



NMJ
V.3

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Joe Milazzo

A Field Recording

The enemies you can't
ascribe are as sloppy with anonymity
as the saints
 (paid)
 you can't plant
on the bus' lowly rumble.
So your immersion inflates.
Levers and bricks effect the separation

of the prisms: high-ranking
shadows, mineable
disproportions of mouths.
The jet stops here. In a sky
whose curves zone brands,
its optic totality
 privately
 ritual.

A parting color

of light centers the sense

of an orbiting your wardrobe, like

nobody, mandates. But the mirror
doesn't screen the engine. The mirror
surges, tugging

an assemblage.

Mobilize the papers that
can't wrench without
your impressing.

You vote to gag
away on the X in aphorism—
appropriately, then appropriately.

A Field Recording

A preached persistence won't
return the living to life.

The stones won't be scrubbed
from the storm.

Hope is robotic anyway—
pilgrims, walking to walk.

The tempos
drop to nothing.

The call infects
all response.

There's no genesis left
that isn't viral. There's no
nature to separate
but in the coral's
glacial reservation.

Revelation turns
its monotonous face
to the desert: pedestal
after pitted pedestal.

A pious resilience
reads the grooves with an
arid grabbing,
a stiff finger of viability
so over our heads.
Its indulgent fraud
is to reinstitute depth,
layer by layer,
fresh before
the inkiness of our
own very eyes.

Increments are the wellsprings
of the worst suffering and
sand turns
everything to sand.

A Field Recording

Shadow-self
of an artificial winter:
that garish, tremendous awaiting
we were guaranteed
our caution had toppled,

just not
to drivel. No, to
antipathy and mimicry:
the remains
of the air.

Where did this declaration
move us? Need never flies far from
the temples it levels. It coughs,
but choking would
assume a question,

an interrogator. And need
is immune to the plague
of the uninhabitable.
Where tomorrow surges, it yaws
toward meanwhile. Atavism rears

its tenement sun. Out
of freedom, this weak
offensive irradiates
only that white ground
lying indifferent
to such fearsome pieces.

A Field Recording

The cranes are deporting
the foundations.
The foundations
are unshakeable and seismic most
where the cranes
chain further cranes—like clutches,
like skeins—to the dammed chalk
of a broken face.
Where pointed notions of climbing
and plummeting
close on circling,
time frames its windows.
Time, opaque as anything clean
against its background of
mineral names.

The foundations
are bored and plumbed,
without memory. Plasma.
Deltas. Chloroplasts of rust.
The ditches and hooks
of scratched traps.
An inerrant setting
of such forgettable suns.
And still the migrations
scaffold the foundations.
Over them the cranes advance
with treads of tanks,
carriages of rendered animals.

The cranes are warped reinforcement.
The foundations are twice struck.
Flattened under a field
of competing accusations,
sorting grinds, fulcrums office.
The sky is only a refuge
where its crust of lime
reflects a square.
The cranes continue what
the foundations sputtered
to the extinguished
and innumerable. The ancient
weather of subterranean waters
holds the second hand back.

The bigger ones hammer one blank
to the next. Armed, as they are,
the ladders. Smearing
leans on.

A Field Recording

Firing its offense,
this cocky ordnance refreshes,

gets lippy, miniaturized,
snuffed euphoria
in the ricochet
of a reddened button.

Straggle to scroll anew.
The hyper-exchange:
where hawkers
stall lauds with dung
song and lamb's dirt.

The daddy bosses pawning
bonuses in their confidential
faculties hector
from the hip. From the floor,
the markets move cages.
Multiplication punches
the product with a bell's
abecedarian boom.

Dragging timetables
can hardly be overturned.
Not even by conscripts
sized like a Christ,
their shrapnel hands sanitized,
their loins and phobias
drabbed in miracle pixels.

But who hasn't hailed
the faked reactions
as they gutter?

This image may contain.

Lunar Notes: An Interview with Joe Milazzo



Why do you write? How do you begin, how does your process unfold, and who or what influences your work?

At the risk of coming off as clever or flippant, I'd like to say that I write in order to figure out what it is I'm writing about. Writing, for me, is an act of perception—the first step in my journey towards understanding. This is another way of saying that, for me, writing is about discovery, digestion (or distillation), orienting (and reorienting), remembering and projecting into the possible. My process is to approach the words as Pascal did the river, treating them as the substance (surface and depth; motion and matter) of a road that takes me where I want to go. This also means that I try and approach everything as potentially inspirational or influential. In terms of subjects or interests, chief among them are consciousness, language, narrative (historical and imaginative, assuming there's much difference between the two), and the various ways in which all these phenomena collaborate to create our sense of the real.

If you were the last person on earth, and you pulled the last book from a pile of ash and cinders, what would it be?

I would hope that book would be a book I've not yet read. And not necessarily one I've been meaning to read. If not, I'd settle for a collected works: maybe Cortázar, maybe Le Guin, or Zukofsky; Bob Kaufman perhaps, or Gertrude Stein. A companion-book.

What books do you have on your shelf right now? Anything or anyone you're excited about?

I am currently reading Clark Coolidge's *Now It's Jazz*, his book about Kerouac and, well, jazz. A fascinating read thus far, in part because Coolidge the essayist is not all that different from Coolidge the poet. But also because I find I don't have much of an appreciation for Kerouac anymore—if I ever did (I don't believe I've ever finished *On the Road*). Then again, I may find that I only really like Coolidge's Kerouac and not the genuine article. Or, that Coolidge's idea of Kerouac is more compelling than even the best Kerouac that Kerouac could muster. That said, I am most looking forward to the second half of the book, in which Coolidge recounts his personal experience (dare I call it "fandom"?) of jazz. I've read excerpts from this portion of the book before and am eager to dig into the whole of its casually (coolly?) haunting ekphrastics.

To read afterward? I'll be browsing the following:

- Susan Lewis, *Zoom*
- Sesshu Foster, *City of the Future*

- Gisèle Prassinós, *The Arthritic Grasshopper: Collected Stories*
- David Sudnow, *Pilgrim in the Microworld*
- Bilge Karasu, *The Garden of Departed Cats*
- Jena Osman, *Public Figures*
- Adriana Widdoes, Allison Conner, Emma Kemp, Johanna Hedva, Mady Schutzman, Orenda Fink, and Suzanne Scanlon, *Rockhaven: A History of Interiors*

What space does/should writing occupy, especially in this present moment?

Literature is, always has been, and always will be social practice. Even the most hackneyed “creative writing” manipulates language against the grain, “the functional”... although maybe only in America do we instrumentalize language to such an extreme degree (and our overly workshopped notions of literary excellence reflect as much). As such, the space writing primarily occupies is its own; literally, what it marks out; the parameters it establishes for itself. But only the best writing is able to acknowledge the ways in which it is ideologically compromised (in the manner of all utterances, whatever the intentions that have channeled them from mind to tongue) while simultaneously freeing itself from what my friend and sometimes-teacher Joseph McElroy likes to call “the tyranny of the anecdote”—the notion that what has been strictly requires what will be.

What was the first piece you ever had published? Are you the same person/writer who wrote it, and if not, how have you changed?

I’ve had several writing careers: “music critic,” book reviewer, for-hire content producer. But I date my career as a writer as beginning with the appearance of this story in an issue of [In Posse Review](#). A decade has since passed, and I am definitely a changed person. For one thing, I’m not sure I have another short story in me. Less facetiously, I’d like to think I’ve broadened my range and my notions of what “the experimental” can encompass. (I am, however, still in thrall to guitar solos. I can’t rub that generational disposition out of myself.)

Which do you find the most challenging and/or rewarding and why: fiction, poetry, or prose?

If the writing requires that I write about or with direct reference to myself—not a body, occupied and occupying, but a personality or set of exegetic atmospheric conditions—I find that difficult. The much more comfortable position for me is one in which I’m cupping the shards of my subjectivity in my hands, knowing that the next choice I have to make involves selecting and fitting another handful of those pieces into the puzzle of a new persona. With the novel, this salvage-cum-invention takes a great deal of time; the relationships that bind author and character are more monogamous, if that makes sense. And plot, or at least drama: its tautness is not the outcome of efficiencies, at least in my practice. Which is not to say that novel-writing is drudgery. It’s just that its pleasures, like Kafka’s Great Emperor, are often more anticipated than received. (Until

you can make yourself a relatively disinterested reader of your own novel, I've found, those pleasures don't fully arrive.) Poetry I find more convivial and quicker, its forms improvisations on everyday saying. It can take me weeks to write a finished poem (whatever that is), but the end is almost always in sight, and the horizon never looks like a deadline. That scope agrees with me very much these days, which are lived mostly from 9 to 5.

What are some of the challenges you face as an editor? What do you enjoy about it?

Time is a challenge. I want to give everything I read as much of my attention as possible. But I can't. So I try not to be too arbitrary in granting authority to my tastes and interests. That is, I try to read as much outside of my proclivities as possible. Just as I am skeptical of the edict to "write what you know," I am suspicious of the notion that "good writing" reveals itself as soon as it's read. The apparent aesthetic neutrality of "good writing" to me seems like a form of self-deception, inasmuch as it denies the choices that codify preferences into default positions. But reading in this way—parallel to myself—takes a good deal of vigilance. Thankfully, it's a skill I was taught in workshop, and one I continue to relearn every time I'm fortunate enough to spend time with unfamiliar authors' unpublished writing. To immerse yourself in the work without submerging your critical sensibilities... moreover, to not idolize craft among all of the demiurges in that critical pantheon... that's tricky. But I've found the effort more than worthwhile. Doing so has kept my world from growing small around me.

What projects do you have going on right now? What are your concerns/obsessions? Anything we can look forward to?

I am currently at work on three discrete poetic sequences and a novel. The novel (title still TBD) is set in Dallas in the 1970s and is something of a coming-of-age story. But it is also very much concerned with the history of the region, a history which many outside of Texas know nothing about even as it remains quintessentially American. If *Crepuscle W/ Nellie* (my first book) is a "jazz novel," this new one is a "prog rock novel."

Field Recordings is the first of these three evolving poetic sequences. The field in question is contemporary and largely rhetorical. If these poems offer resistance—as I hope they might—they do so by way of appropriating, repurposing and recontextualizing (via various discursive strategies; that is, I have endeavored in them to preserve a thematic unity without relying on a univocality) small portions of what is most awful about the current political regime's discourse.

My concern in the so-called "name poems" of *Acrostic Aspice* is with the conditions of celebrity as they are lived by non-celebrities, i.e., "you" and "me." Or: I suppose these poems are all about minor celebrity, as their titles, borrowed from the outer limits of fame, suggest. Our subjectivities so often cohere in the back and forth between narratives intensely our own and those widespread narratives with which we cannot

help but make contact, or which are in constant contact with us. But the latter narratives are so much more easily represented, not to mention “relatable,” while the former remain largely untranslatable. So this self-exchange can never be equal. Still, people live as they live, and their names mean something to them.

Finally, the numbered poems that constitute *homeopathy for the singularity* represent my attempts to undertake a slow study of online existence as it stands in 2017/2018.

What advice would you give to a writer just starting out?

Rejection letters are paychecks. They certify your labors. They’re promissory. They’re also bankable—that is, dependable. Keep saving them up. Keep showing up for work.



Heidi Owens

When did We Forget

The night is dark and clear, clouds just shades of grey, moments away from becoming black, but what they are not, the sky itself is black as if to say there is nothing else out there, nothing else out there, no stars or love or wonder to be found in the vast, vast cosmos we know to exist because we have telescopes and observatories, places to chart the night sky, proclaim it our own and point out stars we might see saying “Why that’s Aldebaran, Cervantes, Copernicus, Deneb, Altair, Vega, or *NSV 00099*,” after we stopped naming our stars after men and women of great renown, after we quit finding deities to worship in them, the night sky became empty, as if all the stars have fallen from the skies and have dotted and speckled every single town, city, building, and car in our metropolises, it is a night sky with nothing out there for us because we took every single one of those stars and plucked them, sewed them into the fabric of our reality, until the lights no longer feel like reflections of the stars, having replaced the stars out there, in our hearts, and so the night sky is black, dark and foreboding, a sign of danger, to not go into that dark forest at night, a warning we no longer heed, when did we stop being afraid of the night, of the dark, when did we forget to fear the vast emptiness of the cosmos, and by giving up that fear give up the desire to explore and find something greater and more beautiful than fake comfort found in the stuff we’ve made of plucked stars.

What's on Your Mind?

Don't look up
Talk, Text, Scroll down Facebook
Talk, Text, Scroll down Facebook
Talk, Text, Scroll down Facebook

Heads downcast as if
grasping at the straws
of a universe which ceased to care
the moment it ushered us in
Screaming, crying. It's all the same.
Bleeding, dying. "If it's all the same
to you, mister, I'd rather stand
for something than fall for nothing."

Laid down to rest
like your mother, father, sister, brother
alive or dead, it's all the same
face facing the silent
disintegration of a race
which wants to watch itself
decay one measly upvote
or downvote at a time.

Grasping for something
visceral and genuine,
not incomplete like
those kids who slept inside
a giant magnet, measuring
hands growing, slowly groping
at a sense of normalcy
normally unknown to all
who lost the opportunity
to get lost along the way
to finding out who they'd be
if they didn't

Talk, Text, Scroll down Facebook.
Look up.

To Be

When I was a child
I had this wild idea
if I prayed hard enough,

Or wished on every single star I
could see in the night sky ...

Maybe, if I was lucky,

In the morning, I'd wake up and be
Someone else. Someone who wasn't
Necessarily not me. Someone who
Didn't have a name yet. But was definitely
Unapologetically me,
the person I have always wanted to be,

Because, you see I was not then
Who I am now.
Nor am I now the person my parents thought I would become
Or who the god my parents worship had destined me to be.

You see, I was assigned a gender at birth which
decided the roles I would
Find myself playing which never fit.
Roles which scolded and told me
I wasn't allowed to cry
I wasn't allowed

To live anything but a lie.

Because that was the person
I believed I was and was expected to be.

But even when I heard that I could be
something else, transgender
as it were, the only word I ever heard in association:

Abomination.

Which I was surely not.
I was no sin against nature,
Frankenstein's Monster to be jeered at
for being queer.

But that's what I felt like
both times I tried to open the door
to a part of myself closely guarded.

Scorned and laughed at by

two people I trusted most.
Leading to a buried key, hiding

A secret which would one day be found
by someone who was ... different, you see.

this boy, girl or girl, boy,
he was not a she
and she was not a he,
back then anyway

he hadn't decided what
gender she was.

And this idea of just being ok with fluidity
Was like gifting myself all the dreams
and prayers
and wishes
Of the person I had always wanted to be

Lilly.
A name I had given myself, then,
before moving on.

And all he said was
"You know, you're pretty"
Four simple words to
a heart that had endured

So much hate and pain
And loss and suffering
Gave me hope. And access to emotions
I never knew existed.

Opened a scar I thought would never heal
But he allowed me to be me, for once.
Which was not enough.

Needing to be me, more
and more and more and more.
He asked me why I hide that side of me

Anywhere outside of our company.
Then she left me. Leaving a chasm in my heart
which left me incomplete and broken.

Forced to find a will to go on
or die.
And I willed myself to live
as I had willed myself to live for 15 years.

15 years in which I rarely considered
the name my parents gave would not
always be mine.

But sometimes the scar of heartbreak
Can make us braver than we ever
knew possible.

Brave enough to tell someone,
who wasn't quite a friend yet,
who I actually was.
Not Lilly, anymore
a name which no longer fit,
but Heidi, who I had become
when I was trading fear
for bravery.

But, Fear still exists, because
of the time we live in,
where people like me are

Kidnapped
Raped
And Murdered
For simply trying

To be.



Freddie Wyss

You burst through a door
too dark a hollow room
A voice speaks
"Did you find what you were looking for?"

*A folder
with nothing in it
on a desk*

*A body found
A day after "fuck y'all"*

You wake to bird song
a few nights more
sleep drunk at the wheel
hurtling over a mountain edge

Hunger rabid hybrid pets, fangborn,
shaken in a cage
airlifted to ward apocalypse

*Sex and life in the death
or a cockroach*

*Over a mountain, through underbrush,
bleeding slightly
iodine cinctures
slow fade scar tissue*

Neck wrenching at a school bench
That feeding off conscious
ness five minutes at a time
motion blurs fault fo
cuss

Kicked wakes of a cat scratch
Shared their bed quarter full
Folded, crossed paths
Blinks to CFO, CO

Misstacked classroom
With three fifths split uneven
Chairs unmatched, unmatchable

Blanket statement:
This isn't a blanket
you're wrapped in

nothing is holding

everything
together

o
r every
thing
else

what a
nice **false**

bottom, except for
infinity

underneath
can't do without

its
covers

dear mike
people will say
dont
do
drugs

we
all do

still

you are home
in a cave
hieroglyphs floating at the walls
such-and-such a place
freeze tag in the streets
with discount prices
savant major saver

the house isn't so cold
I never left

the _____ place that
only _____ go to
on a crowd card

la mode recto verso
ensure page level metadata

ectoplasmachismo
(octo-plasma-cheese-mo)
because nothing is sexier
thin open conversation
porthole portal
(our favorite aphrodisiac)

matthias fell and got
(part of the best part)
staples in his head once
my brother was stapled
I don't know where I remember it

funds remnants of
referential memorandum titled quote
"faux memo"

x=

My reality is so made
Of out of touch that
I only ever risk relationships
Presume me resumé
The name fucked (-,or,etc)
how I always only present in the present
or am present in it
Weighted with alternate timelines
I *take pause*
an other me doesn't take
Regret is
knowing you're dimensions
dimensionally displaced

No hope to amass another space



Gabrielle Castleberry-Gordon

For...You

I'm lonely for...your smirk
That half smile that creeps across your face when I say something too sarcastic
I'm lonely for...the way your hand touches mine
And the shudder of knowing that I'm going to get it later

They say I need a distraction
I spiral myself up with duties and labors but still I find myself sitting quietly with thoughts of you
Feelings intertwined with every step I take
Every breath filled with *you're not here anymore*

I'm lonely for...the way your lips fit into mine
And the way your hot wet tongue wriggled its way through the folds in my ear
And how your teeth bared down so viciously into my neck
Like a dog picking a bone

Existing and away from you
Like a half Gemini star burned out
Incomplete, devoid of meaning
Of essence, of companion

I wonder if you sit too
Eyes toward the window, face pressed against the glass
And feel lonely for me
If you can even feel the time and distance between us like an ever widening gap
An endless abyss
I long to throw myself into
Riddled with memories and past lives and futures of us

Each day I open my eyes I'm lonely
I'm lonely for...your soft sweet smell
The musk you left on my shoulders from your arms around my neck
I'm lonely for...the way your brown eyes welled with tears
from the tragedies lining the world
I'm lonely for...someone to bear the weight of being alive with
I'm lonely for...who I was with you

FairyTale

Sometimes I let my mind wander
Down dark paths and through wicked trees
To a place I pushed so deep in the back of my head
I question if it even exists
That place where you live

It's a dangerous road with many forks
And pitfalls and quicksand
Suffocating memories of you
Your hands your lips your smell
The way my heart beat and the world stopped
And the pain and the suffering too

Nostalgia wells up in my chest
And tears flow from my eyes
Like that rushing creek beside the house I trapped you in
The little breadcrumbs you left behind

You exist only in that place now
In the quiet corridors of a candy house
A little voice in my head taunting me
Come inside, drown in me
Don't you remember how sweet it was?

Maybe we were only meant for stories
Unfolding only when the book is open to our pages
Deluded by the thin veil of fantasy
And tucked out of the sight of those
Who never believed in magic



Adedeji Adeogo Benjamin

CYANOTIC

There is a hole in my heart
Because my soul is home only to your touch.

And every time I ponder on your frame
I get struck with fainting spells.

So I squat with my chin caressing my knees
Back arched, mindful of you.

A.B. you are the origin of my blues
Your love makes me cyanotic.

WHEN YOU ASKED THAT WE GO DANCING

My heart sank to my stomach
Because I don't know how to dance.

I

I never really learned
Because sad people don't dance
And I was sad
Before I met you.

II

The future of Nigerian kids
Is dancing into oblivion
To the tune of corruption and injustice.
Would dancing not make me complicit?

My heart is heavy because of children
with no home, water or education.
I don't know how to dance.

III

You asked that we go dancing and I said,
"No honey, I don't know how to."
You laughed at me.
Placed both my hands on your waist and whispered,
"Sway with me."



Amanda Korz

Word Thoughts

I have a lot of thoughts, but don't think things through.

I think I'm like Frankenstein's creation. Different parts sewn together, always on the outside looking in, too ugly to be inside. Because I don't have the right body.

I don't have the right body...

Are you friends with me out of pity? Ow.

My heart is ugly, don't look at it. It's infected. Puss oozing from different places. Festering. Or maybe that's my brain.

Maybe they're the same.

I'm sorry this doesn't make a lot of sense. But maybe I'll explain myself.

Maybe I'll just stare at my feet.

I like your hugs. They take me out of my brain-heart.

I've written poems about you. I don't think you'd like them. They may make you feel guilty and I don't want that. But I think they're true.

I think I'm drastic. I thought about getting a sex change today. I'd be a very ugly boy and I don't think you'd like me more. Is that real?

Did I ever tell you about my first kiss? It was in the park with a girl. She kissed me. And the parents in the park shielded their children's eyes and walked away really fast. Is love supposed to be disgusting to other people?

I think you think my brain-heart is disgusting.

If I was a flower, I'm not sure whether I would bloom or wilt.

This guy in my Spanish class keeps hitting on me. He asks all these questions about me. About my tattoos and what I do in my free time. Like it's his business.

It feels intrusive.

I don't know how to say no.

I don't know how to say yes.

Because maybe he's a good guy for me. But I'm just not interested.

I think you're the only person who doesn't see us together.

Maybe soulmates don't have to be romantic or sexual. Maybe soulmates don't exist at all. Maybe I was wrong.

I feel foolish. Like a child believing in Santa. Perhaps I wasn't meant to be loved like this.

I still miss you. It's still pathetic.

I think I'm killing you. Draining you. Stealing you.

I think I'm a bad influence on you.

I think I'm bad.

I think I like crying.

I think I don't know.

I think I'm like a bad habit.

I think I ask too much of you.

I think I'm too much and not enough. Mostly not enough.

I think I'm the color of the deep ocean. Dark. With alien looking creatures inside. Pitch black. Feeling the pressure of being so far under water.

Word Thoughts 2

I think I came on like a Tsunami.

I'm sorry.

I got so excited.

The idea of my brain-heart expanding and touching yours was so beautiful.

I cried.

I had dreams where you saw me. I convinced myself that they were going to come true.

I wanted your body to be my cathedral. Where I could find sanctuary.

But there's a problem.

A Witch can't enter a Cathedral.

My brain-heart is still sick.

I don't want my disease to get to you too.

Maybe it's better this way.

My anti-depressants aren't getting any easier to swallow.

Why can't you take me on like that? Never mind, I don't want to be associated with those bitter pills. Swallow me all the same?

I feel absurd. I'm fucking losing wellness momentum for a girl I don't even know all that well.

I feel like a fool. How could I believe that I could have pleasure in a romantic or sexual form?

I feel like, with you, I wouldn't mind taking off the contraption beneath my shirt made of hooks, wires, and elastic.

But that's another fantasy.

Or another nightmare.

I saw you in the cafeteria, you had bed-head.

I want to wake up next to you like that.

But you won't tell me if you listen to the Dresden Dolls.

My deepest fantasy is to have you tie me down and spank me when I get hypo-manic so that I come crashing down from the high.

Then you hold my hand and kiss it better.

My brain-heart really wants that.

That's new.

I'm on Ice.

I'm in the polar regions of my brain-heart, the Wasteland, it's fucking cold there.

I went into a sex shop yesterday, bought a vibrator, got anxious, felt guilty, disassociated.

It was...

I don't want to give up on you yet. Because maybe I'm being impatient.

This is some visionary vomit.

I want our tongues to meet. Have conversations.

I want to see you away from the distraction of your friends.

I took you out, but I'm still bleeding.

So please, do you listen to the Dresden Dolls?



Adam Stoves

TM

every thing in the entire life can be solved. make it into patterns
i mean look at me, an exploded champion divides by three
no suntan boy
no scorpion
and then again how many strokes of the pen the word red is carved in
it never gets stagnant
exactly
stream that flows it never stops
a stream it flows
i thought what a stream



Linda Crate

blind

beneath sunny beacons
he will sip love
through the glance of
another
they will kiss

in stolen moments of quiet
taking loyalty
burying it beneath the water
that now stands beneath the bridge
i've since set on fire

the image of me will shatter
into a thousand pieces
of indigo rain,
and i will fade to gray
falling

when i rise from this death
i will remember everything and want none of it
wishing i had been wise enough to see
through the illusions of his lying tongue
wishing i could use the same fire

from the sky that brings him joy
to set him aflame—
an eye for an eye
until we're both blind.

surviving isn't enough

the windows are large
vacant as most of the customers' eyes
glazed eyed zombies

aimlessly walking, always hungry
for something more than they'll ever find
in this convenience store/gas station

guess it's no different than me expecting
to walk into second shift
praying today's the day i go in
and it won't be a complete and utter mess

so many days i just want to walk out
but bills don't pay themselves—

want to live and thrive not just be alive
dragging my legs through the cogs of a machine
that forgot my existence before it ever began

i want to pull the trigger on these days
and lay claim to the future.



Reviews

A Portrait in Blues: An anthology of identity, gender & bodies

Selected and introduced by jay dodd. Platypus Press (2017, 80 pages). \$16, paperback.

Reading *A Portrait in Blues* is like falling into the hush of a winter night, the path back disappearing under snow as the landscape begins to transform. There's a chill on the air and the threat of getting lost, but there is also Polaris, brighter against the deep blue. This is not to suggest a constant. This anthology is about bodies—be they star, planet, land, water, animal, poem, or our own, ever-changing forms—and is the body ever constant? Even Polaris is getting smaller, its pulse rate decreasing. Stars, too, experience death. But can a body ever really be defined, either by where and when it begins or when it ends? At the same time, bound by so many forces, can it ever truly be free? These are questions the poems in this anthology ask in voices that are vulnerable and sharp and soaked in blue.

jay dodd, who selected the poems, says in their introduction: "I'm curious to what we make of ourselves under limitations— it feels easier to transcend when you can point to the barriers of your departure." These are bodies departing, transforming, yearning, grieving—bodies testing their limitations and relating to other bodies. In Logan February's "Self-Portrait as Cotyledon," "A tree falls in the forest & / I am the forest & nothing stops shaking." jay dodd speaks to this web of connection: "Our landscapes, bodily & otherwise, don't exist in vacuums." So many times in this anthology I drop off a line, and the earth shifts.

The moon, that body whose outfit of light allows it constant transformation, makes several appearances, and powerfully so in Koby Lilliana Omansky's "The Tenderness Intended This": "Where was this moon when I searched for her? That same night? / Could this laughing, monstrous opulence, / larger than light, be the same tepid sphere I saw / shattered behind a tree, full with shame?" In "No Recital," Peter LaBerge casts the heart in shadow with "I'm giving / Being the moon a try" and "Moon: please begin / Again."

These are writers who seem ever conscious of the body, and to be ever conscious of the body, is to be conscious of it changing and dying every moment it's living. Regret lives here, complicated with gratitude, as seen in Laura Villareal's "Apology": "Body, I want to bury you / in fresh, out-of-the-dryer blankets. / Let you bathe in green tea & sunflowers. / I haven't been good to you." And assertion complicated by doubt, as in John Stintzi's "Split /": "yes, I know as much as you do, / am certain only of uncertainty." Strength, complicated by tenderness, as in Jonathan Bay's "Beginning": "Part of me is always / that beating heart / those weak lungs."

These poems remind us "how complex we are" (Emmanuel Oppong-Yeboah, "the thing expressed") at the same time jay dodd reminds us how fragile: "The semi-permeances of the body, physically & beyond, makes all it experiences susceptible to bruising. Flesh blues when ruptured." These poems, this anthology blues, bruises, and ruptures. It is a deep ache, the kind that reminds you just how alive—and briefly so—you are.

Knock

Melissa Atkinson Mercer. Half Mystic Press (2018, 70 pages). \$15, paperback. \$7, digital.

Half Mystic Press's first book, written by Melissa Atkinson Mercer, is bewitching, full of pitch and portents. One stumbles in and is caught in its spell...or is it curse? *Knock* uses elements of both, gathering its earthy ingredients ("my tongue is turbulent with acanthus, with bloodroot, with a pig's mudded hoof" in "she says: these are my lungs") and mixing them with ritual and the conjured voices of dead poets.

On the table of contents, a formula is laid out: six steps to "cure" depression (the first of which is "they cut out your tongue"), split into three parts. Braided into these steps are three definitions for knock, all verbs, all with agency: "to produce a noise," "to gain entry," and "to collide."

When the tongue is removed, one must find other means of communication, and a knock can be so many things: forceful, tentative, sinister, urgent, and deliciously eerie. What is it about noise divorced from body—unexplained bumps in an empty house, scratching at a windowpane on a dark night—that gives one such a chill? That shiver up the spine lies at the heart of this collection where, behind each poem, there is an incessant, unsettling tap, tap, tap.

In the title poem, the cursed speaker says, "If I could be loud enough, if incessant, the door might truly open." But as each section unfolds, instead of the door opening, who is knocking seems to shift. The speaker seems to exist on both sides of the door, an uncomfortable impasse. To be cursed is to be trapped, after all. Frustrated movement ebbs and flows poem by poem until the landscape seems to vibrate, and the speaker's occasional calmness in the face of it deepens the chill. The poem "love was the thing i wanted to say" begins with a house filling with water, the speaker inside. Time passes, and the speaker eventually becomes a fish, and "the walls turned black with eyes." Yet instead of alarm, the speaker says, almost casually, "There was nothing so unpleasant...".

The speaker exists in a dissociative state, sometimes more beast or object than human, other times divorced from her parts, from voice itself: "I found my tongue singing in a pail of waste" ("the first cure for depression..."). The cure for the speaker's "sickness of the tongue" is biblical (Matthew 5:30, KJV: "And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee") and performed outside our frame of view by faceless beings. Mercer's cutting and mixing in clips and lines from poets who committed suicide feels almost like a reclamation, cut-out tongues singing through this collection like the speaker's own disembodied tongue, stubbornly hard to silence.

The loss of voice doesn't stop the speaker's yearning. She projects it (knock, knock) onto everything around her. The animals take up her thirst: "I taught them, the thirsty pigs, lifting their hooves to fence posts: one, two, three & again, darlings, again" in "knock." And as others try to tame the speaker, their shaping a form of violence, so too

do images, words, and objects contain a wisp of violence: “Storms grew on the black lake, cracking it like marble. We plucked out the cotton sky” (“mother, ice storm”).

As these lines show, Mercer skillfully juxtaposes images, building tension and deepening connections. In the first poem, which is also the first cure, the mountains made from the “tongues of women buried for the sin of lust” collide with the father who “cuts the tongues from goats before the feast.” Sitting as they do, the father figure and the women are connected, the father’s violence a shadow that looms and echoes forward. The women, tongueless, become goatlike.

Indeed, the women’s and speaker’s human form eludes them: they are birds, beasts, cyclops, trees, fish, elephants. This shapeshifting (mimicked by form as the poems flow into prose and back) sometimes seems like power, sometimes curse, sometimes both. In “xiv” of “to gain entry,” the speaker says, “my sea-born blood is a cathedral’s light / dreamlike ferocity a snake skin / shimmered beneath the wet leaves.” In “oh where to begin,” the speaker asks, “Lord, preserver of man & beast, who may I ask has been tasked with my unimaginable body...?”

The speaker is often acted upon, and even when she makes the move herself, her actions are almost always self-defeating...or self-mutilating. In “what do you remember of before,” the speaker says, “I’ll dig a grave & climb inside.” This self-immolation is echoed in the recurring womb, which is “Verboten,” whether by the speaker’s choice or another’s. Perhaps the womb is the key to breaking the inherited curse: “While my own mother lives, you could not speak at all. That was the curse we chose” (“too emphatic,”). In this way, the speaker is indeed “apocalypse.”

This multilayered collection weaves the reader in with every image, every shift, until the reader is left disoriented, existing on multiple levels, an ear there, a tongue here. The reader is both the one who hears the knock and the one knocking. Also the knock itself. Also the door. Also the one who opens it. Also the one who leaves. What pieces might be left behind?

Contributors

Joe Milazzo is the author of the novel *Crepuscle W/ Nellie* and two collections of poetry: *The Habiliments* and *Of All Places In This Place Of All Places*. His writings have appeared in *Black Clock*, *Black Warrior Review*, *BOMB*, *Prelude*, *Tammy*, and elsewhere. He co-edits the online interdisciplinary arts journal [*out of nothing*], is a Contributing Editor at *Entropy*, and is also the proprietor of Imipolex Press. Joe lives and works in Dallas, TX, and his virtual location is <http://www.joe-milazzo.com>.

Heidi Owens is a 21st century human who hails from the planet earth, she is most certainly not an alien, no matter how much she might seem like one based off of her inability to understand social cues. Heidi is a transwoman who began transitioning in her late 20s and just finished her bachelor's degree after 10.5 years of school. Her early life was a nomadic one, and she has moved an average of once every 2 years of her 28-year life. She is currently pursuing schooling to be a counselor for transgender and LGBT youth and wishes to use her talent as a poet and writer to help improve awareness for transgender issues. Her work encompasses themes of loss, love, melancholy, fernweh, and social change.

Freddie Wyss is a Brooklyn based musician and audio/visual artist currently really trying hard to get one of the stray cats to acknowledge their existence. After many failed attempts and a few punctured fingers, it remains disinterested. Maybe, it can be bribed with a treat or some scratches around the ear. Hmm, that still doesn't seem to be working.

Gabrielle Castleberry-Gordon: Welcome to Gabe! They are so excited for you to begin your journey with them. Gabe identifies as a queer, non-binary asexual and a "big black bitxh." Currently, Gabe is: desperately seeking solace, companionship, meaning, purpose, and motivation. Join Gabe on their path of being and becoming. Unfortunately, we must inform you that Gabe possesses a high level of emotional intensity. This giftedness manifests through their empathic qualities. Coupled with an eerie sense of intuition, Gabe seemingly knows and feels there is more to their life than merely meets the eye. However, this heightened awareness often distorts Gabe's mental state. From navigating heartbreaks to negotiating suicidal ideations, Gabe offers insight into the blessings, curses, and convoluted intricacies of living with an exceptionally perceptive mind.

Adedeji Adeogo Benjamin is a final year undergraduate medical student of the university of Ibadan, Nigeria. He enjoys reading and writing poetry. An extreme chess enthusiast.

Amanda Korz is a junior at Mills College studying English Literature. Korz hopes to one day be a professor and have a dog. She also enjoys tarot and everything pumpkin spice. Yep, she is pretty basic.

Adam Stoves

Linda M. Crate is a Pennsylvanian native born in Pittsburgh yet raised in the rural town of Conneautville. Her poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has five published chapbooks *A Mermaid Crashing Into Dawn* (Fowlpox Press, June 2013), *Less Than A Man* (The Camel Saloon, January 2014), *If Tomorrow Never Comes* (Scars Publications, August 2016), *My Wings Were Made to Fly* (Flutter Press, September 2017), and *splintered with terror* (Scars Publications, January 2018), and one micro-chapbook *Heaven Instead* (Origami Poems Project, May 2018).

