Exist Otherwise

#10 March 2024

“The rule interests me only for its leftovers with which I make my swill.”

– Claude Cahun



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Cotquean

.

e i g h t

times before,

I saw those lifeless eyes.

How lonely, like a c a t

My disrupter, my **- Cotquean -**.

You kept it hidden in you,

The riddle of a sphinx.

I'm sorry to jinx

it,

.

But I saw it:

you'd l o o k at me,

Chatoyant, Endearing.

We all saw it, that fatal day;

They all say it was just a g a m e.

If it was just a deck of cards

What, then, made us bleed?

I was sorry to read

it.

.

I

pull them

a l l like p u p p e t s,

but **- Angel**, - it's only you

Who has a hold on me t o o,

Who thaws my frozen bones &

frees me of this prison.

Sorry to envision

it.

.

Toti O'Brien

Novia

In the photo they put on her grave
she wears a shell pendant, and you
feel the ocean behind her, the wind.
I remember her in many occasions,
but especially twice. Once, not yet
ten years old, she was sketching
skinny girls by the dozen, pale, home-
made Modiglianis. She will become
an artist, she said with childish fervor
I'd give anything to preserve. It wa
dusk. She sat at a wicker table, and a
nearby persimmon tree painted the
lawn with colorful splashes. She
had already started to go blind.

Twenty years down the line, in
another garden. Her sis' wedding, and
liquor flew. An aunt said she should change
into a fancier dress. I had a
spare one with shoulder straps, ruby
red. I helped her wear it in the bathroom.
Shyly excited, she teetered outside.
Someone handed her a glass, sat her
down. Only then, her hands groping
her bare thighs, she realized how short
the skirt was, and she blushed. She
begged for her old clothes. But you
look divine, someone sighed. She
blushed a bit more.

L. Arcadia

War Dream: Hebenon Cloud

Swinging out colossus-scale glass doors
sucks us: air-conditioned playhouse chill
to suffocating Taipei summer
nights' muggy embrace in Chang Kai-Shek
memorial—no, Liberty square.

Velour slime layers my inner mouth
first cheeks then leaking over gums.

賴煦, 以心, and I are in haze
space-opera Hamlet afterimage
aftersound duel across our retinae
reverb confusion, red gloss columns
echoing final act lightsabers.

Plucking tugging slick viscous slime threads
peeling it from my mouth, spawns more.

Are colonnades, plaza oddly still?
We expect teen dance teams practicing
mosquito hiss, histamine in ears
prissily-coiffed neon-necklaced dogs
tripping us down processional steps.

Intermission wine swishing spitting
but slime fills and spills from my mouth.

Light pollution often reflects red
on smog; tonight's clouds glow green. 賴煦
stares up braced on balustrade, 以心
urges down as though grounding shielding
us: cloud currents approach from the west.

I plug my ear with index fingers,
hearing quick blood pumping rhythm
bite down to stop firm mucus
taste of bulimia
smell of already
decomposing
premature
corpses,
ours.



Deanna Faye

Symptomatic



Marta Barrio

A Bluish Heart



When my grandmother died, I was pregnant. My mother told the funeral, even though she was forbidden to do so. Good news had to be shared.

And my aunts said, "A life for a death," they kissed me, and put their hands on my belly.

When my grandfather died, I was driving on the highway. It was pouring rain, the little girl was dizzy, and she was vomiting and crying, sitting in her car seat. I was singing lullabies to her in the hope that she would calm down, while with the corner of one eye I was watching her in the rearview mirror, and with the other I was looking for an exit where I could stop the car.

My cell phone rang, and I picked it up distractedly. Between my daughter's crying, the sound of the rain, and the beat of the windshield wipers, my mother's distant and sad

voice could hardly be heard, and she had to repeat the bad news several times. I found a service road, stopped the car on the shoulder, cleaned the girl as best I could, and hugged her tightly against my body until she fell asleep, completely exhausted and still sticky.

Her heart was beating hard, glued to mine, and at that moment, on the rainy shoulder of the service road, I thought for the first time of my grandfather's heart, which had stopped beating.

It would be cold and hard by now, perhaps bluish. We had all fit in it. Two parents, three brothers, a wife, six children, thirteen grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

When we emptied the house, we found a bundle of love letters in the drawer of an old wooden dressing table.

And my aunts said: "Keep the coquette, which belonged to your great-grandmother. It's a good, old, dark wood piece of furniture with a mercury mirror of the kind they don't make anymore."At that time, one of my office mates had to send a letter for an administrative matter, and she asked me where the stamp went. She had grown up with the Internet, and her love letters had been typed on the keyboard.

I did send some love letters, from New York and from Manchuria while I was studying languages. But I have not kept the ones I received. They were not as many as the ones my grandmother received. Her courtship lasted four years, and the previous courtship another two.

It took me months to read them all. And I nearly forgot that he was not still alive. Finding that bundle of letters, and thus continuing to listen to his voice, was as if that heart, in spite of its blueness, had never stopped beating.

The day I finished reading the last letter, I cried all the tears I had not shed in the rain on that service road of the A-6, and began to write. But the bad thing about the dead is that they almost never write you back. In the end, it was my mother who kept the dark wood antique.



Abdulrahman M. Abu-Yaman

Nabila's PTSD

This poem contains imagery and references to bodily harm and human blood.

Now, Nabila's digestive
system frowns at meat intake — she retches
on perceiving the smell of Suya or
any kind of barbeque—
dating from the shrapnel of
human flesh captured in her retina
from the massacre she
witnessed in wilderness of Sambisa

Nabila now abstains from drinking Zobo
or any kind of red juice for fear of simulating
it for blood flow since the Chibok tragedy

Nabila is now addressed by an R-word used
for asylum seekers, diagnosed with a
V-word for her digestive allergies
and needs the help of a P-word specialist
to restore her cerebrum back to its default setting

Krutika Zambre

Maria

They say I'm different
I'm not Mister, but Madam
Yet how different am I really?
This metaphor pans back mythical galores to that
Of Eve and Adam.

That delicious forbidden fruit
Delicious… cause forbidden
That sinful bite
That sinful taste to Truth
Would lead to imprisonment
in her own garden

In another garden lies the great Circe
My eccentric grandma with her pharmacy
Her cauldron and blood-veined roots
Tendrils of ambrosia, gift of Odysseus' youth
Drugs and Moly
Oh a great folly!!
She ain't a pharmacist
She's just a witch
And we all know what happens to witches.

Which, What, How, Why?— Fundamental Units of a philosopher's high
Obsession of my mother Hypatia
Like her, I do not have Y-chromosomes
And when you do not have Y-chromosomes, hark here
You utter not, "Why?"
You just
Nod

My big sister Lovelace-Byron's alchemical daughter
Her poetry woven as math her rhythm danced as algorithm

Her tutor de Morgan, oh that esteemed de Morgan!
Did not think her mind and physical application
Could carry binary burden
From the meek meadow of a woman's body.

These men of science around me
Break through a dichotomy
The dichotomy of Superstition
And Reason
But I have a Womb
I exist only in the dichotomy of a Male's gaze
I can either be Virgin Marie Or Maria of Magdalena
I am neither.

I'm Marie Sklodowska Curie
One-third of the Furies
I have one lab coat, dark that i wear to my laboratory
One shot to a seat in the room of scientific history
I make a mark twice
But only as my husband's wife

I sit here in Solvay to each's irk
They say I'm different
And maybe they are right
They won't have to DIE in the pyre of the power that they ignite
I
Rest in Radiance
Alight
Like that Physicist of Salem.



Charlotte Amelia Poe

I Have Been Growing

I have been growing avocados because I like the idea that one day there will be a tree. That there will be a tree because of me. First, the stones, they must be blanketed in damp kitchen roll and kept warm and safe, until a crack appears, and then, maybe a week or so later, there will be a root, emerging shyly from the base, seeking more. It is then that they are to be put in water, in glass vases from fifty years ago that were a steal to buy, a set of three, curved necks to hold it all in place, and they are filled with water and the avocado stone is placed in the plateau, and the root that emerged will dip into the water and follow some invisible path as it grows, and the stone will continue to crack open, and maybe another week, maybe two, there will be a shoot of green from the top of the stone, and the roots will wiggle and snake, and the shoot will grow taller, inch by stubborn inch, until it is time for the transplant to soil, where it can be called no longer a stone but a tree, half a foot tall, and then more.

Sitting in neat rows, south facing windowsill and the sun pouring in, trees that exist because of me and their stems are thickening and growing coarse and rigid and they have survived the coldest days of winter and now they welcome spring and turn their leaves to it. In three years, maybe five, they will bear fruit, that will be opened and scooped, and then there will be a new stone, and that stone too, can be planted, a tiny infinity of new trees, more oxygen, more air, more food, more life.
In a world stubborn soft and unsure of a way to exist that is not harmful, I buy the

cheapest, most dented avocados and I hollow them, and then I ask them to be more than they were ever sold to be. And as bad as these long and endless days can feel, with the insular and pressing feeling of inertia, roots and stems and leaves still grow, and one day, there will be fruit. One day, there will be fruit, and the cycle is endless, and nobody is being hurt, and I think maybe that that is okay, that that is the meaning of everything, that I can grow something, and that nobody will be hurt, and that I choose this. I choose this. I choose this.

Mykyta Ryzhkyh

Copper Night Knocks

Copper night knocks
On the back of the head, asks:
"What street is this?"
And this is not a street,
This is the whole life.
Here at the age
Of 4 I drank sleeping pills,
At 14 I lost my virginity,
At 24 I lost my family,
At 34 my father died (thank God, my father died).
Now I'm free like the cry of a newborn.
I'm single, like when I was born.
A lonely body without everything
Meaningful, invented, composed.
The body, by its movement forward,
Has reached the very beginning.
Ashes close to dust.
And suddenly the night opens its
Lunar hood, and now death looks
At me with its bony eyes.
"Come on, friend," I said to death,
"I hope you don't turn me into a zombie."
The door of cast iron milk opened.
And I started drinking.
My teeth turned black and fell out.
Birds pecked out my eyes.
My body fell off me. Copper night,
Pig-iron milk, golden memory.
And suddenly: emptiness.

Geneva Toland

Blackberries

"Or maybe it was more like the development of a delight muscle…which is to say I felt my life to be more full of delight. Not without sorrow or fear or pain or loss. But more full of delight."

— Ross Gay

They were everywhere, falling—leaping—into my hand. Purple bruises of perfection. They bled onto me, stained me. I gave them my whole body.

My bruised body. My stained body. My *sensitive* body. My gastrointestinally distressed body. My recurrent yeast infected, chronic fatigued body. My tired body.

My tired body.

Eight years prior, doctors had diagnosed me with the vague and largely unhelpful label of "IBS." Gynecologists asked if had I had tried wearing cotton underwear? In other words, there was nothing they could do. As my twenties went on, the disorders worsened, but the doctors just handed me a new prescription, mumbled about less tomatoes, and gestured towards the door.

In the summer of 2021, the discomfort roared its ugly head with a newfound ferocity. Possibly from stress, heartbreak, parasites, bad water, or some combination of it all, my body shut down almost completely.

Here's the strange truth about chronic illness: if you're forced to think about your body enough, it starts to feel less and less like your body. If there's enough discomfort, enough mysterious dis- ease, enough days spent in bed, crouched over, exhausted by the very act of anything, enough moments where the only thing you can think of is your body—you actually start to exit your body. It seems, the only way.

But that summer, I didn't want to exit my body. I was tired of the numbing that followed. I was tired of hating the only body I had. A wise friend asked me, if you can't escape your body, then how can you get more fully into it? *Surrender*, the pain replied. And so, that summer, I moved to the only place I knew how to surrender—the ocean.

I spent hours floating, feeling nothing, becoming nothing, becoming blue. I watched the ospreys float and dive, float and dive, the swallows dip and turn, dip and turn. I merged my body with the larger body, the Earth body. I tried to blend my borders of skin with sea and salt and sand, and found no barrier between us at all. Without meaning to, I suddenly felt that other bodily language begin to speak again. Not discomfort. Not pain. That other bodily song I had almost forgot existed: pleasure.

I found it, first, in the blackberries. I had grown up visiting this spit of ocean in central Rhode Island, and yet never knew. Never knew until right then, that the meadows were full of fruit. I yelped watching their white flowers burst and fall, their stomachs swell blue then purple then black. The goldfinches surrounded me, rejoicing. The bees drank and drank. In a sea of nothing, suddenly there was everything. I filled my mouth, gulped up that sweetness like water in the desert. Such pleasure! Such sour, bursting delight.

I was high. I was addicted. I tethered myself to this fleeting feeling, to this newfound delight. I searched for more and there—each day, another. Let me tell you, let me share. Let me be a blackberry patch in the height of summer, giving, giving, giving my body to yours—

The iridescent green, blue, black back of a tree swallow tilted towards late sun; The smell of oak trees warming; The crash of an osprey against the surf—Headfirst, they dive. Head-fucking-first; Hermit crabs, hundreds, swarming my toes; My mother wrapping her arms around my waist as I cooked dinner—*thank you, baby;* A deer snorting; The smell of crushed tansy in my palm; A carolina wren alarm clock; Everything, everything, tasting of sea—

There are some things that only the chronically ill know, because they must. The first is pain, how to attend to it and how to ignore it. The second is pleasure, how to feel it and then how to enjoy it. And the third, as a result of the above, abundant gratitude. For when a body works, even if for just one single moment, it is like the world has begun again. Nothing is certain. No moment of pleasure ever destined to last, and so I learned, that summer, how to revel in delight.

However brief. However small. However lovely.

R.L. Summerling

Today I am Thinking of Alice Neel's *James Hunter - Black Draftee (1965)*

I hear they're burning paintings now.
Today it was a piece by Alice Neel.
A half-finished portrait of James Hunter,
who was due to leave for Vietnam that week
and never returned for the second sitting.
Palpable sadness and fear
etched on his young face.
His presence diminishing in front of our eyes.
The painting was judged imperfect in
its incompleteness and was purged.

On my lunch break,
I'm thinking about the purpose of art,
and how a combination of words that makes no sense can
tell me everything I need to know about the human condition.
How love tastes rich like egg yolk
And how 2011 smells of mint and laundry soap,
And why I feel so sad in the summertime,
How it reminds me that everything is dying.
Now an airbrushed sheen covers the rot
of low calorie consumption.

I hear the word "book" is now redundant
and what I finished reading last night in bed
is better described as "content"
to be assimilated by a machine.
A story left unfinished by a dead author that
leaves me with a a deep sense of wondering.
I am a multitude of endings,
not a plot twist
but a criss-crossing intersection of every
cruel and wonderous thing
I have borne witness to.

Alice Neel once said "People come first,"
Today I noticed there is paint over my lines.
I am incomplete; I am human.
I have monstrous thoughts and there are
blank areas of me yet to be completed.
Or to be left—



Jay Ferreira

The Muse



Salem B Holden

Sunday Service

red belly / white shelled filled with dirt:

What would you say if I said
I want to be a girl in all the wrong
ways and a boy just the same
29 years to finally meander meaning
"No, that's my government name."
A man walks around with a camera, cemetery hand
Do you think he'll capture me
another tombstone?
water flows toward me these days
a sycamore sheds its skin—we're all just different
types of snakes / backboneless body

What would you say if I said
I was born wrong and right
hermaphrodite tongue—too much testosterone
intersexing a condition known as myself

What would you say if I said
the holiest I felt was when
his pussy was suction cupped to mine:
two coy fish sucking
each other bone dry from sin

What would you say if I said
my partner's pussy
is the altar I worship
and spell the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit with my tongue

What would you say then?

Would you say I've found God /
saved by sin?

Sarah Muir

Southern Gothic Mechanic

With thanks to Bobbi Lurie.

The cows have gone to sleep
as I walk through this park covered in sand
under brisk seaside breeze,
next to the hilled-terrain of cityscape—
marriage of metropolitan hustle with the stillness of the Sound,
marriage: the thing we didn't do,
everywhere: the screech of tires— breaking.

This car smells like freedom.
Once a leader in this revolution— you
—the settler who drove me out
your rifle, cocked and aimed,
finger curled around the trigger.
I never knew why,
I never knew what,
your finger.

This park is filled with shadow people,
these roads filled with tire marks,
all at once your car is your sleep and your home.
Although the cows have gone to sleep,
and the rodeo show now over,
your rifle is still cocked and aimed,
your finger curled
around the trigger.

The shimmering green Toyota is abandoned in the tow yard
and I continue walking on steep hillsides,
cement dampened in reflection.
I must resist
the temptation to wish,
void the codependent condition
of this city, this metro—
screech of tires in place of living.

Though you steer the wheel with your knees,
though your finger curls around the trigger,
even though asleep,
even though the Toyota is now abandoned in the tow yard,
even though I am land lost in the alamo,
you are far
away from home.

I wake up at 7 AM
walk outside to sit on the stoop in baggy clothes,
warm skin under morning sun,
the way the word warm hums,
the humming of cars starting,
dark iris of your eyes, haunting—
what is always forgotten:

the way your finger would curl around the trigger,
your jaw scraping the city skyline.
Your weapons are no longer welcome here
among the chirping songs
of twitter pated birds,
the freedom the road promises,
these early summer mornings.



carries two scars, like twin thorns
embossed in mother-of-pearl.

This prince of silver
carved his hips into
the sacred wood of a violin,
all hard muscle and f-holes finally desired.

This prince of silver
rings his hair in precious metals,
like shining mail, all the way down
to the newly v-shaped curve
of his core's sharpness.

This prince of silver
has a thousand names,
and one; the rotten forge from
his mother, and the steel scraps
of the man he finally became.

This prince of silver
came to be in a post-bellum anomaly, between a
two score hatred and a
two score fear, in that gentle place where pride has gone.

Keats once wrote that he saw pale kings
and princes too, pale warriors;
death-pale were they all.
Was Hector, Prince of Troy, pale then,
as the light faded from his eyes-
stolen by another princeling?

This prince of silver
rides to war in a plumed barbute.

Princes are beautiful, carved for war,
just as we were made to withstand the
violence of this century, the ugliness
made untruth.

They make love and war intertwined,
like how god must have felt casting
down his most favoured, most beautiful
son.

This prince of silver
lords over us in dusty rooms and veiled paintings.
He has created in himself an image,
one neither real nor false entirely,
of pictured perfection,
of a prince that was promised.
This prince of silver
has coins for eyes
and twine for lips,
as a reminder of what
the world can do to us
even when we are beautiful.

For a knight is just a prince with armour,
a boygirl with a sword,
a sword made to cut through
those whose stygian gaze holds the taunting weight
against our bodily sovereignty.

This prince of silver
has entered my apoplexy astride
a pale mare. This post-urban,
post-haste premonition laying
his sweet, cold palm on my brow at last.



Rhys Howell

With Apologies to Hemingway

Pile of luggage, topmost holdall.

Double armed Gallows
Bagel Orifice
Strutting Man with hand in pocket

Boa Constrictor
Wigwam
Finger and Thumb on the forehead
Sideways Trident Top

Large Bowel

Chesty Lady From above
Wigwam
Chesty Lady From above
Big Fish on high shelf

Boa Constrictor
Rugby Posts
Bagel Orifice
Sideways Trident Top
Boa Constrictor

An unwanted long nap

Enthusiastic Triangle
Sideways Trident Top
Plunging Neck Line
Sideways Trident Top
Strutting Man with hand in pocket

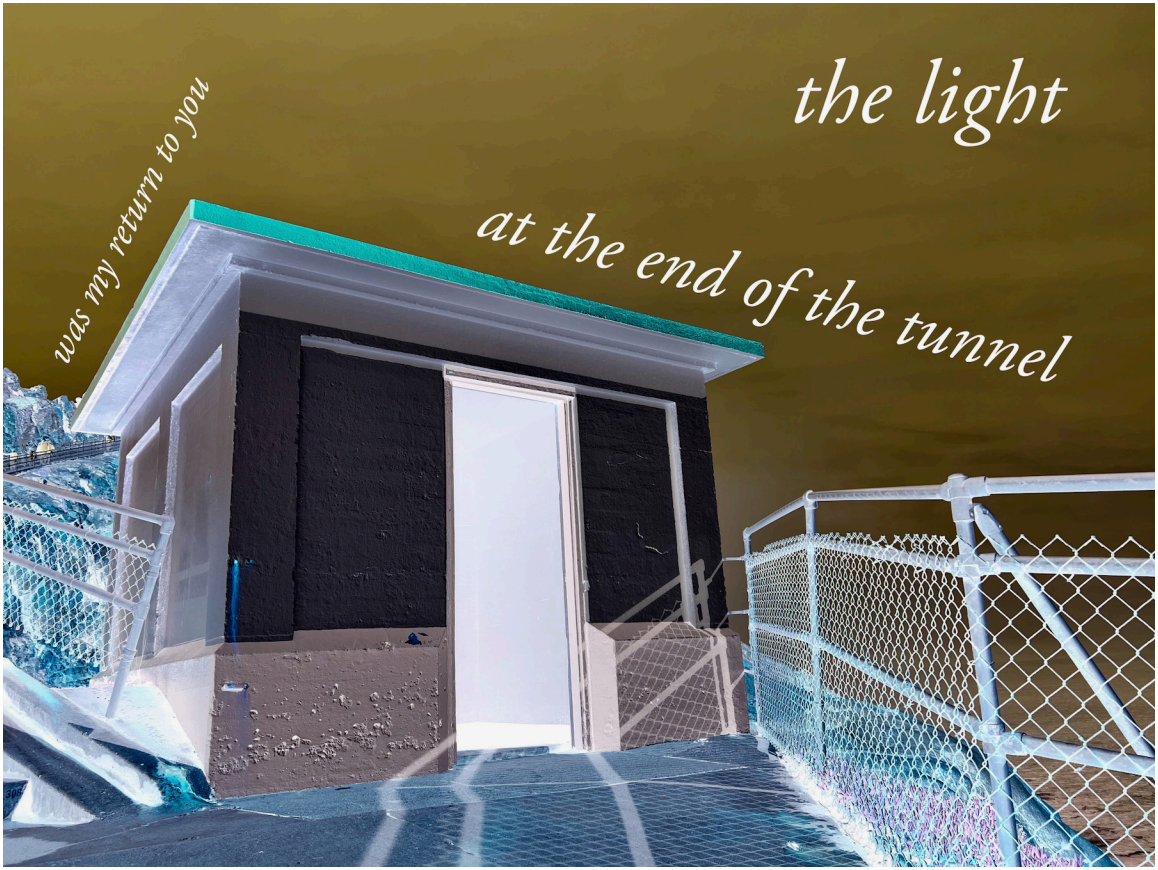
Close Vampire Teeth
Bagel Orifice
Sideways Trident Top
Enthusiastic Triangle

Menses



Cleomé Morra

The Light at the End



contributors



Abigail Redlich (she/her) is a writer, performer, and creative in Brooklyn, New York. Poems of hers have been published in Wingless Dreamer, Quibble Lit, Art on the Trails (in MA), and Dyke Bait Zine. Website



Toti O'Brien (she/her) is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. Born in Rome, living in Los Angeles, she is an artist, musician and dancer. She is the author of Other Maidens (BlazeVOX, 2020), An Alphabet of Birds (Moonrise Press, 2020), In Her Terms (Cholla Needles Press, 2021), Pages of a Broken Diary (Pski's Porch, 2022) and Alter Alter (Elyssar Press, 2022).



L. Acadia is a lit professor at National Taiwan University with photography published or forthcoming in Invisible City, Sycamore Review (featured artist), Tree and Stone Magazine, and elsewhere. Twitter and Instagram

Deanna Faye (she/her) is an artisan and artists' model living in the Houston area. Her photography has been featured in Wrongdoing Magazine as well as in an upcoming special issue in Unstamatic. More of her work can be found on Instagram at @deannafayephotography.





Marta Barrio "When I was a little girl, my parents punished me without reading. When I grew up, I studied literature and Asian cultures, I became an editor, and a writer."



Abdulrahman M. Abu-Yaman is a Nigerian writer and poet. His works have been featured anthologies like Ann Arbor Review, Afritondo, The Lagos Review, London Grip Magazine, Aké Review, North Dakota Quarterly, Blue Minaret and elsewhere. His artworks have been exhibited during Kaduna Book and Arts Festival (Kabafest) and Borno Book and Arts Festival (Bobafest). He is the co-founder of Minna Literary Society (MLS) and winner of Wakaso Poetry Prize and Hysteria Writing Competition 2021. Abu-Yaman is a fellow of Ebedi International Writers Residency.



Krutika Zambre is a writer, poet, and spoken word artist from India. She's a two-time nominee and a gold winner for poetry at the IFP (formerly India Film Project) Season 11. Her work has appeared in The Wire's Live Wire, The Alipore Post, Poems India, The Flesh Mag, Wingword and more. As a spoken word artist, she's been featured in collectives such as Spill Poetry, the Social House, Awaken Words Official, Do With Lit, OneNest, The Habitat and more. Instagram

Charlotte Amelia Poe (they/them) is an autistic nonbinary author from England. Their first book, How To Be Autistic, was published in 2019. Their debut novel, The Language Of Dead Flowers, was published in September 2022. Their second memoir, Conversations With Monsters, will be published in 2024. Their poetry has been published internationally. Instagram



Mykyta Ryzhykh (he/him) Nominated for Pushcart Prize. Published many times in the journals Dzvin, Dnipro, Bukovinian magazine, Polutona, Tipton Poetry Journal, Stone Poetry Journal, Divot journal, dyst journal, Superpresent Magazine, Allegro Poetry Magazine, Alternate Route, Better Than Starbucks, Littoral Press, Book of Matches, TheNewVerse News, Acorn haiku Journal, The Wise Owl, and others.



Geneva Toland (she/her) is a writer, farmer, naturalist, and educator residing on Báxoje territory (Ames, IA). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in the Tiny Seed Literary Journal, Canary Literary Magazine, West Trade Review, HerStry, and Decapitate Magazine, among others. She is currently a student in Iowa State University's MFA program in Creative Writing and the Environment and the co-managing editor of Flyway Journal. Website



R.L. Summerling (she/her) is a writer from South East London. In her free time she enjoys befriending crows in Nunhead Cemetery. She has stories in Maudlin House, Seize The Press, Interzone, Northern Gravy and more. Website

Jay Ferreira is a photographer and visual storyteller based in NY.

Like their gender, **Salem B Holden** (they/them) can be found everywhere and nowhere, probably hugging some tree in the woods, talking to spiders and praising them on their beautiful webs, or foraging mushrooms. They have three chapbooks: How to They/them, Life in the Body, and Rebirth and have been published in Babyteeth, The Insurgence, Many Nice Donkeys, and Lions Online. Their poems have been featured in SOS Art Cincinnati's Pride Celebration and have won the R.M. Miller Fiction award twice for their Young Adult novel. Website





Sarah Muir (she/her) is an emerging poet and communications professional based in Seattle, Washington. She graduated from the University of Washington in 2016 with a Bachelors of Arts in English. Her work can be found in Bricolage (2016), El Portal (2023), Swim Press (2023), and Black Moon Magazine (2023).

Swann Adara Lee (he/hymn) is a Hong Kong-based writer of mixed Southeast Asian descent. His works have been featured in Humana Obscura, Fifth Wheel Press, and Where Else: An International Hong Kong Poetry Anthology under Verve Poetry Press. Instagram

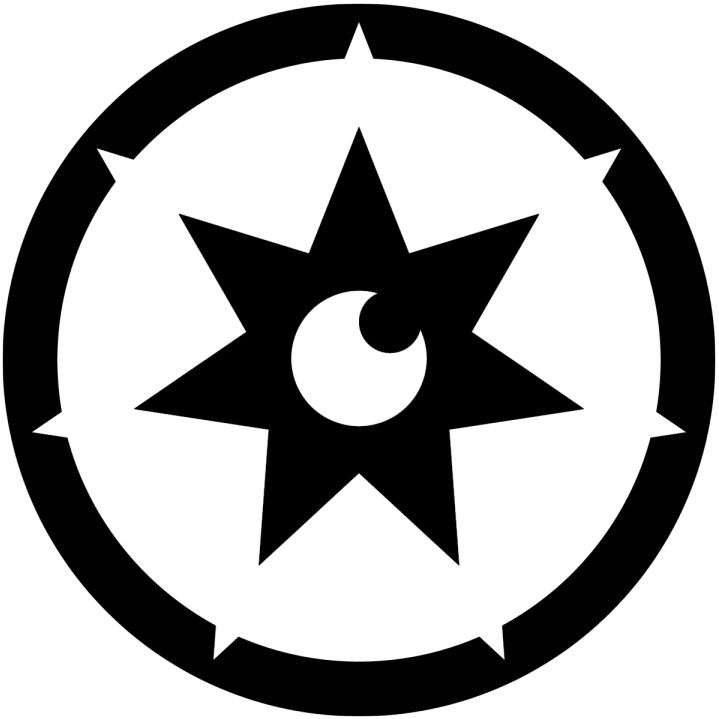


Rhys Howell (he/him) was raised in Gloucester, England, but left for the North before returning South,where he now works for a wildlife charity. He lives with his wife and two children. Like most middle aged men he has a podcast but unlike them he doesn't really want to tell you about it. Twitter





Cleomé Morra (they/them) is a pseudonym for a photographer who wishes to remain anonymous. They've been making photographs since 1980.



www.existotherwise.cc