

*we are
wild*

ISSUE 1

ODE TO DIONYSUS JOURNAL

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EDITORS' NOTE

The past few months have been a delight for us. We didn't expect to receive the number of submissions that we did, and for that we are immensely grateful. We started *Ode To Dionysus* because we wanted to create a platform for writers of all backgrounds to have a voice, and we are so honored to be able to follow through with it.

As a team, we're so incredibly proud of ourselves for working hard to create this collection. Likewise, we would like to thank all our contributors for entrusting us with their work. Issue One could not have happened without any of you.

Until we meet again, be wild.

Love,

The Editors.

CONTRIBUTORS

In order of works

C.E. Hoffman

C.E. Hoffman (they/them) is a screenwriter, author, poet, publisher, and cat lover (not necessarily in that order.) A grant winner, Elgin Award nominee, recipient of a Silver Honorable Mention in the L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future Award, and winner of the 2022 Defunct May Day Chapbook contest, they wrote their first novel at eleven years old, and have continued writing ever since. They've been published widely online and in print since 2010, and edited Punk Monk Magazine since 2012. Current releases include SLUTS AND WHORES (Thurston Howl Publications, 2021), BLOOD, BOOZE, AND OTHER THINGS IN NATURE (Alien Buddha Press, 2022), GHOSTS, TROLLS, AND OTHER THINGS ON THE INTERNET (Bottlecap Press, 2022), and NO ACTUAL SIN (May Day Press/Defunct Magazine, 2023.) LOSERS AND FREAKS is forthcoming from Querencia Press. Find their publishing CV at cehoffman.net/publications, follow them on Twitter @CEHoffman2, and listen to their podcast Scribbles & Spills.

Grove Koger

Grove Koger is the author of When the Going Was Good (Scarecrow Press), a reader's guide to travel narratives; and Not, a chapbook of poetry (forthcoming from Finishing Line Press). He blogs about travel and related subjects at World Enough.

Mave Goren

Mave Goren is a musician, author and semi-professional bog witch from the swamps of New York City. Her work has appeared in Bottlecap Press, X/Y a Junk Drawer of Trans Voices and Trans Rites: An Anthology of Genderfucked Horror. She also makes dismal synthesizer music as Poppet and runs Evil Lurks, a weekly show on Radio Free Brooklyn. You can find her haunting your local library, or at [@yon_wizardmeistress](https://www.instagram.com/yon_wizardmeistress) on Instagram.

Nick Young

Nick Young is a retired award-winning CBS News Correspondent. His writing has appeared in more than thirty publications including the Pennsylvania Literary Journal, The Garland Lake Review, The Remington Review, The San Antonio Review, The Best of Café Lit 11 and Vols. I and II of the Writer Shed Stories anthologies. His first novel, "Deadline," was published in September. He lives outside Chicago.

Shane Reid

Shane Reid is a trans man from Liverpool, UK. When he's not withering away under deadlines, he's working through his TBR and thinking about wandering through more forests. He has work featured in the Best Served Cold zine, Engendered Lit, drip lit magazine, and the upcoming issue of the Icarus Writing Collective.

A.J.M. Aldrian

A.J.M. Aldrian is a graduate of Hamline University with a BFA in Creative Writing and a minor in History. She loves many genres including fiction; horror, sci-fi, literary, and fantasy, as well as poetry and non-fiction, historical, and nature and memoir. She collects books and loves spending time cuddled up reading them with her partner and cat. She can also be found on her podcast "Thinking on the Air" on Spotify.

Angela Arnold

Angela Arnold lives in North Wales and is also an artist, a creative gardener and an environmental campaigner. She has been published in print magazines, anthologies and online, in the UK and elsewhere. First collection: In|Between (Stairwell Books, 2023). Twitter: @AngelaArnold777

Arushi (Aera) Rege

Arushi (Aera) Rege is a queer, chronically in pain, Indian-American poet who simultaneously attends junior year in high school. They tweet occasionally @academic_core and face the perils of Instagram @aeranem_26. Their works have been published in Gastropoda Lit, Full House Literary

Magazine, fifth wheel press, and more. Their debut chapbook, BROWN GIRL EPIPHANY, is forthcoming with fifth wheel press. You can find their website at arushiaerarege.carrd.co.

Bibi Balkhi

Bibi is an ethnically Hazara artist and author, currently based in Metro Vancouver. She uses multiple mediums of art to explore the intersections of her identity and make sense of her place in the world. Bibi's piece "Lilt," was shortlisted for the Wabash Non-Fiction Prize, and published in Sycamore Review, issue 29.1.

Christopher Meadowcroft

Christopher Meadowcroft (he/they) is a poet interested in transness, queerness, and desire. In 2023, they graduated with a Master's degree in Creative Writing from The University of Manchester. His work has been published in The Manchester Anthology 2023, along with a number of queer and local zines such as: Sexxy Trans Masc Diaries, Penny Thoughts, and BENDER. His work is often grounded in a framework of trans studies, combining both the personal and the political.

Damon Hubbs

Damon Hubbs writes poems about Thulsa Doom, Italo disco & girls who cry at airports. He's the author of two chapbooks (most recently Coin Doors & Empires, from Alien Buddha Press). His work has appeared in Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Apocalypse Confidential, DarkWinter Lit, Acropolis Journal, the engine (idling, & elsewhere. Twitter @damon_hubbs.

David Hanlon

David Hanlon is a queer poet from Cardiff, Wales. He is a Best of the Net nominee. You can find his work online in over 80 magazines, including Rust & Moth, The Lumiere Review, trampset Homology Lit. His first chapbook Spectrum of Flight is available for purchase now at Animal Heart Press. You can follow him on twitter @davidhanlon13 and Instagram @hanlon6944.

Devon Neal

Devon Neal (he/him) is a Kentucky-based poet whose work has appeared in many publications, including HAD, Livina Press, The Storms, and The Bombay Lit Mag, and has been nominated for Best of the Net. He currently lives in Bardstown, KY with his wife and three children.

Devon Webb

Devon Webb is a 25-year-old writer & editor based in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her award-winning work has been published in over seventy journals worldwide & revolves around themes of femininity, vulnerability, anti-capitalism & neurodivergence. She is an in-house writer for *Erato Magazine*, an editor for *Prismatica Press* & *Undressed Animals*, & is currently working on the final edits of her debut novel. She can be found on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok & Bluesky at @devonwebbnz.

Emie Hick

Emie is so much more drawn to the personal than the professional, but it warrants a mention that she has some schooling in Education, English, Theatre, and Psychology. They spend their time working, and otherwise trying to pour love all around her, especially to her partner and her creative endeavors. @your.eudai.moniam on Instagram is their primary release, but Eudaimonia is steadily submitting pieces elsewhere into the world, always eager for that world to change. And, hopefully, they'll be able to foster some of that change through their word-writing.

Emily Perkovich

Emily Perkovich (she/her) is from the Chicago-land area. She is the Editor in Chief of Querencia Press, a poetry reader with Split Lip Mag, and on the Women in Leadership Advisory Board with Valparaiso University. Her work strives to erase the stigma surrounding trauma victims and their responses. She is a Best of the Net nominee, a SAFTA scholarship recipient, and is previously published with Horror Sleaze Trash, Harness Magazine, Rogue Agent, Coffin Bell Journal, and Awakenings among others. She is the author of the poetry collections *Godshots Wanted: Apply Within* (Sunday Mornings at the River), *The Number 12 Looks Just Like You* (Finishing Line Press), *baby, sweetheart, honey* (Alien Buddha Press), & *Manipulate Me, Babe—I Trust You*

(GutSlut Press) as well as the novella *Swallow*. You can find her on IG @undermeyou or Twitter @emily_perkovich.

Faith Allington

Faith Allington is a writer, gardener and lover of mystery parties who resides in Seattle. Her work is forthcoming or has previously appeared in various literary journals, including *Pyre*, *Hexagon*, *Myriad*, *Hearth & Coffin*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, and *The Fantastic Other*.

Frances Boyle

Frances Boyle (she / her) is a Canadian author. She has written three books of poetry, most recently *Openwork* and *Limestone* (Frontenac House, 2022) as well as a novella, *Tower* (Fish Gotta Swim Editions, 2018) and an award-winning short story collection, *Seeking Shade* (The Porcupine's Quill, 2020). Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in print and online publications in Canada and internationally including *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The New Quarterly*, *Ink Sweat and Tears* and *Freefall*. She was raised on the Canadian prairies but has long made her home in Ottawa. Visit www.francesboyle.com and follow @francesboyle19.

Fred Pollack

Author of two book-length narrative poems, *THE ADVENTURE* and *HAPPINESS*, both Story Line Press; the former reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press. Three collections of shorter poems, *A POVERTY OF WORDS*, (Prolific Press, 2015), *LANDSCAPE WITH MUTANT* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018), and *THE BEAUTIFUL LOSSES* (Better Than Starbucks Books, September 2023). Pollack has appeared in *Salmagundi*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Fish Anthology* (Ireland), *Magma* (UK), *Bateau*, *Fulcrum*, *Chiron Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, etc. Online, poems have appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *BlazeVox*, *The New Hampshire Review*, *Mudlark*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Faircloth Review*, *Triggerfish*, etc. Website: www.frederickpollack.com.


Helen Gwyn Jones

Helen Gwyn Jones (she/her) started recording her world at the age of 8 when she bought a Brownie camera from her sister, something which has become a lifelong passion. A collector of the past (hers and other people's) she likes nothing better than muted images of imperfection. May be found poring over Welsh grammar books when not photographing drains or going into raptures over rust. Recent publications include Hungry Ghost Project, Free Flash Fiction, Acropolis Journal, Paddler Press, Blink-Ink, Hecate, Pareidolia, Moss Puppy, The Levatio, Camas, Subliminal, Terse. Instagram / Twitter: @helengwynjones. Facebook: Helen Gwyn Jones Photographic Artist.

Hrichita Paul

Hrichita Paul is an author and a student who is currently pursuing her majors in English Literature & Psychology. She has previously published horror fiction and poetry.

James Penha

Expat New Yorker James Penha (he/him ) has lived for the past three decades in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his work is widely published in journals and anthologies. His newest chapbook of poems, American Daguerreotypes, is available for Kindle. Penha edits The New Verse News, an online journal of current-events poetry. Twitter: @JamesPenha

Jen Schneider

Jen Schneider is a community college educator who lives, works, and writes in small spaces throughout Pennsylvania. Her most recent collections, 14 (Plus) Reasons Why (free lines press), EVENINGS WALKS: A Collection of Recollections (Ethel), and Months, Moments, & Mileage in the Rearview Mirror (Alience Buddha Press) are now available. On (Pantry) Stock & (Kitchen) Timers, published by Querencia Press, is forthcoming.

Joseph Nutman

Joseph Nutman is a poet from North Hertfordshire - living in a town where the footsteps of John Clare, Edward Thomas, and George Orwell have walked. This is apt because being part of a rustic lineage is part of what makes up his poetic voice as it enters tension with the Anthropocene and the deep psyche. He finds his home to be on mythological life support but that does not stop him from looking for what is wild out in the countryside, trespassing in hidden pockets of old growth forest. Consequently, he does most of his writing outside. He has Instagram @joseph_nutman.

Margaret Koger

Margaret Koger is a Lascaux Poetry Prize finalist living near the Boise River. After attending Boise State University, she taught English with an emphasis on Creative Writing and served briefly as a Poet in the Schools. Her works have appeared in numerous publications including Deep Wild, Amsterdam Quarterly, Tiny Seed Literary Journal, Limberlost Review, Poetry and Places, Hyacinth Review, MacLeans's Quinterly, What These Hands Remember (Kelsay 2022) and When Seasons Were Kingdoms (forthcoming 2024).

Megan Frilling

Megan Frilling is a graduate of The Ohio State University and a current resident of Columbus, Ohio. She is a Taylor Swift enthusiast, green tea connoisseur, and lover of sandwiches in all forms. You can find her work in other journals, including Livina Press and warning lines lit.

Oliver Fosten

Oliver Fosten is a genderqueer monster-lover from the Pacific Northwest. When they aren't writing, they can be found pouring candles, playing video games, or with a cat in their lap. For more content both fresh and familiar, check out their twitter @oliver_fosten.

Richelle Slota

Richelle Lee Slota (formerly known as Richard) writes poetry, novels, and plays. Her poetry chapbook is Famous Michael; her novel, Stray Son. She lives in San Francisco. She serves as a Meter Keeper, teaching meter to other women in Annie Finch's online Poetry Witch Community.

Rikki Santer

Rikki Santer's poems have appeared in various publications including Ms. Magazine, Poetry East, Heavy Feather Review, Slab, Slipstream, [PANK], Crab Orchard Review, RHINO, Grimm, Hotel Amerika and The Main Street Rag. Their work has received many honors including 2023 Ohio Poet of the Year, Pushcart, Ohioana and Ohio Poet book award nominations as well as a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Their twelfth poetry collection, Resurrection Letter: Leonora, Her Tarot, and Me, is a sequence in tribute to the surrealist artist Leonora Carrington and was recently published by the arts press, Cereal Box Studio.

Ryan Gannon

Ryan Patrick Gannon lived in Galway the summer the roads melted. His poetry has appeared in Assaracus and Chelsea Station. His prose has appeared in About Place Journal and Identity Theory. You can find him online (almost never) at ryanpatrickgannon.com. He believes in you.

Sage Scrittore

Sage is the founder and editor of Saga City. Their poems appear in Drunk Monkeys, Foglifter, Gasher, North American Review, Ocean State Review, The Rumpus, and elsewhere. They live and teach in Western Massachusetts, USA.

Sameen Shakya

Sameen Shakya's poems have been published in Alternate Route, BOMBFIRE, Havik, WINK, and Teach Write, to name a few. Born and raised in Kathmandu, Nepal, he moved to the USA in 2015 to pursue writing. He earned an Undergraduate Degree in Creative Writing from St Cloud State

University and traveled the country for a couple of years to gain a more informal education. He returned to Kathmandu in 2022 and is currently based there.

Shamik Banerjee

Shamik Banerjee is a poet from India.

Sophie Bebeau

Sophie Bebeau is a poet from the small-town city of Green Bay, Wisconsin. Her poems have appeared in *Your Impossible Voice*, *Bear Review*, and are forthcoming in *Gulf Stream* and *Zero Readers*. Her work has also been nominated for a 2024 Best of the Net award. She currently studies writing & applied arts at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and works as a freelance writer and designer. You can find her on Instagram and Twitter at @sophiebebeau.

William Doreski

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire (USA). He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Venus, Jupiter* (2023). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.



FICTION

Adam Got to Name Everything Except This

C.E. Hoffman

When I say, “I think I’m finally done,” how can I know it’s true?

There’s been so many endings. (You’ve trashed my collar, bras, manuscripts; I’ve hung your sweaters from doorknobs in trash bags; we have enough blocks to build a castle.)

I might have been the writer, but you always had the last word. (Eg., “Cunt.” “Cold and cruel.”) All I had were boundaries, plus a few parting Molotov cocktails of my own. (“Fuck you. Get a better attitude. Treat women better.” Etc.)

(Funny. At 2:30 in the morning when I’m kicking you out into a bright, cold night, mostly because this time it was in MY house, and I was FINALLY allowed to make the rules, FINALLY found the courage to tell you it wasn’t okay, that’s when this bisexual genderfluid pixie resorts to unimaginative binary, telling a man to “treat his woman better,” because in the end, that’s all I am to you:

Woman.

Yours.)

I watched the cold light consume your eyes like all the times I was devoured. Who’s to blame for the monster inside us all? Can I blame the booze, your upcoming surgery, the ex who cheated on you who you cheated on me with?

There's kindness here, too, and a loyalty that would raze nations, but these fail to quell the snarling beast I can't dare poke.

I was sick of you shushing me, in bed or out of it.

I was sick of praying our roller coaster ride would transform into a train, something smooth and steady I could trust would lead me to the right destination.

I don't care about cocks. I don't care what you think of me, what version of the story you'll tell your friends/mom. I shouldn't have sworn, with my mouth or my finger, but barring that, I'm proud, because I'm becoming someone who refuses to let their story be told for them.

I will no longer be a passenger to your car or your ideas. Does that make me a bitch? Cunt? Cold, cruel?

Call me what you want! Your words can't hold me down: your insults or your apologies.

I don't have to give things names to love them, fight them, or set them free. My incantations invoke the unspoken and unknown, the most precious, terrifying forces that will forever defy description.

The End

The Happiest Man Alive

Grove Koger

We were sitting in a taverna in Agios Prokopios gazing out across the channel toward Paros when Yiannis told me this story. Or maybe *tale* is a better word. He may well have made it up on the spot. I'd rented an apartment from him, and I'd learned right away that he loved a good tale. What's more, it was my last day on Naxos, so I didn't have any way of investigating the details.

In any case, here's what happened and what I pieced together from my landlord's sketchy remarks that afternoon.

We'd finished lunch and were easing into our second big bottles of Fix while an old man cleared off the tables around us. The cicadas were sizzling in the pines above us, and the silhouette of Paros, which had been nearly invisible in the midday haze, was growing sharper.

The busser took no notice of us, but what was surprising was that he also took no notice of the bottles that shattered on the cobblestones behind us a moment later. Yiannis and I both jumped and looked around as a stout fellow stood steadying the table that he'd nearly knocked over.

Yiannis went over to draw the busser's attention to the mess.

"Deaf," Yiannis said after he sat back down. He inclined his head toward the old man, who was smiling gently as he got busy with a broom and a dustpan. "Does cooking, cleanup. Sleep in back." Yiannis was the taverna owner's cousin, so I assumed he'd know.

“I tell you story,” he continued, automatically assuming that I’d like to hear.

Some forty years before, it seems, a little freighter was making its way one July afternoon up from Crete, which I gather is a harder passage than you might think from looking at the map. The *meltemi* is blowing in your face if you’re heading north, and it’s a pretty strong wind that time of year. Apparently there have been wrecks off the west coast since Homer’s day, but when the captain reached the lee of the island near sunset, he thought he was home free. Then one of the crew—a young man named Spiro—must have gotten careless, because when a chance wave broke over the freighter’s bow, it washed him away with it.

Naturally, the ship reversed course and circled around, but Spiro was nowhere to be found, and the captain had to give up at nightfall for fear of hitting a reef. He put into port in Naxos Town—that’s a few miles north of Agios Prokopios—but he and several dozen other seamen headed back down at first light the next morning in smaller boats hoping to find the unfortunate fellow. And so they did. He was clinging to a rock a few hundred feet from shore, battered and nearly unconscious. They took him back to harbor, did whatever it is that you do in such situations, and Spiro was up and about in no time.

“But not *shipshape!*” Yiannis exclaimed. He seemed delighted with the English word.

No, not shipshape at all. Spiro seemed distracted, and within a few weeks people started noticing that he’d turn suddenly to look behind him, as if he thought he were being followed. There was no question of his shipping out again, so he got a job at the taverna and learned to cook. But there was definitely something wrong by then. Noise distracted him, or rather sound itself. *Any* sound; he couldn’t bear it. He couldn’t be counted on to get anything done in any reasonable

amount of time, so he lost the job and became a bum. And if you think that might be a pleasant way to live out your life on a Greek island, you've never spent a winter in the Aegean.

What exactly had happened to Spiro that night? He finally told a few people—and here Yiannis put on a grave face—that he had heard *seirēnes* flying about the reefs that night and singing. Sirens, in other words—*those* sirens. Seen them in the moonlight, too, and here Yiannis made the familiar gestures that men around the world make in suggesting the attributes of unusually desirable women. But apparently the important thing was that Spiro had *heard* them—and couldn't *stop* hearing them, didn't *want* to stop hearing them. Other sounds weren't just a distraction; they were a curse.

I wondered briefly what kind of song it was that was supposed to have enchanted the poor young man so thoroughly. Did it have a melody? Was it in any particular key?

In any case, things went on from there and Spiro was at his wits' end. The fellow was going mad from the sounds of our world, our everyday hubbub. He had to be free to listen to his sirens, whose song apparently issued from deep inside his head. So he stole a knitting needle and *pierced his eardrums*.

Yiannis laughed. Up until then I was on the verge of suggesting another round, but suddenly I felt a little queasy. "Happiest man alive!" my friend exclaimed as he stood up, slapping me on the shoulder. "Don't hear nothin'. Don't hear nobody bitchin'. Good worker now. Happiest man alive!" He grinned while I anchored a twenty-euro bill under my bottle.

As we walked out, I realized that the old man had taken a perch on a stool by the open doorway and was finishing a cigarette. I looked surreptitiously at his ear, wondering whether I might see some kind of scar or disfiguration. He must have felt my eyes on him, for he looked up at me just then and smiled serenely. Then he turned back to staring out to sea.

“I Know You Are The Reason Why I Can’t Sleep At Night”

Mave Goren

They taunted me. The stones outside my house. When I first moved into Grover’s Hollow, at the far end of the grassy hill, there was a tiny little array of stones. More haphazard than Stonehenge, but more purposeful than a quarry. A stone circle on a grassy hill, like a crown atop its mossy head. They leaned off the cliff, leering at me with those sightless eyes poked deep into the rock. There was something wrong with them. As if they were from an era even the Druids would want to forget. Every inch was covered with puke-yellow moss, garotte-thin cobwebs. Like vultures—or voyeurs—they gazed into my house for the choicest glimpse of the new person who moved into town.

I had moved to Grover’s Hollow for respite, of what it’s hard to put into proper words.

The stress of late capitalism, living in a massive sprawling city, having your value reduced to numbers in a timesheet. But I had saved up, managing to secure a cozy cottage in a quaint little Hudson Valley town, where everyone knew your name, and if you asked real nice at the diner, they’d give you extra eggs topped off with ketchup from the good ketchup bottle.

Much like the jumble of stones on the hill, I felt incongruous. When you move to a town where there’s more hospice beds than high school students, you’re bound to feel out of step.

It must have been the eggs I had. It was too easy to have pinned it on my stress of moving to a new environment. Taking a bus upstate to a place where no one knows your name and the best

conversations are small talk at antique stores. The runny slurry that passed through my body by way of Arcadia Diner and Grill clung to my stomach, staining my soul with its grease. Bertha loomed over me.

“Would you like the check?”

My fingers buried themselves into my forehead. “Yes, sure.” I swayed back and forth, trying to stifle a puke.

“Hey, are you alright?”

“Y-yeah.” I said. The nicotine yellow of the diner reeled around me. “I’m fine.”

Bertha gave me the check. On the receipt, I was greeted by a squat figure with wild hair, spiraling horns and a lolling tongue. I assumed the Great God Pan didn’t like the eggs either.

“Come back soon now.”

I lurched home, eager to get some shut-eye. Grover’s Hollow was not founded by anyone named Grover but by Professor Eustace Cairn. He loved groves, sacred places where the Goddesses would bathe. He believed that the closer you go to nature, the nearer you would be to the Gods. I swatted historic signs out of my face. I needed to get to my place, get some shut-eye, work those eggs out of my system. No. I had to bear the crystal shops and horticultural gardens as the sun was beating itself over my head like a masochistic monk. I told my friends I was moving under the auspices that I was writing a paper for my PhD in anthropology. We all knew I was kidding myself. I was here to waste away in my cottage, to be seen by no one but Bertha and Clark from the antique

store and that godforsaken circle of stones. My friends said I liked to hurt myself, to take myself into situations where I'd leave uncomfortable. I wasn't too sure that was true.

Like a sour note in a song, the henge awaited me.

How long have you been here?

I know you're the reason for my nightmares.

Stones don't usually answer when spoken to. They mulled over, silent as the earth that birthed them.

I rushed into my house, straight into my bedroom. I didn't even bother to take off my shoes. Swishing the blinds down, I curled up in the fetal position, ready to forget this whole day happened.

I awoke much later in the night. Pale moonlight slipped into my room. It was 3 in the morning, the worst time to wake up and the worst time to fall asleep. I emerged from a daze, my whole world swarming with pins and needles. Wind hissed into my room. My body shivered, adjusting to the cold. I rose up, checking to see if the heat was on. Sure enough, it was cranked all the way up. And then, like a dead rat you see on the sidewalk, out of the corner of my eye, I saw something that made my body seize up with abject fright. The blinds were no longer drawn. Wind was crawling through. Someone opened the window. Outside leer the stones, a ghost of themselves in the pale-blue moonlight. They pulse, the lichen like its veins. A rustling comes from my kitchen.

I turned on the light, cringing at how bright it's become. My house looks like it's in the proper place, no one had ransacked any bit of it that I was aware of. My laptop was intact, no one

pilfered the money in my wallet, but then, the rustling came again. It sounded either like a large animal or a human.

I reached for the nearest thing to a weapon that I could find in my room, Introduction to Ethnographic Writing, a door stopper of a textbook. I hadn't read it much, it served as a relic from undergrad, something that I may someday be possessed to read, and maybe cue from for that inevitable research paper I was supposed to write. Like a cautious crab, I scuttled into the kitchen.

“Who's there?” I said. “Show yourself, you coward.”

I turned on the light, ready to strike anyone that has decided to impede my slumber. Instead, on the kitchen table there rested a miniature carved statue, looking like it belonged more at home in a grave site in ancient Gaul than in Grover's Hollow. *How curious.* I picked up the figure, flecks of stone dissolving in my hand. On the face, a hirsute beard and a lolling tongue. The whole body was proportioned as if the creature was attempting to give me a scare, a sort of pagan boogeyman, or possibly a figure to ward boogeymen away. I've never been religious, but I can't lie and say that paganism doesn't titillate me. As much as I hate that circle of stones outside my house, there is a perverted glee I took from it, a rush from my body from head to toe. I waited for the moment I would be able to take another look. Maybe my friends were right. I really am a masochist.

Watercolor

Nick Young

From her earliest memories, Laura Bishop had been entranced by summer flowers. Every year, behind the small clapboard farmhouse where she lived with her mother and father, the hillside that sloped gently up to a stand of thick woods became a dazzling carpet—coneflower and corn poppy, blue flax, Indian blanket, goldenrod, and New England aster. These were the names taught to her by her mother.

“Now, your aunt Elizabeth, a very smart woman, indeed,” her mother had said, “knows every one of those flowers by their Latin names. She learned them at the college in Carbondale. I just know them by what we call them here. Good enough for me. In that I am in agreement with your father. Why do we need a foreign name when we have a perfectly fine one in good, old American?”

But the little girl had not the slightest grasp of the fuss about what to call the flowers. She only knew that she reveled in their palette of yellows and scarlets, purples and blues splashed amidst the lush grasses as she ran with exultation to the shade of a broad willow at the crest of the hill. Sometimes her beloved collie Miss Doxie would run with her, bounding up the slope, barking excitedly and dashing in circles under the willow waiting for Laura to catch up. And while she very much liked the companionship of her dog, what filled her young heart even more was going alone, especially on July afternoons when a hot wind rushed up from the south to stir the flowers to murmuring.

When she was thirteen, Laura was given a set of watercolor paints for her birthday—a rectangular tin case with a hinged lid containing a dozen squares of paint along with a small wooden-handled brush that fit inside and a spiral notebook of special art paper.

“Now you can paint your flowers and have them with you all the year ‘round,” her mother had said.

And so it was. Each day when the hillside was in bloom, Laura would venture forth, sometimes dutifully accompanied by Miss Doxie, at other times by herself, with her painting gear inside a coarse-woven burlap satchel that hung from a strap over her shoulder. On the hottest days, she favored the shade of the willow tree; when the weather was milder, she would find a spot in the middle of the glorious flowers themselves.

At first the paintings were crude as she struggled with the trickiness of using the brush and getting the mix of water and paint right; but as time passed, with diligent practice, she became more sure of herself and it showed in her work. And as her confidence grew, she began to venture farther from home, through the timber at the top of the slope and out into a meadow more remote. It, too, was resplendent with wildflowers, and it gladdened her spirit to make a place for herself amid the blooms and paint to her heart’s content. She also made time for reverie, setting her brush aside and lying back, closing her eyes and imagining she was transported far away to exotic places on a magic floral carpet.

It was especially warm the summer of 1960, the summer Laura Bishop turned fifteen. It was a time of struggle in her life. School had been difficult, particularly her geometry class. The

concepts were hard to grasp and her resistance to learning them festered into resentment over having to take the course at all when she only wanted to study literature and art.

But it was more than schoolwork. There were the swirling teenage social pressures to deal with in her small school. She was not one of the popular girls. She was too plain-looking, bookish in round tortoise shell glasses, her hair cut page-boy style. Out of insecurity, she smiled infrequently and spoke quietly. That did not attract the attention of boys. They were invariably drawn to the cuter, more outgoing girls.

And all the while there was what was gathering inside her, building like a May thunderstorm. She was in the midst of her transformation into womanhood. Her slender body bore the more outward signs; and within, new feelings were stirring, stealing upon her as the ivory moon hung outside the window of her room while she lay between the sheets of her bed, impulses that were both exciting and frightening. At first she did not know how to respond except to push them away. She felt too embarrassed to approach her mother— what would she say? She had no close girlfriend she could confide in. But once, in the bathroom at church, she had overheard two older girls giggling and whispering. Though what they said shocked her at first, she did not forget. And before long, when she turned out the light beside her bed and night's shadows and a rising inner heat enveloped her, she began to discover herself in a new way.

Laura's one constant through the turmoil and frustration was her artwork. She had continued to paint and had taken a class in art appreciation. Before school let out, she signed up for a summer painting program organized by her art teacher, Mr. Bellinghausen. At the first meeting in mid-June, there were only six other students, three girls and two boys from her school and a girl

who was new to her and the others. She introduced herself as Colleen—“Everybody calls me Coll”—Wilkins. She said she was seventeen, her parents were divorced and she had just moved from St. Louis with her mother. She was interested in all kinds of drawing and painting, she said, especially watercolor.

That immediately got Laura’s attention, so after Mr. Bellinghausen dismissed the group with the assignment to return the following week with a drawing or painting of a natural setting, Laura overcame her shyness and introduced herself to the new girl.

Coll was taller than Laura by an inch or two, with the lithe body of a dancer. She had long blonde hair tied in a ponytail and very lively blue eyes that flashed as often as her easy smile.

“What do you like to paint?” Laura asked.

“Just about anything, really. I’m not much good at portrait-type stuff, but I like still life, nature scenes...”

“How about wildflowers?”

“Oh, yes,” Coll answered with enthusiasm. “I used to go to a park in St. Louis that was close to our apartment. It was loaded with all kinds of flowers, and I’d draw and paint there. Too bad we don’t have any where our house is now.” Laura, whose normal reserve normally held her back with someone new, felt it slip away with this girl.

“Well, I live on a farm,” she said, “and we’ve got all the flowers you could want—acres, it seems. Do you think your mom would let you come out and paint them with me?” Coll brightened.

“I’m sure she wouldn’t mind. She’ll be happy I made a new friend.”

Two days later, after an exchange of phone calls between the mothers, Coll drove out to the farm. Mrs. Bishop fixed a lunch of sandwiches and lemonade, talking cheerfully all the while. The girls were polite but restrained in front of the older woman. It wasn’t until they took up their paints and headed out the back door that they began to relax, become more animated and talk more freely.

Coll was immediately struck by the wild beauty of the flower-covered slope.

“There are so many, and they’re so beautiful,” she marveled as she walked side-by-side with Laura. Miss Doxie barked and scampered up ahead to the shade of the willow tree.

Thus began the bond between the two girls, which grew as they spent more time together, painting and trying to make sense of their adolescent lives. Despite growing up in such different places, they found quite a lot in common. Both were frustrated with school, disliking most of what they had to learn. They were convinced adults didn’t understand them. Neither of them had much good to say about boys. Because of her shyness and complete lack of experience, they were largely baffling to Laura. Not so with Coll. She found boys coarse and repulsive.

“They’re not like us. They only think with one thing,” she said, with a slight shudder, “and it isn’t this,” she finished, pointing to her head.

As the summer spooled out, the girls were with each other more often than not, sometimes spending most of the day away from the farm with a picnic lunch Laura’s mother packed for them. And they became more familiar with each other, relaxed and uninhibited. This was Coll’s nature, and it helped Laura emerge from her shell.

When they were apart, Coll remained very much on Laura's mind, a companion as she wandered the meadows by day and by her side late into the night. She was experiencing a kind of exhilaration, a freedom of spirit she had never known.

One day, after Coll had returned home, Laura found that she had left the bag with her painting supplies behind. Laura decided to take it to her room for safekeeping. When she lifted it onto the shelf in her closet, a piece of notebook paper slipped out onto the floor. Laura retrieved it and saw that there were lines of what looked like poetry written on it in blue ballpoint. She recognized Coll's handwriting.

"...my tongue is broken;

a thin flame runs under

my skin; seeing nothing,

hearing only my own ears

drumming, I drip with sweat;

trembling shakes my body

and I turn paler than

dry grass. At such times

death isn't far from me."

What Laura read sent a tremor through her. Were these Coll's words? Laura replaced the paper in her friend's bag and tucked it into the closet.

But she could not put the verse out of her mind. It deepened what she already felt, that being close to Coll was not like having a sister. It stirred Laura in a different way, a way that was quite unsororal.

The afternoon of August 18 was deep in the midst of the southern Illinois dog days. With school starting up in another week, Laura and Coll were intent on spending as much of their remaining free time together as they could, so they planned for a long excursion, eating an early lunch at the farm before setting off. On this trip, Miss Doxie was left behind at the house where she could doze on the shaded porch.

High overhead, the midday sun was fierce, so the girls, each wearing wide straw hats, made their way quickly up the slope to the relative coolness of the sprawling willow. There they sat close together fanning themselves, talking and giggling. After a time, Laura reached for her satchel of paints.

“Wait,” said Coll, taking hold of the other girl’s arm, “I’ve got an idea. Let’s take our things and go to the other meadow.”

“But, Coll, it’s so hot,” Laura protested.

“We won’t stay long, just a while,” Coll answered. “I love that it’s so far from everything—and everybody. It’s ours, our secret, just the two of us.” Laura could see an intensity in the other girl’s face and it triggered an unexpected thrill in her.

“Alright,” she answered. “Just the two of us.” They gathered their things and left the shade of the willow, walking a distance through a thick stand of old trees, mostly oak and cottonwoods,

before cutting across a shallow gully, up a long incline and over to a secluded half-acre swath of meadow that bordered the bank of a tiny stream. Coll reached out and took Laura's hand and, giving it a gentle squeeze, led her down and through the flowers to a grassy patch near the lip of the rill.

"Right here," said Coll. "Let's paint right here."

"There's not much shade," Laura replied, glancing around. Sun dappled the ground as light sifted through the arching branches of a tall oak.

"Enough," Coll said. "Besides, the sun feels so good today." She was usually quick to complain when the weather was especially oppressive. But even though Laura found Coll's reaction to the heat odd, she would acquiesce. As the weeks had passed and the two of them had grown closer, Laura had come to be in thrall to the older girl. For her it seemed only natural. Her friend was opening her, drawing her out of herself, helping her see the world in new ways.

They unpacked their paints and water, brushes and paper. There was also a quart canning jar of lemonade Laura's mother had prepared. It was still fairly cold, so Laura unscrewed the lid and they passed the jar between them, laughing as they drank.

"I think it's time to paint," Laura said at last. So they took up their brushes, wet them and began mixing colors. Laura turned her attention to the trees and stream, while Coll returned as she did on each of their outings to the beauty of the flowers. The girls had painted quietly for a quarter-hour or so when Coll paused.

"You know what I want us to do?" She looked devilishly at her companion.

“What?”

“I want us to get a real tan.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Here, I’ll show you,” Coll said, never taking her eyes from Laura as she unbuttoned her white cotton blouse—

“Coll!”

—reached behind her back, unsnapped her bra and slid out of it.

“What are you doing?” Laura said, eyes wide, flustered at her friend’s unexpected act and her nakedness.

“Now you,” Coll commanded.

“I will not,” Laura answered, her face flushing.

“You trust me, don’t you?”

“Well, yes, but...”

“Well, then, come on,” Coll continued. “Here, let me help.” And before Laura could protest further, Coll reached out and began undoing the buttons on her friend’s blouse. When she finished, she drew the blouse open.

“Now, you finish.”

“But, Coll...” Laura tried to object, but her resolve was weakening as there arose within her a sensation she could not deny. Her eyes flashed around as if she was worried she was being watched.

“Go ahead,” Coll said, “there’s nobody else, just you and me.”

“Well...,” Laura began tentatively, using her right hand to undo the clasp of her brassiere and remove it.

“Now,” said Coll, “lay down by me.” With a self-conscious giggle, Laura joined her friend in putting aside their straw hats and lying side by side, squeezing their eyes tightly against the glare. After a long moment, Coll breathed a deep sigh. “Mmmm, it feels so good. Doesn’t it feel wonderful?”

“Yes,” Laura answered softly, titillated by Coll’s proximity and the heat pulsing against her pale torso.

“I’ve got another idea,” Coll said, rolling onto her side to face Laura. The younger girl raised a hand to shield her eyes and looked at her friend.

“What?” Coll searched Laura’s face.

“I want you to just lay there with your eyes closed.”

“Okay. Then what?”

“Nothing. Just lay there—and promise not to open your eyes.”

“And what are you going to do?” Coll, again with a hint of devilment in her smile, answered,

“That’s a secret.”

“Coll, come on.”

“You trust me, right? You said you trusted me.”

“I do.”

“Okay, then, lay back down and close your eyes.” Laura complied, while Coll got to her feet and removed her blouse. “No peeking, promise?”

“Promise.”

Laura heard Coll move away, but she kept to her word not to look. What was she up to? Laura lightly brushed a hand across her skin which, despite the heat, sent a deep shiver through her. The world was far away. The only sounds were the gentle murmuring of the brook and the rising and falling thrum of cicadas in the trees. Where could she have gone?

Presently, Laura heard the footsteps of her friend returning.

“Where have you been, girl?” Coll laughed.

“A surprise, remember? Now, no peeking, please.” With that, Coll knelt next to Laura and, from the large bunch of wildflowers she clutched to her chest, began strewing the blossoms onto Laura’s bare torso—coneflower and corn poppy, blue flax, Indian blanket, goldenrod, and

New England aster. As the flowers began covering her, Laura picked up their scent and her breath caught.

“Coll...”

When she had dropped the last of the flowers, Coll bent close to Laura’s ear and whispered,

“A thin flame runs under my skin.” For Laura, that moment finally unlocked a door that, though not always conscious of it, she had been pressing against harder each time she was with Coll or when the image of the older girl stole upon her late at night. Without opening her eyes, Laura’s arms encircled Coll and drew her close.

Overhead, the August sun shimmered down. The girls’ legs entwined, knocking over the water jar, spilling the liquid across their paintings, causing the colors to bleed one into the other.

Watercolor first appeared in Backchannels Journal.

I was a dancer before I was a boy

Shane Reid

I was a dancer before I was a boy. A ballerina fit into shoes two sizes too small but I was stubborn because I wanted to wear them. A girl flitting from stage to stage, loving the lights and the costumes and the long practice days and the adrenaline of completing a new routine. Dance school to dance school, never quite settling in one, growing up and growing out. In dancing, you never seemed to need to socially fit in anywhere as long as you danced. I was a dancer before I was a boy.

I was a boy before I was a musician. Piano, flute, guitar, oboe, drums. Then, in a forgotten storage room for keyboards, I found my voice. I sang in the early mornings before school began, my voice scratchy from sleep, discovering how to think and talk and sing and feel. My fingers danced over keys and strings, my voice trailing through scales, and my mind navigating through gender and sexuality. A stage in school, a voice to be heard, a boy to be hidden. Dreams thought quietly and comfortably.

I was a musician before I was a ghost. I was a boy who'd found himself years ago and tucked himself inside the image others needed to see. A boy who lived as a boy in my own mind and loved boys, who wrote songs and stopped singing them. A boy who danced contemporary routines in the small safety of an empty school gym during lunch. I went behind a camera as I grew up and watched everyone perform the way I dreamed of doing. A performance of Rock of Ages; I was the cameraman when I wanted to be in the ensemble. I was a vision mixer for the show but when the dancers stretched and warmed up beforehand, I was sick with envy.

I was a ghost before I was this. A theatre in my city that I attended, every new musical and ballet performance I could. Blood Brothers moved me to tears and I dreamed of being Eddie. Mamma Mia enamoured me when men in tiny shorts danced on a stage. I loved them and I wanted to be them, my body alight with desire for both them and the dream I had tucked away years before. Show me a musical and I'll show you my dream role. Shivers down my spine when the Phantom cries his obsession; I wish I'd pursued my chance. This was my point of no return: hiding when I was not given the tools to be louder. Silenced when I wanted to sing. Stillness when I wanted to dance.

The theatre holds a special place for a boy hiding away, grown into an adult, who cannot watch performances and still think of the days when it could have been him. No longer on a stage but no longer behind a camera, either. Now I'll dance with whiskey in my blood, and I realise it is not only grief and desire that lives in this man's heart. I think music and performance was my first love, and through it, I might grow to love the man I am.

NON FICTION

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FICTION

Uncertain Landfalls: In search of Odysseus

Grove Koger

Along with a myriad translations into a myriad languages, a small library of books have been written about the Odyssey, one of the two ancient Greek epics credited to a Greek poet named Homer.

But we don't know whether Homer actually existed, or even when, although the epics themselves seem to have assumed their final form in the eighth century BCE. We don't know how much of the works he (or she) might actually have composed, but it seems likely that they combine individual traditions that had been handed down orally for generations. In the case of the Odyssey, we have no reason to think that Odysseus (or, to use the Latinized form of his name, Ulysses) actually existed or, if he did, that he underwent any of the experiences that he's credited with. We can be sure that he and his men didn't encounter a one-eyed Cyclops, but, on the other hand, his voyage from Troy just might reflect ancient Greek sailing techniques and knowledge of actual places.

As Ernie Bradford puts it in *Ulysses Found*, "Anyone who has ever fallen under the spell of the Odyssey is likely to ask himself ... whether the whole poem must be regarded as fiction or may have some basis in fact."

People have been asking themselves that question for millenia, and their answers have ranged widely. Ancient Greek geographer Strabo thought that some of the locations in the Odyssey lay in the Atlantic Ocean, beyond what we know as the Strait of Gibraltar. Closer to our own day,

nineteenth-century Belgian lawyer Theophile Cailleux argued for similar settings, and placed Troy on the coast of Great Britain. Serbian commentators have identified the locations of Odysseus' adventures within the Adriatic Sea, which, after all, lies within a few days sailing time of Odysseus' home on the Ionian island of Ithaca. A Brazilian professor thinks that Odysseus reached South America.

I've mentioned Bradford because, of the legion of writers on the subject, he was one of the few with sea legs. A veteran of the Royal Navy, he could boast of experience aboard vessels ranging from a twenty-ton cutter to fishing boats. "For at least three years," he writes, "I sailed the Mediterranean with the *Odyssey* in one hand and the charts and Admiralty Pilots ... in the other."

There's little point in trying to work out the details of the exact route Odysseus and his men might have taken as they sailed down the Aegean Sea from Troy. Their goal lay off the western coast of Greece, so it would have been necessary to round the entire Peloponnesian Peninsula. However, a north wind carried them southward past the peninsula, and nine desperate days later they reached the land of the Lotus-Eaters. And it's here, as Bradford admits, that both he and Odysseus are "entering upon a world of speculation." Having said that, Bradford makes the traditional identification of the land of the Lotus-Eaters with the Tunisian island of Djerba, which lies far to the southwest on the African coast. As for the forgetfulness-inducing fruit itself, he suggests that the sweet, plum-like *Cordia myxa* or the jujube, *Rhamnus ziziphus*, might fit the bill, although here his guess is no more convincing than anyone else's.

The route of the Greeks' eventual escape lay to the northeast, toward Ithaca. Instead, they reached the land of the Cyclopes—and it's at this point that they may have re-entered a geographically identifiable world.

"I find that the navigation of Ulysses from now on bear the distinct hallmark of truth," Bradford explains. "So many of the places, weather conditions, and even geographical descriptions seem to be accurate." He goes on to identify the land of the Cyclopes as the western shore of Sicily, and the much smaller island where the hungry Greeks slaughtered goats as Favignana. Lying about four miles off Sicily itself, Favignana was, it turns out, actually known as Goat Island in classical times!

Still striving to reach Ithaca, the Greeks next made landfall on the island of Aeolus, King of the Winds. Bradford argues in this case for the little island of Ustica north of Sicily. He thinks that the hapless Greeks were then blown northwestward to the port of Bonifacio in the southernmost Corsica, where they encountered the cannibalistic Laestrygonians. When they made their way eastward once again, across the Tyrrhenian Sea, they reached Circe's island, which Bradford identifies as Cape Circeo on the coast of Italy. While Cape Circeo is not an island, Bradford points out that, from a distance, it appears to be one.

The next leg of Odysseus' travels took him (in Robert Fagles' translation) to "the outer limits, the Ocean River's bounds"—in other words, to the edge of the known world. Bradford explains that the ancient Greeks had no direct knowledge of the western Mediterranean or the Strait of Gibraltar. They had, however, heard frightening stories from the Phoenicians, who controlled those seas and aimed to keep others out. Bradford also suspects that this episode, in

which Odysseus visits the underworld, represents a separate tradition that Homer incorporated into the larger framework of his epic.

Odysseus' remaining adventures return us to a recognizable world. Bradford argues for the Li Galli Islands (otherwise known, suggestively, as the Sirenas) off the southwestern coast of Italy as the lair of the deadly Sirens. He then identifies the Strait of Messina, between Sicily and the toe of the Italian boot, as the setting in which the Greeks encountered the monsters Scylla and Charybdis, and the island of the Sun God as Sicily itself. Calypso's island is Malta or nearby Gozo, both of which lie directly south of Sicily—another traditional identification. From there, a course of east by northeast would have taken Odysseus home.

Bradford's reconstruction is something of a Grand Tour of the Mediterranean, but he argues from personal experience. It is, after all, the "accuracy of the framework" of the poem that concerns him. The same could be said of another British writer/sailor, Tim Severin, whose book *The Ulysses Voyage: Sea Search for the Odyssey* also attempts to retrace Odysseus' route.

Severin specialized in actual recreations of epic voyages, and was a winner of the Founder's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society. He also had a particular advantage: he was sailing a 54-foot replica of a Bronze Age galley. His expedition turns out to be a circumscribed one confined to the waters of Greece and the African coast south of Greece. But he concludes to his own satisfaction that "the Odyssey is demonstrably true to the realities of sailing and rowing a galley in the Mediterranean."

Severin agrees with Bradford and others that a strong north wind blew Odysseus' fleet past the Peloponnesian Peninsula. He believes that they continued southward under a "controlled drift"

for nine days until they reached the land of the Lotus-Eaters on the coast of what is now Libya. This location is much farther east than Bradford and others have argued for, but Severin believes that most commentators have misjudged the abilities of the Bronze age Greeks.

When it comes to the actual fruit that the Lotus-Eaters consumed, Severin, like Bradford, suggests the jujube, but adds that “why it was supposed to make men lose their memories is not clear.” The problem identifying the lotus highlights the dilemma that any writer on the subject of Odysseus faces: what to accept as possibly genuine and what to ignore as folkloristic embellishment.

Since Severin locates the land of the Lotus Eaters farther east than other commentators, he places the land of the Cyclopes farther east as well, on the southwestern coast of Crete. He then makes the case for the island of King Aeolus as tiny Gramvousa, off the northwestern corner of Crete. According to the *Odyssey*, it was here that Aeolus gave Odysseus a leather bag holding the winds—a bag that the foolish sailors later opened while Odysseus slept. Gramvousa was once known as Korykos, which might seem to be of little consequence except that a korykos signified a leather bag to the ancient Greeks!

Where was the land of the Laestrygonian giants? Severin finds a possibility in the harbor of Mezapo on the Peloponnesian Peninsula. And Circe’s island? The little Ionian island of Paxos fits the bill. But Paxos lies farther north than Ithaca, as do the remaining sites that Severin links to Odysseus’ voyage. The renowned wanderer seems to have “sailed straight by his homeland.” How can that be?

Severin believes that here we're reading another interpolation, a "separate cycle of tales" involving the Ionian Islands. He finds confirmation among the geographical features of particular islands and the folktales associated with them, but he doesn't explain the skewed geographical order of these final adventures.

Severin supplies a more satisfying answer to a larger question: How did the "sites of Ulysses' adventures, which are first on the logical coasting route homeward-bound from Troy and then in his native archipelago, come to be transferred hundreds of miles [as in Bradford's reconstruction] to the western Mediterranean?" He theorizes that as the Greeks spread westward into Sicily and southern Italy, "they took their folktales with them," pushing the mysterious edge of the world farther and farther west.

Severin's reconstruction of Odysseus' travels is a departure from previous ones, and, after Bradford's Grand Tour, it's something of a letdown. That's no argument against its validity, of course, and it's not the last word on a subject that, after all, can have no last word. It would be gratifying to listen to Bradford and Severin debate the subject some evening in a seaside taverna, but, alas, Bradford died in 1986 and Severin in 2020.

And that, in turn, leads to yet another consideration. The great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges wrote that at the moment of his death, Shakespeare learned from God that he, like God Himself, was "everything and nothing." Studied and debated for millennia not just by geographers and explorers but by novelists, poets, anthropologists and philosophers as well, Odysseus, it seems, is everywhere and nowhere.

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POETRY

St. Kilda

A.J.M. Aldrian

No Saint of thy name they named you
rather Shield or Sweet Wellwater;
Sunt Kelde, ere in tongues of home
or lands beyond and long forgotten
Right of name, wrong what they left unsaid
for what is worth, the birds do make their beds

But the whispers of the sea came to me
wandering here forever to be
to the black crescent earth
and our toil came not to mirth
Where She lay her head
where a man should ne'er tread
of the volcanic past
long forever of what would last...?

The call of the birds
unknown in words
that called me here
told me of the land that once was
But when the waves come
and the waves do rise

Where the village waits,
beaten by the wind and worn with time
Will the green, fresh grass
grow over this place?
For which they left, not of sea or land
never to back again
History, often all the forgotten
but it is what our ancestors left in Scotland

Layers of Dreams

A.J.M. Aldrian

In layers of dreams
off the streetside, under that ghostly yellow light
I called and you came to me,
of sharp embrace, and yet still, ever still
you faded
I was wondering if I wandered too far

In the basement, below the world
danced in dust,
is a room with all my ghosts.
Endless old garments
of times passed
and dolls
of lost children

Retreated to your bungalow
for a smoke
when you came not so close to me in fear,
spoke in whispers and eyes looked low.
When I saw your smile again,
I felt like a specter in your kitchen, heart afloat

They have cold eyes
but they stare not,
for dolls cannot look or see
And there are large hoop skirts hang
silk shoes grayed, from centuries ago
perfect curls fallen astray

If I could keep your hands in some far away place
and I remembered you so clearly
“the games we used to play,
kissed the kid, we traded love like sharing snacks-
A lunchtime meal, gone rotten from overly licked fingers,”
Laughing, we looked out the fogged window over morning coffee
and I wondered if this is the last time

Sunken beneath the floorboard
for no one ever to see
Ghosts of ghosts
Memories of memories
 I see your hands and hear your voice
a broken tune on the gramophone
A water glass with old cigarettes floating in it
 dust of the prairie that chases us away
Dolls that danced together upon the music box
They turn, weaning, no more

 Tapped on the table, on the windowsill
 Echoes on stone and on wood and on glass.
 steam from the teapot. Shrieking.
 “Poor forever, we are,” breathed, forgetting.
 “Do you want me to leave?”
 Your eyes glared back at me.

No one could ever touch it, nie reach, nor crawl
It is too far away from here
hidden in my consciousness
 But it was real, I swear it was real.
Though the world is foggy-
and my steps rattle on floorboards
My fingers on cold porcelain, if I press too hard on the statues, they’d both break.
Instead, I draw behind it, waiting for the music box to turn
 I gaze back in the dark.

 I knew the roughness of your hands as you held mine
 ragged breath against my chest,
 painted like the sea, like the wind, like a train.
 Given its untouchableness
 Unfathomableness, I wondered,
 Were I ever to dance with you again?

And this place,
that echoes through me, hallow and dusty
The fancy hats hung on selves like clouds over me
 Shadowed us in the rain, in the streetlights
 I wanted to hold your hand again
 and cry
 But I see us,
Dolls with rotting eyes

“And you’d bid me goodbye one last time
Wouldn’t you?”
You and I...

Don’t turn anymore on the music box
No song emanates and echoes
the empty silence
of swirling dust.

Stuck in the dreams of the past
the icy reflection coated in
the glare of loss.
in those piles of aged dresses
Weren’t we, nothing more than a dream...
Wisps of the way
buried in the earth

of our minds
Haunted by the things we once had
the people we once were
And I wondered
if you were just another
Doll in the room that was not mine

Your Body Made of Glass

Angela Arnold

All curvy seethroughness, fillable.
Funnel, find, fluid of my love. Want and need
bubbling down, a cascade that's wholly un-undoable,
stoppered – shake it about, jump,
me swirling inside you.

Your body a glass. Half full of the shine of this full-on
sun of me; half empty with my other night time
dreaming self ever absent:
roaming across dark towns
devoid of vessels that could contain me.

Your body, my body – mirroring
mirrors that recede into an impossible
future – we will stand waiting for the smallest
of small earthquakes to break,
shatter and free.

Pour Me Another Poem

Angela Arnold

Say that again, do, really:
in the clefts of my mind,
my darkest places,
bubbles are already
rising: a champagne of words
fermenting, sentences
brewing.

You look at me,
you say, do, repeat
and there's emotion in it, intent,
content. And now the moment
is full, plump with gifts,
ripe for the harvest.

I apologise, really:
your self/ways/words
shouldn't be fodder, trodden
into mash, processed
to produce an
intoxication
of nouns, vowels,
adjectives flying upwards,
upwords,
hyphens placed *here*
and the whole thing
out there
before you know it.
It is theft.
I know.
People: don't
get into bed with
poets.

more cries in the night!

Angela Arnold

owl shriek (fox outrage?) in human tongue
and now we emerge

neighbours who never spoke
never speak

never meet – now virtually flock
as one: listen

eager for these echoes of a pain
we might almost own

almost celebrate
fear loud as day suddenly

made sacred enough
to welcome (admit to?)

since we're all here
each with a burden of dumb dislike

prejudice we'd rather stand aside
not name

not now
faced with everyone's night

no one left out here
as we stand together-alone

a feast of knowing
clarity in the darkest part of the street

Bloodspit

Arushi (Aera) Rege

we're filming a movie // about sex & death & // of course there's a curse // somewhere somehow
there's the dirty little // need to be seen // or be loved // or hurt // or something that helps with
the pain // cutscene // i'm in the graveyard with mylover myangel mygod // baby's in the graveyard
with me // skeletonflower rain or deadman'sfingers mushrooms // baby tells me GOODBYE
DARLING // YOUR HEART'S A MAUSOLEUM // I CAN'T LOVE YOU LIKE THIS // i'm
supposed to respond with // baby i'd bury you in my heart // if only you'd let me // we're filming a
movie where // i'm supposed to be split into two // with tongues carving little lines down // my
cheek // & of course // the movie's about sex & death // (so very *french*) // in black & white & gray
// so the tongues cut me open // bare my ribcage out // cutscene // icarus flew too close to the sun
// baby's supposed to tell me // i'm icarus & i'm the sun // the movie goes on // of course // i hold
dirty little thoughts // about being needed // to be seen // or hurt // or loved // so in the
showerscene i // hop in & touch myflank // becomes yourbody // becomes soapsuds & heartblood
// and baby hops in after // says YOUR HEART'S A MAUSOLEUM // and this time i eat //
baby's heart // and spit up the heartblood // and bury baby in my heart // cutscene // director
ends the movie // says its "too grotesque" // calls me "too good at acting" // cutscene // i pretend
i'm acting // cutscene // baby spits up the heartblood // cutscene // i bury baby in my heart //
cutscene // we're filming a movie // about sex & death // and monotone tongues // cut open
cheeks that bleed out // and bloodspit & soapsuds in the shower

MOM SAYS I'M A MANIC PIXIE DREAM GIRL

Arushi (Aera) Rege

because my hair's / dark red / because i dare / to dream / of college / and stars under / ivy league
skies / words like "onism" and "acosmism" / falling from my lips / mom says i'm a / manic pixie
dream girl / because i dare / to dream / of love / of wanting / of fear / of being whole / because
underneath / brown skin red hair i am / everything & nothing & / something in between / & i'm
sorry too often / & not sorry enough / but to be whole / mom says / is to want more than is
possible / & i'm sorry / but mom says i'm a / manic pixie dream girl / because i'm a time machine
& a temple & a body / and because i dare to love / like it isn't a shameful secret / like i love a boy /
and mom, i'm sorry / but the boy & i dare to dream / of night skies / and watching sunsets go
down / dripping red into lavender skies / like the backdrop of this painting isn't the desert / like at
my core / i'm not a brown kid in the desert / mom says i'm a / manic pixie dream girl / as if
wanting & the level of my desire / are evil / will destroy me / as if i'm everything & nothing & /
something in between / & the stars are mine / for the taking / or as if i'm / going be be nothing but
/ love & body & want & need & desire & / more & more & more & / mama says i'm a / manic
pixie dream girl / because she knows that i'm / nothing but / brown person in the desert / wailing
for the world to listen / *am i something? / am i something? / am i something? / am i-*

Cherry Trilogy

Bibi Balkhi

I

this sweating summer
cherries darken in the heat
split skin and sweet juice

II

painted lips bright red
smear with dew into maroon
cherry stem knotted

III

half the fruit is gone
bowls of pits and tied stems
we have such talent

Salomé

Christopher Meadowcroft

When you kissed me in the kitchen,
I thought about killing you.
I fantasised about reaching
for a kitchen knife,
turning your tongue
limp in my mouth.
I could bite your lips
like ripe red fruit and be satisfied.
You are drunk on wine and say
the moon is weak like a woman.
She is rising from the tomb
and I hand over you—
a dead thing.

Glass Hives

Damon Hubbs

I play skittle-ball with bones and skulls.
The streets slum in fever.
Everyone is studying bugs,
struggling with the quarry
thinking through what it means to be human,
bejeweled beetles leashed across the necks
of the jammiest bits of jam.

I arrange myself, lifelike
watch caterpillars feed on widow's weeds
watch bees in glass hives.
Greenland had a warm past.
The ancient soil beneath a mile of ice—
twiglike reconstructions of our home
before it spent.

His skin

David Hanlon

If the sky was his skin, I'd shoot down from the stratosphere,
halt,
then smooth it out, fill in the pockmarks, massage the stormy tone,
usher away the heavy clouds, the impending rain.

I remember when it held summer days,
when his flesh beamed like sapphires,
before it grew blisteringly hot
then vanished,

as stars do,

as we did.

Middle School Teachers

Devon Neal

No one fights the forces of nature more
than middle school teachers. While firefighters
fill wildfire sky with steam, construction
workers unpuzzle mountains to stripe roads,
and deep sea fishermen are tossed
in seaspray and storm, it is the teachers
in the trenches of adolescence fighting
the most inevitable fight—teens rocketing
at each other groin first, fingertips
brushing like vine fruit, bodies bathed
in darkness and fish-fin neon lights
dancing too closely at the after-hours dance.
All we wanted was to mix together
but for their tireless eyes, the whip-crack
of snapping fingers in hallways, under bleachers,
the hidden pockets where chemistry burns.

Untamed

Devon Neal

They're out on the back lawn,
knees fingerprinted with dirt and dew,
howling at the late-September moon.
It's my job to tame them,
or rather see how much wildness
they're allowed to keep.

HOLY THINGS

Devon Webb

When you grow up a girl
you are taught to be holy.
You are taught to keep parts of yourself behind glass
as if they are there to admire but never touch,
as if your skin is a scripture
you never wanted to write.
When you grow up a girl you are taught that
devils look like men with mischief in their eyes
& hunger in their bellies,
that you are the angel who
cannot touch the ground in case they
pluck the feathers from your wings.
When you grow up a girl you are taught to
sing a gospel you don't believe in,
louder and louder until you run out of breath
but not so loudly
that the wrong people might hear you.
Us girls,
we are told that our bodies are temples,
that they can only worship us on their knees.
We are told that
putting your heart on a pedestal
is the only way to keep it beating,
that being out of reach is the only way
to make a man love you.
We are told to fear desecration
& the calloused hands that might cause it.
This body,
is holy.
This body,
is holy.
This body,
is holy.
But this body –
this is not me.
I am made for a
different kind of religion.

I have a roaring in my head & a
fire in my loins
both so far from sacred.
I have a passion that can't be found
by men on their knees.
I am made for a
more tactile kind of loving.
When I worship
it will be with mud between my toes
& wind in my hair,
singing a gospel that
only I know the words to.
I shall worship standing,
the same way you worship me.
We will not love with our bodies.
We will not pray with our hands.
We will pray with our teeth
& our lips
& our tongues,
we will pray to nobody in particular.
And we shall stay like that,
as the moon watches us
rip each other apart,
screaming sacrilege at the top of our lungs.
This love,
is holy.
This love,
is holy.
This love,
is holy.
For when they told me to be holy
I became the kind of holy
that keeps the devil
beating inside of its chest.

LADIES OF THE NIGHT

Devon Webb

We exchanged boys
like we exchanged the cigarette smoke
that switched lungs between us,
we shared them
like the backwashed saliva
of our thirteen-dollar vodka bottles.
We kissed urgently,
without inhibitions & without pride,
pressing our lips together
in some mad, delirious frenzy
of teenage lust.
We fucked
like bitches in heat,
igniting our veins to distract us from our
monotonous, predictable blood flow
& connecting them to each other
like telephone wires.
But the conversations we initiated
were soon to be cut short
& we knew that, inevitably,
the line would soon go dead.
We were digging our holes deeper
& starting wars in the very beds we had slept in
since before we could spell our own names.
We got drunk on the idea that
dreams don't die
even though we'd already observed
the execution.
How do you escape the void
when you've taken to calling it home?
How do you avoid your own footprints?
We were the ladies of the night,
insomniacs with overthinking minds
who ran away from any opportunity to close our eyes
because we
saw
everything.

Silent observers & disruptive destroyers,
fucking ourselves back to life.

THESE STREETS

Devon Webb

I am the critical observer
of this trembling revolution.
It begins
as we wash our hands of our parents' sins:
their sin is apathy,
their sin is cowardice.
We,
we have a world to save
a collective awakening to inspire.
We play by their rules
but bend them to our will
arm ourselves in Art & Love
speak our words & make them beautiful.
Listen.
Put your ear to the cracks in the pavement
& hear the pulsating rebellion of the underground.
These streets are ours,
these streets where they push our
foreheads to the gutter as the rent goes up.
These streets
where they throw us from our homes,
where we bruise our knees
& cut our hands on broken glass.
Where we continue to dance regardless.
Where we continue to sing
& love
& scream
& unapologetically proclaim our truth.
The truth is that we will not bend our knee to you.
We cling to the freedom of our youth
because this is how we save ourselves,
& this survival is how we honour you.

Your Friendly Neighbourhood Spider-Man!

Emie Hick

every white man
with a
Persecution Complex.

Savant Chemist,
Olympic Athlete,
the Proportionate
Strength of a Spider,
yet attachment issues
make him
Insufferable.

Most days,
he *beat-em-ups*
on the police's beat.
It isn't honest work,
but at least
he's *tongue in cheek.*
Kids these days.
No civic responsibility.
Only in it for themselves.

He's a menace.

Or I'm not J. Jonah Jameson.

Anyone dressing up in a costume
is neglecting their family.
Buy your mother something nice:
On me. Stop by the studio.
You're having way too much fun
wailing on people.

Stop **swinging**, kid, and show up for those you love.

You can't "car guy" our planet back, ***hole

Emie Hick

There is nothing scarier
than a car full, all 4, just
a *haggle** of white guys.

* 

with your bros 🐼 playing golf

🐼🐼🐼 just your caddy, you swear

Ohh... 💧💧💧

🌈🌈🌈 how the time flies...

I kid.

Fun and

Games**.

**Organize.Localize.Mobilize.

Evanescent

Emily Perkovich

The wings are beating a dead horse, again
I watch a welt rise from the grave between each finger-length of skin, and I know you
never imagined me graceful
But that's only a thought now, a cyclone in the memory, not an iceberg
in reality's ocean

What does Seven know of holiness, after all?

Seven knows a pew-bench straining the back, Seven knows the cheek cradles the phone into a
wound, Seven knows the floor isn't clean enough to eat off of

I pick a hair from between teeth, remove the tissue from the eyes, pray to the carpet

Seven knows the hymn for an apology is a late-night courtesy call, a closed-door tantrum
Seven falls from a mountain-top and lands on Six

Six blows a dandelion wish into a lilac, cries a strobe light, holds a bullet in its palm
Six offers you a halo, wonders that they ever thought themselves hallowed, wonders at the
necessity of worship, worship, warship

Seven comes to
Seven steals the bullet, places it in the thigh, suffers the injury on behalf of Six
Seven can take the sting
Seven says fire-away

Seven becomes sacrosanct, though earth-bound, becomes its own sacrifice

I Write Myself Into Your Shoes And Change The Setting

Emily Perkovich

I come to in the thick of it
Find you face down in flooded fields
I imagine you as me

we're face to face mixing breath, we're skin to skin mixing signals, I brush fingers on hips, watch the way your words come out whispered in the negative, know this is the moment when things snap, you're on the ground as I push my heel into neck, limbs scrambling as I roll you stomach-bound, press my palm to back of head, you're screaming, and I'm watching the mud fill the gaps in your teeth, watching browned grass catch in your throat, I laugh, call you water-logged, dig a trench across you, spike your spine, till the surface

I come to in the thick of it
Open the window on the scene
Flash freeze the field
You bleed dirt from all your holes
Scream again for an ending

Mabon Passing

Emily Perkovich

the grass browns quicker this year/shafts of sunlight see through to dirt/where did the rain go?/the minutes tick by in a drought/the minutes aren't ticking/the minutes are still/there is always this stillness in the burning/i forget daily which way the wind blows, and the days stop coming/the world is in famine/i leak out, heavy and never water a thing/i've placed too much emphasis on the season, again/i carve frustration into a tree to live a slow-death and rejoice at the hollow/the emptiness is a space i can fit/dampness fruits in my vacancy/i wilt at the ending/scorch at my body/the minutes aren't ticking/i forget which way the wind blows/i am the offering/i fear a lack of harvest

Quartz & Grace

Emily Perkovich

How I knew I'd return to my bed of roots

A rope snap fury-whip at my spine

Call me vampire cowboy
Blood on my incisors,
cloves between my cheeks,
lit fuse of my palm

I am burning bush

I am blessed tiger's-eye at the neck's hollow

I am ankles sliced in penance

Barefoot-dance on the table-leaves, buckled
Sacred planchette on the basement floor
& dress, storm-swept between the thighs,
core of the apple

How I poisoned the seeds

How I knew you'd never believe

How I wanted so badly to be believed

Send Flowers

Faith Allington

Wild rose, farewell-to-spring,
blue wildrye, cow-parsnip,
bleeding heart.

I'd take just a possibility of flowers,
seed pods dappling the lawn,
entire wild fields poised
inside, waiting for the hinges
to open wide.

Or in lieu of flowers
send bracken fern and salt,
horse chestnuts, curls of sea smoke
and the giddy calling of geese.

I'll accept any and all
natural currencies
provided they arrive
by your hand.

But I'd love most of all
the honey moon, rose moon,
luminous wildflower
marking summer's entrance.

I wonder if you've always known
I long to taste your strawberry moon,
to swallow the ruddy light
until I am phosphoric.

Disorderly

Frances Boyle

Rapacious these women
 on stage senior
students real actors to me
in my first-year tech class

The stage manager is also in the cast
 as a cop who tries to contain the raving
so I hold the book give the cues
 for light and sound
from the front row
 later from the booth
 earphones and mic

Fussy officious king and his principal private
 secretary (male) dismissive of "Miss Thing"
 first woman (secretary)
 first to slowly become feral
disrobe sinuous under Dionysus's spell

 By the end the queen mother too
will writhe in bacchanal will tear her son's
 body asunder spike his head She is
to me as intimidating offstage as on

 In my ears light says nice ass
 and sound replies but not much
in the tit department My voice cueing
 Go! LX30 lightning flash Standby SND8 cymbal
reminds them I'm there pauses their leering

And Dionysus glows electromagnetic
my friend's pudgy boyfriend
 transfigured by a summer
of outdoor work by hair grown long
 and dyed golden for this role

More like Apollo than the wine god
one girl grumbles But inhabited
by this part he's grown confident
arrogant god-like

Note: John Bowen's 1969 play *Disorderly Women* was a
modernization of Euripides' *The Bacchae*

Troupe

Fred Pollack

If the script has slipped your mind and those
of your fellow actors, what you should do
(all you *can* do, really) is put on
the last character, speak the last lines
you remember, rely on delivery
to make them swell or shrink to fit the mood.
Incommensurate postures, expressions, looks,
even of unconnecting love, fill
the stage; then the stage itself vanishes.
It's as if earth itself has rejected you: you float;
the role no longer even has
a name. Colliding with colleagues, you blame
them. Or cling and reason, trying to form
at least an island in the air,
but eventually everyone
gets snagged on the wire. All at once you recall:
the piece was a musical, its premise life
in one of those eras when one's murdered.

Poetical Death

Hrichita Paul

To earn a poetical death, you could try some ambrosia, make a concoction of belladonna and foxgloves. Lick the envy of unrequited love, drown yourself in a cellar of lust. The wine with its red-blue-purple hue colors the excitable senses of your sadistic sins. It will paint nostalgia, awaken rebellious romanticism, and inject melancholy, you will become one with the poem — the poetical death of the poet.

David's Duster

James Penha

**inspired by the job of the in-house restorer
at the Galleria dell' Accademia in Florence, Italy**

If we believe that Michelangelo upon completing his Moses struck its knee with his hammer exclaiming "Now, speak!" what might he have asked of the David? What indeed might I were I its caretaker whisking his every centimeter each month to rid locks of spider webs, his skin of dust? Oh, yes, I would caress his cheek with the back of my hand but when I fondled his nether regions—that dainty flaccid cock as hard as a rock, his sack of marbles, a perfectly sculpted pyramid of pubic curls—I would drop my brush and demand, "Now, come!" with me.

Closet Dressings

Jen Schneider

She'd overdress for everything, always seeking attention. From three-inch high stilettos and plunging V-neck tanks to skintight denim and oversized gold hoop earrings, her closet was both stage and dressing room. She filled the vessel as she filled our home, her way. Its hangers wore emotions as varied as the sizes that draped haphazardly in eclectic and eccentric ways. Tweed wools with faux-fur collars brushed shoulders with spaghetti straps and sequined bodices. Lycra bodysuits hid beneath pleather jackets. Tortoise shell claw hooks hung on wallpapered walls displayed a carnival-like collection of stuffed totes, scarves, and accessory prizes.

While she slept on the downstairs sofa, I'd sort bags -- patent leather, snakeskin, canvas, and suedes. She'd collect purses from which I'd collect pennies, lint, and chewing gum. Crumpled receipts and perfume-scented strips. Each bag, a vending machine. Each shake, something new to stake. Handwritten phone numbers on napkin scraps. Tubs of lip balm and oil emollients. An empty pill bottle. An unused tampon. A dogeared photo of a baby. At first, I thought the faded image was me but the small digits in block print on the back confirmed her own identity.

Sometimes, I'd lie under the hems of her many dresses and stargaze at who she wished to be. Mostly, I'd avoided any chance of cracked *L'eggs* and wondered who she really was.

Oak Table

Jen Schneider

Red oak is an especially porous wood, also susceptible to spills. Heartwood can absorb a variety of states of matter, mostly water at room temperature. A reflection of recollections, I think, as liquid pools. Tablets and pills settle easier with drink. Red oak is also one of the most curated and coveted kitchen table stools. I own a solid block with curated carvings and room for six. An extension easily added for more – cards, conversation, and cucumbers with dill. “Yes,” my grandmother had said when I asked if we should purchase the table one Christmas decades ago – a short time before her time.

The oak table is where we --

1. worked a 2000-piece jigsaw (a London skyline, a destination she’d dream of visiting but never saw in real time) while she wrote her good-byes.
2. polished silver and cleaned her plate of hard-boiled eggs, *Jello* (raspberry), and lavender-flavored iced tea when she had no appetite.
3. let crumbs (and tears) fall while eating a *Quaker Oats* granola bar as her doctor explained the medical report’s catastrophic findings in cryptic coding.
4. changed a newborn’s *Pampers* before ordering another box of adult diapers (generic brand).
5. prepped my babies’ lunches (tuna and pickles on toast, a side of orange slices and a single *Oreo* cookie) and penned tiny notes of handwritten puzzles folded like origami
6. googled the meaning of medical terms with archaic spellings (then erased search history).
7. played twelve rounds of *Gin Rummy* then twelve more rounds of *War* to pass the time (remembering times when time was all we had).

8. reworked calculus problems and recited pages from *Wuthering Heights* and Agatha Christie (mysteries not always captivating).
9. plucked red, yellow, and cream petals from a sympathy bouquet then stuck them in the pages of her favorite romance paperback (unfinished at page 172).
10. dug for a prize at the bottom of her kitchen's final box of *Captain Crunch* (also expired).
11. listened to her final voicemail recording then disconnected the tape machine -- too loud, too much, too soon.
12. took notes on *Days of Our Life* (because she'd want to know) while working a crossword (five-letter word for loss).
13. waited for election results, unable to accept that neither she nor her candidate had emerged victoriously.
14. sorted, folded, then packed her clothing (wools, linens, a lace slip, lots of gingham) for donation.
15. celebrated every holiday and consumed her Christmas pies.
16. asked why a thousand times; said a thousand goodbyes.

Now, the stools sit empty and "more please" is nothing more than a memory. The table is old; its heartwood remains the heart of the home. Cracked and full of crumbs, I avoid most everything. All household items on display. Sales tags boast giveaways. What's left will be itemized. When the shoppers and the moving truck come, I'll say everything can go, except the oak table. It's the last memory remaining, a composition still in the making, of what's never enough time and where I shall sit come Christmas to honor her time.

In line for the second curve of life

Joseph Nutman

First up – a caveat – to go on this ride
your grief must be *this* tall,
an adult's height in tears,
and while we're at it – your money is no good here.

The legal tender we take hides in your shadow,
we also accept change in old bones
and truths that hurt your throat -
you can cash in your career, broken dreams or a second home.

Just make sure you observe the dress code:
No false skins,
No armour,
No covered wounds - let the air in.

Everyone is welcome
so expect ghosts and demons, old friends.
Thank you for climbing, nearly there,
you're almost done with stairs.

The first curve was a mountainside,
now welcome to the second – it's a dive!
One more thing – smile –
no one gets out alive.

Gerilla Perseus

Laszlo Aranyi

“This ain’t water, that ain’t the moon...”

He tipped over the bucket...

“Had no reflection.”

He had retreated all along,
but now the time had come: he must attack.

With tooth and claw...

Right at their throats!

He came from the town of hundred and ten cauldrons
of different size. The nude

swan-like Paphrédó, Enüo and Deino,

were summoned by the heavy dance steps
of horse skeletons

in a field of sempervivum

to the repulsively varicose,

nutrient-rich flame-spouts.

He’s tired of the vinaceous shrieking,

so he is already kneeling on one of the men’s a wrinkled prune
ass;

From a hole, matters not which one,

watery, cool, sticky juice bubbles. (Caustic toad urin.)

“Northward, beyond the realm of gentle doom...”

“Rather go southeast to the source of the Satyr Creek...”

“The three Gorgons are but a figment of our imagination...”

“Wow, how intelligent cornes you are,

God damn you all”

Translated by Gabor Gyukics

Surviving Aphrodite

Margaret Koger

If you think you see Aphrodite stationed near the Acropolis
a shock of red hair, red lips, bare breasts shining with lust
a hand to cover her pudenda, she's Aphrodite of Pandemos
Venus vulgivaga or popularis goddess of sensual pleasure
come down from Olympus, because desire sent you here
to hunt the man of your dreams.

Thinking of Aphrodite Urania? The nude of perfect proportion
born from the sex of Uranus, his seafoam frothing at her feet,
reborn in starry form as Venus. A scalloped seashell opening
as if she stepped from the bath, hands wringing her wet hair.

No. This is Aphrodite Pandemos perched near the Acropolis
surrounded by her crew
Pan to flute pipe dreams
Eros, his bow and arrows
Peitho's beguiling wine
enticing men unable to resist drawn like moths to flame.

If you're awash in nubile hope, sipping ouzo at an outdoor cafe
there by the Acropolis Museum waiting for he who would find you
beware of Aphrodite Pandemos immortal in the ancient city
her heat singeing the heavy air. Dionysiou Areopagitou 15—
 You'll never forget the
 address.

Pleas to a Goddess

Megan Frilling

No one has ever said my name the way you do,
Whispered in the dark like a prayer, a promise, a psalm.
I've never felt so undone by the color of someone's eyes,
The shape of their lips, the curve of their back,
But you have unraveled me completely. So tell me
What you need, who you need, and I can become that.
I've never been one for violence
Or fighting words, but if you need a soldier,
A stalwart guard, I will defend your honor
Until my last breath. Or I can be meek, pliant to your will.
You can mold me like wet clay
To be the perfect girl of your dreams and I will bend
To your every whim. Make me yours and I will forget
Everything and everyone that came before.
Rip out my heart, construct a new one
That suits whatever a wicked, glorious purpose you desire,
And command me to forsake those who loved the old me.
I'll do it as long as it pleases you.

A New Home

Megan Frilling

You used to warn me, “stay away from the riptide
Or you’ll never make it back to shore,”
But I was born with one foot halfway out to sea,
So what would it matter.
Let the current drag me down,
Fill my lungs with saltwater until I choke.
I’m sure I’ll grow gills of my own shortly.
In the meantime, I’ll make a new home for myself
On the sea floor and wait
For the other girls like me to arrive.
The ones just waiting
For the riptide to take them.

She knows all my secrets

Megan Frilling

Sappho stands under my window every night,
whispering sweet nothings in my ear
and giving voice to my innermost desires.
She paints my dreams in hues
of orange and pink and purple,
telling me stories of future lovers in far away places.
Girls in red lipstick and tiny sundresses
that smell of violets and the sea.
She shows me lazy Sunday mornings,
trailing kisses up bare, freckled shoulders
and dancing around the kitchen
while the bacon burns on the stovetop.
She tells me that this can be mine,
only if I'm brave enough to try.
But when I wake, I'm still in my too small bed
in the same too small town I've always lived in.
I gossip with my friends at lunch
about who's dating who
and which boys they're in love with this week,
still playing follow the leader
even after all this time.
I hold Julian's hand under the blanket at track meets
and wish it was Leila's.
I smile and deflect when mom asks me
who I hope will ask me to prom.
I know she means well,
but I don't tell her that I'm secretly praying
I can find a way to disappear to the bathroom during all the slow dances.
And I wait for night to fall,
when I can crawl into my too small bed
and stare at the moon and wait
for Sappho to return to my too small town.
and I will continue to wait,
to live through the dreams she weaves for me
and cling to that tiny spark of hope,
until I can muster the courage she calls for.

Roses are for Maidens

Oliver Fosten

Tournament roses are given by patrons to their knights. The knights, in turn, gift their roses to whatever maiden catches their eye. I doubt many such ladies are still maidens, but it isn't a white lie I hold against them. Not when I've felt my blood quicken the same as theirs at coy looks hidden beneath sweeping bows, polite kisses that linger a moment too long. Life is too short to cling to virtue, temptation's promised rewards too mouthwatering.

I haven't been a maiden myself for some time, and not from warming a strange bed. My name is my own, my body draped in garments that no longer threaten to suffocate me. Finally, I can simply breathe. Not just exist without discomfort, but open myself to the world once more, eager and ready. The dust of old skin blown away by winter winds, the new still learning to accept the feel of sunlight, open water, the eyes of another.

Not long ago, all I wanted was to belong to myself, unabashedly inhabit space. Now, as I watch the knights gallop by on their gleaming chargers, basking in the adoration of the crowd, all I want is a rose. I want to prick my finger on its thorns, draw it into my flesh and feel its sting. I want to press the petals to my lips, taste its sweet dew. I want to catch its fragrance when I turn my head, the warmth of memory reaching me once more. I want, I want, I want.

There is a door shut firmly between myself and any object of affection. The latch bolt isn't so difficult, easy to test through weighted glances and words honeyed with double-meanings. It's the deadbolt that so often refuses to budge, reconciling attraction to the familiar and strange alike, choosing to embrace desire or revulsion. Even when I'm welcomed inside the threshold, I wonder if

I'm a placeholder, a vessel to receive while they superimpose another face over mine. If I'm little more than a novelty, a patchwork amalgamation of parts to play with and discard.

Knights are expected to be gentlemen. Unreciprocated feelings aren't honed into daggers, affairs of the heart kept close. Surely there are maidenless nights when a few of them break away from their brothers to begin more private revels. Fingers kneading into bruised flesh, drinking in sweet gasps. Such strength gentled into calloused caresses. Do they imagine where the night may lead as they assess one another across the competition field, or does their body recall the shock of steel upon steel as they intertwine with another? Is the thrill of disarming an opponent not unlike that first breach, the crowds thundering as loudly as their pulse inside their ears?

I imagine, sometimes, what it would be like to slip into the stables between bouts. Seek out the knight I cheered for until my voice grew hoarse and hands sore. Maybe he would recognize me from the stands, maybe not. If I gave him a length of ribbon or scrap of silk, would I lose my courage and tell him it was from a shy friend of mine? Would he take it, even if he didn't believe me? I could survive seeing him riding out for his next match without my token adorning his armor or weapon. To see him proudly bearing my favor would assuredly slay me.

Roses are for maidens, but perhaps not always. Perhaps the day will come when I will be courageous enough to offer a knight my token. Then, perhaps it will follow that he pulls his steed up to where I sit amongst countless others praying to be chosen as ardently as I do, his eyes unmistakably on me as he offers his hand and the bloom within it.

Free—a triolet

Richelle Slota

Busting free of this lack of verse, this too free verse,
Meters, rhymes, sound from my soul-voice glorious.
Back of barred doors, I served a poet's curse,
Busting free of this lack of verse, this too free verse.
Must write in forms that form the ear diverse.
The time returns, the ancient forms mysterious.
Busting free of this lack of verse, this too free verse,
Meters, rhymes, sound from my soul-voice glorious.

Release Recurring

Rikki Santer

after Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

Amniotic churning of rough sea, the painter reinvents herself. Scaling pelvic bone of cliff, instinct will harness her hunger to be twinned. In an 18th century chateau immense quiet is alert to isolate each rustle of petticoat, shivering tongues of candle or fireplace, scratches from charcoal on tight canvases of uncalcined umber. Eyes of the painter and her muse agree in the craft of craving capture, rapture of their mouths sends paper lanterns to the moon, pubis cradles self-portrait, perfect skin luminous, beholder becomes beheld, beheld becomes beholder. Legend maroons them on this remote shore where time and timelessness intersect. Their gazes for each other fixed in tableaux. Color bars of Vivaldi, what another Orpheus chooses, wedding dress apparition portends. A woman's world takes charge—a cappella canticle with witchy bonfire, hem catches flame. With cedar root, pennyroyal and skewer, a young housekeeper brings down the flowers of pregnancy and painter takes her place as rare recorder. Art always seeks its fulcrum between liberation and captivity. Muse finally released to canvas.

Lovers released from patriarchy to the salve of recurring recollection
deep in their bones.

Muse finally released to canvas because Art always seeks its fulcrum between liberation and captivity. Young housekeeper brings down the flowers of pregnancy with cedar root, pennyroyal, and skewer, while the painter takes her place as rare recorder. Hem catches flame. A cappella canticle with witchy bonfire. A woman's world takes charge. Color bars of Vivaldi, what another Orpheus chooses. Wedding dress apparition portends. Their gazes for each other fixed in tableaux where time and timelessness intersect. Legend maroons them on a remote shore. Beholder becomes beheld, beheld becomes beholder. Perfect skin luminous, pubis cradles self-portrait. Rapture of their mouths sends paper lanterns to the moon. Eyes of the painter and her muse agree in the craft of craving capture. Scratches from charcoal on tight canvases of umber. shivering tongues of candles and fireplaces, rustle of petticoats. The immense quiet alert to isolate in an 18th century chateau. Instinct harnessing the hunger to be twinned, she scaled pelvic bones of cliff. The painter reinvented herself. Amniotic churning of rough sea.

My Relationship Goals from a Trip to Ireland in No Particular Order

Ryan Gannon

1. When the airplane curls itself counter-clockwise, shooting over the Irish Sea, provide a hand for my white-knuckled fingers. We're all going to die.
2. In a hotel room, small and blue, let me leave the seaside window open, to catch the breeze.
3. At 3am, watch me slip from the bed, dress, walk out to the pier, beneath the moon. Watch from the window.
4. When Howth feels like the walls are closing in, the sea is too close, and the dark has too many hours, forgive me. Sing me to sleep.
5. Write poems. Write poems. Write poems.
6. Let me order for you when it's time to use the loo, and the server in the pub is slow.
7. Let me read my poems to you. Let me speak the words of our silences. Let me tell the world that I love you.

A Wake in Two Parts

Ryan Gannon

- I. Outside the pub, the folks in black
bleed out into the pavement,
Guinness in hand. The black they
wear, subtly different than the
quintessential Irish hipster uniform.
I sidestep onto the road, annoyed. I
see them crying. Watch them hold
each other. No one is alone.

- II. As I step into the road, there are
black cars, their headlights on. I
deserve a fist against the horn, but
none comes. The hearse follows,
black like the Coach of the Slaugh.
Inside, the coffin. White wicker. The
cars that follow—like the Black Dogs of
legend.
Wicker, I think, not the tombs of
American caskets.
Because, even in the end, no one in
Ireland is alone.

No Name But Name

Sage

did you hear the one about the river / who decided to become / god for a day

a fish told the ocean, & the wet-furred old-one swallowed the river back into his depths until all sense of river was gone, replaced by the sea forever. my lover is evening. the cool wind-rush grass bends under. closed eyes roll beneath their lids

paper-thin, letting in the light. from the murk the sightless water pilots steered their sleekness towards the brightest spot. this is how they found the land. part of me was not surprised the first time I heard a man try to light me

with a flick of his tongue against the palate of his mouth like I was bundled kindling prepped by the sharp flint of his teeth sucking *fff* before spitting out the rest. *agate*, stone of banded chalcedony. steel ingots still filled

my mouth when I first learned a boy could be inside a boy long enough for neither of them anymore to behave as holiness demands. did you hear the one about the woman whose eyes fall out.

did you hear the one about the cup of water becoming a fountain of golden blood. the one where the giant steps in the ocean and it comes up to his nipples. or the one with the boy and the knot and how he undid the knot by cutting it in half.

so many times I have been undone I come back to the water to listen for what new histories it has to offer. the one where the frog doesn't become a prince. the one where a dog is haunted by its own collar. the one where the boy

becomes something inevitable and nameless. part of me still wants a name for this silence inside my clovered ribs, my numbly humming innards, my vibrating teeth clacking one against the other. it is the evening silence that I covet. rendered

tongueless by rending wind, part of me wants no name at all. the silence is the name.

you're getting closer, says the woman with no eyes, new visual-exchange prophet. the silence is the name. call me nothing. call me nameless. did you hear the one.

Queerness

Sage

long the explicit body beheld by a necessary obfuscation
no longer, yet still lingering — this bond once brokered

can't be unbent — Mother, this name you gave me got me
this far, but I need to take it from here — “this thing I am
to you no more, brother, which united us against meaning”

where the witnesses lay they installed ruins
where the ruins lay they installed more ruins

would that I were born a woman so I could be more correct
in desire — would that I were born a meadow's fresh rain
so “I” could be more correctly performed

where the borders lay they installed a list of names
where the names lay they installed a cemetery

there is a promise between a body and a hole in the earth

what was it my father said about making life easy for myself?
touch is the means by which we inflict ourselves on the world
no, that wasn't it — in the way I arranged the shape of my

wings, a boy found a geometry of lacking he could look at
to see himself infinitely refracted, fragile — no
that wasn't it either — salvageable dyad of spirit

salvation of well-meaning sycophants colliding as water and
tungsten tongues obscuring the field of jewels and eyes

desire like water takes the shape of its container

what does that say about the one who desires?
what does that say about the one who's desired?

the gesture's meaning, determined by the one gesturing, eludes
interpretation — everything resembles its own etymology

until it becomes air — somewhere there is a forest so old
it has no memory of axes — no, I will not tell you where it is

the axes might go looking

Orpheus Poem

Sage

I could never second-guess
the way you pull up orchids.

Two lamb's breaths trapped
between my lips, a secret cage

desire constructs around itself.
Heaven or this; scutch grass

roasted in the high sun leaks
sweet in the canyon grove.

You rub red clay into your palms
make gestures at your

reflection in the rain puddle.
To love yourself is agony.

Better to have someone else
do it for you, while you

love them, and together
make faces at the moon.

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Death is Not the End

Sameen Shakya

The dead live within our memories, evolve
Even, as we take their hands and bring them with
On the journey of our lives.

My grandfather was my grandfather when alive
But after he passed, he has become
A friend, a mentor, a light in the darkness,
Giver of wise words, though sometimes I write them
Myself, and above all, a cherished lyric
In the song that I compose with each breath I take.

Death is not the end. It holds no dominion.
If anything, it's just the letting loose
Of hands on the wheels, but someone will keep driving
For the road too never ends.

Sweetheart Come

Sameen Shakya

With sorrow. Love is a barbed wire above the fence
To freedom. And I climb it with bloodied hands
To be beyond the human longing, that animal
That ties me with hungry eyes to the opposite sex,
Because I want to be free. I don't want to look.
I don't want to be with. Some days I don't even
Want to be, but be, and be with, I must and hope.
Yet if there is a world beyond longing, let me go.
But I can't, and in a sense, I won't.

I tasted the fruit of love, once. And on my tongue
That taste stays, though I rage against it.
I have hurt as much as I have loved. And she
Who's faced both from me, knows it.
Though she's walked away, yet in her shadow I stay.
I look at my bloodied hands. I look at the fence.
I look inwards at the desire to be free
Of other bodies, and longings of the heart,
Yet within, I only see she. How livid
I am. How livid I'll always be. My heart sways
Between two extremes, that only leave me battered
And blue. So, I crawl towards her again.

The Sorrowful Wife

Sameen Shakya

She opens the book of freedom. The pages
Are blank. She must write them. The last book
She lived was of human bondage, but
Thankfully, she's ripped it off, and kicked out
The author. Now she takes the pen, the words
Will come, though right now her head is blank,
But the words will come, and in the meantime
She takes some walks, drinks with friends,
Falls in love in increments, only for the night,
With happy strangers, with smiling teeth,
And silver words. There's two ways this story shall go:

Either she will write her own tale, one she doesn't know
Yet. Or she returns to the old book, that ends the same,
Though there's a chance it won't. Only a sliver.
But the choice is hers. And in that choice
There resides a universe.

The Barista

Shamik Banerjee

By half-past eight he rigs out well and fine,
Belts down a strong espresso, starts at nine
On Walworth road—cloud-mirrored, dressed in haze;
Paddles his pushbike slow in contrast to
The swift electric motors that plough through
The windy air like all the other days.

He reaches soon—a ride less than a mile;
Hoovers the brewing machine's narrow aisle,
Reslices Apple pies and carrot cakes
And puts them in the counter, while, by ten,
His regulars step in—job-going men,
With old selections of their breves and bakes.

Oh! you should see: his hands of cream-white glow
Like steamed-up oatmilk for cappuccino;
His portafilter juggling skill—a smart
Display; how through the coffee scale his eyes
Keep checking if the quantity's precise;
And finishing touch with the latte art.

His movement's smooth like songs of his café;
He keeps the 'curtained' hairdo, it's passé,
But he thinks it's in fashion; hangs a fat,
Black camcorder to video the things
He does during his shift like servicings
To customers and several this and that.

I've never seen a Barista so proud
Of what he does. The diapason loud
From London's street is muffled by his, 'Sir,
One Croissant Aux Amandes with flat white
As you requested. Thank you! Take delight!'
My reply: 'Thank you so much connoisseur!'

Ode to Celia

Sophie Bebeau

*“Once more Love stirs me up, the limb-loosener,
a creature bitter-sweet, baffling.” –Sappho, Fragment 130*

Celia you're a lightning bolt
Celia you're a twisted gut
Celia burns the boy off me
Celia pulls me through her lungs
Celia you're an ancient evil
Celia you're a dazzling germ
Celia what did you do to me
to my furtive life and legacy
you whose diamond ghost is petal-
pressed between new brain folds
whose tongue is a credenza
lacquered rose, religious guilt
Celia you are vessel torment, pink
poetry strum from a fleshy chord, press me
into vestibules unleashing something starving
into fragrant ancient streets of color
Celia your skin is a humming node
your curve a soft eureka
your frequency is wiggling
down my punch-drunk drain
Celia you're a limb-loosener,
bittersweet and baffling, Celia why
would you dig your bones into my heart-
sick brainmeat, stir me up, drink me down
put fires on my body
Celia you are rushing water
destroy the ache inside my mouth
where I felt you become

Wind Bags

William Doreski

Filling every silence with wind
won't save our dystopic climate
or our smoky gray democracy.
You insist on bagging gusts

to unleash in sheltered places
to smooth the texture of the planet.
It's only talk. We're the species
of windy afternoons fretting

about power failures and rantings
of religious fanatics given
soapboxes tall as skyscrapers.
Today I visit the ophthalmologist,

who will declare me morally blind.
You'll sit in the car panting
over shards of broadcast news,
while I fuss over dots on a screen

that wriggle like mealworms while
the technician smirks with apathy.
Back home, you'll resume your task,
catching wind in large burlap sacks

and dragging it into the woods
where white tailed deer watch you dump it.
I'll stay indoors in dusky light
and read some thick old book like

Bleak House or *Middlemarch*, plying
sentiments I can apply to myself.
Once I'm fully, expressively blind,
I'll call you and you'll arrive

with a sack. You can drag my hulk
to the far corner of the woods
and leave me to dark imaginings
textured more richly than flesh.

The Mating of Rivers

William Doreski

We pause on the bridge to watch
the brown stream flex and tumble
and invoke the force of gravity
that makes us flow in ourselves.

I name the flood of '55

the worst in property damage
but the brightest strand of childhood
with the river bottom remodeled
to suit my barefoot endeavors.
You began with arid landscapes

trimmed by dense Pacific fog.
Seals barked away the boxer
you unleashed on the beach where
ghosts of rich men walked alone
as the sun set only to rise

simultaneously in Japan.
The rivers rushing through us
carry the debris of lifetimes.
Beyond the bridge we can stroll
to the meeting of this brown stream

with the River of Rivers watering
Hartford in a purple light.
We lean into the modest view
like cyclists winding into curves.
If we tumble into the current

we can wade to either steep shore
where houses and storefronts stood
until the flood undermined them.
Now a municipal park frames
the ongoing threat. Our small

educations have prepared us
for the mating of rivers but
left us without the resources
to tame the rivers inside us
where the language drowns in doubt.



ART

Nature Dance

Helen Gwyn Jones



CREDITS

Allie Warwick

Editor

Amy Marsh

Editor

Thalia Hawthorne

Editor

Ciara Goodwin

Editor

Helen Gwyn Jones

Cover art