



**riprap journal 37**







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# **riprap journal**

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# poetry

## **A Boss Should Be**

*Taylor Mims*

I.

An overweight, chain-smoking nurse  
with stained teeth, cracked like a river  
of sludge on enamel. She gnawed  
the fatty grey chunks of tri tip  
and paid her daughters the most  
to win best parent in the divorce.

II.

Red hair he'd never admit  
to and biceps purchased in pill  
form at his peak in high school.  
Who waited for campers to worm  
into nylon sacks before nibbling  
on the mistress he employed  
and lighting up in the cafeteria.

III.

Glazed eyes, cataract blue,  
wanders behind wayfarers.  
Wobbles through the restaurant he earned  
with nepotism, flaky sandaled feet, pink toe  
missing a nail. Brandy breath  
catcalls blondes to offer a job,  
if they swallow.

IV.

20 years stunted since fame struck, same  
part down the middle, dyed to conceal  
sprouted greys, misogynist since mom's infidelity.  
Sympathy weight for the impoverished  
collects in gut and thighs, stabilized  
on the arms of men 20 years her junior  
and sells hope to students in juvenile halls.

**As If A Rope, Half Bone**

*Simon Perchik*

As if a rope, half bone  
half pulled from your chest  
the way this dead branch

tells you everything then closes  
though the wood won't burn  
—so many things are made from doorways

and she was left inside  
with nothing to sit on or a stone  
that will fall by itself, broken off

to die alone, whispering goodbye  
for two and this dirt not yet  
just another hole that weighs too much.

## **Backroad**

*Purshia Adams*

Cloud-deepened twilight: struggling into chill  
headwinds, envying the ease  
of creektumble (despite ice) and rosehip  
warmth; above the rapids ice  
curdles and creekrush, manifest only  
in leaf fall, tunnels through.

Ice decays under skies cleared of all but  
pink-lit pufts in the canyon  
aperture; the rush rushes with a fresh  
infusion glazing willow  
wands sclerotic, attractive to airborne  
seedfluff patient until March.



## **Biography**

*Jennifer Bradpiece*

My mother is a hospital bed.

My mother is a glamorous 5'10  
in her long cut slacks.

My mother is steel and metal plowing cold  
linoleum.

My mother is a hand model at 16 in New York.

My mother is a POW inside her skin.

My mother is a text book editor in her 30s.

My mother is hemorrhaging morphine meta-  
phors at the mouth.

My mother is a cross-word Sudoku queen.

My mother swears she's been probed by aliens;  
they watch us now, and wait.

My mother is all perfumed in her cigarette  
plums, anointed in sweet  
white wine, and lit by a Hawaiian sunset.

My mother hisses at the well-dressed palliative  
care doctor  
every time she walks in her room.

My mother calls her the “Angel of Death.”

My mother whispers to me and giggles about  
toe-faeries as i massage her feet.

My mother is a Japanese wood cutting.

My mother’s voice is not my mother’s voice.

My mother was called communist by a small  
town cop  
because she wore black and read beat poetry.

My mother is all Xrays and radioactive dyes.

My mother loses her love: impaled in a trap in  
Vietnam.

My mother contains a PICC line to another  
dimension.

My mother marries her high school boyfriend  
to move to London.

My mother is shrinking like dry sands in high  
tide.

My mother sees her aunt in flames on a movie  
screen  
the day a lit cigarette eats the bed.

My mother dreams the death of another in an  
early morning news radio headline.

My mother marries her divorce attorney.

My mother is the recoil left behind a fired gun.

My mother adopts all my friends and lovers  
while i orphan myself for years.

My mother and i recognize each other the  
night her arm grows four times its size.

My mother nearly drowns as a child.

My mother sees her body underwater from a  
tree branch above.

My mother reads Runes to us every New Years  
Day.

My mother is an octopus, her translucent  
tentacles all inked out.

My mother wears falls, dresses like Twiggy,  
looks like a young Catherine Deneuve.

My mother is a pharaoh, tugging the tubes in  
her sarcophagus,  
wild eyed,  
summoning us all to follow.

## **Chair From Heaven**

*Surazeus, Simon Seamount*

When villagers of country town in France  
see one wood chair fall from heaven, they kneel  
beside it among waves of golden wheat,  
and pray for guidance on what it may mean.

If Jesus had descended from bright clouds  
to explain divine sign of falling chair,  
he might have said they should rest from hard work,  
to read scripture and pray in fellowship.  
He might have pointed to hot-air balloon  
no bigger than a bird among white clouds,  
where chemist Joseph Louis Gay-Lussac  
floats on wind collecting samples of air.

But Jesus never comes, so they argue  
all afternoon until sun sets in flames,  
then they all walk home and sit in their chairs  
puzzled at divine mystery never solved,  
while crowd of children gathers by small stream  
to watch Joseph land balloon among flowers.

## **Cohabitation**

*Erica Brenes*

As your carton of milk  
Squeezes itself,  
Palm to palm close  
As palmers' kiss,  
Tonsil hockey tooth brush bristles  
Eskimo kiss and intertwine.

The things we own,  
Cardboard boxed and intermixed  
Bump together  
Elbow to elbow  
Like two people in the night.

## **Compounds**

*Joseph Rathgeber*

Nobody does compound words like compound words  
like Faulkner or Cormac. The latter might do something  
like applecore

while the former would do a swolebellied, or something akin to  
that.

Saltpeter isn't an invented one, it's accepted. It won't get  
a thin, red

squiggly under it in Microsoft Word. This italicizing  
business is something I need to cut out, though. It draws  
attention;

the masters would never. It would be all, Sentence sentence  
sentence

sentence riverwater sentence sentence. I remember

the softback phonics textbook in elementary school, an exercise  
with pluses and equalsigns and fillintheblanks to fill in.

Examples like,

sun + shine = and pepper + mints = and foot + prints = and water  
+ melon =,

and I'd finish first, every time. I worked fastlike,

like sunshine peppermints footprints watermelon. I worked so  
speededup that I often forgot to even put my name at the  
top of the page,

and teacher would tsksk and deduct points just to make me  
shamefaced.

## **Dinner At Applebee's With Edward Said**

*Danny Caine*

Don't give me that look, Edward. I know what I want  
and I want an Oriental Chicken Salad. Oh to taste

those fried chicken strips floating atop a mountain  
of crunchies soaked in not one but two kinds

of dressing. God bless America. Dress the waiter  
in a polo shirt and an earpiece when he delivers my

bounty and asks me if I need anything else—Sure.  
I need to look around in chew-bliss and see Elvis,

a framed football jersey, and a goddamn trombone  
all nailed to the fucking wall. I need flatscreens,

cocktails the color of highlighters, and to speak  
the name of my desire without hearing you kvetch,

Edward. My grandmother made her grandmother's  
fried chicken and my grandchildren will eat this

in these hightop swivel chairs. I'm trying to find a way  
to think this doesn't suck and Edward, you're not helping.

**Doubt A Human Ear Heard It,  
This Far In The Woods**

*Shane Eaves*

A massive trunk  
branches out-flung

like a shredded umbrella.  
It felled three others

in its topple,  
old trees whose bark

had tracks of moss  
where water ran down.

A sapling nearby bent  
and bent and cracked

90° above the needle mat floor.  
Dead slanted trunks

are line breaks in the woods—  
bark drooling on the dirt,

and the sapling, top pinned  
under the old tree's load

has leaflets in its break



## **Educational Milestones In The Life Cycle Of An Adult Flea**

*Samuel Piccone*

Learns its own anatomy,  
combs its hair backward  
over lateral body.

Learns to jump with tarsus feet.

Learns to store elastic  
resilin between its toes.

Learns its  
viral history.

Learns to “typhus-up”  
the blood, to harvest  
the rubella spots  
hiding in its cells.

Learns to fall in love  
with luminous things—  
the bowl of soapy water under a porch lamp,  
the pile of diatomaceous earth in the carpet sunlight,  
the bright blue glow  
of a flea collar in the distance

Learns to drown and writhe,  
to crave and wonder why,  
to remember the sweet taste  
of a female rabbit’s blood tapped from a tumor  
beneath her eye and how she  
ran in place, whispering to herself—  
Myxomatosis.  
Myxomatosis.

**Emily As Imperfect Light**

*Darren C. Demaree*

Hand over the flame,  
she has a mole on her  
right ass cheek that is

fucking righteous  
in the eyes of everything,  
but the rest of her occurs

too slowly, not enough  
& with very little  
uncommon discussion.

## **Everyone Has A Purpose**

*Kyle Hemmings*

turn yourself into a parrot  
w/ indigenous feather flock.  
beep. or smirk like the kid who  
once handed you a bitter jelly bean  
the color of your good fish-eye.  
years spent wasting at the window  
only to conclude that the world  
is one circle of accidental flats.  
these days everyone is dropping  
from windows to see what will float.  
but you. you won't just die.  
you'll turn to glass  
so everyone can see themselves  
at oblique half-lies.

## **Exchange**

*John Walser*

I give a plume of frost on the storm windows in the morning  
the weak sun melting owl eyes into the frontyard snow.

In the cup of my hands, a meadowlark dives from ground to  
treetop  
as though through water  
searching for the drain at the deep end of the Willowstream  
pool  
where every summer for just one weekend  
a celebration of closing  
they leech the chlorine and added trout  
hooks and feet and bamboo poles dangling over depth markers.

I carry for you in a shouldered basket the ripe peach, the  
broken bread  
the warmed over tea, the soggy ground like mesh  
the garden that wanders thoughtless, sunlight on the path  
sunlight through the slats of the park bench  
sunlight that makes the crinoline of your dress shine like  
mother of pearl.

On the kitchen table next to the plate of plums I have left a  
night  
an apostrophe of neon  
when a quartet washed umber and indigo  
hit hard and sad every fourth beat  
the bass player hurting each note in his jaw  
and me sitting alone, reading words that had begun to blur.

Here behind your ear is the moon's cycle hanging like a skull  
fossil  
in the bluff side of three in the afternoon.

And these are fiberglass curtains, a television wheeled on colt  
legs

    into the dining room –  
round steak thin as a marker stroke  
a baseball game in black and white  
windows to be shut as children rode their bicycles  
behind the truck that buzzed like the mosquitoes they  
pesticide-fogged.

This, my grandmother when we found her when I was ten,  
(Once she was a flapper and a hand model.)  
her bun hair taut, long strands grey as dementia off her chin  
curling like a seam thread – her sequined joy –  
as she sat in a bathtub of her own shit and piss  
skirt spread around her in a halo  
like for a picnic in Lincoln Park.  
I have wrapped in tissue the glow of the cold  
the sleep that comes in tremors and heat, the heft of a draped  
leg.

If I place on your pillow a sky of scrubbed metal  
a sliding glass door open to the fall air  
a paper blown from the sideboard like a slow,  
    slow wasp tracing lines on the screen  
kids in coats ballerina twirling in the neighbor's yard  
and watercolor shadows twitching like angel fish  
    gasping for air,  
will you play that disc of Nina Simone singing "Don't Explain"  
    and sit with me in the moth dark of the back porch?

## **Harry, The Contents**

*Paul Watsky*

of a foot-square, sturdy,  
polished box, snuggled by

your grown child into its  
hole, you worthily

accessorize the mission—for  
him arriving in his cream-'n-

green John Deere mini-  
flatbed to open an Astroturf

bundle and replace the ex-  
cavated earth, thrice

consolidating dirt with that metal  
tool variously called tamper or

rammer, and re-anchoring  
healthy sod so you'd never

guess—pending the regulation yard-  
tall stele: name,

status (colonel, it so hap-  
pens), dates of birth/death,

unit, and, if any, war—some-  
body abides beneath

this former divot, and you  
accessorize for an honor

guard of six in blue Air  
Force dress—campaign

ribbons, effete  
white cotton gloves—de-

livering their mute lesson on  
how to trans-

port, spread, and refold into  
a taut triangle, stars

outside, an appropriate  
US flag, and present the

thing to next of kin, your  
widow, pretending she's well-

equipped to soldier on. One breaks  
formation to play taps, soul-

fully. The entire maneuver  
burns ten minutes. Your troops,

four tall youths with flawed  
complexions, bracketing paired

way-shorter women who, de-  
spite themselves, resemble girls,

march off, reoccupy their black  
not-quite-comical compact

car, and drive away. A second sur-  
viving daughter cries, offers

up her modest eulogy, never  
mentions the bullying or

rageful fits. We leave you regi-  
mented in the seventh rank.

## **Hellhound Rides The Rails**

*Charlie O'Hay*

On bladed hackles summer boils  
to the clang of lost pursuits—

whether by boxcar or naked flat  
he zooms above the rails.

At the end of some dusty rope  
like a mission bell he sleeps,

while today's master paid per diem  
picks beets in puckered fields.

“I think I'll eat a rabbit, I think I'll eat  
a boy,” his dreams like painted barns

roll by, as the bastard sun  
chews through its leather straps.



**If It's Beer On The Back Porch You Imagine**

*Renee Moulton*

the condensation leaks out in a pithy circle  
shrouding the almanac smearing

the dates I circle in red and white  
ink blots of daffodils and larynxes

not quite deterring moths from nibbling  
holes in my favorite sweaters with stretched

out necks and wrists and cinched up waists  
what a waste the throat is a tunnel where the lights

are all switched off when the moon rises to jinx  
the witch in midchant with her hand outstretched

and a faux tiger claw hooked between her knuckles  
which are like oak apples swollen with the wriggling

larvae of her veins shifting like weather vanes  
before the water spout touches down again rips up

again dances in the stretches of nothing land  
nothing but families and folks grasping at bibles

while I sit back and witness  
rivals in the throes of the aisle at the revival

all such a silly sport when one could simply  
drink a beer and circle almanac dates with intriguing

facts like tomorrow's daughter will be stillborn  
better to wait for the kitten brood or the fuzzy

caterpillar to point north and the apple tree  
to drop lilac blossoms into the tornado

that will spit them out as paper stars  
shredding their way toward autumn

### **Ode To My Hands**

*Sarah Davis*

My digits haven't grown since the embryonic stage  
when they learned to grasp hearts,  
paintbrushes, and money

My pinky was torn in half when  
man's best friend exposed  
my secret  
that my birthmark is shaped like an 'L'  
for loser

His hands ask if it feels good  
when he moves in circles.  
I shift positions and say 'no'  
while I scrape the skin from my bones.

The privacy of pockets hide  
nails peeling nails peeling nails.  
Chemicals block the sun.  
Lack of calcium has made the tips  
of me spotted  
to match my paint speckled knuckles.

The ditch beneath my nails  
exposes my experience.  
Men with doctorates read my age spots.  
Their crystal balls tell me of my  
genetic predisposition to Rheumatoid.

“You’ll never paint again” they bark.  
No more shell collecting with Venus, or hermetic nights  
with high rising elephants.  
Only easy open pill jars and wrist splints.

My hands are dead, twisted coral  
eaten by crabs with white coats.  
And now I can’t even sign my name  
on their prescriptions.

## **Self Poem 2**

*Travis Sharp*

A ringing in the ears, the man said, that's a bad sign. The man in a gas station in Wyoming selling overpriced gas to people not from there. A beard, a beer, a symptom of lung cancer, a tattoo he got when he was younger. My ears have been ringing for years. It started with a crossing guard standing in a street. I flirted with him because he had nice hands. We left to fuck in his house. My car broke down. I think I have symptoms of leukemia. That's a bad sign, I said. I don't know. I looked and found no signified. I woke and went to the store and bought the food that you buy when you are in poverty. I ate in the parking lot on the ground next to my car. It is comfortable to occupy space in this abrasive way. Our somatic violence. Greeting other bodies. Signing I do not understand.

**Self-Portrait As Frank O'hara**

*Jax NTP*

after the third carafe of grapefruit vodka

the thick jawline of streetlights clatter

such buttery clarity what is forgiveness

but submission defeat mistaken for love

crammed within the mint echoes of small

spaces rancid clementine moldy avocados

i swig mouthfuls of spoilt milk to calm

the bellyful of alcohol even if you check

the expiration date on the day of purchase

it doesn't mean you'll remember it

it's pointless to ruin your life over a girl

who's in love with a meth addict but you

can always go back to the store to get a refund

pain provides logic which is bad for you  
for some animals the ritual pattern of courtship  
is the dance of death the satisfaction of human needs  
creates new needs the girl quotes theories of marxism  
to refuse my love cowardice is the new order of her day  
  
i wear my freudian slips like fancy evening gloves  
exploratorium it's not the anxiety that i am held up  
but the anxiety that i am holding her up  
  
i thought her lies would change me  
but they didn't that which corrodes will discolor  
i am a whiskey jellyfish certain of uncertainties  
  
each breath intensified by the solitude  
of having nothing to look forward to and i savor  
the fact that once i gave her the chance to ruin me

## **Spline**

*Meredith D. Hadaway*

Not anchor—but the word we call a tiny  
snip of something knotted in a string

to keep the end from slipping through  
the soundboard of a harp. I lost not just

the thing but the word for it, while changing  
a broken string. When I tried to pull the knot

in place the half-inch piece leapt into air.

An hour searching the rug turned up  
nothing. Worse, I didn't know the name

of what was lost—a stent, a spine, a splint?  
I only knew it seemed essential at the time.

Six months of vacuum cleaning and  
scuffing shoes ensured the [       ] was gone.

Until the day we learned my husband  
soon would lose his life.

He lay in a dark room. I went to the harp.

I knelt, hands sweeping twists and  
turns in the rug's medallion, as if I'd find

some answer there where weavers once  
had anchored warp and weft with knots.

Instead I found the little missing piece—  
no worse for all the time it had been

lying there. Not quite as soft as shrine.  
Something sharp like split or splice—

and when the word came back to me,  
I hoped it was a sign.



## **Starting Off A Blue December**

*Idalith Bustos*

I feel the splinter of the wind,  
its heaviness ripe, I can  
smell mint from someone's garden.  
The light makes allusions to  
forgotten grandmothers. A reflection  
of shadows unto weeping  
maples, and my thumb—the one with  
bruises from an accidental  
smashing.

A possum to my left,  
climbing walls. The silence  
allowing her stay. Her child  
clinging to nurture, not  
like an ornament to a tree.  
No, it's tighter than that. Pressed  
against a moment of youth.

Saw a 12 year old running  
yesterday down Somerset Street.  
His sneakers new. Each stride catching  
street lights, digging for speed.  
Thinking him young, I wondered  
if he played tag during summer,  
or if he thought it just the same.  
No more Santas, and felt old too.

Maybe the neighbors won't mind  
if tonight the residue of nostalgia  
makes up for late-night walks.  
I picture spring coming, but still too  
green, too dormant to sprout.  
I insist: let the snow shrivel  
slowly when it comes.

## **Taco Tuesday**

*Jason Yore*

Outside of the slums on Slater,  
I stand in front of the roach coach  
and wait with the mechanics  
on their lunch break.

The kids are playing hooky  
and one is too shy to step up  
to the window, thinking he  
has to order in a language  
he doesn't understand  
or the tacos he orders  
will not taste as good  
because he doesn't know  
where the meat comes from.

He orders what he can translate  
and the hobos come and collect  
cans and pick up our trash  
so they can barter with El Jefe  
for a few tacos  
that add up to a dollar fifty.

The people keep queuing.

I pick up para aqui.

I stay and eat

instead of the usual scam—  
para llevar, if that helps.

This is not a place to wait,  
but we all wait the same.

This is all we wait for  
and it comes quick.

## **The Arsonist's Lynching**

*Nathaniel Bussey*

“For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone,  
I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the  
day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of  
hate.” – Albert Camus (Trans. Matthew Ward)

In the moor's morning gloom sits a pack of wolves  
Emaciated extinguished encircling the gallows  
The arsonist stands bound foot and hand  
Steeped in gasoline

The hangman sets hemp jaws around the arsonist's neck  
He blows the hangman a kiss smiling wide  
Teeth bared like the audience  
Damp fur matted taut across gaunt frames

The arsonist lights his match  
The hangman pulls his lever  
The arsonist dangles and burns  
The pack is still until the rope is consumed

Snarls drown out the hangman's howls  
The pack pulls a yelping pup the color of fog  
Dampened ashes from smoldering remains  
He growls and plunges his jowls into the hangman's rent flesh

## **The Kids Wait Outside For Lunch**

*Toren Wallace*

a snail pulls  
along the top blades  
    re-molding itself around bubbles  
    of shaded dew

and delicate satisfaction. The back door  
is bolted with peanut butter  
and boysenberry preserves

while at the base  
the platter  
soaks in naked lemonade.

What a sticky situation  
we find ourselves in. Slipping in  
and out of a comfortable shell. Wondering,

who is more wrong. Wondering,  
if there is anybody else. The lawn  
will become a tar pit. The soil

    a bloodletting  
    of the trampled esoteric.

**The Mistake Was Waiting Or,  
How Rsvp “Works” With Godot**

*Renee Moulton*

It isn't quite half past three and I'm picking at the label on this unopened bottle of dew the droplets on the outside forming into little torrents as the sun prods me to place it back in the house in the icebox a worn out habit I can't seem to give up on eggplant as a perfect shade of midnight between the lonely bark of cedars or was it dogs jogging down the aisles of the church last week reenacting Jezebel and Elisha stood up on the pulpit with his hands clasped together for the angels to see until my mother rolled her eyes and fell into the aisle mocking his righteousness stamping and her chartreuse hat embarrassing me again and I'm sorry I've been off track do you mind if I open this bottle now because waiting is so very hard when I'm not sure if you're even going to come to the porch this evening is so hot and yet I asked politely and you didn't write back which is very noncommittal and boring of you not to say that you are boring or that you bore me but really what am I supposed to do until you get here I can't seem to open this since it isn't yet five o'clock somewhere you know I can't understand why I even thought asking you was a choice with all your messages coming undated and unsigned fluttering through the mail slot just now was a moth and it frightened me because the sun is still high and I always did think moths were creatures of the eggplant backlit cedars and cold icebox corners waiting to be scraped clean of crystals holding onto the corners of hope that you will come is so stupid now it is four and some and you aren't turning up the drive with flowers in your hand or even a message in response and I do wonder if I'll ever see you again now that I've ruined all the stationary with brown faded rings from this damn naked bottle

## **Ways Of Touching A Body**

*Shawnacy Kiker*

I lie with my face to the ground. Like Elijah he comes, lays his body over mine. His chest on my back, I feel his heartbeat against my spine, knees curved into the backs of my knees. Hands on my hands, our fingers are baskets. He presses me into the earth, like a seed. Because of his body I do not vanish, become air.

Tucking me into bed, Let's do the floof. She pulls the corners of my blanket up and then down; around me, an oblong of eddying air. The blanket falls, soft, a rectangle of warm snow. Here, come here, babe. What are you doing? Stand here. Are you--? I gotta take a leak. What, you want me to watch? Put your hands here. His body is larger than mine, I can't reach around. Hold it like this. Like this? Yeah. Up a little. Ready? Ok. Careful, don't get it on you. Feel the movement inside, like when you're pumping gas. Ok, now shake it a little. You have to shake it? Yeah, at the end, don't leave any traces.

The white room, they are taking my pulse. I offer up my arm, turned to expose the thin pale skin. The small bones, the greenish wavery Y of veins, like a drunken alphabet. The doctor holds my wrist lightly between his thumb and two fingers. He looks at his watch. It speaks in ticks. I speak in twitches of blood. He puts down the watch, hands my wrist back to me, gingerly, like a loaf of dynamite.

We brush her hair. Slow. Too much pressure and it will fall out, the tender scalp will bleed. Gently. Gently. Like touching bubbles.

When there is blood, everything is immediate. First there must be water, water. Poured out like an offering. Something has been exposed. The anointing is prepared—chemicals and salves, if she were a curandera there would be smoke, the bark of trees, drumming. But she is a school nurse, and there is hydrogen peroxide and Neosporin. No matter. Peroxide bubbles in the cauldron of the wound. Blow across it like the language of birds.

When he was a baby, he used to put his hand up my sleeve when I held him. His tiny fingers on my arm, warm and hidden, like a small rabbit.

I slip out of my shoes at every opportunity. Press the bottoms of my feet to the ground. Small pebbles, thick pudding of mud, tree bark, succulent grass; the kind of cold that makes my bones ache, the toes curl in and cramp. How else will I know?

Braid my hair, he says, I like the way your fingers move through it. So I do, two braids. Like Laura Ingalls. Like his Arapaho ancestors. Tie them together behind his head in a knot. He shoves them under his hat. They are secret braids. A woven wreath, a crown he has grown himself and I have summoned, a message folded between hands, to be opened at the proper time. Swimming at daybreak without any clothes on. I am a planet swallowed by the ocean, the ocean settled in the cupboard of the earth. My skin is an eel, my hair long grass, feeding in the wet sun. I sing a corkscrew song. Variations on a folded siphonophore. I can see through my body to the bottom of thought. The vast cracked soundboard of the planet. I flash streaks of lightning, understand without understanding. The sea is a dance, and no one digs graves in the ocean. I am wrapped in a thickness of hush and water. This is how it feels to be borne.

## **You Are The 710 Freeway**

*Kyle Moreno*

facing south you are the coming scent of april lavender you are the weight of all winds you are the city contemplating expansion you are your own richter scale anomaly you are ten frenetic lovesongs you are the transient something at the end of a cold beer you are the sustenance of warm bread for somebody somewhere











**art**





Bay Area Figurative Revisited, James Weeks, Two Musicians  
Ink and Oil Pastel

**Allen Forrest**



Beer Story  
Pen and Digital  
**Terry Liu**



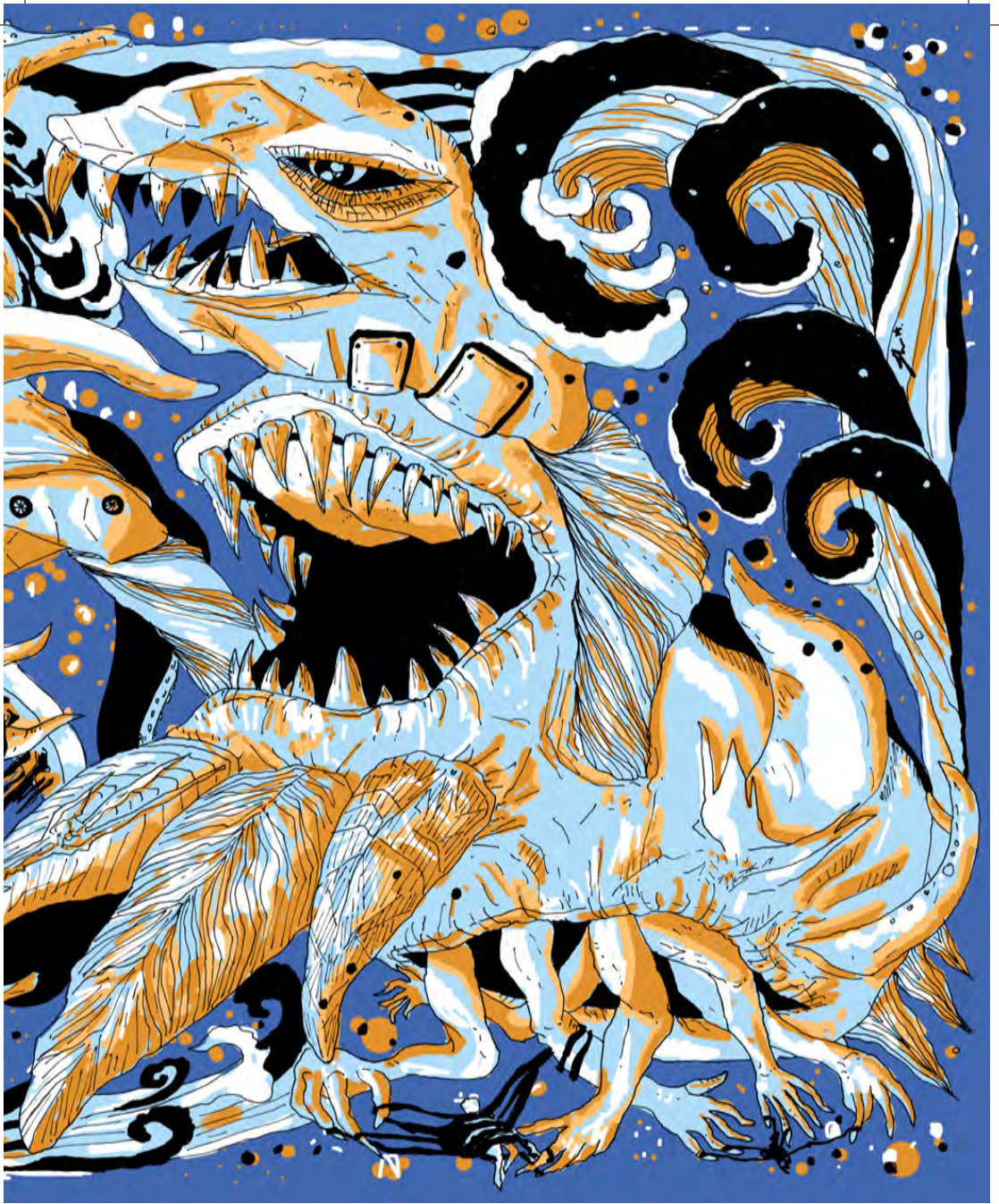


"Time is never wasted when you're wasted all the time."  
- Catherine Zandonna

"An intelligent man is sometimes forced to be drunk to spend time with his fools."  
- Ernest Hemingway



Crab Karkinos  
Pen and Digital  
**Terry Liu**







German Expressionism Revisited, Lyonel Feininger 1  
Ink Gouache and Oil Pastel

**Allen Forrest**





Looking / Living / Lingerig  
Photography  
**Nadine Flores**

Kookookachoo  
Pencil and Brushpen  
**Jamil Gonzalez**









Memoire De I EAU II  
Oil Painting

**Mia Funk**

The Pied Pier  
Mixed Media  
**Terry Liu**



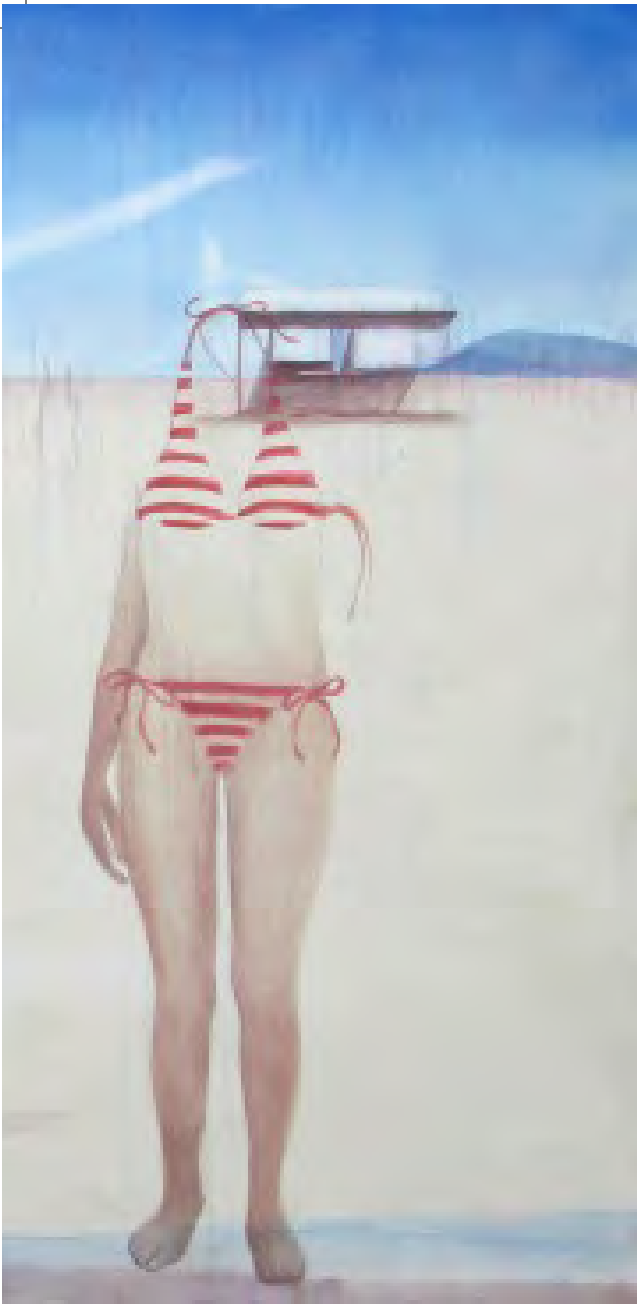




Unnamed  
Oil Painting  
**Mia Funk**







Un Ete  
Oil Painting  
**Mia Funk**

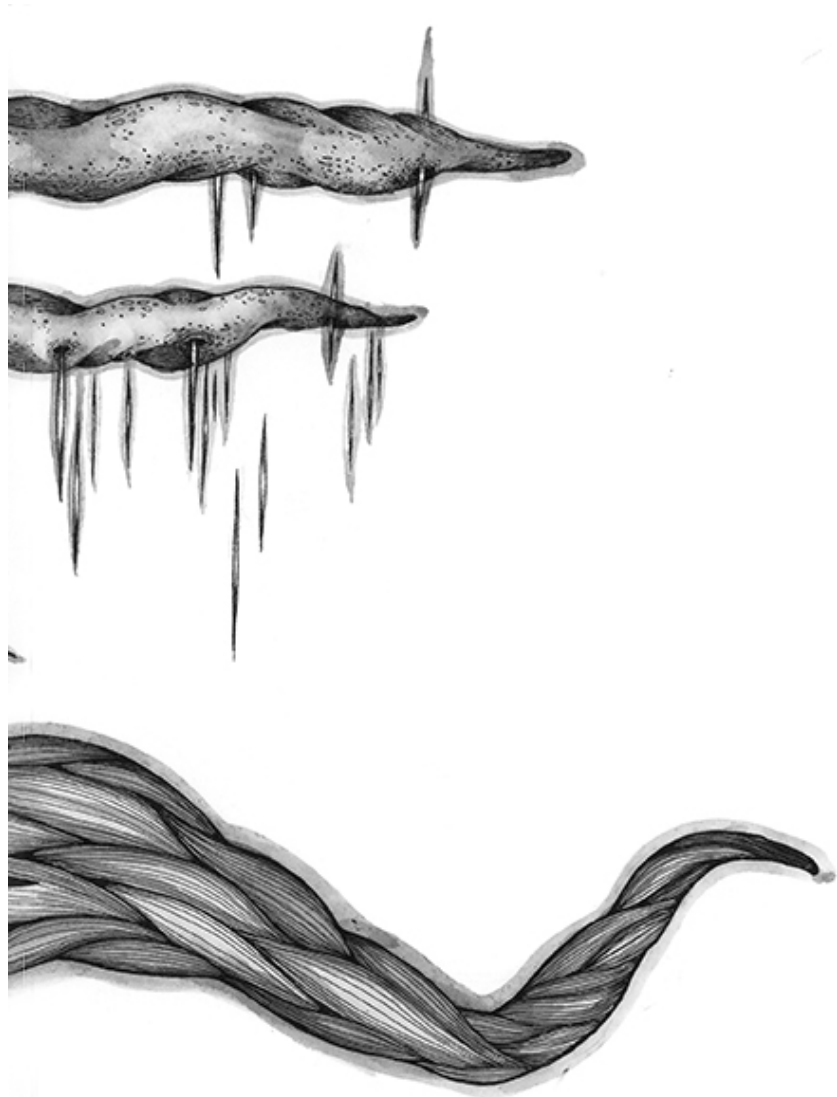




Yurt Like Glaciers  
Pen and Watercolor  
**Lacy McCune**



12 Web  
Pen and Watercolor  
**Lacy McCune**











# Prose

# **Study of Discarded Diaper as Cat**

AJ Urquidi

*(flush fiction)*

Tucked into a ball, the dripping diaper with the two-leaf twig caught in its leg hole: from the street distance I thought it a stray cat. I still do, so I've taken it home.

A can of wet food won't digest—though really, it is difficult to tell. Some kibble sprinkled in for good measure. It's been asleep on the rug all afternoon—funny how the feral comes home and assumes immediately domestic behavior. Though it doesn't know to bathe itself. Stench thickens.

Preparatory shots promptly administered. It nestles down when I scratch the underside of its adhesive ears. I think it's a boy. He does not attract fleas, a feline miracle, but the flies are proving a bother. An oily sensation spreads when lengthwise he rubs my calves.

I turn him onto his back to massage his anterior, but he's a diaper cat, not some demented dog. Unrolled, he feels exposed. I can't blame him for shredding my eye with his adorable fecal twig. It infects.

This undesired turmoil pushes reluctant decision—the cat must go. March it to preschool.

Pigtail girl on the sidewalk playing shrieks, "Of course, I'd love a kitty!" with her filthy paws outstretched. I pass the chore of care to the naïve and more responsible—he becomes her pet and problem now.

**Selfie**  
Kevin Tosca  
*(flash fiction)*

I go into the bathroom. Pee. Take off my clothes. Leave them on the floor. Put on my pajamas. Look at myself in the mirror. Shut off the light. Climb the stairs to my bed where I'll toss and turn for an hour, maybe two. Eventually, I'll fall asleep, and I'll sleep until eleven or twelve or one, wake, go back into the bathroom. Pee. Go down to the courtyard and smoke a cigarette. Look to see if the thirty-four-year-old man I "watch TV" with is home. If he is, I'll go in there. If not, I'll smoke another cigarette, sit on a bench in the courtyard and stare at the sky.

He's not home so I return and look at myself in the bathroom mirror. Eat sugar-filled cereal with a cartoon character on its box. Contemplate leaving again. Then I go up the stairs to sleep some more. Toss and turn first. Play with my pocket-book. Open the zipper, close the zipper. Repeat. Empty and repack the contents. Make some noise. Check the window to see if the man is home yet. Check my phone. Wait. Stare at the ceiling. Go to the bathroom. Look at myself in the mirror. Shower. Drink some water. Go to the courtyard to smoke another cigarette. Re-enter my apartment and look at myself in the bathroom mirror again. Brush my hair. Put make-up on. Leave the bathroom. Watch the darkening sky.

When my mother comes home, I leave. The man is home so I knock, wait, enter. I "watch TV" with him. Around eight I get hungry so I return home. Go to the bathroom. Say nothing to my mother. Eat her food. Breathe heavily like a fat man while I do because it pisses her off. Check my phone to see if my boyfriend, twenty-three, is around. He isn't, or he's busy, or he's lying, so I go back into the bathroom, fix my make-up, try to shit and pee, take another shower if I feel like it.

Then I leave, saying nothing to my mother, not telling her where I'm going or when I'll be back. I smoke a cigarette if I have one (I can always get more from the thirty-four-year-old man I "watch TV" with), then knock on the man's door again. We actually do watch TV. Eat chips. I've begun to drink the beers he offers me. They taste bad, but it's something to do. After many channel changes, much checking of phone and annoying, confusing presence of man, I leave, go up the stairs, put my key into the lock, wake my mother, my mother who now takes pills to sleep.

I go into the bathroom. Change. Wash my make-up off. Look at myself in the mirror. *Stare* at myself in the mirror. It's one or two or three in the morning again. Once again, I've broken my mother's curfew. She'll explode soon. Has to get it out like a volcano. I don't care. It's her fault. She has let me down. Everyone has let me down. I'm in the bathroom. I'm always in the bathroom. I close my eyes. Open them. Shut off the light and leave the bathroom. Climb the stairs to my bed above my mother's bed. I have little, but I do have a bunny rabbit my parents gave me when I was even younger. I keep her hidden. I sleep with her. She's ragged now, gray where she used to be white, falling apart where she used to be whole.

Yeah, there are unstuffed friends, but we never really understand each other. Not really. And there's my boyfriend. And if he's home I'll go there, let myself be fucked and maybe loved a little. When it's dark, I'll whisper in his ear that I want to be a singer. I will sing if he asks me to. I want and I don't want him to ask me to. But he never asks me to, and I don't know how to be a singer anyway.



# **Should: The Shocking Facts**

Irene O'Garden

*(non-fiction)*



**Jill, just how toxic is this ordinary substance found in virtually every household in America?**

For decades, the stimulant *Should* has been prescribed in almost every national, domestic, and professional situation, Jack. This overuse has led to rampant side effects, including dizziness, insomnia, and frequent upset stomach, resulting from the drop in intuitive (the neurotransmitter responsible for gut-feeling).

**Aren't those fairly mild, considering how much work *Should* fuels?**

We're not talking caffeine, Jack. Night sweats and nail-biting are nuisances, but operating machinery under its influence is downright risky. Yet people buzzed on *Should* routinely chauffeur children, mount treadmills, run hi-speed juicers, and text old college roommates. Authorities believe it played a role last week's riding mower pileup.

**So it's moved beyond workday use?**

Sadly, yes. *Should* is now considered a major factor in Sunday Night Syndrome, scourge of dorm life and mommy groups alike, even with available margaritas. It's been linked to depression and can interfere with the release of dopamine, causing fabulous beach vacations to be distorted into a holy hell of obsessive online obligation.

**Sounds like we're *Shoulding* ourselves in the foot.**

Right you are, Jack. The dietary impact alone costs millions of man-hours. As *Should* surges through a hunger-weakened body, Menu Paralysis ensues in two out of three diners, extending mealtime beyond reason.

Yet, ironically, while *Should* can paralyze, it can also cause compulsive behavior, such as ill-judged impulse buys for swiftly re-gifted presents, contributions to iffy group-funding projects, and halfhearted attendance at aimless social events—often fabricated by people themselves in the very spasms of *Should*.

### **Why do people do this to themselves?**

Users often abuse *Should* to avoid the terrible feelings associated with *Shoulda*, a powerful form of regretamine, which spontaneously arises near major birthdays and rapidly flipping calendar pages. Unfortunately, Jack, *Should* clogs the circulatory system very much like cholesterol, though is not nearly as fun to ingest.

### **Wouldn't *Shouldn't* be an antidote, Jill?**

You'd think so, Jack. Seems like a perfectly harmless reversal of the chemical structure of *Should*. But *Shouldn't* is a powerful impulse inhibitor and almost as dangerous. Overuse causes many phobias, including errorphobia (fear of being wrong), uncardiophobia (fear of being heartless), umbraphobia (fear of one's own shadow), and santaclaustrophobia (fear of shopping in December).

### **Are there street versions of *Should*?**

Yes. Known by the monikers *Gotta* or *I-Better*, they can be stronger than prescription doses, but what we're seeing in the clubs is often laced with *Nevermind*, which counteracts the effects. *May-B®* is the diluted over-the-counter version. Incidentally, Jack, the movie *The Bucket List* spawned an industry hawking activities to be done before one's death, but *Should* in this vaporous state is recreational and harmless.

### **Should our children even be exposed to *Should*?**

That's the tricky part. It remains a necessary supplement for children, who almost unconsciously imbibe it. Teens need it too, but thanks to their resistant hormones, it is best concealed in jelly donuts. But because *Should* has been tinkered with by amateurs and profiteers alike, care must be taken.

### **What if you suspect you have a problem?**

The important thing to remember is that there is help, Jack. The latest treatment for those withdrawing from *Should* is *Might*, which is much milder and returns a sense of control and independence to the user, often restoring normal gut-feeling. There's also a growing "naturalist" movement, Think Twice, which claims there are internal filamental indicators we can heed, which they dub "Druthers." It's a good idea to talk to your medical professional, but I won't say you (air quotes) *Should!* 'Cause that's an old acquaintance best forgotten.

**Except on New Year's Eve, eh, Jill? Thanks for that incisive report. You "should" get an Emmy!**

Thanks, Jack. I "should" live so long!

**The Creek**  
Clio Contogenis  
*(non-fiction)*

It's been years since I visited Audri's country house. I used to go there regularly with my parents and her family over the summer, back when she and I were five or six years old. All of us piled into their car and drove for six hours to their old house in the Catskills, arriving long after sunset. Audri and I jumped out of the car and scampered up the overgrown asphalt path toward the front door. Our parents told us to be careful in the dark, because the path was so cracked and churned up by the weeds growing through it, so I slowed down. But Audri never stopped; she leapt over the cracks with the agility of a deer, running gracefully right up the path and into the house. She was always filled with energy when we first arrived, but long after sunset was a very late hour for one little girl, and my eyelids soon drooped. Once we were in bed though, we were eager to sleep so morning would come sooner.

We awoke almost as soon as the sun rose, dragging our parents out of bed to make breakfast. Then we went swimming in the creek. I knew the way, but I let her lead me every time, watching the brown curls of her hair bounce on her shoulders as she skipped ahead of me into the unkempt yard. The grass grew up past my knees, and the expanse of green was peppered with dandelions. Their petals tickled my calves as we passed through. A gap in the bushes around the house opened onto the road. From here, we could see the mountains rising in the distance, their smooth curves emerging from the morning mist. The clouds cast shadows that rolled along their curves, as if the mountains were the sky itself.

We scrambled down off the side of the road and then through a patch of brambles. They scraped my legs, dotted my bare feet with splinters, but I never cared. We soon came to the trees, and the ground turned soft again. Once in a while, we saw a deer that dashed away, showing only a thrilling flash of its tail. Finally, we reached the creek. We stepped out onto the algae-covered, slippery stones, the water dancing around the edges of our feet. The water here wasn't deep enough to swim in, so we followed the current to where it pooled next to a clay bed. We stood together by the edge. The water was still

enough for us to see our reflections, mine slightly shorter than hers. But Audri kicked a small stone into the water and the reflections scattered away like more startled deer. We had learned that the water was too cold to enter slowly. We threw off our clothes and leapt gleefully in. I remember the shock of it against my skin.

We stayed in the water only a moment, climbing frantically away from the cold onto the shelf of clay, getting coated as we did. We ripped handfuls of clay out of the bed and smeared it on our bodies, using our fingers to stripe each other's faces like war paint. It all was wild.

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One time, her mother followed us to the creek, suddenly worried for our safety. While we slid and scrambled over the clay bed, she stood across the water from us. She balanced awkwardly on the rocks, absentmindedly twirling a strand of hair between her fingers. Placid and out of place, she was certainly not part of our game. We resented her presence. Losing her balance for a moment, she dropped her sunglasses and had to turn her back to us and bend over to look for them. I saw a glint in Audri's eyes.

"Oh my God, we have to!"

"What—"

She quickly ripped out a fistful of clay, shaped it into a ball, and hurled it across the water, where it hit the back of her mother's shorts with a slap. I was shocked. The thrill of being bad, of being complicit with Audri, mingled in my chest with the fear of her mother's anger. But Audri laughed so hard I couldn't hear her mother scolding us. Finally, her laughter subsided. Her mother scolded us some more, telling us to come home with her. We obeyed, but as we were walking home, Audri grinned at me behind her mother's back, extinguishing any spark of contrition I felt.

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It is now too cold to venture into the water. It is only late August, but fall comes early here. We have returned, Audri and I, older and without our parents. We took the bus this time, getting here even later than usual. We have stayed up

almost all night, though, baking scones and drinking coffee on the porch. The night air is uncomfortably chilly, so we find a couple of moth-eaten, oversized sweaters to curl up in outside. Slowly, luxuriating in every smooth movement of her thumbs, Audri rolls a cigarette, lights it, takes a drag. I envy the graceful curve of her neck emerging from under her sweater as she leans her head back to exhale a stream of smoke. Her rows of earrings dangle like chandeliers, and her rings reflect what little starlight there is.

Most things about Audri are wild. I am painfully domestic in comparison, and have spent much of my life in her shadow. It is moments like these, when I admire the ease with which she moves, the animal life coiled in her muscles, that I understand why I have followed her for so long. We do not speak. I watch her as she finishes her cigarette, and then we go inside to sleep.

We waken lazily, long after the sun, and decide to walk to the creek. We follow the same path we took as children, my feet stepping on the edge of her shadow as she walks in front of me. Finally, we reach the creek. We stand away from the water this time, making sure not to get our shoes wet. An abandoned railroad track runs alongside the creek for some distance, and we clamber over the rocks to it. Audri skips agilely ahead of me as I test each plank carefully with my feet, not wanting to step on soft, rotten wood.

“Dude, why are you so slow?” she calls back to me.

I want to make up an excuse, unwilling to reveal my unease, but she is already moving again, and I remain quiet in order to focus on catching up with her. As we continue along the tracks, the ground slowly falls away below. I am dizzied by the stripes of forest floor I glimpse between the planks. Our shadows walk along these stripes, mine still slightly shorter than hers. Looking ahead, I can see that the creek has widened into a calm river, and that the tracks curve, forming a bridge over this little river. I can also see that Audri intends to cross it.

She takes one step out onto the bridge. I want to stop her, but suddenly she is running, leaping gracefully over the gaps between the planks and letting out an exuberant whoop when she reaches the middle of the bridge. She turns to beckon to me. I shake my head, but I know, even considering my real fear, that I won't be

able to resist her. And then I am walking across the bridge, forcing myself not to watch the water streaming by below me. Only when I reach Audri do I allow myself to look down. I see I am only about ten feet above the water, but with no railing I feel exposed, ready to bolt back along the bridge.

“This is amazing,” she says.

It is hard for me to agree. I just want to be safe on solid ground. How can she be so fearless? But maybe I should be wondering about me. How can I be so cautious with only this sky above and this river below? I look down and the water is so calm that the sky is reflected perfectly in it, as though there is nothing between them; the sky and the river are one. I feel a sudden thudding in my chest, and Audri frowns as she sees a glint appear in my eyes. I take off my shoes, placing them next to each other on a solid plank. I look over the edge. The water here should be deep enough, I think. I throw off my clothes. I jump.





# **The Right Count**

Linda Carela

*(fiction)*

Judd John, a dark-eyed boy, was born in the Dixie Bus Center bathroom in 1936 and lived in his grandmother's shotgun shack until he walked away one frosty morning in 1949 when his grandmother didn't wake up. 1950, the year he turned fourteen, found him working in a peanut factory. After six months he broke out in hives, walked off the job toward the setting sun, took a left at the first fork in the road, took a right at the next, hoped everything would even out in the end, doubted that it would, counted the stars at night as if just the right tally would mean something.

By the next year he had circled around to the north, logging for timber, freezing in the Northwoods company bunk along with fifty other rawboned boys. One misty morning, before the wake-up bell, when the ice had turned to muck, he slipped out of the cabin and took to the road again, begging food from the rundown restaurants operating alongside the Mohawk Highway. After two months he meandered to New York City and knifed his way into a squat—first-floor apartment in a ramshackle, half-boarded-up building on the Bowery. The raucous nights kept him awake and lured him outside. To observe the bloody violence mixed in with slow-time intoxicated dances was like dreaming anyway. Daylight rankled wounds and he slept in a darkened, windowless room.

The heatwave of the summer of 1953 made his room unbearable, and the streets were worse with melting tar and sickening heat mirages. He threw his Perfection Kerosene Heater, his sole purchase ever, into the maw of a passing garbage truck. Judd abandoned his hard-won homestead, walked off the Bowery, and headed north, a hot wind scattering litter before him. Along Fifth Avenue the street lamps twinkled, beckoning Judd further. When he reached 125th Street, night had come in, and the junkies swayed beside him as he dug in the garbage for the makings of a meal. A rat fell at his feet and then scrambled back up the mesh canister, its stiff, hairless tail sticking out of the mound of crumpled bags and empty bottles. Judd sighed and moved on, watching the street numbers ascend,

wondering where they stopped, wanting them to hit one thousand, just for the hell of it. He prayed for early snow, believing it might portend something, like the discovery of a magical tiger or the revelation of a hidden kingdom.

By dawn he reached the water, plopped down on a shore boulder, and watched plastic debris float by. He had not eaten in two days, and the stinking muck of the bank bore nothing promising. He dozed on the smooth rock and awoke when a gull alighted at his feet and squawked. He made a lunge for the bird but missed.

“You can’t catch those things,” a squeaky voice behind him said. “Why don’t you catch a fish, huh?”

Judd leaped off the boulder and shrugged.

The boy, a scrawny teenager, blew air through his lips and stuck his chin out. The boy’s lip had been split open recently, and he licked at the wound. He squinted into the sun, as if deciding something, and then waved his arm at Judd to follow him. Judd, knowing what he knew of the crafty ways of boys, thought there’d surely be a bigger man waiting at the end of the jaunt, but what the hell, there might be food too, so he followed the boy out to the upper reaches of Broadway.

The boy, Dewit he called himself, led Judd into a dusty park strewn with garbage and then up a steep, dirt path into a dense, wooded area that smelled of decay and buzzed with mosquitoes. The boy chattered about hideouts and ammunition and booby traps and declared that he was fourteen years old. Judd calculated that he himself was twenty-two, although he might have missed a year or two. In a hollow, hidden from any path, stood a ramshackle contraption of plastic sheeting, warped shingles, and a few crumbling sheets of plywood.

“That right there is my place,” Dewit said, pointing his chin at the junk pile.

Judd nodded. He’d seen worse. Having nothing was worse.

The boy drew two bottles of beer from a dirty, styrofoam cooler, and they sat quietly outside the shack. Judd drank slowly and watched Dewit. He had the soft brown eyes of an old man but the nervous energy—twitching, jumping, shrugging—of a recently released convict.

“My brother Reginald’s dead. And Bobo’s dead too but he was just a baby. Mama’s dead. Ain’t never had a daddy, but if I did he’d be dead too. Grandpa’s dead. Grandma’s half dead. I’m the last of the living. What kind of sense can you make of that? Huh?”

Judd reached over and slapped a mosquito. He shrugged, grew pensive. “Maybe you’re tough.” Judd sat back against the flimsy wall and kicked his legs out straight. “I’m tough myself.”

They waited for the darkness. Strange that on summer evenings it seemed it would never be properly dark and then suddenly it was. When the moon rose, Judd handed Dewit the empty bottle and left the woods. He decided to spend some time uptown. Food pickings were slim but it was cooler than downtown, or maybe the weather had just taken a turn. The next morning he walked west on Dyckman, out to the furthest edge, where the Hudson River lapped and sucked at the shore. Down river the bridge glinted in the sunlight; across were the stark cliffs of New Jersey. Judd stood still and waited for something to swell inside him—a recognition, something like the sigh of relief that he felt when he first came to the mountains from the south. But nothing and nothing. Only that shack in the woods, which would make a perfect squat, isolated enough so that no one could find it or steal it, but on the outskirts of the city so Judd didn’t have to kill everything that he wanted to eat.

After two weeks, certain the boy would be long gone, Judd picked his way back through the damp woods. He would fix that hovel up, make it a regular lodge, tight and snug for the upcoming cold, but as he parted the overgrown shrubs and the shack came into view, there stood the boy next to a box bound in twine. Dewit had vaulted up the loading dock of the Pio Pio Live Poultry Market and stolen a chicken, thinking to make some kind of pet out of him, but chickens were not kittens, and DeWit was ready to throw the squawking menace in the river. Judd threw his head back and laughed. This he knew how to manage. He slit the chicken’s throat and then plucked and gutted it, and roasted it over a smoky fire, much to the disgust of Dewit, who

nevertheless ate the lion's share of the meat.

"Spending the night out here?" Judd asked.

"Always do," Dewit said.

Judd shrugged. He had lost his taste for knifing his way into a place. Besides, a place like this was not worth much blood. We'll see what happens he thought. He stood and kicked at the doorway until the whole shelter loosened and tilted. "Place not much good," Judd said, expecting a fight. Instead Dewit nodded and then revealed his stash of tools and spare materials. Judd spent three days hammering and patching while Dewit chattered and nodded in approval.

Judd stayed uptown, visiting Dewit in the afternoons, spending the nights at the end of the subway platform or huddled in a doorway. Judd whistled as he walked the streets, hands thrust in pockets, leaning forward into the wind. If he knew to think it, he might have thought he was happy. However, by the end of October, a cold wind was upon them. Perhaps the winter needed to exact retribution for the blazing hot summer, Judd thought. He pondered going south, but his only memories of that place smelled of sickness and boiled collards. Ironically, the place that beckoned was north—the white pine forest—but he doubted that they took deserters back. Still, he walked along the hard cement, imagining the spring of pine needles. On the last day of October, an icy rain came in, and Judd headed into the park. He entered the shack without knocking, slung his bag of raggedy clothing on the floor, plopped himself down on the thicker of the two bug-ridden mattresses, and declared he was moving in. Dewit nodded his head and smiled. Judd, who knew loneliness but not kindness, suspected trickery, a plot of some kind. But as night after night passed with no knives drawn, no fists raised, no threatening curses, only Dewit chattering about death, luck, and food, Judd knew he had hit the jackpot.

Judd and Dewit passed November stockpiling goods: wires of various gauges; bits of discarded lumber; two cement blocks; a dented cooler; a rusty hammer; a crowbar; a warped saw; sixteen wood-handled steak knives; a roll of firecrackers, Dewit's most prized possession, "when the authorities find us,

we can blow up The Hideout with these”; moth-holed, scratchy blankets; and plastic jugs filled from a hydrant that was always open over on Tenth Avenue. The inside of the shack, with two men now inhabiting it, was too small to store most of this, so Judd and Dewit piled their treasure outside in crates and boxes, camouflaging each cache with cut weeds and shrubs. By late afternoon they stopped work and sat and watched the darkness come earlier and earlier. Before sleep, bundled in blankets, they recited inventory, calling out items to each other and arguing over which had more value. Judd felt like he was a boy singing nursery rhymes or reciting his prayers by his grandmother’s side.

Three days before Christmas, for which they had been stockpiling cans of yams, cranberry sauce, and a bottle of whiskey, Judd noticed the light in the shack seemed off, too yellow. He opened the door and stuck his head out. “Hey, Dewit, looks like a storm might be coming up?”

For two days they had woken up to flowers of frost decorating their blankets, their plastic water jug frozen solid. Dewit kicked at his mattress. “Too damn cold,” he said. “This is no place to spend Christmas.” He had a grandma somewhere with a warm apartment. He pulled his blankets off his bed and dumped them on Judd’s mattress.

Judd, bundled in the same muskrat coat he had from his logging days, reached deep into his pocket and pulled out a broken gold chain and swung it around. “You could go get yourself that girl you’ve been talking about. That would keep you warm.”

Dewit moved forward and grabbed at the chain, missed, and fell into Judd. A girl wouldn’t refuse a gift of a shiny gold necklace, not so he heard. “Hey, give it to me,” he said.

Judd let the chain fall into Dewit’s palm, inch by shimmering inch, until Judd just held the broken clasp. A look passed between them, and Judd let the chain drop into Dewit’s filthy outstretched hand. Dewit closed his hand over the chain and brought his fist up to his rotten-toothed mouth.

“Hey, don’t forget Christmas. You don’t want me to drink that whiskey all by myself,” Judd said as Dewit left.

Nighttime came and went. No Dewit. Christmas came and went. No Dewit. Judd looked around at what he had patched and repaired, the chinked-up holes, the hobbled-together furniture, the soft pillow, which Judd had made with all those plucked chicken feathers. He bundled himself in blankets and paced, cupping his hands over a lit cigarette. No warmth. He tossed the cigarette onto the dirt floor. It sparked for a second and then went out. The plastic sheets, duct-taped to the inner walls, billowed in and out, like breath.

Most days hunger drove him out. He garbage-picked stale donuts and expired milk, and paced around Dewit's bare mattress as he ate and mumbled, "*Not so cold now.*" "*Yeah, I plugged up some of those holes.*" "*Just another month or so.*" "*Yeah, then we'll have it good.*"

By mid-January the sidewalks were slick with ice, and the street shone like patent leather. Cars skidded sideways as they braked, and sometimes one would pivot around completely so that the driver was suddenly headed back into whatever hell he had just managed to escape. Dewit had been gone three weeks.

Judd stuck his finger in the return slot of a pay phone. Nothing and nothing. City or wilderness, it was all the same crap shoot. The dice were rigged and if you won once or twice, it was only a trick to keep you playing. Only dumb boys like Dewit believed in luck, believed a windfall waited around the next corner. Judd paced beside the empty benches, something mean hallowing out his guts, something worse than hunger or cold. He spat it out on the sidewalk, and still the awful thing reached up into his throat until he hunched over and began to cough.

Judd began to go to sleep earlier and earlier as the winter set in, first seven, then six and then five, the sky the midnight blue that only winter achieves. He rose in the perfect darkness of 3 a.m., left the park—even in the dark he now knew the path perfectly—and moved from dumpster to garbage can to black trash bag. Sometimes, most delightful times, an object would appear right in front of him—a sparkling, glittering object. He bent down, certain that he would grasp nothing, a cruel mirage. But still he stooped and sure enough it was a



quarter, a rhinestone earring, a brass button, a bicycle bell, a stainless steel fork, and once a small, round mirror, neither cracked nor broken.

Alone, on the edge of a city of millions, his sightings of other humans had narrowed; he imagined he might be the last man remaining on earth, the last to gather all its treasures. Now he was back to the start, the time before Dewit, the squat down on the Bowery, the Mohawk Highway; hell, even back to his grandma's shotgun shack. Once again he had the stars, the sun, and the moon just for himself.

The days lengthened but the cold intensified. Judd convinced himself that he had forgotten about Dewit, and maybe sometimes, in the middle of a sparkling discovery, he did. But then Judd dreamed of a fat lynx sitting on a tree limb on a moonlit night, or a sleek otter taking one look behind him before he slipped into the river, or a yellow-eyed coyote padding silently through a pine forest. No matter the animal, it always twitched and tossed its head and so Judd knew it was Dewit.

He thought he should just burn the shack down, start over again somewhere else. He even carted a can of gasoline out to the woods. But then he discovered some piece of loot (a silver dollar, a pair of wool socks) that Dewit had tucked away. The place, no matter how useless, wasn't his to burn. Judd scavenged more blankets, even a sleeping bag, and decided to hunker down. He covered his head with a blanket and lay there feeling his breath warm and damp against the wool.

On one of his rare excursions to the other side of the park, he found an owl, a dead owl, but somehow perfectly preserved, except for its eyes, which were gone, leaving the tawny bone of the sockets staring out at Judd. He took the owl, tucked it under his arm, brought it back to the shack, and placed it on Dewit's bed, propped up against the wall so it stared into the room.

Judd began to forget the world, forgot to eat, forgot to remember. Some mornings he didn't bother to get up and fell into daydreams of imaginary beasts and deadly munitions, booby traps and roadblocks. He was a wild thing, a dangerous

thing, a formidable thing that no one dare gaze upon. He was prepared to survive anything - an attack by foreign enemies, a ferocious storm, a pack of man-eating wolves.

Then spring came suddenly with moist heat and the weeds sprouting up green before the snow even melted. Day after day of fifty and then sixty-degree days. A last snow fell the first week in April, wet and sticky and good enough to eat, as last things often are.

Judd had survived the winter, but the spring began to kill him. The damp muck of it made him cough and itch. He alternated between sweating and shivering. One night when his teeth wouldn't stop chattering, even though he lay under a massive pile of blankets, a figure appeared in the plywood doorway. It was too big to be Dewit, but it had to be Dewit, Dewit grown up.

"You need food?" the shadow asked.

"Nah. Bring me something that lasts," Judd muttered and turned his head away. In the morning Judd looked for footprints in the mud but couldn't find any. "You ain't no Dewit. You a jinx," Judd said.

By late April, when the daylight stretched into the evening hours, he couldn't rouse himself to scavenge even necessities. He sipped, a huge effort to reach one sweaty arm out from under the blankets, his dwindling supply of water, and then he slept and slept. At the slightest noise he burrowed deeper under the covers. But at morning's first light, Judd would peek out and talk to the owl, not the speaking of commerce, the rare shop transaction that Judd had occasionally made, but the speaking of the heart, of longing and loss. The owl would stare back with his hollow eyes, his variegated brown feathers rustling in the wind that blew in through chinks in the wall, his broad, still face portending a wise answer. Sometimes Judd would reach out and stroke the soft downy part of the owl's chest and know that he was not truly alone, could never be completely alone.

With the owl watching over him, Judd dreamt and dreamt.

He was a running wild boy, jumping over creeks, turning over rocks, finding newts and snakes and toads. He was climbing trees, the rough, sappy bark scraping the inside of his thighs. He was hollering from the top of the mountain, listening to his echo. But no, it wasn't an echo. It was another boy, a boy by his side. Judd looked the boy up and down, and then Judd held his arms wide and went ripping down the mountain, stumbling, tumbling, kicking up dirt and rocks. He looked and the boy was right there beside him. They were a gang, a bloodthirsty, wild pack of two. They would greet the sun and the moon and count the stars, and the tally would finally come out right.

# **The Sky That She Looks Upon**

Michelle Bracken

*(flash fiction)*

She believed in the power of the sun. That it could clean all kinds of things.

Start over.

She believed in a good hook, could find herself again and again in the replay; the bass, the drums. Again and again.

She believed that all kinds of things were possible, the kindness of a stranger, the love of her mother. The sound of a record on the player. That she would forever be thirteen.

That summer, her mother told her how she and John Lennon were connected. That her birthday and his death were one and the same. A thread pulling them together.

She believed this, too. And she even loved Yoko, and began to say YES instead of NO or WHY NOT. YES. The sun. The drums.

The sound of John singing in the car, the cassette in the tape deck, the windows rolled way down, the heat on her face, the sun in her hair, her eyes.

Darling, darling, stand by me. Oh, stand by me.

John was singing. Her favorite song, this one. She liked how it shook, how it turned.

“This would be so good,” she said to her mother, “for Mellie to skate to, on the ice.”

Her mother was driving, had been driving. Days. Her hands held the steering wheel lightly, her fingers soft. She nodded. Sunglasses. Like a movie star. The girl thought about her sister in the back of their station wagon, how even at the age of five she liked to dance, liked to move, and that maybe, she'd like to skate. On the ice. On TV. The Olympics, maybe. They had never been to the ice, but the song. John singing. The pulse of the beat. It was like a fire through her veins. It made her want to move. Sometimes, she wanted to kiss him, or hold his hand. Maybe even be him. She sang along. As they drove the curves of the hills, the sun hot and high, the weeds yellow and dry, burning. Again and again, she sang. When the car overheated, they pulled off to the side. The music was gone, and the girl sighed. Wiped her face. The sweat. Her mother grabbed her purse and Mellie, too. They began to walk. Away. Somewhere

beyond the road, beyond. The sun heavy. The girl left in the car. Thirteen.

“Stay here,” her mother had said. “Watch the car,” she said.

We’ll be back. Back. Just wait. She sat in the front, her seatbelt off, her feet on the dashboard. Burning. Her toes turning red. Singing. She sang to herself, her finger in a strand of hair. Turning. Again and again, turning around her fingers. She waited like that for awhile. So hot. Just wait. Cars passed. Some honked. Keep driving. Faster and faster around the curve. Loud. She noticed the car before it stopped. It was slow, like a turtle, and it crept behind her. It parked, and a man got out. Came closer. To the window. He looked at her feet, her toes, and then her. His hands on the door, leaning in.

“Everything okay?” he asked. His eyes, so dark.

She looked at him. She nodded. YES.

“Everything is fine,” she said. She tried to smile. Just a little one. Not too big. She stopped turning.

“You thirsty?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she said, though she wasn’t. She was. She didn’t know. She looked out. He walked around the side. He walked to her door. Opened it.

“Come on,” he said. “I’ve got some water, soda.” He smiled. Big. His teeth, so white. His hands on the sides of his pants, wiping the sweat away. She looked out. She looked out into the hills. The sun so heavy on her face, her back, her hair. She looked out, beyond the road. Beyond. Her mother. The man walked back to his car, held out his hand, reminding her.

“Come on,” he said. Again. She followed.

He gave her a drink. A bottle of soda. It was hot and burned her throat. She was dizzy. Her head was heavy, her face hot. She tried to sit. To get back up. To get back. He took her then. Into his car. Buckled in the back, the bottle in her lap. She looked out to the sun. Driving. He kept driving. Beyond her mother’s car. Beyond her mother, her sister, coming back. She

used to believe in the power of the sun. How it could clean all kinds of things. Start over. The heat. Burning. The sound of a record on the player. John singing. All gone now. Yes.







**The Vacancy**  
Laura Picklesimer Greenberg  
*(fiction)*

Tim had taken to watching the homeless in the parking lot below him each morning. The view from the barred window of his bedroom offered a spread of asphalt wasteland and a distant glimpse of the Hollywood sign, just two letters visible through the upper corner of the cracked glass. With a cup of black coffee in hand, Tim kept an inventory of each one, from the prostitutes, to the lean, sinewy meth heads.

The neighborhood crack whore visited Tim's block every morning around eight. She never worked this early, but instead spent the time drinking and occasionally taking laps around the parking lot, which remained free of cars until the night clubs opened it for valet. Today, she gulped down some Popov, straight from its plastic container. After passing the vodka on to the next recipient, she leaned against a wall of graffitied concrete, taking in the sun.

Tim dumped out his coffee dregs and readied himself for the day's chores. On Mondays, he had to trim the brush growing around the barbed wire fence that barricaded him and his tenants from their neighbors in the parking lot. He would need to take out another rental ad on Craigslist. The cracked tile piece on the lobby floor also had to be replaced.

The phone rang earlier than usual, around ten. Tim had just returned from trimming the hedge and rushed into the apartment to answer it. The caller ID read UNAVAILABLE.

"Wilcox Apartments. Hello?"

Tim thought he could detect the sound of breathing, but maybe it was just his own. His throat tightened, the acidic taste of coffee making his stomach churn.

"Grace? Is it you?"

His whispered words hung in the air for a second until he was met with silence again. Tim put the phone back in its cradle with a gentle click.

*VINTAGE 1920s APARTMENT. Steps away from the Walk of Fame, movie theaters, and all the hottest clubs. Carve out your place in Hollywood now before it's too late!* Tim read the words back to himself, weighing the flashy euphemisms against the apartment's actual appearance, its worn carpets

and dank interiors. The downstairs apartment had been vacant for the fourth week now. The owner, Diane, would be livid.

Around noon, Carl knocked on his door. He was a recurring figure in Tim's weekday chores ever since a nervous breakdown had put him on leave from his job at Kinko's. Frail and slight, he moved soundlessly through the halls, a strained expression always imprinted on his face.

"Hey man, I need you to check my apartment. I think someone was in there this morning while I was at the store," he told Tim.

"We've been through this before, Carl."

"Could you look around for anything suspicious?"

"I'm just the apartment manager. Why don't you give your doctor a call?" Tim said.

"I can't trust many people at this point," said Carl. "I'm starting to think the doc might be in on it too."

Carl regularly saw dark, masked prowlers climbing up the building to spy on him. Tim normally caved to his demands, batting at empty hangers in Carl's closet to search for hidden burglars among his clothes until he was satisfied that they had taken up and left. But Tim held his ground this time.

"I have to meet with the owner soon."

"I suppose I can take another look myself," Carl said.

"Keep an eye out for your girlfriend, Tim. People are crazy out there."

Grace had been gone now for about a month, but most of the tenants still thought she lived with Tim. She never did have a strong stage presence.

When Tim first met Grace, she was at an open casting call in Santa Monica, arriving late after coming directly from lecture. Tim was helping his friend cast parts for a short film with a micro-budget. Two minutes of auditioning, and he narrowed Grace down to the cold truth: "Pretty enough to warrant her own glossy headshot thrown in with a pile of a hundred other pretty-enough actresses, but nothing more."

She stuttered through the first few lines and grew more timid as the audition wore on. The character was bold and

unapologetic, but she delivered her lines with a cautious uncertainty that only intensified over the five-minute audition span.

As soon as the ordeal was over, however, life returned to her face, and Grace managed to pull a genuine smile from the casting director. She flashed her gaze over to Tim, and her eyes traveled down to the worn copy of the book he had been reading in between auditions. She leaned against the casting table and picked the novel up without asking.

*“The English Patient. Good movie,”* she said, one hand trailing from the book’s jacket to the table, inches from Tim’s arm. *“Depressing ending, though.”*

All the intensity she had lacked during the audition was present now in her direct stare, and Tim was too surprised to even answer her obvious statement. She offered a quick goodbye, slid off the table and was gone.

Tim guessed Grace might have a chance at a callback at least, but his friend immediately tossed her glossy headshot into the “no” pile. Something about her eyes, the sudden energy that came over her face when she wasn’t auditioning, made Tim retrieve the laminated photo during a break between seeing the other actresses. He waited until enough time had passed and chanced calling Grace.

*“Is this some sort of pity date because I didn’t get the part?”* she asked, when Tim attempted to ask her out. *“How desperate do you think I am?”*

*“I shouldn’t have called you,”* Tim apologized, prepared to hang up when he was met with momentary silence. Grace’s voice stopped him.

*“So what time are you picking me up?”*

Before dating Grace, Tim had been living on the charity of a small group of friends who came out to L.A. with him after high school. He soon was spending most nights at Grace’s single near campus, sleeping in on mornings when she headed to class or an audition. It was amazing, frightening really, how fast everything could change.

The two rested in bed one balmy June afternoon, intertwined and heavy with spent lust. With school over, her lease

up in August and not one acting gig in sight, Grace would have to move back to her hometown in Iowa. Tim couldn't bear the thought of returning to the sagging, beer-stained couches of his friends' apartments, lying by himself each night in someone else's living room.

He had recently begun work on a new screenplay, a romantic comedy that could be filmed locally on a limited budget. On weekday nights when he'd stay over at her apartment, Grace would fall asleep early, and he would recline next to her on the bed, typing while the blue glow of his laptop cast shadows over her bare legs. He'd pause only to touch her head and sweep back some of her golden-brown hair.

"What if we found a way to make it work?" Tim asked Grace, maneuvering so her head rested across his chest.

"How?" she said.

"You want to stay here in L.A., right? With me?"

Tim prepared to kiss her, but Grace pulled away and looked up at him instead, a flash of uncertainty across her face.

"Yes," she finally answered.

A few days later, Tim stumbled across an online job posting for an apartment manager at a central location in Hollywood. The owner was looking for an artistic personality, someone who could stay around the apartment during the course of the day and pursue his own interests from home. The job came with a small monthly wage and free rent.

"It's perfect," he told Grace. "Just what I'm looking for. And you could stay with me, keep auditioning and not have to stress about paying for a place." Tim felt a stirring of pride.

"I'd take care of you."

"That sounds amazing. But are we ready for this?" Grace asked.

"Sure. The owner said it's a large one bedroom, with plenty of space."

So Tim and Grace headed to Hollywood.

"I've been out here a few times," Grace noted of the area. "With the girls. Kind of crazy, but fun."

The bungalow-style apartment building was weathered and sagging, but the manager's apartment was large as promised

and offered a wide view of the streets below, from Hollywood Boulevard, north to Franklin Avenue. Tim found a certain attractiveness to the building's elaborate cement moldings, its moody hallways lined with blood-red carpeting and dark, torch-like lamps.

"It has a lot of character," Tim decided.

"Yes, exactly," the middle-aged owner, Diane Bain, agreed. She was twenty minutes late, but rushed them through the building. She had stretched herself into white leggings and a tiny tank top, with a plunging white blazer. Her hair was set in tight blonde curls, and she kept a huge pair of gold-rimmed sunglasses over her eyes for the entire interview.

"You sound perfect for the job. You wouldn't believe some of the lowlifes who contacted me about the position. And with two people managing, it'll be a piece of cake. I can't imagine all the writing you could get done with this sort of setup. Now, you're both writers?"

"I am. Grace is an actress," Tim answered.

Diane placed her hands on her hips and looked Grace up and down. "Well, of course, with that face."

Grace smiled.

"I'm going to be honest, though. I normally don't trust actors. I prefer writers. Less theatrical. More stable."

Tim searched Diane's face to tell if she was serious, but it was impossible to decipher what emotions hid behind the mask of her gold glasses.

Diane gave a little laugh. "But I'm always willing to make exceptions. Welcome to the building."

Tim didn't have much in savings, so Grace bought most of their furniture with the remains of her student loan package: a new desk, a flat screen TV, a queen-sized bed. Tim and Grace quickly discovered the realities of their new neighborhood: the bands of homeless, the pulsating music from the nearby nightclubs, the late night gang shootings and shrieking sirens that followed.

"There's an actual encampment down there," Grace said a few days in, pointing down to the makeshift tents that lined the far side of the parking lot. "A crack whore's wandering

around by the bushes, looking for a John or something.”

“Don’t call her that,” Tim said, but Grace ignored him.

While they were in the midst of unpacking, Diane arrived unannounced at their apartment door, dropping off a typewriter for Tim.

“Just to get you in the right frame of mind,” she told him.

“That’s thoughtful,” Tim said, cradling the heavy contraption against his chest. Diane didn’t return his smile.

“I noticed the smell of marijuana on my way up to your apartment,” she said. “I have a strict no-drug policy around here. This isn’t some roach motel,” she said, her words turning from honey to venom.

“Of course,” Tim said, staring in surprise as Diane stormed away as quickly as she had arrived.

When Grace returned to the apartment after bringing up another moving box, she eyed the worn gray metal of the typewriter.

“You can’t actually write with that thing. It’s totally useless.”

“It works. And it might be helpful to write without any distractions like the Internet,” Tim responded. He had decided to leave out Diane’s other words, her sudden and strange hostility. “Anyway, it was a nice gesture.”

“I just hope she doesn’t try to pawn off any more of her junk on you,” Grace said.

When Tim tried the typewriter out the next day, the arm immediately stuck. He couldn’t figure out how to fix it. To prove Grace wrong, however, he kept it on his desk, an image of his dedication to his craft. He told her that he sometimes used it when she left for auditions, not wanting to bother her with the harsh sounds of typing.

The broken typewriter still rested in Tim’s bare living room a year later when he set out for his morning chores.

Every Monday afternoon, Diane dropped by to check on Tim en route to tennis practice at one of her Thousand Oaks country clubs. Her shrill voice pierced the lobby, cutting through the sounds of traffic outside.

“Is number 11 still open?”



“Hi, Ms. Bain. Yes, it is,” Tim answered, meeting her at the bottom of the stairs with his management binder.

“And why the hell is that? We’re in Hollywood! I can barely drive down the street without hitting someone.”

“I did get one application two days ago.” Tim rifled through his binder, producing a rental sheet. “He hasn’t gathered money for the deposit yet, though.”

She snatched the paper from him so hard it made a snap. “Tony Jackson. That sounds black.”

She thrust the paper away and turned around.

“What’s this?” she asked and kicked at the broken floor tile, crumbling it further. “I know I already told you to fix this.”

Tim bit the side of his lip and answered with a sullen nod.

“I can find plenty of desperate artists who would jump at this opportunity. Understand?”

“Yes.”

After Diane’s departure, Tim was left alone for the rest of the afternoon. He thought about writing his thoughts down, but there were too many, and most of them only brought him back to Grace. Around sunset, the phone rang.

UNAVAILABLE.

Tim saw Grace’s face, her freckled nose, pale eyes. Of course, it wasn’t her on the other line. The phone number for the building was blasted all across town: on Craigslist, in rental property ads, across the very side of the apartment building. Someone was playing a cruel prank on him. Grace would call Tim’s cell phone, not a landline if she really wanted to talk to him. Still, he couldn’t stand to let it ring.

Tim picked up the phone.

“Hello?”

There was no answer, of course. Tim fought back the impulse to say her name, anger rising within him. “Who is this?”

He heard breathing. He was sure of it this time. He slammed the phone down.

Tim had tried to stay even-tempered and optimistic, but Grace made no attempt to hide her growing desperation,

especially toward the end when everything began to unravel at a faster pace.

“They’re all idiots,” Grace had declared. “Every single person in this building is a moron.”

Tim took to placating tenants like Carl, coming to their aid when they locked themselves out of their apartment or accidentally stuck a pizza box in their oven, setting their stove ablaze. Grace, meanwhile, kept her relationship with them official; she simply collected rent, counted all the payments and posted up three-day notices on the doors of those tenants who still owed money by the sixth day of each month.

Grace stormed into their apartment one winter evening.

“I had to tape up seven notices today. Seven. That’s a third of this entire building late on rent.”

Tim tried to change the subject: “What auditions do you have this week?”

“None. You know I haven’t been to one in a month.”

“Why not?”

“Oh, come on. We both know I’m not very good. I thought it would be fun to try in college, but with the competition and—I don’t know. I think I’m ready to start exploring other options. Maybe get my real estate license.”

“Real estate? You were a sociology major. Anyway, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve been getting a lot of writing done,” Tim said.

Tim was scratching out less than a page each week, work that would be disrupted by the sounds of a brawl in the parking lot or quickly crumbled and trashed when Tim read the words back over to himself in the late hours of the night. He grew depressed trying to write about quirky romantic escapades when he could see club goers vomiting into the front hedges from his window. After moving to Hollywood, his screenplay had stalled in the middle of the second act. But Tim didn’t have a white picket fence to return to in Iowa, a place to sit and mull over substitute careers. He couldn’t afford to give up.

A letter came for Grace in April. Student loan payments were due.

“I need a job now,” Grace said. “And I need to get out of here.”

“We need to get out of here,” Tim corrected her. “We’ll get our own apartment soon, a nicer one. We just have to get first month’s rent and a deposit. I’m thinking we give ourselves three more months.”

“Three months? You promise?” Grace said.

“I swear on it.”

In the meantime, Grace began working as a waitress at a seedy bar on the corner of Selma and Cahuenga. She’d come back at 3 a.m., exhausted and angry. At least she was making money, Tim reminded himself. He barely scraped by on his monthly sum, and the apartment took up all his free time. Grace had given Tim cash for the last two grocery trips.

Summer swept in, 85 degree nights in the apartment with no air conditioning. The bedroom window had to remain open to dispel some of the heat, but in return, the clubs off Cahuenga brought pounding music and drunken screams into their bedroom. Tim tried to stay as still as possible, to conserve energy and minimize the moisture that clung to his entire body. But Grace tossed and turned, taking the sheets off, then struggling to find them again, sending the cheap mattress into a frenzy that would awaken Tim.

“Stay still!” he hissed.

“The sheets are scratching me. And this stupid music.”

“Just stay still and go to sleep,” Tim said.

“Fuck off.”

Grace ripped at the sheets, scratched her stomach, then her legs. Tim could feel the bed jerk as she rubbed her legs and arms attempting to find relief.

In the morning, Grace called Tim into the bedroom. She stood in her underwear and turned around to reveal four large welts covering her back.

Tim thought maybe Grace had scratched herself raw from stress. Then the scratching began for him, large painful bumps that blistered and bled when he accidentally dug his fingers into them at night. The tenants soon began ringing, complaining of similar problems.

“Bedbugs,” Don, the handyman Diane sent around her buildings, told Tim, after he had flipped the mattress over, revealing the incriminating rust-colored stains dotted along the bottom. He shook his head and leaned against Tim’s dresser, shifting his heavy weight onto the feeble wood of the furniture. “Bad news. Ms. Bain is not going to like this.”

“What about me? And Grace? What are we supposed to do?” Tim asked.

Diane refused to pay for fumigation. She ordered Tim to go to Home Depot instead and buy a cheap home kit. Half the apartment had reported the insects, and there was no possible way to trace their origin.

“Gotta dump or bag everything,” Don advised.

All major furniture—the bedding, picture frames, wooden tables, upholstered chairs, clothes—had to be trashed or decontaminated, which in their case, required the items to be tied in black trash bags and left to bake in the sun’s rays for a day.

Tim and Grace stuffed their smaller possessions into large Hefty bags and laid them out in the backyard, piles of black lumps strewn out on the yellowing grass like body bags.

“I don’t like this,” Grace said, peering through the barbed wire at the grouping of homeless people in the parking lot next door. “You think we can keep this stuff out here for a whole day?”

“We don’t have a choice,” Tim told her. “I’ll keep an eye out while you’re at work.”

He reached for her hand, but she had already turned to go back into the building.

Tim and Grace spent the rest of the day carting out their larger furniture to the dumpsters. By the time they moved the bed and couch out, their shirts had grown dark with sweat, and Grace was late for work.

“Can you carry the desk chair down the stairs while I grab the bedside table?” Tim asked her.

Grace rolled the chair out of their apartment to the winding staircase and straightened to wipe the sweat from her forehead.

“Hurry up,” Tim said, “I’m right behind you.”

She glared back at him and with one swift motion, kicked the chair ahead of her. It rumbled down the stairs, gaining momen-

tum, and cracked into several pieces on the lobby floor.

“You broke a tile,” Tim said, racing down the stairs to inspect it.

Tim noticed Carl’s wide-eyed gaze from across the hall.

“It’s fine. I just dropped a chair,” he explained.

Tim stared up at Grace, who stood immobile on the stairs. “Great, now you’ve upset Carl. And I’m going to need to replace the tile.”

“What’s the point?” Grace said and glanced around at the faded wallpaper that wrapped around the front lobby entrance. An ambulance rushed by, casting a brief red glow over Grace’s face. Exhausted, Tim took her advice and left the tile. Their one bedroom may have been entirely bare, but Tim was relieved to have it to himself when Grace finally left for work.

He considered a nap, but remembered that he had nothing to lie on, not even a mattress. Tim was searching for a spare air mattress in the closet when a tenant pounded on his door, a young mother in cutoffs and no shoes, announcing that her toddler had flooded the bathroom sink.

Tim spent the next two hours unclogging the drain. When he was able to return back to his apartment, it was dark. He remembered the bags in the backyard—he’d last checked them right before nightfall. He headed down the stairs, through the back hall to the yard behind the apartment complex. Tim made out the shape of the first trash bag. It appeared deflated. He reached out for it, but it had been slashed and torn open, most of its contents gone. All the bags had been gutted. As Tim stumbled through the yard, he realized that several bags were missing altogether.

The screenplay Tim had hoped to write while apartment managing, his dreams of being a writer, all of it, had been replaced with just one desire: a desperate hope that no matter what happened, he’d still have Grace here with him. Tim’s mind raced to find a solution, a way to bring back their missing items, to give Grace a reason to fight through this battle with him. He searched through what he could save and salvaged only three bags that had remained largely intact, filled with a few pairs of shoes and some clothes, and brought them back to the apartment.

Tim couldn't gather the courage to tell Grace what had happened when she returned from work. He stayed frozen on the air mattress beside her for most of the night, trying in vain to devise a solution to his mess. The next morning, however, Grace caught sight of the three surviving trash bags.

"Where's the rest of everything?"

Tim remained silent.

"What happened to the other bags?"

"Grace, I've saved some money this month. I can help you replace a lot of this stuff."

"Where are the bags?" she whispered, soft but insistent. The lack of anger in her voice terrified Tim.

"I don't know. They were only left alone for a couple hours."

Grace gave a short, horrible laugh. Tim's eyes burned with tears, but Grace only continued with her convulsive laughs. Finally, she stopped. "I can't do this."

"Grace—"

"I mean it. You can stay." She shook her head. "Not me." She pulled the remaining bags toward her chest. Grace moved out that night, with so few possessions remaining that she could fit them all in one suitcase.

After Grace left, the days dragged on, and Tim's morning routine was only punctuated by the occasional recognition of one of his items down in the parking lot. Tim never recovered any of the missing bags, but he soon spied his own clothing, worn by an unfamiliar homeless man outside the 7-11 or in the alley when he dumped the trash. Sometimes, he wasn't sure if he was imagining things when he'd catch a young runaway in a sundress that matched one of Grace's. These chance sightings kept Tim on watch, kept him hunting out his window day after day. And answering the mysterious calls.

Searching through the bars of his window at the beginning of another week, Tim noticed something unusual during his morning survey. The local prostitute didn't have her typical drink. She walked around the parking lot nine times, the longest exercise Tim had ever seen her complete. She settled next to a wiry old man who had parked a grocery cart against

the fence. Tim, watching from above, saw the man bring out a book. He stretched his neck, trying to determine the title— to see if it was, in fact, a copy of one of his books, a remnant of his life with Grace.

The phone rang. Tim abandoned the view below him and entered the living room toward the caller ID screen spelling out the familiar word, UNAVAILABLE. Each ring grew louder, overwhelming his senses. Tim tried to block it out, but all he could see were Grace's eyes staring into him.

He looked out the front window, across the broken street that connected Wilcox and Hollywood to the apartment building across the way. The person on the other end of the line could be anyone, anywhere. Except her. She had left, and Tim would still be here, alone.

He shook his head and repeated back the last thing Grace had told him.

“Not me.”

The phone continued to ring, flashing its tiny red light over the receiver, tempting him to answer. Tim didn't pick up this time, but instead left the apartment, letting the door slam as his voice on the message machine took over: “You've reached Wilcox Apartments in fantastic Hollywood. I'm not available to take your call...”









# Interviews



Victoria Chang's third book of poems, *The Boss*, was published by McSweeney's in 2013 as part of the McSweeney's Poetry Series and won a PEN Center Literary Award and a California Book Award. Her second book, *Savvinia Molesta*, was published by the University of Georgia Press as part of the VQR Poetry Series in 2008. She is a contributing editor of the literary journal, *Copper Nickel*. She lives in Southern California with her family and her weiner dog, Mustard, and works in business.

# **Victoria Chang**

by Taylor Mims

***Riprap: Your latest book, “The Boss,” is partially inspired by a boss you no longer work for. Did you write any of these poems while you were working for that boss or did you need some distance from that person?***

Chang: I definitely needed some distance from that person! It took me several years to process my relationship with that person and to actually want to write something about that experience. Someone this morning said that our most important relationship at work is one with our boss and it really resonated with me. It really can make or break a worker’s experience at any organization.

***R: The poems in “The Boss,” lack punctuation. Could you explain how the exclusion of punctuation came about for this collection?***

Chang: I just never started using punctuation because it felt like the poems didn’t want punctuation. This is a great example of allowing the poems to lead the writer versus the other way around (more normal for me). As time continued, it just kept on feeling right so I kept on leaving punctuation out.

***R: How do you balance being a poet working in the corporate world?***

Chang: It's very difficult to balance anything really. It's hard to balance being a parent and working. It's also hard to balance anything creative with the corporate world. It's hard to balance being a help to my elderly parents and parenting my own children. I think it's typical of people my age to balance things/juggle things. I would say that this is more and more the state of our existence as jobs require more than they used to out of workers. I would say that my New Year's Resolution is to try and strip everything non-essential out of my life. I don't have hours in the day to volunteer at my kids' school, as an example, that's just the truth so I have to strip it out and help where I can, but not try and do everything.

Also, working in business can really take up all your creative juices. I just let it do what it does b/c I really do love working. If I don't write for a while, I don't write. Maybe I'll get back to it another point where writing feels essential. I trust the process of life and living and try not to think too much about it.

***R: You reference 9/11 several times in "The Boss." Could you discuss why those events recur in these poems?***

Chang: 9/11 is something that stays with me perhaps b/c for me, it was when everything in America changed. Life pre 9/11 and post 9/11. Since then, it doesn't seem America has ever been the same. Those were such powerful images of people hanging onto ropes or hanging out windows that they are forever seared and branded into my brain. I can't ever forget it or those images of people suffering needlessly.

***R: The poems about your father are particularly powerful. Was it difficult for you to write so much about your father and his condition?***

Chang: It was very cathartic. It's one of those things where it was hard to watch someone so intelligent deteriorate. Now we are in the reality of dealing with someone who doesn't understand that much. It's very difficult to deal with it now, like bringing him to the eye doctor is such an exhausting process!

***R: Overall, the poems in the "The Boss" seem to have a dark nature to them. Was that intentional?***

Chang: I think I am sunny by nature in person, but poetry is where all my darker thoughts come to play--I think that's true for a lot of writers. I think nothing in poetry is ever intentional for me--poetry has a way of revealing truths that aren't even known to me or deepest thoughts that are sometimes dark and it's a wonderful way for me to explore those thoughts. I think most people don't explore them--it's a lot easier to go watch a movie or to go to Disneyland. Poets don't have that luxury to be like everyone else--we, by nature, like to explore and dig.



Poet, performer, and librettist, Douglas Kearney received his BA from Howard University and his MFA from the California Institute of the Arts, and is also a graduate and fellow of Cave Canem. Kearney teaches at CalArts and lives in Santa Clarita, California, with his family. He has released three books of poetry, including *Fear, Some* (2006), *The Black Automaton* (2009)—which was a National Poetry Series selection—and *Patter*, which was released in 2014 and explores themes of miscarriage, infertility, and parenthood.

Non-fiction section editor, Marcus Clayton, managed to interview Douglas Kearney on Skype over the winter to discuss the poet's aesthetic and overall view of the creative landscape—not simply limited to poetry, but sprawling into performance and music. The following transcription follows their conversation as closely as possible.



## ***Douglas Kearney***

by Marcus Clayton

***Riprap: When you write a piece, do you concentrate on how it will be performed, or is that secondary?***

Douglas Kearney: Well, throughout the entire time that I'm writing the piece, I'm reading it back just as much for a sense of the musicality of the poem. I mean, ideally, as I'm designing the book and designing the work, the hope is that more people are going to end up reading it than seeing me perform. Every performance I do is not on YouTube, so my hope is that the book will have a longer reach as an object. That's why, while I'm really aware of how it sounds, how it plays in the air, if I had to make a choice between something that I thought would be a strong compositional moment as a text versus, "Ah, this is the moment in the reading where I'm gonna get to go, 'BOOYAH!'" I'm going to favor the text. That being said, it might just be my own aesthetics, but at some point, those things stop being separate to me and I think that they inform each other. I'll be honest that, for the most part, where I enjoy performing the most—nowadays, really—is in the space between the poems. I do want the poems to have musicality; I do want them to have a shape and arc. Sometimes, though, I do want a poem that feels almost stuck or feels like it's stumbling. I think I have an affinity for a kind of performance of desperation (and I'm not saying that jokingly). So if a poem is performatively failing, those are spaces where I feel I can draw a lot of kinds of nuances out because that's one of the major concerns of the work. The failure: what can this actually accomplish? Is my personal skillset available, or is the cultural skillset at the level necessary to make something succeed. There's always that moment of, "will the culture allow me to have—and writers of all different stances—to write an

image that will remain pure or unsmudged. Amaud Jamaul Johnson has written about this: if you're a black person, eating a watermelon in public is no longer eating a watermelon in public. So, what does the culture allow us to have? Those kinds of failures are the sorts of things I'm most interested in.

The moments of performance that I most relish are, of course, the Q and A, but also the banter between the poems. Then, I'm in this really beautiful space where I'm in the realm of my poems—but I'm not limited to reading what I've already written, what you could read on your own. I'm talking *about* my poems, re-creating the kind of ideational space from which my poems come. And I'm in that space with a room full of people who like poetry. And because I'm there talking, being some kind of version of myself, I don't have to fill my poems with jokes or certain kinds of ironies. At the end of the day, you're standing up there in the body you have in front of a room full of people who have their bodies, and you're presenting your poetry. So that, for me, is separate from the book as a concept, as a phenomenon, and certainly as an artifact.

***R: Your most recent book, Patter, finds your work experimenting with “typographical poetry” a lot more than your previous efforts. Do you find yourself continuing on with that kind of poetry, or is there something else you'd like to experiment with in poetry?***

Kearney: I definitely feel like I'm trying to see how close I can get to “looking”—and I'll explain what I mean by this in a second—while still “reading.” In other words, at some point, even if it's all words, will the poem become a picture? And, for some people, that's already happened in the work. I think, as I'm composing the work and as I'm pushing the work, in my mind I know that if I were saying to myself, “let's make this a picture,” I would make very different decisions. While

someone's experience of it might be, "well, this to me is a picture. I'm no longer reading a poem," I know that they would be getting something very different if that had been my intention. Part of my interest is seeing how far I can push that before it breaks into a "visual art" experience.

I do worry about the difference between an honest interest and a style. I have, at different points, felt like, "I'm not going to do [typographical poems] anymore," but I've also thought the other way around. "I'm not going to work in conventional, lineated lines." It must have been about a month ago—because it was when all the [Mike Brown and Eric Garner] "non-verdicts" were coming out—I started listening to [Rap group] Public Enemy again, and instantly all the reasons I started doing typographical poems came back to me. I've said before, if I had been able to record with Public Enemy during the "Bomb Squad" days or De La Soul during the "Prince Paul" days, I probably never would have done a typographic poem. To me, that's what those poems are about; they're about creating that same kind of sonic fiction, but I want to do it visually. So hearing Public Enemy again totally drove me back to thinking in those terms.

There are things that I'm still very interested in seeing if I can do with [Typographical poems]. There's a density and there's a messiness that I don't think *The Black Automaton* really demonstrated—it was still fairly orderly and all about controlled motion and sending the eye in different places, but there was still a sense of flow to it. The poems in *Patter* really over-jam the flow so that there are so many options: "Blues Done Red" comes to mind. But the poems that I'm working on now are really much more like [Jean-Michel] Basquiat paintings, or the textual equivalent to Romare Bearden collages, or funk. Something closer to messiness. It's going from density to more of a question of legibility. I'll be honest; I am most

interested in the book as a space. I love performance, but in order to do some of the things I want to do with performance, I would need a mixer, additional turntables, something to sample my voice—basically, the kind of things that [Poet] LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs does so brilliantly. That’s the kind of place I would need to go to get the same sort of excitement that I get from working on the book. So I guess, you know, I’m a studio artist [laughs].

If [the typographic work] gets to where I really want it to go, it would be inconceivable to perform it without technological interventions. I can’t. I can’t because there are layers that suggest simultaneity and overlap. There are things that happen to your eye that I can’t approximate in a way that would have the same sense aurally. I have real trouble understanding when people say my work is performance driven, unless a person just doesn’t find my work terribly interesting. If they just find my performance interesting, then I guess it is what it is, but that’s not what I’m after.

***R: How much does music play into your poetry? Does it simply amplify the work or is a main influence?***

Kearney: Fred Moten once said, “I hear a piece of music and it makes me want to write a poem. Now, if my poem isn’t an attempt to imitate that music, it won’t be worth much. My poem will not be that music, but perhaps I can get to the secret of that music through its poetic reproduction.” So, I’m interested in the poetic reproduction of certain musical effects. My first book, *Fear Some*, I half-jokingly refer to that as a “pop album,” *The Black Automaton* is a “hip-hop album,” *Patter* is a “soul album,” and my next book will be a “funk album.” The book I’m working on for 2015 collects my opera libretti, so: opera. In this thinking, [I see the works] in terms of sequencing and organizing the book and figuring out what

holds them together. Now, *Patter* was easy to put together because even though it wasn't precisely a "project book", it was all interrelated. I knew what could be in the book, and there were things that didn't go in. Really, what helped make those final choices was the sense of the tone that I got from the idea of the music. So, for me, the "soul" aspect of *Patter* is the blending of the secular and the sacred, and so much about the body, yet it's being channeled through these lyric poems. For me, that was soul.

The two rock groups that I think about the most, when I think about the relationship to the work that I'm interested in, are Queens of the Stone Age and Radiohead. Queens of the Stone Age is straight murk, there's a sludgy kind of density. I love that. [Singer] Josh Homme's falsetto over that [sludge] creates a really beautiful tension. [Radiohead's 2000 album] *Kid A* was important to me when I was thinking about *The Black Automaton* because of its austerity.

Music is really important to me. There is that old saying about poets being frustrated musicians, but there are things that I can't accomplish in music. Not because I don't think that I have resources that are up to the task—if I can't do it, then I know people who can—but, to me, there's that visual aspect of a poem. There is the time you get to spend looking at something, and thinking about it, and hearing it. Music cannot, as easily, accomplish a sight pun. You don't get that visual in quite the same way, especially now as we get further and further away from having record covers or liner notes to hold. Music is a house of metaphor for me. In black cultures, it's difficult to find an art form that has proved as useful or as much as a repository of idiom as music. And because I am deeply interested in black cultures, [it has me thinking] what would happen if we move away from the aural and oral and into the textual modality? I love music, it's important, it

informs, but there's definitely a point where I go, "this isn't going to be a song."

***R: What is your view of the poetic landscape of today?***

Kearney: I'll say that one of the things I'm seeing a lot of—that I find interesting—is a lot more mix and register. Some of it linguistic register. Maybe it's just post-modern. But in the work that's most exciting to me, even when it's not experimental work, it feels less like it's trying to be fluent. At that level, you begin to ask questions and wonder, "if you're not going to be fluent in vernacular, are you then going to be fluent in this highfalutin literary language?" And then sometimes you don't get the sense that that's necessarily something that [contemporary poets] are interested in either. The roughness of the edges is showing in a way that I find really interesting. In terms of larger, less compositional questions, right now I'm interested in the number of things that are bringing people to ask questions about the presence of the political of poetry. What is poetry being called to do? How is difference to be recognized in poetry? Is it the duty of the different to blend in? These kinds of questions, to me, are becoming more consistently a part of the conversation, and I think much of it is because there are more people who are in positions of influence and decision-making who have an interest in these questions. There are more ways to have large questions. If you go to a really vocal poet's Facebook, you're going to find [status updates] frequently; a certain sense of a dialogue that's happening in real time with people trying to understand how we should talk to each other. It's a trip to read comments when there's a debate happening among poets because I wonder "does [being a poet with an alertness to what language can do] mean we should be more careful or does it mean we should be even bigger assholes?" [Laughs]

I find the level of social engagement that's happening in the poetry world that many people thought was solitary pretty fascinating . Working as a poet at poetry *can* be pretty isolated. You get together at AWP, then you kinda disappear for a year, then get together again at AWP, get drunk, and behave badly. Fights start, people cross each other, and now that is a thing that's always happening. People are always at the "cocktail party." I find that to be really interesting as that sense of "always in conversation" begins to penetrate the work itself. I like this whole—well, I'm *interested* in, I'm not sure I "like" it—I'm interested in what that kind of "social" means: what it means when people stay basically writing "answer raps."



A former Fulbright scholar and graduate of Harvard Divinity School, Emily Rapp is the author of *Poster Child: A Memoir* and *The Still Point of the Turning World*. Her writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Salon*, and *Slate*, among other publications. She is the recipient of a Rona Jaffe Writers' Award, a James A. Michener Fellowship at the University of Texas-Austin, and the Philip Roth Residence in Creative Writing fellowship at Bucknell University. She is currently the Joseph M. Russo endowed chair of Creative Writing at University of New Mexico.



# **Emily Rapp**

by Kylee Hoelscher

***Riprap: You quote a lot of poetry, fiction, philosophy, etc. throughout the memoir. How did these works play a role in helping you cope with Ronan's diagnosis? Did you find yourself searching through your bookshelves looking for a poem or section of prose that fit the moment, or would lines appear in your mind as you wrote? Specifically, you quote T. S. Eliot's "still point of the turning world." How did that end up as the title?***

Emily Rapp: The works I quoted were literally entirely random. I went to the bookshelf to find solace, yes, but much of what I read and found comfort in was due to the random nature of the book case I happened to search on that day. In other words, my choices could be chalked up to having collected, for almost four decades, a random collection of novels, poetry, Bibles in different languages, and books that interpreted those Biblical tales. If it had been more calculated, I don't think all of the imported knowledge would have worked in the same way.

***R: This is a very personal story. How did you decide what to keep to yourself and your family and what to share in your blog and memoir? Were there things you wish you would have kept out of either?***

Rapp: I tried to write about my life within the context of larger universal issues. So although I was grieving my son from a hideous disease, I also talked about grief in general, about illness in general, about disability in general. Whenever we write nonfiction, the great challenge is to make the personal universal, and that was my goal in

everything I sat down to write. I'm happy with what I chose to reveal and with what I did not. Those choices are a part of the manipulation that characterizes all narrative, memoir or otherwise.

***R: You've mentioned that you wish people would realize that this memoir portrays a version of yourself—not you completely—and that you wish people would focus more on the book than the author. Writing non-fiction, how do you attempt to distance yourself from your writing?***

Rapp: I craft a persona, and I try to write a tight narrative that takes the narrator (a version of me) on a journey in which that version of me is changed. Meanwhile, the person who wrote those journey is moving on with her life, being forged by the fire of her continuous new experiences.

***R: You have mentioned that you wanted to end the memoir while Ronan was still alive so it would be more about his life than his death. You did a beautiful job of bringing Ronan and your love for Ronan to life. Was it your decision to add the Afterword to later editions? What was the reason for adding the Afterword, and how was it emotionally different from writing the rest of the book?***

Rapp: It was a joint decision between my editor and myself. I was in a very different place in the Afterword, and I wrote it out of a sense of gratitude and peace.

***R: You credit your editor with helping structure your stories into a storyline. Can you speak on that?***

Rapp: Like all good editors, she helped me identify narrative

tension, places where the story was repetitive or unsatisfying, or places where language became overwrought, as is a potential pitfall in writing about grief.

Rapp: You mention being lonely, “even with a partner.” Upon reading the memoir, however, Rick is hardly mentioned and when you picture yourself living on the coast of Donegal, you only say, “Ronan and I.” You do say in the Afterword that the book is for Ronan and also for Rick. Was it a conscious choice to focus on your relationship with Ronan given the state of your marriage at that time?

Rapp: My story as a mother was my primary focus here, yes.

***R: Your writing is so controlled even when you are in the depths of your heartbreak. How did you manage that?***

Rapp: Honestly, I have no idea. I will say that I endlessly revised, as all writers must do.

***R: With Ronan, you said, you learned to live in the “present moment.” Living in such a fast-paced culture when everyone seems to be wistfully pursuing such a mindset, have you been able to carry that attitude with you?***

Rapp: Sometimes, but not as often as I would like. That said, I will say that although I’m still a neurotic writer!, I am much more go with the flow. And I do try to make a conscious decision to be grateful for what has been given to me, as well as what has been taken away.

***R: You mention that this time of your life was not a time to be fragile; it was a “time to be fierce.” That attitude resonates through the book, in response to your own disability, dealing with Ronan’s Tay-Sachs diagnosis, and even with people who challenged your “obsession” with exercise. Do you think of yourself as a “strong” person?***

Rapp: No. I think of myself as someone others refer to as strong because they wouldn’t want to face the challenges I’ve faced. Anyone who is out in the world trying to do good, be good, think and feel honestly, is a strong person. Me no more so than anyone else.

***R: There are a lot of references to hikes, nature, natural healing (Reiki) and Buddhism. Were these a huge part of your life before Ronan’s diagnosis and you were able to use them to help during this time or was this something you explored after learning about the beneficial effects these could have on him?***

Rapp: I’ve always been a huge outdoor enthusiast, from childhood even. And as a trained theologian, I have always found wrangling with issues of spiritual significance and consequence to be weirdly calming. Go figure.

***R: You make references to fate, luck and random chance. Has your search for answers made you more at peace that you cannot be responsible for bad things that happen in your life or hopeless that bad things can happen at any time?***

Rapp: Not really. I don't believe in luck, but I also long for it. I think chaos is terrifying, but I know that life would be boring without it. So I'm not sure what to think about any of those things. It's something I'm keen to explore in my next book.

***R: You say the people of Mesopotamia told tales to help them “understand who they were,” and “what their purpose on the earth might be.” Do you feel that telling your and Ronan’s tale has helped you understand more about yourself and Ronan’s role in your life?***

Rapp: Everything I know about anything important I learned from Ronan. He altered my life in every significant way. If my purpose was to be his mother, then I am grateful for that opportunity. Without him, my heart and mind would be a lonely place.



Earlier this year, Viramontes was the keynote speaker at the Latino/a Literature Symposium at CSU Long Beach. This symposium commemorated the thirty-year anniversary of the publication of *The Moths and Other Stories* and the twenty-year anniversary of the publication of the novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*. She also led a special creative writing workshop seminar for selected CSULB students from the English Department creative writing graduate and undergraduate programs, as well as students from the Chicano and Latino Studies Department.

This interview took place by phone on March 27th while Viramontes was on the road, traveling to speak at a university in Lexington, Virginia.

# ***Helena María Viramontes***

by Janea Wilson

***Riprap: What is your personal writing process, and what inspires your work?***

Viramontes: My process, with writing, since we only have so many hours in a day, and working full time and teaching, I had to take time off to write. And so what I do is I clear everything out when I get to my computer. Go through emails, clear out notifications, anything that can be a distraction. And then I just sit there and write.

I like to do what Toni Morrison says and be in the company of my own mind. I refocus, I refresh my imagination. I do these writing exercises. I sit with my slips of paper and my phrases and my sentences and see if anything pops out to me. I am a slow writer, and I have a capacity for curiosity.

Like I mentioned in the workshop, I did not grow up as a reader. And no one was writing stories that had to do with my life, my family, my community, so I decided to write them. I wanted to humanize my people, my family. I have a love for stories.

Writing is practice. The only way to write is to make yourself a space and physically put your ass to the chair and write.

*R: The other day in a fiction workshop, the instructor told a student that including Spanish in his text could alienate readers. There was a lively debate about this, and the students spoke up about the danger of “Othering” languages. Your work was cited as evidence that you could “code switch” in literary works and maintain your audience. How important do you think it is to defend that sort of cultural integrity for a writer, but also as a reader?*

Viramontes: I’ve been told that Spanish does get in the way of understanding, but I assure you that if you don’t understand Spanish there are dictionaries, there are ways of making the reader understand whether it be through other context or what have you.

This is a political problem, it’s a political problem. No one was sitting there telling Cormac McCarthy to not write in Spanish. He has pages and pages in his writing in untranslated Spanish. So I say it is a political problem. Even if you have sometimes one word, a simple word, *abuelita*, the editors will want you to change it.

Language is morphing. It’s always been morphing, you know? About 15 years ago we didn’t have the word **smartphone** and now we do. And so language is always morphing into something, and I get really excited. I get to thinking about the different things we can do with language.

If I’m writing about the Filipinos in my novel, then of course their voice and dialogue and their way of viewing of the world would be in their own spoken word. How could it not be? When I’m writing about the World War II zoot suiters, they have their own kind of language, the pachuco language. How could I not use it if I’m going to be writing about them?



I'm glad that you all defended that. No it doesn't alienate the reader. Not anymore than Tolstoy who used the French terms in *Anna Karenina*. Nobody told him that if you use these French terms that he's going to alienate his reader? Of course not. I'm not comparing myself to Tolstoy by any means, but there is an integrity. If you're aware of what you're doing as a writer, then you have to keep the integrity of your world and your characters intact.

Essentially disagreed, and said the student needed to put in footnotes. I replied and said to the student, "I really don't think you need to, because we have Internet access, so you can literally look up anything at any given time, even sitting in this classroom right now. I don't think it's a fair argument against including the language as his own artistic point of view."

Yes, and then you see—look we have *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz, okay? He uses a lot of Spanish in there. Got a Pulitzer Prize. Not only that, it was voted by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) who once a year will talk about the five most important printed books of the decade. Guess who was the top novel?

We live in a different world now and the language is morphing and it is exciting. And so it may be alienating to some, so what? But you can Google that in a minute.

***R; I read in an interview that in your upcoming book, *The Cemetery Boys*, you plan connect the legacy of violence from World War 2, the Zoot Suit Riots, and the post-9/11 world. Do you outline/plan this connection before you begin writing, or did this connection happen organically as you worked through your narrative?***

Viramontes: It happens very organically. I had no idea. What I wanted to do was to start with the Mexican-Americans of my mother's generation, go back into wartime, during World War II. The idea of the novel and interest with that war started with the Ken Burns documentary on World War II. It was a whole series, considered one of the best on World War II, and yet it did not include any history of Mexican-American participation. For me, it was like "Here we go again." It was a complete eradication of our history!

Both of my uncles were in World War II. One of my uncles who was my favorite, favorite—Uncle Kiko—came back really fucked up. He would always come to the house and take my sisters and me out for ice cream, for candy, to the park. He would drink and tell us stories about the war. And of course at that time nobody knew about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. At the time nobody knew anything. So in preparing for this novel, what I did was start doing research on World War II, and then Mexican-American participation, and then I got his letters. He came back sickly both in mind and body. So that's how I began. I just wanted to write his story. And of course to write his story was to write the story of his generation, his and my mother's. And to write that generation's story, I had to write about World War II, Los Angeles, and to do that I had to write about the Zoot Suit phenomena and about the multicultural history that Los Angeles has.

***R: A lot of your writing and work is based around your drive for social justice. Why that is especially important to you and what changes would you like to see in social justice?***

Viramontes: There's all sorts of ways that in terms of discussion and dialogue that you can radicalize people's views on things. I was listening to Cherríe Moraga because the new edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* has just been republished. She was in New York, and it was wonderful to hear her, because I consider her a true revolutionary visionary. She really is. She's just "Wow!"

She talked about how people can transform society by first transforming themselves one thing at a time, and going about doing that by just being impassioned by one issue and then working towards that one issue whether it's homeless shelters, whether it's getting a diversity of curriculum, or supporting the Dreamers on immigration issues. Whatever it is that you have a passion for that you act upon and try to do something better with it. That's the greatest advice people can get in regards to political activism.

Like I told Cherríe later, "If you go to a place where nobody reads books and you open a book, physically open a book, and you sit there for hours and read, that can be a political act. What you are doing is you are showing other people that there is this thing called reading. When they don't see that, they don't hear that, they don't know that. In terms of that, that's how I go about [advising on social activism]"

So I guess it's opening up people's eyes to realize that we're here. That we matter. That we all enterprise in this great nation. That we are the muscle and sweat of this nation. The immigration flow keeps our ideas alive, keeps our imaginations going, keeps this working mechanism of what the USA is. It keeps it going, you know? And representing our people, this is my role, my passion and so that's why I do it.



Cecilia Woloch is the author of six collections of poems, most recently *Carpathia* (BOA Editions 2009) and *Tzigane, le poème Gitan* (Scribe-l'Harmattan 2014), the French translation of her second book, *Tsigan: The Gypsy Poem*. A novella, *Sur la Route*, is forthcoming in 2015, as well as a chapbook of new poems, *Earth*. The founding director of Summer Poetry in Idyllwild and The Paris Poetry Workshop, she teaches independently throughout the U.S. and around the world.

# Cecilia Woloch

by AJ Urquidi

*Riprap: What do you get out of writing poetry, or what does it get out of you? What force pushes you to keep writing?*

Woloch: I write out of pure necessity. I write, as Ginsberg wrote, “because I want to be alone and I want to talk to people.” Probably I write because there’s no other way to reconcile those two sides of myself: the extreme introvert and the extreme extrovert -- the person who only wants to be inside her own world and the person who wants to be everywhere, with everyone, all at once. I really feel that if you don’t feel you absolutely have to write, you should probably do something else; that if it’s about attention or ego-gratification, you should probably learn to play the electric guitar. And while publication, at some point, is important to every writer for a variety of reasons, anyone who wants to do her truest work had better check her ambition for worldly acclaim at the door. I write out of an inner necessity, to stay connected to that part of myself – let’s call it the soul – with which I have no other way to communicate. And I write because I love language and can never get enough of words, of putting strings of words together and taking them apart again, trying to figure out how language works, how to make it work differently. Because my father was a mechanic and a poem is a machine made of words, as W. C. Williams said. And because both of my father’s parents were murdered and both of the murders were covered up, so there are big silences to be filled in our history. And because a man once held his hand over my mouth and tried to forbid me to speak. I have to write against that hand that calls itself authority. And because an 89-year-old Gypsy man — who’d fought in the resistance against the Nazis in France — was beaten by the French police last September. I write because I’m deeply, deeply angry, and because I’m hopelessly in love with the world.

***R: Pretend there's an open mic night in Paris and you can bring six dead poets with you to hijack the stage—who gets your invitation? Who might be lurking in the audience, waiting for a chance to heckle the lot of you?***

Woloch: H.D., Wanda Coleman, Larry Levis, Walt Whitman, Sappho, Baudelaire, Neruda. Rimbaud would be heckling from the audience, and Andre Breton; I'd also like to have Brendan Constantine and Steve Goldman – both poets very much alive – in the audience, making the kinds of noise they typically make at poetry readings. And Bill Mohr, nodding along, thinking his complex thoughts about how and where all of this fits into the long conversation of poetry.

***R: Your family background is filled with compelling stories, especially back in Poland. What are some of the things your family has experienced overseas that left a big impression on your writing? Do you feel that you owe it to them to write about their experiences?***

Woloch: That's an enormous question for me. I think I *became* a writer so that I could write some of the family stories – not necessarily out of a sense of obligation, but because those stories were always a deep source of fascination for me, from childhood on. And a big part of that fascination had to do with my family's secrecy, particularly the family of my father's mother. But on both my father's side and my mother's side, it seemed to me for a long time that we'd come from places that no longer existed, from people who had disappeared. So I think there's always been some desire to make my family – and myself – “real” by writing, by putting us into a story, and into history. My mother's father had come from “Poland” at a time when Poland, in fact, didn't exist as a state or as a political entity; he never knew his father and seemed to have no history at all, personal or otherwise. My father's people

came from the Carpathians, from the borderlands of what's now southeastern Poland, but they didn't identify themselves as either Polish or Ukrainian. I've done a lot of research and found out that the place they'd come from had been a marginal place, where the whole notion of national or ethnic identity was blurred, and kept shifting; a place where borders kept shifting, too, and a kind of political hotbed, probably with Communist leanings at the time my grandmother emigrated. Their political activities in the radical underground in the U.S. got both of my paternal grandparents murdered, and both murders were covered up. It's actually a lot more complicated than this, and the whole saga is the subject of a book I've been working on for a decade – “digging up dirt,” as my mother would say. And now that I know more of the details of these lives, and the political context, and the history that was never written or was erased, I've come to feel, yes, that I want to speak, especially, for this woman who was silenced, my paternal grandmother, so there is a sense of obligation now, I suppose, though it feels more karmic than that.

*R: What are some of your favorite poetry magazines, journals (besides Riprap, of course!), and small presses? Which ones have supported you the most in your poetic journey?*

Woloch: I'm happy to have this new chapbook out from Two Sylvias Press — a terrific small press run by two women poets who are doing a great job, I think, of sustaining their own creative work — both accomplished poets — and supporting the work of other poets. I think that balance is harder to strike than it might appear. I also really like the Crab Orchard Review and Cave Wall, both of which have been supportive of my work. And I love the New Ohio Review.

I think it's difficult to get the "news" of poetry from the university-sponsored journals, which seem a bit clique-ish to me, sometimes, and overly-focused on whatever the current "trendy" thing in poetry is, and so they can become pretty homogeneous. Once, I was reading one of these journals and thinking that the poems in the issue comprised a "special feature," that all the poems must have been written by a single poet — they were so much alike! — and I was shocked to realize that wasn't the case. It's sad, that poets get stuck in these ruts, or get so concerned with being "successful" or "established" that they succumb to this kind of aesthetic monotony.

I miss the days when there were more independent presses and small magazines. My first poems were published in a poetry magazine out of Chicago called *Random Weirdness*, and in a sort of punk poetry-zine published here in L.A. called *The Shattersheet*. Poets weren't so obsessed with status then — really, it was kind of the opposite, the whole outlaw aesthetic. I know that it still exists, especially in the spoken word scene, and among a slightly older generation of L.A. poets, but I miss the days when there were so many "out-law" poets, people working well outside of academia but also very serious about literature.

And I miss a journal called *Poetry/LA*, which was a beautifully edited and printed literary journal that published L.A. poets, and really nurtured them. It took me years to get an acceptance there; but, when I did, I knew I had really accomplished something; that my work had become strong enough to be published alongside the work of other poets I so admired. The editor of that journal, Helen Friedland, had given me something to aspire to; she'd rejected my work with constructive criticism; and when she accepted a group of my poems, at last, she invited me to read at the publication party, and introduced me in a way that made me feel I'd become a "real" poet,



at last, and that someone was paying the deepest and most careful attention to my poems. I think we need a lot more editors like that, especially for the sake of aspiring poets, and fewer MFA programs.

***R: What advice would you have for a young person debating whether to pursue a “career” in writing poetry?***

Woloch: I would say that if you’re looking for a “career,” please, please do something else. You can make a *life* as a poet — a pretty amazing life, I think — but you make a *career* as a marketing consultant or a hedge fund manager or whatever. I’m really dismayed when I hear younger poets talking about wanting to become “established.” I never dreamed I’d hear people who claim to want to be poets clamoring to be part of the establishment. Careerists have had a terrible effect, I think, on poetry; poetry has been turned, by academia, into a sort of safe, middle-class “career” that seems to attract, more and more, middle-class people who don’t so much have the desire to say something as the desire to be heard; who write for their tenure committees. Don’t do it. Study the craft — even enroll in an MFA program, if that’s right for you — but don’t think of poetry as a “career path;” be ambitious for the work, not for yourself. Jim Hall said it best, I think: “If you let your worldly ambition come between you and the work that’s most important to you, you’re fucked.” Well, I don’t think he used that word, but it’s the only one that comes to me, now.

***R: What can students expect from the upcoming 2015 Summer Arts program, “The Poet’s Metamorphosis: From Page to Stage to Screen” at California State University, Monterey Bay, featuring guest artists such as yourself, Douglas Kearney, Bill Mohr, and a few other contemporary giants?***

Woloch: And don’t forget Marilyn Nelson and Ellen Bass will be there, and Juan Felipe Herrera! I think it’s going to be magical. The group of poets Bill has assembled is so diverse and, yes, so accomplished, and all of them are poets who love engaging with students and sharing with one another. It’s going to be really lively and there are going to be opportunities to do the kinds of things I’ve talked about — create alchemy, share energy, bridge the worlds of spoken-word and canonical literature. I think participants should expect to write up a storm while they’re there — probably at the rate of at least one new poem or draft of a poem every day — and to be exposed to a lot of exciting poetry, to be stimulated and encouraged and challenged, to have opportunities to hone their craft, to share their work, and to be part of a community of poets who want to see one another thrive.









# Contributors

**Purshia Adams:**

Purshia Adams is a native of Idaho. Her work has been published in journals that include the *West Wind Review*, *Thin Air*, and *Icon*, among others. Additional information about her is available at [www.tridentatapress.com](http://www.tridentatapress.com).

**Michelle Bracken:**

Michelle Bracken is a fiction candidate in the MFA program at CSU San Bernardino. In her nine years of teaching elementary school, she is most proud of leading Beyoncé flash mob performances on the playground. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Litro Magazine*, *The Baltimore Review*, *The Redlands Review*, and *Dewpoint*.

**Jennifer Bradpiece:**

Jennifer Bradpiece was born and raised in the multifaceted muse, Los Angeles, where she still resides. She tries to remain active in the Los Angeles writing and art scene. Bradpiece has interned at Beyond Baroque, and collaborated with multi-media artists on projects. Her poetry has been published in various journals, anthologies, and online zines, including *Mad Poets Review*, *491 Magazine*, *The Mas Tequila Review*, & *Redactions*. She also has poetry forthcoming in journals including *The Common Ground Review*, *Paper Nautilus*, and *Edgar Allen Poets Journal 2*.



**Erica Brenes:**

Erica Brenes is an English Instructor at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, California, where she and her husband were both born and raised. After earning an undergraduate degree in creative writing at UCLA, she then received her MA in Literature from CSU Long Beach.

**Nathaniel Bussey:**

Nate Bussey is a student at CSULB, where he is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing. He likes Frank O'Hara, snowboarding, motorcycles, and his local drug culture.

**Idalith Bustos:**

Idalith Bustos is an Acapulco native who enjoys high elevations, mountains, and annoying her teenage cat. She is a double major in Creative Writing and Literature and has a minor in Geography at CSULB; she is also known for her creative Spanglish mispronunciation of words.

**Danny Caine:**

Danny Caine's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *New Ohio Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Off the Coast*, and *The Cafe Review*. He is assistant managing editor at Beecher's.

**Linda Carela:**

Linda Carela lives in The Bronx, NY, and works at a humanitarian relief organization where she analyzes donor data and provides customer service. She is also attempting to climb the 46th highest peaks in the Adirondacks. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Jelly Bucket and Crack the Spine*. She attended The Writers Studio for four years and studied with Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Philip Schultz.

**Clio Contogenis:**

Clio Contogenis was born and raised in New York City. She has always been fascinated by the written word. A voracious reader as a child, she soon began writing her own work, eventually turning to events from her life for inspiration. She has been published in *Stuyvesant Literary Magazine*, *Yale Daily News Magazine*, *Vita Bella Magazine*, *Bluestem Magazine*, *Superstition Review*, *The Write Room*, and several anthologies. She has also won multiple Gold and Silver Key Scholastic Art and Writing awards. Contogenis is a recent graduate of Yale University and has studied with Cynthia Zarin, Donald Margulies, and David S. Kastan. She is also an actor, singer, and pianist.

**Sarah Davis:**

Sarah Davis was raised in the Antelope Valley and moved to Long Beach to attend CSULB. She hopes to earn her MFA in Creative Writing with an emphasis in poetry to later become a professor. Her writing consists of free verse but she is continually working on improving her craft. She enjoys the work of Sylvia Plath, Tony Hoagland, and Allen Ginsberg. A few of her hobbies include petting stray cats, painting, and coin collecting.

**Darren C. Demaree:**

Darren C. Demaree is the author of *As We Refer to Our Bodies* (8th House, 2013), *Temporary Champions* (Main Street Rag, 2014), and *Not For Art Nor Prayer* (8th House, 2015). He is the Managing Editor of the *Best of the Net Anthology*. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife and children.

**Meredith D. Hadaway:**

Meredith D. Hadaway's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Passages North*, *New Ohio Review*, *poemmemoirstory*, and *Salamander*. Her third poetry collection, *At The Narrows*, is due out from WordTech Communications in 2015. She has received four Pushcart Prize nominations, as well as an honorable mention for the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Poetry Prize. She has been a fellow at the Virginia Center for Creative Arts and the recipient of an Individual Artist Award from the Maryland State Arts Council. Hadaway earned her MFA in Poetry from Vermont College and served as the 2013-14 Rose O'Neill Writer-In-Residence at Washington College.

**Shane Eaves:**

Shane Eaves received his M.F.A. in poetry from California State University Long Beach, where he served as the poetry editor for *Riprap*. He is a two time recipient of the William T. Shadden Memorial Award for his poetry. His poetry has been featured in the *American Mustard collective*, *Riprap*, and *Rust + Moth*, as well as having been displayed at Soapbox and Fusion—two multi-media, cross genre art shows. In addition to poetry, Shane enjoys being outdoors, camping, and hiking. When city bound, he enjoys staying up late and wandering the wilderness of the built environment.

**Nadine Flores:**

Nadine Flores received her B.A. in Art: Photography in 2012 from CSULB. She doesn't have a specific creed for her art or creative outlets but one thing that is definite is that she believes art is in everything. Art can serve in so many ways, yet it is up to us to determine how we will use it.

**Allen Forrest:**

Allen Forrest was born in Canada and bred in the U.S., and he has created cover art and illustrations for many literary publications. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's *Reed Magazine* and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of Van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

**Mia Funk:**

Mia Funk is an artist and writer who teaches at the École de Dessin Technique et Artistique, Paris. Her work has received many awards & nominations, including a Prix de Peinture (Salon d'Automne de Paris), Thames & Hudson Pictureworks Prize, Sky Arts Portrait Artist of the Year, KWS Hilary Mantel Short Story Prize, Doris Gooderson Prize, Aesthetica Magazine's Creative Works, Momaya Prize & Celeste Prize. Her paintings have been shown at the Grand Palais and are held in several public collections, including the Dublin Writers Museum. She is currently working on portraits for the American Writers Museum, completing a novel and a collection of linked short stories.

**Jamil Gonzalez:**

Jamil Gonzalez is an illustrator/cartoonist. He works with watercolor, ink brushes, and color pencils. He hopes to branch out his artistic medium in the near future. He gets his inspiration from almost anything, whether it's television, books, video games, graphic novels, or the cosmos.

**Kyle Hemmings:**

Kyle Hemmings lives and works in New Jersey. He has been published in *Your Impossible Voice*, *Night Train*, *Toad*, *Matchbox* and elsewhere. His latest ebook is *Father Dunne's School for Wayward Boys* at amazon.com. He blogs at <http://upatberggasse19.blogspot.com>.

**Shawnacy Kiker:**

Shawnacy Kiker is an MFA candidate at UC Riverside, mother of seven, and the poetry editor of *The Coachella Review*. She self-published her first work of fiction, *Donald Duck, Surprise!* in her bedroom at the age of four. The work is currently out of print.

**Terry Liu:**

Terry Liu is an illustrator and concept artist currently living in Los Angeles, California. His minimum color palette, pop surrealism and complex composition challenge the viewer to experience a new way of viewing narrative art. He is currently pursuing his MFA in illustration at CSU Long Beach geared towards becoming an art professor. See more of his work online at: [liu-terry.weebly.com](http://liu-terry.weebly.com)

**Lacy McCune:**

Lacy McCune is a Los Angeles-based illustrator and is twenty-seven years old. She lives and works in Los Feliz, CA. Her most deeply rooted fascination in art is the process of forming a conclusion regarding objects that are alive but intangible. Lacy's interest is in the method of exploring those curiosities in order to depict hidden ideas that surround us and that would otherwise remain uninvestigated. The visual products that stem from contemplation, prodding at and pushing physical boundaries tend to consolidate a very human progression in idealistic thought and knowledge, which is essential to her livelihood.

**Taylor Mims:**

Taylor Mims is a proud native of the San Fernando Valley. She is a fiction MFA student at California State University, Long Beach who likes weird stories told by normal people and has loud opinions about your favorite TV shows.

**Kyle Moreno:**

Kyle Moreno was born in 1986 and has lived in Long Beach, California for most of his life. Although he has put up with an array of jobs, he has been heard saying that writing is the only kind of work that really, at the end of a hard day, pleases.

**Renee Moulton:**

Renee Moulton holds an MFA in poetry from CSULB. She currently teaches freshman composition at her alma mater while attempting to balance grading, finishing her novel, writing poetry, and performing basic acts of kindness.

**Jax NTP:**

Jax NTP holds an MFA in Creative Writing from CSU Long Beach and currently teaches composition at Golden West College in Huntington Beach. Jax was the former Editor-in-Chief of *Riprap Literary Journal* and associate editor of *The Fat City Review*. Jax has an affinity for jellyfish and polaris and a fetish for miniature succulent terrariums.

**Irene O’Garden:**

Irene O’Garden’s work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Alembic*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Awakenings Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Bayou*, *California Quarterly*, *Calyx*, *Codhill Press*, *decomp*, *Eclipse*, *Fjords Review*, *The Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Literary Gazette*, *Midway Journal*, *Permafrost*, *Sunsets Review*, *Tusculum Review*, *Wild Violet*, and *Willow Review*.

**Charles O’Hay:**

Since 1987, Charles O’Hay’s work has appeared in over 100 literary publications including *The New York Quarterly*, *Cortland Review*, *Gargoyle*, *West Branch*, and *Mudfish*. In 1995, he received a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts fellowship in poetry. His first collection of poems and photographs, *Far from Luck*, was published in 2011 by Lucky Bat Books (Reno, NV) and is available in both print and Kindle formats via amazon.com.



**Simon Perchik:**

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain*, published by River Otter Press (2013). For more information, free e-books, and his essay titled “Magic, Illusion and Other Realities,” visit his website at [simonperchik.com](http://simonperchik.com).

**Samuel Piccone:**

Samuel is an M.F.A. candidate in Poetry at North Carolina State University. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in publications including: *The MacGuffin*, *Chronogram Magazine*, *Apt Literary Journal*, and *Thin Air Magazine*.

**Laura Picklesimer Greenberg:**

Laura Picklesimer is a graduate of UCLA’s creative writing program and a current first-year MFA fiction student at CSULB. She has received the UCLA Extension Writers’ Program Scholarship and the Shirle Dorothy Robbins Award in Fiction. Laura lives in Los Angeles and is at work on her first novel.

**Joseph Rathgeber:**

Joseph Rathgeber is an author, poet, and high school English teacher from New Jersey. His short stories and poems have appeared in *The Literary Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *J Journal: New Writing on Justice*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Mizna*, *Ellipsis*, and elsewhere. His debut story collection is *The Abridged Autobiography of Yousef R. and Other Stories* (ELJ Publications, 2014). He is a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, a two-time Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award Honorable Mention, and he received a 2014 Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

**Travis A. Sharp:**

Travis A. Sharp is a Seattle-area poet, intermedia artist, and book artist. He is co-founder/editor of *Small Po[r]tions Journal* and *Letter [r] Press* and is a curator of [bloodofanauthorbox.com](http://bloodofanauthorbox.com). He has work published in or forthcoming from *Big Lucks*, *Deluge*, *Belleville Park Pages*, *Tinderbox Poetry*, *Circle*, *Pacifica Literary Review*, and others. He tutors and teaches writing at the University of Washington, Bothell.

**Surazeus Simon Seamount:**

Surazeus is the nome de plume of Simon Seamount, a cartographer who lives in Georgia with his wife and daughters. Surazeus has been writing poetry for 30 years, and is composing an epic poem called “Hermead” that recounts in over 100,000 lines of narrative blank verse the lives and ideas of philosophers and scientists. Surazeus earned a BA in Liberal Arts at

Washington State University in 1988, hitchhiked across the United States with his guitar, improvising songs and poems, then earned a MS in Geographic Information Science at Michigan State University in 2008.

**Kevin Tosca:**

Kevin Tosca lives in Paris. He and his work can be found at [www.kevintosca.com](http://www.kevintosca.com) and on Facebook.

**AJ Urquidi:**

Originally from Monterey, CA, AJ Urquidi earned his B.A. in Creative Writing/Film from UCLA and studied poetry in NYC. His work has appeared in many journals, including *West Trade Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Marco Polo*, *CIRCLE*, and *Thin Air*, and has been anthologized in L.A. Telephone Book, Vol. 2. He has edited poetry for *Westwind* and *RipRap* and is a co-founder of *American Mustard Collective*. AJ has been nominated for the Ina Coolbrith Memorial Poetry Award and recently won the Gerald Locklin Writing Prize. His first conceptual collection is *The Patterned Fragment* (89plus/LUMA Foundation, 2014) and he teaches creative writing at CSULB, where he is wrapping up his M.F.A.

**Toren Wallace:**

Toren Wallace is a student and a teacher. His work has appeared in *Poetic Diversity* (Los Angeles), *Lipstickparty Mag* (Los Angeles), and *American Mustard* (Long Beach), amongst other journals. He likes tigers.

**John Walser:**

John Walser is an associate professor of English at Marian University of Fond du Lac. He holds a doctorate in English and Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Eight years ago, along with four other poets, he co-founded the Foot of the Lake Poetry Collective, an organization that sponsors monthly readings and less-frequent workshops at a local art center and that will soon venture into publishing. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in both national and international publications, including *Barrow Street*, *Nimrod*, *the Clackamas Literary Review*, *Fourth River*, *the Baltimore Review*, *the Evansville Review*, *Quiddity*, *Ping-Pong*, *Packington Review*, *the Hiram Poetry Review*, and *Lunch Ticket*. He was a featured poet in the September 2014 issue of *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact* and was a semi-finalist for last year's Pablo Neruda Prize.

**Paul Watsky:**

Paul Watsky is co-translator of *Santoka* (PIE Books, 2006), and author of the poetry collection *Telling The Difference* (Fisher King Press, 2010). A second collection, *Walk-Up Music*, is due for publication in April. His work has appeared in *Rattle*, *Smartish Pace*, *Interim*, *Word Riot*, and elsewhere. He is poetry editor of *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche*.

**Jason Yore:**

Jason Yore is in the process of stealing the identity of another human with the same exact name, so when his parents ask him what he does for a living he can tell them he works at a prestigious technology company in the Pacific Northwest.

**Kathy Rudin:**

Kathy Rudin makes art, rescues dogs, and lives in Eastern Long Island.



I KNOW NOTHING WORTH KNOWING

I Know Nothing,  
Mixed Media

**Kathy Rudin**







