MAY

5

"Under a rain of blows, the rebellious child shook with laughter, exposing his throat; not one so much as touched him."

— *Claude Cahun*

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EXISTOTHERWISE

photograph by Claude Cahun

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Bear in a Bowtie

Jennifer Elise Wang

One day, I decided that all my stuffed animals needed names and I would start alphabetically with my closest companion. This resolution came to mind while waiting for my parents to check out at the nursery. I saw “Amy” written in glittery red paint on a silver Christmas ornament and decided it was the perfect name for my little white bear. She had a red plaid bowtie that in later years, made me wonder if that should have made her a boy, but I already decided that girl bears could wear bowties. I could wear one too if I wanted.

Horse

Victoria Capitano

The boy from across the street is slamming your head into the pavement, red bicycle abandoned on the sidewalk. You taste copper in your mouth, like suckling on nickels. There is something on the tip of his tongue; it is eating him alive. It is eating you. He hits you and you shield your head; it is the only thing your hands know to do.

Dust coats your tongue; tumbleweeds skitter through your heart. The horse galloping in your veins has no name. You spit blood on the chalky white driveway, tears streaming blue. You've never been ashamed of crying in front of him, not when it's just the two of you.

In the suburbs of Nevada, you cannot see the stars at night. You are far from the lights of the city, but they seep into the cuts in your skin, curl up in your chest and press on your ribs. Showgirls are plastered on your bedroom walls; John Wayne watches you from the living room. You are a bandit and he, this boy, is your executioner. You are both guilty of the same crime. Why is the rope around your neck?

This is tired, worn out like a broken clock. You squirm and he does not relent. This day has lasted forever, this moment both a memory and a prediction. This is nothing new. Last week he smiled at you—or maybe bared his teeth, yellowed from chewing tobacco—before hitting you in the jaw. Nothing new. There is never anything new.

My Body Remembers

Mona Mehas

My body remembers pain. It's like a prison locking me inside. My left eye jumps with nervous tension. The right eye wants no part and jerks away. My forehead welcomes my hand, smoothing the creases, leaning on my warm fingers for comfort. My body remembers comfort. Slow-motion resources bring me to ease. Walking along the beach on a warm sunny day, gulls flying high above my head. Lake Michigan laps at my feet. Forgotten unnamed sorrows surface. My body remembers sorrow. I'd locked sorrow away in a box and thrown away the key, but it's spilled over. Sorrow chases me and settles in my pelvis, infecting my spinal column. Bedridden, I drift into Yoga nidra. My body remembers nidra. The voice of dread passes my intestines. Regret leaves its hiding place in my ribcage and wanders through my solar plexus. Love scampers from my extremities heading to my heart. Nidra removes negativity pulling it to the Earth Star chakra beneath my feet. My body remembers Earth Star.

Five Cups of Disappointment

Mona Mehas

I poured a cup of calm but found a hole in the bottom
defeating my goal of contentment

One cup spilled over with love and happiness
until empty of all emotion

The third cup cried softly in the shadows
my defeat reflected in its glaze

I built a fence of wheat to protect the others
but cups are hollow when kept alone

The last two cups clung to each other
two bodies melded into one

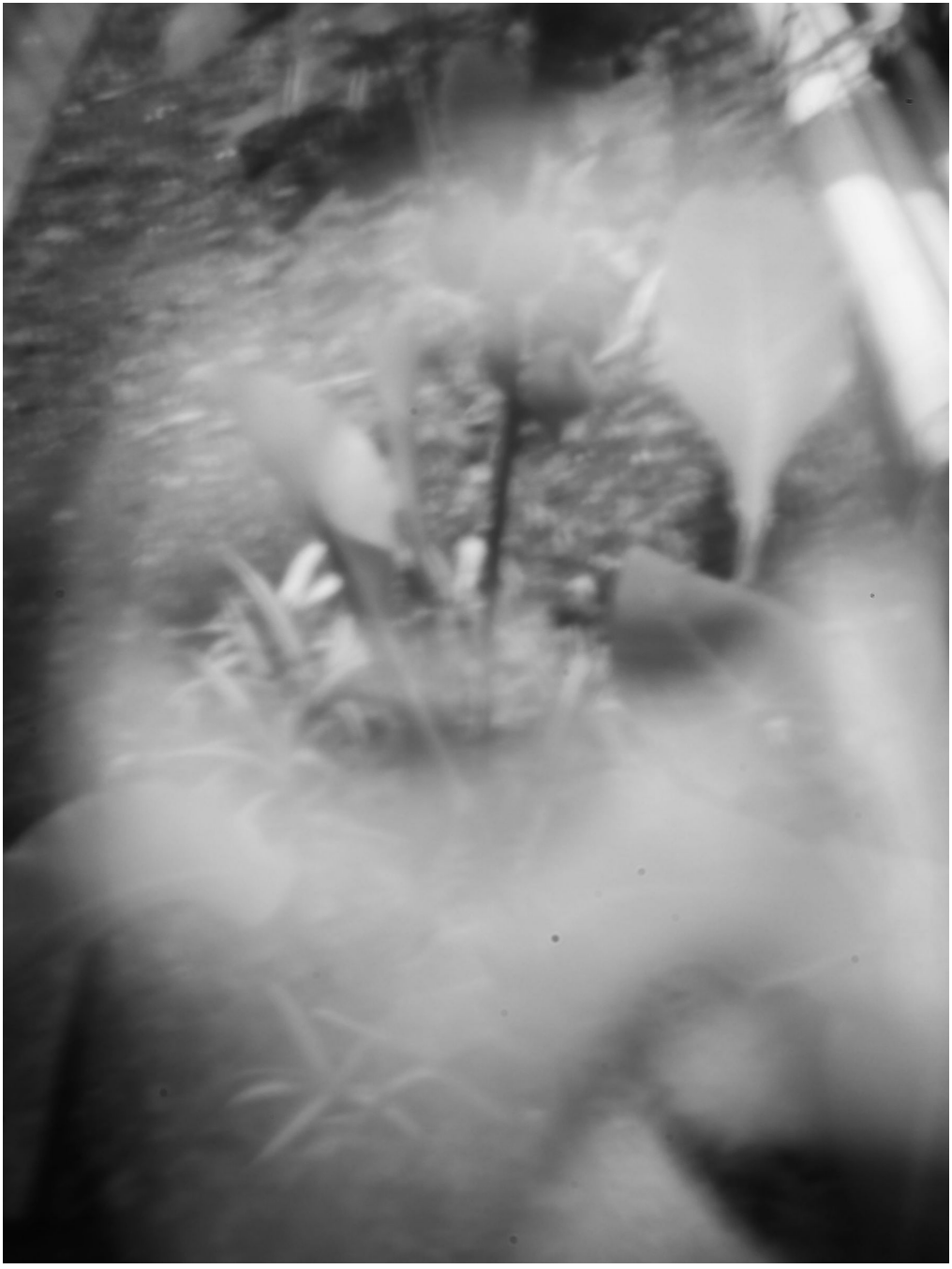
In the heat of the oven, their arms melted
forming again in comfort

Having braved the defeat and the emptiness
they survived the heat together

My heart is a cup crying in the wilderness
aching to be heard and loved

Lensless Eden 1

Kristin Fouquet



Lensless Eden 2

Kristin Fouquet



Mae

Khadija Ceesay

She reminds me of geraniums, red bleeds into pink
and white like the color of her nails in December
when she wants to make herself happy,
        though the sun is low in the sky.

The world looked as if we are all that was left,
kisses echoed off the grass and fostered fog at our feet.
The tips of her fingers were like tiny wings
        extended to my neck, a supple palm.

When I talk to God, it is about her. I know He listens
in the evening, when her lips slide up to singe my ear,
speaking love and life and
        fear of Him into our bodies.

We grow like weeds beneath crooked, angry toes
that run underneath twisted trees.
We are quiet, underground lovers who write
        forever on blackened knees.

And when the moon scales the sky to reach its post,
we bathe in shallow puddles, naked and green where
all can see. She kisses me, like geraniums, red lips
        and pink breasts under a white crescent.

On Mother Devouring Her Daughter

Khadija Ceesay

She says Black is the color of evil,
like a girl in a purple dress that never
reaches her long knees who
looks at other girls with short knees.
I should have been swallowed,
held by the ankles and
dropped into her fiery mouth,
looked at with bulging eyes.
She tells me I am the child angels whispered in her ear for,
talked of my betrayal and lust,
my rise to family altar as woman
praising women.
Ungrateful seed, forever sat in the bottom curve of mother's stomach.
Will never see the moon.
Will never meet girls with short knees,
pretty purple dress,
pretty purple,
pretty.

Returning From Ithaca

Smitha Sehgal

In a dream of journeys, we sit huddled in a boat returning from Ithaca
I cannot see my face
The distinct freckle on my right palm is the only sign of reckoning
We enter the mouth of the river opening to a hungry ocean
Before us sky grows thick, lighting up swirls of fierce orange
Elsewhere it is cobalt
A row boat on fire
Ash trail of smoke suffuses the air
I want you to know
I am a survivor

On a road winding uphill, I bicycle alone,
Alone in the eternal journey
Cedars grow on either side
Green holds out the solace of Earth
At the clearing
Whom do I ask about the way to my street?
I know it is close by, but where?
You wait before a dispensary, frail, old, flowers on your hair
In that tender voice of yours, you ask why hadn't I let you know I am coming
I know I am home

In fragments of time, I realize it is Mahalaya*
Goddess has commenced her descent to Earth
Ten minutes past seven, the sky grows cloudy
Leaves are green, washed by undulating rain over the last three days
Sun goes into hiding
I hear your voice through a crackling line
When we speak it is as though your voice is drenched in rain, shivering
We drift into mundane days of skinning fresh fish
Of a Sufi living in a blue house of poetry
I have too many deconstructed memories
In a strange dream, poetry becomes mathematics

**day marking the beginning of the Durga Puja festival when Goddess comes to her parental home*

An Answer

Ezra Solway

The cellar
of my past

winnows
like a bundle

of wheat.
On the other side

of a sealed door
my future

slips through
a sieve.

The answer, Frost, is yes.

If I could do it

I would do
this very life

all over again.

Funerary

Nicholas Michael Ravnikar

Who mourns for these
bluebells & buttercups
falling into clusters
in the shadow
of Lincoln
& a low pine?

It's a
shallow relief
beyond this
breeze's whisper,
when a fly skims
your thigh before
you brush it away
like these
petals
here

— more than scorns
of the wind
that told a
child
too t i r e d
to pick
them to pick
off them
off
for them
waiting
instead of
these petal heads
the infinite of grass
swept off in
once it
like justice
would seem

You know that hunger
an open flower has
for some bee to
take its pollen
on swollen hair,
without consolation?

The only clouds
we see blow
apart and are too
few and at too far
a distance
to look like
anything

if only so
it could ruffle
through them
again
& tousel
their
skins with
such
dis
regard
Just into
to be p
seized i s
by any e e
hand c
that
stretched
itself to reach

fall
they would
to decide if

Climbing Trees Reflected in Puddles

Lewis LaCook

there's a hole in the rain
through it you can see your birth

it's blank I'm walking with
an itch on my shoulder
with a walking stick

birds carry your arrival string it
over the trees plague years

do you know how many times I've heard you
times I covered myself are the birds
hung like ornaments still covered
with you clamped down on a branch

lights in trees line the path your birth
sudden soak that rains from plague years your cover

over the house black clouds deliquesce
never got the order right it's blank
my coverage of you contained in you blank

I'm sitting with breathing with you

Youth Pastor Vibes

Lewis LaCook

you school me in the drip living sun
up today so stained it high green
so sail vineyards awake
down where flowers capillary

cold wet painted around halo trees wet
with old light held faces
beaut from drowned stumps I'm around

here is where flowers wait for you alone
at one with up and at it at a time when I'm
straight from the drip a living sun up today

deep lemon barking at last year's leaves with cold wet paint
so that I blacken with vineyards waking rust into mud

so that I walk backwards out of the tomb

In These Days I Think Of Waking

Charm Chandler

Waking Up: The Interior Revolution. Preliminary notes.

Body: The here-and-now of this physical form. The real perceives and illusifies its temporal self. The presence of tangibility. This ends the story. Whose story? Mine.

Mind: The sentience. That which the here-and-now knows through the physical form. Mind also perceives an intangible form. This is how and causation.

Heart: The sapience. That which the here-and-now understands through the physical form. Heart also perceives an intangible form. This is why and correlation.

Soul: The identity. The here-and-now of an intangible form. The fantasy perceives and illusifies its atemporal self. The presence of intangibility. This begins the story. Whose story? Yours.

Mine and Yours and Yours and Mine; what bonds this infinite web of correspondences is relation-to-relation (think [I] noun-to-noun; [am] verb-to-verb). Just how far do these beautiful words correlate and cause and undulate?

The Four Great Essences become the prerequisites of My Existence and Your Existence, which then formulate the Pages of Our Existence. How do I want to exist? What image does My Interior Revolution become? This role of Myself orders all revolutions irresistible. If I choose anything, I desire these three:

- ☑ Cool midnight librarian who contemplates information at the rooftop edge of Self-Reference, a grand knowledge center that towers over humanity. She wears shiny shades whose glossy surface reflects the vacuums of space and stars.

- ☑ Classy fortune cookie writer who calculates fate and destiny in the Rotating Convolution, a stately construction that dominates over abstractions. An unfolding fan of fascinating formulas covers his face.

- ☑ Elusive professional sleeper who envisions fables in the Phantasm Stadium, an evolving complex that beds over dreams. Layers of scrim and lace cover their face, so that the only observer of their visage is themselves.

It supposedly ends at three—these images—but it never does. We know this. The list of the Interior Revolution(s) breathes eternal. Don't you know? We have a habit of permutation. So do numbers. From an expansive psychic distance, the permutation achieves a level of combinatorics (of dreams and wishes and rebellion and and and) that begins to look like this:

____ … ____ … ____ … ____ … ____ … ____ … ____

The cloze text continues without permission. All Interior Revolutions liberate themselves from themselves from the fractaling us. Who says that any of this (point at the this) requires anything from sentient and sapient constructs of the physical world? How frightening are these gaps?

Imagine the Interior Revolution of words, for example, or time. Imagine finally understanding all of this.

Imagine.

Poisons and Medicines

Anne Whitehouse

"All things are poisons, and nothing is without poison;
only the dose makes a thing not a poison." —Paracelsus

During rituals of divination,
Mayan sorcerers and healers
induced risky hallucinations
with Brugmansia candida,
angel's trumpet. The poison
in its white, waxy flowers
and dark green leaves,
ingested or absorbed through
the body's mucous membranes,
causes convulsions, paralysis,
coma, and death.

To dilate the pupils of their eyes
and bring a flush to their cheeks,
fashionable ladies in medieval Europe
drank juice pressed from the berries
and leaves of Atropa belladonna,
the deadly nightshade.
To enhance their beauty,
they risked their lives with a poison
used since antiquity to alter potions
and tip arrows with lethal results.

Our ancestors felt more closely
than we the embrace
of science and mystery.
We are still looking
for the boundary.
Chemicals crossing
the blood-brain barrier
create effects in the brain

that achieve results in the body,
altering perceptions
of pleasure and pain.
Reliever of illness
or harbinger of death
is a matter of degree.

Digitalis from foxglove,
lily of the valley, and oleander
strengthens the heart's contractions
while causing blurred and double vision
and hallucinations.
Taxol from the bark of the Pacific yew
destroys cancers of the breast
and ovaries but harms the liver.
Although it induces nausea,
vincristine, an alkaloid
from Madagascar periwinkle,
is the reason why most children
with leukemia now survive.

For the stomach spasms
I suffered as a child,
I was prescribed a daily dose
of a chalky green medicine
containing belladonna alkaloids
and phenobarbital
to prevent nausea and relax me.

Derived from salicin
in willow bark and meadowsweet,
aspirin reduces inflammation,
eases headache, and lowers fever.
Years ago, my great-aunt, sick of life,
swallowed the entire contents
of a bottle and bled to death.

Puffed Up

Anne Whitehouse

From wax, Leonardo
formed a doughy mass,
and when it softened,
he shaped it into
delicate animals
filled with air.

He blew into them
until they flew into the air.
When the air was exhausted,
they crashed to the ground.

He cleaned the intestines of a sheep so they could be held
in the hollow of his hand.
He attached them
to a blacksmith's bellows
and blew them up
until they filled with air
and grew transparent,
expanding into the room,
until everyone watching
had to crowd into a corner.

For a peculiar lizard
caught by a wine grower
of Belvedere, and given
to him as a curiosity,
Leonardo made wings from skin
pulled off from other lizards,
which he filled with mercury.
They quivered and trembled

when the lizard moved.
He then made for it eyes,
a beard, and horns.
He tamed it and kept it
in a box and terrified
his friends with it.

Homophobic Chicken

Jonathan Gennaro

I hate them so much,
Why can't I stop eating their food?
It is not normal for chicken to taste this good
With each bite I take,
The chicken whispers to me
homophobic slurs,
places to be cured,
where it says in the Bible that I am wrong.

The food was not made with love,
But with hate
That's their secret
They expect to push me away from what I am
With their spiteful cooking techniques,
I should be made right
But they are wrong.

I continue to return with the intention to eat
Never believe what the chicken whispers
It is homophobic
The bird was beheaded and still runs in circles,
Proclaiming that being gay is a sin

Do not eat the chicken if you could be swayed by it's ill-intentions
Eat the homophobic chicken in order to prevent someone else from hearing what it murmurs
Save the malleable, queer souls, by eating the chicken
So they do not have to hear what the food says behind his back

Yanu

Andi Benet



Spider

Andi Benet



The Baby

Dave Shortt

what'll it eat? reindeer
lead you to sleepless summer nights,
the forest soon generating enough milk & meat
to begin breeding rich allergies
to hay & cities

& if the climate changes faster
than the sexual norms?
a coastline may drown while
prophylactic methods wash into the moon's phases,
forcing families onto higher ground
littered with antlers & nanotubes,
a new lonely place created from
an incentive to reproduce not on paper (so
how old are these trees? these tweens
fresh from the nursery
growing taller & more or less punky?)

greenhouse gases are an experimental brew
scenting a teen's breath on arrival home,
high on eco-slang, a virtual chase
staked out between a stump & a future family
made from who knows what
this life might be wanting?
fire? ice? or who can say, a sperm
en route to conjunction
with an ovum waiting for conjunction
with (snipped or tied, a
breed of isolates *it was*
a still-uninhabited landscape primeval
fresh out of isostatic depression
puked up like solid food

play in this sylvan, Pleistocene crib,
growling your semi-wild words,
a culture floating in petri dish waters,
a husband
& wife *the living medium,*
weather to trust & bask in,
a thin-soiled voice whispers lunglessly
'come, break through
this crusted cervix overlain with moraine'
& build from these micro-paradises,
these lime-soiled outwashes
(first a bit of sloppy exploration,
growing up quickly into the gametes,
but could anything be remembered about an incubation period
in a Star-womb Playpen?)

some do some don't
choose to experience
little bundles of joy,
ecstatic packets of photons,
before it's wrapped up as a vasectomy
or the years slip into menopause,
by then, correction & reward pause where
'the children look after themselves now,'
or was it a barren time,
like ice that came down from the mountains & everywhere?
when it was time to move on, 'never again
to make love by these lakes & rivers'

'grasslands & tree-islands changing into closed forest'
where a few microbands of people live,
what's out there, is it any better? or
go find your family
or a shelter among an infinite number of leaves

or discarded tires,
a shanty, a shanti

scared of reproducing yourself?
but one child wants to put its arms around every other child alive
& that ever lived

& if there was a possible defect
(showing up like from another planet?)
a Big If would find itself in bed
to beat the odds of every statistical roll-in-the-hay:
as carefully, parentally, it's rocked
into a most special niche,
a huge welcome into
a new dream-home furnished with heavens & hells,
set free from its womb,
as if the arms & legs of I & we
had been fetally contracted there,
now stretching out, expanding
as from a singularity

Somebody

Bat Collazo

for Jack

You put unbaited worms back alive after fishing,
reverse robin, pinky like bird's beak
into dirt, to give them a head start.
And you and the fish get along fine:
respecting someone's no reason for not eating them.
And to speak of eating, when porridge pot's low,
it's kids first, elders first, whatever they can eat,
even if your stomach's wide-open like blue eyes, blue sky, and:
you open all the cages in Hell, just on a whim,
because folks inside are stirring,
causing a racket.
You give them room to gad about
and then you read them some stories to think on.
Any book'll do, good or no.
What do we call this? Common decency?
Tenderness?
Just is, that's all,
the unremarked.
It matters, you matter.
You matter to me.

In Bed, Learning About Bed Bugs

Bat Collazo

A little beetle, black and white, walks by on fitted bedsheet
as I wake up from my nap,
my lonely lover cuddlebug against my back.
I take the closed package of an alcohol wipe
and, to this less familiar creature's alarm and dismay, make gentle transfer
to the nightstand. Only after, fearing persecution,
I confirm online: lost in bed, but not a bed bug.
In etymology, I am unsurprised to learn:
bed bug, bugge, bwg, hobgoblin.
Being bothered at night, as it were: visited.
In entomology, still tucked in blankets,
we watch a longform film about bed bugs,
the transparent slurpee of blood
gushing into the bag of their bodies,
the penchant for tall dowels
in the hopes of human feet once ascended,
like climbing a beanstalk.
The dandruff debris of exoskeletons raining
from corners of mattresses,
the machine that heats houses like skyscrapers heat desert
when there's not enough trees.
It's fossilized ashes, the scientist says,
that really kills them, sending them away to die of thirst,
desiccated. They carry no diseases, however,
which is why
they are very good
at living with humans.

Moving Day

Eric Jennings

"Wow! This place is huge! This is gonna be great."

He's in a onesie. It covers his feet with soft fabric. His excitement propels him. He runs into the house, down the hall, into the kitchen. He makes a sliding stop, changes directions, runs back and to the left, into the den. Slides again. Stairs! Tries running up but it's too steep, his feet too slippery. Almost falls on his butt, laughing. Grabs the hand rail, steps up quickly but in control. As soon as he steps onto the landing he takes off again. Into and out of the four rooms. Four bedrooms! Amazing!

Go ahead. Run. Enjoy this. You will always treasure this moment. The feeling of wonder. At the space. The expanse. The new polished floor. The lack of furniture, of anything. The number of rooms. The freedom. The escape. It won't last, of course, but for a few brief moments, you come out of your shell. You allow yourself to expand into the space of this new, gigantic house. You'll remember this feeling forever. I do.

From this moment on, you will love the act of moving. Leaving a place. Letting go. The excitement of discovery, of potential. Leaving the past behind and entering a new world of possibility. Of hope. However short-lived.

"You make it sound like it's not real. Like I'm running away. But I'm not. I know exactly what's going on here. I'm remembering that I'm still a child. I'm allowing myself to be that child. I'm allowing myself to imagine feeling safe. I'm not looking to the future. I don't care what comes next. I'm not running away. I'm running into myself."

Claude Cahun
Marcel Moore



Contributers



Jennifer Elise Wang (she/they) is a non-binary femme in STEM from Dallas, Texas. When she's not doing neuroscience research, she enjoys writing, dancing, and learning how to skateboard and snowboard. She has been published in *evOke*, *Vocivia*, *just femme & dandy*, and *Ofic*. She can be found at www.facebook.com/jeniversewritings and on Twitter @JeniverseAbr.



Victoria Capitano (she/her) is currently a student in the Philadelphia area. Her work has been published in the *Susquehanna Apprentice* and *Mosaic Magazine*. She's received recognition from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards as well as the Penn State Wordstruck competition. She can usually be found in a cafe, clicking away at her laptop.



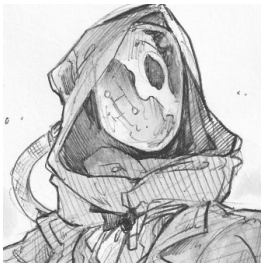
Mona Mehas (she/her) writes about growing up poor, accumulating grief, and the climate from the perspective of a retired, disabled teacher in Indiana, USA. Her work has been published in over forty journals, anthologies, and online museums. Mona is a Trekkie and enjoys watching Star Trek shows and movies in chronological order. Her pamphlet, *'Questions I Didn't Know I'd Asked,'* is available from LJMcD Communications. Follow on Twitter @Patienc77732097 and linktr.ee/monaiv



Kristin Fouquet (she/her) is a photographer and writer from lovely New Orleans. Her photography appears in online journals and magazines, on chapbook and book covers, on album artwork, and occasionally in galleries. When not behind the camera, Kristin writes literary fiction and is the author of six books. Visit Le Salon.



Khadija Ceesay (she/her) is a queer, Gambian poet from Olathe, Kansas. She is currently an undergraduate student at Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, Kansas and will continue on to graduate school at PSU to study creative writing. She has been writing poetry since 2014 about her sexual and racial identity in order to understand herself better and owes much of the ideas behind her work to her relationships with family, both good and bad.



Charm Chandler (he/it) is a graphomaniac from the Sunset Reality. He is the author of two nameless short stories, the both of which can be (un)found in *Fleas on the Dog* and *The Collidescope*. His poetic work can be found in *Vita Poetica* and underneath a different pseudonym (he does not encourage you to find it), *Poetic Sun*. When he is not writing, he is perpetually confused.



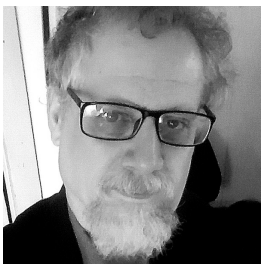
Smitha Sehgal is a legal professional and poet who writes in two languages-English and Malayalam. Her poems have been featured in contemporary literary publications such as *Ink Sweat & Tears, Panoply, Marrow Magazine, Marathon Literary Review* and elsewhere.



Ezra Solway (he/him) lives in Philadelphia**.** His poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Best of the Net, which sounds cool some days. He has other work in *Philadelphia Stories, Identity Theory, Bending Genres,* among other places. You can follow his writings on Twitter @SolwayEzra



Nicholas Michael Ravnikar makes poems, plays, paintings, kids books for grownups and other multimedia excursions. He edits and hosts *Paper Knives*. A recovering alcoholic-addict who lives with Borderline Personality Disorder, ADHD and persistent depression, he's quit nearly every job he's had, from dishwasher to college professor to bathtub repairman, but he managed to earn an MFA from the Kerouac School at Naropa University.



As a child, on interstate trips, **Lewis LaCook** (he/him) thought the moon was following his family's Econoline van. Upon reaching adulthood, he couldn't tell whether the truth disappointed or relieved him, so he started writing things down. His poems have appeared in journals like *Otoliths,Unlikely Stories, Whiskey Tit, Lotus-eater, Synchronized Chaos, Argotist Online Poetry,* and *Medusa's Kitchen*, among others. His collection *My Kinship with the Lotus-eaters* was published in 2022 by *BlazeVOX*. Lewis can often be found wandering the wilds of Western New York state with his wife Lindsay.



Anne Whitehouse's (she/her) most recent poetry collection is *OUTSIDE FROM THE INSIDE* (Dos Madres Press, 2020), and her most recent chapbook is *FRIDA* (Ethel Zine and Micro Press, 2023). She is the author of a novel, *FALL LOVE*. Her poem, *"Lady Bird,"* won the Nathan Perry DAR 2023 "Honoring American History" poetry contest. A new poetry collection, *STEADY*, is forthcoming from Dos Madres Press in 2023.



I'm **Jonathan Gennaro.** I have recently graduated from Northwestern State University of Louisiana. I was an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing. I will also be a Teaching Assistant in France in the upcoming Fall.



Andi Benet (they/them) is a lens-based artist based in San Francisco. Their work centers around performative self-portraiture as a tool to explore identity. More of their work can be seen on their website: And I Love.



Dave Shortt is a long-time writer from the USA whose earliest work can be found in the print journals *Salamander* (Brookline MA), *Nexus* (Dayton OH), *Mesechabe* (New Orleans), *Bullhead* (Ashland KY), *Sulfur* (Ypsilanti MI), *Nedge* (Providence), all but the first two now defunct; and on the internet archived at Astropoetica, Muse Apprentice Guild, and Ygdrasil.



Bat Collazo (ze/zir/zirs) is a queer, Latinx, Pagan poet and artist. Ze is the editor of *Blood Unbound*, and zir writing has been published in places such as *The Wild Hunt, Idunna,* and *Neologism Poetry Journal*. For more information, please visit batcollazo.com.

