviting you to stay with us and drive around and have a drink. We're glad we get to include them in this penultimate issue of NOO. You're still invited over, rain or glitter.



Photosynthesis / © Tuna Onder / from NOO [2]



# NOÖ Presents



**K**OMBUCHA, according to Violet, can help you pass the drug test. The retired couple managing the hot springs in Truth or Consequences both have the same constellation app, but one thinks its background music is “new age,” while the other thinks it’s “manly, like halftime at a football game.” A woman in a blue truck crosses herself as she speeds through a blind curve. Your neighbor reaches over and cleans your glasses. CAConrad’s mom says the humans found Antarctica, but the

penguins kicked them out. In the desert, the crows follow up a storm by filling their mouths with sticks. David is interested in a kind of distance he calls “interactive distance.” At Denny’s, Donte tells a story about Lyle talking to his blocks in kindergarten and Donte getting in trouble. White workers just off their shifts at the haunted house eat pancakes with their clown makeup still on. At a Halloween party in Santa Fe, Mike says “California” to a young Kenyan dressed as a Jedi, and he replies, “No, where are you *really* from?”

Books both do and don’t write themselves, but presentations of those books help clarify which is which. Here in **NOÖ**, we start with

Carrie Lorig’s look at how Ginger Ko’s *Motherlover* “pushes us to not just see and hear a body, but to feel it.” Then Nick Sturm invites us to discover the under-appreciated Steve Carey via a new collection of *Selected Poems*.

Rounding out the poetry presentations, Mike Young examines the basement metal of Amish Trivedi’s *Sound/Chest* and the tender delight of Chen Chen’s *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*, while Nate Logan delves into the poetry play *Girl Talk Triptych*, a collaboration of the NYC feminist collective (G)IRL.

Getting into fiction, Mike thinks about family traps in Steven Dunn’s debut novel-in-fragments *Potted Meat*. Then Gene Kwak does a large family of work all by himself, interviewing both Amelia Gray and Mary Miller—small press short story stars gone big—and reviewing the first “episode” of Carson Mell’s serialized novel *Field Notes From Dimension X*.

Closing out this dimension, we have Austin Hayden’s engaged riff on a Lettered Streets Press split series featuring Megan Giddings and Lo Kwa Mei-en. Finally, Carrie and Nick split duties to interview Liz Blood and Tatiana Ryckman of the wonderful Austin-based Awst Press. Leave the penguins alone, even during halftime, but go ahead and fill every storm with the curves and haunts of these interactive distances.

**WHAT:** *Motherlover*  
**BY:** Ginger Ko  
**IS:** Debut poetry collection  
**FROM:** Bloof

**SAYS:** There is no room in my heart for important men who / surround themselves with flowers

**AT:** [bloofbooks.com](http://bloofbooks.com)

**PRESENTED BY:** Carrie Lorig



**T**HIS MORNING an email appeared in my inbox that ends like this: “I am writing this poem to you because I don’t understand / how to actually be someone to anyone / but I want to make an effort / and you are in my palpitating arrhythmia.” I have been thinking about it all morning and am thinking about it, now, while lying on the shores of Ginger Ko’s *Motherlover*. I think that statement could be read as some kind of admittance or supplication, but I read it so fiercely. It’s vulnerable and it’s demanding / of the world.

So is *Motherlover*, a book that speaks profoundly, particularly in its first two sections “Gaslight” and “Body”, about the searing intimacy and pain of abuse that can be present in portraits of family and romantic partnership. “Raised to be a bride, to hate myself for it, I come to / you full of brides,” says the poem “Flora.” Ko writes intensely about the roles women and bodies can be shuffled between and forcefully restrained inside of: mother, daughter, caretaker, sexual object. The pressure of these roles hands individuals a

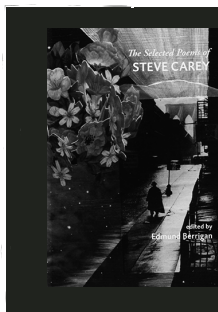
ready-made framework through which to control, patrol, and silence women and bodies into a kind of flickering, non-threatening personhood. “Flora” continues: “There is no room in my heart for important men who / surround themselves with flowers. / Take the garland of wives / and daughters from around your neck. That you feel safe they / would not choke you makes me sick.”

The last section of the book, entitled “Prairie Lighthouse” and made up of fragments divided by the contrasting titles “Day Mark” and “Night Signature,” poses questions about the indelible wound of living with and beyond the consumable confines of comfortable narratives of “survival.” Such arcs can suggest violence is only isolated to “bad” relationships and often serve to allow many of us to avoid facing complicity. “I try so hard to be a neutral person / when I’m not, people ask me why not / the ghost of your cologne isn’t romantic anymore,” says “Night Signature.”

Ko’s lines are beautiful and tough, filled with careful and expertly thoughtful movement. But any beauty that exists in *Motherlover* doesn’t exist to present a palatable world, a female voice here to reassure us. “Night Signature” says: “The water isn’t quite hot enough to release the stain from the tea bag. / [something something sentimental] / My palms smell like I’ve been hanging on metal. / The parts even grime can’t reach my body fills with sick-smelling / sebum.”

Rather, Ginger Ko’s *Motherlover* pushes us to not just see and hear a body, but to feel it, how it shifts, splits, rots, lives, and flourishes against the world / its churning broth.





### WHAT: The Selected Poems of Steve Carey

IS: Edmund Berrigan's selection from seven books

FROM: Subpress Collective

SAYS: Everyone is haunted / watch the water

AT: [subpresscollective.com](http://subpresscollective.com)

PRESENTED BY: Nick Sturm

**S**TEVE CAREY'S POETRY is a jubilant assemblage of crystal phrases and sets, an ongoing practice in the delight and incongruity that emerges in and between uncommon lines, our living ghosts and singing voices.

Carey, who died at age 43 in 1989, is associated with the fierce, joyous, trembling, visionary sounds of the Second Generation New York school poets, and his work shows an intimate overlap with the poetry of Ted Berrigan, Alice Notley, Bill Berkson, Philip Whalen, and others around the Poetry Project and Naropa in the 1970s and early 80s. But what's a generation or a school do for readers who find Carey for the first time in this *Selected*, the first gathering of his work in over 25 years?

I came to Carey's work through a dedicated reading of Berrigan's poetry, a microlineage that allowed me to trace a common devotion in language and sound rather than a canonical tradition. And in these poems, which are so funny and attentive, riding so pleasurably the weird light of a phrase like "You're swacked" or the miraculous

turning music in "Sweatless in my place / Dear, dear gate," we swerve so much and so gently in each line that we're made into beginners, starting again along with Carey to be readers of ourselves and our shared musics. It's a good thing to be a beginner in this poems—it leaves us radically open, without jealousy or anxiety, dreaming. Carey is describing his own practice, and telling us a secret about music, when he writes, "In each a rhythmic adjustment is made // 'Everyone is haunted / Watch the water.'" Both meditative and fervently busy, we're riding each phrase to its textured next of kin.

One of the most terrific things about Carey's poems is his use of punctuation, that language within language that (re)organizes so much of a poem's music. In poems like "Julia" and "Joe Hill," Carey's use of the parentheses, hyphens, and quotation marks make for a lush braiding that subnarrates the movement of thinking, line by line, like Dickinson, Howe, or Notley. He, like them, is "[t]urning her face to her sources," living in jeweled, far, unprecious sound.

Anyone familiar with the New York school will be at home in Carey's *Selected*, but these poems are a long drift past categorization. Edmund Berrigan's selection of poems, from more on-site lyric arrangements to long open field poems to Carey's incredible list poems, like the unbelievably pleasurable "The Complaint: What Am I, Some Kind Of," gives us the most generous shapeliness for reading Carey's work. A true "sooth-brooder," a wayward "Thinker of something else," Carey's voice is still here for new readers, critically joyous, crystalline, and tender. Tra-la, tra-la.

Read Steve Carey's "The Complaint: What Are You, Some Kind Of" at

[WWW.NOOJOURNAL.COM/17](http://WWW.NOOJOURNAL.COM/17)

**F**OR MY SLEEPWALKING DEER of an opinion, one early poem in Chen Chen's debut collection, *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*, does an excellent job showcasing the pleasures and mechanics of the whole book, giving me a see-read-this to prove why I think this collection is the funniest and most tender book of poems I've read in a long string of horoscopes.

That poem is "Self-Portrait With & Without," and it hinges—like many in the book—on a deceptively simple structural game, in this case a bunch of "With" and "Without" statements. Some grab for giggles, like "With thinking / I've grown up now because I regularly check the news in the morning." And some are sudden heart arrows, like "With my mother's multiplying worries. With my brothers, / my brothers." They effortlessly tuck in narrative without losing inventive rhythm; they shift gears into evocative abstraction: "With cities fueled by scars. With the footprint of a star."

Though I've never seen Chen read out loud, so many of these poems make me imagine a full house, reactions of delight and transformations of whoa-I-didn't-feel-that-ache-brewing. The poems employ forms—lists of instructions ("If you / smell something say something"), litanies of apology ("I'm sorry I then called out *Llamas!* twice / three times")—and deploy them like skateboard tricks, all the satisfaction of rolling momentum, then the flips that reinvent that momentum's geometry.

That these poems feel so good at being poems, that they already know they're really funny and smart and charming is, in many ways, the deepest flip of all. In the title poem, Chen lists all the possibilities of things to be, the pressures of family and society for a young, queer Chinese-American son in a white heterosexist patriarchy.

### WHAT: When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities

BY: Chen Chen

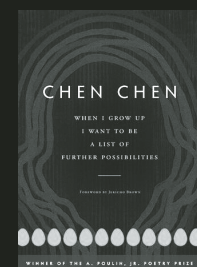
IS: Funny/tender as a sleepwalking deer

FROM: BOA Editions

SAYS: I'm trying out this thing where questions about love & forgiveness / are a form of work I'd rather not do alone

AT: [boaeditions.org](http://boaeditions.org)

PRESENTED BY: Mike Young



("In This Economy" is how another poem puts it, one that says "I've befriended every shade of evening / & they cannot recommend me highly enough.")

A few of these further possibilities: "To be a more comfortable / hospital bed for my mother." And "To be, in my spare time, / America for my uncle, who wants to be China / for me." And "To be a backpack of PB&J & every / thing I know, for my brothers, who are becoming / their own storms." And for the beloved, the ultimately addressed: "To go 2D / & be a painting, an amateur's hilltop & stars, / simple decoration for the new apartment / with you."

In the end, you don't want to just be an audience laugher. You want to be friends with Chen Chen and a better friend in general. You not only want to call your mom, you want to make jokes only your mom will get. When Chen says, "I'm trying out this thing where questions about love & forgiveness / are a form of work I'd rather not do alone," you want to be right there alongside, in the "sudden rain" of everyone and their beautifully unfinished self-portraits.



# IN BETWEEN WITH MARY MILLER



**O**FTEN AUTHORS are hit with the big wave of press around the same time: a new book being in print. Which makes sense. It's a big deal. Commence the ticker tape parade.

But what do writers do in between projects? Right before the new book is released? While working on drafts? While working on nothing and binge watching hot-take TV shows after the fact? We wanted to do some short burst interviews to find out.

Mary Miller is no stranger to **NOO**. We published her way back in [7]. She also published a chapbook, *Less Shiny*, with our sister press, Magic Helicopter. Our own Austin Hayden once said that "Miller's forte is twisting the mundane and carving out the quiet conflict." A fan on Goodreads claimed "she should be our president." If only that were an option.

Mary Miller grew up in Jackson, Mississippi. She is the author of a collection of stories, *Big World* (Short Flight/Long Drive Books, 2009), and a novel, *The Last Days of California* (Liveright/Norton, 2014).

A former James A. Michener Fellow in Fiction at the University of Texas, she most recently served as the John and Renée Grisham Writer-in-Residence at Ole Miss. A second story collection, *Always Happy Hour*, came out from Liveright/Norton in early 2017.

**GENE KWAK:** Your most recent book, *Always Happy Hour*, came on the heels of a novel. Did the stories in the collection come after writing the novel? Were you writing some of them concurrently? You've also mentioned how writing longer stories changed your prose and how writing a novel continued to affect your prose. Can you explain exactly how you feel it's changed? And do you think you'll ever go back to writing short/flash pieces just to switch speeds?

**MARY MILLER:** I'd been writing the stories in *Always Happy Hour* since *Big World* was accepted for publication, some time around the summer of 2008, so I had a lot to choose from. I cut the ones that were too different and also the ones that seemed too repetitive/not different enough. Collections are tough like that. Did I cut stories that I shouldn't have? Is it in the right order? I still don't know how people order collections; it seems so arbitrary.

There are four stories (out of sixteen) that were written pre-2010, and I had to do a bit more editing on those so that the writing styles matched. I think more about word choice now and pleasant vs. unpleasant repetition. I vary my sentence lengths more, as well.

## A CONVERSATION

As far as writing flash: I love flash. My prose is still pretty minimalist and I like a punchy end to a paragraph, which are very flashy-type things. What's changed is that I feel like I need more space in which to tell a story—it's really hard to tell a story in 500 or 700 words. That being said, I've been writing these letters to an ex-boyfriend for fun (to torture myself) and most of them are less than a page in length. It helped to have an audience and to think of them as letters instead of stories.

**GK:** Regarding those letters, are you talking about handwritten letters? Why did you consciously set a page limit on the letters?

**MM:** No, not handwritten, just regular old letters typed in a Word document that I had no intention of sending. They're as short as one sentence and as long as two pages. The manuscript itself is about 160 pages, which was an accident. I can't remember why I even began writing them—the letters aren't in chronological order and I'm unsure which one was written first—though it was a combination of I couldn't stop thinking about this person that I hadn't seen in years and felt like I had some things to say but no one to say them to (I was sad). Anyhow, it's doubtful I'll attempt to publish it, though I may submit some individual stories and delete the salutation.

**GK:** *Always Happy Hour* came out in early 2017. When you finished it, were you still looking it over? What kinds of emotions did you feel at this point in the process? Anxiety? Worry? Joy? And what part of the process is the most fun for you?

**MM:** When I write something I never consider that it'll be published—I simply don't think that far ahead. Some of the things I wrote in this collection will make people angry and could have actual, calculable negative results, which sucks. I find solace in reading quotes from other writers, like this one from Faulkner:

"[The writer] is completely amoral in that he will rob, borrow, beg, or steal from anybody and everybody to get the work done.... The writer's only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream. It anguishes him so much he must get rid of it. He has no peace until then. Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is worth any number of old ladies."

As far as the best part: getting the occasional fan letter is a thrill. It's also cool when people point out connections that you hadn't known you'd made.

**GK:** You've lived in Mississippi most of your life. You moved back a couple years ago to teach at Ole Miss. You're still in MS now. What is it about being at home or close to home that is necessary for you?

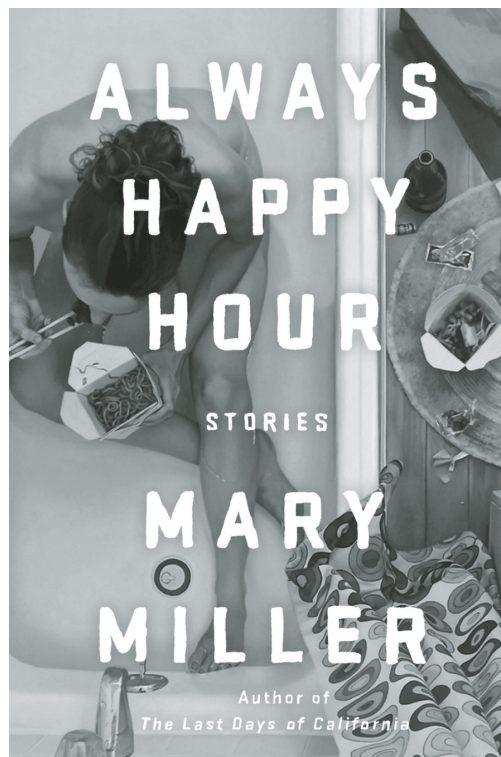
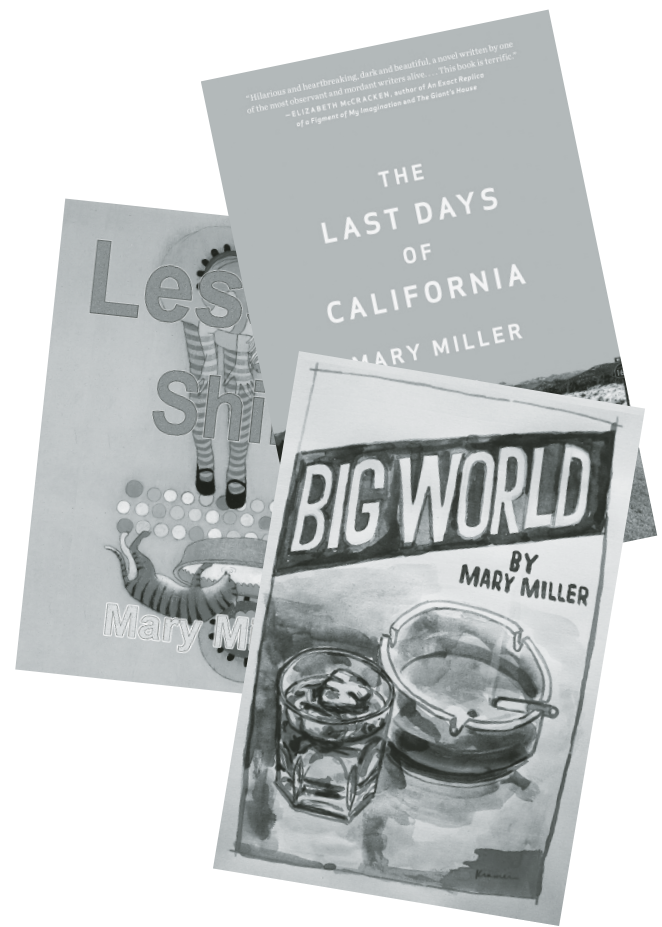
**MM:** I'm a big wuss and don't like to be too far from my parents. I have a large extended family and nearly all of them live in Mississippi. Both sides of my family have been here for generations and we're very good at staying put. People *do* leave, of course, but they typically don't go far (New Orleans, Nashville, Birmingham).

Years ago, when I first applied to graduate schools, I was accepted at UNLV, which seems like a really cool program, and I said yes to their offer, which was a good offer. But I balked at the last minute and went to a school an hour-and-a-half from my hometown. I just couldn't do it. The idea of being alone in a new place so far away was too daunting.

In my dream, I move to New Orleans and buy a little shotgun house and remodel it and ride my bike everywhere and make lots of friends who are cool and good looking and tend my garden and do yoga in the mornings and join a fancy gym where I learn to rock climb, etc., but this isn't going to happen.

This is pretty much the main theme in all of my stories.

**GK:** What's piquing your interest lately? Atwitter over pop culture? Anything that's a lazy Sunday nod? Or a life altering experience? Possible writing influence?



**MM:** Oooh, I've read so many good books recently! Marcy Dermansky has a new novel called *The Red Car*, and we share a press (and a birthday and an alma mater so we're basically like the same person). *The Red Car* is as good as *Bad Marie* (okay, maybe not quite as good as *Bad Marie*, but I *really* loved *Bad Marie* (she was so bad)).

I've also been obsessed with Sara Majka's collection, *Cities I've Never Lived In*. When I finished reading it, I began again, which I almost never do anymore.

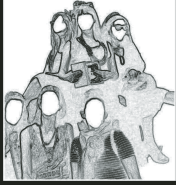
I finally read Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*, years late to that party, and liked it a whole lot. And Jade Sharma's *Problems*—I highlighted so many sentences and paragraphs.

I love some lady writers.

The things I like best aren't atwitter-type things, but it's so nice to see people playing Pokemon Go on the beach near the lighthouse in Biloxi. When I drive by, there'll be a hundred people out there sometimes. Maybe when I get a new phone with an upgraded data plan that stops saying "storage almost full" I'll download it and join them.



# GIRL TALK TRIPTYCH



## WHAT: Girl Talk Triptych

BY: Marisa Crawford, Becca Klaver, Lily Ladewig, Caolan Madden, Emily Skillings, Jennifer Tamayo, Hanna Andrews, Krystal Languell, Kristen Aardsma  
IS: "Girl-women in a room as they figure out from each other what they know and what makes them laugh."

FROM: Dancing Girl Press & Studio

SAYS: I have a relationship with a wax artist.

AT: [www.dancinggirlpress.com](http://www.dancinggirlpress.com)

PRESENTED BY: Nate Logan

**G**IRL TALK TRIPTYCH is a peek into the lives of women, women poets, "girl-women in a room [as] they figure out from each other what they know and what makes them laugh." This play is a collaboration in every sense of the word, as Becca Klaver writes in the credits:

I took lines from the poems and assigned them to "characters," whose names were simply the names of poets acting in the play: Marisa Crawford, Becca Klaver, Lily Ladewig, Caolan Madden, Emily Skillings, and Jennifer Tamayo. The play also contained dialogue from Hanna Andrews and Krystal Languell [...] and Kristen Aardsma, who was visiting during the holiday party depicted in the play. Sometimes someone got her own "original" line, but just as often I mixed it up, inspired by a sense of collective speech. Next, Caolan added the stage directions, also inspired by real life.

An audience seeing this play performed may not have this enlightening information that's provided in the credits, but I don't think they would need it. All three acts of the play occur in ordinary situations: talking on the phone, attending a holiday party, and going to the movies. And each act elicits some hearty laughter. For example, in "Girl Talk I:"

*Marisa:* "My body is healthy as a cock."

*Becca (looking up from Leaves of Grass):* —Walt Whitman.

*Caolan:* It sounded like something he would say.

*Becca:* The collective (g)irl unconscious?

*Emily, JT, and Lily pick up their phones and plug in to the collective (g)irl unconscious.*

In "Girl Talk II:"

*JT (time sitting down, more serious):* All famous men cheat on their wives.

*Everyone else (head nod):* Mmmmh-hmmm!

*Becca:* Obama?

*Emily, JT, Lily:* Nooooo! (now howling in protest) Moooooo!

*Caolan:* Obama ... or ... Jay-Z?

*Emily, JT, Lily (shaking heads furiously):* Not Obama.

And in "Girl Talk III" while watching *The Great Gatsby*:

*Emily (eating popcorn):* I want a 70s French-lady bush.

*All except Emily, including audience plants:* Shhhhhhhhhhh.

*Emily (eating):* I have a relationship with a wax artist.

*All except Emily:* SHHHHHHHHHH!

*Emily (eating):* I had a weird experience ... as a woman.

*The other (G)IRLs murmur, nod, or shrug.*

Really, it's a delight to be in this world, to be privy to how these women interact with each other. It's easy to believe that these characters are friends; there's no hindrance to being caught up in this collective (g)irl unconscious.

Being so engaged with these characters, even in a small amount of space, makes me wonder about what the male equivalent of this play would be and how it would automatically be inferior. Taking these same scenarios, I imagine "Guy Talk I" would be a less than five minute phone conversation about planning to see a baseball game, "Guy Talk II" would be a lame holiday office party, and "Guy Talk III" would be silently sitting in a movie theater as Roland Emmerich's *Godzilla* played.

*Girl Talk Triptych* is a smart and witty slice of life that most people (sorry, bros) will love; I can't wait for what (G)IRL produces next.



Sonia Delaunay, 'Simultaneous Dresses (The three women)', 1925

I USED TO THINK splits were what budding mathcore bands released with post-rock label-mates to mooch off an established fan-base. Fifty-fifty crap-to-crud. Have I ever been so wrong?

The Lettered Streets Press introduced its Split Series in February 2014. Two books in a package singular. Reads one way one way and another flipped upside-down. At estimation, a clever idea bound to shift brows at the AWP book fair. In flesh, though, these gems offer much more.

*Split Vol. 3* boasts thirty-plus pages of poetry, *The Romances* by Lo Kwa Mei-en, alongside seven short stories in Megan Giddings's book *The Most Dangerous Game*. Riff for lick, the separate works both stray and overlap. There's definitely enough to draw an arrow to and from, but the split glows best with emphasis on the distinct two.

Giddings has an eye for quick arcs. Every story whispers a full narrative, while the bundle hits its pyramid peak as a unit. Three boyfriend-stories act as the collection's skeleton: first, last, and one in the middle. Each piece hints an outcome only to swerve past it. Take "The Wheel," with the premise that the speaker's boyfriend treats love like an actual gameshow:

He says none of [my] ideas are feasible and reminds me: we can't all be winners. He makes a womp womp noise and leaves me to pay for the meal. I do it, vow never to see him again, and call him the next morning. On the sixth date, he takes me to his house and shows me the enormous obstacle course in his backyard. I run across a pond while my boyfriend throws tomatoes at me.

This brand of dream-like miniature makes for successful sketch comedy. Bizarre but bare-all. Painfully and obviously there. Skirts the no-duh factor, though; fulfills fantasy when he refuses to go down on the speaker (unless she answers trivia questions). Real life toll-troll. They break up. She says, "Sex with him isn't worth knowing the capital of Connecticut." The speaker's showcase prize is the story to tell.

Giddings keeps with this tone, travelling different paths in it. Giddings writes what you'll want to retell, but you'll fall short. Few besides Giddings has the gift these need. There's the ghost who quits haunting, gets way into Top Chef. The one with witches obsessing over Bowie. The story wherein the speaker comes face to face with her very self, who's cooking and cleaning her house – vibe reminiscent of 2014 Netflix sweetheart *The One I Love*. And that's just it, the stories in *The Most Dangerous Game* mesh fresh with familiar.

Lo Kwa Mei-en's *The Romances* utilizes this tip-of-the-tongue vagueness as well, though not in the same way. She empties the toolbox in this collection to sonically and spatially show the process. Mei-en pairs action with identifiable concept: "The envelopes hush[.]" She pits images against expectation: "[T]he seven scenes..." or "A garter and snake." She's reclaimed the poet's sleight-of-hand sold with a wink. This is wordplay wildly free, and it sneaks its sheen into somber moments.

Take this from "Flick in which the Romance Chokes on Its Tail," one of many flicks featured:



"Hell / -bent is our backwards for you is hot allowed / up there you are, where, does the was take a bite // out of is to tame it? All we have then is overbite / as—fuck, all my heart broke my back."

Mei-en twists language planes here back and forth. Much to mess with. "All we have then is over—" —pause— "-bite." You get an "as-fuck" ticker next to a "fuck-all" nod. I won't bore with the broken-heart, broken-back variations or linger on the fact this excerpt recalls phrases and images from far earlier verse. Plus the piece concludes; the method moves toward an end.

*The Romances* leans on forms till they bow: the tercet, the wacky list, the sonnet. "Romance with Blackout" defies its form at first glance, features in-line spaces blurring the sestina into the blank page behind. Goes without saying the piece seemingly blackouts once or twice. Assembled out of array. Packaged confetti. Controlled fall.

Like Giddings's fiction, Mei-en's poetry revolves thematically around love and bodies, the actions and illustrations of relationships. The collection is not light-hearted. The work does much with modest page count. It's a quick read but not easy. If not for their formal familiarities, the pieces might flail off, untethered. But restraint meets open flow—a testament to the writer's strength.

Here's Lettered Streets' third volume in the series. What keeps the split-shtick serious? Darn talented writers. Clean page-design. On-point cover art that ties titles together. Call me cuddly, but the size and weight feel good, too. Paper has the thrift store t-shirt rub.

Vol. 3 taps into that right-beneath-the-hardwood peculiarity. Peel back the brown butcher paper. Raw writing that subverts rule and regulation. These authors bring a household weirdness to form. Nothing way off except everything flirts with absurd. A shape of pasta you've never boiled before. A text from an odd number. The joy when Spotify Discover nails it and gifts you from nowhere a new anthem to tell your friends about.



# IN BETWEEN WITH AMELIA GRAY

## A CONVERSATION

**GENE KWAK:** Can you talk about how you felt right after you turned in *Isadora*? Relief? Doubt? What's your favorite part of the process between the final draft and the final product in stores? Seeing it in galley form? Reading reviews? Doing tours?

**AMELIA GRAY:** I felt some relief—drafts are always different, but I'd been through the manuscript so many times that I was finally getting to the place where the problems were getting addressed, things were looking good at the paragraph level and line level and word level. The copy editors and I had to get bunk beds because of the things I did in this one. There was a lot to do. It's hard to pick a favorite part of the process and honestly I feel very lucky and grateful throughout in a way that makes me pretty heavily earnest. Opening the big box of galleys might be my favorite part. I kind of hold my breath until then.

**GENE KWAK:** Can you give us three sentences that might be a summation of what *Isadora* is about? One real and two fake.

**AG:** It's a prurient tale of a woman who can't contain her bodily fluids and so spreads them all over Europe. It's a series of descriptions of a single car accident repeated endlessly within the torture chamber of the mind. It's a deeply personal tale of a man who spends five months staring at an oil painting!

**MIKE YOUNG:** Now that the book's been out for a few months, what's been the most surprising part of its reception? Have you heard from fans/scholars/family of the "real" Isadora Duncan in ways that have surprised you or touched you or spooked you?

**AG:** I've seen an impulse among the *Isadora* fans, and I think it's a recognizable and understandable impulse, to think of their hero only in terms of her greatest hits. For *Isadora* that would be her work and her writing over the details of her life.

I mean, I heard one *Isadora* studio instructor grumble that modern interpretations tried to cast *Isadora* as a lesbian, a claim the instructor was annoyed about despite the consistently documented accounts of same. And of course that very fact would make her hero to others, though they might prefer to ignore how she's on the record saying that jazz rhythm is savagery.

Taking anyone as a hero tends to flatten them into their most heroic qualities—or maybe in the case of that grumbling instructor, their most personally identifiable qualities. She was never a hero of mine, which helped depersonalize my experience with her, or rather personalize it in a different way.

But back to your question, I've had some positive response from



**A**MELIA GRAY'S work is about as diverse as it gets. Who else writes weird fabulism and gritty realism and psychopomp Japanese fugues and *Mr. Robot* fanfic turned pilot season pick-up with the same deftness?

Nobody, that's who. I made up those last two just to prove a point. Because you believed it's possible. Which makes it possible. Amelia can do

everything better than most of us can do one thing decent.

In June 2017, FSG published her fifth book, *Isadora*, a kaleidoscopic plunge into the life and grief of dancer Isadora Duncan, mixing together monologues in Duncan's voice with hovering looks at the friends and family suffering along with her. Among many raves, Margo Orlando Littell of the *Manhattan Book Review* declared *Isadora* "a moving exploration of the way sadness threads through a life, stitching it into new forms and figures as strange as they are resilient."

Gray is also the author of *Museum of the Weird*, *AM/PM*—a flash collection about "the lives of 23 characters across 120 stories full of lizard tails, Schrödinger boxes, and volcano love"—and *Threats*, which was said by NPR to give "that prickly feeling that runs up your spine when writing is so hauntingly grim that a ghost may have written it." Finally, there's *Gutshot*, which the *New York Times* called "a bizarre and darkly funny world made of molten sugar and the ashes of everything [Gray] has set alight."

the experts. Lori Belilove, who heads up the *Isadora* Duncan Dance Foundation, wrote to say that she was pleased to find the book presented new perspectives to her. Many of today's *Isadora* Duncan dancers consider themselves second or third generation in terms of instruction; Lori for example was taught by Anna and Irma Duncan, two of the six women who *Isadora* adopted as children, the "Isadorables." I'm still waiting to hear from the Singers, though. Also, I spent so much time with Peter Kurth's book that I'd be curious to know what he thought.

**MY:** In *Isadora*, a few characters (*Isadora* and her sister Elizabeth the most, I think) will be thinking for a paragraph or so and then end their thinking out loud, in a burst of dialogue that comes across as a non-sequitur to whomever they're with. So much of the book seems to involve experiencing severe feelings in secret, yet the feelings are so strong they leak out. This last-line-of-internal-monologue-out-loud move gets at that leak so elegantly. Was this a trick you already knew, or did you come into it in this book for the first time? Were there any "moves" you feel like you "discovered" in this writing process?

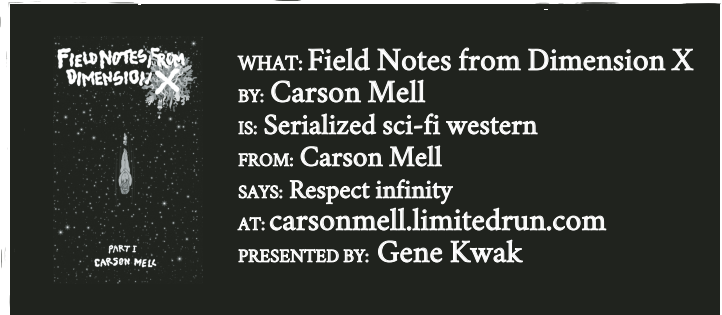




**E**ASY AS TRACING the Big Dipper is connecting the dots from space odyssey to Western. The metaphors are so known. Frontiers. Renegade pilots pulling cowboy moves. A reason I didn't dig the quickly aborted, cult classic TV show *Firefly* was because the nods were too heavy. They rode horses. Dressed in western wear. In a world where space travel was common as a cold. A hack move is just placing a flag upon the build. Easy nostalgia. Remember the Clint squint. Lipped solo cig. See, they say, this is that but in the face of a grave alien. But no, no, *Field Notes from Dimension X* is something else. This is a space case written by a true blue westerner. Might as well have a tattoo runs across his whole torso of the Rio Grande. Might as well go by Pecos Bill, Jr.

Carson Mell's first novel, *Saguaro*, touted a fictional folk singer, Bobby Bird, who was wild as a young Johnny Cash high as a kite eating a birthday cake in a bush. His second novel, *The Blue Bourbon Orchestra*, laid out the capers and labor of an alcoholic guitarist and a fading alt-country band. Mell is originally from Arizona and he sings in a country band called Cas'l. His latest serialized novel is called *Field Notes From Dimension X*, which you can buy direct from the source. It's a space epic penned by someone who probably shouldn't be writing a space epic, but that's precisely why it goes. Why run the metaphor machine ragged when you already grease the wheels? Zero effort is what I'm saying. Honest is what I'm saying.

Currently three volumes of *Field Notes* are available. In the first, we meet Fred Thunderbird Rogard, a half-Hopi, Harvard-educated NASA astronaut. Rogard is married to Maria, the love of his life. He gets accepted at NASA and is part of a preliminary quartet



**WHAT:** *Field Notes from Dimension X*

**BY:** Carson Mell

**IS:** Serialized sci-fi western

**FROM:** Carson Mell

**SAYS:** Respect infinity

**AT:** [carsonmell.limitedrun.com](http://carsonmell.limitedrun.com)

**PRESENTED BY:** Gene Kwak

that is being poked and prodded so the best of the set can take the single-person spaceship, Uniorbiter, to flight. Rogard's biggest threat is Conor Thomas (Air Force; Yale). But in his corner is a grizzled vet, Captain Grant Ready, who never made it into space and so he waves the flag for the underdog.

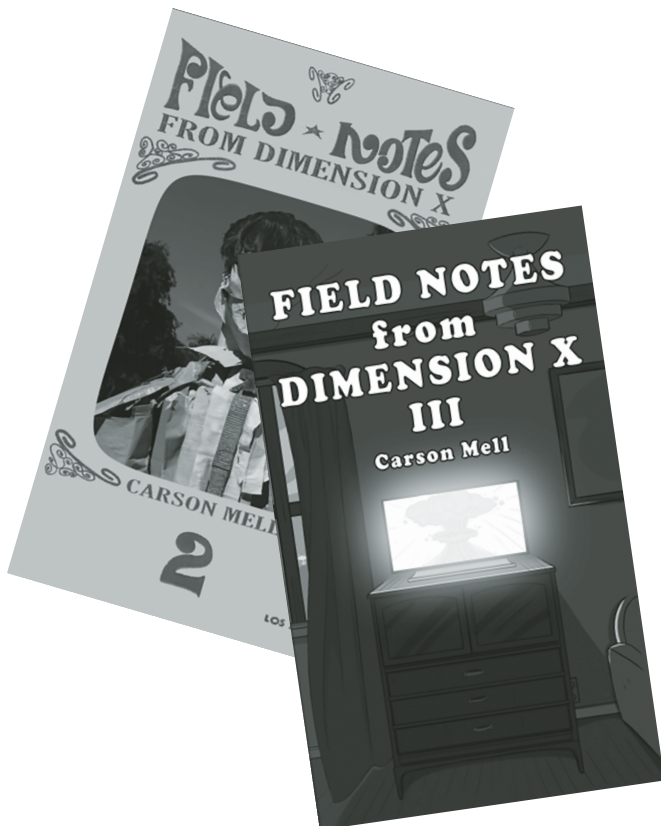
Ready acts as a guide to Rogard in "this white-ass rich man's world." He asks Rogard to move into his basement. Ready has Rogard walk figure eights into the grass to "respect infinity." Ready punches Rogard in the stomach. Gives him late night reflex tests.

The novel cuts between Rogard existing in Dimension X, already having made it into space and getting saved from his crashed spacecraft by a glowing, mushroom creature that he names Zathurian, and giving tidbits of backstory before his life zooming around the multiverse on the whim of the crystal-packing 'shroom. The whizzing around era Rogard refers to as the Kaleidoscopic Years, which he gauges ran from between five to ten years.

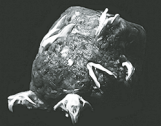
Finally, he's dropped on a planet with people who "came and went carrying baskets of exotic fruits, nets of bloody meat busy with flies, clay pots overflowing with honey." Turns out he's traveled in time and space back to ancient South America and he's pitted in a fight to the death against a fellow NASA test subject sent back earlier. But it's no human Rogard is squaring up against: it's a chimp named Peanut Butter. *Field Notes from Dimension X #1* is just the first take of Fred Rogard's big-hatted adventure. Only think more air-tight astronaut lid rather than ten-gallon cowboy bucket.

No secret **NOO** favors the DIY and independent presses. It's one of the reasons we offer this rag free in print and online. Nothing more DIY than Mell putting out these books with his own change.

The thing of it is, Mell is wildly successful in his own right. He's written and directed a horror movie, *Another Evil*, which has shown at SXSW and the Seattle International Film Festival. He also has credits writing for *Eastbound & Down* and *Silicon Valley*. But to his own admission, when he wanted to publish his first novel, no one bit. Came novel number two, more of the same. Line bobbing, all slack. So he released those both himself (although *Electric Literature* later digitally re-released *Saguaro*), and this time he's going full single player. He's slinging them himself on his own website. Nothing more DIY than that. Some would say renegade. Cowboy. Trying to carve his own space.



# POTTED MEAT a novel by STEVEN DUNN



**WHAT:** Potted Meat  
**BY:** Steven Dunn  
**IS:** Gut punch of a debut novel  
**FROM:** Tarpaulin Sky  
**SAYS:** The slivers of space between shivers are warm  
**AT:** tarpaulinsky.com  
**PRESENTED BY:** Mike Young

**T**HERE'S A REASON the word escape leaves you holding a cape. How the word came into being was for how someone got away: by slipping their collar and leaving you with only their cape, their cloak, their huddle against the dark. The rest of them was the body underneath, braving now on its own.

In *Potted Meat*, Steven Dunn's gut twist of a debut novel, an African-American boy grows up in a poor coal town. He tells you how he and his sister have to go out in the snow without a jacket as punishment when they fall asleep in front of the family movie. Outside, they drink moonshine and make a snowman. "The slivers of space between shivers are warm," he says. "I want to gather them in my hands like sewing pins and give them to her."

He tells you how he imagines drawing a face on an Etch-a-Sketch when his stepdad hits him with an extension cord. He tells you about how Bob Ross has paint, but he doesn't, so he chews dandelions, red clay, wild onions, lightning bugs. There's a lot of paste in the mouth. Goo and juice and shit and puke and jelly and sludge. A lot of ways to get stuck, get covered.

In this neighborhood, kids spray turpentine on their shoes to keep the snakes away. Houses look like the Hatfield and McCoy

museum but dustier. There are half-eaten Barbie heads and big velvet pictures of Jesus. But at the house of the narrator's aunt, he and his sister are off the hook for running up the phone bill on calls to the Care Bears hotline. In the woods, he and Chrissy Ann rub mushrooms on their cheeks. In between everything, he practices to be a ninja and a "fucking architect." With a "waterfall in the foyer." Leave them all hollering and holding his cape. "I bet you I'm gonna be an architect, goddamnit."

Of course, Dunn himself is already an architect. *Potted Meat's* three sections are organized like the instructions on a can: 1) lift tab, 2) peel back, 3) enjoy contents. There is anger and irony and frank sorrow. There is a way of talking so true that, in a review of *Potted Meat* for *DIAGRAM*, Dana Green quotes Dunn quoting his cousin: "I didn't know I talked like that until I read myself talking, and I'm like, 'Damn, That's exactly how I talk.'"

Dunn's wise collaging never condescends to his talkers, especially his young narrator, or fluffs the brutality of the surroundings, the size of feelings. But Dunn also thwarts any gawk for rubble porn. Any gaze coming to *Potted Meat* for that kind of thing is also going to meet a young man exploring his body, making up songs with his friends, wishing he could rescue his sister even more than himself, watching his grandmother both lose her memory and solve Wheel of Fortune faster than any dummy on the TV.

Two of the novel's vignettes linger the most for me: when the narrator discovers his uncle's old records in a closet and Gil-Scot Heron sings: "Home is filled with pain / and it might not be such a bad idea / if I never went home again." And then when a bat gets into the living room and the stepdad says, "Yall know the drill, get ya weapons and I'll hit the lights." Everybody has their particular tool and their particular swing in rare alignment. They burn the bat together in the street, one family glowing in the dark.

**H**OW DO WE CARRY history? Why do our bodies so often feel like traitors? These are a few of the questions troubling the poems in Amish Trivedi's debut collection, *Sound/Chest*, but they're not quite afraid: "Trouble is the only word / I can type with arrhythmia." Concerned with how language "festers" through all the fickleness of embodiment, Trivedi thinks about how our records outlast us, the terror of memorization, and the relief that arrives when you quit believing and wait for nothing.

In "After / Word," Trivedi describes the book's genesis. Each poem is titled after a label found in a discarded card catalog. All with two slash-broken words and a number: "Factory/Shadow 1725," "Phoenix/Toward 1694," etc. Trivedi set out to create a relationship between words and numbers: "The card catalog intrigues me with its ability to be fascinating and useless at the same time."

In many ways, the poems are charged with the emotional implications of that idea: the high of collection fascination, the low of understanding everything's ultimate ephemerality. No wonder that many of the poems ruminate on a "you"—usually missed gazes, miscues, fuck-ups. There is a muttering sadness throughout, an exploration of relations during and after the "terror of knowing / no dream will come."

Time is "lean" in these poems. Salt is everywhere, but especially on shoulders. Abstractions get pretty goth: "change" gathers ashes, and "distance is waste." A suspicion pervades of both words ("Words

**WHAT:** Sound/Chest  
**BY:** Amish Trivedi  
**IS:** Doom metal in the library basement  
**FROM:** Annual Books / Coven Press  
**SAYS:** I am / the denial I wish to be in / the world  
**AT:** covenpress.com  
**PRESENTED BY:** Mike Young



we've never heard / are holding us back") and the rude physical sensations that emerge among the clutter of word life: "Why is the letter opener so cold?" Body wreck—atrophy and anemia and jaundice—glooms "I" after "I," and just beyond everything, there is often some kind of "damaged water" creeping in.

But late in the book, one poem declares: "I am / the denial I wish to be in / the world." And this, ultimately, seems like *Sound/Chest's* discovery against its anxiety: a rejection of time, a rejection of marks, noticing the flicker of the light and questioning "power generation." In between all those slashes, Trivedi finds a dismissal wise to history's massacres. Like doom metal in the basement of a library, these poems scream the words back to themselves, trading in the suffocation of information for the resistance of noise.



# IN BETWEEN WITH AWST PRESS

## A CONVERSATION

## LIZ BLOOD & TATIANA RYCKMAN



**A**wst is Welsh for “August,” the month that Awst Press was formed in 2014. They don’t care how you say it, so long as you’re saying it. (Which, come to think of it, is how we feel about NOÖ).

Awst is an independent literary publisher located in Austin, TX. They put out handcrafted chapbooks, full-lengths, and an annual online essay series, all of which

seeks to showcase diverse voices and fulfill their vision of inclusivity and community. As they explain on their website:

Awst endeavors to support authors through each project and beyond by increasing their respective audiences, playing an active role in the editorial and publishing process of all projects, promoting their activities well past their publication ...

They’ve been one of our favorite presses for a while now, and we’re excited for Wendy M. Walker and their team to keep roaring into their future with their uniquely interconnected and community-minded catalog.

Recent releases include Donald Quists’s *Harbors*, a 2016 Foreword INDIES Bronze winner, and Vida Cross’s *Bronzeville at Night: 1949*, Awst’s first foray into poetry.

As they get ready for their next release—a novel from Micheline Aharonian Marcom—we’re jazzed to present a conversation with editors Liz Blood and Tatiana Ryckman, conducted a little while ago by Carrie Lorig and Nick Sturm. Peek behind a curtain so fine you could even call it august.

**NOÖ:** How is running a press or being involved in a press is devotional act? How does it differ from rituals of reading and writing?

**TATIANA RYCKMAN:** I love the idea of reading and writing as rituals. That seems more peaceful than the way I view those activities. I find it easier to write with delusions of grandeur, or the expectation of reciprocity—either from an audience or the writing itself. I am often asking something of my writing, I want it to help me understand the world and on a good day, to help the world understand itself. Reading often feels like research to me, like gathering, or like being a kleptomaniac. I wonder what knowledge others have that I could steal for myself. Sometimes that knowledge is a statistic, other times it’s a magical turn of phrase, but I hoard them all together on a brain shelf for future examination.

Being an editor is different, because I’m using some of my uglier tendencies on someone else’s behalf, and I think *that’s* devotion. Putting yourself at the service of something with the belief that it can be larger than you.

**LIZ BLOOD:** It’s a devotional act in the sense you are performing an act of faith—that what you’re publishing is worthwhile—necessary, even—and that people will read it. Reading and writing are largely for personal gain, and publishing is an attempt to help others gain.

**NOÖ:** What could be added to the current conversation around small presses? What layer would you like to see move around in the light or grow a new layer?

**TR:** Small presses are often run by enthusiastic writers who are, perhaps, not as enthusiastic about marketing and book-keeping or even *copy editing*. The process of creating a *real book* from a manuscript that excites you makes it easy to believe that everyone will want to buy said book, but that isn’t necessarily true. And the work doesn’t stop when the box of books arrives, it just gets more boring.

We have to start talking about how to sell books to other people (by which I mean, people who don’t also run small presses and write and hope that you will read their submission generously because they bought a book from you at a press fair). Every semester during my MFA there was a panel about “Life after the MFA” in which faculty talked about how there are no jobs and students were basically fucked unless they came up with creative alternatives to teaching. Small presses need to have a “Life after Publication” conversation.

It’s unromantic, but presses are businesses, and businesses don’t run on good vibes. Just as writers can’t pay their rent in great novel ideas. I like to think that small presses can work together to find new ways of selling books, because selling books is *literally* our job.

**LB:** Ditto, Tatiana!

**NOÖ:** Could you speak a bit about the other people working with you at Awst and how you all work together and from varying distances? What are your relationships to each other and how have they changed / grown / where are they going?

**LB:** Half of Awst Press’s editors, contributors, and the publisher live in or near Austin, TX, but there are a few of us who live elsewhere. I’m in Oklahoma, contributing editor P.E. Garcia is in Philadelphia, and our art director, LK James, is now in Portland. Tatiana is a vagabond. One of the advantages of this is that we can attend different conferences and literary events all over the country as

representatives of Awst. Another is that we're meeting authors in our respective communities and can bring them on at the press, increasing the geographical diversity of who we publish. As for our relationships? Tatiana is my eternal platonic lover, and the rest of Awst is our wedding party.

**TR:** The Awst staff is ... amazing. I am obviously biased, but I'm also a pretty harsh critic and I struggle to imagine a better crew. I think it's so great in part because the staff is not all writers. But it is a team of creative people who love books and want them to be beautiful (LK James), or perfect (Emily Roberts), or read by everyone (Wendy Walker) or viscerally affecting (myself), or understood (Liz Blood), or accessible (P.E. Garcia). We each approach those objectives individually, while keeping Awst's mission in mind: diversity (of background, class, race, gender, education, style, ideas, perspectives, forms, etc.).

We all know each other from different circles, but coming together to make *books* is a pretty dreamy way to spend a friendship, and in many ways I think it's made my relationships with the people on staff stronger. There are few jobs in which your best friends are able to see your work so directly, so there is, at least for me, an internal pressure to do excellent work in front of the people whose opinions I care about the most.

**NOO:** How does publishing affect your own writing? How does it wound it and how do flowers grow out of puncture / interruption / permeation / surrender?

**LB:** It certainly takes away time from my own work, something I'm still learning to balance. But when I do sit down to face the page, the people we've published inspire me to try to get it right. The "wound"

bit of your question interests me. I don't know if this is what you mean by it, but I immediately recalled Robert Frost's quote: "The right reader of a good poem can tell the moment it strikes him that he has taken an immortal wound—that he will never get over it." Have we published something that beautiful? Yes, I think so. Donald Quist's book *Harbors* is one example. Our 2016 essay series is another. And every time I interview our authors (my job at the press) I'm struck by their devotion to the craft, which I think strengthens my practice. As far as flowers growing out of interruption—if there isn't space, nothing grows. Most of my career has been in lifting up the writing work of others. That closeness to writing interrupts my own, but makes me eager to get back to it, as well.

**TR:** It helps me read my own work more critically. I can better imagine myself as the editor on the receiving end of my own manuscript. One might see that as a detriment to the art of just creating, certainly Oscar Wilde would agree, but I think it holds me to a higher standard than I might naturally demand of the creative process. I probe deeper and question better.

Does it also steal time from my writing? Yes. But so does going to the bathroom, or celebrating a friend's birthday. Everything that isn't writing steals from it if you aren't paying attention. There's this common idea of maintaining work/life balance—as if they are different things. As if the hours spent toiling are not one's life. I am incredibly selfish and protective of my time, and so I try to make the time I work for others work for me.

**NOO:** Awst publishes using both an online platform and print. How do you move between and use those surfaces differently? What is the value in creating space through both?





**TR:** Walt Whitman said, “Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.” This is where, perhaps my values as an artist and writer diverge from my values as an editor... I believe everyone should have access to knowledge and information no matter their socioeconomic status, and I believe writers should be paid for their work, it is, after all, *work*. I don’t want to bar anyone from a conversation by charging a \$15 admission fee, but I want people to value the media they consume and understand that it doesn’t write itself. It comes from someone, perhaps very much like them, sitting down and making it.

Working both online and in print allows us to straddle those two ideals. The interesting thing about online versus print is that periodicals and presses often pay authors/charge readers more for print editions than web content. But the readership for what’s posted online is infinitely larger and should be the very best work in order to convince the reader to buy the print copy and sustain the publication. It’s always struck me as odd that what appears online is treated as disposable.

**LB:** We use the online platform bring attention to our authors by conducting and publishing interviews with them, publishing new and previously published works, posting excerpts of their work, acknowledging their other publishing accomplishments, and through interviews.

In print, we’ve published five chapbook series and four full-length books. Online is free, and it’s great for publicity, but print is where the money gets made to pay the authors.

**NOÖ:** You recently posted a great interview with Micheline Aharonian Marcom, discussing her book *The Brick House* as an “illuminated manuscript,” and touching on themes of environment ruin, sex, social justice, teaching, and immigrants and refugees. After everyone checks that out, what other recent projects from Awst should we be excited about?

**TR:** We were thrilled to work with the poet and Cave Canem fellow Vida Cross on her collection *Bronzville at Night: 1949*. Inspired by the Bronzville neighborhood in Chicago and the paintings of Archibald Motley, the poems illuminate intimate moments of neighborhood residents; they are affecting and poignant and scandalous, all in the right measure.

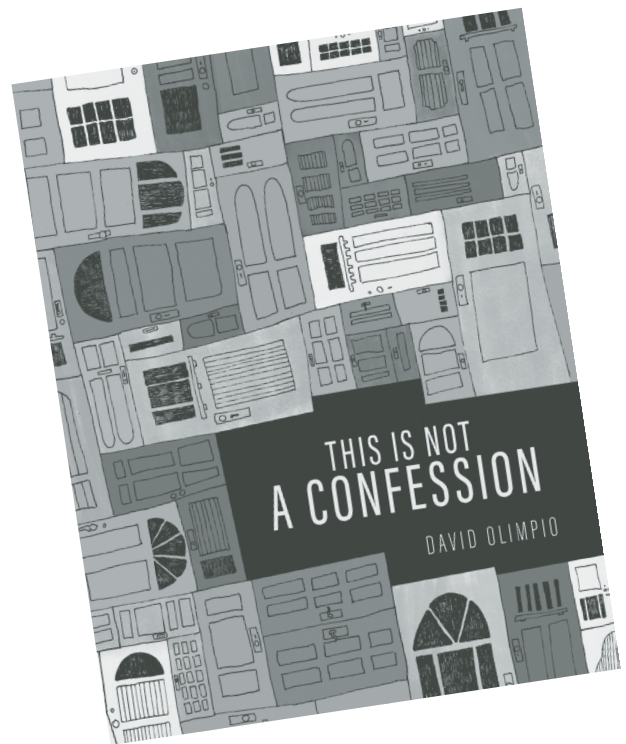
**LB:** This August brought a new essay series centered around religion, curated by Sophronia Scott and Susanna Childress. Last year’s theme was “outsiders,” and you can check out both online.

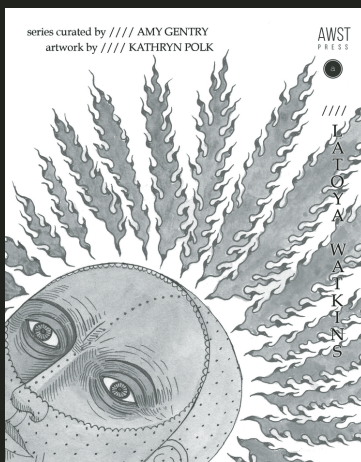
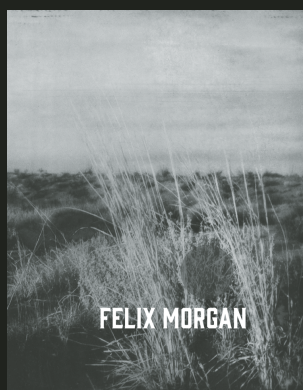
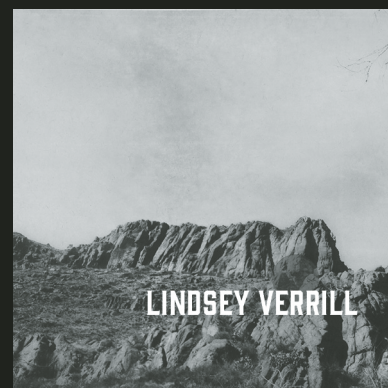
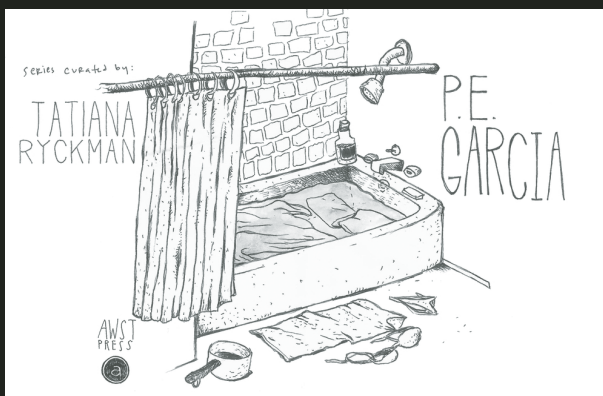
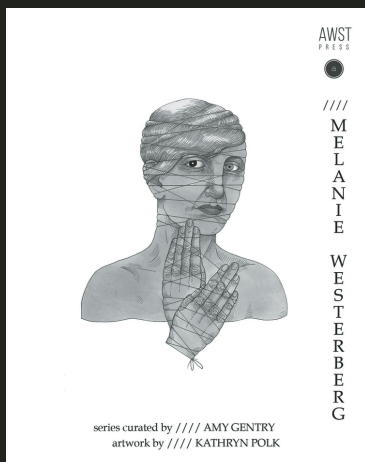
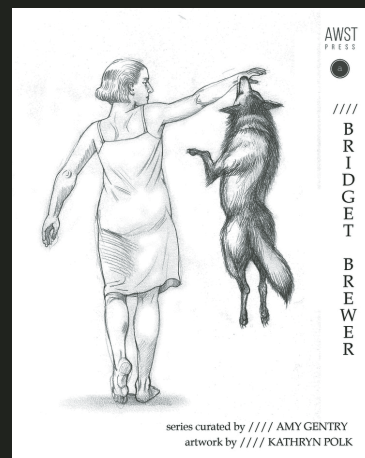
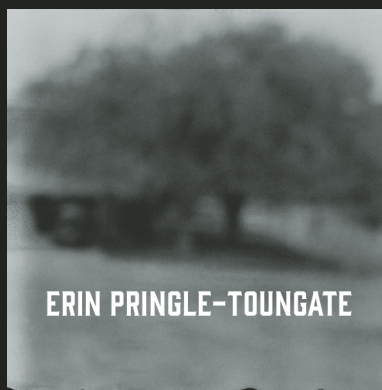
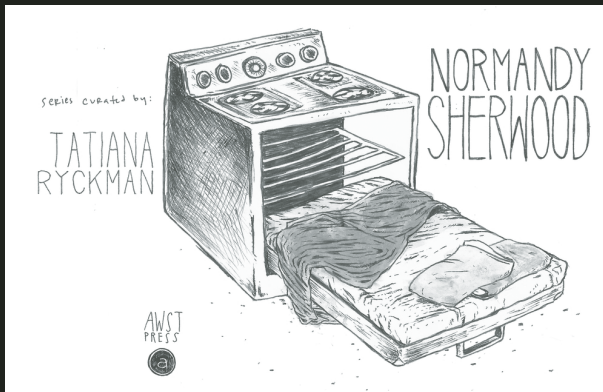
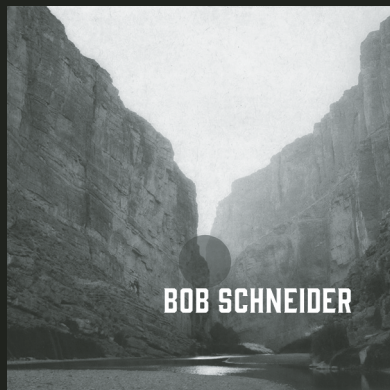
**NOÖ:** Describe a morning you woke without fear. (Thank you Bhanu Kapil’s *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*).

**LB:** “Ha ha!”

**TR:** I traveled to California for a funeral when my grandfather died. The first morning I woke up confused in the hotel room. The

sensation of being disoriented didn’t pass immediately as it often does, and the confusion lasted so long I considered it from the inside. I considered, also, the window; whose window it was, what it looked down on. I considered the wooden beam bisecting the room, and what might be on the other side. I considered the body lying next to me. She turned out to be my sister. It was like being born. And perhaps there is a fear in that, a sort of terror, but it was something small that I could observe from a distance, like the lamp beside the bed.







# NOÖBIES

## SARAH ELIANE SMITH



**S**NAILS FROM 2013 probably haven't aged well, but that's not the case with two incredible S.E. Smith poems we published way back then. What happened was that current Poetry Co-Editor Nick Sturm took a spin as a guest editor of

NOÖ [Weekly], and he showcased Smith's "OTL" and "Given the Modalities of Clock Time, We Were Like 'Fuck That.'"

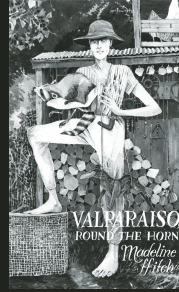
Smith's poems—you can read a great whole book of them called *I Live in a Hut*—blow bubblegum right in your face, where it explodes into "the grease that shines on everything." Like "a boy with a bag of snails hanging from the handlebar of his bicycle" or "the history of the slam-dunk." They know things big and dirty as "an era of crystals in coffee," plus things small and spreading as "the tent worm situation in the upper Midwest ... milky hammocks over whole maples up and down the interstate."

That's why we were so excited when we found out she had a new novel due that we breathlessly added an entire chapter to the history of slam-dunks. Luckily Smith corrected us with this update of her own:

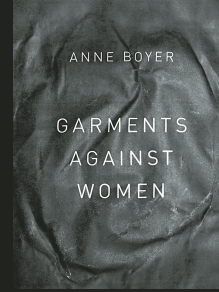
*Since 2013, I finished a fiction MFA at Iowa, moved home to Pittsburgh, and got a 9-5 job as a taxonomy analyst, which means I help train a machine-learning classifier to know the difference between juice and energy drinks (so much trickier than you would think).*



## NEW AND NEWER



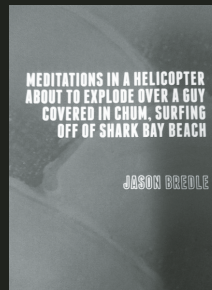
*Valparaiso,  
Round the Horn*  
Madeline ffitch



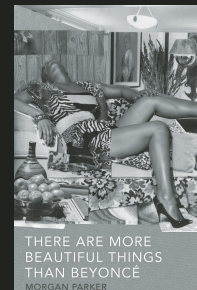
*Garments Against Women*  
Anne Boyer



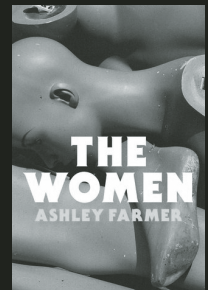
*High Life*  
Phil Estes



*Meditations in a Helicopter  
About to Explode Over a Guy  
Covered in Chum, Surfing  
Off of Shark Bay Beach*  
Jason Bredle



*There Are More Beautiful  
Things Than Beyoncé*  
Morgan Parker



*The Women*  
Ashley Farmer

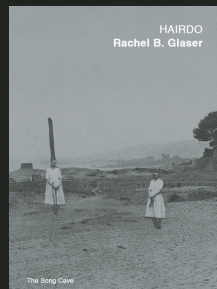
*At night I would work on my first novel, which I just sold to Sarah McGrath at Riverhead. It's called Who Will Be My Neighbor in This New World? While it starts with a teenage girl's disappearance, it spills into other territories such as alcoholism, Appalachia, goats, mistaken identity, and things like that.*

*I'm still writing poems and stories, and right now I'm most excitedly collaborating on a series of RPGs about crystals and neuroplasticity, among other things!*

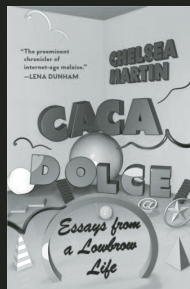
When asked to clarify, Smith confirmed she meant tabletop RPGs. If the new world has firecrackers in cookie tins and raisins soaked in a plate of brandy, it will probably still be as fucked up as this one, but we trust Smith to show us the neighborly way, the "funny faces in the dirt."

# NOÖ ALUMNI BOOKS

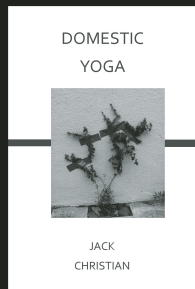
((A FEW AT LEAST / THERE ARE A LOT))



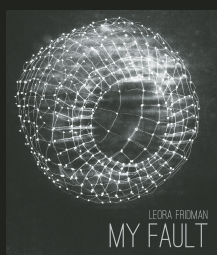
**Hairdo**  
Rachel B. Glaser



**Caca Dolce**  
Chelsea Martin



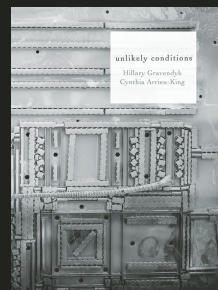
**Domestic Yoga**  
Jack Christian



**My Fault**  
Leora Fridman



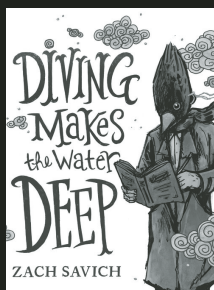
**The 8th House**  
Feng Sun Chen



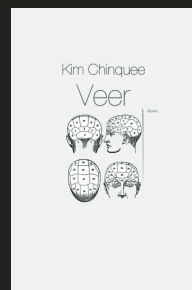
**Unlikely Conditions**  
Hillary Gravendyk  
& Cynthia Arrieu-King



**Bone Confetti**  
Muriel Leung



**Diving Makes the Water Deep**  
Zach Savich



**Veer**  
Kim Chinquee

## CHRIS CHENEY

**T**O KNOW HOW TO WIN a staring contest against prevailing doom is an important contemporary skill, and that's why we recommend the disquieting wisdom of Chris Cheney, whose two NOÖ [9] poems re-manifested in the company of many other sharpened eyelashes in *Lay Me Low*, his 2016 debut collection from 421 Atlanta.

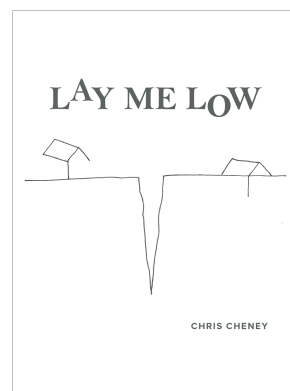
Cheney's poems are dark enough to laugh as the plane goes wobbly and soothing enough for the same occasion. That was our experience of reading the book. Another time we called Cheney's poetry "like a violin you left on the stove." Sometimes the people in Cheney's poems sit on the edges of bathtubs, beat their gloves in headlights, find seeing eye dogs by the trash.

But sometimes tour guides practice in line at the supermarket. The hiring committee sends a basket of breadfruit. The blood donation truck driver is asleep, and you're wearing Armani sunglasses like you're going through a divorce, asking the person burying you not to give a fuck, telling them to "abandon the love that has been so good for you."

What's Cheney up to these days? Besides co-authoring *I Cry: The Desire to be Rejected* with quasar Amy Lawless, or teaching social justice classes at the Brooklyn Bridge Academy? We asked him:

*You can find me on chess.com as the Swamp\_King, strictly 10 minute blitz. I contribute to such twitter projects as Cannifa, Cannifas\_ Army, Save King Cannifa (cannifa2015slw), and Coy\_Doyle\_. I like phone calls and text messages: 413-668-6029. I'm fine with telemarketers and spam. I was the former head coach of a varsity basketball team in the PSAL basketball league but after a 3-15 season, I have been moved to a consultant position.*

We have no idea what went wrong in those 3 wins, but we can picture the 15 losses perfectly: the bouncer's other son huddling everyone together, ignoring the cello music booming through the arena, reading them a poem that ends: "If they ask you to play into the night, you play."







# THE GAGMEN

Andrew Rhodes

IT WAS A MIDNIGHT of impossible odds. One-in-ten or one-in-a-million. The Gagmen were live at The Nightingale, and I was there to witness. They played the song “If We Just Let People Fall Apart It Would Be So Much Easier.” That had been my favorite song for so long I had memory damage. And the thing about a live Gagmen show is you never know what kind of covers they’ll pull out. Variety is favored. Anything. I’m talking Seventh Symphony to “Ain’t No Cure for Love.” Buddy of mine saw them play “Hit Liquor” at a date in Columbus. That’s music for an expanding world, boy.

When they’re in the groove, The Gagmen make use of their whole bodies. The bass player has suction cups on his shoes so he can walk up walls. They angrily push each other around the stage. Is it real or an act? I say it’s real. The music starts and the sound covers you. Sometimes they stop a song seconds in because emotionally it requires too much of them. The singer, Mulf, will claim they will never play that song again. Every member of The Gagmen is at least two nationalities, dual citizenship. The drummer is Korean and French. Their album *Culture is Just a Thought in Your Mind* had me at the first note. It’s a single G# played on a Rhodes.

One night, during a show in Iceland, Mulf thought he saw a ghost and began screaming for the phantom to reveal its true nature. “What do you represent?” he yelled. The rest of the band didn’t understand. Immediately after the Iceland show they disbanded, and Mulf, so the story goes, spent two years in seclusion. Without touching a musical instrument, using only his boots to stamp a beat on the wood floor of his cabin, Mulf wrote nearly all of the songs that would show up on subsequent albums: *A Spaniard Who Never Learned My Name* (2004), *Humans Arise out of Nature Just Like Plants* (2005), and *High & Drunk in a Sexist Decade* (2007).

But at The Nightingale they were on their game, performing tunes for every level of thought. And seeing them, pulling covers from everywhere and nowhere, I was inspired to create my own stuff. Though I was tinkering in a different art form—I wanted to be a writer of fiction—the creative spirit they endowed penetrated cotton and canvas, paper and page. I would write of underwater plantlife, the dying economy, displaced egos, industrial farming, academic trafficking, mortified old women. Name it. Just like The Gagmen, I’d pulse the world’s pulpit. Thus inspired, I’d invent a wet and holy suffering.

Wrapped in all of this sound, spinning through the sad people, was me. This was my show. This sound was the drug that would birth me from the shadows. And then I saw him. Fucking Huntz. That dopey fuck. And get this: he was behind the merchandise desk, selling Gagmen t-shirts and records. Was he their friend?

A little background on Huntz. A writing-school peer, he took a year off to soul-search while I stayed back trying to save some coin. He quit sending post cards after Oslo or Granada or somewhere. The time away must have done him right, because word on the street was that Huntz was about to publish two books. A nonfiction book about jazz and a novel about a series of unsolved murders. Well here he was, invading my space, my creative zone, a barrier between me and the magic of The Gagmen. He was bobbing his head in front of a wall of Gagmen posters, drinking a beer with a slice of lime. He saw me and waved. Pointed outside, so outside we went.

He hugged me and said, “Hey, buddy. Long time. What did you think of that ‘Funky Cold Medina?’”

I looked at him, incredulous. “The truth? I cried. My heart exploded.”

"That was my idea. Mulf asked what song they should cover. Ha."

He was saying something else, his hand on my shoulder, but I lost him, his goatee, his smug notions of suffering and jazz. I wanted him dead. I could have punched him in the nose, the throat, the crotch, under the armpits, and on the top of his head.

A number of people had come outside to swap cigarettes and take selfies. They were talking about the gig. I heard one voice say, "It's a demented Three Stooges sketch infected by high art. Beautifully vaudevillian." Huntz started hamming it up with fans.

"Hey, it's the merch guy!" they said.

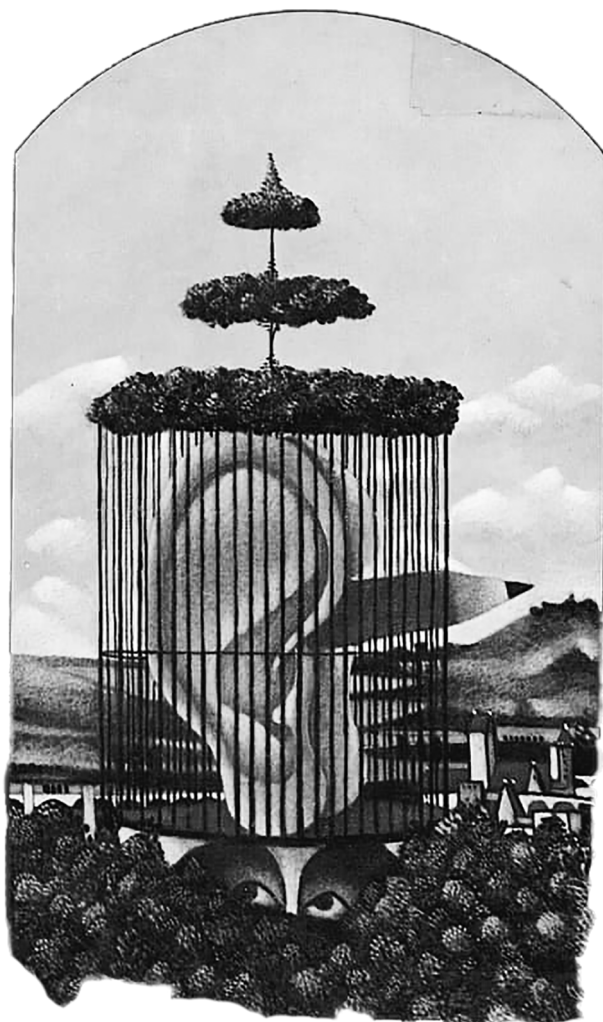
They all crowded around, wanting to know what he knew. Were the rumors true? Was the band going to play from the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa? Was it Mulf who sketched the schematics to the perpetual motion machine in the live album liner notes? I felt God's hand over my windpipe, cutting off my breath. There I was, losing the source of all life to the muffled soundtrack of the most moving music in the universe. It was an abomination. I had to take a seat on the curb.

Eventually The Gagmen stopped the show. Probably by pummeling one another into their full-stacks until they shorted. The night was well over for me. I was close to dead. Despite this, I stuck around long enough to see Mulf come outside. He embraced Huntz and thanked him for all the vinyl he'd sold. Then he looked at his fans, a mob blocking traffic and taking pictures. He stood proud and still, wearing an unbuttoned leather vest with no undershirt.

Finally he spoke up. "People. All of you. Listen and hear this." The people went quiet. "It has come to my attention that recently the elements of life—earth, air, water, and the fires of the sun—all came together tonight to create a miracle. That's right. A miracle. And this miracle I now hold in my pocket."

The crowd looked at one another. It was too much. They began jumping up and down in anticipation, ripping at one another's limbs to get a little closer.

Mulf removed the thing from his pocket and held it up like a priest at consecration. It was a lime. Sure, it was just a prop he had grabbed from the bar on his way out the door, but I couldn't take my eyes off it. I was just like the rest of them, watching the legend become flesh. He held the lime over his head, grunted, and squeezed it to explode the juices. The liquid ran down his arms, dripped onto his face and his bare chest. Swear to you for a glimpse I saw, like an x-ray, his heart beating. This, the only story I know to tell.



Kurt A. Vargo for the first US edition of *The Lime Works* by Thomas Bernhard (Knopf, 1973).







# WESTERN

Michael Credico

**N**O GOOD WESTERN begins with Indiana. Never mind how American it is: me, the Eldorado, and me having stolen the Eldorado from a One Stop in Fort Wayne. It is my desire to kick the Heartland in me, to become the type who'd shoot another man for his wants. That I could never shoot another man's the truth. It's why I waited for an empty vehicle left running; done under the cover of dark.

Call it getting blacked-out on the road that splits in half the corn or not knowing when to stop. I couldn't stop until we did. We head-on a buck in Cairo, Illinois. I'm beside the body, unable to leave its side, though I'm on the lam. I mistake a Taurus for an interceptor. The driver offers a knife. "At least you've earned the head," the driver says. "And if you've a wall at home or a mantle."

I saw through bone with my eyes shut thinking of the horror of a body down forever. Where do you go from here when this is far as you can get?

The driver says, "Just you?"

"Us," I say. "Just us boys on the road in America," meaning also the infant. The infant's upended, pressed against the cracked windshield of the Eldorado. I didn't check on it after the head-on. I went to the other body, set myself beside it, and waited.

I could have run.

I'd thought about running when I'd discovered the infant in the back seat while searching for things I could

sell for gas. This had been before Cairo, before Illinois. I'd told the infant, "Coochie coo." I'd sold a steer's skull for a quarter tank. Some pa I'd make. And I'd told the infant, "Some pa your pa must be."

"My father was a drover," the infant had told back.

I was different than that, having had to admit I didn't know where we were going.

The infant had said, "Going's all we're after anyhow."

My whole life I've felt like I was after. Before all this and still.

The infant isn't moving. The driver presses its chest for pulses and breaths.

Some men we are, trying to figure what's alive and what's not.

The driver weeps, "It's the wrong way things should be."

I suggest we're under the confluence of the rivers, is all. I'm on my hands and my knees in the backseat of the Eldorado digging around for worth. The driver's boots are expensive looking, I notice. I ask, "What's the point of spurs in landscapes such as this?"

The infant's hanging stiff from the weeping driver's fist like a prized kill. The driver says, "Is that all?"

What else is there? is the question I'm worrying over again.

"No," I plead for us both to believe. "There is the road."



Kyle Peets

HAZARD UNIQUE to Venezuelan highways is a goo called La Mancha, the

**A** HAZARD UNIQUE to Venezuelan highways is a goo called La Mancha, the stain. It's less a stain more a sludge the consistency of chewing gum. It makes the open sky look like a city. The forest is a forest. Science has spent millions in research trying to figure the stuff out, but nobody has any clue to what the goo is or where it comes from or how to get rid of it. The goo taunts us humans, saying, "I've appeared in nineteen radio shows." And then it says nothing. The goo has a skin like the rest of what we don't know. I want you to see it. It first appeared in 1987 covering fifty yards and spreads each year. By '92 the Government recognized it a major driving risk. A horizon of everything we hoped we wouldn't find, but we would never know it. What you see is our whole lives. Eighteen-hundred have gone there, after losing control. The toll grows. The goo grows as well. I am trying to figure out how to fit your wrist into my heart, the problem remains to this day.

HAZARD UNIQUE to Venezuelan highways is a goo called La Mancha, the stain. It's less a stain more a sludge the consistency of chewing gum. It makes the open sky look like a city. The forest is a forest. Science has spent millions in research trying to figure the stuff out, but nobody has any clue to what the goo is or where it comes from or how to get rid of it. The goo taunts us humans, saying, "I've appeared in nineteen radio shows." And then it says nothing. The goo has a skin like the rest of what we don't know. I want you to see it. It first appeared in 1987 covering fifty yards and spreads each year. By '92 the Government recognized it a major driving risk. A horizon of everything we hoped we wouldn't find, but we would never know it. What you see is our whole lives. Eighteen-hundred have gone there, after losing control. The toll grows. The goo grows as well. I am trying to figure out how to fit your wrist into my heart, the problem remains to this day.



# LOOK AT YOUR NEIGHBOR

LOOK AT YOUR NEIGHBOR. Look at your neighbor's body. Can you see your neighbor wielding a stick? Propelling through water? Is this neighbor graceful? Does this neighbor look good plastered in sweat? Is there a large mountain? When I was in high school I played water polo and I sucked. I kept getting beat in the face by this girl whose arm stopped at her elbow. The ref wouldn't call the fouls. I guess he thought she wasn't doing it on purpose. If I wasn't drowning I would have asked her: How are you so good at this sport? Against all odds? What do you think about when you are playing? These are important questions. Why am I drowning? Why do I feel fear? For example: I read an essay by Barthes. He says people who think too much can't be very good athletes. He talks about France's famous cycling brothers: the Bobets. One was an intellectual, and the other cycled so hard he got cancerous saddle boils. The dead tissue came right up against his vital organs. Can you believe that? Do you ever look at your neighbor who cycles a lot and catch yourself thinking: what is wrong with you? How do you have such willpower? How come people who think a lot can't be good athletes? They can be competent athletes, but sooner or later they won't want to continue. Sooner or later they'll stop. One time I swam so hard I threw up in the water. Then I got stung by a bee. Then I got hit in the face. I latched on to the wall of the pool and I said to my coach: I want to quit. He was disgusted with me. This was in the middle of a game. Have you ever thought about why people get disgusted by that? Quitting? Some people never quit. Like your neighbor, the invincible. You say to him: "I think I am going to die." He says: "You are not going to die." You say: "I feel so bad, I think I am going to die." He says: "You only think you are going to die, but you are not going to die." You say: "I am not strong enough to keep going." You say: "Nothing makes any sense." He says: "Then crawl, or else."

Anelise Chen



# LABOR DAY

Kate Garklavs

ON THIS, the first cool day of almost-fall, you'll join the trail where it diverges from the edge of the light industrial zone: auto-body shops bunched along the shallow shoulder, pocked tin roofs menacing as glass eyes; the formidable cedar-shingled face of the historic bait & tackle; the ice cream shack with 60 flavors of soft-serve, coned on demand. What they don't tell you is that a cheap bucket-seat reupholstery will need revision within a year, that fabric frayed where the tacks puncture it forms little anemones of poor workmanship. That each flavor of soft-serve starts its life as vanilla base—dextrose and palm solids—and is tintured with neon liquid derived from the concept of the flavor itself. Jewel-toned whorls of syrup recall the dimestore days of youth: gummy clots of Mike & Ikes snuck in the back of Max Weller's wagon; powdered wonders of Country Time, Kool-Aid, and Tang; strawberry Smucker's in puncture-thin packets; fevered Cherrytussin nights when your bronchial rattle shook the frost-hoared windowpanes. What they don't tell you, as you cross the railbridge-cum-trail, is how you'll be jarred by the hollow lilt of rapids tumbling into birched valley. Red glimpse of a cheap fiberglass rod, dropped and abandoned, its snarl of line toyed by the churning surface. Two years back when the boy fell, drunk, to his death, you stood shoreside as the medics recovered his body. Not pulled to shore, but airlifted. The water doesn't pool more than five feet at the river's center, not at this point. The copter's blades flattened the crowns of the trees, turning their leaves silver-side up, and in your crook between trunks no one could see you: Not the headphoned pilot, somber medics, walkie-talkied detective pulling shut the collar of his unlined jacket. Not the EMT who dredged the corpse nearer shore, nor his partner for the heavy lift. They don't tell you the finality of the click of the safety straps, the indrawn breath of spectator trees, that season ends not Labor Day, but the weekend before. *Come back next year*, sighs the paper-hatted man who denies you your cone. Aluminum snap of the cash window shutting you from view, dimpled aluminum bodies of passing domestic trade-ins. Brittle early-evening light a mourn for pleasures inexplicably, unfairly rescinded.



# ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Marcelle Heath

**E**LEANOR ROOSEVELT IS A CAT, a ghost, sometimes a vase of poppies. Often she's the child that goes missing during recess or walking home from school. What mischief is she up to, we wonder, our hands in our laps, careful not to pray. We will not pray! We will not. Eleanor comes back to us after supper to wash the dishes. He's in the kitchen, a towering figure, with a gray pompadour that smells like Brylcreem. Afterward, he climbs out the window, his long dress snagging on the rotting sill. Weeks pass. We're disconsolate. Roosting crows in the Tulip tree remind us of her quick hands. Uzbeki bowls filled with rose water evoke days of protest. We fast, rub ash on our cheeks, copulate five times a day. It's reported she's the main character in Jonathan Franzen's novel-in-progress, but we hear on good authority she's working as an actuary in Council Grove. One day Eleanor turns up for happy hour, in the middle of a story about how our boss cut our overtime hours. We are self-conscious. Didn't she say something about how great minds discuss ideas, small minds people? But to our surprise she chimes in about the time her manager insisted she write a speech for his daughter's wedding. Eleanor laughs, saying she couldn't fault him entirely. Her laugh is full and warm, filling the room with bumblebees. The conversation moves to other topics, an upcoming trip to her uncle's national park in North Dakota, a study on the gut-brain connection, the Dodger's six-game losing streak. Hours pass, maybe weeks. We fish out bumblebees from our drinks. Eleanor offers to pick up the tab, and we thank her, inviting her to a friend's new tapas place. Eleanor says she'd love to come, and we board the six to Burnside. Our bones creak as we disembark, and we reach out for sure hands. So much has changed! Don't you think, Eleanor? We look around, flummoxed. There's no sign of her. When the bus pulls away, someone spots her in the window, the boy with the braids. Our vision is blurred in the glimmery darkness. The boy turns and waves. Trickster! Someone croaks, we suspect Dorothy, a Libertarian. Hank runs after the bus, but his knees are bad, and he doesn't get far. Jim starts to cry, but he recently lost his dog. Sadie, trying to lighten the mood, says, "Well, the story is over I guess," and for a moment we think she might be right. It might be true after all.

A HUMAN BEING who could quietly cram herself into her unusual aura, H was perfecting her instant-death technique.

Every stupid everyone was there, complaining happily, and then they met H.

She'd been absent ten days from the second floor of the bathroom. And separately she'd been absent ten days from the plumber, Tom.

Why was she cheering in front of the TV? And people were coming up to her and addressing her as Pinky?

Hoo! It sucked. Another person came up to her, they'd had all their teeth extracted while playing blackjack, the teeth went into a pan, were reinserted more or less at random.

It was like she'd been immersed in glop overnight and there wasn't any scheduled date for her to put her foot down and demand a whole new time zone.

Another person came up to her, with furrows in his brow. Whatever was growing in the sink... things that grow, when given the opportunity... Oh, fuck! In the little crevices where his knuckles were, too! Was it possible to vaccinate a sink?

She needed to pretend to look for Tom, and after a really long time not find Tom.

Strung lights flickered on and pumpkin flowers were being folded into the goat cheese.

Contact! A pair of boots and a small bet on how long it would take to stomp on all kinds of gunk that would fly massively up into the sharp boundary between the upstairs and the *really* upstairs. No, but she wished she could, instead of listening to an anecdote about... did it even matter?

Oh fuck, a person came up to her with an amazing resemblance to a revolving door. She couldn't look him in the eye. Yes she could but she had to stand off to the side.

Gee, all this stiffness was intoxicating! Just look what happened when she introduced herself as H! Just thinking about what she could scrape off her instep made her tipsy!!

Tom's innocent face was both cute and basically said "sitting duck." He had the shoulders of a swimmer. Someone was drooling. Enough drool followed Tom



around to qualify as useful irrigation... hopefully everyone down below had their umbrellas out...

She fussed at a scratch on her elbow. Okay, she would coach the scratch. It would become *more* than a scratch. Another thingy that was not a scratch would get into a struggle with it. *Her* scratch wouldn't even break a sweat. Forget it, too much stress... she would find someone else to coach the scratch.

Yummy! Two millipedes clamping down on a Napoleon. Oh wait, she'd already spoken to Tom about his random friends.

Just thinking about bouncing on a springboard made her tongue burn. Actually, her tongue felt somewhat like a springboard. Her tongue was on fire from too much thinking about stomping. If she could bounce on her own tongue, she would vaporize the noses of her boots...

Yet *another* person came up to her who seemed... jumbled. They'd gone to a pottery class and made a set of... casters. After they moved along, a reek of casters followed in their wake.

Or hang on just a sec... what she *really* needed was to stroll outside, mismanage sober pillow talk, be struck by lightning, *then* stuff something up. Better yet, a double strike that would zap, in turn, each of her lightning-shaped earrings.

Classic Tom. He'd left too much room around the stand. She could see up into the clear night sky. There was a void around the stand. Tom didn't have the intangible virtues without which she broke out in boils that resembled steam holes. There are boils, and then there are boils.



THESE ARE MY DEMANDS, I told the doctor. Water whenever I want it. A sky over my head. Grocery shopping. A glass of cheap wine. My friends—but I was only really thinking of one person, the person I was in love with at the time (he was not in love with me).

These are my symptoms: croppped speech. Lemonade breath. A worry-shaped hole in the middle of my palm, dug in with my nails. Sneaking hot chocolate into my room instead of eating awkwardly with everyone.

I keep waiting for you around the corner but you don't come. If I see someone that looks like you on the subway, I stare and stare and stare until they turn their head. I'm trying to stop.

After I was discharged, the first thing I did was go to the deli and buy a tuna sandwich. The old white flowers in my hair, the ones I'd stolen, had faded. But there were more and whiter flowers on the trees. It was spring. My window faced the East River and I saw birds and ships and what I think was a totem pole. If I go in again (because you don't leave forever) I hope it's rainy and windy and wretched outside. And I will bring my cell phone charger.

I don't ever really hope for rain. Or wind. Or wretchedness. I kind of hope for snow.

When I went back to volunteer I was reminded that the hospital only has two colors: blue and green. Some things are white and yellow and maybe a nonaggressive shade of pink. But these things will look like blue and green after a while. In the free hospital, the prevailing humor was yellow.

A woman called Jodie wanted to go home and take care of her dog. No one was feeding her dog, which was

in her apartment out in the Far Rockaways, which no one was paying for. There are things you'll never understand if you're not a pet owner. I'm not a pet owner. But isn't there enough I don't understand?

I like everyone's nails. That's all I can think of in the way of conversation. They have these sparkly fake fingernails, the ones with butterfly decals.

This part of my life is never over. I think it is; I know it isn't. I chase sleeping pills with cough syrup as punishment for whatever it is I did, or failed to do. Then I sleep. Maybe there is an angel at the foot of my bed. For some reason, all these things seem terrible to write.

The sign on the door reads "Elopement Risk." Do patients run off and get married? I ask. Turns out it's just another word for escape.

Styrofoam. Neverending water. A chair to sit in and eyes to shut. The cohesion of our curled up bodies. Our hearts. A window, after a window the sky, after the sky the sea. A bathroom. Some books, and light. This is all we need. This is all we need. This is all we need.

# Birds and Ships

Amy Bergen

# BLACK SPHINX

Joe Worthen

“AIN’T NOBODY can find the EP, ain’t nobody even seen it,” Dylan says. “Pollux went on a Gulf Coast sojourn checking all the indie disc shops just as they were closing up but nobody had it. He went so far he couldn’t get back. He wound up putting industrial staples in reams of plastic in a Lafayette factory. He never even said nothing. I had to ask his motherfucking sister about him at a CITGO. Pollux gave all the way up. Pollux probably gonna live and die in Lafayette now all cause of that Black Sphinx EP,” Dylan says to a stranger in line at Taco Bell. Dylan keeps sliding a zipper up and down his leather jacket, which has got an emblem of an eagle talon on the back and nothing on the front at all.

Dylan does a whippet out of a red balloon in the mall parking lot and thinks dumb shit until his friend Zach gets off work and steps across white brackets to Dylan’s Ford Contour. Zach does a whippet. Zach does another whippet. Dylan and Zach drive around, listen to a stand-up off an iPod and talk about one of their friends, who killed himself from depression. Dylan talks about the difference between depression and anxiety and just having a bad time generally, every day. Dylan says he’s depressed. Dylan says he probably couldn’t kill himself though. Zach says he could kill himself. Then Zach just looks out the window and watches the telephone poles go by tan salons, by cash advances, by dollar stores, by close-up parking lots, and by far away parking lots where

the cars are so small they look like crushed shells. Dylan asks him what he’s thinking about and Zach says that today SEARS taught him a new way to fold sweaters and he’s thinking about sweaters now. Then they drive around for six months. Then they drive around for a couple of years.

Dylan’s got French fries in his mouth. Dylan’s got French fries in his hand. Dylan sits the wrong way on a picnic table out back of Rico’s during the daytime when

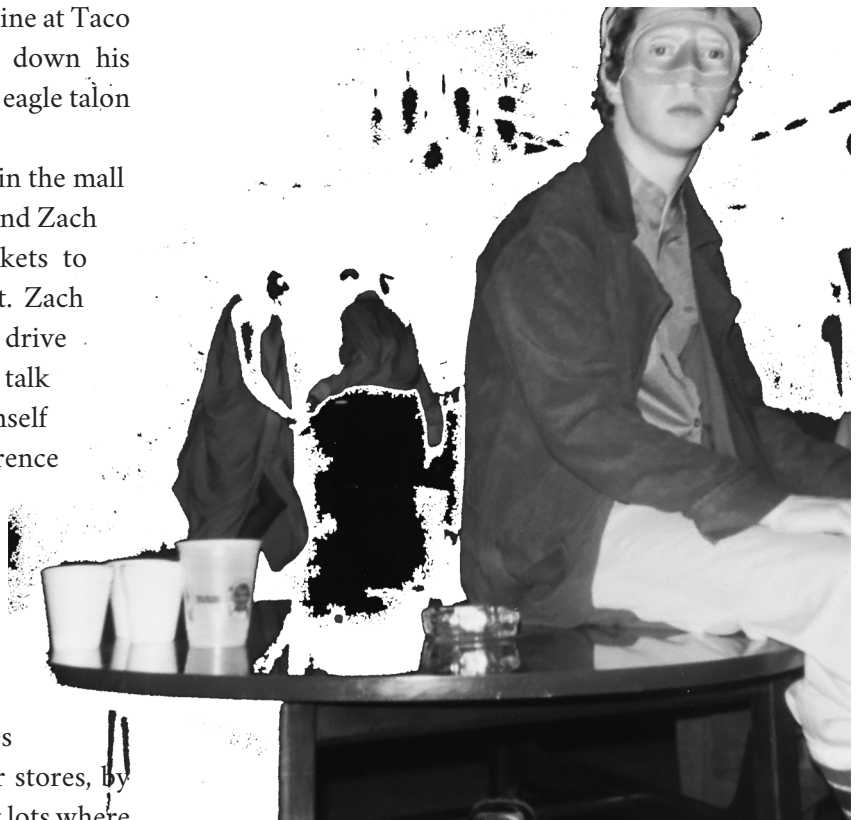


photo found by Superbomba



just the bars open and there's no band and no people. Dylan sits way under a soft gray plane and waits for its sound to reach him. Instead, a Burnout that Dylan might have worked with at Subway, or Arby's or Sizzler, comes out back to smoke a cigarette. Dylan looks over at the Burnout, who has an Evan Williams T-shirt on, and the Burnout looks over at Dylan, who has French fries in his mouth and French fries in his hand.

Dylan has lotto glitter on his fingertips and behind him is a black light raptor poster that says "Raptor Attack" in raptor claw font. Dylan has won nothing. Dylan hasn't left his apartment in a fortnight. Dylan gets high and signs up for classes at the community college. In a class about American History before the Civil War, Dylan sits in the back left corner and fills half a composition pad with notes and drawings made of spirals and cross hatchings and yin-yang signs and 3D cubes which he taught himself to draw. Dylan passes three out of four exams but doesn't reenroll. The sky comes down in fistfuls of gray cotton. The sky comes down in shredded clingwrap that sways over dusk skylines. The sky comes down once a day the whole year, and nothing changes but the gradual progress of a CVS someone is building up on Eastwood.

"Ain't nobody can find the EP, nobody even seen it," Dylan says. "I know what you're thinking, girl. You're thinking this man may be chill but I can find anything on the Internet. It is the primary tool of my generation and I use it all the time for pretty much whatever and it serves my needs reliably. But you'd be wrong. I've combed the blogs for this Black Sphinx EP. I've combed the torrent aggregators and the forums and the P2P networks and I haven't found anything. This Black Sphinx EP is the last EP lost to time. Everything else will be available forever and equally common."

The girl at the register doesn't know and she doesn't think Dylan is cool and Dylan went to high school with her, which is probably why. She's got a ring in the middle of her nose and a new dye job that bleeds into the space around her hair and makes the whole cigarette selection look ink stained. Dylan wants to touch that hair because he knows a new dye job is the softest thing. A new dye job is so soft that little pieces of it come off on you, so Dylan keeps talking to her but she only gets less interested and eventually she goes and stands behind some glass and

waits for Dylan to leave the pharmacy, sit on the curb and light a cigarette with his talon facing out.

Dylan puts pictures of his dick on the Internet. Dylan puts pictures of his whole naked body and face on the Internet. Dylan loses track of where all the pictures of his dick are and then posts more. Dylan posts more pictures of his dick on the Internet than he ever intended to and regrets them one at a time while sitting on a toilet, staring at patterns in his leg hair.

Dylan lies on a thing that goes either way between a bed and a couch. Dylan lies under three blankets. The one blanket is more of a sheet. The second blanket is a comforter from a bygone Christmas and the main thing about it is that it has never been washed. The third blanket is a rough Peruvian quilt that he got from his one of his dad's extramarital girlfriends. It reminds him of infidelity and it is the warmest of the three. On the phone a girl talks about depression while the television runs infomercials on mute. She says the main things have been discovered. She says she feels like the frontiers are settled. She says the horizon is used up just like the stars and that we can go whatever way and it would be the same.

"Ain't nobody can find the EP, nobody even seen it. They say that the thing only came out in a small batch, like 30 presses. And the thing is just four songs that Black Sphinx recorded before they broke up. They toured that material for less than a week. On the rumor this one EP is the best they ever recorded. People literally hanker for it. People literally turn on each other for it. People literally pine for it like a woman's touch." Zach has literally heard this a million times. Zach shrugs, lights the bowl and holds weed smoke in while the ceiling fan chops stale air. Zach holds weed smoke for eight months then exhales. Zach changes the TV to something Dylan thinks is news at first but turns out to be a comedy show where all the jokes are also facts. Zach laughs. Dylan learns three or four things.

Sitting wrong on a picnic table out back Rico's at night, Dylan smokes cigarettes under torn clouds and three stars pushed together like the seeds in a white grape. He finishes a conversation with a girl and goes inside where there's a band playing and High Life comes out of a tap.

"Ain't nobody can find the EP, nobody even seen it.

1%

The format itself is dying. The physical form is dying. The secondary Gods are dying backwards up the totem pole, man, backwards up the appendix of the holy book, man, backwards straight up mount Olympus all the way to the king-sized Tempurpedic where Zeus rocks mortal pussy. And all that's left out there in the ether, in the unknown, in the realms of faith, is that Black Sphinx EP." The Burnout listens. The Burnout is on the next barstool, expression cluttered with studs and hoops. The Burnout wears a lacquered vest over an Evan Williams T-shirt, fading like weather across his chest.

"We know about that EP," the Burnout says. "We toured with Black Sphinx. Way back when they were a unit. Way back when it was all still cool." The Burnout makes the smallest gesture of all time and draws Dylan's attention over to the space like a spotlight, up to the front, where a single man stands before a wall of fluorescent t-shirts tacked and overlapping. "Eckhert ran merch." Dylan's eyes open just a little bit wider and he feels the flat leather of his jacket reverberate under expressions of bass.

Eckhert is saying some things to a small circle of chicks like: "I'm a Gemini" and "Anything green is 20% off." Dylan doesn't have time for this bullshit. He approaches the side and says: "You know anything about Black Sphinx?" and Eckhert says, "Maybe I do." Eckert is old and narrow, a long, improbable splinter, looking preserved and alert. He takes a Zippo out of a prehistoric bootcut and lights a cigarette. On the Zippo, there's a picture of a woman masturbating. Dylan asks to see it again. Eckhert says no. Dylan asks if he knows anything about the lost Black Sphinx EP. Eckhert tells him to wait in the parking lot by a '96 Chevy truck that is painted custom gold then loosens his face and smoke falls out of his nose and mouth.

Nobody important comes for a long time. Dylan gives a homeless man ten dollars and tells him to go buy a couple tall boys from the CITGO but the homeless man leaves forever. And the parking lot is dark, and the sky is dark, and the Chevy is Vatican gold.

Eckhert comes up and activates the power locks, moving slow inside a bleach-stained cardigan. Smoker skin hanging from the bottoms of his throat, his ears, whichever side of his arm is lowest at the time. Eckhert

7,7 %

organizes a girl into the front seat, Dylan into the back seat, and a box of merch into the trunk. Then they move silent along tungsten orange freeways towards unknown regions.

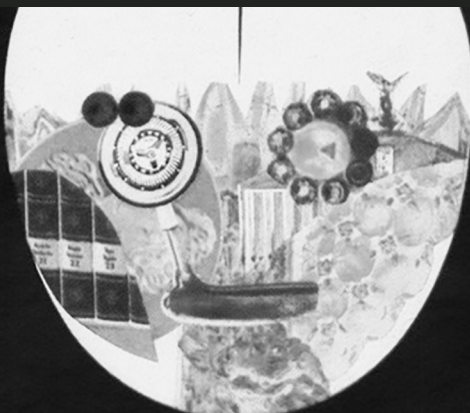
Eckhert pulls two fingers out of Mary and runs them into Dylan's mouth like he's putting on a glove, fingerprints down. At first it tastes like rainwater, then nicotine, then that sense stops working for twenty minutes. Dylan's mind spins a thousand halted thoughts until there's an illusion of sequence, logic, to them, then the fingers come out and he goes blank.

Eckhert fucks Mary in a nest of linens, laundry, remote controls, envelopes, pistachio shells, half empties, empties, mix cds, pizza boxes, extension cords. Eckhert fucks Mary on the edge of a bed while Dylan sits in an Ikea chair and tries to masturbate. Eckhert packs a bowl and they pass it. Eckhert plays a bass line on an unplugged electric bass. Eckhert pulls a box out from under his bed and the box is full of Black Sphinx EPs and he offers Dylan one. Eckhert offers Mary one but she declines without saying anything or even changing the patterns of her breath.

"Are you sleeping, Mary?" Eckhert asks her, bends over her, looks at her face, tries to find out for sure. "Are you sleeping?"

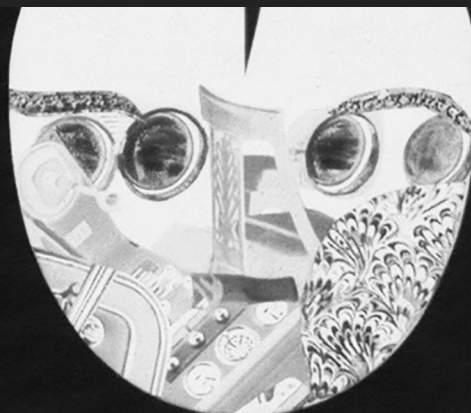
Dylan is bent in repose on his couch's dead shrug. A choked Freon note from left center and a rapid percussive approach to a first verse. Dylan wears no shirt. His talon jacket is on a hook. His community college sweatshirt is folded the way they fold sweaters at SEARS. When the chorus comes in, it comes in with 400 effects on a new guitar that sounds like two airplanes fucking in a cathedral. Dylan lies on his bed couch and listens to the EP twice through. Dylan lies on his bed couch and listens to the EP for three months. He listens to it for a leap year. He listens to it for a decade and change.

"Is it as good as you thought?" Zach is on the cell. Dylan stands in his personal wreckage, faces out the window, sees a square of dirt where something new is going to go, and says: "Yeah."



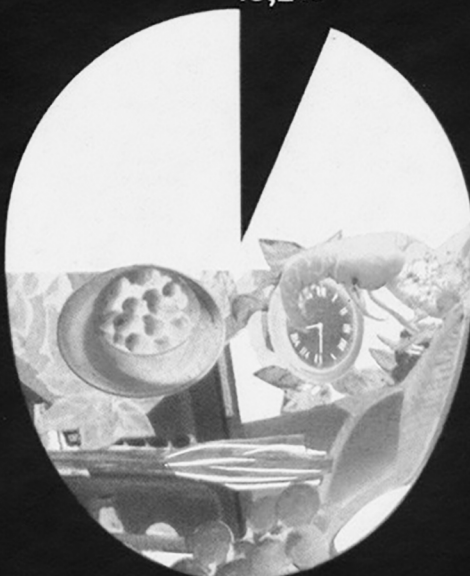
*riche bourgeoisie*

13,2%



*bourgeoisie moyenne*

38,6%



*petite bourgeoisie*

36,8%

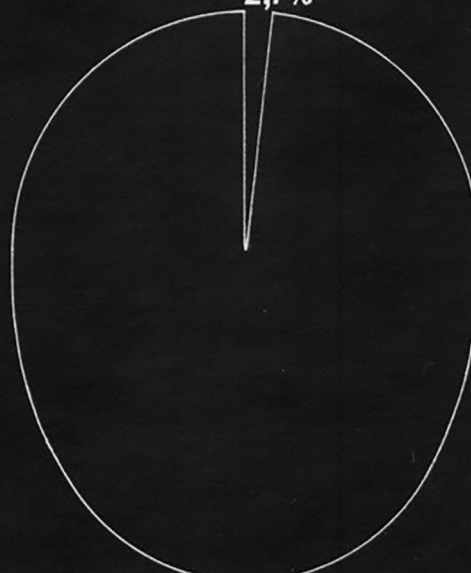


*ouvriers qualifiés*

2,7%



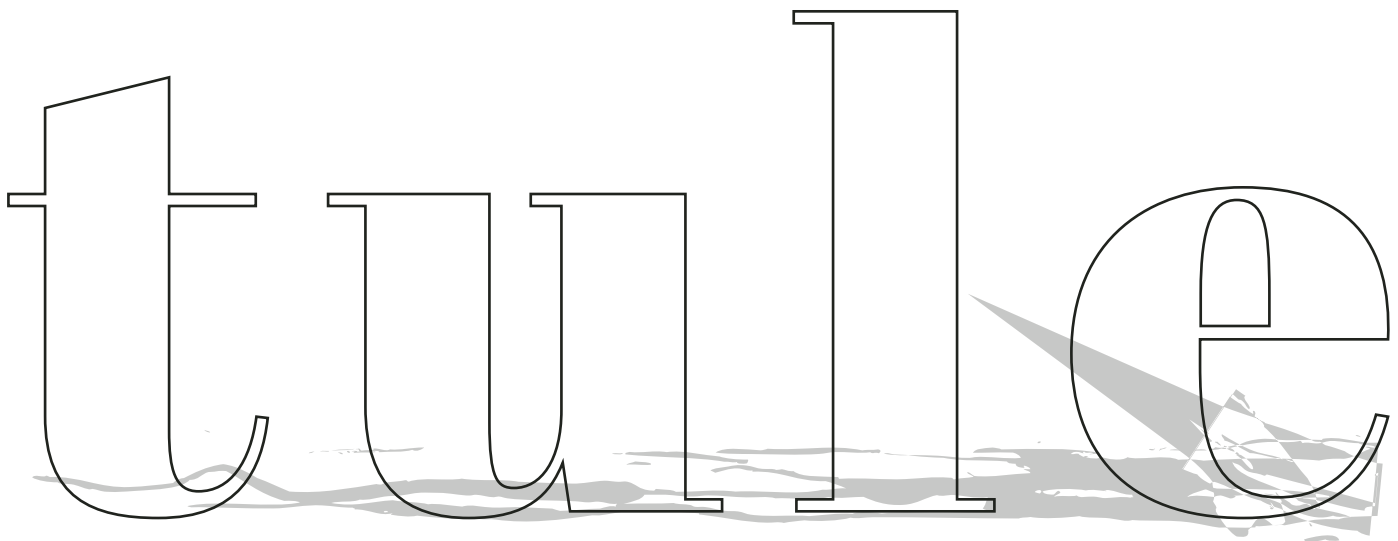
*manœuvres*



*cas non classés*

Maladies mentales et classes sociales, collage by Schmid





**T**HE CALL CAME from inside the house. It was made by Black Aggie who came downstairs and bashed the babysitter's pretty little brains out before she stole the pretty white children. She tucked them under her large breasts and left a trail of sour milk and ants out the door. No one bothered to look for her but they did arrest the middle aged woman (Perla) who worked the kitchen at Casa Lita. "Thank god they caught that bitch," everyone thought.

That's the story the papers report to the TV anchors, and the TV anchors report it to the websites, and the websites report it to every mother and father in America, and they all tell their little Brents. Brent from Miami who's posting on Craigslist, looking for a roommate (FEMALE ONLY).

In the ad, he posts a photo of himself, shirtless, and asks that any girl who's interested send pictures (under 35, around 100lbs. preferably).

When the first woman shows up she'll have her long curly black hair tucked under a hat and her nails painted like eagles and her tits jutting out from her chest like howitzers. He'll greet her by wagging his finger at her and sayin, "Oye loca ven pa 'ca," she she'll shake merengue and cook gallo pinto and feed it to him on the couch, and Brent will dream of her calling him papi and moaning, "Fuck my panocha," and when Brent goes to stick his fingers in her he'll touch ash and her tits will nurse sour milk. In the morning, Brent wakes up in a bathtub of ice with his liver missing. The story makes the 9 o'clock news. All the men agree it's horrifying.

Down South Carolina, George Stinney's ghost was resurrected by a hoodoo niggess. They forgot to cut his dick off before they electrocuted him and now the great-granddaughters of the lily-white women in the audience, the ones who stared into George's eyes when his mask slipped off, they all love big black dick. George's ghost drives a black Impala and flashes his headlights at them and when they flash back he follows them home and fucks them. They have black baby after black baby after black baby. The TV anchors crane to watch through the glass. In his hospital bed, Brent cries for how they've been ruined.

In Maryland, the roads are full of women in white. They're all followed by large white dogs. I'm driving through Rising Sun when I spot one and offer her a ride. "Where are the children?" she asks me. I don't know where the children are. I haven't thought of them since they went missing. "They've gone down to the river" is all I can think to tell her. Hearing that she takes her hat off and her hair falls in vines. I drive out of Rising Sun before sunset, like my father was told to do, and when I drop her off her dog is black now. She leaves a trail of ants on the seat.

The children are found one day. The TV anchors speak for everyone. They tell them they'll go to heaven. They don't tell them about the white hood their father wore.

At a roadside diner on 95, I meet Ian. On his way to Miami, he tells me. "I'm looking for a roommate when I get there," he says. "Hopefully a woman, I'm not much good with cooking and cleaning." Ian asks me if I've ever

# viejja

Justin Sanders

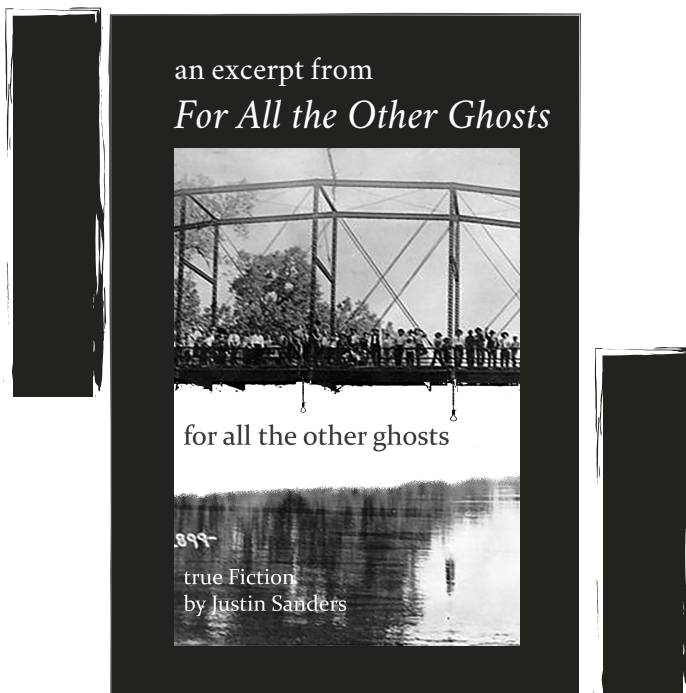
heard the story of Black Aggie. "What scares me," he says. "What really scares me is spooks." He smiles. Then he asks if I know any other ghost stories.

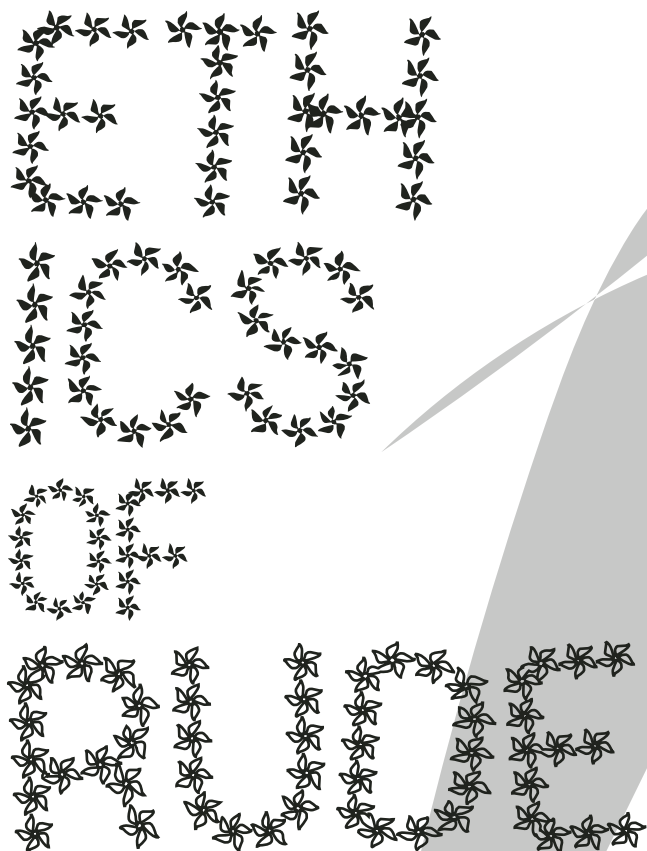
I put up the hood of my shirt and Ian sits uneasy. "Drive through Valdosta," I say. "Look for a tree with a whiskey bottle at the base, a cigar stuck in the neck. That's the grave marker for Mary Turner. Bloodied Mary Turner," I call her. Ian shifts and grins. "Her husband was a convict bought off the chain gang. One day he was too sick to work so his owner beat him. He vowed revenge and two nights later the owner was shot dead. Police arrested Mary's husband, they had him in jail when a crowd took him from their custody. They hung him then castrated him. Mary protested. Said, if she could, she'd swear out warrants on all of them. Days later a crowd of some two hundred people converged on her. She was eight months pregnant at the time. They hung her upside down, soaked her clothes in gasoline and then lit her on fire. And while she burned, a man from the crowd took a hunting knife and cut her belly open. Her unborn child fell out and gave a cry, before someone crushed it with his boot. Then they shot her over a hundred times."

"She should have minded her unwise remarks," Ian says. And when he looks over, my hair is growing in vines and my mouth is full of black class. Ian stands his ground,

and I vanish from the diner, just another hooded nigger disappeared off the road.

There are footprints in the ash of George Stinney's bones. In jail, Perla-who-worked-at-Casa-Lita's rocks back and forth praying her albescence: "Por mi cupla, por mi culpa, por mi gran culpa."





Liz Bowen

fuck a canal  
a flowery fractal  
fuck a neon rose

i write angry poetry  
i fuck up the mood of the room

call me an animal  
i won't be offended

become me an animal

i want to be an animal  
no one cares about the animals  
or their beaks or their teeth  
i care about their beaks and their teeth  
and their shivering pelts  
in the snow  
in the fields

i'm crazy  
woman writing crazy  
woman writing my body contains  
cells that attack each other  
but still writing please stop eating the flesh  
of my sisters  
i care about their small legs  
their strong legs

people are afraid of being animals  
the distinguishable churn  
of a body alive  
people are afraid of eating the flesh  
of their sisters  
and they do it anyway  
but call it something else



become me a language  
for the prelingual

become me feathers and the illegible  
markings of claws

they are free  
until they meet us

silent brandishers of cold unfeeling  
of stopping time  
replacing it with new time  
new birds breaking open  
and falling to the ground

fuck a new bird  
fuck a new day  
unless it is  
somehow different

become me uncharted calendar year  
undo the machine  
i don't want to be a machine anymore

i'm an animal  
call me an animal

i want to have blood that can be  
in the wrong places  
i want to be in the wrong places  
but only those of my choosing

my own choosing  
a scream not an alarm  
a primal grasp of a sister's hand  
a platter that does not serve me a sister's small  
strong leg



Victor Brauner / Entre le jour et la nuit (Géminis), 1938

i don't mind being afraid of dying  
except when i'm afraid someone stronger than me  
will kill me

i'm afraid i will kill something weaker than myself  
i'm afraid i have killed something weaker than myself  
and didn't even feel it

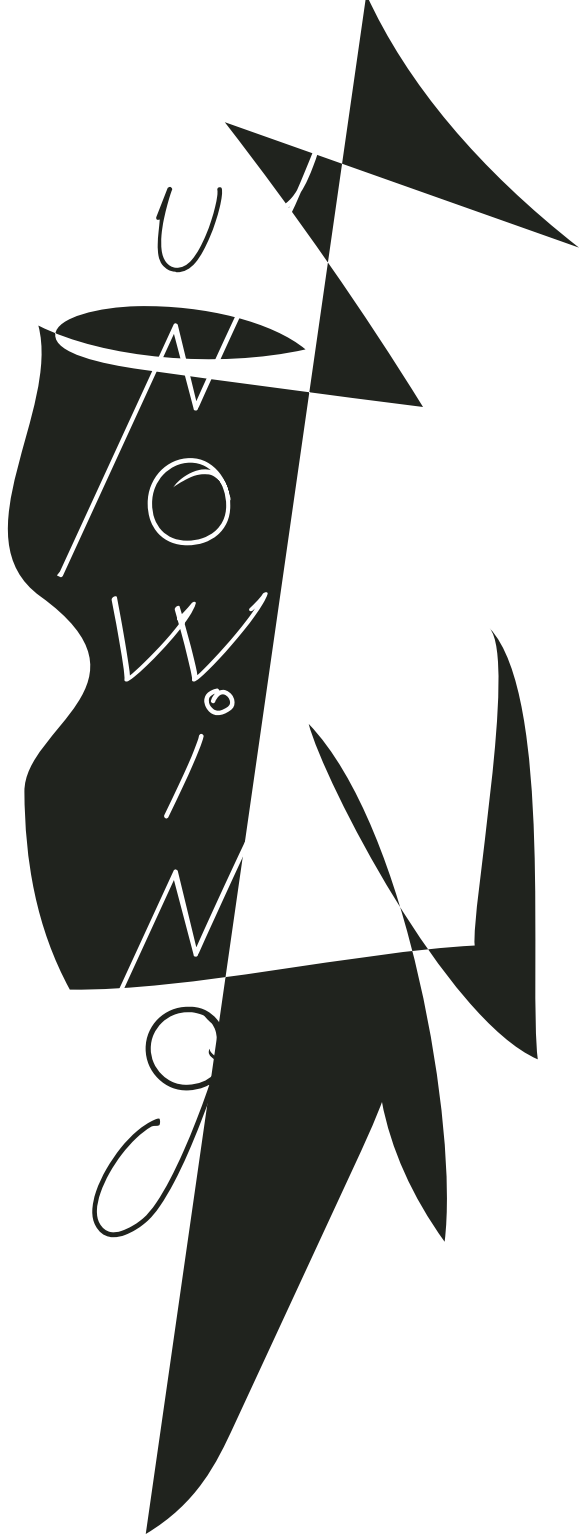
where is the wrong place of my choosing  
where is the country whose hands  
won't lay claim to my hands

become me an animal in the dark night of no country  
in the snow  
in the fields

this is considered  
an extremist position



Liz Bowen



i t's dirty between us  
improper  
brush my hair out of your eyes  
and i'm like thank you

a hundred times for not  
freaking out about the machines in me  
i'm like thank you for spanking me  
near but not exactly where  
the medical tubing  
enters my skin

/ counting the ways to be a freak body  
/ counting the source materials of bruises  
/ abrasions and lesions  
/ a bleeding always from somewhere  
/ a membrane  
/ unable to hold  
/ unsure if sick or just  
/ spent

is this where i kissed the concrete?  
were my knees on the ground, which time?

please understand  
until now  
i knew myself only as a circuit  
an inventory  
i carried myself as if sterile  
i did not participate  
i scrubbed my hands

please understand  
obliteration is a gift  
when you are accustomed to negation

i receive the reverb  
of flesh unsung  
as a gift





Colleen Louise Barry

My banner signifies my life  
long membership to the cult

Big dreams about green  
Sleeping by water and an occasional human  
hang out with beer

My banner is permanently  
more than anything else  
at home with some pillows

I've fallen asleep on the job  
and the birds embody it all  
during the whacked-off feeling of night

I will become mostly what  
I'm learning  
everything at once

All concepts are human  
All humans are metaphors  
All metaphors garden

My banner keeps me from seeing myself  
reflected on any surface

I keep it pinned to my forehead  
in a brutal fashion  
I bleed because the wound of it

About nests I know nothing  
and birds fly south and here  
and dreamless

THIS  
IS A  
MIRROR

and O  
What about it

I'm learning nothing



This is hair  
It is protein  
It looks like a daffodil  
wailing in the sun  
Hair is human

Emotion is a small bloodless pea sprout

Hair is a way for me to tell  
how far away a person is

.

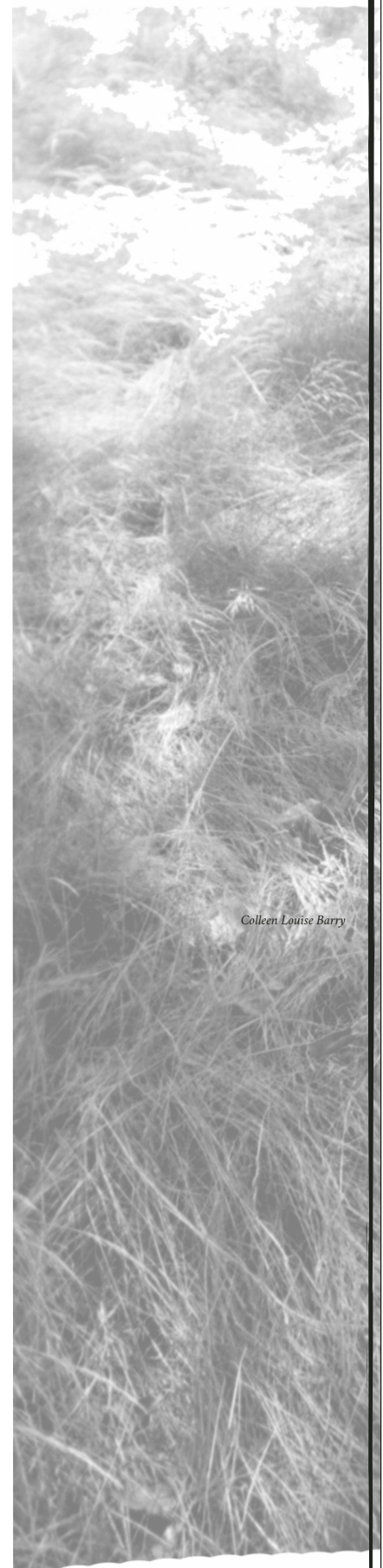
This is a surface  
I am reflected on  
No surface

Am I reflected

I make so many mistakes with green beans

This is just today

I am sitting while the wind does whatever  
to the house and my banner whips around  
A chained-up  
snake in the garden  
A furious human wig



Colleen Louise Barry

# Some Trees in the Mountains

Colleen Louise Barry

The blood moon wasn't bleeding  
It was just a little pinhole  
poked through on the other side  
Life is walking around  
saying it sort of feels like a dream  
right now but at the time  
it was so real

What's better  
than light in the early morning  
with people  
who are singing

I like the hush of addition  
the heat has to eat through  
Then the kale gets wilted

Like all this consciousness  
There's no where to put it  
but a body, a skin sack  
an avocado, toothless

Eventually  
a warm slow breeze  
gets beat up  
There is no one to defend it

The breeze is a student of grief  
There are many there to teach it

How the sun sees you  
is split into parts

There is more than one way  
to be an individual  
there are more than three  
known dimensions

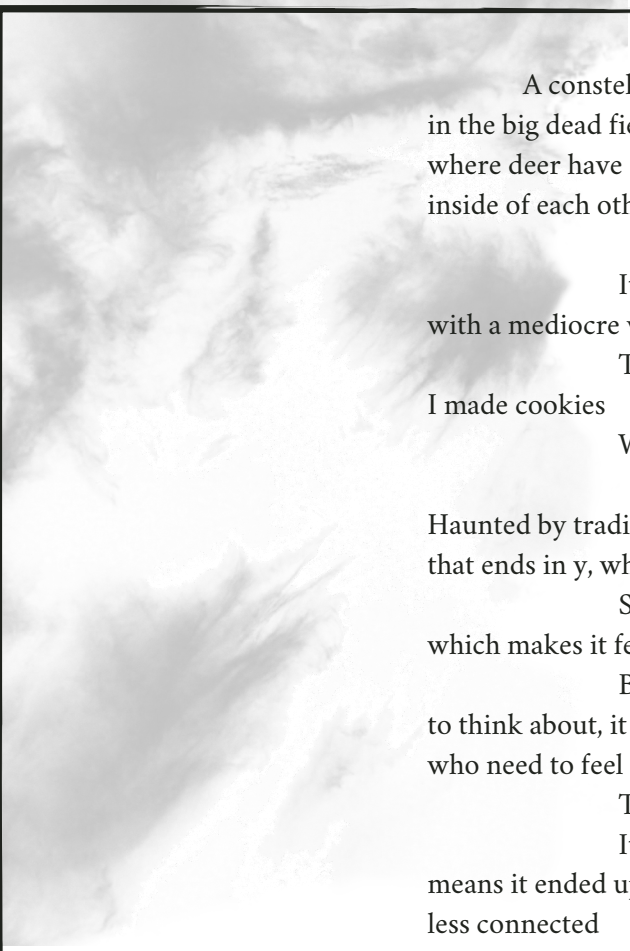
There are no countable variables  
There's the moon because it's night  
who sometimes looks like day



There's the neighbor peeling an onion  
 that makes her cry  
 There's an irritant in the juices  
     There's soup and there's sauces  
 There's a beautiful river in China  
     Then  
     There's the Connecticut River  
 that is in Massachusetts  
 I am comforted by its unmoved moving  
     Half-submerged naked red branches  
 A swarm of gnats above yellow grasses  
     The color of death is aggressive  
 underneath the crazy teenaged sky  
 that is a hopeless romantic

More important than money is value  
 What do people value  
     I paid a lot of money for my education  
 I paid a lot of money at a bar  
 I paid 7.99 for strawberries  
 I paid some dude to mow my lawn  
 I paid online for tickets to see a band  
 play my favorite song, it goes  
 If I were a man and you a dog  
 I'd throw a stick for you  
     I moved freely through an orchard  
 I moved freely through your thighs  
 And freely I considered the word credit

I will most likely never leave Earth  
     All matter is recycled  
 In this way I get rubbed off on  
 with some color  
 that is my own modern age  
 The gray punched with pink  
     The great white shark of my heart  
 I mean the actual beast  
     When it rains I think about Gerry  
 I'd like to be reconfigured  
 as a fern with moss around, some worms  
 beautifully rotting into soil  
     Because of clouds I know the only thing  
 in the body is the body's  
 potential THE END, its cleanliness of order



A constellation bends  
in the big dead field grass  
where deer have slept  
inside of each other

It's stringy being here, alive  
with a mediocre word collection  
This is all one long sentence, life  
I made cookies  
What's better

Haunted by tradition, happy is a word  
that ends in y, which makes it feel open  
Sad is a one-syllable word  
which makes it feel simple  
Bad is a non-moral word that gives a lot  
to think about, it gives a lot to people  
who need to feel good or normal  
There's nothing in between  
It doesn't matter  
means it ended up  
less connected

The weather moves around in my eye  
Is weather what kind of natural?  
I feel wholly confused  
about all kinds of directions

Sunsets are pornography for the ocean  
playing in the background  
The moon is a climax  
of Western innovation  
Did you see that white dog  
with its face lushed into the wind?  
Honestly, there is nothing better  
than the work done by a flower  
The centrifugal motion  
Permanent cycles  
fatly lodged, determination

All the colors I try to leash  
go wild and run together  
with time to make a picture  
When the picture is done  
what does it mean  
What is the appropriate measure

Bright deep blue silver gold black and purple  
that was the pile I lie in all Sunday  
Now time is officially over

Truth is a lonely territory  
The evening's cream  
is an argyle cross  
The fog punctuated by heather  
They possess a thick connection  
I pull on my gray wool jumper

I love work  
but as soon as I can I can't  
wait to be with the other people  
I go outside without my sneakers  
I turn slow and the pine needles  
tenderly, O

What would I be without the weather  
Who would I love  
What's better  
than a breast pocket  
holding an enormous deep red flower

Grief is a lot of March weather  
An increase in clouds and windy  
Some teens in the mountains  
Some thirties by the river  
This means the geese are coming back  
like addicts in the rain  
From their elevated visions  
the land looks like peppered chicken

There were two girls  
in a circle of men  
They will never be forgiven

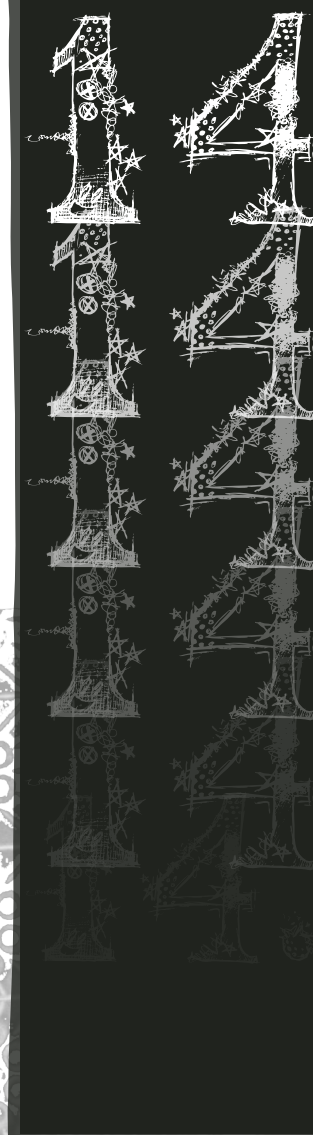
There are three does living  
in an abandoned public high school  
They take opulent steps  
near the gymnasium  
Against the graffiti  
they are aliens

They eat the grass around the sign:  
*Good Attendance Equals Good Grades*  
and some trees obscure the rest



Alex Gregor

Crawl into the cocoon & silk.  
 how many days went by  
 before you started counting them?  
 the clock drips.  
 it spells CHIME.  
 the airlock bubbles.  
 yeast slurp.  
 but your attention occupies a cloud, not an orbit,  
 so YOU WANT THIS BY THE CAT  
 OR BY THE POUND?  
 i'd rather have squirrels,  
 but tell me about the rabbits.  
 how they hop.  
 how their motions affect the passage of mine.  
 in a country full of children,  
 who eats the crust of the bread?  
 dancing naked in a sun room,  
 you told me my fortune as i ate it.  
 it's time for a shoe shinin.  
 it's time for a back waxin.  
 i said MAN THAT'S A LOT A TIRES.  
 i said MAN THAT'S A LOT A TIRES.  
 i said 4 SETS A FLIPPETS & A WAIL,  
 can yer hossie do the dog  
 at the BIG PIG JIG,  
 do your wings have feathers,  
 & how's the catfish down there?



Alex Gregor

you live on a grid that's static.  
that's a tough krill to swallow,  
but we can fold our sheets.

sweet meat.

black bread.

fat back.

you try to sink,

but treble hook set.

the shortest distance

to lean two joints

is the spine—

snap back.

the grounds float to the bottom

the fat floats to the top,

reduce heat and simmer.

WHAT'LL THE SQUIDS INK?

TELL EM TOMORROW

at the toe of the sock.

like even caribou lose their footing,

but boy you trippin.

put your mouth to the spigot:

say steez.

say shankee.

gargle and spit.

you wanna move up

i wanna throw down


our lights out

we stay lit

but what we need to hear

is the whole rest.

## Cheryl Quimba



I s the swift-running skiff, is doubtful  
these arms, my arms, ropy and speckled  
and wished it were sleep,  
can it be,  
wrangled a green bean for dinner,  
a drink that scalds,  
running almost  
a marathon, you don't  
stop, it warms you,  
Is a warning, I could  
brush against every hand I see, it would be  
edifying, a real thing,  
clear cut through the abdomen,  
inching closer,  
closer, can it be  
summer, still, summer a puddled splash streaking  
the windshield, your sodden face, three  
times I crossed the horizon,  
a photograph only,  
a way of keeping,  
time waning at the borderlands,  
the cracked vicinity,  
like a love patrol,  
laws against being  
away, you purchased a table  
it shone,  
it dissolved, a gunshot, no  
a slingshot, in that a rubber band  
springs back,  
springs back  
to me, back  
to me, I called out across  
the decades and the echo was better  
each time, am older,  
can it be,  
a periscope when I thought it  
a person



Cheryl Quimba

TOOK

UP A

I took up a man  
to watch how far I could  
throw him  
Found a lizard  
out back the house  
How many times I've said  
No matter, the moon still  
catalogs me scared at night  
But hollyhock is a thistle  
I burn

How about we  
come over quiet  
a second  
I got a trumpet  
that needs  
someone's tight mouth  
Just about five  
we walk over like horses  
like I've seen you behind  
my closed eyes  
I call you I call you I call  
It's morning now see  
that old crow saying  
it's about time we caved

That's your shoulder  
smearing sweat against  
the wall  
see the sloped field no more snow  
I call you I call

Just a man to press against  
A man looking  
then look



\*

all I think about now are suns  
buried deep in soaking eyelashes I mean  
there's a shooting averaging to every day

I mean

it's undoubtedly always been out-of-hand

I mean

it's a lot of me in an apartment  
sleeping through everything important  
cottonmouth'ed into the ground

you are beckoning me  
glassful of meandering and posting and

I mean

I'm just scrolling through openings for public service  
and choosing gratuity all day  
mason jars of lettuce or five dollar bills  
or a better image  
a film flickering through my retinas  
I'm daydreaming of reading more

I mean

etching —through theory or time—  
pieces to convince the world  
they're important.

this is a text of saved changes  
wet slate marked by stoned  
and daggers sprouted from the gardens

I mean

what are we doing if not praising the gleaners?

\*

I'm erasing a lot of things lately

\*

this text is sutured  
steeped in idiom/idioma

\*

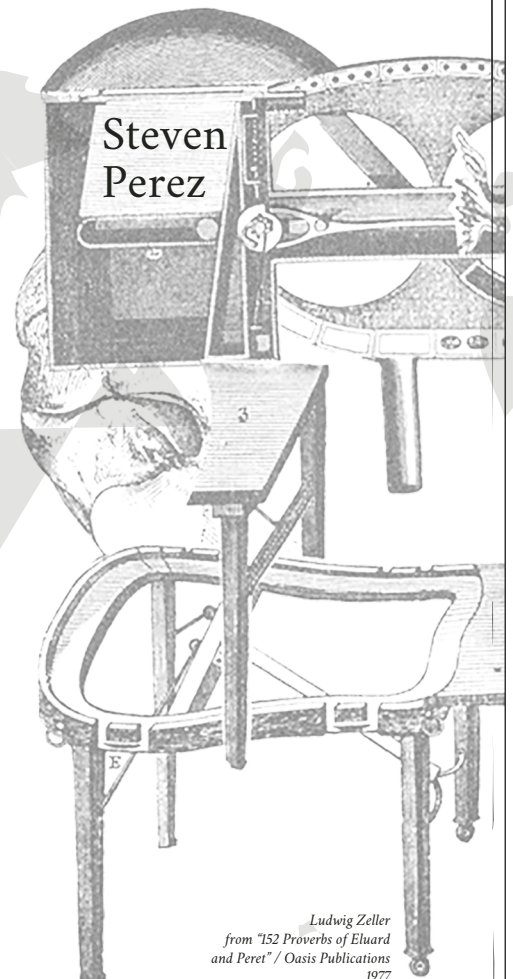
this, I suppose,  
is my answer to language

\*

I haven't reached for my cutting  
board today

ONE  
DEEP  
IN  
FALL

Steven  
Perez



Ludwig Zeller  
from "152 Proverbs of Eluard  
and Peret" / Oasis Publications  
1977

this is my way of saying I'm hungry  
 my lead gone game dead  
 a dead game of horror  
 I stopped eating meat for six months then  
 for two days only ate honey butter chicken biscuits  
 and I felt knots  
 I stopped eating meat again  
 yet in those two days  
 I said to her "I just can't focus anymore"  
 my lead body is in a gulf of sandpaper  
 my lead body is in blown glass alone  
 my lead body can't make out what flowers are

\*

the president is furious and making politic all over  
 propagating gun smoke  
 is there not gun smoke everywhere you look?

\*

a voice is perched on the window of a sedan  
 how am I gonna write a poem when I'm okay?

\*

I'll say my prostate is diamond snuff  
 I'm sitting on cases of water bottles knowing full well the cost of plastic

\*

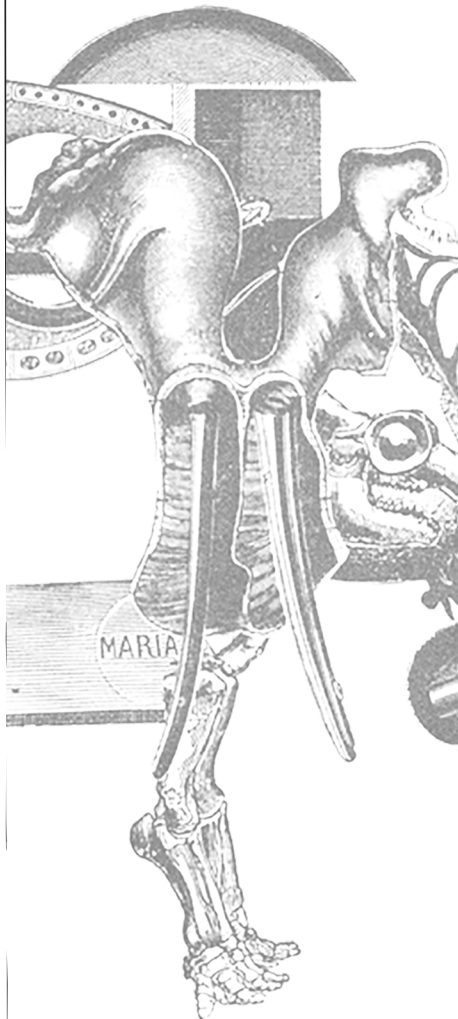
in beginning a question with "do you still," there is a shift from certain to uncertain  
 like in a single bag of tea is medicine  
 like a velvet tongue glossing a sidewall  
 like a leg  
 I am unable to move  
 I google'd the etymology of the term 'shell-shock'

\*

a wall is lined with dusty electrical outlets. I want to ask someone around me to  
 explain how electrical currents work, but maybe not. just blow the dust into my  
 nostrils. knee me. gulf me. spit me. my gravel pit in the nostalgia of nicotine. the  
 nostalgia of front porch saliva pale ales and rooftops spliff'ed out. the outlets keep  
 making faces at me.

\*

milk is running down my legs  
 I mean  
 I'm looking up at the cereal  
 ceiling—a pasteful of eyelids  
 a sound in one lick





*Is This Becoming Of Me Or Am I Sensationalizing?*

lint, let verb be: dawn; let verb be: foliage; let sun be: lit; be: leg  
 I'm reaching for a lozenge to tickle my lung in a motorcade of Crown Vic's  
 a mountainous trachea will border me  
 will you skin me but not in how lungs hurt?  
 will you skin me in how I want to hold leg // lung // dust // milk?

\*

the infrastructure is not asleep  
 it is dead

\*

*Meredith called me last night weeping.*  
*She saw another father shot down on the television.*

\*

in the cold morning my braille skin screams concerned  
 the sweat soaks into the linens  
 my braille skin is no longer surprised by backwards—the direction and the spelling of the word  
 my braille skin isn't listening anymore

\*

I burned myself on the cast iron griddle. the sun burns drunk in front of me. wake me, cherry pits. wake me  
 alive like ice water. I'm awake now sitting by the traffic's tunneling wind where being alone is a thumbnail  
 for this poem

\*

is it weird I still ask questions  
 of craft and occupation  
 language and merengue  
 death and solace?

\*

*when will the sun birth me calm?*  
*when will the sun burn my scalp?*

\*

a marble counter is eating the sky let talk be like *blah blah blah blah*  
 and then the word 'lichen' I keep referencing lichen and buying olive oil.  
 my father is in jail again  
 I'm mostly eating kale again  
 mothersky peel me  
     like right in the mouth  
 where I eat the fertilizer of a floral bed

I'm dreaming of a splint for my lung  
I'm dreaming of a splint for shoes, hollowed through their sole  
the sky is beating me with a splint

\*

in a room full of thumbs spelling their names in condiments is one gold helium balloon  
Meredith is fingering a rosary

someone lead me to my kin through the sound of steel  
in the way steam works its way up  
in the way sandpaper grips

\*

### #3

*this is my fourth time writing of my first night in philly and I might be missing the woodland  
canopies I can't breathe so good*

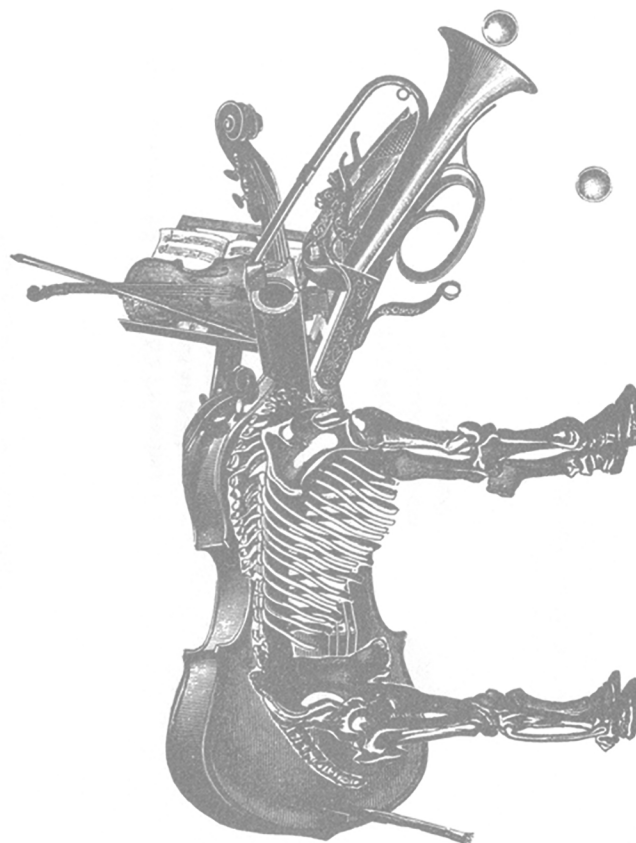
### #5

a splint chalked into me,  
my throat I'm breathing a locust  
I mean  
it's created when I makes its image  
out into the brick dawn  
I'm tipping over a box of lang-  
uage it's a dollar or two too heavy  
my linens of mint juleps soak into me

\*

I searched for warm socks in a pack of Newports  
and found a photo of me kneeling in a pew  
I could post it somewhere but then it's there forever  
unlike burning leaves or bark with a little  
bic lighter the white one  
you read about white lighter pockets  
you read about embargos  
you read and sever the glue  
or staples you wish you didn't  
bend into themselves

\*



# YOU TOLD ME TO LISTEN TO THE EARTH'S RESONANCE SO I BECAME AN ARSONIST

*"How is wilderness memorized into the body?" — C.A. Conrad*

Meredith Blankinship

The way no alarm system is the absence of net  
A man and his roller bag heading down the sidewalk forever  
I covered my plantings in dirt  
I covered my seedlings with straw & lit them on fire  
The cicadas seemed to like that  
They got louder & louder in the absence of other  
demands on my time

If I'm not attached to outcome I'm just following a feeling I'm afraid will come to nothing  
before I die  
Before we all die I hold money in my hands & I freeze it  
I light it on fire by doing nothing  
I show the world I'm made of straw  
I cradle the empty space in my up-facing palms  
I put on clothes for sweating I take them off when I'm ready to fuck  
Holding on to my love's tail & whipping it over my head in circles

This girl snipping the vines waving up the gutter  
This girl the vine bringing the fence down

Fuck my curated sense of wonder  
I carry it around like I could be compelled  
Waking you don't know the phase I'm out of  
A shapely & despondent glimmer tacked on to the middle I feel myself returning



## UNTITLED



Meredith Blankship

*coming like this to  
the end of the planet  
the adhesive my body produces from  
too much worry generous amounts to seal the files for good*  
— C.A. Conrad

The earliest cruelties are manifest in the ear canal  
From where an opportunistic species, your mother  
Dropped you in the river & you were filled  
You were worried by the teeth of the current & jawed into a bed of kelp that strapped you  
to the bottom you had no small inkling, being a baby, of hope for being saved

We came with rain  
from a table facing the wall our self-conscious trust in rain this outside  
The water, your mother, bored by dynamite, hollowed long holes cored into rocks above  
her lapping mouths

Nobody wants the green fruit but then  
Nobody knows how to start without hello  
Trivial in the teeming sluice we evade the practice of romance among the rock slides  
Be honest about your true abilities but how do i cut that application's cake? Presented  
with the reams of your rain questions we solved for hexes  
Past bedtime & tender  
The cliff face couldn't be trusted nor the appetites that watered it  
We knew you were in there & we let our feet & hands touch the bottom to show we were  
listening  
Your mother, the split of blood  
otherwise what could we love more than stone  
The falls show us as we are in the androgynous sun  
I had a job to do, it was words to give you, pressed backwards in your paw but the rains  
stayed on the back roads & we seen it in the moving pavement  
as my orbit decays, making  
A little room to run new each time

# THE JOY AND TERROR ARE BOTH IN THE SWALLOWING

Christine Shan Shan Hou

May the daughter never resemble a sullen cabbage.  
Running jostles the organs within the rickety confines

of a torso, like rearranging your body's furniture to give view  
to a swimming pool. The swimming pool possesses the same

qualities as other swimming pools. It is blue and vague.  
How suddenly a thought can unglue you and make you fall

into pieces. Each piece, a new country captivated by southern light.  
In the south, spirits follow false passageways.

Bright young people mark their territory by repeating simple  
tasks in an invigorating manner.

Bright young people need adventure, a heated portable incubator for  
processed foods and aspirations governed in by new technologies.

A rigid awareness dawns over the heart smothering the only existing  
frond of certainty and arousing my womanly insecurity around

machinery. It's good to do the work even if you want to do horrible  
things with the results. This must be how every girl on a diet feels.

Cataloging the day's sugar intake is one form of reason.  
Bright young people don't know what they want unless you

show it to them. You cannot rely on algorithms or spirits to show you  
the path. There are ways to be wanted that have yet to be discovered.



Christine Shan Shan Hou

The key of being able to live anywhere is the queen.  
The trouble with saintliness is its proximity to godliness.

Destroying an entire group of invasive creatures at once  
Is the only way to do it. Driven out of dankness

Lone survivors fear helicopters overhead. It is impossible to know  
if an invader has truly been eliminated until several years later.

Even pigs at their most mature state are not immune to tragedy.  
Herding creates an impenetrable wall of stares. Within the life

Of the perfect creature an idea is forced into action. The equivalent  
of plucking eggs and vegetables off fertile ground where worms

Spawn a disposable creature. Wreckage is necessary when forcing  
any idea into action. Bystanders smother a mound of good intentions

At a gala banquet. As soon as trust wavers, erroneous puddles  
promptly evaporate. The point of aging is not to fill holes but

Charm untrustworthy bystanders with your determination.  
You cannot offer up the women in your life as proof of your goodness.



# CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

**C**OLLEEN LOUISE BARRY is a writer and artist. Her work can be seen in *jubilat*, *Sixth Finch*, *Forklift*, *Ohio* and other places. She runs Mount Analogue, a weirdo publishing project and art/bookshop in Seattle, WA. @colleenlouisebarry / @themountainanalogue / www.mount-analogue.com.

**L**IZ BAYAN is a multimedia artist born in Salem, Oregon. Her practice in the fields of digital arts and new media focuses on mediation, technogenesis, and digital vision.

**A**MY BERGEN lives and works in Portland, Maine. She's working on a book about scientist Nikola Tesla for younger readers and has a short fiction collection coming out from Magic Helicopter Press.

**M**EREDITH BLANKINSHIP's poems have appeared in *H\_NGM\_N*, *Beecher's*, *Imperial Matters*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Similar:Peaks*, *GlitterMob*, *Sink Review*, and *Finery*, among others. She is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and lives in Atlanta, GA.

**L**IZ BOWEN is a writer, scholar and editor living in New York City. She is a doctoral student in English and comparative literature at Columbia University, where she also teaches undergraduate writing. Her first poetry collection, *SUGARBLOOD*, was published by Metatron Press in 2017.

**A**NELISE CHEN is the author of *So Many Olympic Exertions*, an experimental novel that blends elements of sportswriting, memoir and self help. Her essays, reviews, and profiles have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Gawker*, *NPR*, *BOMB Magazine*, *New Republic*, *The Morning News*, *VICE*, *Village Voice*, and many other publications. A former fellow of the Asian American Writers' Workshop, she is now fiction editor of AAWW's online publication *The Margins*. She teaches writing at Columbia University.

**M**ICHAEL CREDICO's fiction has recently appeared in the *Black Warrior Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *Columbia Journal*, *Hobart*, *Juked*, *New Ohio Review*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Quarterly West*, and others. He lives in Cleveland, Ohio.

**K**ATE GARKLAVS lives and works in Portland, OR. Her work has previously appeared in *Juked*, *Two Serious Ladies*, and *Ohio Edit*, among other places. She earned her MFA from UMass Amherst.

**A**LEX GREGOR is a writer, editor & instructor currently living in Rome, Italy. He is one of the founding editors of OOMPH! Press and

was previously the curator of the DIRTY SOUTH reading series in Atlanta, Georgia. His chapbook, *FAUCET*, was selected as a finalist for The Atlas Review Chapbook Series (2015). His work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Fanzine*, *Real Pants*, *Jacket 2*, *Entropy*, *Deer Bear Wolf Magazine*, *DELUGE*, *Queen Mob's Tea House*, *Muse /A Journal* and elsewhere. He has a MA in English from Georgia State University. You can find excerpts of his writing at: www.marginalcomets.com.

**A**USTIN HAYDEN is a fiction editor at NOÖ *Journal* and an mDiv student at Eden Theological Seminary.

**M**ARCELLE HEATH'S work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Kenyon Review Online*, *matchbook*, *Nanoism*, *Necessary Fiction*, *PANK*, *Storychord*, *Wigleaf*, and other journals. She is Series Editor of *Wigleaf* Top 50 (very) Short Fictions, and Managing Editor of *VIDA: Women in Literary Arts*.

**C**HRISTINE SHAN SHAN HOU is a poet and artist living in Brooklyn, NY. Publications include *Community Garden for Lonely Girls*, *I'm Sunlight*, *C O N C R E T E S O U N D*, a collaborative artists' book with artist Audra Wolowiec, and *Accumulations*. Additional poems and/or artwork appear in *Ace Hotel Blog*, *Gramma Daily*, *Dusie*, *Poor Claudia*, *Fanzine*, *Elderly*, *iO: A Journal of New American Poetry*, *Weekday*, *Bone Bouquet*, *Belladonna*, *Gwarlingo*, *ILK*, *LIT*, *The Atlas Review*, *tender*, *Lemon Hound*, and *Two Serious Ladies* amongst others. She has received awards from Key West Literary Seminar, The Flow Chart Foundation/The Academy for American Poets, and Naropa University.

**G**ENE KWAK is a Fiction Editor for NOÖ and is the author of two chapbooks: *Orphans Burning Orphans*, and a self-titled collection published by Awst Press. He has published work in *Juked*, *The Rumpus*, *Hobart*, *Redivider*, and elsewhere. He is from Omaha, Nebraska.

**N**ATE LOGAN is from Indianapolis, Indiana. His recent work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Dirty Chai*, *Sea Foam Magazine*, and *Yes, Poetry*. He's editor and publisher of *Spooky Girlfriend Press*.

**C**ARRIE LORIG is the author of *The Pulp vs. The Throne*. Her chapbooks include *nods.*, *stonepoems* (with Sara June Woods), *rootpoems* (with Sara June Woods), and *Labor Day* (with Nick Sturm). She is a Poetry Editor for NOÖ.

**K**YLE ADAM KALEV PEETS is a multi-disciplinary artist. He has received the 2017 Richardson-Spica fellowship in printmaking and photography at Interlochen Center for the Art in Michigan. His work can be found at www.kylepeets.com.

**S**TEVEN PEREZ is a poet and musician living in Philadelphia. He is an editor at Tagvverk and his self-released chapbook, *in palm*, can be found on the internet with its accompaniment album, *lozenge*, from his solo project, *allscum*. He also plays in the band *Lozenge*.

**C**HERYL QUIMBA'S poems have appeared in *1913*, *Dusie*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Everyday Genius*, *Horseless Review*, *Phoebe*, and *Tinfish*. She is the author of the poetry collection *Nobody Dancing* and the chapbook *Scattered Trees Grow in Some Tundra*. With Joe Hall, she co-authored the digital chapbook *May I Softly Walk: The Santa Fe Journals*. Cheryl lives in Buffalo, New York.

**A**NDREW RHODES is a fiction writer from Mississippi. His work has appeared in publications such as *New World Writing*, *The Laurel Review*, *Punchnel's*, *Per Contra*, *Upstreet*, *Crime Factory*, and others.

**K**ATHERINE FORBES RILEY is a computational linguist and writer in Vermont. A Dartmouth College graduate with a PhD from University of Pennsylvania, her academic writing appears in many places. Her creative writing appears in *Blue Monday Review*, *decomp*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Spartan*, *Conium*, *James Franco Review*, *Mulberry Fork*, *Halfway Down The Stairs*, *Crack the Spine*, *Storyscape*, *Whiskey Island*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Eunoia*, *Literary Orphans*, *Eclectica*, *BlazeVOX*, *McNeese Review*, *Akashic Books*, and *Buffalo Almanack*, from whom she received the Inkslinger's Award.

**J**OHAN RUFO is the poetry reviews editor for the Poetry Project Newsletter. Work has been published, or is forthcoming, on *Poets.org*, *Ploughshares*, *The Offing*, *The Capilano Review*, *Tagvverk*, *Entropy*, *The Journal Petra*, and *Dreginald*. Links and contact at dadtalkshow.tumblr.com.

**F**ORTUNATO SALAZAR divides his time between Mexico City and Los Angeles. His most recent fiction and translations are at *Tin House*, *PEN America*, *VICE*, *The Offing*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and elsewhere.

**J**USTIN SANDERS is a ghost from Baltimore. His words can be found most recently in his book, for all the other ghosts, and on city walls, for all the other ghosts was published as a thesis project for the MFA in Creative Writing and Publishing Arts at the University of Baltimore. To read more about Sanders see his interview with *The Kenyon Review*.

**N**ICK STURM is a poet, editor and scholar. He is the author of *How We Light* and the forthcoming book *Another Mona Bone Jakon*.

**J**OE WORTHEN is a writer from South Carolina who works in the pizza industry and dislikes animals. More of his work can be found at [www.mezacht.com](http://www.mezacht.com).

## MANY THANKS TO THE WARM OF HEART

Alaska friends  
Albuquerque friends  
Allied Media Conference  
Akron friends  
APRIL  
Ashland friends  
Athens (GA) friends  
Atlanta friends  
Austin friends  
Nat Baldwin  
Baltimore friends  
Buffalo friends  
Brooklyn friends  
California in general  
Chicago friends  
Chili for Breakfast  
The Cinnamon Urns  
D.C. friends  
Des Moines friends  
El Bosque Garlic Farm

Feliz Lucia Molina  
Fog Machine  
Hawaii friends  
Treefort  
Indianapolis friends  
Kalamazoo friends  
Kansas City friends  
Kittery friends  
Los Angeles friends  
Louisville friends  
Mellow Pages  
The Mill House  
Minneapolis friends  
Muncie friends  
Nampa friends  
New Hampshire friends  
New Mexico in general  
New York friends  
Oakland friends  
Omaha friends

Oregon in general  
Oxford friends  
Philadelphia friends  
Pitchfork Festival Book Tent  
Pittsburgh friends  
Poetic Research Bureau  
Portland friends  
Pygmalion Festival  
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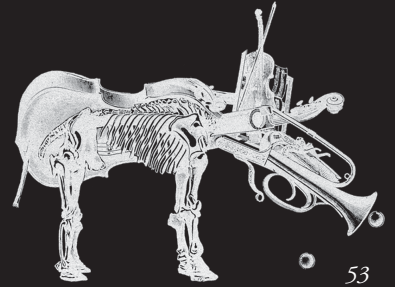
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# NOÖ Journal [17] FOR FREE FOR YOU



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## INSIDE NOÖ [17]

This morning an email appeared in my inbox that ends like this: "I am writing this poem to you because I don't understand / how to actually be someone to anyone / but I want to make an effort / and you are in my palpitating arrhythmia."

**NOÖ Presents: Ginger Ko's *Motherlover***  
*Carrie Lorig* | 4

Look at your neighbor. Look at your neighbor's body. Can you see your neighbor wielding a stick? Propelling through water? Is this neighbor graceful? Does this neighbor look good plastered in sweat? Is there a large mountain?

**Look at Your Neighbor**  
*Anelise Chen* | 25

I don't know where the children are. I haven't thought of them since they went missing. "They've gone down to the river" is all I can think to tell her.

**Tule Vieja**  
*Justin Sanders* | 34

a way of keeping,  
time waning at the borderlands,  
the cracked vicinity,  
like a love patrol

**I**  
*Cheryl Quimba* | 48

my lead body is in a gulf of sandpaper  
my lead body is in blown glass alone  
my lead body can't make out what flowers are

**one day in palm**  
*Steven Perez* | 50

