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The Oakland Review was established in 1969 as Carnegie Mellon's literary arts journal. Edited by students, and published in the spring, it serves as a collection of high quality literature and art. Submissions are evaluated anonymously.

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From the Editors,

This issue has been a long time coming. It would be wrong to write another word without first thanking every single one of you who has contributed to this journal, not just for your patience, but for your passion. We hope that this collection of work reflects that same level of care, creativity, and love.

For us, publishing this issue is a bittersweet moment. With the graduation of our own Ashni Mathuria and Cameron Monteith, we have to say goodbye to two of the most talented, thoughtful, animated people we have ever met. Finalizing this issue without them feels very much like a turning point, both for us and *The Oakland Review*. But to that point, we believe the future is bright.

This collection of work embodies this optimism we have. These poems, these stories, have so much weight to them, and yet there's a sense of joy that makes it all bearable. For putting our review board through every emotion imaginable, we again must thank our wonderful contributors.

Additionally, a huge thanks must go out to our own Jennifer Bortner, who single handedly formatted this entire issue. Her love of all things literary is what keeps this small Pittsburgh group going. Without her as my Co-Editor-in-Chief, none of this would be possible.

While working on this issue, I've learned a lot about what it means to care. That these images and stories are not mere fiction, but they're real, tangible pieces of creatives from around the world (I'm now resisting the urge to call this a "mosaic"). I only hope that you, the reader of this journal, feel that too.

Sincerely,
Dylan Rossi
Co-Editor-In-Chief

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Rana Tahir

Orange Line

I didn't expect the rasp in his voice,
the coarse hymn, the awkward noise

on this metro line into the capitol.
Have you surrendered all to Jesus?

No one answers him, but he begins
by dusting off his dry throat with the first warbling

notes, stays on his path singing to the mostly
empty car, and all those almost ghostly

eyes, save for the boy who snickers loudly and me—
frantically looking for something else to see.

I'm late. The fierce snow
put the work day on two hour hold, so

there's no morning rush of black suits and ties
and shined black shoes that try

to step into an already stuffed car.
His breath struggles over his tongue, projecting far

closer to me than I want. This man makes
his call. He believes

in an answer, and all his muscle and tenor rise.
He sings and blessings fall

but I cannot see them. All I see is the boy
letting a laugh escape between his fingers.

At metro center the man walks out singing,
I surrender all. I surrender...

Katherine Parsons

A Reverence

The silence after sex is sacred:
it suspends us above
what we are doing and
what we have done.

We fill our lungs with the spaces
between each doing and the next
bring life into each little death
and laugh into it, blasphemous.

Lip Manegio

ekphrasis of the automat by edward hopper, oil on canvas, 1927

there is a man assembling sandwiches behind some large machine, waiting to pass them through the gaps to a pair of starving thumbs. a woman is degloving just one of her precious hands, is stirring her sugar into her coffee with the tenderness she used to reserve for sunday mornings. they both think, sometimes, the loneliness is sublime. to work without needing to see the consequence.

to eat without worrying about who might sit across from you. the man making the sandwiches nearly slits the end of his finger against the edge of his paring knife, but he doesn't. the woman drinking the coffee is impatient, and burns the tip of her tongue, and a startled gasp leaks from her. a small noise next to the steady hum of the radiator, the rumble of the L train passing beneath their feet. the man knows the woman is there. the woman knows the man is there. they must. they do not acknowledge each other, and it is comfortable. everything that is worth saying has already been said at least twice. the glove is already off the hand. the sandwich is already made. the world is exactly where it wants to be.

Justin Aoba

The Sound of Small Things

The hum (I imagine) of a body returned through an open window, the abacus clicks of days gone, days done, the pouring of water over black stone.

I sew the hours with shortcuts,
kindling moments with minutiae
even while heat feasts on sight.
It's the quiet things that saw
back and forth until at last,
I am eaten down to sour bones.
Movement is perpendicular to sound.

So I sit in the park. I watch colors grow from dark branches thundering across the sky. I hear footsteps, hungry for presence, the slow tread across time and scale and the prism of history. I think of the sound of leaves: we are eating dinner under the tree where grandmother died, and soon our limbs will crawl with the brushstroke of gentle flies, keepers of motion's last memories.

Kayla Kavanagh

will Rise

after Jessica Rae Bergamino

will float through the floorboards.
will water the plants, feed the cat.
will hum raspberry seeds into the cracks
of my teeth. will unlock the drawer,
will wave that rust ashore. will wade.
will seaweed together memories.
will cobble forgettings apart.
will dry in the sun. will let the wind
lick the edges of my ears. will ask
the seagull to befriend the cat.
will ask the knife to melt the sand.
will skate along a sea of steel. will learn
to braid an island's hair.
will ribbon the wrists. will not
ribbon the wrists. will wish my ribs
good morning.

Darren C. Demaree

Emily as a Night Thought

That blue moan
is the sky giving
in to her frame.
.

Cassady O'Reilly-Hahn

Park

These boots? Old news.
Shit stain: clean stick: hose: dry.

They leave our park dirty
and the dog thinks he needs to help.

He wipes his ass with a shredded patch of grass
—reprocessed and stacked like wastepaper in a basket
and left to bake in an asphalt kiln.

O plastic sack left half buried in the sand!
A child at play unearthed your visage,
held you between thumb and forefinger
till the breeze claimed you as a lover again.

*How does it feel there in the shade?
Might I join you on that sticky bench?
I do not mind the smell of charcoal.*

My mother said that “park” was a verb
meaning: the action between play and contemplation.
Meaning: a picnic, a glass of spilled wine.

The grass is old enough to drink, I'd say.

A green boy like that? Aye.
Wet his mouth under the blanket a bit.

*Kick his shoes off and let him breathe, she said,
Kick his shoes off and let him breathe.*

Anon Baisch

my Mother died 50 days ago

Eventuality and yes it and
Of shovels of scraping of

Commencement of and of after
Bodies of and the unseen

The collection the heirloom gravity
What is the decomposition of

And we have paid and
Promise and we believe in
purity

Of And what consumes the Ash
a mother body and

Lauren Campbell

Clytemnestra

when my mother adopted
the boy
she told him to stay
quiet as stone
corpse-quiet

to wash his *boy business*
keep his *bird* clean
as though it would unnest
and fly back to god
to spill her secrets

we had secrets too
brother was a word
that i would whisper into his mouth
my lips gravid, ready
for his tongue to turn me
atomic, electral

Julia C. Alter

Uvalde

I'm American, in my comfortable sadness,
ruminating over backyard deer. My American
sadness, I wear it like my ayahuasca necklace.
It used to mean something. Now it hangs around
my throat, hand-beaded in a wet dark forest
where I was once a human. Today I'm tired
of gratitude—even tired of trees, with trees
surrounding me—the audacity. I see them in relief,
in the darkness where they part. Just swallow me.
When you look up the leaves are so sparkly, my son says,
looking up. Beyond the wildest drug trip,
the things our kids might say, what they might do,
and what could happen to them. Trees in Texas,
Texas ash. Nineteen mothers' children.

Samuel E. Cole

pull the plug

now you're gone, and **the**
imprint of us is codified, sealing in what the **sun**
gave and what the moon took, a five-decade inscription **bends**
my mind toward forgiveness, softness writing **down**
hardness as misunderstanding and maybe it's a degree of maturation **to**
set hurt and blame outside, let them blow away and **scatter**
somewhere inside the wind. I choose our laughter, stealing **coins**
from the bottom of mother's purse, bossing the town lake we fell **upon**
as if to never walk again, but only to swim, to float with ease **the**
ripples, to infuse, I love you, into our skin, with the purity of **water**

*the original poem pays homage to "The Golden Hour" by Brent Calderwood from
The God of Longing copyright © 2014, repurposing the line,
"the sun bends down to scatter coins upon the water"*

JC Reilly

Morning Deer

The day starts early, the slivered moon still hanging.
The deer bite gently on the plantain lilies in my yard.

I watch the deer decimate the plantain lilies in my yard.
And the roses. I should have planted more hellebores.

The roses make for a delicious breakfast. The hellebores,
those poisonous Lenten beauties, are lovely and left alone.

Like a poisonous Lenten beauty, I am left alone.
I rumble in this house too big for one, but not for two.

I rumble in this house too big for one, where the two
of us spent so many years growing together and then apart.

So many years together, how did we grow apart?
The marauding deer move on to the daylilies.

Marriage marauds love as easily as the deer raid the daylilies.
The day starts early, the slivered moon still hanging.

James Champion

A Retrieval

An open hand.
Here's the pill, communion wafer, miracle
I almost believe in. Now...
the image brightens.
I wade into the memory and drag

black leeches out
gleaming. Little still ornaments, appurtenances.
I am sacramental, I have
something to offer. I gorge them

and they slide off like suicides, fat,
lives lived.
The diving board hangs extra still.
The memory is unchanged.
The lake's surface unrippled.

The child I was is still drowning
in it. The loon
gone, absolutely gone. Its hollow
cry marks where it was.

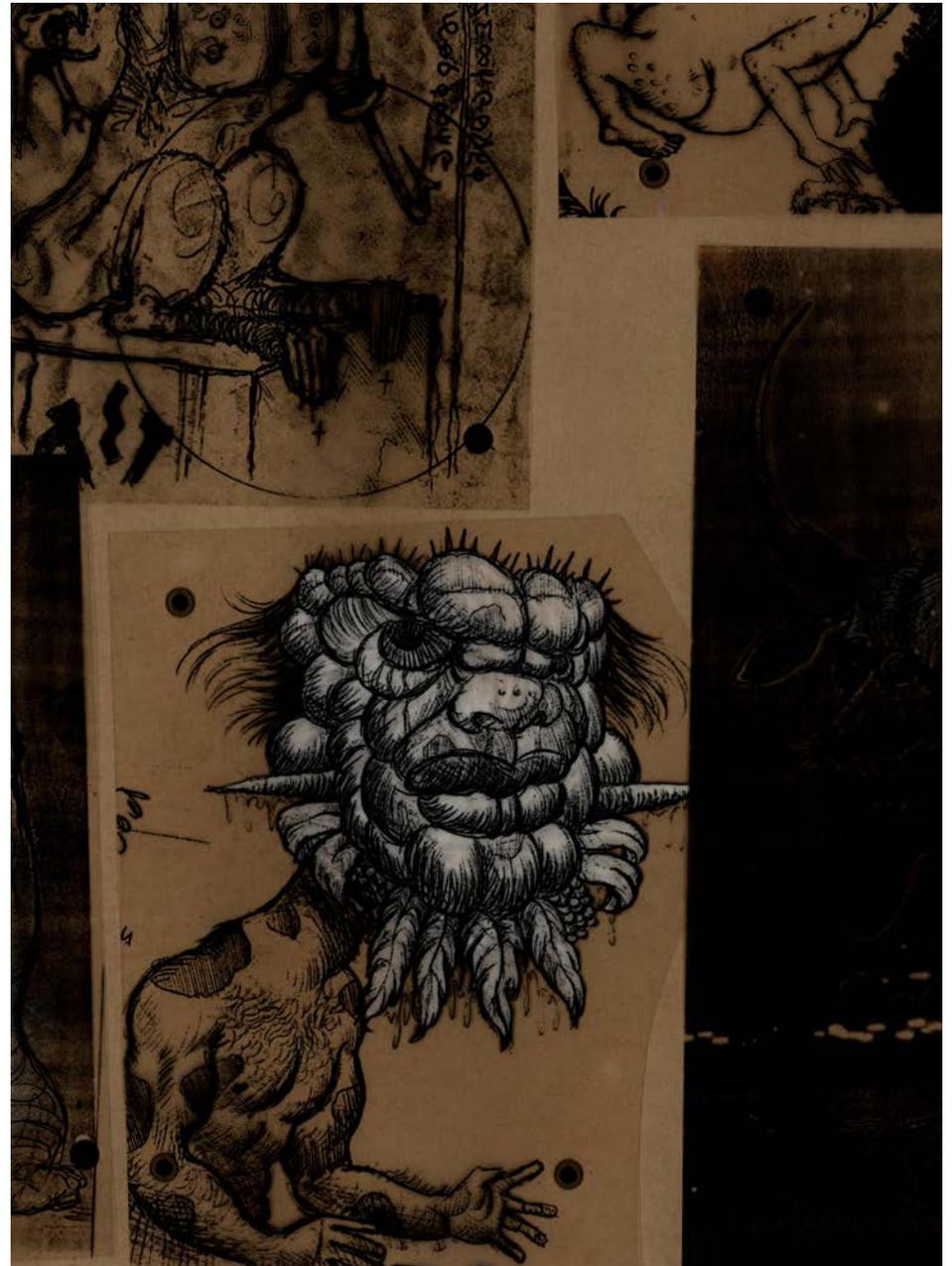


B. A. Kocis

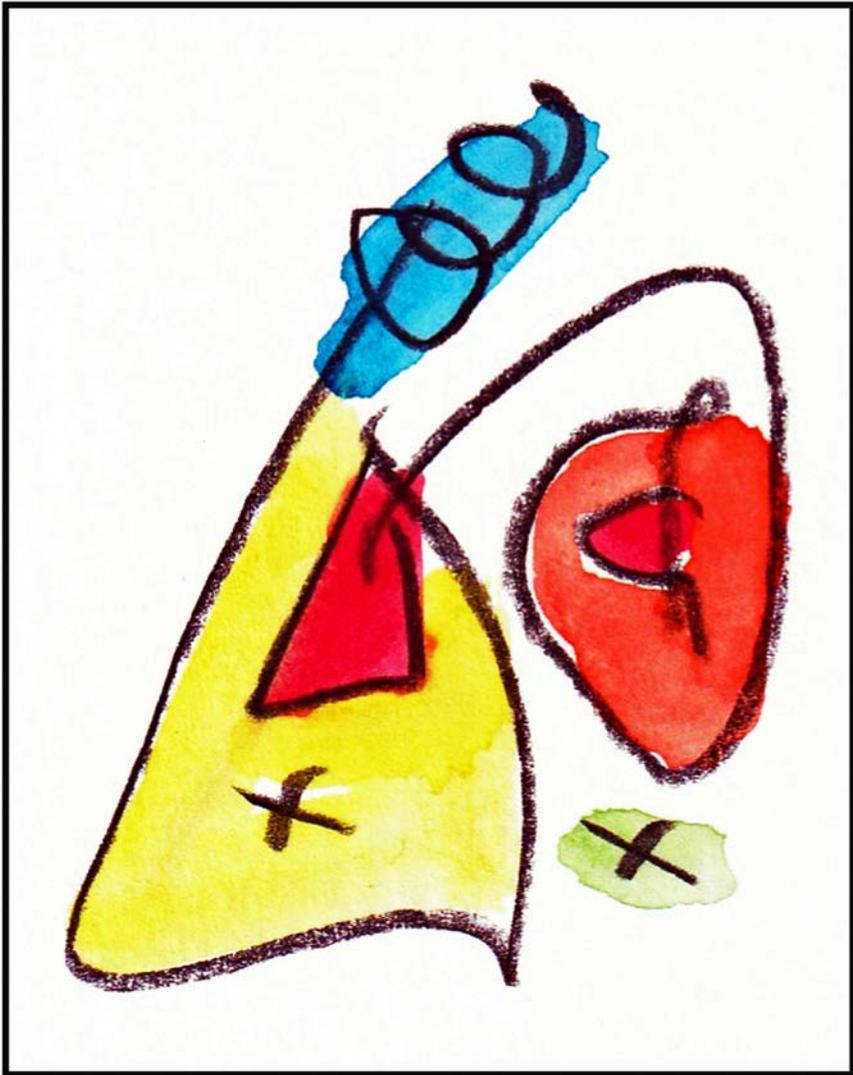
Empire of Innocence No.2



Abdullah Enis Savas
a song for a poet



Don M. Swartzentruber
White Casserole



Michael Moreth
Facile



Nataliia Burmaka
Spring



Delta N.A.

Time's Persistency 2

Rex Brooke

Puplets

Dear Sir:

I am writing in response to your inquiry regarding the puplets which I have listed for sale in the June edition of the *New World Farm and Ranch Magazine*. Yes, they are still for sale. No, it was not a misprint. Puplets are what I call them. The pictures have not been photoshopped. But let me explain:

Last year, during the Thanksgiving holiday, I had the occasion to be visiting my second cousin, Alex, at his estate in West New Hamphaven, which is a cloistered enclave out on the Anacachi Peninsula. I had been invited for the Thanksgiving weekend, and the weather in those latitudes is quite temperate, even in November, and so in spite of the fact that I would be among complete strangers for over a weekend, and the fact that my second cousin was most probably hoping that I would not accept the invitation, I chose to attend.

"Can I bring Zoey?" I queried of Alex.

"You have a girlfriend?" he inquired without irony.

"She's my dog,"

"Of course you can. What sort of dog is Zoey?"

"She's a mixed up Chihuahua."

"Delightful."

And so Zoey and I arrived on Thanksgiving Thursday, late in the morning, with my one suitcase, and Zoey's bed, and blanket, and special collar for festive occasions, and her pills and ointments, and cans of dog food specially formulated for the hyper sensitive canine pallet.

The estate, levied on some many acres of unintended pasture, was in a state of mild disrepair, to put it kindly. Alex, I must tell you, is a scandalous Lothario, whose drug and alcohol addiction has almost bankrupted the estate--which had been in the family for generations—and would have bankrupted it had it not been for the steady hand of his wife, Alexa, and the simple fact that once you have scads of money, it is very easy to keep it. But I digress.

Second cousin Alex, in an annoyingly jovial mood (obviously fueled

by you know what), greeted Zoey and I at the fortress-like front door. After a formal but frisky handshake, he led us up a rather grand attempt at a staircase, pausing halfway up to catch his breath, and to suddenly announce, “When everything is so perfect, it’s hard to not be unhappy.”

Fortunately, it was not much further to the guest room, for my bladder was quite full. Alex swung open the door and let us go in first. “I’ll let you two get settled,” he announced, and he then shuffled back down the hallway, pausing at the top of the stairs to steady himself.

The room, although dusty and exuding a faint odor of moth balls, was very well furnished with fluffy comforters and pillows. There was a large canopy bed, whose mattress was so high off the ground Zoey could not get up onto it, even though she tried several times. The room had its own 3/4 bath, with a quaint toilet where the water tank was bolted to the wall high above the toilet seat. It made one a bit uncomfortable at first, to have that weight over one’s head. But necessity wills accommodation, and so on.

So It must have happened that very day. I had settled Zoey on her own bed, and had given her the medication she takes before her nap, and had gone downstairs to make myself useful by helping the ladies in the kitchen with the peeling of potatoes, and the washing of endless dishes—there were to be some thirty people for dinner. The ladies, of various ages and varying amounts of plastic surgery, were linked by an apparent fondness for turquoise and lavender and shoulder length hair with highlights. In the glorious afternoon with the light flooding in through the tall kitchen windows, they chatted like sparrows and sipped endless glasses of rather nice merlot, while they chopped and crushed and ladled all variety of ointments onto the soups and vegetables. In a radical break with tradition, my second cousin’s wife, Alexa, excitedly informed me that pork, along with turkey, would be the main course. If only I knew then what I know now.

Needless to say, the ladies must have been more accustomed to the levels of alcohol being administered, than I, (who I must confess, am no stranger to the grape) for, well before the dinner bell, I found it necessary to excuse myself for a breath of cool air, and to see if I could get my head to stop spinning. I remember attempting to splash some water on my face from a water fountain—water that was trickling out of the rather eroded penis of the fountain’s marble cherub—when I slipped,

and fell head first into the green water, striking my head on the base of the statue. It is a miracle I didn’t drown, but I’ve always felt that god was looking out especially for me. I was revived by the ancient gardener, who didn’t speak a word of English, but who was able to alert the kitchen ladies who came running, wringing their hands and began patting me dry with dish towels. “Are you alright? Do you want me to call a doctor? We should call a doctor.”

“No, no, I am fine,” I assured them. “Only my pride is injured.” It did seem abnormally bright as I slowly shook my head. It was then I realized that I had left Zoey alone in the room all afternoon, and that she had missed her usual feeding time, and was probably breaking out in hives at that very moment. In spite of my tenuous condition, I rushed up the interminable staircase to my room, only to find a, I don’t know what the polite word for this is, a “servant”, standing at the open door to my room, blithering about how there were these frantic cries coming from inside and how, when he opened the door, a small dog had run out and had disappeared down the stairs, and how he would have chased her, but he had an bad hip and you know.

I thanked him, although I believe the sarcasm was lost on the ninny. I was panicked. Zoey was loose on 10 acres of untamed wilderness, when up to this point, she had only been off leash when within my little house, and then only when there was a gate so she couldn’t go up the stairs and possibly stumble. For all I knew she could probably already be dinner for some badger. Did badgers frequent West New Hamphaven? I had no idea, but in this world, where there is something to eat, something will come along to eat it. A badger. Whatever. Things with big nasty sharp teeth. Yellow teeth, and bad breath.

Fortunately one of the waifs who was scurrying about the halls of the house like a field mouse, a rather rotund boy, conveniently also named Alex, announced, with a lisp, that he had seen Zoey running off toward the pens. He pivoted his rather large head in a small arc, indicating a vague direction.

“The pens?” I inquired, rather shocked to learn that they harbored more than one on the estate.

The boy, a rather wretched specimen who smelled of sour milk, now pointed to the eastern corner of the property. “The pig pens,” he said slowly. “The pens,” he repeated, as if his teeth were falling out. I peered intently in the direction he indicated, and could barely make out

amongst the tall grasses a squat, grey brown building with a tin roof.

“She must have gone to visit my pigs,” affirmed Second Cousin Alex, as he joined the group. “The pigs,” he repeated, with a majestic sweep of the arm which was not cradling a rather formidable rifle. “On the eastern slope of the lea.”

“Lea? Pigs?” I questioned.

The pasture,” he said again, pointing in a vague direction. “And pigs. Yes indeed. Most certainly. Wonderful animals. They eat anything you know, and grow faster than a chicken. I was just headed there. I’ll show you the way”

“My god,” was all I had time to say, and with the utmost urgency, I turned and almost trotted toward the eastern slope of the lea. Second Cousin Alex, fell in behind me, with the rifle slung over his right shoulder and with his left hand holding a large tumbler of vodka. After a few hundred yards, he pulled up short, breathing hard. He waved at me to continue, calling that he would catch up in a bit, and slowly sat down in the dirt.

I hurried on. When I reached my destination, I was greeted by at least ten squealing pot belly pigs. So excitable. They came scampering up to the gate, smelling and snorting, searching me with their little eyes, and then, en masse, they suddenly turned and bounded away, kicking up their fat little hooves like a bunch of drunken chorus girls.

As I walked around the perimeter of the pen I noticed that also among the incarcerated were three white geese, who hissed at me for no reason, and a rather hairy pony with one eye. It was then that I saw Zoey, covered in mud, slopping about in the corner of the pen, playing leap frog with one of the larger pigs. Alex arrived, surveyed the scene, set the rifle to his shoulder, and shot the pig in the head. The pig, now with its brains oozing out, began to run in a tight circle, squeezing loudly, before suddenly falling over. I got to Zoey just as she was beginning to lick up the blood.

Needless to say, we did not stay for dinner, but drove home, 6 hours on winding, unlit country roads, arriving in the desolate hours before midnight. We slept most of the next day and missed the televising of the holiday football games.

As days passed into weeks, we overcame the traumatic memories, and a kind of gauze settled around our resumed routines of tea and biscuits and crossword puzzles, and two a day walks down to the mailbox and

back. Christmas came and went. The scandals in the daily news came and went and our winter days were filled with predictable calm.

That is until four weeks ago, when Zoey, whom I thought had been putting on a bit of weight, gave birth to a litter of 6 puppies. Not really puppies, mind you, in the traditional sense, as you can see in the photos. I call them “puplets” (patent pending) because they are not all dog. They do have paws, but they also have rather snout-like noses. Oh. And the curly little piggy tail. It’s hard to tell where the ears came from. They have a thin fur, white mink colored, which reveals their soft, pink skin beneath. They have long eyelashes, and are incredibly smart. They are truly one of a kind. Genetic miracles according to my vet. They could be trained to hunt for truffles I would imagine. Possibly even house broken. Definitely they are objects of conversation. I talked with our local rabbi, and he assured me that because they have paws, they are not tref, so they could be a source of Kosher bacon. And you would have a corner on that market. So, yes sir, they are still for sale. Email or call me at ###*****. But hurry, because these puplets will go fast.

Olga González Latapi

H

but please
consider my position

my bones are made of you and sometimes I wonder and sometimes I
suspect you may be

the sun, yes you are
the sun

I
only come from bones
from
silky red
from
red
earth

the same
now

holding you up

look down
do you see
the grains vibrate against you

the

such red stuff

sweet trees come from

from such red
future

do we ?

come in
from
the
shape of
trees

do you see
now

the cost of
you

high

heeled
and

walking all over me

concaving
and falling apart

back to
the forest

sprouting from my feet

how beautiful we wait
how beautifully we anticipate

the break
of all

Adina Polatsek

Shadows

What is it that shadows give each other?
-Alejandra Pizarnik

When lines come together in the light
one on top of the other
I see all my mothers above me

and will I find them again in the mirror? Will they soothe me,
pat my hair? Is it right to ask to be comforted
from those with hollow chests and fading
ends? This ache I lie with—it is nothing like the rumbles
that bore me.

I want to take her in my arms, my mother,
and take all that carved us out. To pull shadow-
roots from the hollows of our throats, passed down
like recipes of survival. I want us both to be free
from our bones.

I could go far back
and far back but I fear I couldn't bear it,
that Dina upon Dina would unravel
in my blood; hands covering eyes
over daring Shabbos light, kicked
from land to land and holding on to the tail-
ends of God; dead, yellow-starred spouses,
yellow-starred kids—all these shadows on top of me, a light
burning above my head—

what do they give me when I am
not afraid to hold them?

Great and Mighty Deeds

Halloween fell on a Saturday, so at 2 P.M. the afternoon before, Mrs. Gamble turned us loose to celebrate our fifth-grade party. Incidentally, I had just accidentally predicted the end of the world due to a mistranslation of the school principal's first and last name. I started off by transliterating—just putting the names of kids into the Hebrew alphabet. With some time to look up words I didn't know, I translated every kid's name into Hebrew by Halloween. Ahmed Rivers ran around the room fanging classmates with his plastic vampire teeth. Lilianne Banks was demanding fealty to her princess-dom in exchange for her sloppy orange and black spider cupcakes; meanwhile, I had my brown leather tome (black electrical tape to keep the binding in place) splayed out on my desk.

Translating was an almost impossible proposition because even though Ahmed Rivers' last name could translate to NAHARE, there were three different words for river in Hebrew that made telling his future go somewhere between he will die in a fiery plane crash over the Gulf to becoming a white house press secretary. At first, I misspelled one of the words and that had Ahmed breeding rottweilers in Colorado. I suppose it could be all three, really.

I heard Carter Fairbanks (which I'd translated to Rope-tie Kind Riverbanks) had been chewing whatever-it-was all day. Nobody knew whether it was the remnants of a quarter-a-turn rubber ball from the grocery store up the street or some of that Kodiak chewing tobacco the high school kids carried around in their back pockets. Rope-tie Kind Riverbanks was so cool, so defiant slinging what his wad of gum or even harbinger of the End toward those wood-panel slats on the portable's wall. It didn't bounce but left a wet glob of spit and dark debris that blended in with the wall. He stuffed the cupcake in his mouth en masse, including the plastic spider-ring. Rope-tie Kind Riverbanks didn't have to swear fealty to Lilianne like I did. I heard him slurping and sucking on the spider-ring next. I stared at the mess he left on the wall.

The day before the Halloween party, I asked my teacher, Mrs. Gamble,

what her first name was so I could tell her future later in the day. After social studies, I told her that Mr. Gamble was going to find a new wife within the year. She made me stay in during recess and write fifty times: I will only use my numerological skills for good, not evil.

I forgot to ask her if she spelled Sarah with an "h" like in the Talmud or without, like in the Christian New Testament. If without, then that changed everything, but I'll be damned if I tell her now.

Before Carter's goo had hit the wall, I was rethinking my foray into prophecy, running through multiplication tables in my head, seeing if the answers could instantly blink into my head once I asked myself, seeing if I could summon the numbers like I read true masters of arithmancy can. Betsy Lemon must've seen my flummoxed countenance and told Mrs. Gamble.

I shooed her away telling her I had swallowed Lilianne's cupcake spider and I'd make sure it made its way out in the next day or two. Carter's goo. There was something remarkable about it.

My studies into the numerological arts started about the same time my mom and dad sat me down to show me hand-drawn pictures of men's and women's private parts and fallopian tubes and something called a labia minora that only made me wonder what the hell they might be getting me for Hanukkah this year.

A day or a week or so after that, my mom took me to a garage sale down the street on a Saturday morning. I wasn't happy about it as it interrupted my ritualistic cartoon-watching, but it was at a temple rummage sale in the summer that I'd found this antique metal ruler that folded in thirds and came with its sheath, like a sword. I kept it in my bag along with my Hebrew dictionary. My Mama and Papa didn't understand why I'd want the thing, but to me it was the most fascinating thing I'd ever seen. So, at the Roth's garage sale that morning, I blew a quarter on a book of Hebrew Numerology and added it to my stack.

"Why do you want that nonsense?" Mama asked me.

I told her if she let me get it, next time it rained and I had to stay inside, I wouldn't bug her about being bored. I told her if all goes well, it'd keep me busy for months.

I snapped my dictionary shut with new resolve. I knew it. I was more sure about Carter Fairbanks than anything else I had ever foretold. He was meant for prodigious, mighty deeds and there it was before my eyes. I've spent years trying to chew gum until it fell apart, until its molecules

had no other choice than to say—like Mr. and Mrs. Gamble soon—we’re getting a divorce. On the portable’s wall, Carter’s mystery had had conquered with the same indomitable spirit and I knew it portended well.

I called Carter over to my desk, showed him my calculations. Carter moved his finger down the paper, all the way down and...punched me in the crotch. Carter patted me on the back, consoling me, reminding me to never let my guard down.

Luis “Louie” Fernandez held his overly developed mitt of a hand over his mouth, unable to contain his laughter. Regina, whom everyone in my class labeled “The Weird Girl,” shook Wal-Mart brand cheese puffs on a napkin in front of me and asked me if I was okay, adding to the humiliation. I nodded too vigorously to convince anyone. Louie chortled. Head down, dipping a finger in the frosting of a now sorry-looking cupcake, I pondered the delicate constellation of Carter’s wall-goo.

Lindsey Clark

Caterina

Her son toddles through the park’s grass

(a lawn! in Arizona!),

explaining through sentence fragments

its green wonder.

His full cheeks, eyelid shape

(almond slope, a gentle ocular coastline),

sharp transition from olive skin to curved mauve lip—

all the image of his mother.

My friend of more than twenty years

(our orbits drawing us closer, pulling away, cyclically)

came late to marriage and motherhood:

a long wait for her match; a perilous, traumatic birth.

Now she lives as one leg of a happy triad

(she chose well, and they got lucky),

daily joy tempered only by career frustrations.

Or existential dread. It’s always something.

We meet now as life allows

(knowing to be grateful for this sustained connection)

every moment of the present containing our origin,

the girls we were at twenty-one.

Blazing sun over childhood summers in Sicily

(*grazie a mamma Maria Luisa*, both immigrant and prodigal)

had imprinted a golden glow into her skin and soul

and set fire to her poet’s heart.

Puffy with unnamed depression

(sprung from the crushing blandness of suburbia),

in Italy I felt incongruent yet—finally—free.

My skin burned then peeled, burned then peeled.

For two decades her life has bounced gently against mine

(and I await each comforting contact).

I know the shoebox in the closet where she keeps love letters

from boyfriends past, a cardboard lid on old emotion.

On the other side of forty, we have each reached a balance
(she succumbs more to worry, I feel lighter)
and I would not go back if I could.
Who knows if we would land here again?
Her little boy calls my name, pulling up blades of grass
(caution to the wind, the price of water in a desert!)
and tossing handfuls high, smiling her sweet smile,
decadence raining down around him.

Colin Keating

Barbie Dream Hearse

When she was a kid my friend Zoe would stage funerals for her dead pets: gerbils, hamsters, the occasional goldfish. She'd load their stiff bodies into Barbie's pink Corvette and lead a funeral procession through the backyard to freshly dug graves, little speedbumps of dirt.

My 70-year-old mom says "So I'm a cliché, who cares." One of my preschoolers says "I'm never going to be sad." We make these plans, we pine for the penthouse, the pool, the permanent suntan. Never a Malibu Dream Morgue, never a sadness, never a scattering of ashes over the Pacific; only the obstinance of plastic.

The Dead Hamster Parade granted those rodents some dignity, some semblance of remembrance. But it also pierced that other plastic kingdom, laid bare the ritual; a rehearsal for that undiscovered country, far from the fuchsia forms of Goddess Barbie.

We are the envy of all the dead. Paint their coffins pink and bury them in the Dream.

Rich Glinnen

The Child in Me

The child in me
Kneads his father every day,
Keeps him flexible.

Garrett De Temple

ping pong

(space at once quiet &
pocked with constellated ticks)

our hollow star
blasted from one end of a flat earth
(mostly blue)
to the other

rising haphazardly fit-
fully & with sudden verve swer-
ving & abruptly setting
amid bushes & branches
 (meteoric in the miasmic half-light)

finally cracked like an eggshell and cast into the etcetera

(the paddles, well –
 the odd hands of God?)

Contributor Notes

Julia C. Alter

Julia C. Alter received her MFA in Poetry from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and appeared in journals including *The Southern Humanities Review*, *The Raleigh Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *CALYX*, *Sixth Finch*, *Foundry*, *Palette Poetry*, and is forthcoming in *Stained: An Anthology of Writing About Menstruation*. She lives in Vermont with her son. www.alterpoetry.com.

Justin Aoba

Justin Aoba is a writer and editor based in NYC. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Five South*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Barren Magazine*, and elsewhere. He is a member of Heung Coalition and an associate poetry editor at *Identity Theory*.

Sarah Aziz

Sarah Aziz is a poet, journalist, translator and illustrator based in Kolkata, India. She is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in English Literature at Loreto College, University of Calcutta. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Voice of America*, *Mantis* (a Journal of Poetry, Criticism & Translation housed at Stanford University) and *The Lumiere Review*, among others.

Anon Baisch

Anon Baisch is currently a data analyst working in the semiconductor industry and lives in Saitama, Japan. Anon's poems have been published most recently in *Mantis Poetry*, *Levitate*, and forthcoming from *Waxing & Waning* and *Second Factory*. Anon's collection *w/Ashes* is forthcoming from April Gloaming.

Rex Brooke

Rex Brooke is a former inner city public school teacher/carpenter, currently writing out of Southern California.

Aaron Buchanan

Aaron Buchanan lives in the Tampa Bay area, though he is a Michigan native—a land he considers mystical, incongruous and features prominently in his work. He teaches philosophy to pay the bills, collects photos of public art and his two daughters for his Instagram and is a Level 33 master of mix tapes (it is the highest degree of expertise awarded, to be sure). His writing was most recently featured in *The Great Lakes Review*, *The Phare Literary Magazine*, and *Running Wild Anthology of Stories*.

Nataliia Burmaka

Nataliia Burmaka (Ukraine/Finland) is a poet and an artist. Her works were shown in exhibitions in Finland and were featured in American magazines such as *Welter*, *Quibble.lit*, *Rednoisecollective*, *Flare*, *805*, *Phoebe* etc.

Lauren Campbell

Lauren Campbell is a writer and writing instructor. She lives in Southern California with her husband, dog, and cat.

James Champion

James Champion (he/him/his) is from Whitehall, Michigan. He has a bad habit of looking only at his shoes as he walks place to place, but this makes arrival (and the sky) a constant surprise. You can find him online at @jameslchampion on Instagram or Twitter.

Lindsey Clark

Lindsey Clark's writing has previously been published in magazines such as *Thin Air*, *The Elevation Review*, *Barely South Review*, and *The Shanghai Literary Review*, as well as the Africa anthology "*Memories of Sun*." She is also the author of a travel memoir, "*Land of Dark and Sun*."

Samuel E. Cole

Samuel E. Cole lives in Hoyt Lakes, Minnesota. He is a political junkie, poet, and essay enthusiast. His work can be found in a myriad of literary journals and reviews. He has five published books: two poetry collections and three short-story collections. His books can be found at samuelecole.com

Darren C. Demaree

Darren C. Demaree is the author of nineteen poetry collections, most recently "*neverwell*", (Harbor Editions, June 2023). He is the recipient of a Greater Columbus Arts Council Grant, an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award, the Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and the Nancy Dew Taylor Award from *Emrys Journal*. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Best of the Net Anthology* and the Managing Editor of *Ovenbird Poetry*. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

Garrett De Temple

Garrett De Temple received his MFA from Manhattanville College and currently lives and works in NYC. His work has appeared in various publications, including *Yo-NEWYORK*, *Miracle Monocle*, and *FOLIO*. He is a lyricist for the Brooklyn-based songwriting duo The Point and bassist for the NYC-based band Silver Relics.

Rich Glinnen

Best of the Net nominee, Rich Glinnen, has had his poetry featured on Rich Vos's and Bonnie McFarlane's podcast *My Wife Hates Me*, and is a mainstay at the Nuyorican Poets Café. His work can be read in various print and online journals, as well as on his Tumblr and Instagram pages. He currently has two cats, two kids, and one wife.

T. M. Hudenburg

T. M. Hudenburg is a writer who works and resides by the coast. Retired from teaching at the high school level and at community college, he has finally found the time to pursue his twin passions of serving as a cruise ship lecturer and working with teachers of English and Afghan refugees in Central Asia. He is ecstatic this piece was published by *OR* and hopes that you, the reader, enjoyed it as well. Read on!

Kayla Kavanagh

Kayla Kavanagh is an MFA student at the University of South Florida, where she teaches creative writing and composition. Her work has appeared in the *Roanoke Review*, *West Trade Review*, *carte blanche*, *LandLocked*, *Typishly*, Oxford University Press Blog, and elsewhere. “we Rise” is her first published poem.

Colin Keating

Colin Keating is a writer, musician, and artist from Portland, OR. His first collection *Dog Tao* was published in 2021 and his work has appeared in *Defunct Magazine*, *Ignatian Literary Magazine*, *People*, and *Gap Tooth*. He likes death metal, swimming, and Jeopardy.

B.A. Kocsis

B. A. Kocsis is an Australian poet and collage artist whose work has been published in *Into The Void Magazine* and forthcoming in *Tofu Ink*. Kocsis served in the Royal Australian Infantry. He holds a BA from the University of Queensland and a Master of Teaching from Queensland University of Technology.

Olga González Latapi

Olga González Latapi is a pansexual poet with an MFA in Writing from California College of the Arts and a BS in Journalism from Northwestern University. Her work has been published in *Sonder Midwest*, *BARNHOUSE*, *Wild Roof Journal*, and *The Nasiona Magazine*, in addition to a spoken word album with *Amaryllis Records*. Originally from Mexico City, she currently lives in Madrid.

Lip Manegio

Lip Manegio is a writer and dyke from New England. His poetry has appeared in *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Muzzle Magazine*, *Tin House*, and been nominated for the Pushcart and Best of the Net prizes. He also works as a designer/printmaker, serves as editor in chief at Ginger Bug Press, and is the author of *We've All Seen Helena* (Game Over Books, 2019). Find him at lipmanegio.com.

Michael Moreth

Michael Moreth is a recovering Chicagoan living in the rural, micropolitan City of Sterling, the Paris of Northwest Illinois.

Delta N.A.

Delta N.A. (@delta_na) are a couple in life and art, working together by painting in unison. They learn from each other and share a creative flow poured into their artworks, a common language that makes each artwork realized by two pairs of hands look like a single artist's creation.

Cassady O'Reilly-Hahn

Cassady O'Reilly-Hahn is a poet with an MA from Claremont Graduate University. He is a managing editor for *Foothill: A Poetry Journal* that highlights graduate student voices. He works for Deluxe, a company that localizes TV and Film for a global audience. In his free time, Cassady writes Haiku for his personal blog, *orhawrites* and his Instagram @[cassady_orha](https://www.instagram.com/cassady_orha). Cassady currently resides in Redlands, California, where he can be found flipping through fantasy novels in a cozy recliner on the weekends.

Katherine Parsons

Katherine Parsons is the founding editor of *The Passionfruit Review* and a PhD candidate in contemporary literature. Her own poems have been published in various online and print journals; her first pamphlet, *Little Intimacy*, won Frosted Fire's 'New Voices' competition and was published in 2022.

Adina Polatsek

Adina Polatsek is a writer from Houston, Texas. She is currently studying at the University of Texas at Austin and was the runner-up for the 2023 James F. Parker Prize in Fiction. She has poetry and fiction published or forthcoming with *Apricity Magazine*, *Verklemt!*, *Soundings East Magazine*, *Welter*, *Barzakh Magazine*, *Hothouse*, *Ligeia Magazine*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Figure 1*, *The Talon Review*, *MSU Roadrunner Review*, *Wayne Literary Review*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, and *Moot Point Magazine*.

JC Reilly

JC Reilly is the author of *What Magick May Not Alter* as well as *Amo e Canto*, winner of the Sow's Ear Poetry Prize. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *The Arkansas Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Peregrine*, *The Phoenix*, *Rougarou*, and elsewhere. When she's not writing poems, she croches, plays tennis, and practices her Italian. Follow her @Aishatonu.

Abdullah Enis Savas

Abdullah Enis Savas is a poet, writer, and translator born in Vienna, Austria. He published his debut poetry collection in 2022: *What God Meant by Flowers* (Ebabel Publishing). He has published a short-story collection: *Don't Wait For Me* (Pruva Publishing, 2021), and a visual art/poem chapbook: *zDOKUZ variations* (Paper View Books, 2022). His recent book is an interdisciplinary work that combines the elements of poetry, AI, and comic books: *Pens* (Fabrik Books, 2023). He currently lives in Istanbul.

Don M. Swartzentruber

Swartzentruber's "White Casserole" was inspired by source material at the Chicago Field Museum and the Artists' book (Livre d'art) movement. This ink and brush drawing was created in a portfolio that is disassembled so pages are mounted to museum walls. Acknowledgments to the Indiana Art Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts for the Esque exhibit. Don Swartzentruber earned an MFA from Vermont College of Norwich University.

Rana Tahir

Rana Tahir (she/her) is a poet, Radius of Arab American Writers member, Kundiman Fellow, and educator from Kuwait of Pakistani origin. Her work appears in *Poetry Online*, *Palette Poetry*, *Quarterly West*, *Fresh!*, *Catch*, and *Print Oriented Bastards*, among others. Her best-known work is a Choose Your Own Adventure novel based on the life of World War II Allied spy, Noor Inayat Khan.

