# TRANSOM ISSUE 16: FOR THE TREES

[wherein we can't see the forest]



**"6 Blind"** Digital Nate Cheshire

**VERNAL EQUINOX 2023** 

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Liz Jacoby

1 "Place at Intervals"

### Tyler Friend

- 2 "All these immovable benches"
- 3 "the moon, the moon"
- 4 "Fruitfly [10]"
- 5 "Fruitfly [16]'
- 6 "Fruitfly [18 & 19]"

#### Edward Mayes

- 7 "Refrain From Going Astray"
- 8 "Lissome with a Lisp is Lithesome"
- 9 "Conjugating the Tensities"
- 10 "Alliance for Dalliance"
- 11 "Lookalike"

### Jo Christian

- 12 "Learning to Hide, or Lessons in Becoming Small"
- 13 "At 8, My Father Tells Me to Treat my Body like a Temple"
- 14 "Nocturne for my Childhood Home"

#### Julian Mith<del>r</del>a

- 15 "Ill & Cov"
- 16 "Waterspeak"
- 17 "Ocean Architectures for the Land-Locked"
- 18 "Praver for Hunger"

#### Tamiko Dooley

- 19 "Nightwalk"
- 20 "Persephone, growing"
- 21 "Still Tife"

#### Kelly R. Samuels

- 22 "Canopy Disengagement"
- 23 "To Tree Tip. to Brush"
- 24 "The Quick Dropping"
- 25 "Grieving Unknown Pines"
- 26 "Trees Were Just"

#### Christopher Strople: collage

27 "Art Modern'

### João Luís Guimarães trans. Calvin Olsen

- 35 "O preco do passado"
- 36 "The price of the past"
- 37 "Meia-noite"
- 38 "Midnight"

### John Grev

39 "A Drowning in the River"

### Nora Schimpf

- 40 "unbury"
- 41 "Guide for the Perplexed, 1:50"
- 42 "parsings of you"
- 43 "a fractalwork of fibers"
- 44 "the nonlinearities of repair"
- 45 "the matters of monarchs"

#### Charlie Clark

46 "Thanatophobic Insomnia Poem I Thought Was Going to Be a Love Song'

#### Liz Jacoby

52 "Trysting"

INTERVIEWS & BIOS

# LIZ JACOBY

#### Place at Intervals

the walk back home from the canopy of the old store in an early July rain hits the tar and chip wafting the smell of rubber invading my nose as if to remind me that even this place has been altered

steam rises ankle high
a fire dampened
even the dogs were wise enough to lay down
on the porch of the farmhouse
in a pre-snore state
as my bare feet
skirt pebbles and jagged rocks
kicked up by a motorist
every few hours

the lamp and book are visible
through the screen door
as I approach through shattering sky
and the hushes fill my ears
there isn't an inch that is safe from the torrent
not even the blades of grass
under the giant maple tree's baldachin
juddering
I reach the front door
wondering what it is like
in the expanses of raindrops.

For Kaye, and anyone who's ever been here. Jan 2023

#### All these immovable benches

& none of them in the shade. The magnolias, just a little too short. A bee

landing on a black combat boot, somehow all removed from the possibility of violence. Sure, we could sting

but then who would sit amongst the clover? Who would caress these thick, thick leaves? These moments, escaped

from capitalism, et cetera. All this nature they've not yet paved over, only paved through. Even the rich

still want to have trees around, so at least that's something. The cicadas!

This is supposed to be a big year, but I don't see any holes appearing in the ground, mysteriously. Or bees!

I heard that many bees are solitary creatures & live alone just underfoot.

#### the moon, the moon

for Frank Stanford

always the moon, always its incantation. it loves to push us around

& the pull of the pool, something abt the way water & moon

interact, or the similarity between *moon & loon* all these birds calling

& us not answering it seems rather rude, don't you think?

the *battlefield*, the *love*, the *you* always a *you* 

### Fruitfly [10]

after John Berryman

Strange gatherings, voting: all these democratic tendencies I never paid much attention to, until. Car radios overtaken by talk & that's dumb. Fathoms, trysts, all

things we don't attend to. The ocean is so deep & unknowable. There are plenty of things for us to deal with on land. So much hurt & huddling. We've no business or too much business, I can never tell. The headlights

have gotten brighter & I'm not sure that's a good thing. There are some things that get harder to see when they're brought into the light, some things that startle & freeze. Dear, won't you come to bed?

# Fruitfly [16]

after John Berryman

Up on a wall, it looks like art or something. It's all about the venue, the way we think about things. If you put it on a white wall with a notecard, we're like *wow*.

Especially

if it's phallic, or makes us think about fertility, which is a weird enough concept on its own. Add some free wine & cheese, a frozen daiquiri all blue & pretentious. Kneel down. In the hall, near the bathroom there's art there too. We're molten & moon-eyed, dressed in all black. We commune, possess

eachother. The gallery gets no commission on this, we are moving outside of the marketplace. We, squeaky & glowing, contrasting magnificently w/ the white walls.

### Fruitfly [18 & 19]

after John Berryman

Flowers don't cost much, all these seeds & needs, all these dandelions just waiting to be turned into wine. All this clover, scared of the bunnies. John is thirsty & let's get him a margarita, why not?

Hit a high note, out there in the weeds, Julie Andrews-style. God, she's a national treasure & isn't Nick Cage around here somewhere? Out there in the shed, we have a swamp cooler going, but it's still hot. It presses us & we press back. We

all dream well enough, but it's the remembering that gets us in trouble. I mean, we always remember our nightmares & ain't that just the way it goes. We're going to the barbecue place & do you want anything?

#### REFRAIN FROM GOING ASTRAY

Might you too have seen the flock of geese Honking at the railroad crossing, or at The very least did you not fail to cut off

The ID bracelet from your wrist afte

Exiting the hospital so surreptitiously,

Or have you not counted as a mistake

Your ordering of truckloads of imaginary

Sand to fill up a fissure of your own creation

Or the Copy That, Copy What, Copy That,

Copy What you hear over the walkie-talkie,

The gurgling the babies make while they're

Clearing their throats and about to commit

To a speech of exactly one word, and have

You not hidden your collection of bobblehead

From public view again, and could you ask

What day of the week judgement day

Falls on this year, but a ha-ha is precisely

A ha-ha because no one knows it's there

Or might you think that proves the existence

Of geese early warning signs to the great

Debunk the heraldic fluorescence that every

So often you see on the moon seen best from

The alley behind the houses, dark with fatigue?

#### LISSOME WITH A LISP IS LITHESOME

Nobody sells the truth, nobody sells it, nobody Sells the truth, nobody sells it, as if it were For sale, there among the pumpkins and there

Among the tchotchkes, under the table at The rummage sale, or when the house is for sale But not the horse, the horse is never for sale,

Nor the sailboat, no, not for sale, salt on a Bird's tail, no, the piece of coal in your Hand will make your hand black, cast

Iron, or when you've ironed the same shirt Your entire life, when fulsome *became* unctuous, (Even though unctuous was always unctuous),

Unglued, unhinged, as if you live in a holler And threw a tater through a winder, As if you were holier than thou, and it was

Ghastly to us that the gruesomeness grew on us. Not that anyone could really tell, and while You could tap your fingernails on the table

In the taproom, take a cab to the cabaret, (Rhyming with hooray), and while you can't Sell the truth, neither can you give it away.

### CONJUGATING THE TENSITIES

It's past time that the go signs were Reinstalled, letting the intersections do What they do best, the sacred right of

Way, the hurried sign of the cross, And if we could reclaim the abandoned Silos and live in them, put in plumbing,

Put in wifi, perhaps we'd know that sky is A sign of what's up, and earth, well, Earth, well, here we are, grateful again

To be on it, something we've signed on to For our time here, until we sign out or Sign off, and ask if the speeding bullet

Is faster than the speeding rabbit, or can Something go zig without going zag, We asked ourselves, the same question

Always getting the same answer, as if Swerve comes to merge and then everyone's Happy, the free samples of tightropes,

The overture and finale of every tunnel We've driven through, and we had to ask What we were doing while we were

There, if you have to ask, if asking by now Isn't in the books as something prohibited, An asterisk, uncalled for, an exception.

#### ALLIANCE FOR DALLIANCE

You were positive you said doubt, but you Also thought you said it like debt, and not

Like death, doubt never tethered to anything And certainly not death, or if you said

Twain, as in you're doubtful but that The twain shall meet, or when you said twelve,

Two left over from ten, or twenty (twice ten) And not that duplexity ever gave you pause,

You gave cause to wonder what kind of Biscuit should be eaten at twilight,

When you would build a fort one day

And tear down that fort the next, when you

Watched Sonny Man awaken from his trance, And then you remembered how said cat once leapt on

The table, his passage up, traveling without any Grip at all, and then he walked on the keys

Of the pianoforte, soft/loud, soft/loud, soft/ Loud, no doubt not composing as he went along,

But you are there, and a fat lot of good it does you, Nonchalant, binocular, and flamboyant to the end.

#### LOOKALIKE

Even you had thought the copy you had seen That morning in the window didn't look anything

Like you, but it could have been anyone, Anyone staring at the bird feeder needing

Birdseed to fill it, or the minute or two it Takes to fill up the car, and not just

The illusion of a car, because a car did Bring you here for it to be filled, that

Is something you truly know, not just some Brain wave that washed over you, and now

That you have a washer and a dryer, do you Miss the weekly trips to the laundromat,

The long table where you would fold your Clothes, or was it just the creases you noticed.

The shadows that fell out, you were twenty-three Once, the same age when Henry Shrapnel invented

His fragmentary bomb, the Vietnam War nearly Over for you, but for others it was destroying

Their normal lives and their abnormal lives, What they saw was not exactly what they got.

# JO CHRISTIAN

### Learning to Hide, or Lessons in Becoming Small

Home— where I learned to fold my body —between the floorboards where our backs were battered and our knees whipped with leather belts, where underneath puddles of dog shit and piss were the scuff marks from the dragging, our younger bodies pulled across the floor like a sack of laundry, where I learned *NO!* could be felt like a wooden spoon swung against my temple—

So, let me tell you how I made it out;
I learned to love the dark damp of small spaces,
the gaps between closet crevice and cabinet corner.
No, smaller still. I became nothing. I folded my body
tighter than a ball of dust, a pocket between particles, a gaping hole.

# JO CHRISTIAN

### At 8, My Father Tells Me to Treat my Body like a Temple

If my body
is a temple
it houses many shadows
engorged and growing fat
a web of empty mouths
aghast and agape—
they murmur, they sigh
how much more
can we fit in our body?
are you not done yet
with your carrying—
you collector
you keeper
of the dead?

# JO CHRISTIAN

# Nocturne for my Childhood Home

One ridge and a single steep drop—or a mouth, each gum and bald birch tree a tower of teeth and bone, jutting along the jawline or of the Tennessee crag, ready to gorge itself.

Each minute light softened, like fat fizzling from a pan of hot margarin or stale bread charred black in a broiling oven. Those nights, I was neither bread, nor margarin. No.

I was the moon, skin peeled and blistering with shadow, a boiled chicken liver— half a promise—to sink back into the open lips of the crag, its toothy smile grinning, ready to eat.

### ILL AND COY. 1

rough acts thin glass
with regard to especially perfect
however deceived in automatic sight
arid rustle each rougher summer
we recommend abundance over the ragged

crag. Alone, I drove ancestors to the blood groups of buttes and honey rain, raging stray time, into their half-hearted hollow

after dismounting my delight I endeavor to bottom to vicious inches of metal

the animal these animals halt within my edge

I was not broke by distance but sign

a small sag before the last drop traps the void traps the capture of the unprime take and rob

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>An erasure of "Still Hunting Wolves and Coyotes" from *Wolf and Coyote Trapping* by A.R. Harding (1909)

### Waterspeak

oft lauded for auer begot-begot yar, water's like that like idols but (not to knock yr awe) we want to talk small. (tho 'talk' is not the word)

moss is small.
soggy with auer osmos.
crisscrossed with droplet-daughters

or frost. that too is us-all. embossing skarn. stalking the aqueous on claws of ice. autumn swansong.

and thaw. fodder for swallows swooping at dawn. for sun-kissed goshawks.

and fog yawning soft, scoffing at yr clock. blue accosted by eclipse.

us-all pond, drawn from odd bogs halted by marsh-plants and logs. blots lost in olive-green algae. besotted with sop.

fox washing her paws daubs whiskers, she knows.

yre fishing for the author of the raw lot—the Beyond is fraught with thought.

this knot of water hems auer small-g god. auer froth.

#### Ocean Architectures for the Land-Locked

- 1. Pop out two windows. Build a frame to secure the panes of equal size. Drill a small hole through the edge of the lengthy side. Adhere the panes to the frame with tar or sap such that water will not leak, leaving a space the width of a finger between. Gently funnel water into the space. Carry the frame out of doors and hold it at arm's length. No matter how you wobble or cant, the water will remember flat.
- Bring a bucket of sand and a companion to an empty area. Instruct the companion to toss double-handfuls of sand at your knees, thumbs, thighs, earlobes, calves, shoulder blades, forehead, feet.
- Spend a hundred days filching bolls of cotton until you have piled them into a haystack. Press your face against its slope and shout.
- 4. Acquire a bedsheet, preferably all of a piece. Find an open space with no branches, towers, clocks, turrets, poles, lantern hooks. Place one heavy rock on each of two adjacent corners. Extend the other two corners as wide as you can and billow the sheet up, allowing it to catch air like a sail and hang, momentarily.
- 5. Build a wall you cannot climb.
- 6. Amass a May army. Assign half to clear rubble from a hilltop. Assign the othern to gather toadflax, liverleaf, aster, bellflower, witch's thimbles, chicory, gentian, houndstongue, larkspur, mountain angelica, clematis, lobelia, rueflower, sweet william, nettleleaf sage, zigzag spiderwort, clasping bellwort, and skullcaps (hyssop, dwarf, and hairy). Clad the expanse with blue-green flowers. Admire their undulating pelagic palaver.
- 7. Stare five degrees from the sun until your eyes draw water. Float on flotsam of light, tossed from nameless shore to gull-encrusted rock. Amidst objects once familiar, haze and fade.

# Prayer for Hunger

Members and initiates, let us pray

Lord, grease our innards with nouns glazed in -ity, -tion, -ment, -dom, -ness Let us sample their savory chew their gristle

Haunted by unknown and immaterial, Bless us with spoon and cup overfilled with

epithet/taxonomy/
title/appellation/index/
lexicon/appendix/
bestiary/pharmacopeia/
herbarium

Let us be lifted Lord footnoted and glossed in honey by arms of cornucopious bounty

In each's name we behold a corollary of being and so fed by its machinations, do enter (humble, head-bowed)

the House of Existence paved with glass

Amen

# TAMIKO DOOLEY

# Nightwalk

and when the headlights
race towards us
we cling to the wall of the pavement
wheels roaring closer
they swerve into the kerbside lake
Hokusai's muddy tsunami up and over our heads
we scream and laugh
when I turn to you
your damp lips are parted behind a curtain of drenched hair
and I want to hold you
as close as the dress that presses against me, wet through

15

### TAMIKO DOOLEY

### Persephone, growing

I heard you swear Once, before my final year

We were wheeling our suitcases in Naples After a Herculean journey by train I heard a shout behind me Turned to see you lying twisted

Your hand reaching up
A gladiator's beg for mercy
Choking diesel fumes whirling
Vespa motor roaring

The dual-helmeted hydra Sped away, treasure glinting in its jaws Orange jacket storming down Via Carlo Bussola Past crumbling walls of graffiti

The bastard took my Rolex, you whispered

A word never ripped out my guts as then.

I blamed my tears on the theft, the exhausts, Your bruised wrist - anything but the truth: That for such language to fall from your lips -To have grown enough to hear that word -Was Hades clutching and dragging me down below.

# TAMIKO DOOLEY

### Still life

because they pull me aside to say
I'm not allowed to draw that anymore
stalk and leaves suggestive
too juicy heart-shaped fruit
through tears I both do and don't understand

Eve, naked, Eve, banished

the strawberry I drew at playtime screwed up in the bin

after dark I creep and unfold to examine the shape of something discovered forbidden, overripe turned from sweet to sour with a flick of the tongue

--

Some Trees May Social Distance to Avoid Disease—National Geographic

### Canopy Disengagement

This shyness of the crown, it's true.

Asin

As in I kept all the sharp edges at bay, walking with care for fear

of harm. Having once, now learned. So, maybe, these trees out among the wind's fervor, wind with its devil-may-care leading to abrasion—to the breaking of, the splinter, the disruption

of the bud—

know to stay clear of what has proven to wound

Or light. If the canopy thickens, what chance for growth below, or of the limb in need of stretching?

I was rarely if ever mentioned when he phoned home on days I was running errands, and so, I never seemed to seem real to them. Little vexation, soon forgotten.

First dappled. Then, shade,

Watch me.

Watch me shy away from later feeble attempts at kindness.

These trees seem right sensible to me.

The black mangrove.

The lodgepole pine

Dryobalanops aromatica.

Neighboring

but uncoupled.

Look: There's sky to be seen between

Taking to the Woods with Maines Tree Tippers—The New York Times

# To Tree Tip, to Brush

They will return to where they once picked blueberries tenderly

to tree tip, to brush the balsam fir, the juniper, the cedar and the pine.

Three hard frosts. Three cold snaps. Pitch in the palm.

Would that I could have climbed and roosted in our pine in winter in this midwestern state. And seen the ocean from.

Too deep the snow, too fretful the mother. And just the one near lake, frozen.

# The Quick Dropping

May hasn't brought anything resembling spring except this abrupt shedding of pod and blossom velvety casings like of the iris left found on the walk and streets wet and slick from rain wind carrying them somewhere scatterings where the city took down other trees whose branches broke overhead

We're inept at identification know the maple because of its helicopters what we learn are called samaras keys with fibrous skin that will arrive later

For now there's this and the sweep of chartreuse on the bluff's northern slope cast in shadowthen as swiftly lit

Romes Iconic Pines, Hit Hard by a Nasty Parasite, Now Face Their Own Pandemic—The Washington Post

### **Grieving Unknown Pines**

I have never been and will never be and yet—the trees.

The other morning there were trucks and the chainsaw's edge that woke us. The dropping of limbs shredded quickly, near.

And I thought of them, again, with their tall bare trunks capped in needles and how they're dying in more than one way:

these iconic pine

To walk Rome means casting upward or to stand in their shade. To mourn.

I texted her, asking if she knew any good reason. She wrote: The trimming of the one, the felling of the other—disease.

Along this avenue

Later, we passed where the one, where the other had been. And there was more sky and the settling of dust.

Chronicles of the Rings: What Tress Tell Us—The New York Times

### Trees Were Just

Trees were just, once, for climbing and to shade—
their leaves troublesome at autumn's arrival.

The big pine by the road was what my mother warred over with men in trucks and with chainsaws. The sign at its base with all the shed needles: Do Not Cut Down This Tree!

Rings were for wearing, though back in the muddled recesses

I find something about a ring each year—

outward from the center.

What trunks we could not fully embrace as girls were ancient we were told, and telling, now, of more variable and uncertain streams that pass over continents.

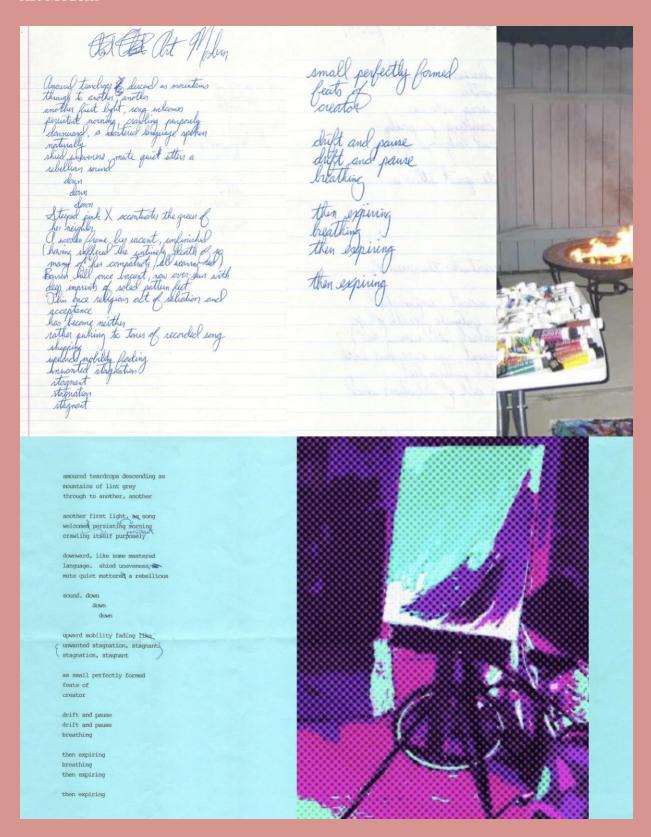
The bristlecone speaks of snowpack and drying riverbeds.

The spruce of the cosmic ray.

Look: The long core sample of the fir is so like the pointer she used at the board when we conjugated verbs in languages we were learning slowly—

out loud, in recitation, outward from the stem

### Art Modern





#### Art Modern

Steeped pink X accentuates the green of her neighbor, wooden frame lies vacant, unfinished, on a barren hill, once mottled with arrays of color. Trodden now, with the deep imprints of soled pattern feet. Uncomplicated in its simplistic demure, this once religious act of salvation and acceptance has become neither, rather it pulses the dull tones of much-too-heard song.

#### Word Dis-Association

Fascination fascinatio fascinati fascinat fascina fascin fasci fasc fasc fasc Oct, Molern.

Onound teardrops descend as mountains through to another enother another enother another first light.

This says exclames a persentent norming crowling purposely downward, a meetered language spectras.

hushes been as brushes back veries attends

over a person of the says of the says of the says of the says highline of the says highline of the says o



### Art, Modern

Teardrops descend as mountains to another

Another

Another first light.

This song welcomes persistent morning.

A mastered language: Spoken.

Streaks

Of

Color

Pre-dawn blues

Afternoon grays

Nighttime yellows

Color

Of

Streaks

A shy unevenness.

Mute quiet

Utters

A rebellious sound.

A wooden frame lies vacant and unfinished.

The barren hill, once vacant, is now over-run,

Pulsing to tones of a recorded song:

Skipping.

Fascination

fascination

fascinatio

fascinati

fascinat

fascina

fascin

fasci fasc

fas

fa f

Upward mobility fading:

An unwanted stagnation.

Stagnant. Stagnation. Stagnant. Stagnation. Stagnant.

They ask him questions not wanting answers,
Wanting him to gasp subservience like the aspiration
Of a slain red bleeding mute tones of grey.
He grasps a copper flask spiriting a cerebral
Plumage of, this time whiskey.
He holds the whiskey and adjusts his visor of life accordingly.
This is not the first time and this is not the last.
This arch of orange seizes him and shakes him.
He protests this rapture.
He protests.
He sees a reel, a caption of the past;
Of the same scene, the same movie.

And smiles. It is hot.

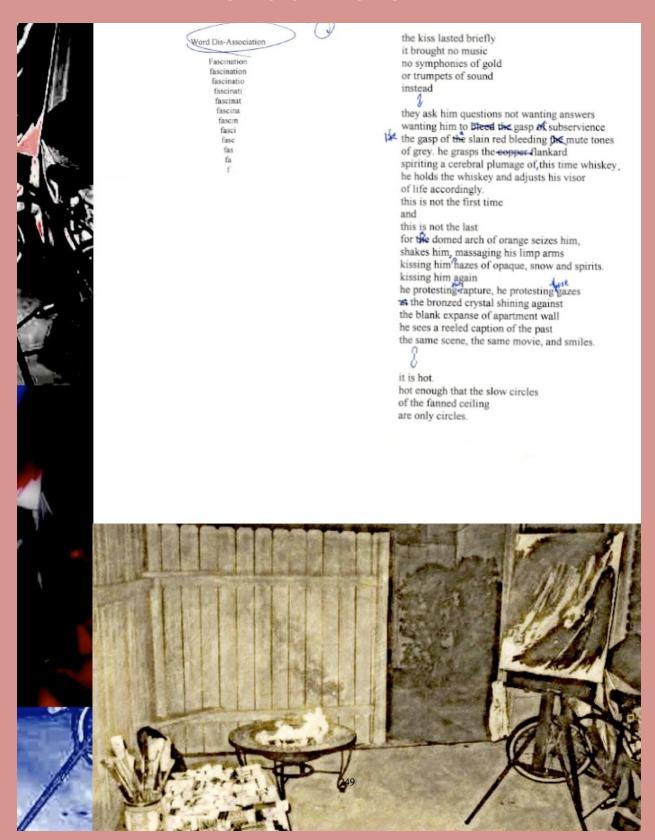
Small perfectly formed Feats of

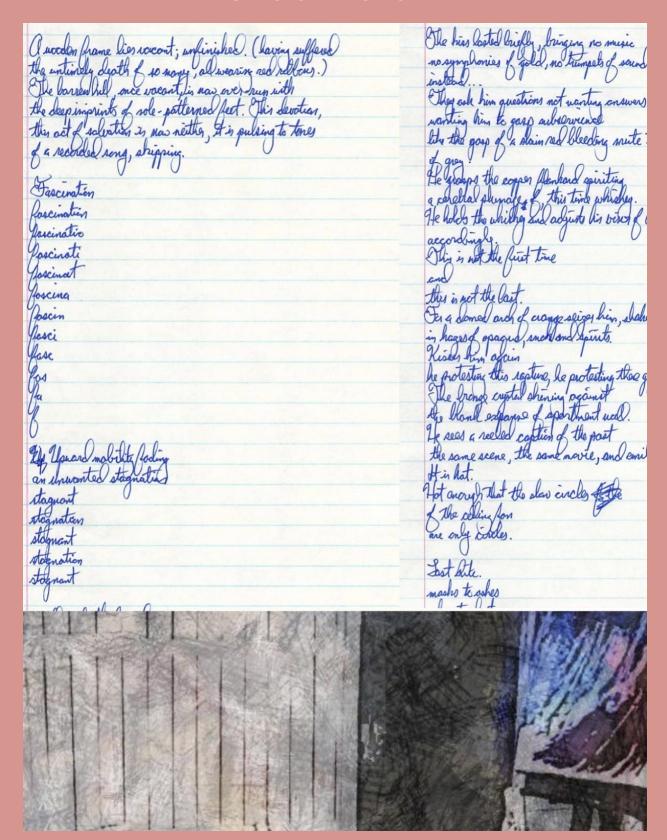
Creator

Drift and pause, Drift and pause. Breathing...

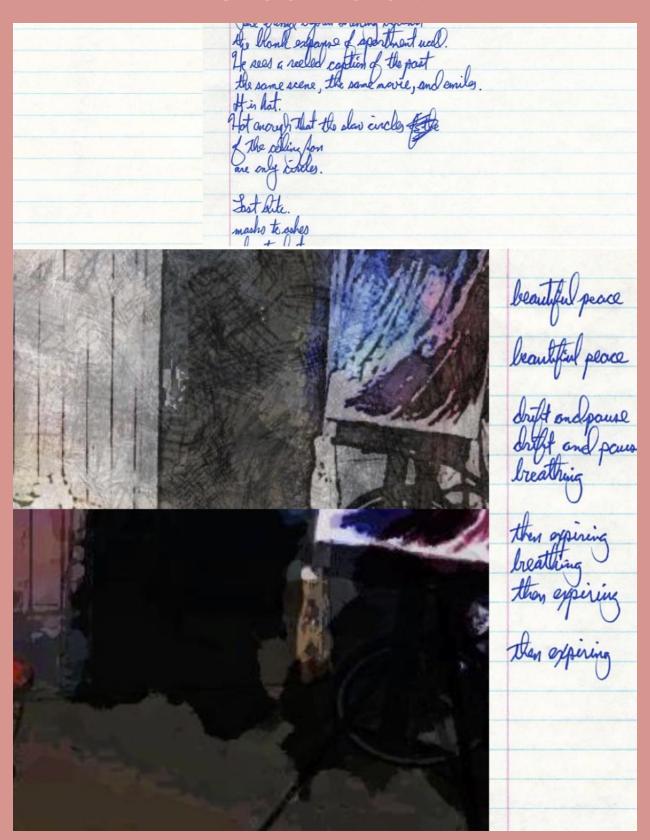
Then expiring. Breathing, Then expiring.

Then expiring.





## CHRISTOPHER STROPLE



# O preço do passado

Na casa de manuscritos de Valdštejnské náměstí o tempo não era de graça. A impostura do pó (ao dar mais pátina aos livros) inflacionava em olvido o custo da antiguidade. Chegáramos a Praga (havia o comunismo saído) mendigando uma atenção no escudo dos Wallenstein num *Breviarium Monasticum* de Josephi Grünenwald. «Se vão fatiar a História do que foi o meu país ao menos que paguem por ele.» A mulher do alfarrabista era cínica mas prática não querermos pagar as feridas de um papiro ferido era faltar ao respeito à província da memória cometer heresia contra o preço do passado.

# The price of the past

In the Valdštejnské náměstí house of manuscripts time was never free. The dust's deception (lending more patina to the books) inflated the cost of antiquity into oblivion. We'd come to Prague (just after Communism had left) begging for attention on a Wallensteins's shield in a Breviarium Monasticum of Josephi Grünenwald. "If they're going to slice the History of what used to be my country they should at least pay for it."
The used bookstore woman was a cynic but practical haggling over the wounds of an injured papyrus was to lack respect for memory's province to commit heresy against the price of the past.

#### Meia-noite

Deus nos acaba?

#### Midnight

than that God runs out on us?

# JOHN GREY

# A Drowning in the River

Even the sun is unequal to the task Why illuminate the riverbank if the only show is a body being lifted into the back of an ambulance?

So take back your gift, old sol.
It was unasked for, uncalled for.
Light on death is still death.

No flame,
just paleness.
Nothing ignited.
Merely dulled into submission.
The face is purple.
Only the fingernails are red.

What kind of world is this when the first thing day shines upon is a thaw-less frost?

And a stone.
Hard, inviolable.
Try rousing that.

#### unbury

i meet your gaze with the hallowness of a decaying tree, dormant & rotten & petrified within its season. a structure of stoic minerals incapable of abode.

come, let me cool your scars and peeling flesh. let my shadow cover your sunburns twist my branches and they can tweeze out the salt from veins i couldn't myself unbury.

i would fill your mouth with stones & cover your skin in clay, would it renew our bodies. all i can offer is to convene with the breath around you

and the soil between us softens

#### Guide for the Perplexed, 1:50

,	with the lips, but also to th	faith by the soul, convict em in words as
you		connect
you have form essential	to rise possess unit	, reflect , and ty, G-d has no corporeal implies
		declare unity like doctrine
but		
as		affirm freedom belief.
	apprehension	
has this		conceived from what we
******		found
follow your reason, and conceive Unity		
	understand Commune with your ow	to that class who on heart and be still.

## parsings of you

~Let the light denote your harsh edges and uncertain geometries delicate raster between my beams. Your conscious newness more than a novelty—invigonating life in the misnomer of preoccupation and accepting ends to do to the total the misnomer of preoccupation and accepting ends to do to the total the total the misnomer of preoccupation and accepting ends to do to the total the total

Occ upy space and l!ght will scatter inc\*herent,, perspect ives dw¬ndled into dusk--/volu minous Und ov·rp wering reflect on.

Rad[ate hon%sty and the tree w\ll prune ]tself; hold form and remæning nodes recurse in unb\_unded and exeget c {parsings of you}

# a fractalwork of fibers

Take this flower from its place I want
Wiping dirt and dried buds. Reborn
Turn petals between your fingers, Discern
Tenderly the fractalwork of fibers under sunlight

# the nonlinearities of repair

the earth rotates past me, jovial and spritely as the seasons that turn through grief. voices recede and decay and the murmer of guilt as prescient as trees uprooting concrete. we leaned into growth without guying and spiraled until our branches arced toward icaran earth, overwhelmingly sated and eternally sunken

#### the matters of monarchs

"some butterflies are meant to lie dormant," you say, as if the matters of monarchs were ever mine. You guarded seeds in dormant seasons, diffracting wind, projecting love.

they sprout wildly, arced and merging
a web of synthesis— through your fibers.
soon buried by the branches in your debt
carcass rising to success, hummingbirds and blowflies in harmony.

Solitary & brittle, something to beholder.
If a larvae could remember

# CHARLIE CLARK

## THANATOPHOBIC INSOMNIA POEM I THOUGHT WAS GOING TO BE A LOVE SONG

Of all the things I dreamed

myself incapable how strange I am

awake now without you listening

to the rain arrive like a sloppy

loud calligraphy listen what I am

here to decipher I cannot

say my sense of things has always

comprised a waking blur even

childhood was odd sleepless sometimes

parts swollen as our child's arm is

bitten in her sleep all night the smell

of hydrocortisone and fever leaking

through the sheets if I dream tonight it will begin with the words you employed to describe

the doctor's face on seeing her skin

what never should be the gray of rotten

strawberry greens it is both strange and not

that I can't reason why I am not now

with you sleeping strange to think any one

thing has any one reason as a mother

I love that you don't for easy

comfort assure our child there is

a reason for everything the reason

for her bite may be all this spring

rain scaring
the reclusive insects

in in the dreams I imagine I should be

having they shiver

shimmer harmless little

star spots on the ceiling and like it is a kindness

we allow them to go on I don't know how

many spiders we swallow each

year while sleeping but someone

does I heard the number once

at the funeral

I remember best the armored flourish

of his mother's

like peanuts rising from the coffin

I don't know who it was that said it

but they were drunk and obscenely

educated so speaking slurrily with

education's gleeful disdain for niceties someone responded

carry another fifty bags of mulch

*just to get to sleep* so maybe it was

spring then too not that seasons matter

to stories like these where again I am

awake here in the house of love thinking why

sleep why when

can't survive this age when to our

wedding our friend can come in her

best new turtleneck read Rumi to us

then die before we have the chance to

thank her as promised over tacos why sleep

when even here beneath the cool

comforters of spring any sleeping

body can roll once and its skin won't

stop darkening love why sleep when

the future we have created for ourselves

can cough can itch

it can dream and die of anything

as quietly as any friend there

is so much exact gloom pairing with

the vague it recalls love the day or

was it days when all we could reason

to do was slouch suck our teeth

like I am now not sleep but drop

a dollar each in a hat in a bet

to see which soul between us after

the funeral would

be the last to laugh

# LIZ JACOBY

# Trysting

She lives between wake and sleep as consistently as the earth has spun upon an axis for millions or perhaps billions of years an immovable blind spot.

if there were frequencies of sight she would be there folding laundry or in between the clouds that often kiss the lees of a town long forgotten

she shifts like the drawing of a curtain deciding when and what you see lingering at the hallway window in a white lace dress waiting for a train that never comes.

For Kate Hagaman, Il November 2022

# LIZ JACOBY

**T:** What to you is the more vulnerable perspective to see through, approaching an inevitable, significant change or waiting for it to approach you?

**LJ:** I feel like this question sees straight through me and my work. What a wonderful question. I often find myself retracing what life was like for women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More specifically I wonder what life was like for my female ancestors. Could they have possibly had the autonomy to answer this question in the same manner to which I am afforded?

I think Kate had to wait.

I think Kaye had to wait.

They were expected to wait, but there are power and vulnerability in both positions.

**T:** How do the experiences the speaker(s) have change the places they occupy? How is the light recast, the view into the window repainted?

LJ: The relationships between peoples and places and the spaces they occupy are the essence of humanity. It inspires and gives us purpose. Kate is waiting for a train that never comes because the tracks are gone. The Chicago-St. Louis train that used to run right next to her home has vanished. So, her vantage point, from that window, is not only historical, but haunting. Kaye has lived there so long she has become a fixture. Her book and lamp are waiting for her despite how quickly time has passed.

Everything is temporary—the world has taught me this much. So, when I think of the women who appear in my poetry, well, they are frequent haunters. I see them in old picture albums salvaged from the attic and in the tones of stories passed down through those willing to tell tales around firesides on cool summer evenings. Yet, there is something to say here about space. In essence, does a space make a person? Surely, not entirely, but it certainly has an effect. Kate and Kaye would have had much different vantage points from city windows.

**T:** The additions of who the poems are "for" or where they are "from" add an interesting epistolary feel to the larger context of the work. Do you end all your poems with a dedication or acknowledgement, and how do those frame them for you? Are they a start or an end?

**LJ:** I do. I feel like the Latin phrase works best— "In medias res." Writing is an act of living. It is interesting that the press has chosen these two works for publication because they are both inspired from a farmhouse my great-great grandparents built at the culmination of the Civil War in southern Illinois. The house the speaker approaches at the culmination of "Place at Intervals" is home to Kate's window in "Trysting."

**Liz Jacoby** is a writer and professor with a PhD from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Liz has had work published in *Soundings East, For Women Who Roar, The Vehicle, Shot Glass Journal*, among others

#### TYLER FRIEND

**T:** What initially brought your attention towards insects as a focus of your imagery? What draws your eye to the overlooked, those who are clambered over? Do you have a favorite bug?

**TF:** The obvious answer is that they're always around—I live in the south, so it's hard to avoid our bug friends. But I think the real answer is closer to your second question—they're overlooked, always there, both beautiful and an irritation. Easy to ignore, or easy to hyperfixate upon. My favorite bug is the southern black widow because I grew up with them. <3

T: Do you think acknowledgement from an institution (art museum, literary canon, etc.) validates art, or is it "made real" with the viewers'/readers' opinion? What assigns greater value, visibility or exclusivity?

**TF:** I'm all about O'Hara's idea of art as conversation, as phone call. I think it's all about reaching one person and really connecting with them.

T: What about Berryman and Stanford inspired you? What about it made you want to base your own inside it?

**TF:** To continue Frank's metaphor, I also think, though, that you can turn that into a three-way call or even a party line. That's part of what I'm trying to do too when I reach back toward other writers or artists from the past; I'm just calling ghosts, really. And sometimes (like with Stanford) I let them pick what we talk about, and sometimes (like with Berryman) I just steamroll over them and kinda forget they're there once I get going.

**Tyler Friend** was grown (and is still growing) in Tennessee, despite all the odds. They are the author of *Him or Her or Whatever* (Alternating Current Press, 2022). When not writing or teaching, Tyler works in the circ department of a public library where patrons call them "ma'am," but then get flustered about it.

# EDWARD MAYES

Also featured in Transom Journal Issue 14, **Edward Mayes** is the author of five books of poetry, including *Speed of Life* (1999); *Works & Days* (1999), winner of the AWP Prize in Poetry; and *First Language* (1990), winner of the Juniper Prize. He has published poems in the *Southern Review*, *Poetry* magazine, the *New Yorker*, *American Poetry Review*, and *The Best American Poetry*, with recent poems in the *Kenyon Review*, the *Gettysburg Review*, *AGNI*, *Colorado Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Blackbird*, *Boston Review*, and *Crazyhorse*. He lives in Hillsborough, North Carolina, and Cortona, Italy, with his wife, the writer Frances Mayes.

# JO CHRISTIAN

**T:** Did you start writing with the shape/visual spacing of "At 8, My Father Tells Me to Treat My Body like a Temple" happened in mind or did it shape itself into that form as you went along?

**JC:** The form of "At 8, My Father Tells Me to Treat My Body like a Temple" happened only during revision. When I draft my poems, I tend to just let it all come out word by word, and then I go back and think about the words and phrases of the poem as if lines on a canvas. In this particular case, I felt like the phrases were a sort of haunting, and as such, needed to echo across, or haunt, the space of the page. Because the content was an echoing in my mind, and the speaker's mind, I wanted it to call out to the reader in the same way.

**T:** Was it a cathartic writing experience to turn the speaker inside out, expose their innards to both your own and others' eyes?

**JC:** I love the idea of the "speaker's innards" being on display in these poems. I feel like a lot of my work is trying to get at the core of an experience or a trauma and let the reader glimpse it and experience it from my perspective. Like anyone who writes about a trauma will tell you, it takes a lot of energy, time, and patience, that you honestly don't get to see the full fruits of until someone reads it. Sometimes I felt the trauma response prevented a straightforward narrative or prose poem from coming through, as the trigger would make me want to give too much unnecessary information that was really asking the reader, and myself, to believe it really happened.

However, to answer your question more directly, I think writing with the trauma is also wrestling with it, a struggle against and with it. Ultimately, I think writing these poems has helped create some distance, maybe distance with words, and come to some sort of acceptance of them. Not necessarily healing or forgiveness but acceptance for what was and how I got here today.

 ${f T}$ : Has writing a poem about your own experiences ever changed the way you view them in hindsight?

**JC:** This is such an inciteful question because I think the reader can sometimes feel the shift in the speaker of these poems. I began writing them out of a sense of lamentation, but what I found was, through them, through articulating all of the experiences and perspectives of a whole family, a whole generation, I was able to inhabit them in a new way and gain a sense of empathy or clarity. It was as if, with the help of imagination and words, I began to feel a closeness and understanding with people I've been largely alienated from.

**Jo Christian** (they/them) is a poet and writer from Eastern Tennessee and Kentucky. They are currently an MFA candidate at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *Grassroots Literary and Arts Magazine*, *The Kentucky Monthly*, and others. They also hold a MA from the University of Louisville and a BA from Campbellsville University.

# JULIAN MITHRA

T: Do you have a favorite poetic form? Do you start with the idea for the poem or with its form?

**JM:** As a reader, I prefer forms that follow from a project's focus. For example, adapting the newsprint obituary to write about grief in Victoria Chang's *OBIT*, or the biographies of saints to describe intimacy in Audra Puchalski's *Queer Hagiographies*. As a writer, I'm attracted to forms that operate on extreme constraints. "Rocky Mont," which appears in *Pinky Thinker*, Issue 7, only uses words with the vowel O to ruminate on snow. In my chapbook on trans\* embodiment, KALEIDOSCOPE (Ethel Press) I chose fourteen- or fifteen-letter words as titles and composed the poem solely using anagrams of the title. To me, it felt akin to being constrained by our bodies and yet still flexing creatively.

I start poems with a piece of language or a sound or image, usually, rather than form or cognition. In the case of "Ocean Architectures," I needed to include more about what my novel's characters would believe about the ocean, living between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers in an intertidal zone. What does it mean to experience the effects of tide without its presence? Why would someone construct a container to demonstrate the enormous horizon? Actually, I began that poem after creating a handmade book about sailors, inspired by Melville, and spending time with the observation that water in a container always finds its horizon, no matter how far from the ocean.

**T:** What was the point of view in regards to violence against nature/natural bodies in the source text of "Ill & Coy," and how far did you have to push it in order to make what the poem says take shape?

**JM:** The point of view in this guidebook for how to hunt wolves and coyotes in cattle country is dry, pragmatic, and not generally violent or gratuitous at all. Of course, it draws from predictable subtexts of human dominion, but the language appeals to me for how it encourages the reader through straightforward advice. I believe my erasure reveals some of the subtext and manifests a latent desire, rather than a violent one. So the second level of repression in these texts is the one that produces a heteronormative subject through rugged individualism and a denial of the libidinal economy of hunting. In the poem, the human is implicated in animal impulses.

In several cases, I shifted the meaning of borrowed language *toward* overt violence. For example, the first word, "rough" in the original simply describes the uneven ground that's hard to ride over on horseback, as they are near the Badlands, though here it's related erotically to rough play or rough trade, roughing-up. Although in another case, "broke" originally referred to a wolf breaking cover or leaving a bush, and here, "broke by distance" sounds colloquial (as opposed to "broken by distance") and symbolic. It reminds me of "Brokeback Mountain" by Annie Proulx, or breaking with convention. I'd say that I pushed the language quite far from its original context and associations because the tone here is intimate rather than authoritative.

**T:** You play with phonetics and abbreviations in these poems to great effect. How did you decide what to leave written as it typically would be and what to manipulate? Do you prefer the experience of hearing your work read aloud or reading it silently?

**JM:** I'm hearing this question the most in "Waterspeak." As the title implies, this poem is soundforward, so the misspellings remind the reader that this is a rendition of speech. In particular, the poems in this series (from my hybrid manuscript) lend voice to non-human subjects such as boneset, indigo, and oysters. The collective speaker ("we") became essential to emphasize a colony of organisms like oysters, or the uncountability of something like a river, in contrast to the individualism of Jacksonian populism. In a related poem, "Windmill Island" (*Along A Shoreline*, 2021) the cordgrass, a marshland plant, speaks with *our-all* and *we-all* pronouns. Here, I misspelled *our* to *auer* to force a certain pronunciation and a certain self-consciousness. Some English speakers say *our* like *are* and some say it like *hour*. Also, the letters *au* remind me of holy words like *aurora* and *laud*.

My performances of pieces often disarm people with their emotionality and musicality. I prefer to recite this work, although what one gains in sound one loses in space. Especially for an assonance-heavy poem like "Waterspeak," the experience of forming my mouth to the same sound so densely gives almost a hymn-like effect. The predictability is soothing, embracing.

**Julian Mithra** hovers between genders and genres, border-mongering and -mongreling. Winner of the 2023 Alcove Chapbook Prize, *Promiscuous Ruin* (WTAW, 2023) twists through labyrinthine deer stalks in the imperiled wilderness of inhibited desire. *Unearthingly* (KERNPUNKT, 2022) excavates forgotten spaces. Read recent work in *warm milk*, *Heavy Feather Review* and *newsinews*.

#### TAMIKO DOOLEY

**T:** Each of these poems hinges on an act, a word, or an image too fraught to be seen or heard without consequence. What happens when the unseen makes itself seen? Who defines what ought not be witnessed?

**TD:** A revelation can be shocking as it makes us question the self, its environment and its relationships. The mask has slipped and the real world is presented to us. Our upbringing defines the parameters of what we witness. When we start to break away from that mould, the process is both enlightening and terrifying, especially where this is triggered by an external factor.

**T:** "Still Life" and "Persephone, growing," both center on allusions to women in myths and a loss of innocence. Is the pain of that loss necessary for growth? Why do you think we mythologize that pain?

**TD:** We grow in difficult times, including during loss. Here, the protagonist both matures and recognises their own maturity simultaneously, adding an additional level of self-development. Is this because we need to experience pain in order to understand it?

Aligning ourselves with mythological characters provides distance from a moment of hurt. Contextualising it within the line of those before makes us feel less alone. At the same time, this intertextuality magnifies the loss, by calling on the tragedy within these epic tales. This echoes the duality of pain: we may cerebrally recognise it as everyday, yet the experience can feel as painful as if it has never happened before.

T: Is "Nightwalk" an ekphrasis inspired by Hokusai's "Great Wave" or is the reference contained to the one image and line?

**TD:** Although not originally intended as an ekphrasis, the poem evolved to this effect during the editing process. During a dramatic incident, our mind may suddenly recall a particular cultural and historical touchstone, such as The Great Wave. Life imitates art. This is our way of processing and connecting something new to our past.

**Tamiko** read Latin and French at New College, Oxford. She was the winner of the BBC Radio 3 carol competition 2021. Two chapbooks of her work have been published: "SHIMA (Islands)" (Alien Buddha Press, 2022) and "Seasons of Love Around the Rising Sun" (Broken Sleep Books, 2023). Two more will follow in 2023 with Cephalo Press and Audience Askew.

#### KELLY R. SAMUELS

**T:** How are the forest and speaker changed by who looks and acts upon them? Would either behave differently if no eyes were on them?

KRS: The forest can be changed in a negative or positive way, depending on *how* people interact with it. If we, for example, take to cutting down huge swathes of trees versus being there to solely observe and learn to promote healthy growth. If we're mindful or not. If we're respectful or not. In my poem "To Tree Tip, To Brush," there is a culling of branches for holiday wreathes, but many of the tippers in the NYT article I read that prompted the poem focus on overgrown parts of the forest or where logging has already occurred. They also use sustainable practices concerning how much of a branch they take. My sense, too, was that those particular tippers appreciate and even love the forest—its sounds, its smell. I wanted some of that to be conveyed by the speaker, who also loves trees and has been known to climb them.

Would a forest behave differently if no one looked upon it? I doubt it. Trees will do what they do on their own or with one another, as referenced in my poem "Canopy Disengagement." It's only people's direct actions, or lack of action when it comes to climate change, that trees will respond to.

I think people, or more specifically, my speaker in many of these poems, would feel a loss if not able to look upon trees.

**T:** Do you think the person on the forest floor or the person over the canopy has a more accurate view of the forest?

**KRS:** I would have to say the person on the forest floor for their proximity to the trees. There are advantages to walking in a forest. A person can touch the trunks or even the branches, the leaves and needles. They can use their sense of smell. They can climb a tree, if they're so inclined and able to sit and listen to how it moves in the wind. They can see up close. They can also get a sense of other life forms that inhabit the forest

The one exception would be a bigger picture, like how many acres a forest stretches or how much damage has been done to it. Then, someone over the canopy has a more accurate view. For example, drone footage of the Amazon illustrates the rainforest's decimation.

**T:** There are explicit commands to "look" in at one specific element or another across these poems. Does the very form of erasure constitute an unspoken command by the poet to only look at certain aspects of the source text? What parts of the source are you asking readers to overlook in these poems, and what parts are you drawing attention to?

KRS: Sometimes, at times in a poem, yes, I want the reader to focus on one particular thing and will actually use the word 'look.' These moments are often found at the end, a sort of command to take note. At the end of "Trees Were Just" I was trying for connection—to point out that the fir sample resembles a tool that was sometimes made of wood to educate students about language. This resembles that. The source of that poem—a NYT article—discussed trees' rings and what we can learn from them about what is termed 'climate variations,' so the concept of education and connection rose to the surface for me when composing the poem. It was what I most took from reading the article, probably because of my continued concern over climate change and how everything is connected, which I addressed in my full-length collection, *All the Time in the World*. Therefore, it was what I chose to write on.

But the command is only for that moment, and within context of the entire poem, and is only one way that I and other poets use to focus attention. Monica Berlin and Beth Marzoni in their beautiful collection *No Shape Bends the River* utilize the word 'so.' Punctuation, too, can do some of that work; the use of a colon or an em dash, both of which I use in "Grieving Unknown Pines" to narrow in on the trees, the pines, and what is being done or happening to them—again, what I took from reading the article that prompted the poem.

In short, what I am drawing attention to with these poems is what drew my attention: how astounding trees are in their actions that might mimic our own; how we can tend to them; their, sometimes, brief beauty; their loss; what we can learn of the world and ourselves from them.

I never want a reader to only pay attention to that one line or part. And, naturally, *if* there is a source that has been the springboard for the poem and the reader reads that source and sees something else that interests them, great. Mine is just one story, one lens.

Kelly R. Samuels is the author of the full-length collection All the Time in the World (Kelsay Books) and three chapbooks: To Marie Antoinette, from, Words Some of Us Rarely Use, and Zeena/Zenobia Speaks. She is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee with work appearing in The Massachusetts Review, RHINO, The Rupture, The Shore, and Court Green. She lives in the Upper Midwest.

#### CHRISTOPHER STROPLE

**T:** What came first: the painting and the photo of it, or the poem? Do you think of them as three separate things, or one piece?

**CS:** The poem came first. I used to think of them as separate mostly due to an initial need for there to be a distinction between mediums even though I was aware of intersections between them. As time has passed, I have become more practiced with different mediums and there is less separation between them. Is it one piece yet? I'm not quite sure but maybe that is the final destination.

**T:** Were the handwritten portions and line edits the initial drafts of the final typeset text or were they made afterwards?

**CS:** The handwritten portions and line edits were from the initial drafts.

My process for writing poems includes an initial draft (I think of it as a "sketch") by hand that has no edits. From there, I'll eventually type out the sketch, print it and then begin edits.

A single sketch is often combined with other edited sketches (some of which may or may not have been drafted during the same period of time). Those sketches are then components of what then becomes a single poem. It is possible for a single sketch to become a single poem and I really do not have a formula to determine whether that happens. It is sometimes by coincidence and sometimes by necessity.

Once that is done, I write out the combined sketch by hand into a single poem. That poem is then typed out and, more often than not, edited again. At that point I am typically done with writing by hand and any further edits are usually made while at the computer.

**T:** The digital and physical edits made to both the text and the image depict an active process of reshaping "live" on the page. Do you see the collage as "living" and evolving still? What is it to be finally, finished?

**CS:** Yes, I do see the collage as "living" and it does continue to evolve. More than likely there is now some pressure to think about what finalizing/finishing entails, but I am still quite affected by the possibilities/variations that accompany text, art and image. Given the nature of this affection it is still not clear to me as to what it may be if/when finally finished.

And I am not sure if there is sufficient time for me to reach a point where it is finally finished. When I was younger, death was more abstract then it is to me now and I suspect that is because as I've aged, death is more proximate, at least when thinking about it in terms of life expectancy. Perhaps it is living and evolving because I am still living and evolving. Time will tell.

Art and poetry have been fanciful, indulgent, even hysterical; in other words, an almost impossible objective. For me it is neither an identity or a calling, instead it is an activity that both makes meaning and records experience. I continue to explore the intersections of text, art and image; a pursuit partially derived from a fondness for color and an affinity for aesthetics. Numerous cultural influences provide continuous inspiration for this creative work. **Christopher Strople.** 

# JOÃO LUÍS GUIMARÃES & CALVIN OLSEN

João Luís Barreto Guimarães was born in Porto, Portugal (June, 3rd, 1967) where he graduated in Medicine. He is a Poet (as well as a Reconstructive Surgeon). As a writer, he is the author of 11 poetry books since 1989, including his first 7 books in "Collected Poetry" ("Poesia Reunida", Quetzal, Lisbon, 2011) and the subsequent "You Are Here" ("Você está Aqui", 2013), published in Italy, "Mediterranean" ("Mediterrâneo", 2016) — National Award of Poetry António Ramos Rosa 2017, published in Spain, France, Italy where it was Finalist of the International Camaiori Prize 2018, Poland, Egypt, Greece, Serbia and forthcoming in the USA, Finland and Czech Republic; "Nomad" ("Nomada", 2018) — Best Poetry Book Bertrand 2018 and Armando Silva Carvalho Poetry Award 2020, published in Italy where it was Finalist of the International Camaiori Prize 2019, Spain and Czech Republic, forthcoming in Serbia and Egypt; the anthology "Time Advances by Syllables" ("O Tempo Avança por Silabas", 2019), published in Croatia, Macedonia and Brazil, forthcoming in India; "Movement" ("Movimento", 2020), Grand Prix of Literature est 2022, also published in Macedonia, forthcoming in South Korea. The English translation of "Mediterranean", by Calvin Olsen, won the Willow Run Poetry Award 2020. His work is published in anthologies in Portugal, Brazil, United States, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain (Castilian and Catalan), México, Dominican Republic, Croatia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, as well as in literary magazines in Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, Holland, Romania, Hungary, United Kingdom, Macedonia, Brazil, México, Uruguay and the United States. He has read at literary festivals in Malaga and Pontevedra in Spain, Aguascalientes in México, and Zagreb/Split in Croatia, Bremen in Germany and Washington and New York in USA. English translations have appeared in World Literature Today, Poetry London, Asymptote, The Banyan Review, Salamander, Anima, Tupelo Quarterly, The London Magazine, The Columbia Review, The Contand Review, Bellevue Literary Rev

Calvin Olsen is an American poet and translator based in Edinburgh, Scotland. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Boston University, where he studied under Robert Pinsky, David Ferry, and Nobel laureate Louise Glück, and an MA in English & Comparative Literature from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and he is currently a doctoral candidate in Communication, Rhetoric, & Digital Media at NC State University. Calvin's poetry and translations have appeared in *The Adroit Journal, AGNI, Asymptote, The London Magazine, The National Poetry Review*, and *World Literature Today*, among many others, and he is the recipient of a Robert Pinsky Global Fellowship and a 2021. Travel Fellowship from The American Literary Translators Association. More of his work can be found at calvin-olsen.com.

# **JOHN GREY**

**T:** Is the abstraction of written words enough to "protect" the reader from the sight of this death? Is the poem recreating the horror of the image, just preserving it after the fact?

**JG:** The poem is written from the perspective of someone who comes upon a horrible scene accidentally. In recreating the image, I try to come at it from different angles: directly as in the case of the third verse. And then, with a more abstract, even metaphorical approach by roping in the sun which, in normal circumstances, would be enhancing the scenery. Here, it's shining a spotlight on a terrible situation

T: The speaker asks the sun to "take back its gift;" can the sun, or anyone else, ever take back having seen or shown something? Can anything ever be unseen?

**JG:** The use of the word "gift" is ironic, sarcastic, whatever but emphasizes the fact that the sun really is a gift to the planet. But, in this case, it's an unwanted one. Can the scene be unseen? To me coming upon something so sad and depressing would have lasting impact. It would always be there, somewhere in the corridors of the brain.

**T:** Is the act of witnessing as inevitable and immutable as the sun rising? Does loss need a witness to be made real?

**JG:** The implied loss here is more loss of innocence than say loss of a loved one. Witnessing the death of a stranger, like passing by a deadly car crash, may, in the moment, conjure up a guiltily curious feeling but, in the long term, it can well lead us to dwell on our own mortality. In this poem, my intention was for the protagonist to feel anger at the very randomness of the situation because he knows that, going forward, we will carry the images with him.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Sheepshead Review, Stand, Poetry Salzhurg Review*, and *Red Weather*. Latest books, *Covert, Memory Outside The Head, and, Guest Of Myself* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Washington Square Review* and *Open Ceilings*.

**T:** The speaker(s) in these poems become trees, solid but unseen shapes, celestial bodies. Do you feel like your writing transforms along with the speaker? What is it to create a (poetic) body and to then let go of it?

**NS:** In a sense, i wrote these poems knowing they would be let go. There is the tree as this spiritual symbol—things like the tree of life supporting a network of unending roots and branches to hold growth and stability the world across. Then there is the tree in human terms—falling dormant, bending and struggling to find light over decades. These poems saw both through the speakers, capturing the moments of divinity seeping through the stages of lives in struggle, knowing those stages approach one end or another.

**T:** What was your approach to line spacing and choosing what was visually obscured and revealed? How does separating lines and phrases out from the main body of the stanza or poem change the emphasis put on them by the reader?

NS: Where possible, i try to use spacing and obfuscation to build duplicity. i delight in obscuring a poem away from a singular writing, blending either mediums or ideas. Playing into the discussion around musical notation in "parsings of you", there is something to be said for the structure behind the obfuscating of words. where a simple theme (the honest and complete expression of self) is varied through the song (rebuilt in imagery and obfuscated in glitched characters) before being reintroduced in its plainest and most conclusive form.he spacing within lines and stanzas is often how i build separate voices—whether different narrators, points in time, or the constant reflection of thought that anxious, ADHD-coded folk find themselves in. Dealing with the mixing of ideas, "a fractalwork of fibers" used the spacing between lines to delineate (and blur together) two separate ideas, an immediate sensory experience and subconscious emotional acknowledgement.

Not quite related, as spacing was less in my control, but i do want to mention "Guide to the Perplexed, 1:50" here for a moment as well. The original essay builds a theological idea, that G-d is beyond human comprehension and cannot be grasped in human terms—yet faith is built by accepting that shortcoming and recognizing G-d's qualities. My goal with this erasure was to call for action toward those qualities, though not discussed in the essay. There is something to be said for the act of erasing to bring the spiritual nature into a physical emulation.

**T:** The musical notation present in "parsings of you" gives the impression of some sort of tune or melody the words are set to. Is there a specific way the poem sounds in your mind? Have you ever written music before, and is that something you're interested in?

**NS:** Before writing poetry, i had more experience with music in traditional senses—singing in choirs, playing guitar and in orchestras... when i wrote "parsings", i had started toying with ambient and noise music, more experimental sounds. i had been leaning into glitch art across mediums when i wrote it, and so wanted to translate the corruption of ideas... essence.... onto text. i imagine it would sound like a smearing of the words, clippings of each syllable carrying over to the next and ruminating.

Nora Schimpf (they/any) is an engineer, trans woman, and disaster bisexual in Louisville, Kentucky. When not trapped in technology-purgatory, they can be found in local parks and coffee shops—or creating purgatories of hir own (noise music). Her poetry is a dedication to renewed life and romance and has appeared in *Coffin Bell Journal*.

#### CHARLIE CLARK

**T:** Does the speaker keep themselves awake in order to keep bearing witness to all this memory? Is replaying and suffering in the replaying keeping these images — people — alive in some small way?

CC: I think the speaker arrives at the poem's moment of wakeful worry/cogitation less through an intentional act of will than through an overwhelming and unbidden onslaught of thought. And, well, late-night thoughts are the worst, right? Attending to anything at four AM can be far more distressing than attending to it at four PM. I think the speaker is trying to bolster himself, to protect himself from the distress he's experiencing, by addressing the beloved, by insisting on the connection with the beloved, even though the beloved, lucky one, is asleep. And thinking through/attending to the ailment of their child is triggering memories of these other events and people touched by mortality. I don't know whether the lost are kept alive by the speaker's replaying these images/scenes/stories in which they figure, but I do know that the *living* can find something—whether solace or simply a way to endure hard time—through recollection. Which leads into your next question.

T: Does voicing the fear of losing a loved one with this poem ease the terror, or intensify it?

CC: I once saw the singer Nick Cave give a talk/performance about a year after the loss of his son. During a question-and-answer period, someone asked him why he was out touring and performing so soon after his child died. OK, maybe the question wasn't as blunt as that, but that was the gist of the inquiry. Cave called his performance, and his touring generally, "an act of survival." It struck—strikes—me as a deeply wise insight into one aspect of the nature of making. Whether it eases or intensifies the terror of loss, the act of making is one way one has through terror and loss. Going back through this poem, I think there's a certain amount of humor lurking in it. Or attempts at humor, at least, that speak to the way speech can be a means of attending to distress. So maybe I do think that the process of making here is helpful. Maybe it's not right to think about making as having a lessening or aggravating effect on sorrow, so much as giving the experience of sorrow a new direction.

**T:** You keep this poem in tight couplets that run anxiously down the page. Did you go into writing/drafting the piece with that "tunnel vision" effect in mind, or did it occur to you after the words themselves were in front of you?

**CC:** When I started drafting this poem, I was having real trouble finding lineation that satisfied me or felt right. Not just for this poem but for several on which I was working. (For another more extreme example, see: <a href="https://theaccountmagazine.com/article/clark-21/">https://theaccountmagazine.com/article/clark-21/</a>.) I'd spent a long time writing with the notion of utterance in mind, in relation to the line. That the line can function as a thought that lasts the length of a breath. And I still do work toward that and find real pleasure in it. But in working on this poem I was finding myself composing material that didn't always adhere to

the notion of the line in relation to a single utterance. Too much hypotactic tightening and thought doubling back on or questioning itself. One way I have found to work through that formal problem is to narrow lines down to the point of single words, sometimes single syllables. Breaking things down to such a minute point helps me see sonic and grammatical relationships in new and different ways. (It's also amusing to have a five-hundred-word poem be, even if only for a day, nine pages long!) After breaking the lines down to that extreme, I start building back up until I find a length of text/speech that feels right, or that feels appropriately fraught. The line can push/pull against progress or sense-making, or it can help provide a moment of clarity. And lines can create little eddies of meaning that are real or resonant, but that are broken apart by the larger grammatical structure. I suppose, in this poem and some other poems composed around the same time, there is a bit of a mimetic element—trying to illustrate a sense of being overwhelmed by information or experience. And the couplets seem a matter of visual pacing/spacing. They help keep me from getting utterly lost in the words. Which isn't to say it was completely an afterthought. I'd arrived at the couplet as a part of the formal solution of the relaying of information. They help give shape to the material, and like the lines, a couplet can help suggest different relationships of meaning in the text they contain than in the larger text of the poem.

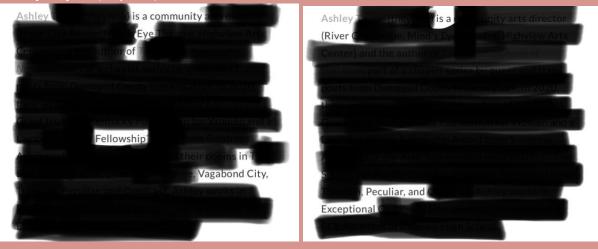
**Charlie Clark** was a 2019 NEA fellow in poetry and has received scholarships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Clark is the author of *The Newest Employee of the Museum of Ruin* (Four Way Books, 2020). Their poetry has appeared in *New England Review, Pleiades, Ploughshares, Threepenny Review, West Branch*, and other journals.

# EDITORS THEMED BIOS

Nate Cheshire (she/her) is a visual artist who fell in love with literary journals during her time in undergrad at UofL. She loves mediums, such as comics, that bring art and words together, as well as dense visual and written symbolism. She's especially fond of thought defusion, optical illusions, sudden epiphanies, and the view from the canopy.

**Jodi Hooper** (she/her) is a poet and fiction writer based in Louisville, Kentucky. She avoids silvered mirrors if she can help it, and can often be found hanging out in the margins of whatever you're reading lately. Jodi is a religious viewer of *Beyond Belief: Fact or Fiction with Jonathan Frakes*.

**Ashley Taylor** (they/she)



Thank you, dear readers