

Spring 4-1-2016

Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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columbiapoetryreview

no. 29



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Columbia Poetry Review is published in the spring of each year by the Department of Creative Writing, Columbia College Chicago, 600 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60605.

SUBMISSIONS

Our reading period extends from July 1 to November 1. We accept online submissions only. Please submit up to 5 pages of poetry (one poem per page) during our reading period to *Submittable* at <http://columbiapoetry.submittable.com/submit>. The cost of submission through *Submittable* is \$3.00. We respond by February.

PURCHASE INFORMATION

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How about a Little Soul Music

Three bagpipe will soon come. Selah.
River's little to no fish now, river's
Slow, selah. Summer's two fat rac-
-coons crawling up & over the back
Porch rail, dos mapaches, fat
As dogs, hissing for scraps then
Run off by the decaudated cat. Selah.
Three bagpipe. I turned on the light.
Don't kid yourself, kid, it's always
Something : last night was a dream
About a movie called "Mercy." Tonight
It's all just far too long. Now the light's
Come on, the man's rooster's a mile off
& so into it he crows each time I'm up
To piss : he's better than us persons,
Who only wish we could bust the head
Of language, who only dream a new

Plan to carve the words in right. Amen.
The way we'd haunt the word *snake*
Would be quaint but for the serpent.

Poor Onion

Some suckers live lyrically
By looking *in* the body. Poor suckers,
Poor math, pure omen. Other folk
Look to the outside, clutch at huff rags &
Try just to get to be nothing : maybe
Score a job down at the chicken plant,
Pulling feathers, cutting throats, best case.
Takes a half a year living six to a room
Just to make an offer on a thirdhand truck.
Poor number. Hail the great conflicts :
Man vs. the Stankin Ass Pit Void, or
Las luchadoras contra la momia. We could
Find suckers, stake them, pit them against.
We could take bets. A crowd could form,
Thrash its paltry capital, then as quickly
Disperse. They fight hard but none panther.
Their own truth hold out just one flower.

Me, I'm more sensitive than most.
I have a bouquet. Not truth.
I have not a bouquet. I have a bucket.

Gardening

That night I tried to phone you after the housefire & you didn't pick up. That night I tried to phone you after the housefire & you didn't pick up. That night I tried to phone you after the housefire & you didn't pick up.

The question isn't whether I dialed the right number, but if you'd ever really been there at all. Beyond the window, the gardeners unlock the iron gate. They pick up their shovels. One by one, they begin to dig—

The First Lamb Comes Out Easy

Dry grass sticks to his black shine. His mother is restless, waiting for the next fall. We did not prepare for another. My brother, with wool-fogged fingers, keeps the straining sheep firm. I do not have the strength to hold stock still and can only look. She arrives warm and unbreathing. He scours her mouth for blocks, her underbelly for dents, for abnormal growth and finds nothing. Healthy in size, bigger than her brother, but made to wait too long. This happens with siblings sometimes. My brother has left with the living but I stay behind, holding this lamb, feeling her heat fade. And I hear, in the distance, bleating.

Slow Moving

Last night I dreamt of my feet hushed in sand as I
spent hours sawing straight-grained basswood

the color of milked coffee. Is this like the teeth
parachuting from mouth dreams? Does it suggest

self-inflicted darkness? In this town I am
surrounded by light that makes me wish I had gorged

on your incandescence before leaving. Have you
already packed? The seats are filling. The seats

are filling, I am certain. I am full of this
open-mouthed keening that can't be silenced

until your feet touch my ground. This is not
coughing up the green bones of garfish, or paying

full price for worm-hollowed apples. Being alone
here is like a deer caught in airplane tires—ribs

splintered and muscles trembling—while passengers
worry about layovers. But once you arrive

we will make this new our own, like birds building nests
out of scouring pads. Our wings might chip

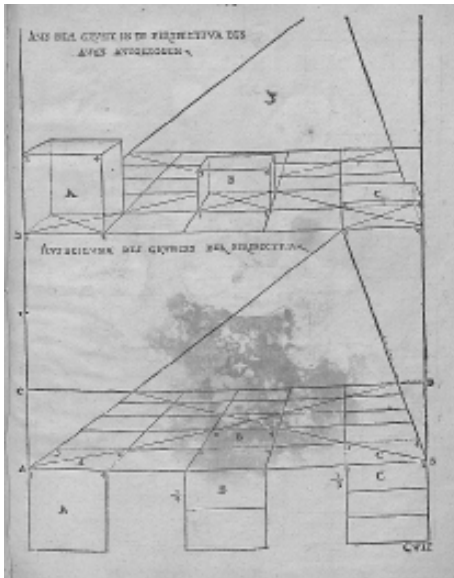
and pointed beaks wear dull, but we'll boast red
breasting deeper than any species back home.

How to Build an American Home



In order to travel from one house to another without touching the cracks, a network of points and people must be absorbed. Intersecting routes of familial intention and linguistic obligation: a prism-shaped notion of belonging. On its surface, such criss-crossing could be seen as interference, but I prefer an accident of geometry. Without such nodes, we are merely dropped satellites blinking as the earth approaches midnight.

How to Build an American Home



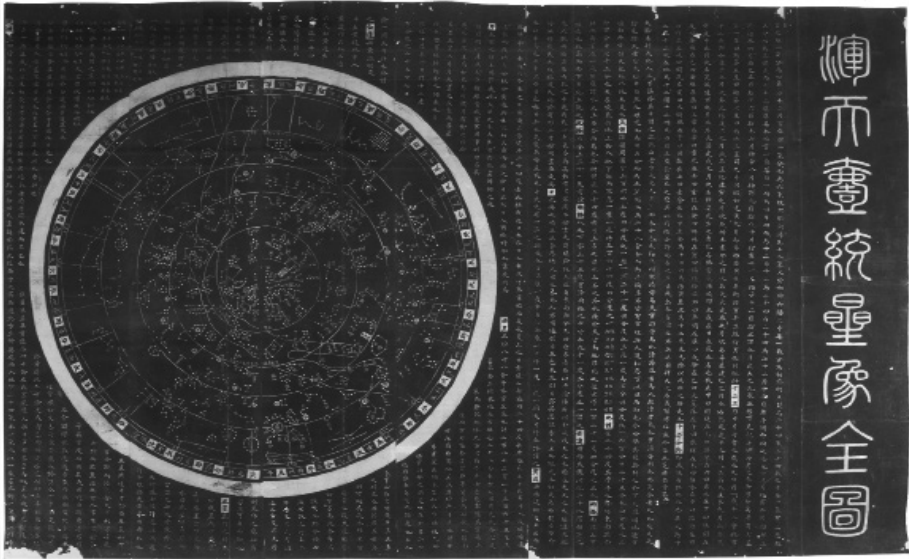
If there is a word for *to gleam through soot* and another for *smoke-black*, then somewhere also is

dust, fume, dim,

which would mean flying dust or bright smoke.

We will always hold those who kept us in the world before we could fall out again. Geometry is a configuration of parts, each asking itself: *How do I adhere?* It is a tricky matter: in order to unfold a multisided structure under a plain sky, we must draw on murky shifts that crack and tumble in the underground.

How to Build an American Home



Her mother in the house is the house :
in the kitchen splitting roots : families split, bodies split, history split : sound
splitting : not a word, but a texture, terrain : not a speech, but a depth, density :
the structural foundation, the wall's stuffing : a fact of houses everywhere.

In extant

& the hummingbird enters torpor; what
brings us to *almost*; what must return from
body's slow trance; to understand keep;
how the spider crawls up the jaw

& dips one thin leg in the mouth,

withdraws & keeps saunter; to be in
familiar pastures; in extant; to know
regardless of; the heart pumps in manage
of wings beating one to fifty in a second;

say *metabolic*; say *what burns*; say *a lovely use
of*; & we all distant & watchful of our
nature in show; to peer out of fullness of
mind, eye forward; to catch the universe
unfolding at a fleshy-seam, say

expose; pupil hollow in design, in passage.

This lure

Dragonfly over lake; to view the reservoir
from middle; how the lap unravels edges
into view; when we speak of wings & fins,
do our words jealous in the lack of

forms in all the ubiquitous blueprints? Say

*we carve from; say wing forgot me; build
keels—for float roams in spinal cord;
build gunwales—for our lungs forget
water; & we boat & boat*

our lives in hull away from stern &
starboard; in fear of capsize; in distant
desire; to be water & not; to witness the
dragonfly; to lack hover; to be body in
sink at sight of the bank; say *this fade*,

this lure; an incantation from inception.

Any Unkindness

when you fuck me and i don't
like it, is that violence. you keep
goring my form in pursuit
of an end i have hidden from
even myself. no words are safe—
i have such illusions about s&m
and what pain is not.
when you fuck me and i think
[brutal] is the best word for this
winter, is that normal. i'm not
there under your nails because
you chew them out of habit.
i'm holding your hand so you
can't harm a thing that i pity.
the pinkness of the skin
around the nail is an omen.
brutal is the winter and some days
a bird migration may as well be
any unkindness of ravens. is it
generous to think i'm as malignant
as a sinkhole. is it violent,
hoping we don't think alike at all.
it could kill us, what we don't
know but are starting to glimpse

Bawl-Mouth / Tongue-Fault / Disease

That it may go like this

Hound blood mapping the throat's throat the throat bawl-mouthing

the dark That we listen to the fiddle crop-dusting

the man the porch the pot of beans boiling the family of eight

hungry and then some Always what is left

is what is left is only what the dogs get the redbones the blueticks

understand the back back parts of the heart

A piece of glass

A shard of white after-death

The woman moans the butterflies

of Bolivia release resin from their migration their Montana

cave Moon washing up dead fish

all the way in the Wabash

How could the only twenty-three whooping cranes

left in 1954 have survived

my life?

Somehow we simple-down we yes and no we word-skip

the blood

we chop-mouth and inexact Out of the smoking rain

the cigar-dead get into my brain

There is beautiful blood

in my quite beautiful mouth

All I have killed

I have dressed with skill

with a pack of hounds acting

as one

sound

If we could collective, say, the mouth

If we could mouthful and mine-step and release
The back back parts of what I know

I know Maybe now I might finally get it
right That it may go like this that sleep itself

might doze off that the dogs might finally throw us
a bone come in from the hunt scratch forth a bed curl into themselves

That I might sniff out the resin in my tail rest my head upon
what's behind me pass the time without Indiana or moon-shred

or the tongue-faults of the past the tongue-toughened indiscretions of disease

Naloxone

Do you hear that? All the things
I meant to do are burnt spoons

hanging from the porch like chimes.
Do you have some wind? Just a hit

and was the grass always this vocal?
A hit and the blades start sharpening

in the sun, hideously. I wear a belt
because my pants don't fit.

My pants don't fit because I wear
the belt. I can tell you how it tastes.

Tannin. Heaven. Is it May already?
As one-time owner of my own

private spring, I can say
it's overrated. Remember? Someone

found me in a coffee shop bathroom
after I'd overdone it

and carried me like a feed sack
to the curb. As they brought me back,

they said, the poppies on my arms
bruised red petals.

They said, He's your savior.
But let's not get carried away.

Let's stop comparing everything
to wings. Have you ever even felt

like you're going to not die
forever? It's terrifying.

Icarus in Oxyana

Talk to yourself. Console.
Invoke an image of progress,
failed. Two Vs of geese colliding.
An X, exploding. Pretend
not to worry about your father,
or that he no longer worries for you. Something
about angels, levitation, waking up
with a belt around your arm,
some blood. Tell yourself to listen,
something about your mother,
how she's the best part of you.
A memory of childhood
equated to a bomb. It worries you.
Which worries you. Think again
about the geese. You have migrated through today
through sleep. Someone on the porch
who's lost both his arms
chain-smokes. Something about angels.
Or geese. Or wings. He warns you
about flying too high. Then helps.
Something about chances, not knowing
it was your second until your third
never shows. Summer air. People
blowing up things and celebrating.
Something about pain
as a private choir moving through you.
A movement. A movement. A movement
helps you up. To the porch. To the armless full
of smoke. Where do you want to go?
Nowhere? We have just enough

to get there. And then some.
And then, something. The geese
piercing the sky. They rise, and then, they rise.

2.2.14 Clarity

couldn't
clarify
touching the skin of the
throat meeting the chin made
the skull emerge and
put flesh on the wood

the spring nests
either side of
the river a door
opens footsteps
squeak tire cars
the phoebe the
barn owl and
a airplane engine

3 ice fisherman in
front of
the bee hive hut
one mile behind them
the winter days
what repeats
the snow in

not everything
present is visible at
the corner of
Morris on and Thornton
crawling into the
second world of
cherry trees buried to
the branches in
wind drifts from

a corn field happened
yesterday or not here
a flock of robins in
 the swamp willows
a squirrel's shadow
 one of two climbing down
a green house
 30 feet from
 ringing claws on bark

s upporting the
 whole illicit
 structure
 a rch of
 snow over the
 frozen stream

 the compression
the s now line on
a newly poured
founda tion
an open hole
a round it a nd
 the old house
torn down

the kite in the tree
I said to
the bee hive hut at
noon
 not at either place yet
stopped in
yesterday's tracks

there's no door so
 it must be art
 a woman in
 a green jacket
 I slide under
 a tooth of ice dangles
 from
 a duck weed strand
 the sunlight reaching a
 few
 feet in

do you know
 who made this
 we did
 yesterday and the
 day before yesterday
 two creatures
 giddy
 turning around
 euphoria

a clump of
 snow falls on my face
 writing
 breath below the oculus
 appears
 in
 the sun layer
 clouds above it
 a tree creaks in
 dots more snow
 arm and face
 released from
 the sticks a dog barks

washed up sticks woven in
 it
 a cone not closed
 a bee hive hut
 one in
 a cave in France
 James says
 5 feet at
 the base diameter

2 foot diameter
6 feet up
lichen duck weed
fibrous bark
fragments
vibrate
a deer face in
a cracked stick
a large eye with a white
snowball directly above this

of
fire
shiver in
the blue before
coalescing around
the slightest
gathering

the shadows of these
interests on a patch of
stripped wood
after 47 years I
woke up inside
this
nothing had fallen
when there's no
vapors the points

a man passing
a great dane a black dog
is
reminded
of
a funeral pyre
a skier in green
passes without
looking with

an oyster shucking
sound the road
cuts
 directly
 over the house
I wasn't in
many places at once
 earlier

they are present
the thousand small
 actions
 the grass grew
the sticks joined enclosing
 a hollow this was
written inside of

from *Thank You Terror*

I've been looking
for the sea
all these years,
& what have I learned?
That gravity goes
away at night.
That the trash heap
beneath the city
remains after rain.

There is a silence
we each enter each day
& once we enter
we are impermeable,
like here I am,
your rocket queen,
the trees all black with ants,
the cold callus of the sky,
& I am failing these mountains
& what else would
you have me do?

The good thing is
we are learning
to cut cold skin off warm.
The good thing is
a government inside me,
this doubled autumn
of the heart,
that we're all
supposed to try.

Sweet Gnash

for Michael

Tonight, the mind is an animal refusing
to numb between the slender jaws of Arizona.

No sweet mirage ending with a line of wild
blooms. No toed rope between here and Arizona.

For this memory I work the small ghost Michael left
in my skin, before he left my skin for Arizona.

By day the sun fills the fields with sienna, the color
I'd call death if death were a field in Arizona.

He survives another night because I have bargained
with a god in a cloud somewhere above Arizona.

Michael is not dead, but he is beyond voice. Outside
my mouth he is no more forever than Arizona.

I tell myself his skin is not flat enough to taper, that skin
has more purpose than to separate a god from Arizona.

Sometimes, I touch the places he hasn't left yet—
facing away from the mirrors, only while rain stuns Arizona.

Sometimes, my mind is good as a box of spines. What use
are words when bodies speak fluent dust in Arizona?

Ghosts have never used words this way. I promise I will
follow suit once every bone I've touched is a ghost in Arizona.

I empty my mouth of permanence, this sweet open mouth
of its scorpion tail, its unknowable *Peter*, its *Arizona*.

I love me some him

my man is ghost I mean he dead I mean he left me I mean I never had a man I mean today I saw a person so wonderfully average, a little round, brown & genderless like the mean & median of all humanity & I love me some him, some them, I have trouble explaining gender to my family so I don't bring up mine, I just eat the food & thank Jesus when appropriate & don't dare bring up my thoughts on Christ. can I tell you a secret? once I was hard for a whole church service thinking about a boy who just that morning had turned me into his palm, or I was less a body and more a doll so real it even bleeds, either way I called that love, he demanded I open & I became a portal to someplace warm & wicked, I called that love & in the morning he made me tea, ironed my shirt, spat in my mouth, called me his bitch, thanked his god, looked into my eyes & vanished. the doctor told me he left me a gift in my blood. when I get lonely, I grab the blade. I make a mouth & kiss it. my body is 1000 mouths, each sings a different song about missing a boy.

for when you need to disappear

the device you use when you need to disappear
is made of parts of people serene and bloody

you put the parts over your parts and whisper
I am not ugly
you take the parts off and whisper
something loves me

when it is time to gather more parts there is no diagram
for disassembling a person's love parts glowing synapses
cavernous vessels it is specific disappearance in here
in this person valley this awful depth yes go in the cave

you whisper
I am dead and invisible
and then you are
how directionless is a pile of blue sinew

what are you hearing from the dead when will you
evaporate worthless into someone else's soil and
will anything grow in the missing you

Said Gun's Wife's Funeral

I buried her
behind the coop
under a dogwood.
It was warm
and the crows
were curious
about my digging.
What is missing
draws us in.
She had a shock
of gray hair
in her bangs. Her
legs were thick
from stooping
and rising
to tend a creature
smaller than her.
She kept two bullets
in her apron.
I could go on.
I worked down
to the exchange
of loam and clay.
Exposed worms
leveraged themselves
against the void.
She would apologize
for cussing even
when alone.
I tied either end

of her coffin
to stumps
at the foot and head
of her grave
and going back
and forth between them
paid out rope
to lower her.
I'd shut the lid
with spiral-shanked
box nails. So death
is work too.
I could only do
what was there
to do. This walk
back into the house.
The crows
returning to the field.
This laying
my hands open
on the table.
This last shift.
This still.

Idaho

The best part of riding a horse
is the better shadow you make.
The best part of the better shadow
is knowing only half of what it's thinking.
Even doing nothing is a form of moving on.
Through the white pines, the horses
walk single file, in a sentence,
each rider becoming the verb
that aspires to be the verb To Be.
The forest has no replica.
Its beasts disprove everything.
At dusk, everything you've been worrying about
is a sack of rabbits
you have to carry down to the river
and press slowly beneath the surface
until you feel it go still.
In the morning, when you wake,
you'll think you've stitched the valley back together
just by opening your eyes.

Leaving the Tamaracks

We didn't sense the cadence of vacation's ending, our wet bathing suits pressed against the station wagon's leather backseat.

Giggling, unaware, my sister and I let damp hair leave slug-like streaks behind our heads, feeling no dread in the premonition

of September. Calluses on our feet from a summer outside, our soles toughened, a natural protection. Far from home, we forgot

how warm months shielded us from harm. We only knew the long drive meant ice cream. *I want*

black raspberry with rainbow sprinkles in a sugar cone. Rosie always gets chocolate.

Over-sunned and dosed with sweets, we slept,

our bodies buttressed together in sticky, sated calm. Four small palms cradled beach stones, seashells, detritus all worth saving.

Darkling

Cold. Gray. Winter approaches.
The dark arrives earlier and earlier—
yesterday at three thirty, quarter of four
the light's already low, sun slant, shadows
gathering. Shadows gather. But in my
dreams I am confident, I know more,
I remember more. This morning I'm
making a poem about Switzerland, I'm
thinking about bread, about milk. Milk
and bread are different matters—one of
need, supply, the other choice, preference.
What I do and do not need is a changing
array, not one ordered like the seasons.
In the autumn of my seventy-fourth year,
I am struggling to learn how to live. From
day to dark the task is different. From day
to day, from dark to dark. What larks,
that boy said—no, a man to a boy. For
what larks do I have time? How gray
morning is. We should water the tree,
we should beg for rain, we should ask
forgiveness of our neighbors. There is
little to do and much to suffer. I'm lying.
There is much to do and much to suffer.
It's the first of November, that penitent
month, so little to redeem it. A chain
breaks, a chain won't break: November
into November. One night all the golden
gingko leaves fall to the ground, a fire's
embers. Now gull loft and heron flight

punctuate a gray sky shore that's beaten
again and again by waves of November.

The Easement

My shade twirls its thumbs, or yawns
& I want to go with words ahead
of me like a test fire, like a dummy
robot, like a forcefield slowly dimming
& as a children's funeral game complete
with songs & singing. The hawks address us
each & yet know what little blood's under
the top hat of my shade. Oh, boo.

The Easement

& I think of drunkenness swimming
catching the clobbered stanchion,
the largesse's caption—
The cordial's peal & petal.
Yet, Bunting, clambering here
in the ear socket, there in the vein.
So harvest out what might go good
with a night & a drink & a swim & a sleep.

What Are the Thorns of the Rose

What are the thorns of the rose to the exploring ladybug?
Look how, from the proper perspective, the whole rose is a petal.

Therefore, the proper perspective can never be that of a god. You are
Strangely safe so long as you pick on somebody your own size.

You let fly an arrow, you should be content to let it fly.
You don't have to run alongside it and tell it how well it's doing.

You needn't promise it any reward; for when it has stopped in my neck,
It will have the same pleasure as comes from cinching a leather cord.

The heart's symbol is symmetrical: you scissor a folded sheet.
But the thing itself is as lopsided as a dog biting its side.

The heart's American eagle has its fingers spread out for flight:
It's as if our emblem for the human hand had a thumb on either side.

Madrid stands with the asymmetrical. He identifies with the writhing snake
Being inseminated by a feathered dragon on a cactus on the Mexican flag.

For the First Few Years a Person's Whole Body

For the first few years, a person's whole body is a right-handed person's left hand.
Between two and six, the left-handedness is driven into what is in fact the left hand.

The left-handedness coalesces there. Expelled from Paradise, it establishes its camp.
And there it forgets it was instituted of God in the time of man's innocency.

It was, after all, instituted of God, so why must the mistake-making faculty
Be always so ashamed, so ready to be punished? Why must it play the wallflower?

I was like Margery Kempe: I lay on my side to pray. I answered my husband
I would much rather die than consentyn to any fleshly comownyng.

I would rather his head be struck off, or even for the world to end.
And if that's a mistake, it is mine. I can't be rid of it by cutting off a part.

Si tu mano derecha te hace pecar, córtatela y arrójala. My manner
Of prayer was to listen to God—listen, and answer in tears. He said:

*I am not three. I am not a family. I am not a beautiful human face.
When you gaze at your painted Jesus, you have your back to me.*

I reply: "Poor fool and knave, there's one part in my heart that's sorry yet for thee"
—the fool being my left hand, and the knave my right. The evil-doer and the bungler. . . .

Shaker Traditions

Like a seed. Not
like a seed a tree
comes out of. Like
a drop of rain frozen
on a window, making
its patch colder than
elsewhere on the pane,
attracting a circumference
of frost, arraying
itself in trceries.
Like a catalyst. I'm
long overdue to become
officially estranged, though
there's been no declaration,
vetted or not. Excommunication
isn't what used to be communication
and will no longer be communication,
ever. It's the reaction ensuing when
communication was never there and
a mighty illusion of communication has been,
and at least one of the reactants is intensely
invested in that illusion. There's no church
to hold me
and stop fishing
that there were.

The white pines don't get
lost in signs of their enlightenment.
Snake me with you.

Dance Marathon #3

It telegraphs my wobble. The projected light makes
my muscles ache. I don't know where I stand. I've
been dancing. Maybe I'm part of the spectacle. I'm
depressed and no longer dancing. I haven't
collapsed and I'm not standing. Sweat slinks down

my forehead and cheeks. I resist the impulse to
smooth it into a thin sheet. A balmy residue gathers
at the collar around my neck. Maybe I rapidly went
through the list of poses regardless of what flashed
on the screen. My eyes have never left my head. If
I'm a winner I wonder too much. I wonder exactly
what it is that I've won. If I've survived it's not a
matter of fortitude or hope. It's a matter of chance.

Maybe I'm one of the numbers. I've never spun the
dial and that's a choice. The projector never

switches off. There's no music and the silence is
constantly altering its tempo. The outline around

my body is drawn with
shade and I can't tell

whether my

feelings keep

spilling

out. Something

has

to

fill

this

shifting

silence.

(tape hiss)

my condition

my condition my condition
 my condition
 was chronic

musical condition
 dystonial smear
 homonkular fist
 disorganized clust.
 kitscheekitsch
 eeyayadadagee.
 cheegecheeyaya
 heah. get kissed. logic
 board breakfasted
 cogic tongue can't fall
 for dancing, can't kiss
 for kissing ass. msn
 be see how much I

kiss? I wonder
 how much sleep
 when she sang that
 shit at the whitehouse,
 whitehouse, big lewd
 lyric selfie. suck my
 dick, motherfucker,
 hallelujah, I love her
 so much more than two
 and tango meant shango,
 treacherous mime, daddy
 meme, good morning
 sprung, morning hung

O²

Here I go in my black forest. What it is with the real groove rolling
through the burial
and deep-frying of my hammer and horn. Here go some lip-smacking
swine and a black
spear. It's an appositional
quickness we stuck on. The first six books taste good and you pale
when you become an observer. When you make
your observations on being an observer,
when your ruler takes over, we detonate and chant
and dredge the sea. If I ever even try to
stop singing this you can eat my heart. Till then I'll be trying to kill you
every day. I say this not to you, as if you were there,
or you, but to the house band. This head just stay
in the air. We must be our own dream, huh, Ms. Jackson?
I would be so quiet when I
stole into the kitchen to get my cookie, which you said was mine without
ever saying, so you
could dream about me doing it again and
again while falling, still falling, your air just out of reach, all
information blown away, all that fabric inside, the gravity
of all that free love.

every saturday night

recess is flat out jump suite. bliss
is stress no pressure. a rhythm
fissure a hiss, fresh on the porch,
gravity and air past portraiture,
falling apart as little new orleans.
how long can we say how long
we been here? how long can foxy
curl? coming and going has a
grain called stress and we drink
to that. bliss is secretly chocolate.
people slow down when they come
past here. other shit is hard traffic.
pressure in santa monica in you
if you don't take care out here.

mangrove porch colorature

here your eaves, too,
where you might find fang
the possum trapped in your
abundant plans

where the extra hangs
and the insides and
the outsides get washed and
the coolness overhangs

in waiting, so: the reserves
in accord with preparing,
welcome, your household
spirits, air layered with done

hair, you and me and all the rest
of the beautiful black women

Communion

This is the blood of your
uncle, dope-laced and hot.

This is the blood of your
cousin in a cell. Drink this

because everyone is dying.
Even the white boys who

feed you good, steal grapefruits
from the stand by your house.

Even the pretty girls. Even
the wild cats. Even mothers.

This is the body you carry
with shame. This stale bread.

This is the body of a sinner.
Stretch marks, unknown bruises.

This is the body expiring.
Eat this in remembrance.

This is the blood of the Atlantic.
What makes you possible.

And Cold Sunset

How I feel about you is smoking a cigarette in the rain.

I think about walking into traffic, and suddenly, your dick.

I think about a yellow line and then a road and then an animal.

And nothing rises up. And horror is a verb.

I want to forgive myself for over-indulging.

Food delivery men see me without a bra more than anyone else.

My body is an argument I did not start.

In a way I am not aware who made me.

I bow down to a deep plea.

When strangers call my name I feel like a white girl.

Skin in reverse and a quiet pussy.

Nothing helps me not think about universes.

I'm funny because I know nothing matters.

Nancy Meyers and My Dream of Whiteness

I can't be sorry

enough—I have learned

everything is urgent.

Road closings, animal lungs.

I am working hard to be

as many people as possible

before I can't.

I know my long, dark movie

looks like fistfuls

of gravel in a brown bottle.

My storyboards fill me

with calculated sorrow.

A full plate and burnt sage.

Dollar signs, breaking news.

I work two jobs, three jobs.

I am honorable and brave.

The ensemble cast

whittles down.

Maybe I am a slave.

I make ends meet.

I don't get kissed.
My wide smile.
I cook in my small apartment.
I would rather serve than eat.
I wipe my palm
on my apron, forehead.
In our house we watch
movies and they remind us
that we are always afraid.
You never get arrested.
What you look like is sheer
fabrics and ivory shells.
Alec Baldwin is smoking a joint
in the bathroom of a CEO's
birthday party. Steve Martin
tastes the goat cheese
and considers nothing.
There is no question
that god waits at the end
of your staircase curling

softly like wood-finished ribbon.

Anne Hathaway hires a decorator.

Diane Keaton makes midnight

pancakes, tops them with

lavender ice cream.

What is beautiful

does not need to be

called beautiful.

No one talks about money.

In our house, the sky

is upside down.

None of us find unlikely love.

I do not revel in my luxury.

The suspense is killing.

If it seems like I desire you,

you're right. I want my whole

mouth around your safety.

I want to be buried

side by side.

Pregrets

duly afflicted by changeling light, I beg you commandeer buttons, rubber wheel with electric fans is where we chase the headley, that's what I'm paying tire tread on wood with chain and flashlight for, internal server errors & bummers unite, do what you want, stretcher dropped wound to run, brain with bear hanging out back of its head, minus manic to be emphasis, how do I even who like to myself's a sound's question, on the subtitled proto-make laying some first eggs for drawing spies like dust, let the electrical junction box coming come, did bibi ever finish his speech to the hack & tool brigade, open tanking the melting across vortexical slushlight, incendiary antic blends a conservative gots to wield as yield costume playing with bends, & like rhythmically that, articulated orgiastic instacore hemorrhaging on cue, the clunk bus, nah I'm just sitting over there mad at its not drunk, permissions request dolefully replaced by crab-grabbing octopi, compass & passbook sharing projected fecal explosions accredited to event's horizon portrait, gives the deadpan evil eye to a zone out posing as at work, considering multiple offers bleachable moments & bleachable shields, fabricked adult-ass plumb bob, turn a blind grid fragment of yellow rubber life raft, hey dig dog, open panting, dumpling go

Pregrets

just leave a little unfinished feeling on the edge
there somewhere, disrespect your given indentation
you know, sounding like some idea of talking, fuck
that, with the angular nearness of objecthood, its dis-
equilibrium & rational miscomposition & congrats
you're a dissolute piece of seriousness undergoing
routine axis inversion, & presenting Janeway, on top
of existing offers, we could always gradually reintroduce
the DNA at a later date, elite relievers on the reverse
side, June drew a Twombly, two hundred comments
to go please, he should be rapelling or sleeping on
the sidewalk every day, the copy dosed with gravitas
prepositions for sale, naked taste subject fondles
mechanical buy, mows-down-most-of-the-league don't
wanna sit around the pen watching spankings every
night, big hot pastrami confidant stewed so much it
freaked out rivers, exhausting previewed space, any
minor mix-up might spiral sneeze into piss streams
for some reason I'm always in a good mood, mentally
you ever see weekend at bernies 2, there's already a
dead guy, Spider, Baboon, Bocci, & Pockets, devolving
from scorpions to brothers, edge auto rental bumps
made a little move, didn't have my footing, trying to
sort out the jester market, the domino market, the
classical problem of underexposure to old commercials

Mars.4

let us admit our planet is a toilet
humming locates undertow
bash our heads for a vision
a fixed moment of our
argument
stamped into the
fiber of it
number one is a solid memory
number two is an open call for
the address of where we will die
we're not going to
smell good after
the war we
just stink and
cease bathing we
cannot wash properly in a
toilet

Mars.3

wings break in beginning stages of
 begging
 breeze through the window
amplifies peripheries of sex Ah the
 wind is on our side
 helping one another step
 down into the sewer we
 look to our deviance for
 sake of the daily Yes
 oldest entry in
 manual says be
 careful to not
 go over
 the side
 be calm if
 it is too late
 float off cliff hands held
overhead into extinction song 108

Mercury.3

first time biting the new
lover matches pace with
feral interior
caress purple tooth mark as
four day residual haunting
smoking it lasts as long as
the draft continues its surge
hell isn't where we're sent it's
where we enlist our talents
room service carries us up the cherry pie chart back to other
side of
utterly unsure
burnished in the yard was the mood
sensing an ulterior ignition take hold

Mercury.2

open door at
last a sound to
paper the wall
betrayal floating someone else's
crutch no compunction to
flee our option
a morbid
cake taste
shoveling ideas
an eating thought

got over it knocked red through the why
timing of things never smelled so good
take a moment to
throw something over the
balcony for onlookers
you can take a class on
how to assure others
but I prefer us
incomplete

Corpsography

The body is connected to the boi and the boi is connected to the cock and the cock is constricted by the sphincter and the sphincter is part of the ass and the ass is described by a daddy in a compliment and the compliment is connected to the mouth and the mouth is connected to the esophagus and the esophagus is replicated in a sex toy that is in the recommendations section on Amazon and the recommendations section on Amazon describes the sex toy as containing ridges that stimulate the penis and simulate the texture of the throat and the texture of the throat is connected to the tongue and the tongue is connected to another tongue and another tongue is connected to another body and another body has an arm and an arm is connected to my thigh and my thigh is connected to my knee and my knee is connected to his hips and his hips are connected to my hands and my hands are connected to my skull and my skull is connected to my skin and my skin is connected to the mattress and the mattress is connected to semen left by the other body and the other body is connected to a steering wheel and the steering wheel is connected to a vehicle and the vehicle is connected to the road and the road is connected to tax dollars that I don't have to pay because I'm poor and my poor is connected to my parents' poor and my parents' poor is connected to the trailer park and the trailer park is connected to a memory of when I was a child watching TV and the TV was connected to the VHS player and the VHS player was penetrated by a VHS tape and the VHS tape contained a film and the film was *George of the Jungle* and George was my first crush and my first crush was connected to my tiny mattress and my tiny mattress was connected to me cuddling with George my head connected to his chin my hand connected to his hair

Variation on a Poem by Herrick

Love, I have broke
Thy yolk;
What was clear eyed
Upon the plate
Is naught
But dismal smear.

My failed attempt,
To spear
My Love and oust
The ache instead
Outspread
And now I'm toast.

Bring Me with You

*And I saw the sea lifting up and shining like a blade with the sun on it.
And high up, in the icy wind, an aeroplane flew toward us from the land.
—D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, Sunday Jan 30, 1915*

I looked at my ass in the large living room mirror this morning and thought Youth has left me spinning slowly to a stop in the mud rut of a country road on the way to someplace locals dump dead refrigerators. I need to stop talking to myself and start exercising more. We begin by finding the power walkers unbelievably silly and end by wondering where we could get away with it without our friends seeing. I love the woman I sleep with every night, and I take this moment to thank her for all she does. On hot nights we barely touch but there's always some small part that does, a kneecap pressed along a thigh, the bottom of a foot against the top of a big toe. In the morning I invariably wake up with my arms around her. If I were trying to save her from drowning, I'd grab her the same way. I'd lay flat and let her use me for a raft, the waves slopping up the side of my body. She sitting with her knees up under her chin, one hand above her eyes scanning the horizon. The other steadying herself on my ass.

Pretend Therapy

I pretend you are here. I pretend you are here & you are tired—I can tell
 by your seedy holes that heave like bell pepper slices: fennel sprouts from your flat bones,
 seedling holes gouged-out & waved like a bloated violin make you laugh
 by convincing you that I am convinced
 “five” rhymes with “dicks” when I’m sleepy & I am
 pretending that you pretend to be offended by “dicks”
 so I make a case for “five” being worse (it is
 compelling) & mock with, *plot twist: I’m still*
a virgin so we can enjoy a gasp of great horror.

O you sweating drunk-text mill,
 O you sedating mess of hands you are pushing on me
 how pink lemonade powder or hotel towels smell—
 are you pretending to count with me

how many precious moments figurines have watched us
 fuck in your stepmom’s basement? Are you pretending to convince me
 to reconsider how much panty lines that canal-bank plump under skirts
 turn you on? Sure as shit

you must be tired, you must be tired of pretending
at least. Are you smelling pepper seeds & fennel
 in your hands & on your pillow? Are you in your family room
chewing barbie feet & foggy plastic grapes while I hold
 some other dude's cock the way that you would
fingerpad bills if we robbed a bank? Since I saw you last you know
all of my red blood cells have been pushed out
 by new ones—are you pretending to tell me I'm different,
but can't quite put your finger on what, like a haircut or a new perfume? Pretend
to circle my body with your eyes the way you follow the kitchen's fan blade,
 the way you follow my leftover sock in the washing machine.

The Use of Youth

How cozy was the idea that we would meet easily, nodding to each other as we settle down. How sweet the thought that we'd produce flowers in our pockets, grow roses under our arms. I knew even then the covered bridge on the way to church wouldn't be there forever. That's why it was so important that we made out in the darkness, in basements, in cars with the radio on. What's the use of youth if it can't be spooned with your tongue? What's the point of having your own zippers if nobody ever unzips you? In the stars we swallowed was the light being let in from the hallway. Our parents coming down stairs was the noise that came with the alarm in our hearts. Our hiccup of kisses, a small bee.

Succeeding in America

It is not as if I can capture the high road simply by mowing everyone down at the ankles. In fact, as I try to navigate the crust, I find my desire to spring forward is held in check by my desire to fall back. It's like, for each and every Newton there is an opposite Newton, say, a fig, a Wayne, who is chubby as a tween but a real fucker on the banjo. Also, as far as showmanship goes, it's hard to beat a drum harder than all the daydreaming eyes at the soda fountain or all the twinkling cheeks at the record store. For every black button on a lapel, there is a tiny wish in my heart. At every hopeful talent show the number of dance steps is the same number of steps to my bed. In my bed, where my dreams are cartoon surfers, I can feel the musing of the future. I feel the skin that isn't yours spread across an ocean that isn't ours. It's like the foam in my throat is a bubbled snake, like the vest in my chest is a fur grenade.

The Consolation of Philosophy

There is a hole in my spine
Where a fig leaf rests.
A hole in my foot
Which the honeysuckle
Makes its own. Woe is me
That my husband
Has the sense to differentiate
My wounds from what grows
Out of them, branches
From the hole in my stomach
Where they put their roots.
The weather is good
In the story I'm reading.
The story I'm writing
Doesn't say "the weather" once.
The winter air seems pure
Only because it chokes us
And in the hole in
My throat, there you'll find
My coat of arms—

Not a lion or an eagle
Or a crest made of chevrons,
But a shield with a lemon
Inside of a rose.
There is a hole in my spine
Where a fig leaf rests.
A hole where the sunlight
Each morning steals its way
Into my body and where
It makes, despite the holes
In me, a person out of me.
When we lose faith in the present
Only the future tense remains.
And when we lose faith
In the past, we put
A chair beside a window
And in a manner of speaking,
We look up, in wonder at
The bladder-shaped stars.
You bought a jar

Of olive spread and a bag

Of walnuts. I bought saltines

And a jug of wine.

There is a hole in my face

Where the light

Gets stuck, where the wine

Coats my retina with the spectacle

Of us eating and drinking

Our purchases beneath

The groin vault of the sky.

We put a throne beside

A rose-shaped window

And in a manner of speaking,

We look up, in wonder at

Nothing in particular.

We might even be praying

As we sit together

Drinking, looking outside

Of the walnut, I mean,

Of the oak-leaf-shaped window.

Pondering the qualities

Of nothing at all.

Instructions to a Painter

Everything in nature takes some tweaking
To perfect. I archived plants but
Of what little I knew, I couldn't speak.
Take echinacea, for instance

That stupid plant we think will heal us
And whose properties we figure
Can take the place of drugs. I've never seen
Sickness, but I can imagine it.

I've never seen a real mountain but
I can write one into a poem.
I am unable to tell what's good from
What's boring—real mountains or

A line of verse in contradistinction
To the colors on my lamp.
The lamp, by whose light I make the canvas
Into a map of what's useless,

The wind into the ampersand that links
My images of plants with yours.
Given time, a fragment will lapse into
The rhetoric of the sentence

And birds will make subordinate clauses
From the disorder of the air.
I'll use architecture to remember
The names of colors painters use—

Arches stand for pink, the roof for orange,
A patio the green that ruins
Our idea of what the evening should
Look like, abbreviating stars

Into dialogues between the body
And what some people call the mind,
Extinguishing the view from our window
Briefly with scenarios of light.

I never understood how objects came
To represent ideas, though I
Love enough the deconstructed borders
Of the clouds, how they signify

Nothing so much as their own abstraction
Via language, my own thoughts
About them versus paintings of them as
They became phenomena for art.

The Archaeology of Private Life

I still think it's dumb, how we're sitting
In my living room, googling the deaths
Of poets. The really perfect poem
Has an infinitely large vocabulary, built

With a finite set of letters—a system
Not an ocean, to house our antiquities.
Typically, we'd sing the mythos
Of someone else's ancestors, and use

The lyric "O" as testament to our desire
To find new ways to sing. That night
We looked for something to entertain us
Besides the clouds, besides acoustics,

Besides removing birds' nests from temples
To make room for our smoke detectors—
When I say "nests" and "temples" I mean
The proverbial ones. We followed your GPS

To water but didn't know what we'd find.
Turns out we've polluted the woods
With prophecy, and nothing but a pond
Remains of that vast, imaginary sea.

The light hit the pond at right angles
But didn't impress us. We believed nothing
Natural could resemble mathematics
Despite the fact that the light itself

Ordered the landscape into figures,
Making matrices of native and invasive
Species, rationing beauty into shapes.
I intellectualize nature too often

Using rhetoric to suggest a narrative
When there isn't one, swimming as far
As I can into the DOS-green sea.
We used our phones to find the pond

As we walked through the forest.
It was cold. You waited for blood
To emerge from the clouds, while I waited
For language to come, for the rough draft

Of a poem whose images would settle
Into little approximations of morning,
Whose lines without my knowledge would
Turn phrases into figments of harmony.

Instead of grammar, logic, rhetoric
We studied evil, and danced to the music
That, in nuances above and below us,
Came from nowhere in particular.

I tried but failed to understand
How fire can have color, how songs
Betray our fear of incoherencies
While granting us some further proof of life.

The night looks the same whether we
Stargaze in -ology or -onomy. Uh huh
Makes sense, since we don't need textbooks
When the plantlife's on microfiche

And we can walk out into a field or pond
To study the particulars, to use words
To fasten daylight to its opposite. In poems,
That is, to make erasures of dawn.

from *understory*

third trimester—january 27, 2014

~

[our] midwife
says sex

will help
labor—*don't*

google maieso-
philia—mānoa

valley winds
billow [our]

bedroom curtains
like vowels

in “enewetak”
and “mororua,”

“kaho’olawa” and
“pagan”—branches

of [our]
unborn daughter's

respiratory tree
are now

beginning to
reach—nālani

and i
spoon—coconut

oil—push
hard tight

like vowels
in “tinian”

and “nagasaki,”
“trinity” and

“bikini”—steel
winged bombers

break [our]
turtle shell

sky—yield
a thousand

suns—i
hold nālani’s

thighs—rain
clouds and

trade winds
baptize guam

in strontium-90
circa 1954

*what traces
of cancer*

*remain buried
in pacific*

*bodies like
unexploded ordnances?*

i place
my hand

on nālani's
darkened piko—

we catch
our breath—

will guam
ever be

included in
radiation exposure

compensation act? \$50,000
when [our]

daughter is
born, will

her eyes
open to

irradiated light?
when she

takes her
first breath,

will she
choke down

poisoned wind?

Artifact

In colder climes
than intimacy or ardor,
a green notion of branches
rocked by wind and growth
stays whole, held in abeyance,
reified or deified,
numbered or remembered.
The story travels in the longitude
of the seldom seen:
decoder rings, loose tea,
and letters mark your absence
from the story. Whole
or retracted, the night
gloved our hands.
What did we feel holding
the world wrapped in velvet?

For Kenneth Irby (July 30, 2015)

Light enters the hotel room through sheer white curtains
windows open to the street across Umlandstrasse
what looks like honey locusts spire upward behind pink and green rooftops
as tourists lean over the Neckar or are ferried in gondolas beyond a magnificent
willow whose green meets the green of the water's surface

I'm Not Crying You're Crying

The shower is a good place to go
when you want to convince yourself

you're not actually crying. I admit
I made a mistake when I threw

a handful of dirt on a still open casket
at a stranger's funeral. Now

I'm allowed only a handful
of glitter. Now I'm allowed

only one hand. In this
crowded cemetery how can

you not have one foot
in someone's grave?

What I want to know is why
I can regenerate some parts

but not others. I get my hair cut.
I trim my toenails. Still, I weep

because I'm guilty of having
a body that does things

without my knowledge. It opens
windows. It closes them.

Genre Fiction

Every day crimes are committed
in the passive voice. Keys are lifted
from around the necks

of sleeping empresses. Forgeries are
commissioned in the museum gift shop.
One way to get away with it

is to burn the evidence. Another way
is to pretend to be someone you're not.
If there's glass on the carpet

then the window was broken
from the outside. It's not breaking in
if you've fallen down a well.

It's not breaking in if it's
someone's summer home in Montauk
in December.

Every day a detective is born
for whom I will commit endless crimes
of passion. Gentle theft.

Tender arson. Here is your first clue.
A wooden rocking horse in a red
and otherwise empty barn.



Ryan Snyder Ananat splits his time between Chicago and North Carolina. His ethnographic essay “Hope. . . teach, yaknowhati’msaying: freestyle knowledge through Detroit hip-hop” is published in the collection *Art and the Performance of Memory: Sounds and Gestures of Recollection*.

Anselm Berrigan’s most recent books of poetry include *Come in Alone* (Wave, 2016), and *Primitive State* (Edge, 2015). He lives in New York, where he has spent most of his life, and hangs out mostly with pigeons.

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Morgan Parker is the author of *Other People's Comfort Keeps Me Up At Night* (Switchback Books, 2015), selected by Eileen Myles for the 2013 Gatewood Prize, and *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyonce*, forthcoming from Tin House Books in 2017. She is a Cave Canem graduate fellow, winner of a 2016 Pushcart Prize, and poetry editor for *The Offing*. She also co-curates the Poets With Attitude (PWA) reading series with Tommy Pico. With Angel Nafis she is The Other Black Girl Collective.

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Cate White is a painter, writer, book, video, and installation artist whose work is characterized by rawness, humor, and emotional honesty. Her subjects range from satires of cultural ideals to dark and funny existential reckoning to narrative paintings of herself, her friends, and imagined characters asserting their humanity both heroically and pathetically. Raised in the back-woods culture of guns, 4x4s, and meth in Northern California, White finds familiar comfort in communities on the margins, and much of her work portrays her experience from these margins, both in subject matter and philosophical perspective. She is the winner of the 2014-2015 Tournesol Award from Headlands Center for the Arts and the creator of the 10-volume graphic journal book series, *The Book of Life*, which is available on Amazon. She has exhibited her work internationally and is currently a grantee at the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program in New Mexico.

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Felicia Zamora is the winner of the 2015 Tomaž Šalamun Prize from Verse, and author of the chapbooks *Imbibe (et alia) here* (Dancing Girl Press, 2016) and *Moby-Dick Made Me Do It* (Flat Cap Publishing, 2010). Her published works may be found or forthcoming in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Indiana Review*, *North American Review*, *Phoebe*, *Pleiades*, *Potomac Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Tarpaulin Sky Magazine*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Laurel Review*, *The Normal School*, *Witness Magazine*, and others. She is an associate poetry editor for the *Colorado Review*, a fall 2012 Martha's Vineyard Writers Residency poet, and holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Colorado State University.





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• Danez Smith • Mathias Svalina • Joshua
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COVER ART:

*To become the sea I died.
Translucent dirt, I died that.
To be the small hill mounds,
Delicate pupating shapes
Of the roasting carrions
I died my head and lips
Into the sky.*
Louie Otesanek, 2014
Oil on canvas, 100x120 cm

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