

NO. 2

12/22

# VERUM



PHOTO BY JAYNE MAREK

*the honest, severe, and hidden  
truths of poetry & art*

EDITED BY

Keira Armstrong



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# *LETTER FROM THE EDITOR*

Secrets are something we keep hidden, tucked away. Whether they be tender love affairs, or buried treasures, they are ours. But in this issue, twenty two contributors share the most important parts of themselves. They are, in these pieces, authentic and vulnerable. Gotta have to guts to do that. I hope you, reader, can see the effort and love that went into this issue, in all it's artistic glory.

Keep creating,  
Keira



# *GRAVEYARD DIRT*

KALA GODIN

This body is holy ground.

And what I mean by that is,  
This body is a graveyard.

And I don't mean that this body is a dying thing,  
What I mean is, this body is a ghost story.

This body is flesh and bone,  
Blood and haunting.

# *THE STORM BUILT AN ARK OF DECORATIONS*

NICHOLAS DERTINGER

Plastic gravestones carry on the wind  
like kites littering the streets with  
manufactured dollar store fear and  
gutter-clogging debris—there's a flood  
advisory pinging our phones.  
The rising waters float a wedding dress  
of skeleton bones past the sidewalk  
until the storm drain swallows it. A  
hand waves from the neighbor's  
window; the lights flicker—we see  
nothing. In the garage we look for a  
light but only find matches. You burn a  
candle for me and resurrect a fear I'd  
long since buried. If I die for a moment,  
will you set the heavens on fire?

I am sixteen, afraid of  
impermanence—I want to live  
forever. I am twenty-two,  
conceiving immortality. We bring  
home our children. I am thirty-three  
and can hold eternity in my arms. The  
fear subsides and we await dry land,  
watching the deluge carry the tattered  
remains of scarecrows and yarn  
woven spider-webs sail two by two  
toward the river's edge.

# JACARANDA

/

## ANDREA DAMIC



"WHEN I FIRST CAME TO SYDNEY, MANY MOONS AGO, I FELL IN LOVE WITH JACARANDA AND ONLY RECENTLY I'D DISCOVERED THAT IT IS NOT AN AUSTRALIAN NATIVE TREE; IT'S IN FACT INDIGENOUS TO BRAZIL. THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT SPRING IN SYDNEY WHEN JACARANDAS RAIN PURPLE ON THE STREETS. IT'S ALMOST SURREAL, LIKE WALKING THROUGH A FAIRYTALE AND IT HAD TO BE CAPTURED."

# MEMO MORI

## RJ DANVERS

I never got grief until I got annoyed.

You, not in all the photos I take,

you, like a fingerprint on my glasses.

Like the static on a bad photocopy, background noise I can't bring into focus.

You've left me, at this point, or you've died-

the narrative is a little unclear, actually.

My point is you're not here, but the version of you I keep in my head is getting old.

I need to know that you think I'm living how you would like me to, I need to know that you think

I'm happy, all this I need your approval.

I'm a newspaper intern with an old typewriter and I'm very nervous.

It's not the seventies or anything- it's modern day and everybody else has a laptop and keeps looking at me like I'm crazy.

You're the editor of the newspaper but you never come out of your office. Your name is on the emails I don't receive on my typewriter and I keep slipping notes under your door but I know you don't pick them up because

it's getting harder to get the notes under there.

The light of your office comes on in the evening but you're never there, or you're always there, and either way you're not speaking to me.

You're on the other side now, and the blinds are all closed.

I hope the view is nice. I hope that- well, I hope it was all worth it, how you lived frugally. I told you that leaving an inheritance was the mark of a wasted life, mostly because you didn't have kids. You had me, and you've still got me slipping notes under your goddamn door.

This week I've had to start using a ruler. I don't know what to think.



The coffee that the guy who sits opposite me makes is a crime against nature, me, and whoever made his desk. There's about seventeen rings on his desk all overlapping like distant family at a funeral. He's divorced, and no wonder if he can't use coasters. He writes the same articles every year and switches out the names of celebrities and locations. He's lazy, which I respect- he is boring, which I could forgive, save for the coffee. He's just a man.

I wish you were here- I wish you weren't. Are you real? The rest of the people in the office are going out for drinks and I'm invited. Is it pity? Is it comradery? Are we just British? We're British and I wish I knew the rest, but we're in New York and the rest of the people here are American.

I accept the offer of a drink after I've finished what I'm typing.  
Every note I say goodbye.

I feel sorry for the editor of the newspaper. He knows I miss you and he uses the other door to the office so he can have more room for the printer. He knows about the notes and he doesn't read them. He thinks I'm grieving and he's right. What backwater place did they even send you to?

It's the forties. Let's say it's the forties. My typewriter is no longer out of place. I'm wearing a brown suit and my hair is styled, you're wearing a suit and we're drinking in your office. Are we doing this again? Where we pretend they don't know, where we pretend we'll find wives, where we pretend that we are all appropriate.

You are no longer here. It's a tragic story and I'm just writing it down.

I'm going to the bar now.

Don't worry about me.

I hope that you are happy, wherever you are.

I hope that you are safe.

I'm sorry I wouldn't go with you. But really, I always did love writing and you just liked to edit things. You censored yourself out of New York and I'm left here writing down stories. I hope your suits are crinkled and your shoelaces are tied together.

They changed the name on the glass of the office door today. This will be my last letter.



***UNTITLED***

**ELINORA WESTFALL**

# *SEPTEMBER,*

*10th* IBRAHEEM UTHMAN

Caught between the teeth of a dead alley,  
God's trounce had come to us as though the rain  
And the starving sword chewed dates  
That had departed our seats of poetry  
and were greyed

Emptiness is a pendulum  
That sways between us  
Over a board of puzzles  
And your eyes on me  
Were eyes that lurk  
On which is lost

Now, beneath the sword and dates  
Your body is a thin flame in its wake  
The lump in my breast, who's shelter?  
These fireflies in raven-wine, clap your voice  
Against a windowpane and a date tree  
In an alley edged with greyish seeds  
I need a thousand years of sun

# WIFE

D. DINA FRIEDMAN

---

She might have consumed herself  
had she managed to find a tongue  
poking through her pillared mouth  
petrified, like a fossilized limb of a  
tree, all for the sole sin of glancing  
behind to what she'd had and lost  
as she fled the holy flames; her legs  
transformed to salt, a sad substance  
known for stinging, used to soften  
ice, though no glaze in the smoking  
ashes she once called home. Every  
sinner dead. Not even a deer spared  
to loll or lick her sores, leave a kiss  
for this once-woman, now a thing.  
No one tried to hear her heart throb  
under crystals. Her husband left no  
food to soothe her stomach's growl,  
so she stays where the waves once  
foamed, detritus of the Dead Sea.

# *GOOD LORD, GREEN APPLE* / MJ GOMEZ

*-after Ocean Vuong*

His heart in his mouth, his heart penciled  
 into his knuckles, his heart as fingerpainting,  
 his name a heart  
 -beat away from the drummer's march.  
 of forever,  
 his name chewed up  
 in a stranger's mouth, dusted  
 into stars until it finally becomes golden  
 -green. Green Apple. Starless,  
 moonless night, don't lie to me. We know  
 that to love something is to leave it  
 shattered. To find even this flesh  
 wound worthy of our lips.  
 Even the split forearm has forgotten the other side  
 of itself. Goodness, good lord,  
 how can I tell you this?  
 Give me a word to love  
 into a palm-scented mess until we miss it  
 all over again. Give me something to cry about.  
 Another name tossed to the dust.  
 Names like rage  
 & malice, ugly names, potted-lilac names,  
 names beautiful only when no-one's left  
 to remember them, names only we cry over,  
 names in half

-dead tongues, names of rubble,

because something has to die.

Because when a poet needs something to grieve,

he makes up a boy

& gives him a name & takes both away.

Hello not-Max.

Hello not-boy-not-girl.

Do you want another name? Is the soup to your liking?

Could you ever love someone enough  
to force yourself back into the shape of a boy?

Don't answer.

The mystery is what keeps this story interesting.

Keep walking. Green Apple.

For better or for worse, the ars poetica has already come to an end  
at its beginning.

For better, goodnight, not-Max.

Keep walking. Keep walking.

The sidewalk grieves

every inch of me it gets to keep.

If you're still awake, love, beware the flashing lights.

Good morning.

Good lord, Green Apple.

# THE LIGHTHOUSE MOON

RICHARD M. ANKERS

Few people see the world as I do. There are those hours of gold and blue and green, and there are those which are not. I roam the latter and shun the first. Some might say I'm disenchanted, but others know the truth.

I live for those monochrome moments where the moon rises high like a lighthouse, definite and bright, guiding me through life's tempestuous waters, easing me away. I would drown by the azure light of day. Really, I would. Only in nocturnal silvers am I happy. There's no need to hide when bathed in moonlight.

I know how to open the front door without the floorboards creaking. There's an art to not scraping the frame, a slight tilting, an adjustment of weight. A slow turn of the key and I'm gone. Despite wishing to kick the loose gravel back into the yard, I don't. The gate comes next; it creaks in protest. I wince. Still, what's done is done, and not even the sleeping roses have marked my escape.

The street stands deserted of all but the sentry streetlights, a little less than reassuring as I prefer the moon above. False light pools all around in an insipid citrine, which I sidestep as though it carries the plague. The moon struggles to overpower what man has mastered and I seek out a deeper shade of night.

I hurry away, my trainers soundlessly absorbing the kinetics of motion as easily as water would a scream. I cross three roads with the same carefree abandon as a hungry rat and make short work of the thoroughfare. Now, it's a quick skip past the ten or so houses remaining with their well-tended gardens and not a weed out of place and onwards to the fields beyond. It is here where mankind fades back into the dream I have woken from, and here where the first car streaks past to call it a lie.

I hate cars, all vehicles, with their predatory headlights and smokers' coughs. They hunt the tarmac as planes do the daylight skies, so I stick to the path like glue.

The fields are open here. The farmer has cut his hedges to gain more space. Where only a week ago elderberries tickled my cheeks and nettles prickled my bare legs, now, nothing. Why doesn't he realise that space is what he has? The moon redoubles its shining efforts as if sensing my dismay.

I look left to what at first seems rippling, silver water but is in fact the product of the farmer's hard work. A revelation. There are birds clustered in the tilled soil, moonlight reflecting off their white tipped wings like the protective luminescent bands the runners sport who share my pre-dawn musings. And I wonder, are you there Mister Fox, Mrs Owl? A brief disturbance of flapping wings and a confused squawking gives nothing away. The fields settle like grasses released by the wind. Not a wing flaps. Not a beak prods at the glimmering stars.

Soon, I have negotiated the cars and turned towards the sleeping hospital, so busy in the daylight hours, dead by night. Here where the always faulty streetlights flash a mixed Morse code, I breathe. It feels good to breathe, deep and true. A frosting cold enters my lungs, reviving and refreshing, transforming the stale air gathered from the city into something primal, exciting. I don't want to release it, but in the end, must.

And for a moment I forget myself. I stray. I wander. The path is released to others as I wobble onto the road, so joyous do I feel in this place where the oak trees gather, and hawthorn hedges protect their nightly guest. Thank you, I mouth. A brief rustling as if to acknowledge my presence sends a shiver of delight that suppresses even the fear stirred by a distant growling motorcycle. I tense, but it screams away.

I take the rise in the road at a canter, running down its rear like a six-year-old a hill. There's a smile on my face I'm unwilling to share. The robin that always clicks a welcome, as I see it, not him, does just this and I click one back. A sharp dash through the now greying night marks both his surprise and escape.

Half a mile of luxurious silence, of soothing darkness and time regathered. It is more precious to me than all the money in the world.

I see the houses reappear like ghosts in an overly large cemetery. The myriad windows for tombstones only serve to enhance this thought and I pray not to see any eyes blink from the curtain cracks, scowl from the letterboxes, cry from the beds.

There is life now, signs the world is stirring. A man whistles as he rides his metal horse down the road. He's too lazy to peddle, the oversized battery doubling as a calorie counter, or so I imagine. It has very little to do. A man and a woman walking a dog each say good morning. I smile and answer the same. At last, someone normal. There are three people sat at a bus stop. One is using his phone and the other two are watching him do so. I look away. I have to.

I re-emerge into society as my moonbeam companion disappears. I will count the hours until his return. There is still no sun and only the briefest lightening of the sky above, but I miss my silver guardian already.



The coffee shop sign blazes a welcome. My friends are stood waiting. I wave and they return the gesture.

“You made it,” one calls.

“Barely.”

“That’s six a.m. for you. There’s only spectres and swimmers at this time of the morning. Oh, and coffee drinkers,” he laughs as an aside.

And I wonder as the shop’s door opens and the beaming face of a girl happy to see money waiting on her doorstep appears, which am I? It is a question I shall return to repeatedly until time stops, and the lighthouse moon reveals itself once more.

I hope it’s a little of both.

# *HIS FATES*

LEA WILDEST

Bitter lips are best (he keeps them sour)  
Anxious eyes always fixed to the sky  
He comes to me (in some foreign hour)  
And it's here where the queer reapers lie  
Biting at the (forgotten flower)  
-Steal your kisses away; stub them out in the ashtray

And thick black hair like his glasses' frames  
I find the end (smouldering in love)  
He holds the bouquet to hide his shames  
The petals are red (just like his blood)  
Given in passion taken in flames  
-All death is reproduction (and what you touch).

And The-Rosey-Thing takes what's given  
Only ever hide your soul away  
Because Death first needs Love's permission  
And your synecdoche love might dismay  
But please never give him a face.

My friend, you found  
the passages of my childhood,  
walked starlight into hot  
summer mornings  
along the spine of my youth.

What did you find there,  
among the shadows?

The fist of our house, if opened  
held an echo  
of my parent's youth:

My mother's eyes  
bright emeralds,  
as she watched me tumble  
in the leaves  
of our backyard,

my father's hand finchlike,  
perched temporarily  
on the curve of her hip,  
eyes to the horizon.

And I, like a  
sapling grown strong,  
gone.

*FROM THE  
BATTERED GIRL  
WHO ALWAYS  
SAID HELLO*

MONICA FUGLEI

*for Don Welch*

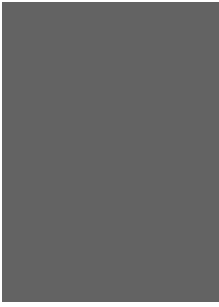
# COME OUT

AMY HARRISON

AMY HARRISON  
(SHE/HER/HERS) IS AN  
ENGLISH TEACHER IN  
CASA GRANDE, ARIZONA.  
SHE HAS FOUND HEALING  
AND PEACE WITHIN THE  
DESERT. THE ABANDONED  
DOMES IN CASA GRANDE  
REFLECT THE MYSTERIES  
OF GRIEF.



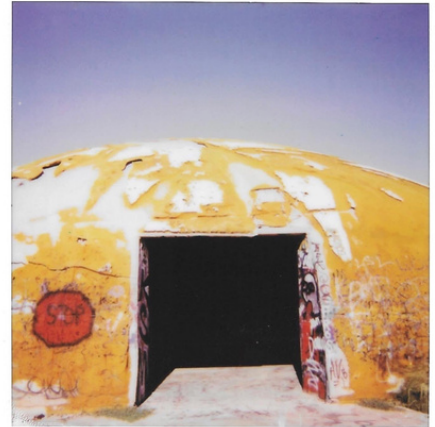
AMY HARRISON



**INTO**



**FIND ME**



**CALLING**



**ENTER**



*ON TRANSLATIONS OF  
LANGUAGE LOST TO  
TIME*

/ EMILIE MENDOZA

Muse, tell me how he watched him fall to sea  
Head thrown back and laughter echoing. Tell  
Me how the wound bleeds into wound bleeds  
Into streams of gold. Find the beginning.

Tell me how you sat in your car calling  
Anyone who might answer, mascara  
Streaking. Tell me, Muse, did the fruitbearing  
Demeter answer your prayer of spring?

Find the beginning. Now goddess, child of  
Zeus, tell the old story for our modern  
Times. Is this song of a hero? Is there  
Honor in lamentation of the self?

Will they tell their stories, once they have  
turned  
To ash? That dreamer, this ghost, those  
soldiers, you  
Liar. Tell me, Muse, have we drawn ourselves  
In sand? The tide is on her way to me.

# ***IN MY DREAMS***

**SADEE BEE**



# *HOW TO CARE FOR ORCHIDS*

DEARBHLA O'BRIEN

CW: references to eating  
disorders and body image issues

my sister is learning to evaporate

the skin on her stomach

pinched between thumb and

forefinger

white with purple veining

she injects herself, and shrinks

injects and

shrinks

a miracle drug in testing

meant for something else

but it works for this

just fine

like the antipsychotics

when they got the balance right

she doesn't eat now

she might have learned that from me

when I was 16

a child

her arms and limbs

scream girlhood

disappearing between gaping hemlines

can't reach her, warn her

she is being made obedient

she's doing it better than me

she grows orchids on every available surface

petals white matching lilac threads

pure

small

delicate

she keeps them alive

i ask how much will be enough

she talks set points

dress sizes

and the flower i am watering

overflows

overflows

overflowing

the puddle on the ground a drowning she does not tell me to stop

no one tells her to stop

for a flower is blooming

and we all must sit and watch



# *THE LAWLESSLY SAD*

CODY ARES  
BAYNORI

"I have been told;  
I am quite easy to forget,"  
I lie in this way.

As my enamel is destroyed,  
my spirits are reborn.  
It is apparent that time is unkind.  
My desire is to fade away  
so that I can be held by another.

I wish for the sun to fall,  
so that I may bite  
an in turn, rise.

With the spill of light, I find.  
My cucumber-mint chapstick  
now tastes like vomit.  
It has been soured by the touch of lips  
from the previous night.

With just one charged AirPods  
and my neck scented by Barbasol,  
reflection arrives.

The smell of burning flesh  
has haunted me since adolescence.  
This is how I am marked:  
A smile that dulls a room  
and eyes that never meet yours.

# GHOST RIDE

JOSHUA MERCHANT

the ghost of my father peers out a bus window with a rifle.  
the ghost of me chooses a window seat wearing a bullet proof vest.

I live in my jawline now- I don't speak much  
unless spoken too. there's a pin the ghost of him  
tries to yank from my tongue.

there is a seat filler in my mouth desperate to give  
and receive a good morning. there's a seat filler  
for the pin I wish to lodge in a coworker's ear-  
a translator for a language shaken.

everyone on this bus has an echo I keep  
crashing into- a few seats away is a jar of quarrels  
with her lover or bloodline or both. the seat behind  
a jar of coke and methamphetamine and slurs.

the jar around the neck of the man  
next to me is quiet. mine is full of  
smoke. mine is a snow globe shaking  
itself into my father's image.

I step off tripping over my own feet.  
my jar breaks- rebuilds.  
my jaw tightens and I stick a pin  
in my tongue for safe keeping

*YOU MIGHT  
HAVE BEEN THE  
ANGEL*

/

MIKE FARREN

taking off your angel wings & robes  
stitched together  
from pages of a book  
no one could read any more  
folding them up  
and concealing them  
in a chest  
of seasoned wood  
with camphor  
and naphtha  
and sweet herbs  
to stave off corruption  
just as we would for a corpse  
then putting on your human flesh

# ON CRYPTOGRAPHY

GREGORY SMITH *after Aleda Shirley*

Luna swells even during Her confinement.  
Isolated sunlight is another way of saying

the dimness may drip but you are still worth  
a cathedral of toothpicks and glue sticks.

Yes, it hurts to be a fragile masterpiece,  
to splinter as easily as you sway.

But there is something Vitruvian about your arc,  
the love-lit sweep of limbs you forgot.

The diamonds in your blood, the carbon coating  
your lungs, don't you see it? The way we crave

sameness like a gripping fist? The way we all  
arrive coated in whale guts and ambergris?

Nobody comes here clean. We raft rivers  
of tears, but the salinity of seas makes us buoyant.

So what that you've shown yourself a  
cracked casting rune? Is it not enough  
that you're still worthy of the throwing?

Rest softly in your dead language.  
God enigma'd you a tongue of green  
flame, saw you fit for song,

indecipherable to most, yet dancing  
to the foreign, recognizable sounds.

# REACHING GOD

/ AGBOOLA TARIQ

In the silence of dawn, the adhan calls this body.  
I feel God's lips kissing my heart to renew my faith, so I  
sit in a corner beside my shadow where my hands receive dua  
from the edges of my mouth. I urge to pluck the moon for God to see  
where this body lies while the devil hides under the cloak of  
my dark skin. I pick a rosary and repeat God's name  
till my voice breaks, still, the pieces ring in my head telling  
me other names of God. The sun breaks through the darkness and  
there's a vale inbetween that separates my ego from myself. Like  
a dark boy who just washed away his s(k)in, I could feel His presence  
in the veil of my body— a sacrifice for reincarnation.

# *SECRET HISTORY*

RC deWinter

though no one was supposed to get hurt

we all were

by hands by words by thick leather belts by neglect  
old enough to bleed too young to fight back

we all were

kids lettered in a slum of blue collars and not enough of anything else

old enough to bleed too young to fight back  
wondering why we were born

kids lettered in a slum of blue collars and not enough of anything else

we grew up twisted in knots  
wondering why we were born  
to be nothing targets for failure

we grew up twisted in knots

by hands by words by thick leather belts by neglect

to be nothing but targets for failure  
though no one was supposed to get hurt

# ***HE IN WATER***

/

**JAYNE MAREK**



**"MY ART PHOTOGRAPHS OFTEN EXPLORE PATTERNS THAT SPARK AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE. THIS ABSTRACT PIECE REFLECTS THE AMBIGUITIES OF PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION. THE SMALL HUMAN FIGURE IN WATERY MISTS EVOKES THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST LANDSCAPE, BUT ALSO INVITES VIEWERS TO IMAGINE BEING INSIDE A DREAMSCAPE OF THEIR OWN."**

# AUTHOR/ARTIST BIOS

## *in order of apperance*

**Jayne Marek** has provided color cover art for Typehouse, Chestnut Review, Silk Road, Amsterdam Quarterly 2018 Yearbook, Bombay Gin, and The Bend as well as for four poetry books. She has published poems and photos in Rattle, The New York Times, Spillway, Bloodroot, One, Salamander, Eclectica, Bellevue Literary Review, QWERTY, The Lake, Women's Studies Quarterly, Ascent, The Cortland Review, Notre Dame Review, and elsewhere. Winner of the Bill Holm Witness poetry prize, she has been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart Prizes.

**Kala Godin** (she/her) is a 25-year-old author living with a physical disability (Spinal Muscular Atrophy type 2) and is confined to a wheelchair. She's had 2 poetry collections published, as well as several short horror stories. Halloween is her favorite holiday. She likes tattoos, chocolate, and witchcraft.

**Nicholas Dertinger** (he/him) is an illustrator, poet, and writer currently living in the Chicagoland area. Nicholas works in watercolor, creating pieces that are chaotic, weird, and unrefined. His writing focuses on the mythical meeting the spiritual, and how traumas are viewed within this setting. His debut poetry book, Paper Fledglings, is now available from Stoke the Wild Press. Follow Nicholas on Instagram @nickdertingerart and Twitter @nickdertinger for more.

**Andrea Damic** (she/her) lives in Sydney, Australia. She has always loved capturing moments in life, from objects and nature to people and their interactions. She is also a big fan of abstract. Sometimes while in the process of capturing a certain moment, Andrea knows exactly what the outcome will be. However, more often than not, that end result is utterly unexpected and if she is to be honest, she gets lucky more often than she would like to admit. Her photographs sometimes feature or are forthcoming in online magazines and exhibitions, such as Rejection Letters, Fusion Art, Door Is A Jar Magazine, The Piker Press, Welter at University of Baltimore, Unlimited Literature and elsewhere. Andrea also writes, mainly at night when everyone is asleep. You can find her on [linktr.ee/damicandrea](http://linktr.ee/damicandrea). One day she hopes to finish and publish her novel but most of all she would love to get her children's picture books that she writes for her daughter, published. Who knows, maybe she gets lucky. :-)

**RJ Danvers** (she/they/he) is a Hampshire born poet inspired by Richard Siken. They have a great love of warm printer paper, colourful things, walking in fields and literature. They have been published by Hebe, the6ress, and filtercoffeezine. They also have work upcoming (at the time of writing) from dipthong lit and Roi Fainéant press. Their handwriting has become very fancy after years of calligraphy and is now so romantic it's illegible. They are a poet, a Capricorn, a liar, and a Taurus.



Influenced by David Bowie, Virginia Woolf and Sally Wainwright, **Elinora Westfall** (she/her) is an Australian/British lesbian actress and writer of stage, screen, fiction, poetry and radio from the UK. Her novel, *Everland* has been selected for the Penguin and Random House WriteNow 2021 Editorial Programme, and her short films have been selected by Pinewood Studios & Lift-Off Sessions, Cannes Film Festival, Raindance Film Festival, Camden Fringe Festival and Edinburgh Fringe Festival, while her theatre shows have been performed in London's West End and on Broadway, where she won the award for Best Monologue. Elinora's full-length short story collection, *The Art of Almost*, and her full-length poetry collection, *Life in the Dressing Room of the Theatre*, are forthcoming with Vine Leaves Press.

**Ibraheem Uthman** is a poet and the author of the book; *Mind Of a Bard*. He is a member of the Hill-Top Creative Art Foundation and he is writing from Minna, Niger State, Nigeria.

**D. Dina Friedman** has published widely in literary journals and received two Pushcart Prize nominations. She's the author of two young adult novels: *Escaping Into the Night* (Simon and Schuster) and *Playing Dad's Song* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux) and one chapbook of Poetry, *Wolf in the Suitcase* (Finishing Line Press). Her short story collection, *Immigrants*, is forthcoming from Creators Press in 2023. She has an MFA from Lesley University and taught for many years at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. Visit her website at [www.ddinafriedman.com](http://www.ddinafriedman.com).

**MJ Gomez** (they/them) is a young writer from the Philippines. Pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English, they enjoy playing guitar on hot, sleepy days and stargazing through bus windows.

**Richard M. Ankers** is the English author of *The Eternals Series* and *Britannia Unleashed*. Richard has featured in *Expanded Field Journal*, *Love Letters To Poe*, *Spillwords*, and feels privileged to have appeared in many more. Richard lives to write.

**Lea** (he/him) as a gay poet wants to explore themes of existentialism, queerness, family and all the intersections in between. He likes to take his own individual experiences and universalise them to make sense of the world. Lea currently studies Philosophy and Literature at the University of Warwick.

Educator and poet, **Monica Fuglei** (she/her) currently serves as the department of Composition, Creative Writing and Journalism chair at Arapahoe Community College in Littleton, Colorado. A 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee, her work has recently appeared in *Caustic Frolic*, *Progenitor Magazine*, and *Mason Street*. When she's not writing or teaching, she's usually knitting or tweeting on #AcademicTwitter.

**Amy Harrison** (she/her/ hers) is a creative soul who teaches high school English by day, and writes poetry at night. Her work is fueled by anxiety, grief, wonder, passion, and coffee. She can be found on the weekends exploring a local brewery and taking polaroids of the desert scape with her vintage Impulse Polaroid camera. Amy lives in Arizona with her husband, dog, cat, and over 400 vinyl records. Discover more of her snark and sass on Insta or Twitter @poetry\_and\_polaroids. You can read her poetry in *Musing Publications*, *Poetry as Promised* and *Elpis Pages*.

**Emilie Mendoza** (she/her) is a high school junior from Panama who primarily writes poetry and flash fiction. When not writing, she enjoys crochet, taking pictures at soccer games, and playing volleyball (though not in that order).

**Sadee Bee** (she/her) is ever-evolving as living with mental illness is never a straight line and hopes to be a voice and advocate for those like her. She uses art as an outlet as well, creating whatever comes to mind, and is heavily drawn to speculative and out-of-this-world elements. She is inspired by strange dreams, magic, and creepy vibes.

**dearbhla o'brien** (she/they) is a writer and theatre maker from Dublin, Ireland. They are a recent graduate of Drama and Theatre Studies in Trinity College Dublin. When not inevitably waiting for a bus, dearbhla can be found squirrelled away in the local library or a quiet coffee shop with a book.

**Cody Ares Baynori** is a writer who was born and raised in Northern Kentucky. He presently lives in New York City while he studies at Columbia University. His poetry is influenced by his life experiences as a Queer & Latinx man, homelessness, and his struggles with disability and mental health.

**Joshua Merchant** is a native of East Oakland exploring what it means to be human. A lot of what they explore is in the realm of love and what it means while processing trauma, loss, heartbreak. They feel as though as a people, especially those of us more marginalized than others, it has become too common to deny access to our true source of power as a means of feeling powerful. However, they've come to recognize with harsh lessons and divine grace that without showing up for ourselves and each other, everything else is null and void.

**Mike Farren** (he/him) is a UK-based writer and editor whose poems have appeared widely in journals and anthologies. He has been placed and commended in several competitions, including as 'canto' winner for Poem of the North (2018) and winner of both the Saltaire Festival and the Ilkley Literature Festival poetry competitions in 2020. His pamphlets are 'Pierrot and his Mother' (Templar) and 'All of the Moons' (Yaffle) and 'Smithereens' (4Word), with a full collection, 'Backendish', forthcoming from Sentinel. He is part of the Yaffle publishing team and one of the hosts of Rhubarb open mic in Shipley.

**Gregory Smith** (they/them) is drinking wine right now. They still have not finished solving their face-turning rhombic dodecahedron puzzle. You can find them sharing kandi bracelets with Metalheads or backswinging at a warehouse rave. Their poetry has appeared in The Peoples Book Volume 2 and on NHPR.com, and their debut collection is forthcoming from Game Over Books. They're an Aries and therefore are here to spit fire and truth, no matter the cost.

**Agboola Tariq A.** (he/him) is an unfolding poet from Western Nigeria & a student of law in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He explores in his writings, possibilities, self revelations & anything that exists. He is a lover of arts & drama. He is forthcoming in @IceFloePress.

**RC deWinter's** poetry is widely anthologized, notably in New York City Haiku (NY Times, 2/2017 Connecticut Shakespeare Festival Anthology (River Bend Bookshop Press, 12/2021), in print: 2River, Event Magazine), Now We Heal: An Anthology of Hope, (Wellworth Publishing, 12/2020) easing the edges: a collection of everyday miracles (Patrick Heath Public Library of Boerne , 11/2021,) The, Gargoyle Magazine, Meat For Tea: The Valley Review, the minnesota review, Night Picnic Journal, Plainsongs, Prairie Schooner, Ogham Stone, San Antonio Review, Southword, Twelve Mile Review, Variant Literature, Yellow Arrow Journal, The York Literary Review among others and appears in numerous online literary journals.