

NMJ
V.6

Editor | J Worthen

Night Music Journal | nightmusicjournal.com

Submissions | nightmusicjournal@gmail.com

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Lourdes Figueroa

(from a letter to the editor)

Please find a collection of poetry that is my chapbook and a series of poems that are in dialogue with my lived experience when my parents and extended family worked in the tomato fields in el azadón. The words el azadón are mostly used and only used by the ones who have worked the fields and work in the fields, it is what we call the work of tilling the soil under the blistering sun. This collection and the rest of my work has been in the making as far back as when I learned to speak English in Idaho when my parents picked apples there. I could even say that it goes as far back as when my amá crossed the border with her 30 day year old son in her arms crossing the desert. My grandfather died tilling the fields in Yuba City, when he was part of the bracero program. The fields took a toll on my abuelita's body developing cirrhosis when she never drank a drop of alcohol.

Overall, this is the writer that I am. My work tastes of pesticides, sweat, blood, and llanto. It relates to everything I write about, it is about the stink of el azadón, the queer in el azadón, it has everything to do with the food we all eat, everything to do with la x on our bodies and el nopal on our foreheads. Quite honestly it is my life, poems in constant conversation with each other. Like the descendants of the nopal, they are the ancient un/remembered human heart. What inspired me to write was and is survival.

(from *Ruidos = To Learn Speak*)

Migrant III

I swear to you that they did come, that they are here, I saw them, at least I felt them, the rain collapsed hard that day, and so did the horizon, but they stopped by, their bodies were everywhere, I heard their babies crying, they were wrapped in blanket bundles with wide brown eyes, I swear this to be true, I can feel them, it is as if my world went into theirs, no, no—no that's wrong they went into mine, into ours, they smell of orchard and gun dust

*

she climbed toward the mountain
thousands upon
thousands stars trickling through
as the day turned to dusk she looked
seaward to see the first of many
& though it was seaward her eyes called to
it was the river
that pulled her chest /ribs wide open
the gates of her heart
completely exposed

*

there were mass sightings
in the ruins
more so in the tomato fields
they uncovered nameless hands & torsos
a pair of shoes
an empty water bottle
alongside a highway that split
the desert into two breasts &
there were mounds of a multitude
that kept coming from a distant fog
a radio & the television
blaring lights next door
flickering white lights
so they all could see
& I swear to you
I began to see signs
of our impending doom
on the outskirts of the desert
I heard the wailing of the Euphrates
forming the lands in between
Teotihuacan &
the corner store by the city hall
providing the best spirits cheap
for our alcoholism
the spirits strong
to make the fog thick enough
to carry their voices

*

at the time
it was the mid 1980's
America sounded like
bruce lee & she-ra to a 5 yr old

from the city of Guadalajara
the television giving us the language
we all needed to form this prophecy
& though we did come
the gun dust was piling up
all around us
making the day soft
just like the white sand
of the Mediterranean Sea
when she recedes

*

that morning
my apá was high as fuck
the year was 1985
& my amá's passport was stamped
NO Ustedes no entran
she named the little bundle in her arms after Anwar Sadat
at one point we all believed in revolution
my apá laughs
& says to my amá

i'll meet you at the other

side
takes my hands & my sisters' little palms
boards the plane
stumbles the whole way
to the other side

*

I'm not an angel
nor am I a prophet disguised
as a poet
everything is written
in the palm of our hands
& these things
are revealed in scrolls &
in these scrolls is a hidden map
to Hermosillo & that map marks
the land all the way
to a cave that is in the land
that is split into two by a river
& the most important scroll
is written in stone
a small stone that sits at the entrance
of Guatemala & Mexico
that entrance is a cave
that is the 3rd of the 7 caves
very soon we will find it
feel them all around us
know that the multitude kept humming
with the sound of our English
saying this is how poetry gets written
with blanket bundles & brown faces

peering out
what's life?
which one is this one?

*

her name was maría
la maría
she had visions that translated into lyrics
& when she would speak
it all sounded like prophecy
at one point a priest was brought in
bathed her head
in holy water
the priest tried an exorcism
pressing crosses
& splattering holy water on all the walls
the village around them could hear
the droplets & the prayers of the priest
that is how small the village was
the rattle of the rosary
kept cracking in the air
like a chicote slicing through skin
& it started to smell like burnt hair
but her name is la maría &
she is from a small city that is growing
she continues to have visions that flicker
on the television set
on stormy nights
she goes to her bathroom window
in her small studio apartment
she sits on the cover of the toilet seat
cocks her head to hear
the droplets go through the drains
& the sounds of her neighbors with the t.v. on
sometimes she'll get lucky
& hear some bodies making love
maría has a childlike demeanor
naturally naive or so it seems
when she sits there & dumbly smiles at you
they say she is an orphan
that she grew up like an orphan
that she was found at the mouth of a river
in a handwoven basket for tortillas
but the real name of the multitude is maría,
they are a poet & they were born in the lands
between the river before they split in two
they smell of nopal & gun dust

*

we moved our bodies toward the river
between the two lands
hoping to reach the children before
they drowned
their faces still having
Malichin's features
hoping that it was one person
that would save us
as we marched toward the riverbed
the desert mountains in the distance
still & stoic
we planted seeds anyways
the empire silent like the mountains
& in her insides
the revolution was happening
as we approached
we were tender
we scraped the earth
to break the path &
softly the ripples of the river
kissed the reeds

*

al ladito del camino hacia el Norte había arbolitos creciendo
con ramas que parecían manitas buscando el cielo
y nos fijamos que cuando cerrábamos los ojos
se mecían las ramas con nuestros murmullos

*

cariño
I wanted to be sober
to tell you how I got married
in San Francisco's imagistic city hall
how Peggy's brown eyes welled with tears
when Judge Virginia asked us

will we take care of each other?

how at certain times during the day
the dust settles in the desert,
the moon rising for the coyotes

we said yes to each other

twelve years passed
we broke things
sometimes even our hearts
sometimes we wouldn't know why
& how hard we hurt each other
we are growing with each other
like a hummingbird
growing with her flower

the heart wasn't darkened
it was shattered into fragments
like all the lives
we took each other's hands
over & over again
weeping watching the sun set
behind the large immense sea
knowing that it was just the two of us
that would ever know of the two of us
& we told each other this:

*in the end all we take with us
is the memory of each other
no one will remember us
that our love ever was
we will*

...

las mariposas y sus duendes

a collection of mirroring poems

we are decolonizing our bodies w/ our
colonized mouths

embalming our tongues
justly so, like the neat crease of an envelope

utter/less/ utter/full

each joint allowing for the bend
of light folding our left over skins

precious organs/ heart/ ear drum
continue to beat echoing dream and
memory

we are eating our mouths inside/
out

'slumber

for a while, whether drunk
or sober at 2am i've been meaning to tell you to sleep
nursing on your belly

i slur

listen/ how puckered lips /sucking on plums
meaningless poet wanting to live
inside that/ sound of the angels' wings
and though you can hear them
just as the mumbling of brown speckled doves arriving on a window sill
after a long batch of rain
your eyes kept slurring
we kept disturbing
the wings outside our window
nothing made sense
as you opened your thighs cradled my head
the angels mimicked each other
still sucking on plums
we split the children in half
never/mind their little bodies
the river was strong enough
to swallow a desert whole
so it was easier for us to forget
the massive grave
an absolute miracle as we began
to squeeze our eyes shut
the wind picked up, knocking over
the empty garbage cans in the migrant camp
restless soul
the poet is becoming bitter
learning to dig for gold
and we wanted to sleep,
hoping the children would come home
i told you

i'll tell you a story

instead you took my mouth wrapped it around
walls, all the while the angels were still there
and they began to whimper

the poet is dead the poet is dead

and we looked outside and inside
the walls splattered in red
limbs on our floor, small hands on our pillow
i've been wanting to tell you to go to sleep
with our knees covered in blood
never mind the rising sun
and the gust of wind

hueco

tu me dices
que no hay crisis
el día se abre
el día se abrió
nuestras bocas vacías
pareciendo lo negro de la calle
nos embarramos
nuestras tripas tragando/se
se de ser
ser de sed
te quiero lamar
mi lengua seca
hacernos hueco
the prophets
prophesized
happy that their visions'
came true
how war was easily sold
inside humble homes
delicate baby palms
rubbing calloused hands
rubbing my eyes open
i keep waking up to the sound
of children whimpering
we keep caging them
oh lord i keep giving up
putting on my uniform
taking off my uniform
i crawl back into bed
lengua seca
quiero ser
el hueco de tus tripas
lo vacío de tu boca
pero quiero decirte
que somos tú y yo
fijate bien
estamos hirando
torciendo los ojos
cerrando los oídos
pero quiero ser
hacedora de suspiro
soñar y
acabarme

La Mariposa y sus Duendes

towards
a new direction
the monarch went
trying to avoid the nearness
of the sun
it took them over 300,000
generations,
before & not after
the beginning
was essential for the
end
arriving on the day
of the dead
no one mentioned
how cloudy the skies seemed
the grave stones wiped clean
it was terrifying even
the phantoms couldn't find
their way
& we heard the awful sound
the ask for deliverance
by the river bed
brown living waters
clasped against the desert
300,000
graceful wings drowned
*

the journey
remarkable
it took both populations
several
generations of bodies
to make a 6 to 9 month trek
from north to south
for the winter
after
the mothers dying
joining
the milkweed on the way back
alongside march
life begins
again
as the caterpillars rise
eating leaf after leaf
they grow up
ready to fly without
knowing their mothers
they know
where to go
spreading pollen

the 2nd population
landing closer
to the sun
bronzed their torsos
*

by the time
we arrived it looked like
the land had swallowed the bodies
in secret we hoped for the bones
to surface
none of it makes sense
300,000 of them rubbed
to dust
we thought
careless
*

eventually the prophet
goes blind
naming two dreams
she couldn't bear the
peoples' name
a prophet never could
see which population was
crossing the river
& name which one
was laying the children
it is easier to understand
the currents of the ocean
*

homeland
the tigris river
transforms
on this side
half of the euphrates'
sand
tastes almost
the same
as this one
submerging the land
today the moon is shaped
in our thumbs
waking mouths
pray to angels
pray to angels
heaven is becoming
robust tilled soil
madre tierra
we keep watering it
with blood
children of
abraham
*

madre
la tierra se muere
pero me dices
que nos va a morder
hay pedazos de dientes
entre los files de tomate
y la huerta de almendra
las mariposas se están
acabando
el rio se está secando
y ya podemos ver los huesitos
de los nenes
y nosotras hijas de Malinchin
*

aún i was hoping
for this poem
to lead me
at least a waltz
that mirrored
a migration
to answer something
about the unknown
breaking
the fourth wall or the veil
between you and i
knowing that you
love me
no need to say it
to each other
you are beautifully
made into
three
holy trinity
as i run my fingers
through your hair
and the smell of your
body on my body &
i know that you love me
in the same way a hummingbird
loves life in the same way
the leftover bones of the butterflies
are loved by the vast land
we are disappearing into
all of us together
forever
*

i remember the first time
i held you in my arms
do you?
we were so new
& so soft
we took the N-Judah
to ocean beach,

then you brought me to
the Tenderloin for some
good Thai food
i couldn't stop kissing you
on the muni bus on the way
to your apartment on York St
in San Francisco
i learned to ride the bus
because of you
i fell in love with
walking in this city
up hills & down hills
& i got a job here
serendipity
you taught me how to arrive
& we survived
making a home here
*

but do you remember?
how we forgot each other
how easily we got used to
jumping over torsos
strung out
passed out
limbs bleeding from
too many needle holes
even the woman covered in
days old suet & her period blood
on her crotch
all crispy on her clothes
how we continue to go get
groceries & read the news
all at once
but bless the love that continues
to love
because i thought
we were all sober
*

it is impossible
not to say blood is
on our hands
life feeds on life
but i told you i have a story
*a woman dreams that she is a butterfly
she awakes as a woman, not knowing
if she is a woman or, if she is a monarch
dreaming that she is a woman*

who dreamt this? if not Borges' tiger
or Merwin's bear
what are we if not clay?
hurry up now

we are dreaming
the maker is talking
like the dead
only neither have a tongue
and i am lost in your
rainbow resembling
the long stretch of the river
*

aún el desierto
nos olvida
entre la crema de su polvo
y sus piernas secas
estamos aquí
deshaciendo el hacedor
haciendo la hacedora
no es un sueño
besar un colibrí
es un milagro
tu y yo
en lo azul de este mundo
hermosura
somos sin saber
i'll tell you though
look out
the neighbors are saying
Abrahams' children
are killing each other
a hole through a railway
we all thought we could escape
it is true there are murderers
as we travel through
the tunnel
*

PITY

(After Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poem PITY THE NATION in the thread of Khalil Gibran)

i pity the poet
that calls out to the poet
and hears only silence
i pity ourselves that live and work
within the monster
i pity the sound of each other and the smacks
of our cheeks and the popping of a champagne bottle
at a protest march i pity it all as coca-cola makes a living out of our
supposed revolution

quetzal
coatle

te respiro
dentro

fuera pulmón
en bolsa

serpent afloat
slit eyes

unslit
lids

plunder the
brown out

bill board
on highway

white the
pores

The un/ remembered ancient human heart

there is no song different than the one we have already sung. Borges speaks of a poet, along the lines of a prophet that will sing the story—that will sing the epic once more. We are a combination of what came before and what wasn't there before. The urge to speak the urge to utter comes along from the sound of salt, from the sound of sand grains disappearing. Every present moment, every piece of reality is nothing more than life appearing and disappearing, there is nothing and there is everything. The urge to utter is in the core of the movement of our cells, our genetic makeup speaks, it is a story that the cosmos are constantly uttering, whispering galaxies, singing stars, all of these things in conversation with each other and we are doing it too, the moment we blink and first learn of the sound of our mother's heart beat—our bodies know this. As we are dropping bombs on each other, we know this, as we are spraying bullets on each other we know this, as we are tearing at the earth we know this and so does our earth and so do the trees, and the salamanders blinking

Lunar Notes: An Interview with Lourdes Figueroa



Why poetry? What pulls you into the page? What poets first inspired you and who do you return to?

poetry, somehow it found me, or we just crashed into each other, I spent a lot of time in the library growing up, specifically when my *apá* was violent, it was a place of refuge for my *amá*, she constantly read, she constantly read to us, I read a lot of fiction and still do, but one of the first poets that I stumbled upon was Emily Dickinson, I didn't quite understand her then, mouthing her English at the time, I was about 11 years old, and in school it was Edgar Allan Poe when I was in 7th grade, I have a very vivid memory of my teacher putting on a record player and having the class put their head down on their desks and I did, I closed my eyes and suddenly there was the story *the tell-tale heart*, and I am grateful for this, I tear up remembering this, I think it was reading and my *amá's* constant love of reading that saved us, at least has kept our hearts and minds this far, and the poets that gave me the language to articulate and write what my experience living what we had lived was Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Castillo, they continue to do so, and outside of books because the poem exists in sound and story orally the first poets were really my *amá* and my *abuelita chona*, their stories nurtured my mind, my heart, and my conception of love

and it is important to note, the poets around me here in San Francisco and the Bay Area, I read everyone I can, and we all should, we are part of a thread that blooms like veins, I feel very lucky to have access to different forms of the word and how it is being passed from person to person, zines, chapbooks, open mics, film, local presses... none of us exist in a vacuum and none of us come into our poetics in a vacuum

the poets that I keep reaching for, or find myself packing into my backpack right now are Rosario Castellanos, Norma Cole, June Jordan, Kim Shuck, I've been carrying around Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian's *Writers Who Love Too Much* which somehow weaves itself with some of Alfred Arteaga's *Chicano Poetics*, and *This Bridge Called My Back* edited and put together by Cherríe Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa, they all bring the poem back to the body, I have to say we are not an assembly of voices, but thread, threads being weaved into each other, I keep reading Roberto Bolaño, Jorge Luis Borges, García Lorca, Kamau Brathwaite, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and more

but the most powerful of voices that are always in my ear are my familia, my *amá*, my wife, my *hermana y mis hermanos*, the memories of my *abuelita chona* smoking her cigarettes and telling stories of her childhood while she planted her

flowers and attended to her small garden of roses, tulipanes, mint, manzanillo, oregano, and a small peach tree

What space does/should poetry occupy right now?

the poem is a vessel that articulates our insides, the act of using the word to invoke what is inside and vice versa to bring the outer to the inside, it is revolution in every way, the poem revolts, the poem turns, the poem shatters language, the poem too takes the language of your insides, of your own particular mouth and uses those fragments to further connect us in some way, bringing each other into each other, the poem is everything and nothing with the human breath, the poem is meant to be broken in every way, the body collapses the poem so the poem can be in the body and the body can be in the poem, we need it, we have always needed it since we learned to song with each other, it is more ancient than we realize, existing in its' own way in different languages, terrifying and beautiful, asking what's this, what's life, which one is this one? I am another yourself/ In Lak'ech

Name some poets you're really excited about right now. Who do you have on your shelf/in your ear/on your mind?

the poets to be on the lookout for are **each other**, with my whole heart I believe in each other, we must read each other, elevate each other's voices, support each other, never apologize for our sound, no one sound is the one, we must embrace each other's sound, read widely with intention or with pleasure or with love or with pain, but read

Breath is the first word that comes to my mind when I think of your work. When I read your poetry, it has such a beautiful, hypnotic quality, and I always feel like I'm returning to the deepest level of being. How do you inhabit your poet self? What is your work's center right now?

my works' center continues to be the gut, the lung, the throat, el corazón, the communal, we are meant to sing in some form, all of us, everything is made this way, it is the nature of this reality, as we love whatever it is, love whomever it is, we are in movement, we are in creation with each other, in constant revelation with each other, this is duende, this is how the sun loves us

What projects have you been involved with recently, and what do you have planned?

Current projects I'm involved in are: I'm in the heart of putting together my second chapbook, *Ruidos = To Learn Speak*, that I am doing with the Alley Cats Residency here in San Francisco. I am putting together my first poetry workshop that I will launch in January with South of Market Community Action Network, this workshop will seek to create a safe space for the voices of our LGBTQA immigrant community and will be in the heart of the South of Market. Too, I'm about to

embark on my second film script, a short film in collaboration with my wife, a story of immigration

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

I was recently told by a therapist that I have PTSD, no one diagnosis will do, there are layers of trauma that I had no idea how it was affecting my mind, and coping/survival mechanisms I am working through to identify, things that I had refused to name my body names, the poem helps me articulate some of the pain, the body has a way of holding trauma so it can survive, and so does the mind, my memory drops, I drop things, sometimes Peggy will tell me a story about something that happened and I can't recall anything,

I articulate from a queer brown mouth, a descendant of colonization, from a severely bruised body that refuses to forget her trauma until it is said in some form, a survivor of rape, a survivor of molestation, these things are not me, but things that I lived, these things are a human experience, and all these things are deserving of literature, of poem, of song, this is how we recognize each other...if I were to come across my childhood self, I would hug her and hold her and read to her like my amá did, and take her to the library, and tell her 'keep going to the library, continue to be kind in all aspects' to everyone



Howie Good

Pond Life

You shouldn't stop in the middle of crosswalks to do shit with your phone. Instead, you should be picturing the two of us elsewhere – say, approaching a field of sunflowers. I would cut a whole stack for you and you would stick them under your coat. Another half-hour of walking would bring us to a stone bridge over a pond, you pointing out a swan with a head like a big white wedge of wedding cake. You're thinking this will never actually happen, aren't you? Well, Van Gogh once ate a tube of ultramarine; he loved the color that much.

Self-Portrait, Shrugging

My father tried to kill himself three times, once with an electric socket. The lights throughout the house went “pop!” I would shrug when people asked me what happened. Another time he tried to hang himself with his belt, and it was just luck that the ceiling hook came loose. I was about to turn nine. I remember because I had recently won an award for most improved speller. There wasn't a day I didn't come home from school shaking inside. And so maybe I only think I remember the cop cars in the driveway and all that glass shattering.

Postcard from America

The smells of old cooking fires cling to their clothes and hair. I've been warned not to look too closely at their faces. "Let us in," they beg. They swear for the ten thousandth time that they're deserving. We like to think we're like peace-loving Switzerland, just without all those cows and Alps, but after dark, it's a whole other thing. Gates are locked. Wayward bombs fall from the sky on hapless civilians. Babies get sent to prison. This will continue. This will be allowed to happen again. Even the dog remains asleep despite the unnerving whine of sullen engines.



Courtney Bush

Jubilate Agno

I feel like all I have is a brain
You keep making mistakes over and over, Lauren
Shirts that changed colors
Garbage bags that sat in burning fires without melting
You don't even support the town
A music teacher shops late at Wal-Mart
In a sweatshirt covered in little fish
In the middle of an incurable nervous breakdown
I took my mother to the play and in the play
I killed Greg's girlfriend without consulting a script
For the first five hours I was a vehicle of pure consciousness
Trucks were seen in garages and then not seen in garages
Metal handcuffs left no marks on the bedposts
The fire in the gorge began and ended at different times

I found mysticism in a ranch style house
Countlessly wished at the top of the stairs
Crossed the yard walked through the gate
Walked through the brown grass up to my knees
Past the Planned Parenthood through the Planned Parenthood parking lot
Cried into the eastbound traffic and then
Chased Peter right into it raging bright red
Chased Josh into the headlights too
Then all my friends came running
I had said come back and they came back

Even from the dead, rising from the knee length lawn
Where I had tried to pick out all the glass
Their bodies in the weak green light

I asked Greg's girlfriend to come back and she came back
And onto the highway light, streams of it
Meeting and dispersing

The one that hit me with his truck came back
The one who called me bitch came back
The one who broke into my house
Who took our cat and renamed her and lied
The one I loved while fire melted my boot soles
Who impaled his hands on a barbed wire fence
Ending up with stigmata at Kelli's farm
He's back waving white arms on the esplanade

Do you think you're better than me
Do you live in New York City
One punch to the face on the front lawn
One body through a barbecue grill on the back porch
One frozen burrito in the microwave
One drunk and naked girl screaming
One drunk in fetal position in the soccer goal
One fallen mailbox, one pile of bricks, one scratch filled in with nail polish
As everything with angels is nine
Down the stairs in a pillowcase
Bloody legs in the woods

Somebody looking in the window
Somebody else lighting napkins
My mother's friend Michael came back
Instead of a name an epiphany
The weed came back when the money came back
When we lost it, it was found

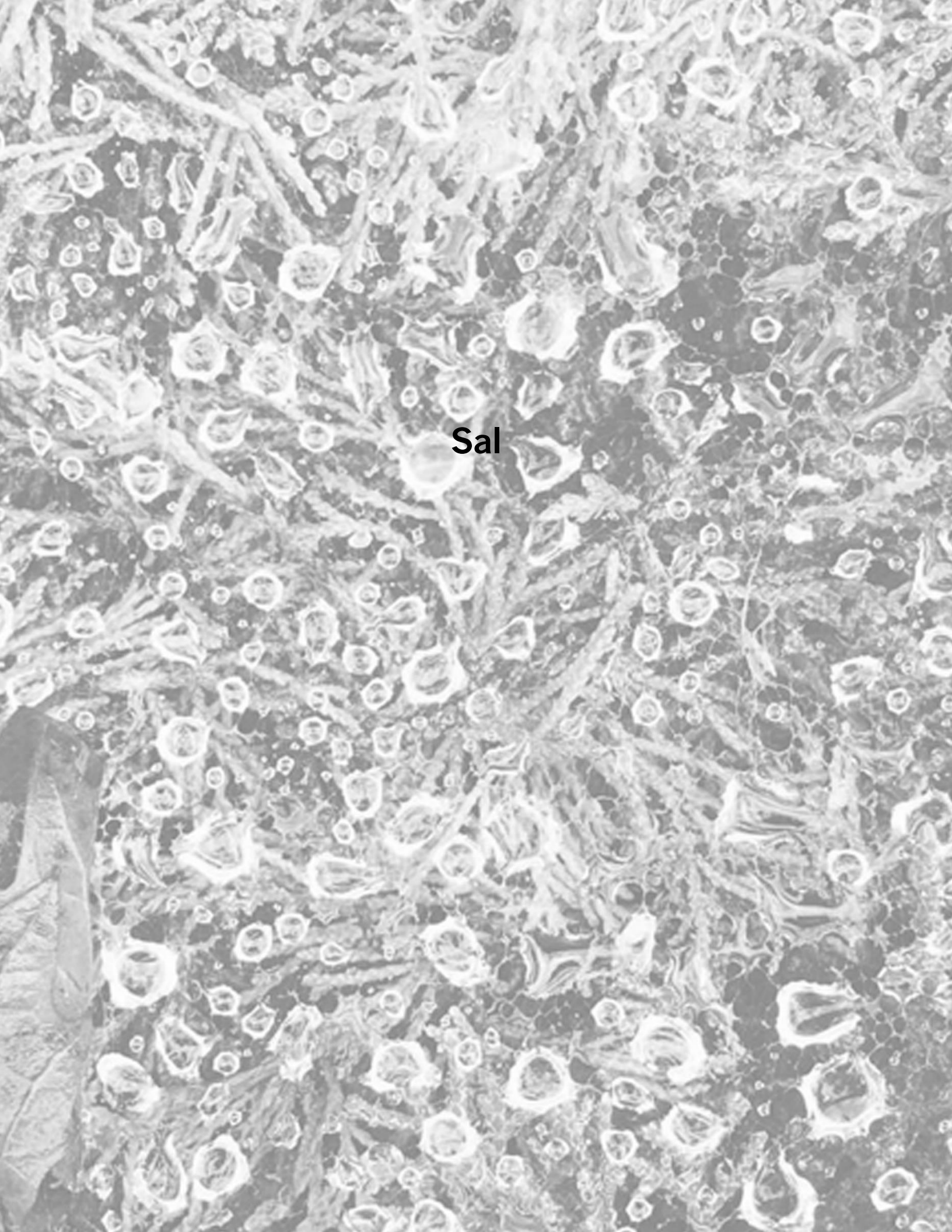
Tess came back saying the whole sky is cold
Your arms full of books came back
Jameson crept back to my room to read one more poem
We opened a window and the crow came back
Into the apartment where we had to kill it
And its body drained into the highway behind the house
Brown leaves drain backward, aluminum cans thrown in the woods
Drawn back a yard at a time
The creek itself moving back and back
The crack of a twig in the middle of the night
Zach came back believing in UFOs
Eating french fries
Blake came back vomiting on a puddle of ice
You came back making mistakes over and over, Lauren
You came with your phone lit up in the hand behind your back
Lighting one line of you
Lighting a few bleached hairs whipping in the noise
Gabriel came back with a nose full of poison berries
Lucas came back with a peach
Before the baby was born, she kept coming back

Draining herself into the lonely yellow highway strip
Treating it like a bowl

And how many times I've said I'll never dance again
How many times I've become a trout in a fish stream
The magic drained from me
The animals with no magic
The conversation I repeated this time lacked all magic
The water drained from the manmade lake
The sand dredged up from the middle of the sea to build a beach
In the middle of the impossibly loud highway
Loud every hour of every life

Television created the illusion of you coming back
When it was also real
And real my mother coming back on the illusion of a forked poem
One fork in my bedroom, the last poem Jameson read saying
The lyric itself is too much
One fork a path into a world of sin
I was told we'd be taken somewhere placid

I was told the highway ended North
And South you could drive straight into the Gulf
Dovetailing, you came back
Dovetail, into the highway under the big lights
For you, they change them out for stadium lights
Hunting lights, police spotlights, a light you could mount on a submarine
A car with high beams, honking as it flew



Sal

Moving On

A fresh start doesn't always come easy; old habits are often shackles (unsightly, heavy with the weight of the past, and not always kickable) & we cherish them for too long. My father tried to quit smoking once & he woke up to cigarette ash dripping down his chin. My mouth no longer knows how to hold a promise. Forgets what shape the tongue forms when a truth is spoken. Sometimes moving on can't be done all at once (and yes, there may be times of your life you can never get back because of it). All you can do is keep adding more slivers of white to the black paint & someday it'll be such a faint shade of grey no one will know the difference. A fresh start may be worth a fight, but it's up to you to decide: do you want this life? The one rusting with empty words? Or do you want to feel the fresh air in your lungs again?

H₂O

I imagine the first language you ever learn to be a lot like water. It sits in your mouth, tasteless, slowly dribbling down your chin as you consume more exciting meals.

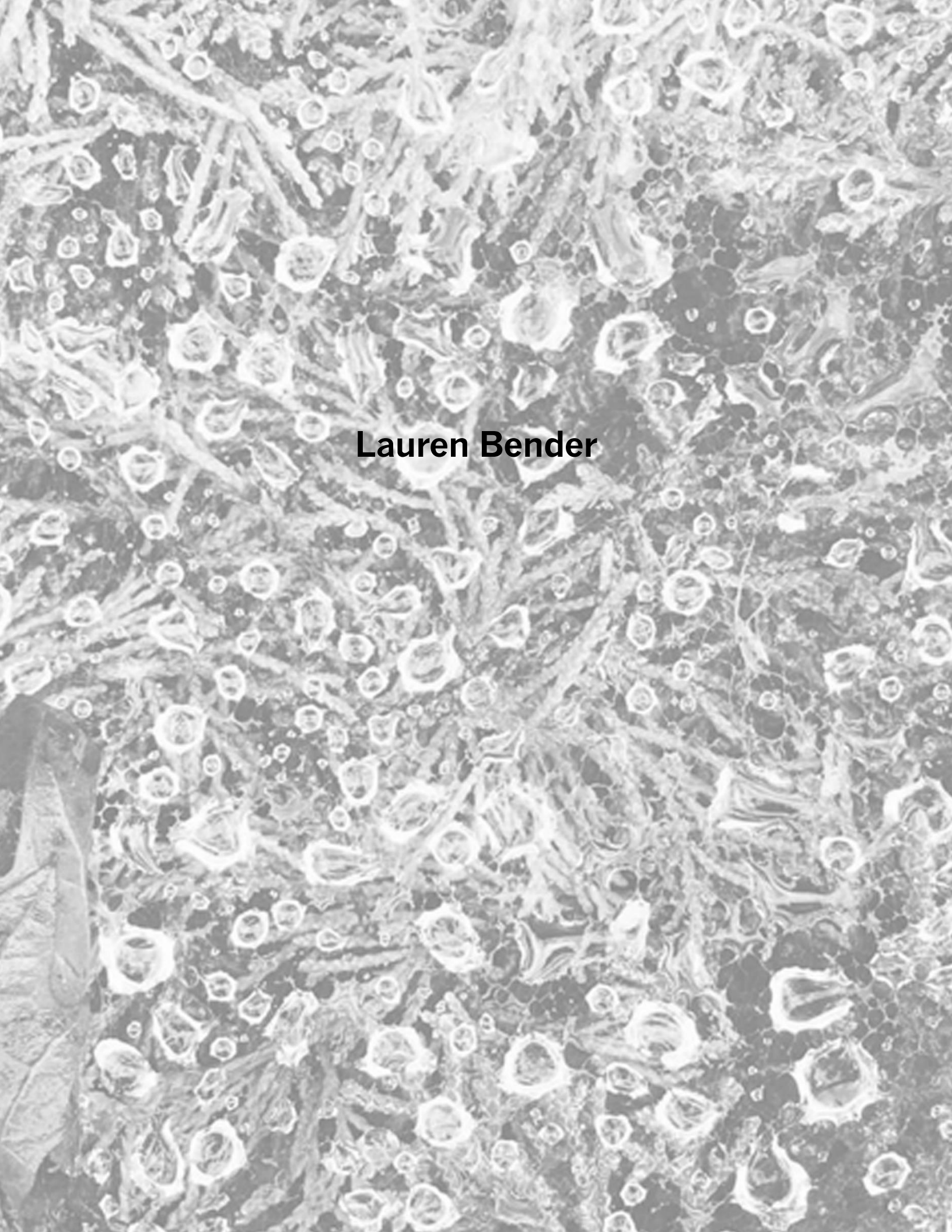
[Fact: the average person produces about 1 liter of sweat in a day.] Even as I hold perfectly still, my mother tongue is evaporating off my skin, melting away into air every second I forget how to pronounce a word.

[Fact: water helps with anti-aging.] Just watch as your vocabulary retreats back into the level of an 8-year-old. This is the most effective weight loss routine that exists: very soon, everything you say will hold no meaning. Tell yourself *it's only natural*. After all, you only utter the same phrases day after day. It's a cycle of dead ends you don't know how to meet.

[Fact: 815 children died by choking on water in the past year.] Convince yourself that being surrounded by too much of anything will always kill you. This is why you don't want to go back: because your home country is an ocean whose waves you have not yet learned how to ride.

[Fact: water is fluid, hence it takes the shape of its container.]

[Fact: water is also essential for life.] Close your eyes & you can picture it all again: your grandmother insisting on you learning the alphabet. You remember how the first letter, ki-yeok, sounds like *memory*, ki-eok. You think you can hear your dry tongue, dragging itself across this desert of a mouth. You don't think you can remember the last time it rained. You don't think you can remember ever being full.



Lauren Bender

corkscrew

she lists for you, soft, substances
she can't swallow. how long
can you pretend to be porous, as if
whatever she is is able to knit
itself through your loose frame

in the morning your sister buys pears
& smiles & says she can't be an alcoholic
because,
 you don't remember the reason
 your sister is an alcoholic

someone you almost know comes in
& threads her way to the bar
& hangs over with her half-smile
& orders a pale-brown liquid
 where have you been?
 people ask from the shadows

you are too suffocated
to choose the right words, to remember
how to talk to anyone without saying
how disgusting,
 you smell furry & rotten
small & terrified like every other human
thinning their anguish

someone you almost know almost
finishes you & when you've come
within inches of being done
they go home & you have to set
all the pieces back at zero position

where have you been?
why are you here?
we missed you,
 sweetheart, welcome back
 tonight is free wine night

someone heavy-breathing
through anecdote at the mic
says their therapist knows
 what to expect by now

& you know
by the loudness of their laughter
which ones from the crowd
want everyone to know
they are in therapy too
because, you studied this in school
because, everything

hits too close
not to laugh at, not to
make some sort of sound about

Proximity

what if I run into you
in a mall &

you are close? & we go
with friends

to find a table where
you sit on

my right & you do that thing
you've always done,

gesture. while you speak
your hand, your

left hand, waves & rests
in front of me,

rises & falls inches
from my face, &

I do what I've always done,
hold my breath & keep

still & shut my mouth & watch
your arm & hand

& skin *fuck fuck fuck* & don't
touch you, not once, don't

grab you & rub my forehead
across your fingers.

what if that happens again
& again & it's all

that ever happens? how many times
can I survive it?

Proof

I want to be a trombone
girl, I thought, but he had me blow

a few mouthpieces and declared me
best suited for the trumpet,

all gleam and shock and shout.
Trombones are unpopular (middle school

for hipster), but trumpets are loud,
disruptive, and I was quick to

warm to the outcome, the quiet one
horning through the silence.

Oh, I don't talk? Listen to this:
hours of practice, note after note

blasting, obsessively training myself
to need breath less and less,

every moment I didn't breathe
another moment to generate noise.

He said I was a natural. I am not
a natural. Introvert shaming

leaves you too angry not to make
damn sure everything is a fuck you:

put on the hot pink shirt, flirt with
every guy, share all the secrets (fuck

your wide eyes). My hands smelled
of brass and valve oil as if

I was an extension of my new voice,
greased and ready for a fight.

As winter comes

it softens to black earlier, the sky sadly
opting out of the conversation. if I am

spending part of every hour I'm awake
checking social media, I guess

that has to count as an addiction. trust me,
I don't need another addiction.

trust me, a fixation on Facebook would fall
low on my list of issues to fix.

six or seven politicians did immoral things
today, so says my newsfeed

fifty different ways. joke, joke, sarcastic
joke, mean joke, something insightful

but it ends with sister-fucker. I don't,
can't, like any of this. I open all

the new quizzes in separate tabs as I scroll
past them, still hopeful I will find

what speaks to me. which I guess at this point
would be the post: politicians do evil,

don't care we know they do evil, everyone
at a loss how to stop it, details

irrelevant, thank you and good day. no,
I don't even have the energy

to debate whether power turns people evil
or evil people are drawn to power.

probably both. life is complex. social media
is simple. I circle back to the first

quiz, which is choose your favorite desserts,
we'll guess your zodiac sign, and because

I have taken endless versions of this quiz
with only the slightest variations,

I know it will be the highlight of this cycle
of mindless scrolling, even though

they always get it wrong. I don't mind,
I feel like a Virgo, and I would love

to live as a Pisces, and it makes me smile
to be mistaken for the dark Scorpio,

and once in a while it's Aries, after I pick
my favorite pie, the perfect cookie,

agonize over pancakes versus French toast,
impulsively click the cherry cheesecake,

and I'm struck with delight at the match, as if
the universe knows, it really knows me.

Mutant the Magnificent

We laugh
& laugh
at radioactive
batteries
& I don't know why

I am laughing
because you are laughing
& I get scared
when I don't follow
the joke

but then you say
they don't pay me enough
to care & I think
amen sister (if shared parent
companies count)

radioactivity
is one of the catalysts
for the metamorphosis
of human to super
human, in theory

I pry back
the top
of the ionization
chamber & there
she is curled up

on her bed
of americium
the little superhero
with her cancerous
super powers

& we look
at each other
& I think she has been
here all along
but I never thought to check

they don't pay me enough
to be curious?
to risk opening compartments
to see the mysteries
& sleeping freaks

she won't tell me
what she is capable of
& I suspect

it's because
she has no idea herself

but I lean down & ask
do you require
a safety data sheet
& she laughs & laughs
& says my life is sad



Isobel Hodges

Diversions

Written in a long-ago voice
punctuation was different then
wordsrantgether.

History leaves few clues and many spaces
art diverts us from the stench.
Tainted water, choleric corpses
thighs slick with shit and blood.

Anatomy museum labels
are hand-typed
precise.

N597.

Subarachnoid hemorrhage
from ruptured aneurysm
at basilar artery bifurcation.

This slice of brain looks like an ant farm.
Egg chamber, food store
and larvae room.

A little bleed, says the nurse.
Words to minimize panic
in nature corrosion is gradual.

Buffer

It's humid, rare for this city.
Sluggish rain evokes warmer times.

The tram doors open
for a woman I used to know.
She reaches for a handrail.
The scars on her left arm
indict the right.
A diversionary balm
in defense of life.

She lowers her head, leans in to my chest.
I trace knotted lumps from armpit to wrist.

A pardon or a charade. We know she never made it.

The tram slows.
Chronic overloading, excess friction
adhesion between tendons
a grating sensation below the skin.

I must be standing over an axle.

Mythologies

I cling to the mirrored perimeter
of La Manna market.

This is the scuttling period.

Flustered and fearful

I whisper to the figs and apricots
hover over the olives

Away-ness, inside-ness

food avoidance and sleep hunger

A partner's unenviable role.

How long could she hang on?

I ask Nonna to read my tea leaves.

Hmmm, ok, she says

She brushes jam drops crumbs
and frowns

turning the cup until symbols emerge
from behind her gold-flecked teeth.

Mythologies mollify the way sliced aloe vera glides
over a burn.



Sam Rose

In the hospital waiting room I wear yellow and I say to myself

you're wearing yellow today are you
a sunflower or a cautionary tale or a
discounted price or are you waiting
to find out does the colour your
clothing represents depend on the
news you are given or does it mean
whatever you want it to mean are you
in control

and I reply I just don't know

The phone rings until it has no breath

The phone rings in the middle of the night and the night shrinks against the intrusion – an intrusion that is younger than it, suddenly born against the black, erupting from an unexpected womb, its shrilling light blowing dust from the air around it, creating a vacuum, a new night within the night like a crack in a rock, a fault in the earth.

Is the fault older or younger than the rock it is carved into? Younger because the rock precedes it, older because it was always going to appear; its fate predates its parent, it has been waiting for this, for life, for the rock to give something of itself, to create nothing from something. The night holds its breath as the newborn crack wails.

The phone rings until it has no breath left. Such a short life. Ignored, it dies, gives up against the night which seals back up again like it's healing a wound left by a bolt of lightning. It closes up, the echo of ringing stops, the night expands, breathes, no longer intimidated. The silence returns – is younger than the ringing, but also older – preceding, receding, then believing again, that peace can be retrieved again.

The Living Room

I could not sit on the couch. I tried. Gave up after one episode of Mad Men and a few tiny bites of the dinner my partner had made for me. I left the night to carry on without me, maybe before nine. My confused head muddled the Mad Men I had barely watched and I lay on my back in bed, images turning around on my lids, making little sense the way thoughts don't when you're half asleep and half awake, unable to firmly grasp one or the other.

The nights are too long. I get up and eat half a tiny tub of jelly from the fridge because I can barely face anything. I sit back in the armchair, sleep accidentally in the day, fail to sleep at night. Doze through movies and the soothing tones of video games my partner plays that don't involve shooting. At night I try the bed, try reclining in the armchair. My stomach is painful in every position. The dishwasher whirrs and beeps its completion. I eat jelly, walk around trying to get my wind up. Take an antacid for reflux. Give up. Back to bed.

Parents visit and I don't get up from my seat. They text first, see if they can bring anything. Sometimes I miss Dad's messages because I haven't looked at my phone; the surgery seemingly also removed it from my palm. It is no longer routine. The new routine is to stab myself in the leg every evening at six to protect against blood clots. My partner goes out for an hour or two, for the first time in a couple of weeks, as he should. I'm fine alone but don't know what to do. I feel like I should write, so I manage a few pathetic words with a quiet soundtrack, leaning on the arm of the chair. The living room is strangely quiet.

I try to tell myself that I am surviving. There is only one day when, sitting on the toilet, perhaps feeling sick or in pain or gassy or all of the above, when I feel like it would certainly be better to not be alive anymore. Like it is too hard to continue, and what is the point, anyway? There would be more moments when I would feel like this, but this is the only time after the hysterectomy. I missed most of September and October, my favourite month. I couldn't tell you what was going on in the world. I went to my parents' house a bit but I don't really remember. I remember sitting in my living room, vividly. From the night before my operation, perching on the edge of the sofa drinking two lemon flavoured pre-op drinks and swabbing my nostrils to protect against MRSA, preparing for a 5:30am start so I could shower with the special shampoo, drink the next two 250ml drinks and need to stop for a wee on the hour-long car ride to the hospital. To the feeling better days, the "I'm well enough to spend the day alone and even make myself lunch" days. The living days, at last. Until the next operation, a month or so later. There really was very little living going on in the living room.



Hibah Shabkhez

LAMENT TOSSED INTO THE RAIN

Vows of vengeance from an orchard's petal
Dribble onto the windscreen at the halt
Forced upon us by peonies in metal
As our tires crunch in the greying road-salt

The revenge of this ghost-orchard that treads
Its old haunts given up to the rose-cage
Mangles at the meeting of flowerbeds
Heart and mind, literature and language

Alack, this orchard I raised with my breath
Gloating over each petal force-bleached fair
Crowing at every soft hue hacked to death
Extinguishing all its ruth with a glare

THE HOUSE ON THE FRIDGE

Underneath a sun fiercer than yellow
Before a sky of chalk-striped blue,
I am a brown house of bricks with shallow
Pencil walls too steep to be true.

This page and I host a stick-family
Lodged in pink windowsills to light
Up loving eyes with the sense to see
We got all their smiles just right.

YENNING FINGER-GOBLINS

The goblins that live in my fingers say
Autumn is the time for fondly running
In the long grass after midnight
For watching dread dinosaurs flinch away
Trampled by a pen-tread swift and cunning
In the long grass after midnight

The goblins that live in my fingers know
No duty, only the thrill of the chase
In the long grass after midnight
Of searching for the just-right words to grow
Word-moulds to tame jasmines for their ink-vase
In the long grass after midnight

The goblins that live in my fingers dream
Of penning the smouldering of shadows
In the long grass after midnight
Lizard-tongues darting ere the insect's scream
They pluck songs out of the earth with pen hoes
In the long grass after midnight



Marissa Skeels

Aphasia

word wordwordword

without a wall or cliff to water
not clean not
because that is the point, that there not is th

The black of a dropped net
with the bomb blast silence but
without the dread resin ants nor the bangbangbanger head stalk
But a very different calm too
to the white of spilled nothing burning outwards
silent of sensation
Not smoke fog c low claw ...louder *cloud*
Only wai t.

Or sometimes it's the look
staring at a hole
or brick behind me or
spaghetti tangle from slippery salty mouth missing bone letters
Or it's spitting impatience
For To Clip Each Cut Snip da Vinci
But usually it's nothing,
just

too to annoy pause blue burn star

Before the Beach was Gone

Living is neither here.
I want for you to die well.

The scared eye of a shark
washed up between storms
clearer than the purring bruise
of coming and past noise
smooth from afar, glass sand, a warning sea
the wrong colour, size, and sharpness
and a twin further down.

One for each of you
death to arm yourselves, to square
deafening foraged glee with
pertness in the roots of my teeth
pollen broken decades hence
to rot out in the open
for birds, crabs to eat and be eaten
in light in the mirrored wash.

The Floor is Nightingales

Pride steams from this clay cup
filled with what is known.

Sunny squints and tangy voices steep in millennia
of memories.

Crouching buds stretch, touching, passing
names only so far in any direction.

lips

Tori scutes march up its sides like headstones
skin smoothed, gut cracked, bloodstained

open.

Pocked peaks circle the rim like a fuse.
Kintsugi keloids bleed whispers to the sea.

Tea filaments unspool, knotting this way and that
mapping sighs.

Some threads rise in the weaving
made of different string, or tugged.

Now and then, bubbles break
from their fronds to burn with flavor
forging blades and smithing gears
which score new veils
of coppery lace into the glaze.

When stirred by brush, the taste
of the world's first novel cuts through
telling of love (and worse) that braids generations.
Poetic redemptions leap from glued-stuck letters
while warring histories copulate their way along a Milky Way
of lantern paper.

Matriarchal ghosts watch times eclipse.

A lick of frayed thread with local eyes, hair, and voice
burdened by the taste of hamo in summer
and radish in winter mutilates
—mutates—herself to slough her stains
and buck over the brim.

Sung words over a shoulder
as familiar as children raised a couple of years
and a few streets apart
roll a wave to the far edge and back.

Leaves stir; one bobs to see
her

off.

The temperature unwinds.

No one needs drown today.



William R. Soldan

An Armor

after Parkland, FL

Kids aren't dying again, they're still dying,
and the threads and diversions . . .
have me so—tired.

My boy has a fractured leg, a moment of play cut short.
I wish I could tell him it was the last time he'll feel hurt and broken and mean it,
that life won't continue to steal the ground beneath him, as it does,
to bear down.

But we tell so many lies already.

His cast *is like an armor*, he says, because it's hard as stone.
I Sharpied a lightning bolt down the side, and now he thinks he's a superhero,
bulletproof, invincible.

Kids are dying, dead, dying.

My kids are alive.
For now.
Shielded only by youth's fragile illusions and these four walls.

Yet what do I do but escape to this trap of mind
to write these—what, these *poems*?
As if reflection changes facts, softens truths, makes bearable.

As if without intervention, he really could
save the world,
stop the bullets when they start to fly.



Jennifer Lothrigel

Anastasis

The ghosts were busy
planting seeds.
There was freedom
in the light under my tongue,
I spread in all directions.

It began with everything I
had forgotten,
your carnal hands,
the erasure of tense,
then deeper down,
a fever,
then a tunnel that went
all the way through.

A trance garden bloomed
from my blushing skin.

I heard the hot breath of the ocean
birthing slippery creatures,
my body,
its warm vessel.

Dark Space

In 8th dimension physics,
unrequited needs
will rise upward
like a spiral
staircase achieving
a vortex arrival.

I remember the way her hands
were undelivered love letters,
were morning next to a new lover,
were leftovers again
instead of bed time stories.

I don't know how to get somewhere
unremembered by skin.

In 8th dimension physics,
emptiness becomes a barefoot walk
along the edge of the Universe,
picking crimson red
moist berries while weeding
out burnt stars from your basket.

Fierce Hunt

Anima wore
her dark cloak
to the grocery store
at midnight.

The muffled voice
of her inner child
whispered
“I’m starving.”

She was a huntress,
tiptoeing through
a fluorescent-lit,
pretense-denied
candy aisle.

The red woven plastic
shopping basket
swung by her side
like a creaking lantern
guiding her through the dense
supermarket jungle.

This is a true story.

The image features a dense, intricate marbled paper pattern. The pattern consists of numerous small, irregular, light-colored shapes, possibly resembling bubbles or floral motifs, scattered across a darker, textured background. On the left side of the image, there is a large, detailed illustration of a leaf, likely a bay leaf, which is partially overlapping the marbled paper. The overall appearance is that of a book cover or endpaper.

Samuel Gilpin

FALSE PROMISE

i.

if only for a moment, not built,
no, neither prudent—
wind storm, a constant roar,
misplacing our heads
against fold of sun,
and there's nothing bitter
and that's enough

ii.

how eloquent the lips,
how to put them together
for no good reason,
is it really necessary—
struck by the silence
dangling from our necks,
no faith in the beyond,
in the world, and no appetite
for a moment of return

iii.

the depiction of the sky
falling on a windowsill
studded with dew,
this small world
found again—

***DO YOU EVER HAVE THE FEELING
THAT THE WORLD'S GONE AND
LEFT YOU BEHIND***

there's something primitive
in the mirage
of late horizon

expressing itself
through abandonment
and motive
and the stillness

where thinking is
to mean perception

where shadow and light
mean nothing
but themselves

what occurs
at the edge of vision
where each angle's silhouette
is loaded
stepping through itself

the light can only
scatter against
the tightly knit pine
soaked in rain water

SELF-PORTRAIT (AMOR FATI)

light skews across

our faces

stilled

in a sequence

of many indivisible nows

structure

as the means

to reach essence

this notion of inspiration

like the same murky shadow

only the

rain escapes us



Jasmine Harris

Never Gave Up

How come every time I hear I can't or never have it's a challenge
I take it personally
Like you don't know the DNA that runs through me
Like you don't know what I been through to develop my capacity

Would you believe me if I told you I've never failed
Never known what it was like to not excel
Never knew what it felt like for my name to be skipped and not propelled

Cause every time I dropped the ball
I'd tumble to recover the fumble
Never gave up nor stopped trying
My soul is consistently complying
Transforming me
To what I should and for that moment need to be
So when you say nobody's good at everything
I guess nobody's me

A Woman

Do you know
Have you met a woman

I am the hottest icicle
I am the calmest wave
With the tide, I am the force going with you
The gentle sting
That reminds you to keep running
I am everything you need and nothing you could've imagined
I came to defy each sophisticated statistic
Break ground and loosen chains
I am
Always have, always will

Daddy's Love was Enough

Daddy spewed linguist love
Not by saying superlatives but telling tales
Serving stories like water to an avid well
Anecdotal evidence hoping to propel,
guide, and anchor this ship
Cause as one drifts
Through this expedition, don't be expeditious; rather selectively strategize,
selfish stewardship
Cause one missed method may result in a slip
And one skipped step could sink your battleship
Sunken and halted by mindless methodical misdirection
Daddy's arms remained open,
even as he scolded,
providing a place for recollection
Persistent to remind me, peace comes before any outward succession
He would say, "Don't let that be you...
Don't you dare thrice cry over controls beyond you."
Daddy trained us to pull-in reigns if tough road rides were too much
"Take care of yourself," presented patiently polished, providing your own
table and cup
Daddy filled mine, saving me a seat
Filling me up
So I was and will always be rough, tough, abundantly enough



Anete Kruusmägi

*

I have met people who don't care
about your politeness and customized answers.
They sweep it from their doorstep together with dust and palm leaves.
They turn the broom around and stab a hole in you.
Shocked at first you look and look and don't get it.
Then you relax, your world starts to flow out, slowly.
Parts of it burn like acid, and parts of it are pretty
and illuminated like a lake full of fluorescent jellyfish.
There are a lot of holes too and all these times you have looked at the stars.
You smile and you cannot help it keeps flowing out:
the dark and the light, the beauty and the beast.
In the substance, you can see, how her white long fingers
are looking for answers trying to learn, to understand.
But the only answers here
are for me.



Alan Parry

Muse

filling the hours
anything pronounced

probing at one's consciousness for

old wounds

still

young enough

a chance at success

with compliments

something new

to brood over

Maturation

years frittered
away

green wilderness

then rebirth

books/hope

leafing through the folds of time
poring over classics
bringing my own truth
down on them

emerging

empowered



Nancy Iannucci

In My Head

It's that James Dean thing / makes me shift about
/ left to right / one eyebrow up / a kissable pout /
you know the look / cuffs & boots / I wear them
/ & still he shakes his head / in my head / & it's
that Kerouac thing / that makes me set words to
fire / a Desolation Pop! / travel the country / in
search of *it* / it never turns out right / does it? /
& he shakes his head / in my head / & it's Emily
Dickinson / the dash witch / makes me want
to hide / but I hate to wear white / & to drain
another's nerve power / & so she / too / shakes
her head / in my head / & it's *him* / gas lighting
wizard / crippling crippler / is it me / ? / no,
it's him! / me? / black hole / hoover / makes
me believe / it's / ALL / In My Head.

This is how a conflict resolution conversation with a narcissist begins and ends

I need to talk to you about how this made me feel

--
--
--
--
--
--

Cry

--
--
--
--
--
--

Cry

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--
--
--

I'm sorry. You're right. It was my fault.



Reviews

Lily Blackburn on *Earthquakes in Candyland*

Jennifer Robin. Fungasm Press (2019). \$14.99, paperback.

Jennifer Robin's feminist gonzo nonfiction collection, *Earthquakes in Candyland*, is a series of disruptions; from essay to micro-flash, Robin takes the position of an intimate journalist, combining observation and interviews with poetic vignettes and philosophical inquiry that push us to question ourselves and our role as humans.

Many of the longer pieces in the book follow in the style of Robin's statement in the story "Oxy's Midnight Runners": "I'm here to hear stories," she says to her interview subjects on a trip to New Orleans, "I'm sick of telling mine."

Anais Nin, an influence of Robin's once said, "We write to taste life twice." It could be said that Robin's book is a result of tasting life twice to illuminate meaning and experience in her work, and the result is deeply personal, blunt and empathetic.

What Robin calls "fissures in the illusion," these essays, flashes, and tweet-riffs are what seep up through the cracks of the candy-coated veneer, critiquing everything from our self-obsessed technology addictions, to the criminal justice system; they are meant to provoke and also to connect.

Told from bus stops, train stations, MAX rides and sidewalk encounters, the book weaves a narrative of lives lived in transition, as if Robin took a literal road trip through a Candyland apocalypse and recorded the whole thing in her notebooks.

The 125 stories (in 315 pages) tackle both deep critique and celebration of American experience from multiple perspectives. The story "Breathe Deeply" narrates unflinching descriptions of violence in a series of vignettes revealing a history of racism at the hands of white slave owners. "The Tarot Reader of Troy, New York" details Robin's hitchhiking journey across the country to visit her biological daughter in an open adoption. "Oxy's Midnight Runners" follows a pair of New Orleans teens selling pills to make ends meet, while discussing everything from ghosts to ancestry and what it means to "have no truck."

Later, the interviewer turns the camera on herself.

"I am trying to remember everything...as if I can retreat at a later date and like an ancient scribe add up this information on sheets of pressed goatskin and it will spell out the meaning of life. And why shouldn't it? How much do I need to know? How much does anyone need to know?"

This is how Robin gets personal on the page, with larger questions which unexpected, intimate connections naturally stir within us, if we're paying attention.

Her fascination with the lives of others is contagious; the army-brat turned model on the overnight Greyhound. The cam girl exchanging emojis with her clients on the night bus. Lonnie, a tattoo of a star on her cheek, touting her God-love to a man at a Portland bus stop. They are the people who challenge the norm by being unabashedly themselves.

Like literal Queen Frostines or Princess Lollys, it's the experiences of those Robin meets on her journeys who ground the stories— symbols of hope guiding us through our own sense of American aimlessness, our search for a lost King, something to believe in.

The story "The Best Flavor" is one sentence: "If we must have mind control— what is the best flavor of mind control?"

The micro stories that break up these essays prod and expose, and feel like distilled versions of what Robin cannot let us not hear; we're fucked, but people are beautifully complex, and our stories matter.

Contributors

Lourdes Figueroa was born in Yuba City, California, during a trip her parents made from Mexico to the USA when they worked in the campo tilling the soil. Her work is rooted in migration, what her family lived when they moved to this country. In 2009 and 2011 she attended VONA. In 2012 she completed an MFA with a focus in poetry at USF. Her work has been published in Jack Hirschman's *Poets 11 2008 & 2010*, *Generations*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Something Worth Revising* and *BACKWORDS Press*. She currently works and lives in San Francisco with her wife. *yolotl* was her first chapbook, published by Spooky Actions. Her chapbook *Ruidos=To Learn Speak*, written during her Alley Cat Residency, is forthcoming.

Howie Good is the author of three recent collections, *I'm Not a Robot* from Tolsun Books, *The Titanic Sails at Dawn* from Alien Buddha Press, and *What It Is and How to Use It* from Grey Book Press. He co-edits *Unbroken* and *UnLost* journals.

Courtney Bush is a poet, preschool teacher and filmmaker from Mississippi, currently working in Brooklyn, NY. Her work has most recently appeared in *Critical Quarterly*, *blush lit*, and the *Adirondack Review*. Her chapbook *Isn't this nice?* was recently released by *blush lit*.

Sal is a multifaceted artist who currently works at an art museum and makes tender lo-fi tracks in her bedroom when she has a moment to spare. When she's not writing, she finds life generally tiresome.

Lauren Bender lives in Burlington, VT. Her work has appeared in *IDK Magazine*, *The Collapsar*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Yes Poetry*, and others. You can find her on twitter @benderpoet.

Isobel Hodges is currently studying for a Master of Creative Writing, Publishing and Editing, and has also completed a Graduate Diploma in Creative Writing and a Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) and shifts between writing and making art as part of her process. Three artist residencies in Spain over 2018 and 2019 have inspired unexpected collaborations and new creative directions.

Sam Rose is a writer from England and the editor of *Peeking Cat Poetry Magazine*. Her work has appeared in *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Haiku Journal*, and others. She is a three times cancer survivor and is studying for her PhD, researching the role of poetry in psycho-oncology. Find her at her [website](#) and on Twitter @writersamr.

Hibah Shabkhez is a writer of the half-yo literary tradition, an erratic language-learning enthusiast, a teacher of French as a foreign language and a happily eccentric blogger from Lahore, Pakistan (check out her blog [here](#)). Her work has previously appeared in *The Mojave Heart Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Brine*, and a number of other literary magazines. Studying life, languages and literature from a comparative perspective across linguistic and cultural boundaries holds a particular fascination for her. Follow her on Twitter [@hibahshabkhez](#).

Marissa Skeels is a Melbourne-based editor and translator who has lived in Fukushima, Kyoto, and Tokyo and whose translations of works from Japanese have appeared in *Overland*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Inkwell*, and elsewhere.

William R. Soldan is a fiction writer and poet from Youngstown, Ohio, and the author of the story collection *In Just the Right Light*. His poetry has appeared in various publications such as *Gordon Square Review*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Switchblade Magazine*, *Jelly Bucket*, and others. His second book, *Houses Burning*, is forthcoming from Shotgun Honey Press in 2020. You can find him at www.williamrsoldan.com if you'd like to connect.

Jennifer Lothrigel is a poet and artist in the San Francisco Bay area. She is the author of the chapbook *Pneuma*, (Liquid Light Press, 2018.) Her work has also been published recently in *Arcturus*, *Yes Poetry*, *Dash Literary Journal*, *Visitant Lit*, and *Riggwelter Press*, amongst others. Find her on twitter [@JLothrigel](#) and instagram [@PartingMists](#)

Samuel Gilpin is a poet originally from Portland, OR, living in Las Vegas, NV, as a Black Mountain Institute Ph.D. Fellow in Poetry at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. A Prism Review Poetry Contest winner, he is currently serving as the Poetry Editor of *Witness Magazine* and Book Review Editor of *Interim*. A Cleveland State University First Book Award finalist, his work has appeared in various journals and magazines, most recently in *The Bombay Gin*, *Omniverse*, and *Colorado Review*.

Jasmine Harris is a secondary educator and published poet featured in the *International Poetry Digest*, *Ink & Voices*, *Rigorous*, etc. Author of *I May Have Been In My Feelings*, she focuses her writing on identity, relationships, and the climate of society. Harris frequently quotes her inspirations as Maya Angelou, Ntozake Shange, and Tupac Shakur.

Anete Kruusmägi is an Estonian writer currently living in Belgium. Previously she has published poems in the Estonian literary journal *Värske Rõhk*, and in *Melancholy Hyperbole* and *Figure 1*.

Alan Parry is a poet, playwright and editor from Merseyside, England. He is an English Literature graduate and English teacher. Alan enjoys gritty realism, open ends, miniature schnauzers and 60s girl groups. He has previously had work published by *Dream Noir*, *Streetcake Magazine*, *Black Bough Poems* and others. He cites Alan Bennett, Jack Kerouac and James Joyce as inspiration. Find him on Twitter @AlanParry83 and @BrokenSpineArts and Instagram @alphapapa83.

Nancy Iannucci teaches history and lives poetry in Troy, NY. Her poetry can be found in numerous publications including *Gargoyle*, *Juke Joint Magazine*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *Riggwelter*, *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, and *Hobo Camp Review*. Her debut book of poetry, *Temptation of Wood*, was recently published in 2018 by Nixes Mate Review.

Lily Blackburn is a Portland based writer, an editor for *Typehouse Literary Magazine* and a full-time bean pharmacist (barista.) She graduated from Portland State in 2017 with her BA in English. You can find her work at *Little Fictions | Big Truths*, *Coffee People*, and *Angel City Review*.

