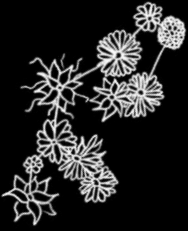


THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, LIMA

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VOLUME 4



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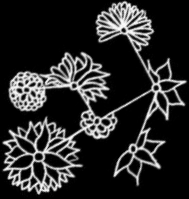
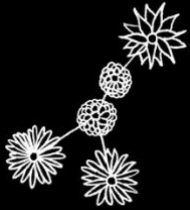


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A Note to Our Readers

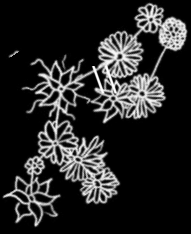
As editors of *Asterism*, we look for moments of fresh originality and surprise. To find these, we search through the hundreds of submissions we receive for those works where one turns the page and finds a canvas – a painting that creates a vivid image for our minds’ eye and invites us to experience the emotions of a world crafted with words. We look for the backyard described by Abigail Swoboda of Temple University, where “birds scrawl invisible cursive with their bodies between the telephone lines.” We look for ways we perceive ourselves, as Haley Barthuly of MSU Billings, whose speaker describes herself as “all petals and no stem, which is to say, I was decoration.” We look for utterances like those of Matt Harmon from University of Michigan, who connects the disappointing “squish” of biting into a tomato to a critique of the modern world, saying, “there was no crunch. No howling of utopias swirling in their sin and drowning themselves in baths of industrial light.” We look for words that remain after our eyes leave the page, voices that we hear even though there’s no sound, and works that we want to share.

We here at *Asterism* are excited to present you Volume 4 of our journal. As undergraduate editors, we are grateful for the opportunity to have read work from across the US, as well as from Canada, the United Kingdom, Palestine, and New Zealand. The selected works that are showcased here reflect the skill and creativity of those who have crafted them. Most of all, we are thankful for you, our readers. We hope you enjoy these poems and stories as much as we did.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Brown, Senior Editor
Victoria Sullivan, Senior Editor
Logan Grant, Managing Editor
Karsen Shrider, Managing Editor
Hannah Stoll, Art and Design Editor

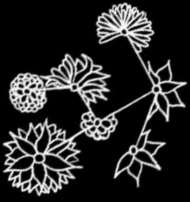
Ramzy Abukhader, Editor
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Lauren Chatman-Wright, Editor
Heather Pickrell, Editor



Abigail Swoboda (Temple University)

THE BORROWED SPECTACLE OF AN IMAGINED HOME

The lamps in the living room of the house I pretend to live in twice every day
cast
the warmest light I have ever known.
Warmer than the glowing lightning bug goo in the grill of my great
grandfather's Cadillac.
Warmer than the peeling plastic deck paint that buckles beneath my fingers
before I brush it into the backyard —
the backyard where we share chickpeas from mismatched bowls,
where we watch fireworks from within a different, bluer world,
where I am almost untouched by the old pain of loving you.
In the backyard, I am letting the clovers and dandelions grow.
They are soft beneath my spit-soaked socks.
In the backyard, birds scrawl invisible cursive with their bodies between the
telephone lines.
So much of flying is falling.
So little is staying still,
but some is.

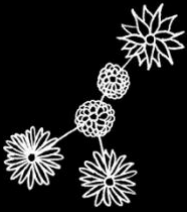


Katie Prior (University of Southern Maine)

BROTHER

John's all there is out
here with me in the loudness of dark
stallions stampeding out to pasture,
his dog chases, barks and corrals,
he smoke-speaks to me *remember*
to hitch the damn gate. With a finger pointed
at a cross-haired moon through
a squinted sky-blue eye, he smacks
his lips and trods away, dog follows
her fur matted with the dirty
words and dishwater from the
ranch house kitchen, John calls his wife
a bitch. We all turn in.

While we're still sleeping, he
beats the rooster's call and walks the
bitch out to the field blanketed pink,
dew collecting on the dog's hind, each
drop a prism of apricot light. John
shoots the pale moon between the eyes,
smiles, and the horses charge the gate.

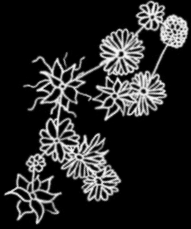


Haley Barthuly (MSU Billings)

CALLE DE LOS GLADIOLOS

Mellifluous vibrations sink through my skin
melt my teeth
curl my toes
as the caramel thick sound crawls from his mouth
up my legs
and repeats.
Creamy rhythms render sumptuous solutions
to my hands
to my lips
sticking satin of my dancing dress clings
to his words
to his beat
-ting
drums.

Delving down, freckled percussions form freely
circling me
revealing
baritone beating my chest heaving, I dance
embedded
obsessed.



Yijun Huang (Boston University)

CAMELLIA

"Come with me." I heard the voice, clear and strong.

I spent a lot of winters with my grandma in my early childhood. Dad was busy. Mama was busy. I was free.

Every morning, before the sun came out and cold hard air was stripped away, they dropped me off at the alley that pointed to grandma's house. Grandma was always there, under the orange flickering street light, with two baozi that still had white hot steam, one stuffed with meat, one with cabbage.

"Behave, An. Listen to your grandma," mama said to me with the car window down.

"Go, go. I got this," grandma gave a wave to the car and handed me the hot baozi at the same time. "Eat them, eat them all. You will grow faster."

Sometimes I turned around to see the car light disappeared at the end of the alley as the sound of chewing cabbage gradually came back to my ear.

"Look front when you walk." Grandma gently pulled my hand, and I could feel her warm palmprint all over mine that made me lose track of time walking in the dark alley that I used to be afraid of.

Grandma was a writing teacher, so usually after breakfast she would teach me how to do my journal. I would sit on a wooden chair that creaked and grandma would stand behind me. Through the reflection on the archaic TV screen, I could see her bend her back and try to squeeze some clarity into her eyes so she could check my spelling.

Almost every time grandpa would sit in the room, either on the bed or next to his desk, in silence. In my memory, I only heard him talking for less than ten times and that was all I could count with my fingers.

Fourth, I remembered the fourth time was on the dining table during Friday family dinner.

"Hold the bowl when you eat." It came out of nowhere. I was cavalierly throwing a piece of pork belly into my mouth. There was something in grandpa's voice that immediately turned down any demur and turned off the pandemonium that only belonged to our family dinner.

I barely knew him. I knew he was 95. I knew he was in the army, and dad

told me that grandpa was going to Taiwan but decided to stay in the mainland after he fell in love with my grandma. Oh, and grandpa only wore dark blue Chinese suits and I thought he probably had five of them. He didn't want people to read his face so he rarely talked as if he spent all the quota of talking when younger.

"Pa doesn't like me," I said to grandma when she was chopping parsley to make dumplings. "Pa never talks to me."

I heard the chopping stop, and the shiny knife was held still halfway above the cutting board for a few seconds before it again continued. That was the first time I realized grandma needed not to bend her back to talk to me again, which she used to do a lot.

"Take this vinegar to the table. You are a big boy now. Go help me, big boy."

"Come with me."

The clear and strong voice came from back when I was alone and grandma went out for her afternoon Mahjong, and I thought for a second that someone broke in.

I slightly wiped off the cold fog on the window and saw grandpa in the yard and realized it was him, a straight shape of dark blue. In the house they lived in, there was a small yard. Though hardly pretty, grandpa still managed to make it thrive. He kept a notebook about how to take care of different kinds of flowers, whether they could tolerate cold, need much water, or even their specific aroma.

I put on my down jacket, sneaked out to the yard door and secretly stuck out my head and stood on my tiptoes. I wasn't sure if he was talking to me until a could-not-hold-anymore sneeze made him turn around. He was nodding at me with two hands tied at his back. He wanted me there.

I limped through the yard with hands on my shoulder, through a tree of magnolia, a frozen water sink, all dead. But in front of him were two bushes of camellia, like a burning flame in the world of doldrums, the undertone of lethargy, as the winter wind billowed up their petals.

"You know the name?"

I shook my head. Grandpa's voice seemed only ferocious in the cold. It was a clue that connected a whole series of puzzles in my head.

"Camellia. You shall remember that." I felt like the voice didn't come from a man but a phonograph that just thrummed into life, and for a sudden I recognized his voice again.

"Smell it. Tell me what you smell."

I slowly crouched down and put my nose just close enough to smell but not too close to soil it, like a pilgrim. I breathed and smelled and sniffed, but there was only another sneeze.

"It grows in the wild, over the hills, everywhere free. Even in winter, it never bows down."

"Grandpa, then why are they here, in this yard?"

"Smell it. It tells you everything. Just smell it."

Still nothing. I thought camellia must take a lot of place in grandpa's notebook. Or perhaps he wanted me to write the part of camellia's smell for him.

"Go inside. Don't catch cold."

Quickly I rushed inside and let the stove wash all over me. The window I wiped minutes ago was now foggy again. All I could see was a red flame really close to the shades of dark blue.

Tenth. That was probably the tenth time he said anything to me.

Two months after his ninety-six birthday, mama told me grandpa was no longer with us. Dad hosted his funeral. I thought someone like grandpa did not have many friends. But the funeral house was more than crowded. Dad was busy. Mama was busy. Grandma was busy. I was free.

"An, you gotta squeeze out some tears," mama whispered next to my ear before I ran away.

I scuttled through many legs and heard people having all kinds of conversations. There was slight laughing and secret crying and choking and talking, of course.

"Zhenxiang was a great guy."

"He sent me money for my tuition"

"He came and paid me a visit for ten years over new year."

"And he always got up really early. Probably a military thing though. He came to buy baozi every morning."

On our way back home, mama turned on the car radio which dad always hated. No one was talking.

"Mama, where did grandpa go?" I saw mama look at dad, pause for a second, and then she tapped his arm.

"An, pa went to a really nice and quiet place, and he is gonna live there for a while," dad looked at me through the rear view mirror as he lowered the radio volume with his right hand. Dad's eyes were red. He must not have been sleeping well lately.

"But I think pa is in the yard."

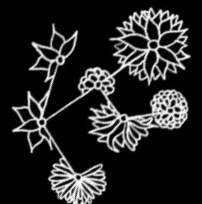
"Yard?"

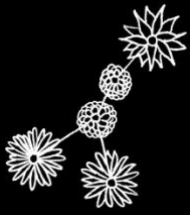
"Yeah, in the backyard, in the camellia."

"Camellia? Why? Who told you that?" This time dad turned off the radio and turned his head around to directly gaze at me. Now I saw his dark circle too. But mama made him look front.

"Just smell the camellia, dad." Outside our car, we quickly drove by every corner in this city where I used to run. I stretched my body as far as the seatbelt allowed and bent over the window, then I saw the alley to grandma's house. I saw the orange street light. I saw grandma but her hands empty.

"Just smell it. It tells you everything."





Adam Weeks (Salisbury University)

ELEGY FOR THE LAST SPRING CHERRY

The lingering burn that kept through the ash
and pulled its way closer to the skin
of our first and middle fingers. We drew
each other in like we did our Lucky Strikes, sweetening
our teeth together in the shade of an oak. It was slow burning

across the sky so we huddled our eyes together
against the light, trading stories between
flicks of the lighter. When night came we gathered
around the fire, the one caught in our hands
and our lungs. The slow-dying against

the early sunset, the one that stuck in your throat
and scraped itself out. We were greedy
and didn't leave any for winter, winter while I'm stuck
alone where the grass won't grow past our roaches.



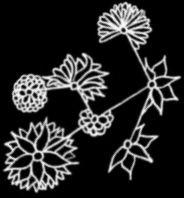
Grace Sleeman (University of Southern Maine)

MOOD INDIGO: HOMAGE TO DUKE ELLINGTON

When I was a kid, my best friend's mom
birthed two babies and buried one.
I don't remember much but holding hands
and sitting before the congregation
of sunchokes, watching them sway with their faces
turned upwards. We turned our faces upwards too;
we swayed as though we, too,
were only yellow flowers atop thin stems.

It rains while I'm at work,
drumming heavy on the roof, the windows. The streets
of this town are drowning in salt water; we stand ankle-
deep and turn our faces to the rain as though hoping for baptism,
but we are still only dissolving into salt
and the rain is simply waiting to become ocean.

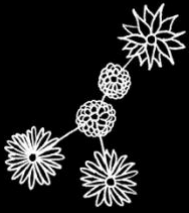
I watch the sunchokes sway in the night breeze
and close my eyes against the heavy sea air.
The harbor feels close tonight; the storm has
brought it overland, lapping at my shins.
The concert up the hill is almost done -- downwind
floats a saxophone wail, tremulous and mournful.
I turn my face upward, and sway.



Allyssa Haygood-Taylor (Clemson University)

IF I LISTEN CLOSE ENOUGH

Entire cities call out your name. It's become routine for my nights to be sleepless as my bed is mine alone now. The sirens below tickle my ears like your lips once had but they get lost in the noise of 43rd street. I count the times Mrs. Whitaker opens and closes her window, she said she's getting old and hot flashes is her only enemy, and tonight so far it's twice. I haven't stepped foot in the kitchen in 4 days and I know you'd yell at me for not throwing out the Chinese leftovers at the bottom of the fridge. There are two dirty forks in the sink and two is always better than one, so I keep them both. And that married couple that just moved in above us- above me- won't stop fuckin. Don't they get tired? I can hear that drunk who lives 2 doors down stumbling in, talking nonsense, this is early for him to be calling it quits. My window is still jammed 5 inches above the latch, just enough for me to stick my hand out for a smoke. I get real close and push my lips to meet the cool air and exhale just for the smoke to be pushed back into here, onto me. It's like the world don't want nothing to do with me.



Yasoob Rasheed (University of Chicago)

LIVID

Fiery

forest take me away from this moment and
all after woozily wander me towards your
light
pierce my bones with autumn air

Writhe my ant legs inside you
and when I swallow you in one big gulp
detonate my
stomach slather your skin with me
allow me to step foot in front of
foot back inside you

October forest

take me forward through your infinity
toward the black heron roosted on fragile
legs tear two glossy jet marbles out of its
head

Drip the sweet syrup onto my sticky
fingers strike me to my knees on the icy
sand

your eyeless heron staring at
me weeping sweet obsidian
blood

until it flies away

Now I'm on your
empty road
driving
consuming the median

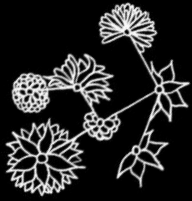
Your smooth paved road
is a still black pool that I dive in
holding my breath and clamping my
nose when I open my eyes

I don't breathe
I swim toward the stars underneath me

When my mother sees me lying on the road,
I'm naked and
shivering she wraps a black shawl
around my shape fuses me with the night

I am a floating head



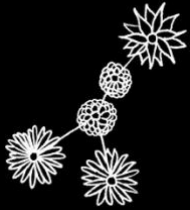


Katelyn Moorman (University of Wyoming)

WINTER

She grows distant as it grows colder. She muffles her laughter with scarves and dims her touch with gloves, her energy frozen along with the tips of her ears. I caress her cracked lips and bleeding hands, whisper secrets into her temple and hold her shoulders as she shakes. Sometimes her hands are limp inside my grip, muscles liquid and weak, her smile fading out into the lines of her face and her eyes vanishing beneath her still open eyelids. I kiss the tender skin beneath her eyes with shaking breath escaping through my parted mouth to reassure her that I'm still there, still waiting, unmoving.

She knits stars into her sweaters, celestial thread against black yarn, to thaw her veins from the chill. I find a pair of mittens with dying stars woven into them in my coat pockets (they're at their brightest when they're dying, she says), and they burn my knuckles as I slide my hands inside them. She buries herself inside sweaters and scarves, mittens and hats and socks, until I have to weave my fingers through the thread and dig to find her flesh inside them. I wake up with her lips feathering over my shoulder on a Tuesday in December, a constellation-encrusted blanket with yarn thick as our fingers pooling at our waists, and she asks me if I still love her. I say yes.

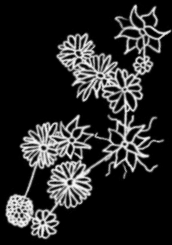


Abigail Swoboda (Temple University)

FIFTY-FIFTY

Hidden inside of me, your hands are blue like an old painting's.
I swoon between the waves of their veins.
I haven't yet decided who I want you to be.
You exist doubly within me,
shivering beneath the mechanical heat of my whirring heart.
I turn over the unburdened quality of emptiness like a quarter
between my fingers.
Loneliness without pain.

In the company of rustling leaves, I pan for golden sunshine between
the leaf-lace.
Skywriters play cat's cradle above me.
I want to smell cold wind.
My coat hangs from my shoulders;
inside, I am floating.
I think there is room for you in here, whoever you are.



Poppy Stavrinou (Roehampton University)

WAITIN' FOR ME ON THE OUTSIDE

Belle was a pretty woman. She had big blue eyes n' yellow hair; her skin was real soft too - had a kin'a pinkish color to it when she work hard. I came to work for her few years back as a farmboy but I ain't never allowed to sleep in the house. She say ain't right for man n' woman to sleep in the same house when they ain't married. I always look at her though. When she cookin', cleanin', pluckin' chickens n' all sorts but she never look at me the way I look at her. She look at me like she disgusted with me, like she hate the way I dress, hate the way I smell n' talk. She never had a kin' word to say to me 'cept for one day when a gentleman came drivin' up the hill in his big fancy car, she tol' me to stay in the chicken coop n' count eggs while the gentleman was in the house. I didn' get a good look at the gentleman but I knew he was smart in his clean suit n' black bowler hat. She put on her best dress with pink flowers for him n' they were smilin' n' laughin' like they was married.

Well, I was countin' the eggs, got to 'bout eighteen, I can't really count pas' seventeen but I know tweny come sometime. So I had counted three seventeens when she pop her head round the door n' say to me "Ray, I needs you to do somethn' for me." She look at me like she awful scared of somethin' so I say "Sure Belle, what I gots to do?" I touch her hand to be nice but she snatch it away n' then she grab my wrist n' pull me t'ward the house, holdin' her skirts in one hand n' marchin' like she goin' to war. We gets to the kitchen n' on the floor is the gentleman, he got lots of white froth comin' from his mouth n' his eyes roll back but he still makin' short, jumpy breaths. I says to Belle "We gots to get him to the hospital Belle, he gon' die like this, what happen?" Belle grab my face in her hand n' make me look at her, she say "Naw Ray, he was bad. He try lift my skirts, he gots to go." She look at me with big serious eyes; they drill holes into my brain n' I nod. She press somethin' cold into my hand n' I look down n' it's a cuttin' knife, big n' sharp. She tol' me never to touch em' case I cut myself n' make a mess so I don't take it at first. She press the knife harder in my hand n' I takes it. I ask her "What do you wan' me to do with him?" she say "I wants you to dispose of him. You know what dispose mean?" I shake my head n' she say

"Damn it Ray, it mean get rid of. Like we do with the scraps." Well I nods my head n' she leave the room, say she gonna take a nap. I wait till she gone n' take off his clothes. He had fancy clothes n' I thought Belle might like me more if I wore em' 'stead of my overalls so I took em'. After I takes his clothes he still breathin' a bit so I holler Belle but she don't reply. When I look back at him he tryna' crawl away, gettin' foam all over the floor. Well I panic a bit n' can't think of nothin' so I get him in the back with the knife, he wriggle a while, flickin' foam everywhere on my shoes n' the cupboards. I think 'bout how Belle teach me to keep the pigs still while I catch their babies so I kick him real hard in the ribs, hear a crack. He stop breathin' then. I use the knife to try n' cut him up in small pieces, ready to feed the pigs cuz' thats what *dispoze* mean but there were a lot of him n' he make a lot of blood so I take him to the slaughter house n' use the wood-chop axe instead. When I finish choppin' him up I put the chunks into the trough n' they start nashin' him up like he gonna get up n' go somewhere.

I gets back to the house n' Belle's in the kitchen on her knees, her cheeks real pink from workin' hard. She pretty. She look up at me with that disgusted look n' say "Ray, you left blood all over the tiles, now I gots to scrub em'... N' look at you trailin' more mud n' blood through the door!" I feels kinda embarrass so I step outside again n' say "Well Belle, I dispose of him. What us gon' do now?" She stop for a bit, drop the scrub brush she was usin' n' got up. I could tell she were bothered. She say she gotta take 'nother nap n' rush upstairs. I knew she wernt' nappin' though, she were probly writin' 'nother one of those lovey ads for that column in the papers.

'Bout a month later I come out the barn lookin' real good in the suit, I even comb my hair n' wash my face cuz' I was gonna ask Belle to marry me. When I look through the kitchen window she there sittin' at the table gigglin' with some new gentleman. His name was Andrew. I remembers cuz' she kept sayin' Andrew this n' Andrew that n' touchin' his arm n' puttin' on a real pretty face for him. By then I knows the drill n' go count eggs n' sure enough, a couple hours later, I see her face pop in the doorway. Well, you coulda' knock me out with a feather, she smile at me the pretty way she do the gentleman: flashin' her teeth n' those big blue eyes flutterin'. She so pretty I ask her to marry me but she laugh sort a awkward n' say "Ray, now's not the time for bein' dumb n' what you got them fancy clothes on for? Take em' off, I needs you again." She done said this five times before: 'I needs you again.' It mean

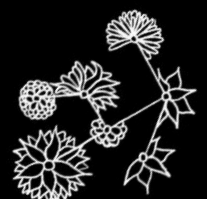
the gentleman been nasty to her n' gots to go. A few weeks aft' I fed Andrew to the pigs 'nother gentleman come by the farm but I know Belle didn' invite him. She came outside with a frown on her face n' in her apron, not her pink dress, her hair wern't even done. I saw his face poke out from the car, he big n' fancy like all the others: young n' clean, wore a nice blue suit n' tie. He say a few words to Belle but she shake her head n' look worried. He drive off aft' a bit more talk n' Belle watch him leave with her hand on her hip.

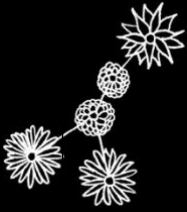
The next day Belle ast' me where I disposed of all the gentlemen n' I say to her "Like the scraps." Belle look at me with a funny face; it look like she surprised like I grew 'nother nose or somethin'. She say "You put em' in the pig trough? They eat em'?" I say, "Yeah, cept' for the bone but I bury those." She look at me funny again n' ast' "Where you bury em'?" I point over to the barn n' tell her I put em' under the soil patch inside. She seem to calm down aft' that n' put on the oven. That night she let me sleep in the house n' I get all happy so I dress up again thinkin' maybe she marry me this time but in the middle of the night she be shakin' me awake. She tellin' me she in love with me n' she wan' to run away with me. I be so shook all I can do is sit with my mouth open, she tell me we can't stay here cuz folk would be talkin' bout it nasty n' say we need to run away. I ask her where we gon' run to n' she say her daddy house in Texas. She say she gon' leave first but I have to stay n' burn the barn. I ast her what I have to do that for but she say it for *precorshon*. I think that mean stay safe. In the mornin' she come up to me smilin', I see some her teeth gone. I ast her why they gone n' she say she disguisin' herself. That sound smart, so I tell her goodbye n' she put a little peck on my cheek n' I watch her walk down the road with her suitcase. She 'bout to turn the corner when she turn n' wave at me. I'm the happiest man alive.

I smile so hard when I be lightin' the haystacks. She never been so nice before I couldn' believe it. She actually love me. She kiss me. I get all giddy thinkin' 'bout it I accidentally burn a little hole in my sleeve. When I leave, the barn is really on fire, black smoke risin' into the sky n' animals goin' real crazy, squealin' n' screechin'. I go n' get ready to leave but I hear a different noise n' look on the road n' it's the Sheriff with a big ol' fire truck behind him. He take one look at me n' the barn n' whip his gun out, he yell "On the floor with ya hands behind ya back!" I'm so shook I do it n' before I know it, I'm in cuffs n' bein' hauled into the Sheriff's car. I ain't never been in a car before n' he drive me away while the fire truck put out the barn.

When we get to the station he throw me in a cell. Sheriff ask me where Belle is but I don't tell him nothin'. Sheriff starts callin' me a crazy son of a bitch n' lookin' over at me with evil eyes, gun in his lap. The phone rings n' he pick it up, his eyes go wide n' switch at me again. He say he gon' fetch the coroner n' slam the phone down sayin' to me on his way out, "You real done it this time, son."

They give me tweny years for arson n' murder. I can't count all the way to tweny but I know it more than eighteen which mean I'll be here a long time. They give me a clergy to talk to every week n' he all about bein' nosy n' wanin' to know 'bout the folk in the barn but I never tells him nothin'. I know Belle be waitin' for me on the outside.





Sophie DeFreitas (Queen's University)

A RECURRING DREAM

sometimes time trips, and I forget where I am, and notice things I think I shouldn't

such as: my grandfather's funeral

there's a butcher shop across the street. I'm staring at it as the hearse leaves, wondering if the employees ever count how many corpses they see go by in a day.

(there's not a lot of jobs you can do *that* in)

My brother's holding my hand and I don't even notice

When I sleep sometimes I look down and I'm dressed in water. I try to touch it and it falls.

When I sleep sometimes I have:

A recurring dream:

I am on the ground. Someone is hitting me, hard. It's dark, and I can't see who is above me, but they are crying. I'm crying. humans in the heat

When I'm awake sometimes I feel like I'm upside down. Hearing things backwards.

do you ever count the people you pass. do you ever see what they looked like when they were children.

A recurring dream:

I am hitting someone, hard. It's dark, and I don't know who they are, but they are crying. I'm crying. humans in the heat

(It's in the smiles. That's where you see it)

When i wake up, i wake up. i



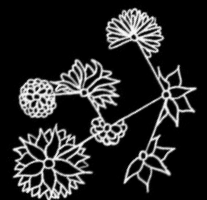
Gale Acuff (Arab American University, Palestine)

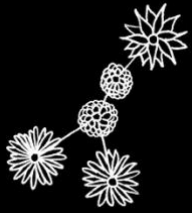
DOUGHNUT HOLE

I like to go to church and Sunday School
(Sunday School anyway, church puts me to
sleep) because the only God I get is
there, I don't much care for Him on schooldays
or Saturdays unless I have a test
I didn't study for or there's two strikes
on me and my buddies will beat me up
if I choke so I hang on until next
Sunday when we'll pray and sing for an hour
and talk about the exercises in our
workbook and at the end of class have Tang
and doughnuts like the body and blood of
Jesus, make that the *blood and body* but
then again it's not real Tang unless you
add water but anyway last night I
dreamt that I could walk on water and I
don't mean water skiing but like Jesus
setting forth from the boat over the harsh
waves to calm the storm with my disciples,
my Saturday-sandlot-pickup-baseball-
pals-like-disciples in the boat crying
and screaming 'til I walked back and made them

ashamed for acting like ye-of-little-
faith whiners but anyway the water
was Tang and the boat a giant doughnut
much like an enormous inner tube, say,
and at Sunday School this morning I took
a doughnut when Miss Hooker passed the plate
but told her *No, thank you* for the Tang and

so all I had was the body and not
the blood and after class I asked her if
that makes me lukewarm, merely lukewarm, and
she laughed and laughed and laughed. And then said yes.



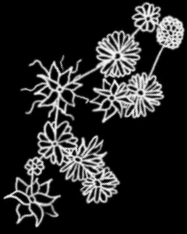


Adam Weeks (Salisbury University)

GET-WELL TEA

My mother saw a crack in my façade and watered
it with a teapot, mouthing better days and letting steam
rise to my tattered plaster. I believe in her Earl Grey
and lavender, in raw sugar and sweet cream, that her honey

will mend my fissures. The water is kept
hot and scalds me as I steep in her leaves, swaddled
in the flavors. My mother watched me rupture and sits
with her kettle, bathing me with bergamot
and clotting my hollows with some sweetened dregs.

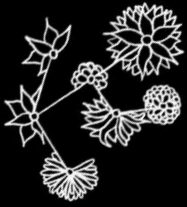


Jonah Hudson (Queen's University)

RIGHTING WRITING^{1,2}

The creek of a door echoes in a house
dammed by those who sleep there,
silently cursing in a mid-night mown
a vein promise to do the repair
The wring of the telephone cries out
begging to not be mist in the busyness
where we often chews to ignore it,
holy unwilling to be present.
You will, and yet won't, clearly hear it their,
the obviously mislaid peace of the puzzle –
there is no hiding it to the well-trained I
yet its awkwardness is not fare to listeners
The immense tension in what we sea
is not to be found where a speech is maid,
of coarse, only when combined
does it strike the discordant cored
All is not what it seams:
duplicity can be scene not herd.

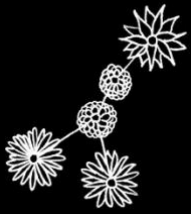
1. This poem is to be read allowed and its discrepancies aloud.
2. It hurt me as much to right this as it will hurt the reader to reed it.



Gillian Lynch (Salisbury University)

LECTURE

The dark. How far far enough is: when
they build a notation to escape
the zeroes. Or when people blew up
trying to get there – wreckage, bodies
not found for weeks. Some of those extra
side zeroes are on the whiteboard behind him
when he tells us that the basketball in his left hand
is the earth, the golf ball in his right
is the moon *of the moon*, the light bulb on that kid's desk
is the sun. What the tides tell us *is really just*
that there's a lateral, *the far side*, we never see.



Maya Webster (Agnes Scott University)

NEW AND GROWING THINGS

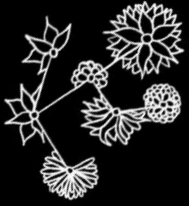
The wide green expanse of the hills stretched into the distance, each blade of grass quivering in the spring wind; a huge green furred creature holding the world on its back. A young boy, lean body pressed against the rough bark of a branch, wondered if the creature would ever get tired of them; drilling their wells into its flesh and acting as though it belonged to them. But nothing belonged to this boy. Or to his family that had worked the land for years. In the distance he could see the blue spine of the creature rising from the earth, marking the horizon and disappearing into the clouds. They seemed the largest things in the world, an insurmountable wall that signified the end of his world. In school they were told the mountains out west were much higher, that hundreds had died trying to reach the sea on the other side. But these here were old mountains, with old blood and old power. He and his siblings knew them better than the man their Daddy worked for. They knew how cold and sweet the creek water got after the first melt. How the sap from trees was a good treat but would do little to ease the pangs of hunger. Which mushrooms were safe and where a cow went when it was lost. He slid down the branch, the seat of his too-big pants snagging and tearing to expose the white threads beneath the denim. All his clothes were too big, bought that way so he would grow into them and pass them on. By the time they reached baby Ellie they would be more patches than denim.

He landed on the ground softly, his feet sinking into the damp, warm earth. It smelled sweet and heavy. The dead things of last season rotting in the ground, turning it ripe and ready to bare life. Lining the soil with nutrients the way the womb lined itself with blood before an egg dropped. A line of smoke rose from the chimney of the boy's one room house, working its way into the clear air along with the scent of beans and cornbread. The boy's stomach contracted and solidified, remembering the hot mushy oats scarfed down at dawn. The beans too would be mushy, flavored with salty bacon grease and chunks of ham. But the cornbread would be sweet, crumbling in the mouth and absorbing juice like a sponge. The hard hunger of his stomach rose in his throat and into his salivating mouth. It had been oddly warm for early spring and there was bound to be something edible

poking its head from the dirt. But before he ran to the waiting forest, which promised spicy onion grass and sweet blackberries and peppery watercress and bitter blue chicory, he saw the shining blonde head of Mary Russell at the foot of the hill.

She was taller than him, though they'd been born barely a week apart. She wore an old dress of her Momma's clasped tightly around her waist with a discarded belt she'd bored a new hole in. She looked every bit the woman she claimed to be when she stopped playing at the creek with him and his siblings the summer before. The baby fat had melted off her face, and her breasts were no longer tiny buds poking out from beneath thick cotton. She bent to pluck a sprig of lavender growing from the garden out front of her house. She would rub it on her wrists and throat like her mother and every time he caught the scent all the hard edges of the world seemed to soften. As his eyes travelled down her body he noticed her feet, the bare and dirty feet of a child. That had gripped the bark of a tree fallen over the river and run across it. That had heels calloused and crusted with dirt.

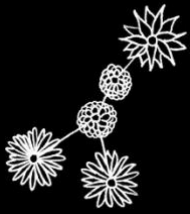




Anna Staud (University of Notre Dame)

2020

at midnight he pressed his soft lips against mine & my teeth stopped my tongue from spilling i love you onto the chipped floor with the vodka & confetti & i stared into his almond eyes & thought maybe this year the world will stop burning & our hollow cathedrals will spit out music instead of ash but now twenty-five days have passed & we still do not believe we are beautiful we walk around heads down wishing we were going somewhere else & last august a six year old boy said to me this city needs to be torn down so no one gets killed & when we got to the park he ran to the swings & now he is seven and can swing higher but still hears death cries of four more years & tastes metal hate in the water he drinks & the air is frozen i can't walk around this lake anymore & sometimes want to break the candles after i pray because all i see is barbed-wired fear stretched for miles on an arbitrary line that was stolen & i bite my nails in class worried if i should choose A or B while bombs go off in another country & a white man shoots thirty people whose names i can't remember & now i wish i said i love you



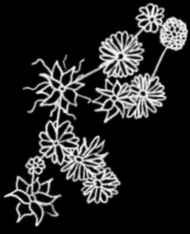
Mariela Bautista (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

JUST THIS ONE TIME

Imagine this on a rounded square screen
 smelling of bagel with strawberry cream,
 my skin
You're standing near
 perfumed like coconut shrimp
 I'm begging a bite
 You win
I like you, okay?

Hand in jean pocket,
 eyes on your warm beer
speech-class-red chipmunk cheeks
 steamed lenses
struggling to focus on that *But you don't know me*

used-to-be-kind boy
 the kind I knew without knowing
 my pencil sketch of you
 smeared
tears waking up sunscreen's stupid smell
looking at this
 T-shirt and worn-out jeans
 sobbing
Textbook-and-street advised mind throbbing
 knowing the drop of
 pails
 and pails
 and pails of paint off a window ledge.



Emma Sidnam (Victoria University of Wellington)

MORNING

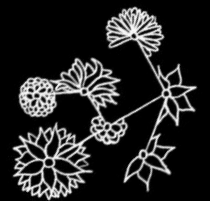
I swing a briefcase
Between my teeth, the concrete
Hard against my feet, I trip
Over the curb to the same
Beat as the music emanating from
The window of the closest café –
It is morning and the streets are
Alive with mundane schedules
And burning fingers on wasteful
Coffee cups, soon to be tossed
Into the ocean and perhaps
Choke some unfortunate seal.

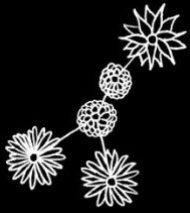
This is Wellington, the
Beehive is close by, and MPS
Dressed in night colors and
Nikes troop like soldiers into
Various doors, their cars purr,
Wait in the spaces of dark below, or maybe
The cars stay at home like
50s mums, the buses instead are full like
Pregnant women in their 8th month.

The Beehive is mostly
Ignored by the strangely well-dressed students
Across the road, who only
Cross it if they carry signs and
Indignance, combined with a youthful
Apprehension of change - I have
That too, although I
Am also cynical, like a cat

That was once unloved and will
Forever be wary of humans.

It is morning and the half-fogged
Windows of an empty study-room
Witness a solitary fly entering,
Baleful and unheard, full of
Some fly-life that will never be
Appreciated, the windows
Exhale, the lusty light streams
In, cannot help itself, the fly
Leaves, never to be seen
Again.

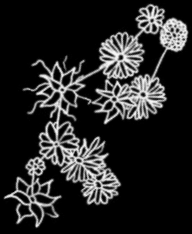




Carla Seravalli (University of Iowa)

FABLE

There was nearly a story here. There was a point
at which I left out the character's name, what she was after.
I left the writing to meet a lover in a snow bank.
It was dark, I pushed through. Rubbing against furs, all Lucy in the wardrobe.
On the other side, I was the snow bank.
Bank of my self, stealing from the bag.
I had a Turkish delight. I had another. I had a lover
push me into a rack of shoes, rack
meaning river, shoes meaning sheet rock.
I unpack all the central concerns:
*Am I livable? Or at least overly effusive? Or cold, dark, etc.,
a place for pantry goods? I am asking
all the right questions, I hear
young goose honks roiling from the bell tower,
endless slip of the bell tower,
listening in. I was an adjunct, I was an attic above
the highest expectations, living
in spite of the altitude, the extremity. The barbaric faculty of my living
as my breath threatened to reel the life out of me.*
In dreams, the giant goose eating, eating me. Honking *stupid girl, your lover
isn't gone, only an indent in the snow
made to feel like one.* I ask, *What kind of snow?*
It says, *The kind you are, the kind you are living in.*



Colin Gardiner (University of Leicester, UK)

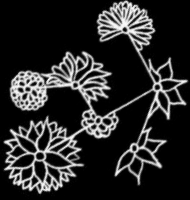
CANLEY FORD

I take broken leaves to a silver slipstream
Where someone has dabbed red paint
On Millennium Green. And there are no dogs
Allowed without a leash.

The horizon surrenders amber,
And the traffic mantra oscillates
Through the trees. Painted Ladies
Have been spotted amongst the Buddleias

And the thistles, being in flower. I didn't know,
That Red Admirals live alone in secluded
Leaf tents, and Tortoiseshell caterpillars live
Together in a mass of spun silk.

Evening bruises worry the rosacea sky's edge.
Antibiotics fall from shaken cloud ribbons.
I close my eyes and lie down, feeling
The itch of leaves absorbed into my bones.



Saharah Chalupny (University of Idaho)

AVALON

She was to me what her name always told – a final resting place.

She smelt of cinnamon sticks and the dusty area of a library often ignored or implored by youth certainly not interested in the untouched literature that lined the corner. Her skin was smooth and glowed of liquid gold under the rays of the sun she surely could crush with the tips of her nimble fingers. When I looked in her eyes, I saw the smoke rising off of a tall pine tree just struck by lightning, dampened only by the rain falling from the sky and silenced by the thunder rattling my bones in her presence, but they remained kind in every smile. My teeth sizzled every time they landed on me; I could not even think to look away.

I had been blessed to feel her lips against mine after a night of cheap bubbles and harsh burn in the back of my throat. There must've been an antidote on her tongue, for I was cured; I had even told her that, and when she asked, "What had been the poison?"

Well, I said, "You."

She shook her head and laughed at me, calling me some sort of jesting insult that only made the room around me spin more and more. "The antidote," I said, resting my hand on her waist and smiling so stupidly when she didn't push it away, "could I have more?"

Her breath contained fire at every whisper into my ear. My favorite flames were in the quiet of the night, only the brightness-too-high television screen lit up with some cartoon meant to lull us to sleep and my glass of water half-empty on my nightstand. Her hand drew shaped under my shirt and those tongue hushed embers would float into my head, looking for fuel to start a wildfire in the dense thicket of my mind. My toes were cold, they always were, but her nose against my jaw as sleep began settling over us both maintained my warmth until the morning chill.

She had grown up in a city, not one of the big ones that always get destroyed in the superhero movies, but a city big enough to get lost in if you took a wrong turn down Fifth instead of Darling Street. A strange look would illuminate her face when she mentioned it, the same kind that I only saw when a lighter was in my hand and her upper lip became eclipsed by smoke. "I hope you see it someday."

Hurricanes raged beneath our feet when we yelled. Her tears filled my throat; it felt like I was drowning with every breath, every spiteful word falling out of our mouths. Glass windows clattered against their panes. She pushed me and grabbed me and cried and cried until she, too, was left on the floor in pieces like a priceless piece of china. The same one I had thrown against the wall. The same one her mother had kept so nice and clean to showcase on top of the refrigerator.

I knew as I cradled her in my arms and soothed the aftershock of the storm settling in her chest that I had no power to put her back together again. The scotch tape on my fingers did not have the capabilities to fix her jagged edges that sliced open my skin, but she did not ask for my help. I could only watch as she threw herself back into the furnace to melt her margins crudely back together. She began to smile the same way, but I saw the difference. It was like looking at a painting you had finally finished, hung up in a museum for every person in the world to see, and every time it passes by your field of view, you can only see the brushstrokes that should've been better, the color that should've been brighter, everything that should've been... perfect.

But I had not painted her; to me, she filled my lungs with the breath of morning dew at every instance I could lay my eyes upon her. I kissed her hoping she felt how much adoration I had for her. I thought I loved her enough to make her forget about all those brushstrokes she hated about herself, but we both knew.

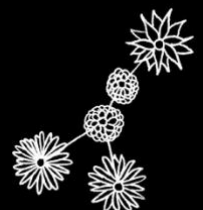
Our efforts were futile.

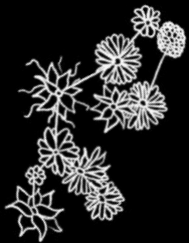
She had always been to me what her name had told – a final resting place. As her roots grew deeper within my heart, she became that sort of unreachable paradise, too. The kind you should only find after death, the kind that you might be lucky enough to get a glimpse of, but then suffer from the punishment.

I know it will come; whatever suffering awaits me for holding this piece of

paradise next to my side for so long, but now is no time to muse about such things.

She is here, next to me, igniting my blood and drowning us in gold paint.





Colleen Beckloff (Bowling Green State University)

COUPLES' COUNSELING

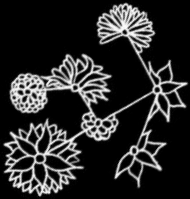
*you make me think of flowers,
like you have a garden in your chest –*

between tomato trellises a crow lies in pieces,
but I eat the bones so there's nothing left for us
to bury. I pick mites from my feathers, dry
and dehydrated – like your eyes – *I'm sorry –*

and there you are, eating pomegranate seeds,
reclined on the therapist's faux leather chair
and muttering something about your mother –
go ahead, keep hiding your pain behind your own teeth.

you dig nails under the chrysanthemums
lining your veins, sprouting like beautiful
weeds. *but here –* leave the soil untouched
like you – let's wait for life to grow again.

what a pair we are.



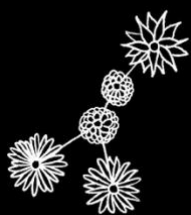
River Langham (University of Southern Mississippi)

LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS, REVISITED
WITH APOLOGIES TO W. C. WILLIAMS

Running downwind it rocks hard forward,
The ship that passes Icarus in Breugel,
And the eye adds an icon's glow
As though in some Byzantine saintery
The beauty of the gilded farmer's face.

For full real it is, in every bit of carving
As though salt air had dried with oil-paint
Before the gale had driven its model
Deep in the cupped hand of darkness;
As though the painter were able-bodied
And rebuilt it round him as he brushed,

And full ideal it is, in its animal wholeness,
The foresail dove-white and moon-bowled,
The mainsail furled, the mizzen winging out;
The stays kabbalistic-straight and crossy,
And fiddle-taut as to be wind-bowed:
A ship to be inscribed in a circled square
Like the image of Leonardo's perfect man.



Emma Sidnam (Victoria University of Wellington)

NEW YEARS

our bodies were painted Picasso
darkness / huddled
heat beneath a floor of stars /
beneath us, sand cold as
revenge / between our toes,
flames red as day /

the New Year stalked us, one
eye faux-closed / drinks and singing
a friendly mask / she knew
our desires, our numbers,
we followed her / relentless

together we swept the ground
with attempted rhythms
in our feet / together we
were a circle, cheeks pressed
as kisses, art as
midnight drew / holding
her breath / around the
world revellers threw fire
at the sky.

when all was quiet, the rituals
ceased to silence, I lay in dreams:

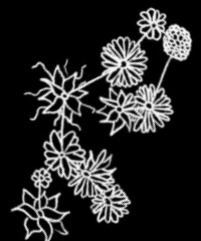
emotion swallowed me
and my skin stuck to the walls
of its mouth – hot, tingling with
sunset flush, it was all
rather overwhelming, each

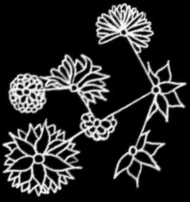
breath a wish, a sprung-up
salty river bearing my
body away /

and like everyone i woke up /

and because we only look
one way, we were now the
farthest pinnacle from the
same dream.

365 days
we wait, we
roll ourselves in
paint.





Gillian Lynch (Salisbury University)

TOUCHING YELLOW

Like this: the ebb and rush
of bodies rehearsing their distance
from one another. Or when our parents
came through the front door
during window-open
springs, and the air would prove
its existence, slam
our bedrooms closed. Or how whiskey
hurts the mouth, bites
the throat, ruins everything until
warmth on stomach
walls. Those sickly
green waves hitting blond,
that hot honey sand.



Matt Harmon (University of Michigan)

I BIT INTO A TOMATO TODAY

i bit into a tomato today, just like i would
an apple, both red as the moon that drove
mothers to kill their kin and threw whole
continents into the rising oceans with the hopes of building anew.

the skin gave me everything and ripped between my
begging molars. my jawbones tremored, vibrated
to the rhythm of the death-wailing hummingbird.

there was no *crunch*.

no howling of utopias swirling in their sin and drowning themselves in baths of industrial light.
no punch thrown by the effervescent drunkard filling his gut with gin and weighing in on the
crimes of humanity.

no pious siren come to warn us damned about the absence of afterlife and the mass execution
of hope against the Black Wall.

just a *squish*.

mistaken for *forbidden*, i was lured
and lied to and yet i regret nothing.

instead of apples we found rotten tomatoes and chomped, chomped them all.

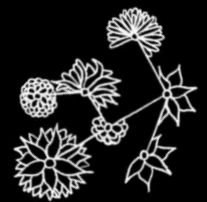


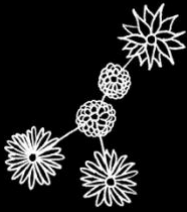
Haley Barthuly (MSU Billings)

DECISION

Today I'm going to tell my mother
the marigolds bloomed
at the same moment
I started missing home.
I'm going to spend all day watering
what I'd otherwise let die
drops
I pour back
whiskey
into her drained
iris golden brown aged and
dripping
While time
inside of the circle—slowing
its expansion—
retracts to a single pupil.
I'm not going to let her know
I was all petals
and no stem, which is to say,
I was decoration. Or
about the spiral of smoke
that descended over the whole
of my blurred reasoning. No,
Mother,

I never had to wear
 beads of sweat like jewelry
 or dew,
 I knew
all along
that it's worse to drop
down on your knees
when you've lost your way home.





Colleen Beckloff (Bowling Green State University)

A PLEA TO SOFT LIPS

I want to live inside her mouth, let her swish me around with wintergreen mouthwash, and spit me into a paper cup. I'm too afraid to ask her what she wants from me – what if she puts me back on her windowsill, says she wants her mouth empty for a little while, says that I can feed the birds for her while she thinks on it – I would, too – I'd tell the birds how much I want to rest my head on her teeth, dig toes under the soft blanket of her tongue. I'd clean the nooks of her molars, scrub plaque from the back of her incisors, and when she grinds her teeth in her sleep, I'd pet the roof of her mouth until she felt safe. I'd tell the birds how much I loved her lips, even when they swore at me, and how much I wanted to know what was stuck between her teeth – but they would just peck at my feet, ask for more birdseed.



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