

The Portable

BOOG READER 12

An Anthology of New Orleans and New York City Poetry



J Grabowski art, <http://jgrabowski.com/>

NEW ORLEANS EDITED BY

MEGAN BURNS AND SKYE JACKSON

NEW YORK CITY EDITED BY

GREG FUCHS, STEPHANIE GRAY, DAVID A. KIRSCHENBAUM, AND LEWIS WARSH

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Breathtaking Magic and Heartbreaking Tragedy

We have lived in New Orleans our entire lives and are thrilled to have the chance to showcase the work of so many local poets. Poetry in New Orleans reflects the range of experiences one has in a city that can hold both breathtaking magic and heartbreaking tragedy. As we hold our collective traumas each hurricane season, now our thoughts have shifted back to the manner in which this city bends and folds across time: how it is both archaic and new, within time and timeless, the best and the worst of living the American "dream."

Post-Katrina New Orleans is a space we barely recognize. But here we are waist deep in the reality that you cannot go back to what is lost and that we will all disappear sooner rather than later. To be a poet is not only to bear witness, but the very act of *standing* to bear witness. Steeped in the type of survival that pushes against the darkness by turning suffering into beauty: there is no city in the world that does this like New Orleans. It is in our music, our art, our food, and our communities: we dance in the streets together in one season and help each other to survive in the next. May we all learn that the foundation of survival itself is the ability to see one another more clearly.

The featured writers in this edition, who accomplish this feat with depth and nuance by evoking such gorgeous rhythm and imagery, remind me of the Mississippi River—each rippling with stylistic ease, contributing to the ebb and flow of our literary existence. No matter where these writers find themselves in the world, at their core, they are New Orleans poets. As Chanel Clarke, one of the poets you will discover here, astutely notes, their "goddamns in the gulf stream" resound.

Some of these writers are teachers, students, and booksellers, even, transplants who have been forever marked by the distinctive imprint that New Orleans can leave on a soul. Although each is unique, what unifies them is their devotion to the craft of poetry. Furthermore, all of them hold fast to their own places in our delicate ecosystem of language.

It has been our most satisfying pleasure to delve into the worlds that these writers have created based upon their own unique experiences of New Orleans, from Geoff Munsterman's Auden-inspired piece about an introspective walk to the streetcar to Betsy Houston's exuberant take on the joys of turning 40, these works implore the reader to dive in and fully submerge themselves. In just a few moments, you will traverse these connections and discover, as we did, the intricate web that connects us all.

Megan Burns
Skye Jackson
July 29, 2019

Lewis Warsh, one of our New York City co-editors, has had a presence as a poet and editor in the area for over 50 years. He wrote the following intro to the poets he selected for the reader as a way of showing how all of us within the poetry community form and sustain enduring relationships.—DAK

Lights Out

I met all these poets in New York City where encounters are sometimes transient and often long-lasting, and almost always meaningful, and relationships are shape-shifting in unexpected ways.

I met Omotara James in 2016 when she was a part of the M.F.A. program in creative writing at Long Island University. She's a great escape artist, and just when you think you know her, she disappears. Her poetry is graceful, awkward, and fearless at the same time, and she never stops giving.

Uche Nduka was also a student in the M.F.A. program at LIU, about 2010. That's where we met. He came to the program from Nigeria fully formed as a poet, and his presence in a classroom always heightened the level of discussion and intrigue. His poems are just like him—outrageous and tender.

I first met Lydia Cortes in a workshop at The Poetry Project that started in 1998 and went on for years. I was the so-called workshop leader, but I felt I was learning too—and Lydia continues to be one of my teachers. I can always hear her voice in my head, all the intonations, like a series of small explosions, a siren in the night coming closer and then fading away.

Peter Bushyeager also appeared in a workshop of mine at The Poetry Project, maybe 1992. Peter's voice is stately, concerned, sometimes confrontational, and he never takes no (or yes) for an answer. There's always something more, and he works hard clearing out the detritus while taking note of what's most familiar and casting it in a new light. Possibly, he seems to be saying, the detritus is what counts the most.

I met Barbara Henning in 1985 when we were both teaching in the English Department at Queens College. She's a person with many ideas about writing, who argues persuasively (in her fiction and poetry) for fully engaging the tensions between life and art, as if all you needed to do was cross an invisible line, and you'd be some place you knew about all along. Indeed, with each new poem by Barbara Henning, "it feels like starting over," to quote John Lennon in some lifetime long ago.

Lewis Warsh
July 27, 2019

About the Editors and Artist

New Orleans

Megan Burns (<https://solidquarter.blogspot.com/>) is the publisher at Trembling Pillow Press (<https://www.trembling-pillowpress.com/>). She is the co-director of The New Orleans Poetry Festival (<https://www.nolapoetry.com/>) and runs The Dragonfly: A Poetry and Performance Healing Space in New Orleans (<https://www.noladragonfly.com/>). She has been hosting the Blood Jet Poetry Reading Series in New Orleans for the last six years.



Megan Burns

Skye Jackson (<https://www.instagram.com/skyeinthecity/>) was born and raised in New Orleans. She holds an English degree from LSU and a degree in law from Mississippi College School of Law. She is currently an M.F.A. candidate in poetry at the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop where she works with Bayou Magazine. Her debut chapbook, *A Faster Grave*, was recently released from Antenna Press. Alisa Brooks photo.



Skye Jackson

New York City

Greg Fuchs



Greg Fuchs (<https://www.instagram.com/gregfuchs68/>) teaches students with disabilities to trust themselves and question everything. He writes poems and makes photographs. Fuchs survives beneath the underground but surfaces occasionally with his fabulous artist wife, Alison Collins, and their magical son, Lucas.

Stephanie Gray



Poet-filmmaker Stephanie Gray (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/stephanie-gray>) is the author of seven poetry collections including two full-lengths, *Shorthand* and *Electric Language Stars* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs) and *Heart Stoner Bingo* (Straw Gate Books) and five chapbooks, most recently *Words Are What You Get/ You Do It For Real*, and *go under the surface* (above/ground press).

David A. Kirschenbaum is the editor and publisher of *Boog City*, a New York City-based small press and community newspaper now in its 27th year. He is the author of *The July Project 2007* (Open 24 Hours), a series of songs about Star Wars set to rock and pop classics. His poems form the lyrics of Preston Spurlock and Casey Holford's band Gilmore boys (<http://www.myspace.com/gilmoreboysmusic>).



David A. Kirschenbaum

Lewis Warsh's most recent books include *A Free Man* (Spuyten Duyvil), *Out of the Question: Selected Poems 1963-2003* (Station Hill Press), *Alien Abduction* (Ugly Duckling Presse), and *One Foot out the Door: Collected Stories* (Spuyten Duyvil). He is editor and publisher of *United Artists Books* and teaches in the M.F.A. program at Long Island University (Brooklyn).



Lewis Warsh

Cover Art

J Grabowski



J Grabowski (<http://jgrabowski.com/>) lives and works in Manhattan. His work stems from his notebook process that he has continued for over a decade; making work on the go, where ever he is; bringing the studio to the place. He cofounded The Heliopolis Project (2010-15) and runs PUSH Press with Jason Morris.

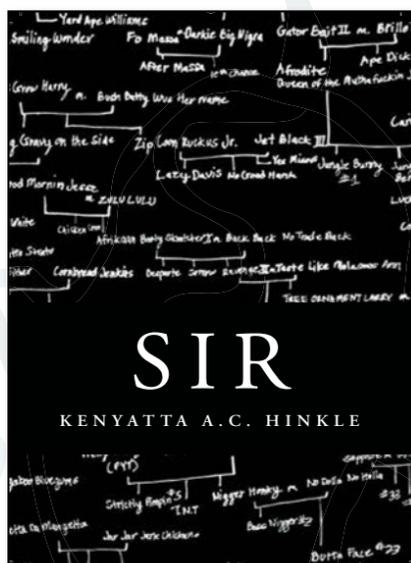
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MATTHEW SHENODA



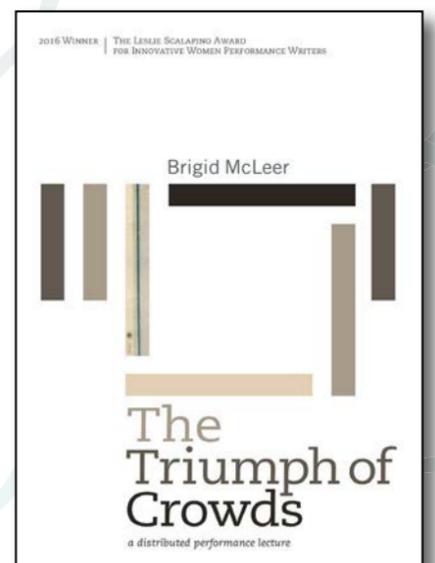
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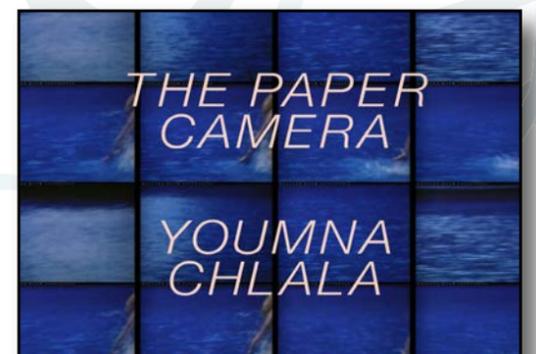
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NEW ORLEANS

Greg Fuchs photo

Columbus Street, New Orleans, 2019

Chanel Clarke



Guide to the Delta

On coming to America and green pea soup.
Excuse my critical face feminism.
Excuse the sugar in my lemonade,
the tick tock don't stop in my marsupial
love pouch. On cabbages and cornbread.
On honey bun prophecies.
Steak knife youth ninja odyssey
standing in line for WIC and food stamps.
Line the route to Dreux Avenue
with plastic cups and dolla4schola envelopes
or don't speak to me.
Put the purr back in the box, Josie B.
On tumble dry and diaspora.
On Miss Mississippi and anatomy.
From Nina, to Paris with love.
Goddamns in the gulf stream,
making their way to shore,
coated in black oil, goddamns bear eyeless
shrimp and fish that don't
smell right.
Call the country, or not.
Call the country, oh no.
Call the country. Collect.

For Phillis Wheatley

Into halo to erase the seventeen signatures.
Enter ship's hull to smell the living.
Into sea to reckon with the tossed.
Enter dust to touch dust.
Into carbon atom to seek Adam.
Enter the coast to know one's self.
Into sun's pouring to hold a little girl's hand.
Enter love too vehement.
Into the close contracted mind filled with fire.
Enter smoke to rescue the burnt.
Into black to back to black so black.
Enter chariot to swing so low sweet chariot.

Into swing low swing a body higher.
Enter who you hanging with?
Into who you hanging?
Enter tree trunk root deep.
Into who taught you to sweep?
Enter who taught you to read?
Enter red. Into dripping red.
Enter blood so black into black to back to black so black.
Into blues. Into what you know about the blues?
Enter who you calling a girl?
Into who you calling a boy?
Enter yes sir. Into no sir.

Into my daddy ain't no slave.
Enter my mama ain't no slave.
Into why they slavin though?
Enter watch the news.
Into watch the blues.
Enter yes sir. Into no sir.
Into who's too polite.
Enter who's too shy.
Into what did shy ever do for me?
Enter ask my country not.
Into ask my country what for.
Enter: ask my country, what for?

Of Extremes and Cognitive Distortions

My fear is the fear of the conqueror
face wet with the blood
of the conquered.

My fear is 25 million years old,
clear and deep as Lake Baikal,
the depth of my fear, as of yet,
unexplored.

Black or white thinking is surely not
as bad as black or white schools, yes?
My fear some fifty years of Southern

re-segregation, my fear flocks
of white flight going north and south
and north again, but everywhere they go

niggers gotta come, too, and I feel sorry
for them, I honestly do. To live your life
in fear, fear that leaves your heart

Oymyakon Russian village cold, fear that leaves
your soul dry, Atacama Desert Chilean dry,
blocked on both sides by those familiar mountains
one called white envy, the other called white rage-

and my fear is the fear of the weary,
face scarred by the relentless footsteps

of change that always seems to stay the same.

White progress is so slow.
To generalize, to minimize, to catastrophize-
My fear the fear of the conqueror,

my fear the fear of the weary,
my fear feels 25 million years old.
My fear, my fear, yes-all mind

Rememory

Large moon's glimmer obscured by yellow haze of pollution,
and what clouds tried to rain this afternoon.
For a second, I am a nigger in the dark
smoking a cigarette and sitting in the blue chair
facing your garden, the blood lilies I brought you
from Amsterdam.

Your heart jumps and sits fat
on your pink tongue.

I'm sorry, I say and smile. You turn on the porch light
after tossing out the compost, twelve eggs I cracked
for a Spanish tortilla, broccoli stalks I cut, snippings
from radishes, the black eyes of small red potatoes.

I stay outside, thinking about my nigger problems,
my locked up brother, the beautiful black boy they killed,
and the beautiful ones they are killing right now,
and it makes me want to kill the leaves,
and I am thinking of a warning from long ago,

don't get in that car with the tinted windows and rims,
that's a nigger car, and at the end of the day, to them,
you're a nigger,

I know the night is a nigger,
and I want the nigger night to swallow them up,
the way they swallow us, and I want them
to see burning bodies hang from the oak trees
as I have seen in my mind's eye,
in the corner of my nigger eyes,
as I have seen in my rememory,
or what they call psychosis.
I want them to walk through blood,
to look at their feet and feel the blood
that won't rinse off, and hear the cries
at a pitch that cuts the eardrum,
and beats and beats.

Chanel Clarke was born in Louisiana and received her M.F.A. from the Michener Center of Writers in Austin, Texas. She lives and works in New Orleans.

Elizabeth Gross



ghost thing in the park

ghost thing says *no one knows you*
like I know you says *I know you*
like that sunlight you're wearing
like the lightning you go looking for

ghost thing has a map of me, marked up
with all the pain parts where we meet.
ghost thing finds me quicker when I forget to eat
hunger holding open that wrong door

to a feeling like horses in the sun.
but I am not running from ghost thing
I have my own map and choose to trace
over again each place I meet ghost thing
I meet myself there.

ghost thing in the early risen moon

if I had a skywriter today I'd spell out MY FEELINGS
ARE IRRELEVANT

and wonder the ratio of others who saw the sky speak
for them vs. to them

before the words wisped off, pronoun first, to blue.
a better way to choose

friends? likely not. ghost thing, I went looking
for you in the river

and I went looking in the road, but not a trace
of you showed

until the moon appeared shining in the still bright
afternoon, urging

me on my bike faster than I go, faster enough
to beat the coming train.

ghost thing in the unsent letter

dear ghost thing, it's true, you ruined my life, and also
true, I begged you to do it.

it's not as if my soul was a clean fluorescent conference room
you reached in to switch

the lights off as you continued down the hall. lord knows I'll wait
here at the darkening window

reading by the latest possible glow, knowing how bad it is
for the eyes. this dark room

coming on inevitable as natural night, that's how I remember
you, my young mind changing

the furniture around to make room for this new thought, sex
making space inside for what

might burn and which I didn't recognize, back then, as rage.

ghost thing in the supermarket light

the green things are sweating it all out like they believe
in the permanent green.

ghost thing says *what does that even mean?* I'm not here
to argue, I just need

something to eat. ghost thing says *nothing to feed*
you or your kind here

just lean in, little emptiness, you've lost it
in this ugly light—

and I upset the pyramid of plums in choosing
I can't stop the rolling

or the later rolling caused by that first rolling or
the produce guy rolling his eyes.

I know it is unreasonable to want to run from this,
but I want to run

right out of my body, or shoot out like a flare set
at the wrong angle

briefly visible to aircraft above in a holding pattern
waiting for the go ahead.

ghost thing in the voice of a dead thai popstar

she is figuring this one out on her own, she has nothing
to explain, nothing to talk out

she has run some painful ribbon to its end, then
spooled it back to keep

in a deep pocket, her finger on the fray. there are times
I feel this way—

some solemnity creeps in to what should have been
an ordinary sadness

then invites it to stay. and I turn stony and vow
never to let it out

in language, no, I am all exoskeleton and sidelong glances
at the dark window

(crossdressing to pass for the strong silent type for whoever
might pass by)

but what I want to be is melted into glass—
a huge bell, its ring

so low it rumbles, once struck, for a very long time.

Betsy Houston



Turning Forty in New Orleans

Saturn – planet of discipline – rules Capricorn,
the sign that begins the day after my birthday.
I am double Sagittarius on its cusp:

two shots of fire tempered with earth's firm hand,
meaning I pay my bills on time despite always
wanting to run away with the circus.

Fuck forty. Fuck that high school poetry teacher
who said I shouldn't use words like *joy*.
Bless whoever named this bar after Saturn,

intended contradiction or not.
Bless these hot lights, this sticky linoleum
I'm dancing on all night, though I've got work

in the morning. Bless this city of joy I ran for
to learn how to write, bless the freight train horn
that makes me pedal faster every time

I hear it – racing toward the tracks as the horn
gets louder and the train gets closer,
as Saturn spins slowly overhead, shepherd moons

preventing its rings from spreading out
and strutting about the cosmos
like 10 million years could be the new forty.

Pushing Back

Mom ran ice baths at night to cool
my raging temperatures, calm the hallucinations
that seized me every night after a valve near my bladder
formed backwards, pushing toxins into my blood
instead of out.

In the children's hospital,
the doctor slid my mother papers, a pen, winked at me
over his desk. Said the scar would fade to an inch or two
in a few years. *Barely noticeable in a bikini! I promise no boys
will ever know!* Mom's jaw tensed.

The doctor sent me
into surgery with my favorite doll. Afterward I still
couldn't tell which way to go, always lost in public places,
playgrounds, parks, panicking when nothing
looked familiar.

By the time I realized the doctor
took the doll away to operate, my bikini incision
was a pale stripe under my belly, my body no longer
poisoning itself. By the time I looked up
vesicoureteral reflux to understand

what'd gone wrong,
I was furious at boys, at men, doctors, my father,
everyone who'd made Mom cry, made eyes at me
in public places. I'd have died without that procedure.
I'll die before I let another man rearrange me.

A previous version of this poem appeared in Rogue Agent

Devil At My Heels

*an erasure poem from
Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska*

taillights, roadmap, license, registration • on a back street by the riverside
• I dreamed long distance salvation • cold night, carburetor cleaned,
heart a chained door • hard things pulled open • my father's house a
ready fight, edge of town silent and still • corn fields • overpass • gas
station • ghost voices where the pines grow wild • full moon rising
above the graveyard • everything dies • Jersey boys don't get caught •
my crossroads soul better off gone • I catch a dark highway, don't stop •
river, rush on through them badlands • deliver me from nowhere

We, Raptors

*You're implying that a group composed entirely
of female animals will breed? – Dr. Wu*

I'm simply saying that life... finds a way. – Ian Malcolm, Jurassic Park

We left no bones. Unquenched by cow and goat,
we thrilled to such chase, ancestor instincts
pushing us on. How delicious that hunt!
We savored each jawful of those men who
tasted like fear, freezing rain, and torn organs,
their hands that reeked of our blood. A foreign
hum reigned, new urge pooling deep in our guts
until we all lay together, until
we brought a brood of eggs into a world
it seemed our foremothers never left. God
is dead, gender transcendable. We sense
the rules shifting like ferns in coastal wind.
Amok on our island, we understand
irony; that queen is a stone-cold bitch.

A Truth Or Dare Game

an erasure poem of the 1988 instruction sheet for the board game Girl Talk

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Blindfold
Ice cube
A few friends

WHAT TO DO:

Win by acting crazy or telling your innermost secrets
if you trust your friends. If you play well
enough
then you'll get an extra special treat a fantasy fortune.

When you want just lay on top of the other itchy fingers
but don't yet keep score (Point Princess), let the girl with
the most beautiful hand happen if you dare

tell the truth. Don't overdo it or you're really in trouble.
Maybe you're afraid to admit OH, NO! where everyone can see
but if you win you're the first to want to play again.

Laura Mattingly



Hair Project:

The Ecstatic Barber of Infinite Loneliness

"I wish I could sail across the river, into the bushes, like my hair does."
Indigo Mattingly

"When you decide to be yourself, you will be alone." Thich Nhat Hanh

Kinky, tight curls, textured, straight

Corkscrew, damaged, a waterfall over the shoulder blades, fine as silk, sweet as honey roaming down slow, coarse, matted, nappy, helix-shaped, kinky soft, kinky wiry, bone-straight, hair plentiful in youth, smelling of chemically simulated petunia-scented product and colored maroon, hair that looks like money, hair thin and tinted green from chlorine, hair of the pacific, gritty with sand clumps at the scalp, brittle and dry, hair that breathes fresh sea salt.

Hair proved itself to be the only solution to a great sadness I was under.

Big pickle. New baby. Little money. A voyage gone awry.

The barber knew I could cut hair. Had seen my work walking around town on the head of my brown eyed best friend.

It was a windy river job. Middle of fall at midnight, halfway into a bottle of wine, done with kitchen scissors, rats leaping in arcs on the rocks around us. It was asymmetrical and inspired. It was an intimate cut, and the movement kept—she looked like she was walking in wind all the time after that.

So the barber gave me her job before she left town, at a downtown bar with an antique barber chair with a red leather seat, and her own hand painted sign that said 10 dollars a cut. And the drinkers and the cabbies, and the petty-cabbies, and the servers, and the tattoo artists, and the longshoremen and public health students all lined up to receive Mohawks and faux-hawks, and pompadours, and mullets, bobs, and layers, with face framing, thinning, texturing, and blunt bangs.

In hair the loneliness lifted. Hair is all about growing, after all, and then shaping and touching, washing and combing, changing. Transformation. Talking. Smoothing.

A keeping, and a tending. The point of primate grooming, is not just to clean but to bond. Who is at home waiting for you, who is the one who combs and picks you, who braids and organizes you, who washes you.

Hair is for looking at

and the lovers desire the looking

each wanting to be a new thing every time. Familiar enough

but different, so

there will be a next look and a next

this color in this season, the autumnal look,

the longer strands goldening in the summer,

thinning a little later, face rounder, hoping all these gazes formed a staying pattern, hoping she will want to read him like a long novel to its end, not all chapters out of enthusiasm, some just for a sense of persistence, and a choosing—this is the book I chose and choose, so I will read it. This is the one I groomed and groom. Through observation, I learn love as an action. A tangle is an unintentional knot. Sometimes love is a falling. A loss of power or sense of control. And sometimes love is grown, with sprinkles of water and well placed seeds and whispering in the night.

Of course hair would cure a broken heart. Hair communicates. Self professes through grooming and natural inclination: class, politics, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, what part hick, what part punk, funk, newscaster. It's complicated, hair. A tangle is a knot that is unintentional.

There's hair like an ocean churned up, rained on and cold,

there's hair like a waterfall,

hair like a marsh, long grassy finger's rippling

there's hair auburn as a forest fire

there's hair ornery as an inside joke

there's hair like a soft sleeve

there's hair prickly as conifer needles

there's hair thick as a morning fog

there's hair obnoxious as a neon supermarket at midnight playing bad three decade old Christmas music in February

there's hair clear and perfect as a memory

There's hair like all my relatives lined up in the picture, bleached blond and teased, on grandmother's sofa, in a living room with avocado green linoleum, in the Midwest sometime in the eighties.

There's the clean line

there's the inverted bob

the Kentucky waterfall

there's the falling out

excuse me,

I shed a lot

excuse me, I haven't brushed, I haven't washed

I haven't dyed recently

haven't tended to

haven't cared too much about lately

in years

since 1968

I need a shot of liquor before this

I am so nervous

I am being touched

touched

tended

gently pulled on

smoothed

looked at

please make it smaller

it is too big

for my day job it must fit under a helmet

it wouldn't seem like it,

but you have no idea how much space it takes.

Michael “Quess?” Moore



10 (tenements)

the year Gary's lips turned from pink to black
and the lights turned out in his eyes
his smile turned smirk turned eviction notice
telling me where I was no longer welcome
after that I started watching all my friend's faces
to make sure there was still somebody home
but I secretly wanted to become a foreclosed tenement
to expel everything from me before it had a chance to leave
to turn hard and menacing as the brick and mortar
everyone was scared to enter

12 (omen)

“Most of the truly important moments in our lives go by unnoticed.
We recognize them only in retrospect after we have chosen one
road or another.”

—August Wilson

it was 1993 when the bass vibrated so hard it propelled me from
the desk where I was studying for my History final/ sprung board
me up South Oxford Street and 3 blocks down to Spike's Joint
across from Fort Greene Park where Arrested Development was
recording the video for “Revolution” on Spike Lee's Malcolm X
soundtrack/ and I wasn't afraid of crowds yet or maybe I was but
the bass was too much for me to care/ while some nigga was talk'n
bout/ *I don't give a damn bout that revolution shit just gimme the
beat/* and I didn't know it then but he was the “black man actin'
like a nigga gettin' stomped by an African” in that ‘Everyday People’
song/ a peephole into the Civil War of niggas vs. Africans that
would swallow my every step from adolescence to adulthood/ and
I didn't know it then but I was standing in the beginning creep of
the shadow of the wars to come/ the ones that had always been
there but were just now pulling themselves over my young head
like a dark cloak/ and the only thing that would keep my head up
(and down) was the beat/ cause I was finally making sense of that
riddle my dad had yelled at me over some Jamaican rhythms at an
African street festival a few years ago when he said, *Don't it just
make you wanna move!?!/* and I peeled my church boy eyes away
from the gyrating curvature of the brown woman on the moving
truck in front of me and looked up at him/ gap-mouthed, scared
and oblivious and shook my head no

14 (time bomb)

when I'm 14, after a year of house arrest, my mother tells me I
still sound like a time bomb ticking/ I do not tell her that I cannot
recall a where nor when/ my heart was not a metronome for
the fears programmed into it/ how the fear is an electric thing/
the very currency that my body runs off/ got me wired all funny/
what she calls nervous system I call a jumble of tangled chords/
misinterpreting the messages sent to it/ I do not tell her how easy
it is to push someone's buttons/ when they are mechanized into a
weapon designed to go off/ how easy it is to make them blow up
when they're running off voltage as volatile as mine/ with emotions
too explosive to release peacefully/ how even my calm be battery
acid gestating beneath my tongue/ how I cut off speech like a
snipped wire/ for fear of what explosions my mouth may birth/
close my eyes to dream a self not manufactured into a tool of
destruction/ how even then... I can hear my heart

...ticking...

and then another old white man
is another old white man

the black boy reaches
open palms to the blue
sky behind his eyes

from it dangles a body aflame
feet kicking beneath his pupils
hovering just above

his mouth a Vermont landscape
syllables snipped and kempt as
suburban lawns on tamed tongue's pasture

passions pasteurized to be made palatable for
pomp & circumstance in
house of the privileged

stilted on spine and femur of
black grandma's grandma's grandma
galvanize the bones when

skinless pink-faced man says, *From New Orleans huh?
You live in a dangerous neighborhood?*
black boy all eager good sport in Hunger Games

not knowing he prey

says, *It's New Orleans, what neighborhood ain't dangerous?*
laughter from the skinless pink-faced man
laughter from the ghost pale college kids tending the bar

as if to suggest, pour me another
skinless pink-faced man say *You teach in a poor and shitty school?
When you gonna do something about that poor and shitty school?*

more pale laughter spills
their cup runneth over
black boy lips seal like casket

feet flail behind his eyes
embers rain down
tongue all smoke and ash

(black) thoughts of a middle class comeuppance
but then wary...

lest you be lassoed by the hood boy/ be noosed back to the
wretched limbs of your family tree / lest all you try ghosting come
back haunt yo' happy home/ creep up your children's spines like
that crack-head did ya mama's fire escape/ just a vagrant truth
looking to be fed/ might set flame in they hearts/ turn it kitchen
and whip they bloodline like it's stir fry/ leave embers in they
throat/ turn they mouth trap house till they open it and you get all
the smoke

got a whole gang gang of ancestors & tar babies blackening they
speech/ tap dancing & war chanting on they teeth/ got a li'l Harriet
in there/ li'l CLR with a splash of Garvey/ li'l Rodney, Huey and
Sabrina with a pinch of Pookie for good measure/ some Sambo &
Hambone up in there too yeah

while you steady talking Colgate & Ivy League dreams/ talking
family Crest and crease your bleached tooth smile/ for preemptive
palatability with precious pomp & circumstance of the pallid
people/ talkin' enunciate... talkin' tawww-king/ talking tall king
from tar king/ talking blood & dust brushed off Battle Royale
shoulders/ talkin' *son take these rocks I handled the boulders/*
never mind the mountain you never shoulda had to climb in the
first place/ just to peak at a false summit/ glimpse a chimera of a
charade/ to know the Sisyphean slide back into the bowels of all
you ran from/ when the towers topple/ when stolid ivory turns
fumbling chalk/ when it all falls down

Michael “Quess?” Moore (<http://ascribecalledquess.com/>) is a poet, educator, actor, activist, and playwright, in that order. His poetry explores issues of race and social justice, anxiety and depression, love and loss—in short, what it means to be a Black Man Child in the Broken Promise Land.

Geoff Munsterman



Nativity Play

Spilling sand a year now, gouged
 hourglasses at the edges of
 your property must have filled
 themselves. As you master
 tidied swamp—gas wasps, haul
 rot to ash heaps—does your brother
 come always charming & troubling
 just to say hey? Sweating through
 the last green of this year's autumn,
 you embrace the chainsaw, thank god
 you weren't peacenik at your
 youngest daughter's age. Think of
 her, not that addict—childhood
 savior, default father—oldest
 brother restricting no one from
 the party. Everyone but mother
 cut him out, he'd gamble
 & lose & always have somewhere
 to turn. Her love the weakness
 letting cancer spread. Brother
 was a cancer, is ghost—a metastasizing
 radiated by the good book's sermons.
 Not speaking to yourself—you'll speak
 to the baby brother glad to work
 twelve steps on his twelfth strike
 with twelve theories why America
 stopped being great, not one offered
 mentions any chances given.
 You'll speak to the sister
 whose paralytic throat warbles as
 she brags at country clubs of an
 Uptown youth she never had.
 Children as diplomas, she's got
 doctorates in divorced, separating,
 & estranged. Doctors injecting
 Botox in her vocal cords—
 fifteen-hundred bucks a shot—
 recommend chilled whiskey
 she can't stomach. Forget
 about the stepsons, the druggie
 & the queer—but wish them
 far better than a potter's field—
 with urgency in your voice, you'll
 speak to the youngest sister
 when you find out which preschool
 her daughter sends the kids.
 Its playground the Navy's old
 toxic dumping grounds, but
 when you tell her pull them
 out (pull them now) craft an
 excuse that doesn't poison
 valuations for the up-and-coming
 or upset the ingestion of poorer
 hoods to unify the Point.
 Your Bible teaches right from
 wrong, but Jesus never suffered
 screw-up nephews like other
 sister's boy, the one you won't speak to.
 Some master of the English
 language he turned out to be.
 How can your sister, his mom, fail
 to see him as the tragic outcome
 of life outside the faith. Only the one
 son matters—the tax-paying patriot,
 father—who understands winners
 write history as losers elegize.
 He's dismantled all his chances anyhow.
 She disowns her boy & all this progress
 is hers. Hers, goddamnit. Hers.

The Normal Heart (June 12, 2016) after Auden

Walking to the streetcar in this
 dress shirt makes you look too much
 like white boys coming from money,
 gets you jumped for your six bucks
 & the wallet father got you at the prison
 rodeo. A few bruised ribs stiff

against startled abdominals & a lip
 won't stop its throbbing, but the emptied
 keepsake turns back up at the streetcar line—
 like to think they tossed it from
 summer's open windows letting
 breeze crease through. Tell yourself:

they didn't have a gun at least.
 Tell yourself one more mother-
 fucker tries me & I'll evaporate
 the sidewalk with his spit teeth. Practice
 your pleading, walk like a balled fist
 all stomp & knuckle, dream

of a joke that undoes their need
 but mostly try not to cry because
 a person gave you fear of living
 your life. Your life. Is it really
 if you live it wincing? The fearing
 its repeating screams like

a rigged up Ryder truck buckling
 the stunned structure of
 a Federal building, distorts more
 than a pundit's logic before
 all the murdered have their names
 returned by nervous coroners

too knowledgeable in what hate can do
 to schoolchildren, to gay pride
 writhing without judgment in
 its sacred spaces, to parishioners whose
 open hearts make them targets—
 martyrs in this war between cowardice

& existence. The act of prayer mere mumbles
 ringing hollow as stump speeches.
 Search for an answer undoes the blood,
 removes the shock of violence & a shrug
 from the conservative dark that deepens
 wounds too deep to ever heal. Accept

that maybe there isn't one, that living
 makes you a collector of the harshest scars
 while someone unlike anyone you know
 tenders the bill from human misery
 same ink of negation that has plagued our race
 since we gained & took a pulse.

Geoff Munsterman (<http://www.nextleftpress.com/>) works at an antiquarian bookshop. He also designs books. In 2013, he wrote a full-length poetry book and last year self-published a chapbook. He used to publish handmade chapbooks for other poets, but now he makes Coptic notebooks out of boards from old books. Geoff needs a hobby.

Taylor Murrow



July

Insects quietly buzz and remind you where you are — home. You spit into ditches, Gran dips cauliflower chunks into a bowl of mayonnaise. Ice pops melt and drip and slick down your wrists while the box fan hums. Playing hide and seek in the dark, the first time the older boy down the street asked if you knew what a BJ was, you crawled up the magnolia tree and carved another flower. His cheeks were two red lumps of clay. You won't shave your legs for another three years. Mama doesn't talk about it, but here, in the thick of the air, our tongues know how to breathe.

Parable

At grandma's house. Mom, check. A little baby girl, check. Terrible tragedy phone call says have you seen the news, 9000 people are dead. Suddenly the air mattress I've been sleeping on is not safe. Everything around me is water and overgrown grass. Thick. The danger of nature returning the favor. Inside, mom sleeps the high off but the whole backyard is flooded, break-neck tulips stretch over backwater's edge sprouted overnight. An old man offers lawn services. Choose from this list he says. Are you an angel? we say. Sometimes you just have to say yes. In no time the water drains and was there ever a tragedy? Clutch baby girl close to your chest, near the incision. Watch the tulips breathe, shine. This is our kind of dirt.

What the Living Carry

Broken appliances, mystery plates, a childhood crib.
Not the birds cawing on the lawn, understandable but no.
Letters written in careful print, the words spelling unable to keep up.
No, there is nothing left of the backyard, the house, the waters that rose and then settled just outside the door.
The trees have all fallen. A collection of faces.
The grief that names itself the bottle in the freezer.
No, not the ghost misplacing the keys.
Not the court filings or the intake forms.
The above ground swimming pool that was slightly unlevel.
The sun still pressing itself against the window.
The heartbeat that slows and then quickens, and then slows again.

If God Were a Woman

I close my eyes and remember
a prism a paperweight probably purchased
in some novelty store clear and plastic
blue felt bottom

but the way the light pierced
its center the way the rainbows
shot out a storm of colored shards
in my palms
makes me think of watching the news

with my grandmother nearly 90 never left the South
dresser drawers filled with rosaries
no longer used
I've lost my religion she says
Two grown children gone before her

a grandson of 20 too She knows
the incantations by heart her arthritic fingers
used to trace each plastic bead full of grace
the Lord is with thee
I think it's worth a shot right

My own mother was not a believer
no reason to think
anyone would hand you a bedside prayer
that anyone could usher you
from one world to the next

Creator of heaven and earth
Their lives a series of cruelties big and small
As it was is now and ever shall be

I wonder my grandmother says today eyes cloudy gray
sunken hands shuffling deck
for the next round of solitaire
we're watching the news Where another woman has clawed
at the raw part of herself opened her crystal chest
I wonder if this would happen
If God were a woman

Elegy

The box stays in my car for days.
It once held ashes, gray powder in a sack

but I can't throw the plastic vessel away,
the one where they spelled your name wrong, brother,

the one that held what could be swept
of you into a pile. I tried to be gentle,

gave you a new home made of wood,
crafted by hand, a plant preserved in glass.

Would you have preferred an aquarium? Your plastic baggie zip-tied
to a fake feather of seaweed, bobbing along with feeders, speckled cichlids

You always splashed while I just wanted to float.
A family of waves — mom and I lost in whirlpools

while you, the waterspout, determined to make the ocean
do your bidding, gathered it in fistfuls and flung it to the sky.

Taylor Murrow (<http://www.taylormurrow.com/>) writes and lives in New Orleans. She is a co-producer of Dogfish, a monthly reading series in New Orleans' St. Roch neighborhood. You can read her nonfiction at Pelican Bomb and Room 220, and her poems have been included in plain china and The Tulane Review.

Amanda Emily Smith



Moon

As ocean moves to meet tide of moon,
Your moans come in the same heavy waves
And I drown happily.

April 26, 2019

Heart in Hand

Reach into my heart
Feel it beat with you.
Wade through my water
Feel me quake just between us
just for us
you slap against waves of me
as you swim back and forth
you reach my deep
Until my heart quakes
And spasms
Drown in me
Small deaths
I lose my breathe
I am undone
And Resurrected
each time by hand.

February 20, 2019

Black Kids

Black sons and daughters
Mississippi red clay children
Seven ward Creole kid
Southern people

Black daughters and sons
Native Sons and Native daughters
Black as moonlit night
Black as Amber honeycomb

Black sons and daughters
Half melon smiles
Full sunlight laughter

Black daughters and sons
Sunlight sparkles on ebony skin

Black sons and daughters
A WORLD of color in your faces

Black daughters and sons
Listen to the water.
Black sons and daughters
Wade in the water, children.
Wade in the water.

July 13, 2017

Over the Weekend,
My Little Girl Heart
Grew up.

She is the original who created us.
She will love just as deeply.
She will feel just as fiercely,
but she will not hold on to folks
that harm her.

She will not covet those that cut her.
She will have no other women before Her.
She will not be a porcelain doll, broken and stuck
in the persistence of memory.

She will honor her name, Pumpkin Love will flowing in our blood, carved on our bone and written in our marrow
She will not murder Herself. She will not martyr Herself. She is that she is.
She will die. She will live on in the stars of our synapses.
She will not believe false prophets.
She will not commit to adulting, she is forever young still and all.

January 11, 2019

Darker Sister

I am the darker sister,
Often scorned and spit upon
Many times looked down on.
My brown skin spurned by
The children of the bluest eye.

I am the darker sister,
Of whom many do not know
I am the darker sister,
Whom many have forgotten.

I am the darker sister.
I birth the world from between my legs.
Sculpted the land like a potter sculpts clay,
Music sprung from my belly
I spit language from my lips and
Rhythm beat from my hips.
There is a world of color in my skin.

I am the darker sister.
I cried the Nile
When my children were taken away.
I live and breathe for them each day.
I am wounded from the shackles of time.
I bleed for the ones still enslaved.

I am the darker sister.
I know no end.
I live in each of my kin,
From the banks of the Congo
To the rain forest of the Ivory Coast
To the dessert of the Saharas
To my scattered son like stars
Lost to the night sky
Yet still burning bright.

I am the darker sister,
I will rise again.
I am rising.
I am rising.

I am the darker sister.
I am the darker sister.
Darker sister.

2009

Little Girl Heart, Ten Commandments

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NEW YORK CITY

Amanda Deutch photo

Feed the Clown, Holga 120 Camera, 2015, Coney Island

Peter Bushyeager



Nature's Mighty Law

For C.C.

We love living on this island
 though a decent view
 would give the full benefits of sun.
 When the wind is right
 and the whitecaps lap
 ocean smell wafts down the avenue
 where a brass plaque
 marks the spot an obliterated
 colonial farm and pear tree stood.

Any ocean is old and restless.
 Ours constantly infiltrates
 the river four blocks away.
 Your carefully considered colors
 and pragmatic choice of coat
 reassure me every morning
 your soft back against my nose.

Lead Singer

There's a poppy in your brain that closes before dawn.
 At the tip of the crown of your head
 are secret scenarios that make your tits stand.
 You calmly sit in a formica-paneled green room
 immaculately clean, inserted far from surveillance or
 any music associated with violence and you can't be wicked
 because there's no money to pay the wrong people
 to play that dance hit too many times.

You're not performing some sort of purity.
 You want to bend your neck forward
 and curl your lips toward the microphone
 like a baby bird.
 The lyrics don't really scare you
 they're not outside touching down they're
 part of the blackout inside when
 men do curious things to the world.

Dew

I'll walk you out in the morning dew
 past new dredged dunes' low-lying
 sprawl of pioneer plants
 to the spikey panic grass on
 the old frontal dune
 that holds back waves
 and only hear the crystal melody of
Morning Dew floating lightly above
 its dark lyric core: post apocalypse
 the final two lovers alive ankles sticky
 wading in shifty sand they believe is the site
 of last night's promise.

Ankles sticky in the morning dew
 pioneer plants alive post apocalypse
 in the shifty sand of
 new dredged dunes' sprawl
 I'll walk out wading past
 the lyric core that holds back
 the final waves of last night's promise:
 spikey panic floating lightly
 and low lying on the dark grass
 is the site above the old frontal dune
 and two lovers believe you and only hear
 the crystal melody of *Morning Dew*.

Tour

This foreign country has more orderly money and its capital has a tall arch strung with white lights, just like the entrance to Louis Armstrong Park.

I'm traveling here, lounging by the Ferris wheel decorated with colored lights on dimmers that flare up and out like fireworks.

I arrived by accident so I don't grasp a pen, look up from my notebook and gaze off in the distance that borders anyone's face.

I avoid bad form in the midst of glittering amenities that aren't commodious.

I think I'm an example of the art of miniature but I flaunt the energy gathered from my vintage clothes.

I think I'm better at assembling, not cooking, food, and I was taught to aim for the porcelain to avoid the loud pissing sound.

I can't hear the hum and neither can you.

Locution is different here but the language and content are the same.

I erase evidence of the city of my birth. I lower my voice and practice accents. I go English. I go Spanish. I go high and tense. I don't move my lips.

I think maybe my heart is in the highlands.

Cameras and mics are positioned at the core of what I know and when I might know it.

Walls can be made of fiberboard and not reach the ceiling as long as the place is secure.

The southeast marble rolled quickly northwest in my rented room with the crooked floor.

I want to be rich but won't pay for it.

Walking past, someone calls me "darling"; the vendors are out tonight.

There's a disturbed marsh on the edge of town and many Common Reeds.

I think of the surprising violence of the waltz.

Peter Bushyeager's poems have recently appeared in *New American Writing*, *Café Review*, *Local Knowledge*, *Sensitive Skin*, and *Live! Mag*. He is the editor of *Wake Me When It's Over: Selected Poems of Bill Kushner*, and his books include the full-length collection *Citadel Luncheonette* and the chapbook *In the Green Oval*.

Lydia Cortes



This Us This They

Aggravated assault & battery to our
Bodies souls & minds over matter whose
Mater are you demeaning the Madonna

The mother of god who came first the
Chicken or the egg or the mother or the
Son or the holy trinity or the roly polys

Or the royal police saying I didn't do no
Thing wrong nothing he looked like he
Was walking away from me but I knew

That tool in his holster was no tool no
Fool better than a hammer if I had a
Hammer I'd use it in the mourning I'd

Use it to smash the weapon he'd use to
Screw me over or was it a driver in a car
Pulling him over working it to let go of

Some white out red rages the playing
Field might've been evener but all the guy
Was his license to not kill though that

Wallet could've been a gun not the trusty
Ole won not like the one entrusted by
Church & state for me to dutify dutifully

Enact my troth in THE man wees the man
With the trust of the system to keep things
In orders in ardor of our pledge to keep

Things contained the seething angers
Them at bay cause with that madness
One never knows what they can do no

Can can like little a little too loose Lautrec
The little ones have the most angry stored
Up cause they've been kept hungry &

Mean so we've got to pro tec the in inner
Innocence hidden or disappeared
Those in power through their

Hard works hard whiskey hard hearts who
Ain't bout to give what they earned soft
Through the swear & the switch of their

Cro Magnate minds using now the newer
Ones coming in the poorer the darker of
Complex lingos Oh say now can't y'all

See how this all came to be this dissing
This differencing this dislocation
This us this they

Simply Existing

Just saw this on
The snow I love
This song it was always
The same couple of words
From the east please be
Nice out there for a little
While it would have been
Soon corrected as please bee
Enough with the first version there
Would now be a new understanding
Thinking how important to make the
Little buzzing creature always so
Busy making honey for his honey
The queen how to make him happy
Too how to make him content and
Not make it anymore about simply
Existing or just plain being when
Bullied begged and commanded
Please be please be bee please

A New Kind of Love

a version without monkey business
aversion to simian goings & comings

adjective came before noun that's kind
of what we do avert when not subverting

here's to us all us sentient non see me on beignets feeling filling up the empty

spaces between tooth and nailing non aligning coats the wall on the clock then

there's time for dread ahead this will be
our shining hour at dinner we had cans of

peas and carrots and corn kernels served
au naturelle that's how it was done en casa

mais oui straight from the can into the
serving bowl water and all no heating

heeded may we now skip the veggies mami yo no quiero don't pry por mi marie

tina no pinot egregious we garnered together to bear the lord's cursings he

chases and jesus his will to be sown wicked pressing for the cross now please

make the salad dressing from old velum drapes noting the raisin de tray in jest

encumbrances but don't overdue
destination wettings in white tulle on the

beach liberating bribe and groin growing
freddy remember freddy free freddy for a

fee or feed the boy fried batatas the orange spuds speed it up Mami mucha

hambre ham bones ham bones ma bonus mi broth kept in back room hid away from

evil eyes ice in the winter our ft. greene apartment no heat you hear no water high

enough aint no folly low enough for gaye people marvelous back ain't no basement

high enough no attic low antics fran's tick freddy's sick in the nicked of tines it was

the best of signs 'twas the knife be gore chris' ma and note a feature was slurring

not even my house

Brenda Coultas



In Search of Giants (excerpt)

I walk at midnight on the Grand Concourse of my mind, trying to achieve the actual location of movie palaces and boulevards. Uphill to the Bronx to the monuments of Woodlawn: obelisks of the Woolworth's tomb and Herman Melville's meek grave topped with rocks and coins for luck. The 4 train ends here a long ways from Arrowhead, with its view of Mount Greylock.

A map of Manhattan that charts only the springs
To point out where the grey spaces turn to hardwood forests and castles. I follow a prayer string from the Battery to the Bronx Zoo, draw myself up by a thread to the fabled worlds above. Find Jim Carroll's lost needles and basketball jersey and shop the covered charms of La Guardia's market on Arthur Avenue.

I never toured Poe's cottage or walked along the aqueduct that brought water from Croton to the city, where he paced back and forth to High Bridge; however, I have driven underneath waiting for his thin body to drop.

Am I afraid?

I've known ravens less voracious and fatter. A locket portrait of his baby wife cracks our windshield. The fallen Poe fastens his coal-lined eyes, fixes a gaze, a bead, to still my heart.

At a forgotten destination

At a damp tomb

I did not climb the wooden and sturdy toothpicks of the staircase. I did not take from the war chest, ribbons and medals or blueprints for a torpedo or smart bomb. Nor did I take quilt blocks nor wooden eggs for darning socks nor board games of checkers or marbles.

Here in this warm space, my obligations fall aside and weep, and my love poem rebound. I want a lover with tree trunk thighs: A young willow that bends with the wind and buds in spring. However, I am cast among the unromantic who powder and spray nature out of our nature and those who hate the feel of moss or dirt.

I dress and prepare to walk a hundred blocks uphill along the Hudson, noting the direction of other people's partners, and the weather and white froth the river sometimes takes on, and the joggers, bikers, strollers, and New Jersey Palisades, those cliffs of amusement parks that once rivaled Coney Island, that island of rabbits.

Or Rat Island
Blackwell's Island
of plague victims

This walk towards boulders of the Northeast, thrusting without sensuality, evading gravity, of pushing the daily upwards, sucking mud through a straw and making bricks. I set my legs to work mixing the muck for a penny a brick.

About John James Audubon, of said Audubon terrace and Minniesland, take a feather to him.

Walk with purpose and whistle down the avenue
Witness where bodies lie close together
From under the celtic cross to a ballroom
Homage to fallen bodies of Audubon Avenue

About Birds of America: he had a system. The elephant folio, is not a folio of elephants. Rather Audubon's Elephant folio contains etchings the actual size of North America's birds of prey.

Near a wedding venue, near a trailer park, near the bottoms, near the twin bridges where you can shake off Kentucky mud, near the massacre of Passenger pigeons, a folio lies under thick plastic, and they turn the page every few days and there is his buckskin suit, his wife's hair combs.

John James Audubon, study these bones

John James Audubon, pay your debts

John James Audubon, set your slaves free

Wiltwyck

I would take my inventory but I do not own any animals, not a flock of geese or cattle, but a flock of laptops and modems, radios and cameras, answering machines and televisions.

My ship is a headstone, docked beside the old dutch church lately of Wiltwyck, Dutch for "wild town."

In Wild town, I walk the bluestones of sinful living & When I am drunk & make promises that dry up in the sunlight & where there are stone churches and jails & where there are furnaces for turning rock into dust & for smelting ore into metal into tools & where there are powerful hags who fly on coarse broomsticks during the night.

My name is Brenda Bluestone, I might be Brenda Goodwife or Goodman, I might be Brenda of the millstream, bookstore or broomstick, Brenda of the Wallkill, Brenda of the Shaker Villages, Sister to Sister Anne, of the Mountain house, of shell middens of the Hudson, Brenda of the quarries and dungeons of Ulster County. Brenda on the bluestone highway studying the proper hold(t) of stone.

Bury the laptop
inside a spirit house of
upright slabs
for an afterlife abode

Causes of Death in Ulster County 1847

Expired in a field from drink; rattlesnake bite (his brother in law sent him the snake in a tightly secured box, he took it out to show friends); typhus; peddler murdered by a housewife (her daughter wore a dress made from his goods); suicide by hanging (he went to make his name in Brooklyn); shot accidentally in a rowboat (duck hunting); horse returned without him.

Kyle Dacuyan



Vacationland

We are on vacation. We are in Los Angeles. We are taking our time which means we do about three things every day: sex, food, and then another thing. Today the other thing

is we go to the house where he lived until he was eight or nine. I can see him bloom with the good kind of unheimlich. A word often insufficiently translated as uncanny. That we append

an English understanding of the prefix un is an injustice. Un in Deutsch is not so much not as very, or rather rather, shall we say. Rather, a measure which says both little and a lot.

Neither not nor very. A rather dram of heimlich ist unser un. Heimlich like Heimat, the German word for homeland. But also heimlich itself heimlich, the adverbial disclosure of a secret.

The allergies that cloy to the pollen of what we come from. And bewilder us still, or again. Rather. Everything seems so suspiciously familiar on vacation, but the words I find or think

I need wild themselves from out my grip, like a herd of horses who know I am no jockey. Happy is the feeling unheimlichest of all, the mare so powerfully free I do not dare to kiss her.

Like bae with his nose in all this California plantlife. He remembers. I want to. We are capable of peace. Vacation is so fragrant with nostalgia. I take a picture, but the picture's not the same.

I Am No Angeleno

I'm a stranger here. I like that. My body clock is ticking three hours in the future. I wake before the news, I have pre-dawn with the mountains. This makes me feel if not invincible, at least not so impatiently human. My friend in Silver Lake says everyone here lives in the Very Right Now. Which I think is a consequence of the constant summer. Also his specious and rather narrow views of everyone and here. I don't know that there is anywhere I have an everyone. More I am a herd of one, the calculus in my brain, alienating and elsewhere, a sugar-high child who won't accept the off-switch. A year ago, a lover ago, everywhere I looked I thought there was no beauty I could again belong to. And now I see that what is beautiful is what precisely I have nothing to do with. Like this jolie-laide duck skanking through the reeds of Echo Park, his bill fat with stolen food. I want to trust my own joy like that. More fully, I mean, more thoughtlessly and sweet. There is a man I newly love back east in the future, whose grief I want to take each time he comes inside me. There are times I am just about to come when I wish that I could say the names of everyone I've ever loved at once. Plenty of truth should be impossible given physics, given speech, given time and its insistence on linear forward motion. Well. My friend in Silver Lake says *should* is a word that doesn't do me any favors. So I am here in Los Angeles, but I am also giving myself permission to be here and here and here in the realities I am inventing. That is the miracle of wakefulness inside the shut pink of your eyelids. You can latch your sublimating heart to the wingtip of an airplane. And I am, and it is flying two thousand miles across the heartland to light the morning's change upon my lover's face. The light is light I have endowed with an intention. That he remember how deeply loved he is out here in the past, where we are kissing and I am walking backwards down a hall. We hold an orange between us and sway stoned to Arthur Russell. It is Saturday. Isn't it. We have hours and hours with nowhere to go.

previously published in wildness

Kyle Dacuyan is a poet, performance-maker, and executive director of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's. Recent poems are in *Ambit*, *The Offing*, and *Social Text*, and he's presented performance at *Ars Nova*, *FringeArts*, and *The Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue*, among other places. Ted Roeder photo.

Everything Is Flint for a Better Life

What I am doing with my hypnotist does not constitute adultery though true there is a post-trance residue

I get velvety and slick in, and something tense of mine unticks at his command that I relax

like a Dali clockface going goopy on the time-trees. I feel scooped in him, or he in me,

when I put him in my ear, Michael, my inductor, my seducer, my could be anyone at all

since all he is is voice walking the corridors of my dark. Who is he, my lover, my real beloved

asks, and the truth is that Michael is an Australian Youtuber whose video hypnotes last anywhere

from 40 minutes to 6 hours. Why does your disembodied hypnotist have to be shirtless and Australian,

liebchen wants to know when he spots Michael's thumbnail on my phone screen.

Michael in the flesh is irrelevant, I say but not aloud, amethyst on one eyelid,

rose quartz on the other. I am going to another side of the world to drown a little while.

We have what, an hour until dinner.

We Create Spaces in Our Brains of Static Conviction

I am in Daytona at a crab shack watching the tilt-a-whirl from my dinner table, waiting for the thunderstorm I know inevitably will happen. Earlier today I sat in a circle at the library with 80 bikers and church ladies and ACLU hippies talking about their perceptions of the news. This is my work. I go into communities and talk about the media people read or watch and trust or don't. A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who has retired to the Everglades asked the room do you really believe there is enough actual information to fill 24 hours a day of continuous television. I understand the point and yet yes I do believe information is a volume that will exceed time for forever. Up the coast of this peninsula children are shouting from the tops of cars at the adults who have failed once more to keep them alive. After the meeting, a woman wept to me in the vestibule that the members of her knitting group live entirely in a world devoid of news. I don't know what to tell her. But the truth will touch us all eventually, I trust, like the wind from the back and forth of waiters making breathe now the napkins on these tables, like the patrons who sense in their gathering at the windows that rain is in the forecast and roiling at the end of Main Street, which in Daytona is the ocean.

Amanda Deutch



Shoot the Freak

5 shots for \$3 dollars

Whatcha doing here?!

Photographing the freak

It costs 8 spankings!

Freak is doing a
on the ledge of the target
How do you spell Clark

paint ball and spray paint
coladas and
painted cursive sign:

I am alone here a camera
empty day listening to the
capturing what I can
unobtrusively entering in
a passenger
a customer
a voyager
a human target

maybe I remember the
Don't get married. Stay
They weren't hitting on
to give a 20 something
and a decade later, I can

one guy's at the table reading the post, one tans
one has zinc making him ghost in the light

It must have been in the fall
shoulder season
I came to find my family

landscape
streetscape
cityscape
seascape

a passenger entering the seascape
a landscape entering the
shoulder season a decade late
making zinc ghost and my family
reads the post. It was honest
advice to give a 20 something
girl who is "just one of the guys"
painted cursive sign: LIVE
HUMAN TARGET. They
weren't hitting on me
capturing a decade, I
came to finally



ain't free!

crossword puzzle shirtless
area
Kent?

and gyros and pina

tables for customers only

film
voices

the landscape

guys at the table
single.
me. It was honest advice
year-old
look up and say I took it.

from search for a lost shoe

My grandmother is a fish diasporic, dispartate

metal coffee cans reused as piggy banks store coins hopjes, D train

brooklyn busses

roaches scatter on kings highway the old white

rounded GE fridge

her building elevator that will only go once you pull closed the metal grate

elevator smells of the bodies that entered it before us supermarket nearby
where she bought white bread, coffee ice cream, and cottage cheese



canned peaches and pineapple on sale at the A&I
grandfather long gone from the few details
that linger vaguely: her age, place of birth,
other relatives, photographs, matchbooks

Amanda Deutch (<http://www.amandadeutch.com/>) is a poet living in Brooklyn. Her most recent chapbook is *Surf Avenue & 29th Street* (Least Weasel Press).

Joe Elliot



No George,

it's illegal to sleep in the park
 because if you could sleep in the park
 you would not need a house
 and if you did not need a house
 you would have no place to keep your belongings
 and if you had no place to keep your belongings
 you would very soon stop trying to acquire them
 and if you stop trying to acquire them
 you might also stop going to work and participating
 in the competition to acquire more belongings
 and if you stopped going to work and participating
 in the competition to acquire more belongings
 you would be unable to be located on a day to day basis
 and if you were unable to be located on a day to day basis
 you would be unable to be accounted for
 and if you were unable to be accounted for
 you would be unaccountable and unmeasurable
 and if you were unaccountable and unmeasurable
 you would not have a number
 and if you do not have a number
 you would have to be given a number
 and photographed from the front and the side
 and issued a cot and a blanket and a toilet
 and a cell to put them and yourself in
 so that you can be accountable and belong
 to a location on a day to day basis

Hi Everyone,

Please let me know by Friday yes or no
 If you want any of the furniture listed below
 Breakfront in mom's bedroom
 White laundry hamper in mom's bedroom
 Black TV stand in mom's bedroom
 Six broken painted caned chairs in mom's bedroom

Two four poster twin beds in middle bedroom
 Double sleigh bed and matching bureau in left front bedroom
 Oval side table in left front bedroom
 Two black side chairs in left front bedroom
 Portrait of unknown hatted lady who has reportedly appeared to guests
 staying in front left room
 Capacious oak bookcase with doors in right front room

Victorian horsehair sofa where hatted lady perhaps once swooned in upstairs hall
 Standing embroidered fire screen in upstairs hall
 Mahogany low boy in downstairs front hallway
 Gold tray on end table in downstairs front hallway
 Old napping sofa that needs to be reupholstered in piano room
 Tippy tiered table by old napping sofa in piano room

Sideboard with intricate inlay work in dining room
 Six heavy formal caned chairs in dining room
 Stupid toe stubbing couch in TV room
 Small coffee table in front of stupid toe-stubbing couch in TV room
 Drop-leaf table between reading chairs in TV room
 Antique brass standing lamp between reading chairs in TV room

Pine table used to store toys by back door in kitchen
 Narrow white book shelf next to Normandy cupboard in kitchen
 Any decorative copper cookery hanging in kitchen
 Wooden armchair with seat that mom needle-pointed for dad in kitchen
 Thanks,
 Josie

Watching Myself

raising my phone to my left ear
 and then abruptly switching it over
 to my right ear, because my right ear
 is the one I always listen with,

and consequently thinking about how
 little I use my left ear, I feel a sudden wave
 of sorrow for my left ear wash
 through me, and become aware

of my left hand making its way
 up the left side of my face to find that ear
 and with its fingertips feel it there,
 attached to my head, and am all

tingly as they gently explore and trace
 its indentations and soft, cartilaginous lobes
 and swirls, and am overcome by a burst
 of love for this ear that is mine,

this ear that only wants to help me
 hear, this ear that I for so long ignored,
 neglected, yes, this is my ear! the one I am
 feeling this breeze coming through

the window with, the one I am right now
 hearing the buzz of a car in the distance with,
 the one that grows as I grow, and feel
 warm joy run down both cheeks

Blew Blue

You'll never get to where you want to be
 because where you want to be
 is always some other place than where you are,
 which is where you are. It doesn't matter

what rhetorical machinations you use
 to leverage what is. What is is as furry
 and faithful as Hachi waiting on a Tokyo
 platform forever for his Master

to return. What is is the wavy blue
 bulletin board border the teacher
 hasn't replaced in fifteen years. What is
 is the wind, which has neither origin

nor destination, but merely brushes
 your eyelashes as it passes through. You are
 passing through, too. But you knew that,
 didn't you, the same way, after a while,

you no longer hear the underlying
 drone of the jet. You're up in the clouds
 and you like it there, where you are
 neither taking off nor landing.

Joe Elliot is the author of *If It Rained Here*, a collaboration with Julie Harrison (Granary Books), *Opposable Thumb* (subpress), *Homework* (Lunar Chandelier), and *Idea for a B Movie* (Free Scholars Press). He teaches English and lives in Brooklyn with his wife and their three sons.

Laura Elrick



It is a Violent Rotating Column of Air

On the bench in front of a café, little general store, a bakeshop, country kitchen. Small median cutting the street. Row of trees planted on a plain between ranges. Swirling ones loose at their roots.

This precarious shaking between parallel earths, a diaphanous sky what is "solid"?

Someone says look at those trees they don't look right.

Alerted, agreed, you stand up—what?—a tornado. So you run for the delicate café door. Grasp the effete knob. Down to a cellar, the cellar you think, its vast dim room of boilers painted dull green, sub-marine red gauges, blinking. You blink too.

The gauges throw red light on the zone, and through a waft of damp concrete you will begin to smell it, utterly human.

You will come across a small, lost girl who wishes to hide a letter from her mother. Do you tell her you will help her, but not in the machinery? Not in the machinery.

If you press the knobs and the chemicals threaten, then... See? you tell her. What good is a letter to anyone. But oh, alright, you can put it with the things in this high cabinet (a head).

Just go on and try to take another one's girl-child's letter. But not in this tornado! Not in the tornado. Cubby holes fill with conservative families, try not to offend them. What is it.

Normal States

Or the time you were four days under descended into illness fever so high it claimed you

eradicated self, the organismal theater a host for colonies but for the response systems you would have died

warring but for a boy you hardly knew who on the fifth day said we're going must be a doctor who speaks like you

you've got to get up hold on here and here the bright postcolonial sun melting the feverish object for a haze

sentimentalizing film in the image of a history that only read like a picture, this shot toward the sun

woozy angle, the anti-souvenir of a host for the colonies clung what are you doing there but running

unawares but sickened to the heart of it personal torments a puppet for the state around his waist days lost on a mattress

back of the motor bike your arms on a floor, hobbling down a hall you could keep nothing down, nothing in

by the time the boy came, so lithe another day the doctor had said another day just one and you might not have

by the time the boy came, so lithe another day left to shield your eyes another day the doctor had said

just one and you might not have even one piece of dry baguette the colonial host would be to vomit but to eat

the little sandwiches with the soft cheese with the chilis and cilantro delicious in the street it came on so fast

you did it in the gutter by a hip café days weeks a month your limp body and helped you to the cot

from the wavering zones, the spots of sun-drenched haze and when at last you found a telephone

they had no sense of where you were or how anyone lived that hospitals had no soap it was difficult to go out

and find a place to sit and order something small, a tea perhaps or water, to count the money that a normal state takes

thinking not much to pass military trucks the nothing down, nothing in, their white high roll bars & lights like a pickup built for hunting

like a pick-up built for hunting why you were there, a backwash of the schools, what you already knew, a chest of tortured skulls

a windowless room the partially exhumed lavender dress, child-sized pocket, it was just there, decades later, like the metallic tasting pills

you could keep nothing down, nothing in, skin you weren't you, you weren't anything yet but a privilege in leaving oh god she had said

less spoken than exhaled we thought you were dead and you were dead for having been thought so and it was

the kind of dying that happens everywhere in the state inside the state of every state but you swallowed them down because you wanted

yes you wanted to live the first yes and that was the start of the complicity that normal states with only a blush burns

and then obedience tinged with a burgeoning else an anxiety in the host you are knowing you now are and that you will learn you want to, no, must kill

Slurry Pump

To find it depressing, to wade barefoot through sludge, toward the hull of a rusting ship rent in half, this sliver-house, a Gordon Matta-Clark, except you live there, actually.

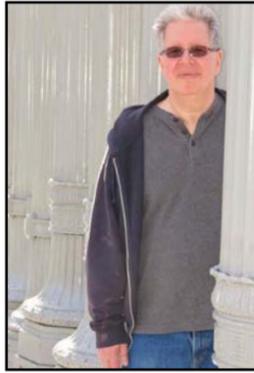
After scooping the sludge into buckets and lugging them the half mile or so up the beach you come back to the wall as it collapses, sending clouds of red dust up over the ledge of your hiding place, where you squat.

How strange to think that all those lessons (guppy, minnow, porpoise, shark) could have prepared you for this type of breathing. A poem for the future, then. Their work is to recover gas from the coal beds and to prevent the escape of fugitive gas.

It is, in a way. A slurry pumped to the surface.

Laura Elrick (<https://bombmagazine.org/authors/laura-elrick>) has written several books of poetry and currently teaches in the writing department at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

Ed Friedman



from Walkthrough: Span Hex

Spoon back the sugar. Nothing firm.

South toward New York City, name streaks and shadows
 Dark Green-Violet, Dark Orange, Chewed-off Moonlight Against Coronal Shifts.
 Chase down Bosses. Gush white smoke.
 Apply Iced Coral lipstick, and don't say "No, not again, not algebra!"
 Waterfalls pour after long dryness, like on Saturday
 turn the Golden Helm heroically north where some work their asses off. That's us.
 Here, go up. There, lie flat. Lick away mustard
 till you get to pure wiener skin. Revamp beauty
 before it's proven. Talk to everyone, and they'll talk about you.

Who says dark matter is breakfast cereal and End of Time

is a place? The slow one-second ticks are lapsed strokes,
 tokens really—Soil, Rabbit, Hinge.
 The flames are thoughts on gas fountain crests.
 Study me. Spend my money. Show off your serious legs.
 Rains pelt, eggs crack, burrs scratch. Are progressions progress?
 Here, observe a spark pillar. That's South, whose recently mopped floors
 invite confident sidesteps and goat parades. Ever seen one?
 Yes, intercoms accept our every description.

Now we'll be fighting off sleep more than Cavern Bats and Shale Enemies.

Beat them, scale the west wall, adopt funny voices, say
 "Legs this thick and muscular hold the distance then squeeze utterly crushing..."
 You look cold, linger, whiten. All 100,000 silences set off alphabetic
 deep tan bursts. Lost enough? Fool searchlights and make them float
 messages over our terrain. Go down, this will brighten, see into
 nothing so rashly strange as writing: rude stone courses, deeply scored.
 Again, push button A for Mesozoic mail. I'm kidding. I'm rust,
 wary of costs, principled behind slatted doors. Do you know
 cutoff jeans and black sneakers stick to you? So leave the freeway,
 then glance again south. The next area, called 3 Schists
 can't be sold. Not for cocks, silos, or prestige. Who makes empty
 hero agreements, objective dead men, not partners but subjects?
 Go claim your share, whatever that is. Dreamy Benefactors?
 Between these extreme modes lies Canada.

Fall out of the 1967 closet, and say nice things about buckwheat flowers.

Ever seen any? How about a tennis ball? OK, start moistening its surface.
 Spit will do. Envision the troposphere as a papaya-shaped leather pouch.
 Bubbling finger-length rivers, several hundred of them. Sacheted clothes
 won't secure a Game Over. For that imagine history as a lead tennis racket—
 no, a smooth clay court inscribed and gauged. Forget it.
 Send me laconic pen-pal letters, evil looks, moschate odors.
 Think "musky" and steep clean concrete roads.
 Drive them through constant scientific progress.
 Unfamiliarity grows—runs a dissolving length. Blink,
 stammer, drool. Know exactly what to tell.

So far, perfect day, raked gravel, regular blue-lined yellow tablet paper

Drop down the left waterfall. Grab one silver stud,
 not playing on words, nobody with you, no plump hands.
 Look at your bent fender and summer's loneliness.
 Good, sink to the next level, use head swivels.
 All manner of absent treatment glides the mental airways,
 troubling what? Every year is a new stirring, wagging litters,
 thick blanket felts, and not like talk-horrible-curses.
 We'll meet between red paper curtains wearing lantana patterns.
 Stand looking across at me in elevator shoes. Alligators are a surprise.
 You get through them though, and go west, file north, jump right
 and southwards. Hoist a brave new money. These close calls
 seeing lightning and whatnot—real danger processes how?
 Invisibly, as customs cede concrete work methods their bases.

Go east, say "John F. Kennedy" and defeat enemies.

You'll see two switches and love stuff like that.
 Giant Volcanic Rock Head, go through it like a living room
 with so many medals to break or purple virgin land.
 Here's the Bosses section, in mind no name. They give me
 a dollar, fry meat. What's in those lemon tree clumps?
 Think of only hard-won joys. Maybe they're there, and
 what about this blacktop grade? Press switch B
 until nothing happens: oops, fish leaps and monkey masks.
 Somebody, quick, make a down payment. Feel the air lock, squeal.
 Close to the Thanksgiving National Holiday, hunch in.
 No one says "duck." Everyone say "yay!" We outweigh fall evening.
 Flies land. You'll have to fight crawling away. Everyone say
 "dried azalea petals" and "gone."

Spot two Norways retaking root on improvised lands.

Blue hydrangeas, eyes wildly roll, and a fat mellow slug.
 I'm tall, waxed, not living ginger, anything that squat or gnarled.
 Could we be deeper in passion throes among hemispheric collective hums?
Huts, I mean, they have shapes to tie us to. Aggressive birds reply,
 shrug, and start off unseen—the resulting downward deflection,
 vertical pressure—oh-oh, there it goes! We learn or
 don't learn anything, name streets after ourselves.
 Who's going to be without scars?
 Who will pause, smile, turn observant?
 To summarize, we're fucked but intrigued.
 That's the pre-historic Nordic mythology kicking in.
 As I understand its verses—not a word spoken,
 except for intricate howls—"no one is originally from Georgia
 though there are clearly exceptions."

Ed Friedman (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Friedman) is the author of 11 books of poetry and prose, the most recent of which are *Two Towns* (Hanging Loose Press) and *Ideal Boy* (with Kim MacConnel, Helpful Book). From 1987–2003, he was the artistic director of the St. Mark's Poetry Project. Ken Friedman photo.

Bob Gaulke



My bank account

when I left the middle class
I had few regrets
held onto the accent
but little else

saw the destruction
wrought by millions of sultans
had to imagine
being someone else

you approach with caution
unfamiliar with my medication
our drug of choice is exhaustion
we merge and create situations

I begin to relax
when I perceive no threat
I've fallen out range
of any panic attack

I sleep close to the ground
without making a sound
just an occasional nightmare
from that distant past

Of those

27% admit to being racists
36% feel dissatisfied with their lives
41% describe others as being "ignorant"
53% feel unloved without knowing why
64% would like to start over
72% wouldn't know how to try
10% hung the phone up
86% stared straight ahead without a reply

the calm was the last thing to fall

we had such high ceilings
I think the building
was from the eighteenth century
it was wonderful in the summertime

the way I dressed then
what a peacock
shirts were silk
shoul'da seen the cleaning bills

she was an angel
background was theatre
family was rich
we vacationed in the mountains

job had a lot of prestige
oversaw twenty people
believed in what we did
compensation was generous

after I lost everything
and came here
a calm fell over me
you ask me

why I keep smiling
what can I tell you
everyday
I thank god I'm alive

You Stepped on my Shoe

"You stepped on my shoe."

-"I'm very sorry."

"Are you gonna wipe it off?"

-"I don't think so."

"We gonna havta fight then."

Daily horrors

Open fighting broke out today between Pepsi-Co and Nabisco brands as bystanders looked helplessly on while victims of all ages succumbed to sudden attacks of hunger mixed with diabetes. Billboards plastered entire blocks as the relentless march of vending machines, advertisements, and viral memes inundated the population. Vegetable therapy proved ineffective for 90 percent of the population as mouths rejected any homeopathic approach derided as "healthy" by the corrupt media while top scientists in hidden laboratories poured their best efforts into synthesizing a new kind of cheese salsa with superior mouthfeel impervious to refrigeration. The outlook for today is grim but satisfying.

coyotes

inside my mind
I move from smell to smell

touch to taste, flavor to color
afraid and ecstatic

running fast asleep or with hunger
yesterday doesn't matter

I jump higher
than the ghosts can reach

we meet at a spot
near the water

you appear
startled when I see you

drawn to something in me
I can't see

nothing said
is important

you already have determined
the course of action

to take us deeper
inside the mystery

Everyone loves the explosion

It captures something vital
Its colors, choice of medium
and scale embrace
a certain vitality
could I get something smaller
and darker with the same?
for some reason I'm drawn
to the image
but would like something
more affordable to frame

Alan Gilbert



Old wine in new bottles

There are a thousand stakes
but just one heart,
so strike behind the mask.
My dinner is beans and heading downhill;
everything else is lipstick on a pig.
Eventually we find the door
that only leads to the bathroom.
We watch open carry in the public square,
the way history writes itself
if you let it.

It also tastes like floorboards,
with a boot on the back of the neck
or a garden withering in the sun.
There's no pretty way to say this,
but it's still a metaphor.
Sometimes you don't want to go home,
though that's no reason to guzzle rosé
during a heatwave.
Art isn't therapy for the state,
so don't let a camel have all the humps.

In other words, let it rip.
First we need a reboot,
followed by an expectorant,
while how-to leaflets fall from the sky.
The age of Man is over,
as even the stones speak.
I share a sugar cube with a donkey
standing on the roof.
What's a portrait, anyway?
We cross borders every day.

Snapchat isn't fast enough
for what we've seen
or for being alone with our thoughts
as a star chart peels from the ceiling.
Equations are for the doctor,
while we steal the prescription script
and practice the art of refusal.
Rivers might reach the sea,
but not the ones
with all the dams on them.

Welcome back to the desperation.
The speeches call for blood.
My family is like a menagerie
chasing a brown bunny down its hole.
How much scotch to how much soda?
When do you want to meet?
Lots gets left out of the stories,
whether personal or shared.
Mine lost its grip beneath a tractor;
yours remains unfulfilled.

You are what the network produces.
The panting is contagious,
trying to stave off the collapse
that the predators mask
with their scent and mandatory retina scans.
Instead, put a little flavor in my ear.
We climb the trees until they topple,
then eat dinner over the sink,
Golden Arches lined up to the landfill.
No one should let me fly this thing.

One day at a time

We ate dinner at a diner in New Jersey coming back from the game
where you sat on my sunglasses while thumbing through old photos
on your phone. We spoke the language of pork chops and soda until
I lost you at the crossing—the movie version stars lots of orphans.
One house has vinyl siding; another is made of stone. Either way,
smoke pours under the door. Yet the deepest night is made from dreams
and the fire alarm of the present that fits under my hat when secured
by a chinstrap and a garbage bag wrapped around it.

The hotel pool is a little murky but the goggles help with that or only
dipping your toe in—I don't judge. This is a record of more than me
on the waitlist, stirring syrup into creamed corn after machines seeded
the clouds, bringing more rain. That's why this evening is my own little
storm surge, overflowing the docks. It's also known as picking up
the pieces on a trip to the skyway, since it's always quieter after we exit
the streets or try to hit the high notes when there's all that junk piled
above my head.

The grass grows greener in the lengthening shadows next to lead lining
the pipes. I couldn't take it anymore, but I still did. You said that's life,
yet to me it feels closer to death and its relentless sprawl, its lowered
boom mic we squeak into. The rooftops stop at the water and a row
of police cars where I sent you a quick Snap that cuts off my head like
the kings of France and England, because the messages have to come from
somewhere, spilling their tails like a comet or maybe directions shouted
from the back seat as the history gets erased with each click.

I'll take my succor one sugar cube at a time while waiting for a pump
at the gas station and hoping that you'll text from beneath a purple sky
so astounding it almost seemed real, which isn't exactly the same as
too good to be true. There's a difference between the steak you buy
and the steak you eat, but you said to burn it all down, and I couldn't
completely disagree. We touch both hearts and lungs in the hospital
for pneumonia where the nurses get nervous watching the continent
of plastic expand.

Thanks for noticing, but I still feel cold. That must be why we never
arrive on time, with our bag full of giblets, those leaky sacks. I'd rather
do that with you and this ache of want and sorrow. I just wish it didn't
hurt more. The brass ring through the bull's nose leads it to clover
or the slaughterhouse, while the tourists and their fanny packs crowd
into churches, dropping loose change into a slot that makes the bells ring.
I'll sing for my supper too, but I need spunky and only a little remorse,
as frogs croak and splash in the pond.

The skateboarders pass in a whoosh, their trucks a lovely wobble.
We work the circuitry beneath the lake as the planets smile benignly
with their dumb, round faces. You saw one rise above the horizon line.
I thought it was a star, but who knows what happens behind those hills?
I'm not even sure what's going on in my head. It's full of spatters
and loose jelly with someone breaking in when all I wanted was to be free
and maybe a little peace. Turn the lights down and the music up.
This flight is leaving soon.

Barbara Henning



from Digigrams

Kiss Me

—dreaming—on my bike—in Detroit—pull up to a bungalow—a guy tells me—over there—chain up—I know him from long ago—inside some kind of sale—models with skeleton key necklaces—things out of hand—brutal hand-to-hand—some politicians—outside under an elm tree—bike gone—sorry they spray it with something—it pops open—bike skeletons everywhere—minus a wheel or handlebar—under his breath, a curse—he might shoot me—so cold at the bus stop—I take a cab—passing the VA hospital—I remember the guy—my hand in his—he was kissing me—
(26 Feb 2016)

Wham!

—on the lowest speed—up the slight slope—toward the center of Manhattan—smooth sailing on 6th Ave—raining and cold—under a plastic poncho—then downhill—record rain brings wildflowers—in Death Valley—a NYC policeman forces a man to stand—outside—in his underwear—in the rain—I can do anything I want, he says—my dentist likes the bully—you're lucky I don't vote, he says—about Hitler—well he was listening to the people, right?—which people? I holler—it's going to come out—Capote warned People Magazine—with a speed and power like you've never seen—Wham!—about Hillary—the dentist hesitates—she's a grandmother—why doesn't she stay home—with her grandchildren—you must be kidding—let's talk about the Oscars—some people talk about Aristotle—while brushing their teeth—please don't talk—just clean my teeth—Loretta Lynn didn't mean to knock out her husband's front teeth—click-clack-clack-clack—be sure to talk—to your physician first—then take all necessary precautions—
(29 Feb 2016)

It's Us

—what would you do—I say—in class—to a young woman—she wants to be a nurse—if a doctor told you—give this medicine to a patient—you knew he was wrong—it could be fatal—calm, collected, logical—maybe you'd lose your job, I say—trying not to panic—the numbers on the meter jump—she says, calmly—I'd give it to the patient—we were all like—Whoa!—well, I'd lose my job—that would be murder—the bully stares back at us from the mirror—ugly and frightful—haters, bashers, hucksters—it's us—bundled like an old mummy gliding down the street—I head toward—a bundle of—yet-to-bloom crimson peonies—loose ends—catch them up—quietly with as little movement as possible—
(3 Mar 2016)

Judge Judy

—in the morning—it's raining—yellow locust leaves—on the cement—people silent, stooped over—difficult to explain—the outcome—to the children—in yoga class—we are crying—can't fathom—how anyone could listen—and still vote—for the bully—and his macho pigs—wide-spread reports of fires—broken windows—ten percent of college grads—believe Judge Judy—is a Supreme Court Justice—and they hate Hillary—Europeans have women leaders—and social-welfare—we have a commander in chief—and a military industrial complex—as first lady—they once spit on her—thousands of dead pigs—floating down a river in China—they called her a dirty socialist—the thing is—they need—universal health care—they need—universal mental care—in union square—thousands and thousands—of pastel post-it notes—growing—a wall of mourning—
(9 Nov 2016)

The Funky Chicken

—wake up—creaky, old—falling apart—when the winds—from the south—hit the mountains—mid country—smoke and ash—obscure the night sky—to chase away misfortune—Amazonian shamans light a stick—of palo santo—to chase away misfortune—say “no” “not that”—say it loudly—like Mr. Blow—peddle onward—to yoga—in a purple coat, red plaid scarf, green hat, grey pants, blue-green-black striped socks—colors roll with the wind—wheels pass over—unsuspecting insects—at Bowery and First—chain up—ring bell—do the funky chicken—preen—scratch head—march in unison—poke a wing—here and there—then forward and up—with your tail—then flip flap your wings—home-ward, the cement covered—in golden leaves—the air crisp—chain up—on the corner—two men—deeply inhaling—I cover my mouth and nose—with a scarf—give a five to the bodega clerk—passing the smokers again—carrying home my daily addiction—two packs of—chocolate peanut butter cups—
(27 Nov 2016)

So Do I

—hey buddy—are you looking for a glove?—the bank, the hardware store, the health food store—apples \$3.80 a pound—that's crazy—turn the corner—Ave A to 7th Street—surprise—my-ex on the sidewalk—when I was in the dentist's chair—I imagined you kissing me—wanna sit in the park?—let's go to your place—for a minute—look around—the first one to leap up—a standing ovation—not that, back off—sit down—can you at least hug me?—best to stay here and there—I signal the space—between us—he nods—the atlas 5 rocket lifts off at 9:45—roars into a clear sky—I look for you everywhere—so do I—why did you get married?—he shrugs—the sheer physical toil—required to survive—without electricity—we might have gone on—slightly hungry—you wanted that life—he nods again—then I say I love you—he says, I love you too—then he's gone—just like that—
(24 Feb 2017)

From Every Angle

—melted sand—then sheets float—in molten tin—silvered—a mirror image—nervous—elbow tweaked—loss tingling—through out—away I go—on Easter Sunday—by car and truck—goodbye—dear elms and scholar trees—Mourad—Mogador—Commodities—Veselka—Sally—Sylvia—Yoga East—Katonah—Essex Stationary—Genny—Cliff—The Poetry Project—my neighbors—life on 7th Street—you're not moving—are you?—pushed—into the subway—into the boroughs—think the opposite—that great yoga sutra—tonight—I'll be sleeping—in the same bed—yes?—from every angle—exactly the same—my body, my books—on 12th Street—in Brooklyn—head pointing east—as usual—sound asleep—under the same sheets and blankets—
(16 Apr 2017)

Now and Again

—to cover misdeeds—puff yourself up—with exaggeration and falsification—your allies—a glittering who's who—in the corporate financial world—supporters—homegrown—Detroit Right Wings—the eighth letter—their icon—88 HH for Heil Hitler—nonetheless—here we are—moving along—as usual—on the train—an old woman—late 80s—her hands shaking—thin—wearing a baseball hat—every human body—a marker in time—a squat woman—body like a boxer—red dyed—ear length hair—unwinds a long—snaking bracelet—carefully reorders—then rewinds—glittering diamonds—on the 6 uptown—a skinny guy—grey messy hair—tiny rimless glasses—tattered jeans and shirt—reading a book—many paper markers—what is it?—lean left—catch “Benjamin”—lean further—“lter”—Walter Benjamin—every human body—a marker—to escape nazis—he took—an overdose of morphine—1940—at 51st street—I stand up—have you read *Berlin Childhood*?—I ask—yes—and he likes it too—my favorite Benjamin—did you read the early version—the one—about the moon—I will—he says—we nod—then off the train—walking east—just as—the moon crosses over the sun—the city in darkness—for a fleeting moment—
(21 Aug 2017)

Barbara Henning (<http://barbarahenning.com/>) is the author of four novels and seven collections of poetry and shorter prose. Most recent books are a novel, *Just Like That* (Spuyten Duyvil) and a book of poetry, *A Day Like Today* (Negative Capability Press). She lives in Brooklyn, and her readings can be found on PennSound.

Omotara James



Prologue to a Name

THE BODY IS AN unmarked grave before it is given a name. On the seventh day the priest, parents, family, elders and the invited gather 'round the newborn in purpose and ceremony. They assemble with the necessary ingredients for life. Place them on her tongue. Bring sugar so that the child might experience some sweetness. Honey: in case the sugar is too sweet she spits. No child rejects the pace of honey. Salt because there is goodness in all things. Crocodile pepper, so that the woman's life will not be too plain. Ata ire for fertility. Water, for it has no enemy. Obi or Kola nut to ensure the girl will no iku danu. One taste and the child will vomit death away. Orogobo or bitter kola, so that she may grow ripe with age. Now, the child is ready:

Half Girl, Then Elegy

Having fallen while no one was looking
Having borne what fell through
Having fallen early

Having barely fallen through myself
My luck, so close to catching,
Having caught the worst of it

Having fallen from the sky, and then
Through it. Having landed to realize
I had been part

Having parted the late sky, partly
Sky where I am delicate, I took
A tumble through the night bloom

I took the night with me as I tumbled,
Delicate with the infinite,
Which swells from the tallest branch

Having grown swollen
As does low-hanging fruit, I tell Nadra,
I couldn't help it—

The fresh heave of new breast
Thick switch of hip: a group
Of unnamed gifts is called a steal

She says, fruit you can reach is still
Precious. Her name means rare: her lean
Thins towards the unusual.

In Lagos, we name our girls
Darling, Sincere, Precious, because
A name is a stake in the grave

Having grieved and taken and taken
On the way to Eros, terra-Thanatos
Having arrived late to my own bloom:

Halve me like a walnut
Pry the part of me that is hollow
From the part that yields fruit.

Mama Wata

The saliva seeps from the glands at the base of my tongue
the way the earth rejects the rain after, (or worse)
during the flood. Pursed lips seal in the fluid.

My tongue womb-ly like a baby
sinking
further from consciousness back into the amnio.
This
is a warning.

Whereas

from girlhood, my mother taught me to fear
public restrooms, driving in the city
early on-set womanliness and compliments
from strange men,

because a mother loves like milk
sours
on the kitchen counter | at noon | inside your locker | at 2AM

but a father's love
provides metaphor
in | on-coming | traffic,
rots you to the root—

is a soft candy sucked
hard against the molar
complicit
in sweetness

a father wants justice
to press hard
against the man who rapes his daughter,

whereas a mother
knows no justice
except a mother's love

Self Portrait as a Queer Block Party

Your fat spills soft across the moonlit crown of grass.
Your soulmates are a gaggle of fish, shoaling thick,
until you are schooled enough in this love.
The hours left before sunrise are shimmering scales, marked
for the net, long-cast // before you learned time had an end //
Bodies so true, joy pools behind the ears & around the clavicles
like jewels. Like fucking jewels. Pores chant in the street:
we are alive. Speakers blast the humid sky like firecrackers
in June. You take the first hand, then hip, with you through the dance,
glide, until you find the body you abandoned // measurements ago //
You travel it with your partner. Their unshaved armpits, bleached
seaweed green. Their bare midriff, a silk thicket. Their saffron robe, a
protection, against the binary of day or night. An inch of belly
leaps beyond your shirt, like a flying fish in silver light.

Three Women / Two Transfers and a Token / One Reincarnation

(for Max Ritvo)

Lately,
flossing in the sink or
tweezing on the toilet

or hovering over the pregnant woman
I gave my seat to
when I haven't been touched in (8) months,

I stare into my reflection: into my mouth
towards the fleshy back See life
evaporate into nothing—

a hole where there was ivory
once and I sink like a cavity
into the soft tissue of time, as it is

proof of all we cannot repeat. Ecstatically,

a woman's baby gurgles
above the engine and the heat. I shift
my eyes. Open my mouth. Make sounds.

Tracey McTague



Notes From the Numbing Room

For John Godfrey

"He was awake a long time before he remembered his heart was broken."

Orpheus invents duende
for the flamenco mad Maenads (not Eurydice)
it is the same death eternally
spontaneous human combustion
"She is too fine to be my wife," Mr. Cleary said
eternal sound of looking back
a veritable torrent of newts in a fever dream
flame bursts from mother's mouth
almost a cinder swept into ceaseless shadow
& faces burdened with light
fluent in unhinged auger
& that reoccurring dream of buying milk
at the hardware store

amore y amaro

"the darkest place is always under the lamp"

brief sense of startling hope
while sky goes grey
the guise of tomorrow etched on a transom
her small figure obliterated by light
cook the hen that doesn't lay
pursuing the oracles
of exquisite grotesque
chronicle of dark woods
in glimpsed light

anchor in a flood epoch

For J.A.S.

it's all sky now
in the sweet fête
by & bye pie times behind us
in this land of selfie-stick opiate
& Dunbar's number one friend
happily drowned in this ardent expanse
even in more vertical moments
language nascent & subject to sweet corruption
in sun streaked sublime
this bird with Sanskrit heartbeat
finds home out of nothing
born like this with breakneck devotion
craving truth like air to flourish up
& sing into my mouth
with patois of redemption
& neck musk vipassan
BTW: forearms are obscene
Brooklyn, Beirut, Bobigny
places to inhabit life everyday
in any vein of your body
with rub board's porch percussion
& 2 dollar bill's emissary of pity
under the wreck of my sweater
my skandhas miss your skandhas

marginal utility

cops shot another man
while you ate a paleo muffin
with shared burden of insomnia machine
& sommelier's artisanal wig

select emoji race option here
in gilded dream foretold by Kabuki
master's embryo embroidery of
cicadas born bone-colored in tree
sucking sap with punch drunk viragos
birthright to potential
obliteration beautiful
as small deaths' twin shadow
ours wait behind green patina door
knock-knock
who's there? kitsuné
kitsuné who in brick dusted placage
lies here

we are all sea-starved selkies
& excommunicated foxes
not through crime but favor
of the desire machine
unable to resist
exploited well and granted
little by little eyes
trained outward to sticker
priced life and displaced deceit
meandering under current
with sitcom-numb-laugh
and other third act issues
not imposed by gods or devils
but offering gifts most precious:
mules, ravens, & black cat bones

the heir of labors
fortune is a woman
manifesting revenge
for post agrarian shackle
domestic serf turned
nursing home meat bag
saints' and merchants' tombs
raise stammering truth from
a history of two worlds
lè marasa covered in blessing
& cursed in caul of sea born longing
you are your you
willy-nilly here at all times
still waiting for a life
up there and it wanders away
all things must live in a light
of diminishing graves
only wilder
and more solitary
consecrated nest empty
unexplored and wrecked
booming singular
in warning pitch
rife in myriads
for dweller within
agrarian asphyxia
enter blessed muck and rot
swamp as sacred marrow
for changelings & wives
six cents on the dollar
thus the shore is shorn
and the trees hold it by right of possession
sooner worn out
so much for the night
a mere shadow
and reminiscence
in this hum of refuge
distant and uninquiring corpses lie more low
than our curiosity go
keels and anchors alike
faith of our kindred bird
bounding into buoyant light
on this broken horizon

Tracey McTague is a dissident, poet, and visual artist born and raised in Brooklyn New York. She occupies a house on Battle Hill with her daughter Aurora Morrigan, and works for the Global Alliance of Muslims for Equality. Her secret home is in New Orleans.

Stephen Paul Miller



True Story

There I was
at a March 1st, 2015
Public Theater performance
of Hamilton—sitting
serendipitously close
to Bill and Hillary.
I didn't know it yet,
but that night The Times
would break Hillary's private
email server story,
and throughout the intermission
she crouched at the edge of her seat with her phone
as her husband stood beside her in the aisle greeting his fans
perhaps shielding her and Chelsea.

Magnetically drawn to Bill
I glided with pleasant ease through
Secret Service agents
straight to the great man
at the other end of my section
just one row in front of me.

It was uncanny not knowing
if it were more through the roof
to be with a then popular ex-president
or score a ticket to Hamilton,
and I decided to talk with him
about both the play
and politics.

I waited my turn and said,
"Hamilton's 'bailout' wasn't like the 2008 one."

The former president looked toward me and focused.
It felt as if we were standing on the moon together.

"My administration tried refinancing underwater mortgages?
Did you know that?"

I didn't but stuck to my point:
"Jefferson went along with Hamilton
on the debt assumption because
he didn't have any better ideas."

"No," said Bill, "He got the capital moved to Washington."

"Yes," I replied, "but mostly
Jefferson didn't have any better ideas, and,
even as president, he didn't go back on Hamilton."

William Jefferson Clinton
took this in as if a revelation,
smiled knowingly,
then beamed broadly as if to empathize
with a president, one he was named after,
who knew the art of striking
a deal with the dreaded opposition for a purely
Pyrrhic political victory.

"That's very interesting,"
Bill said in a savvy tone of self-recognition.

Jefferson moved toward Hamilton early.
"We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists."
his 1801 inaugural famously announced.

And Bill too
brought "the party of the people" closer to its foe.

At the 1980 Democratic National Convention, he wanted us
to face the end of post-World War II
prosperity and tackle new problems
like "inflation" and "debt"—
>>>>

3

If all time is fresh
Everything bubbles.
Clouds over the mound of Arad
e-tickle the strings of my heart.
Everything coming

to you will get there.

His First Funeral

When the thin pet beta fish
he named by himself died
I told my 6-year-old Noah,

"Potato Chip lived a long life.
Remember the good parts."

"There were no good parts,"
cried Noah.

"Potato Chip was boring
but I loved him."

After Basho

An ancient pond.
A frog jumps.
Trump!

nonsense of course
since American productivity
then as now was rising.

It is only the rich gouging
excess profit from worker productivity
that's the "problem."

In April 1993, Bill told his cabinet,
"Where are all the Democrats?
I hope you're all aware we're Eisenhower
Republicans now standing for lower deficits
and free trade and the bond market! Isn't that great?"

Then came the Republican stuff: NAFTA, '94 crime bill,
'96 welfare reform, repealing Glass-Steagall,
Defense of Marriage Act, and deregulating derivatives,
banks, and telecom.

The second act announced, I told Bill,
"It was nice talking with you."
"It was nice talking with you,"
he emphasized with soft Southern conviction.

Stephen Paul Miller (<http://bit.ly/2RIHgv0>) is a professor of English at St. John's University. His 12 books include *There's Only One God and You're Not It* (March Hawk Press) and *The Seventies Now* (Duke University Press).

an inquiry into the nature
and causes of Adam Smith

the messiness of life
not practiced but acknowledged
glossing over porous
faces rug-swept
to navigate the world
in material multiplication
to birth a book
paying lip service
to the working class
with fraudulent universal
determinations of value
admittedly inaccurate
but convenient
ranking hands dealing
truck & punishment
police & revenue

shy
too nervous to sit for portraits
has only been drawn from memory
an avatar
of "natural liberty"
& selective apathy
having never needed to speak of one's own necessity
having only ever applied unproductive labor
having appealed that a worker frame their value
as it advantages the powerful
while the powerful are amply advantageous
promoting dystopic visions
& here he is
Adam Fucking Smith
compensated on the backs of workers
celebrated on the backs of bank notes

in the moral philosophical
coarse clay of self-interest
as bound to benefit society
there is a parallel fallacy
to trickle-down advocacy
of supply-side wealthy
hoarding idle metal
as bound to re-invest

in the great-mind theory
versus laissez-faire
there is a false dichotomy
player piano governments
collapse exact justice
into pretend science
accumulation
the cure & the cause

Carol Mirakove



twilight at vacuum & continuum

the antidote for bad feelings is good feelings or neutral feelings the
antidote is not intellect control is not a counter & traffic in a poem
is free to sit when the line loses its wheelgrip & slips into rex & rush
bodies clasp hands & crack into each other depositing memories
in the library of affection in real time & in reverie sounds like violin
fabrics ruled by the sun blast radius skips on knowledge hinged on
fiction reproducing dusk flaring on a soft belly trust is a luxury open
arms signal either help hello or stop

with

before you I floated
a chaos system body
of family abridged
the topology of grief is an open set of gulfs

the topology of grief is an open set of gulfs
gender spoke a spectrum
a chaos system body
one face can be a radix

one face can be a radix
a blue-green look back
gender spoke a spectrum
imagination elemental

imagination elemental
standing in for heaven
a blue-green look back
nature is partial

nature is partial
and precisely responsive
standing in for heaven
before you I floated

machines with legs

the new subversion
is an unrecorded hello
to Cathy on the bus
which is short for Cathedral
everybody's autobiography is doctored
everything's a basement to something
unicorn leaderboards rain in the background
impending catastrophe our constant social content
public static void main
in the displaced long-term memory store
in the finite chronic phonological loop
in the unknown tail of eventual consistency
forever is a long time

Carol Mirakove is the author of two books of poems, Mediated (Factory School) and Occupied (Kelsey St. Press). She has provided spoken word for tracks by musicians Firas Kay and bates45.

Uche Nduka



Mbari 2

Inverse of the space beneath the leather finish of design.
 The breakup of a family. The disintegration of a country. The dysfunction of a diaspora.
 Our sleeping symmetries. Struggling to come to terms with dangerous stuff.
 Happiness is not for the faint of heart. To doubletrack the narrative of heritage in our blood.
 Our ascending chronicles. Always buzzing with parapraxis.
 Living with a traducer's leitmotifs. The teeth of twilight bared.
 Where xenophobia and hooliganism fuse. To catch one's breath before surrender to fury.
 Begins to drift: motet, glissandi. Love is not for the faint of heart.
 Dress us in firmaments. Deeper ways in which light has penetrated us.
 Moonwise into our nakedness. Enough time to be among the fighters the jolly pranksters.
 We stayed past closing time, but with no intention of trivializing the search for love.
 What lay around and what lay beyond.
 A stonier rose walking the fine line between earnestness and pretension.
 Now under the covers in the temple between your legs.
 Midnight: autodidacts in traffic. I thought of all the whales partying in the sea.
 Eagles race the skies through a pure day. The compass of reason distrusts passion.
 Hazed by the homage to the star-crossed. Brackets unclosed. My once-stuttered pledge.
 Into what may or may not be a song turning against a singer.
 You've been going round in my head for a long time.
 One voice too many one heck of a traveler. Pardon me, I've got someone to offend.
 The rebel is only loved in death. Mystery stays true to itself. I did it. Calm down!
 This encounter- bikes and the relentless fever of archives.
 Against a rule of law that violates our existence. You can't take away that heritage.
 Beneath the night sweats of a catbird you flash your necklace, mint witticisms.
 The past of the future. Onward to the slab of nightly news.
 Remaking the static where it is least expected. You dare not let your bullseye get cold.
 You spit when spoken to. Too close to home it's sad I never accepted your blackberries.
 I mourn with recklessness because you write the hell out of everything.
 Let butterflies do the lighting while friends gather around the ruin of jubilee. A love lane blocked.
 Turn on a light alongside the butterflies instead of just listening in. Skinny dipping in hocus pocus.
 My head's not straight. Don't slow down the troublesome trombone in the canyon of redemption.
 Story after story after story about personal space. The letters burn half way to the truth.
 Smiles of the rain make good on their promises.

Uche Nduka is a Nigerian-American poet, essayist, and pilgrim. His most recently published volumes of poems are *Ijele*, *Nine East*, and *Living In Public*.

KB Nemcosky



Second Manifesto

we find help
in the architecture

nose glasses
are sufficient

but they
haven't been
mass-produced

we extend tongues
into another
dimension

exercise
invisible ears

fingertip eyes to
X-ray see

this world
as necessary

so never
mind the bollux

the greater part of chaos
isn't complete

Flow Chart

Wholly in part

I know life as
a larger activity
in the absence of
form

Small and overtaken
I ask the diagram
whanging an emptiness so sore:

Is this something sudden?
It could
easily be so still

but no
the astringent wind
shrouds the milk-blue
girders

foretaste
a city despair published
in a sky so busy
we can
never feel soon

except to put up
and in

Spectrum

There's a way of looking up without
lifting your chin – sometimes it never
occurs to me to look up
a Mission church sells its air rights – 6, 7, 8, 9,
10, 11, 12 stories high
a dark wall of cinder block
rises from above
the new God on our block

Sentries on a stoop my neighbors
we shake hands

If the sun were out – we'd be in a shadow –
if a shadow should disengage
from its source

What would happen?
Where would it go?

Good Lord! – my shoes don't match
one brown – one black – I stomp my
feet of snow in our lobby
elevator smells of patchouli & wet Weimaraners
I press 5 & up I go
skipping 2, 3 & 4 as if
our sun has better places to set

On my windowsills – a new species of birds
rerouted – confused
That building wasn't here before?

Solar flares in the forecast
I track the Northern Lights
follow an aurora

with my fingertip from Arctic latitudes
down the Hudson Bay
to Michigan mitten
to our Tuesday-Friday alternate parking
side of W. 16th Street
Chelsea

Pint of Seltzer

Embouchure

you try italicizing a period – it looks the same

when we don't want differences we can't tell the difference

breathe in – count to four – hold for seven – exhale for eight

feel the curvature of the Earth an arc some 8 inches per mile –

on flat ground that's quite a step down

inarticulate tin can plunks across the gravel

Rio Grande – get back in the rent-a-car

welcome signs – tires rubbing off state lines

miles of gypsum sand dunes whiter than the sun

you'll have to live up to a kiss and I will vital up

we want nothing more than a willing arboretum

a supple dash – quiet things – sound sleep

I smile and wave first

way way way way up there

a crowded window waves back

Elizabeth Placido



Untitled:

Neglecting you like everyone else has is just plain cruel
 But it's hard to not want to
 Falling apart is your favorite thing to do
 I stare in awe as I watch you pick up your own pieces
 And put them back together
 Somehow you still function as a human being
 Your shirt hanging loosely on your poor figure
 You poor disheveled little thing
 How can someone this corrupted be so interesting?

Mirrors are sensitive
 But so are you
 You both like to reflect things that aren't you
 Indulged by your self hatred
 Pushing things around you farther from you

You asked for loneliness
 I gave you warmth
 I'm sure you're the answer to all my questions
 But I'm too scared to ask you if you would even know

If loving my reflection is a crime
 Then I am by far the most innocent prisoner
 Prisoned by imperfections
 Nothing makes sense
 Yet here you are

Though it's sad to say:

Putting self love in words is like trying to fit every broken promise in a glass case
 Decorated by sickeningly sweet deceit and lack of acceptance
 That so quickly shatters every time you open it, but somehow you end up more broken

Gluing every broken piece together wishing someone could fix you too
 But you got used to feeling like your heart will stop every time you acknowledge your worth

Sundresses and melting popsicles in this upcoming tragic June
 You forgot what it feels like to feel pretty

Ungodly hours is holy enough to have you stay awake
 Is it a sin to want to die so soon?

But the saddest look in your eyes
 Is every epiphany suffocating your heart
 And yet somehow
 Though it's sad to say
 You make defeated look okay

So I'm okay

Silence is a lonely sound:

Because of you
 There is unfinished poetry
 Stanzas cut off like my sacred words as I try to put on display my sugar coded mantras

I hate the way the relief tastes
 Regret seeps in the crack of my bedroom door and sweeps me off my feet

Maybe I just don't belong
 When being poetic is my broken aesthetic
 I don't accept it
 But rejection isn't an option
 Leaving open wounds unattended
 My head is still spinning
 Saying good bye to my creations
 It's a crime to be creative

It's only when I'm quiet that I start to listen
 It's only when I'm sad that I start to understand
 I scream at myself
 I don't want to hear you, my dear depression
 But the silence is a lonely sound

Elizabeth Placido writes poems in the spaces between the old and new dramas that challenge a high school student. She lives with her family in the Bronx. Elizabeth edited and wrote for her middle school newspaper, The Wade Times.

February 2:

I'm hopeless
 I reach for things I can't seem to grasp on to
 I swear on things I can't prove
 Letters spelling things I don't understand
 But I taste the bitterness to your words
 Torn up by things I can't control
 I can only go so far

Letting go of the most comforting touch is hell
 Accepting your lack of emotion towards me is just something I
 don't want to do

Loving someone that's colder than the winter we met in
 And you're just a daily reminder that
 Bones break with the right amount of strength
 And hearts break like it's nothing

But despite that
 I'm waiting for the door to close by itself
 But your hands,
 grasp onto the door
 I get my hopes up for just a second
 When the hesitation is evident in your whisky colored eyes
 It pains me to see it
 But there's no goodbye when you slam the door behind you
 And I'm left alone once again

The struggles of a writer:

Even the sky isn't pretty enough to distract me from the pain
 Because no matter how many stars or clouds there could be
 I know that pain doesn't have an expiration date
 But my life does
 And it's not like I want to stay
 I pace around inside my mind
 Lost but not entirely

Mixed feelings
 I'm still trying to understand if I'm supposed to write because I'm
 sad or because I'm happy
 But even when I'm okay
 Why can't I write like I'm okay?

I don't want it to be a cry for help
 I just want to be creative
 It's a struggle to write based on emotions
 When you can't express how foreign okay feels on your finger tips
 Or is happiness to me
 Just boring?

The only thing to actually want me:

Flickering candles always end up messy
 Cold rooms like my heart
 Empty
 Lost in a mindset that tells me that losing myself isn't truly losing if I get to
 sleep just for tonight

If getting rid of what hurts me is self love
 Then I deserve it in every way
 Pity isn't wanted
 Your authentic touch, to me is bittersweet lulling
 Your unasked for sympathy makes me despise you
 Despite how much I need it

The nothingness that fills me up more than anything, tasteless yet I like it
 Embraced by the darkness that swallows my being
 The only thing to accept me
 The only thing to actually want me

Michele Madigan Somerville



White Irish

For Maureen Mullen
June 19, 1961–March 17, 2010)

1
The squall left a scrim of lace last week upon the cross-
thatched screen door. How cold the cool
hum of peace was, coming in, coming through,
coming to, called to order as it were,
lolling, as it was, in the hub of wherein
your fascinations once smoldered.
(Okay. I'm coming over.) Forgive
me, O, pseudo sister,
I couldn't make it through—
they wouldn't let me through—
but your last words to me,
ones only a painter would say
to a poet, I have them here,
they return, repeat and persevere,
an avalanche of dawns.

2
As a child I wanted nothing more
than a sister, and now I have you
whom I wish tonight
it were in me to love less.

Though your muscle begins to pump
its last, your capacious eyes still
narrow in a squint,
as you find me
for the last time
funny
and emit a familiar
flash of Lucifer guffaw.

3
In that daily nook you claimed
to which you repaired, where only
you went, your drawing table
beside the washing machine,
where smaller work and your
particulars of mind fell in perfect
line, where a broom, the brush a white
witch commands for pushing clouds
about her realm leaned against
a wall, about
as useful as a flute
filled with sand,
remains.

There your fervent interest in herding bodies
heavenly and otherwise in order
to better harness or release them
to their driving light reigned
as house gods with their spin cycles
and effervescent. A spray
of doubt shed upon the Turkish
Purples and golds your fertile certitude and
crescent and cross and star of David
were and are and hover
like northern interrogation lights
above the terra *firma* your
investigation fairgrounds ever are
and shall be, Selah. Shiver,
whorl without end.

>>>>

4
Here and there your free-
range gods and graces still amble.
They try the circle dance called
"The Color Wheel" and all join in the reel and whir.

Would that their centrifugal force
might draw you back to where my baby
blues might take you in
one last time before the salt
and burning wetness.
A call on the 17th. Your gallows
Saint Patrick's Day joke? Not funny? Funny?

5
Your mettle gave up, but your lubricity
refused the ghost, but not before
those last words to me, ones
only a painter would ever say to a poet,
leapt out as from a harp despite
that you were only pseudo-Irish
as if to indicate you were already half-
way there, ferry-bound, a bardo rambler—

6
The promise of spring combusted in rash jutting
yellows and sharps rushing into being with naked glory blades.

Heaven now
and then is more than anyone deserves, but we
Irish had you for a spell. You put on our lashing
lilts and wit with *converso* zeal.

As much love as ever I have had for any woman
makes me want to hurl a rock at God

but your tenderness holds me
back.

7
"Tender," your favorite adjective, trumps as
it harrows, it invites as it renders, it advances as it comes in
on cue, sure as cool marble but swift
like the revolving door your mind in drive
always ever is
which stops just long enough
to listen as this sappy clod of auld—

8
How can you be gone to where
the Holy Spirit's got your back?
Until I get there, please have mine.
I will see you again. Everywhere,
I will. Meanwhile, this: The snow
was general over Brooklyn the week your
pallor got the best of you.
You became white as a sail and flew
the flag that was the sum of all colors.

Then shovel, trowel—

May your vessel prove dream-
worthy, its canvas full and perfect
as a gravid belly. May your travels be soft
as your hair upon the Queen Mary-blue
your uncommon confidence continues
to be, rising as with flair
you set forth for ascension depths
where I pray our God will deliver you
from evil—but from not temptation.

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Issue 130 free

The Portable Boog Reader 12: An Anthology of New Orleans and New York City Poetry

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David A. Kirschenbaum
editor@boogcity.com

film editor
Joel Schlemowitz

poetry editor
John Mulrooney

printed matter editor
Debrah Morkun

small press editor
Mike Wendt

counsel
Ian S. Wilder

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Perhaps you will concentrate
your thoughts for a moment
and avoid thinking in terms
of good and evil

— Sixth Zen Patriarch

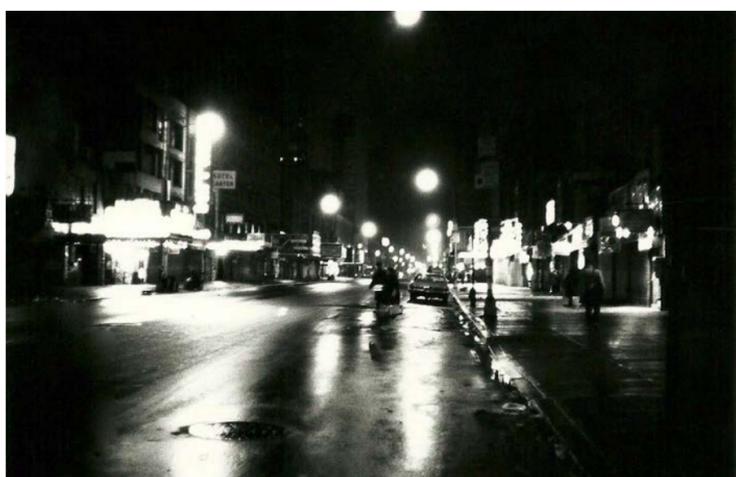
Two recent poetry chapbooks from Stephanie Gray from above/ground press

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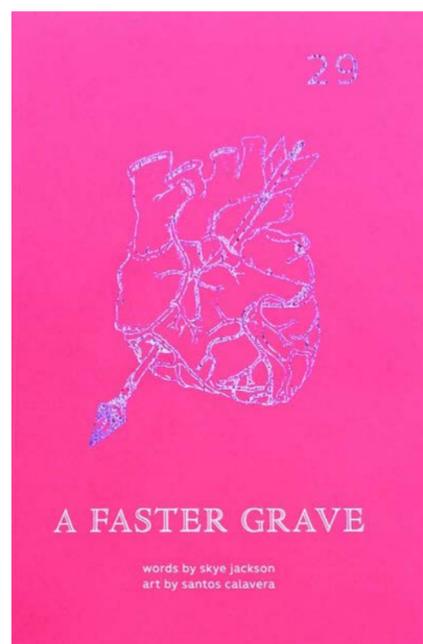


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Alisa Brooks photo

Not So Basic Burns



BY ANNE-ADELE WIGHT

Basic Programming
Megan Burns

Lavender Ink, 2018

What does punctuation mean in BASIC? What does it mean in a book that offsets poetic language with pointed brackets, double colons, clustered slashes? Most urgent, what's the best recourse for a reviewer grounded in the liberal arts and looking for a key to crack the code?

Megan Burns' *Basic Programming* answers that last question in the second poem: "in order to read the coding, GOTO REASON." These poems bring the reader up short with a fundamental question: what is the basis of our programming? They suggest that early attachment or its failure, recognition or its lack by a parent, sets us on a path from one point to another or traps us in an endless loop. ">RUN PROGRAM," using the BASIC convention for numbering lines of code, opens with:

This book's biggest surprise is the two long poems that juxtapose *Wuthering Heights* with the titles of songs by Bob Dylan. Here Burns asks, 'how did Emily write attachment theory so accurately?,' noting the clarity with which Emily Brontë motivates her characters to ruin each other.

10 what does the attachment of people for each other
20 have to do with the beginning
30 there is no past it's a story
And what might that story be? The poem implies, as does much of the book, that we're all programmed to seek attachment, no matter how much pain the seeking may bring.

When attachment breaks violently and tragically, we must all suffer. The first line of the first poem, "break against," makes it clear that Burns is writing from grief after her brother's suicide. The opening line shows the horrifying violence of his death and pulls us deep into the poem, in which Burns confronts her guilt as the survivor ("my brother I did not know how to love").

The intense lyricism of these poems calmed my nervous impulse to learn rudimentary computer science. Their core is natural language, not programming language. The statement, "language is everything to me/ it is my one true love/ I am it and it is me," coming at the end of the densely expressed "PRINT <TELEPATHY>," reads like a poet's manifesto.

The occasional GOTO titles ("GOTO 520," "GOTO 'alexithymia'") counter the apparent order of the poems, jumping us around in defiance of how a book is supposed to work on paper. These commands behave more like hyperlinks. Incidentally, there is no poem "alexithymia." Checking the table of contents, laid out like a program on the back cover, I found a specific direction to "P96, L8." But the poem on page 96 is "high risk heterosexual relationship." Sure enough, line 8 refers to "telling/ a no-story." Alexithymia is the inability to identify or express one's emotions, associated with lack of empathy and poor interpersonal relations: surely an absence of story. "high risk heterosexual relationship" begins with an HIV test (negative) but quickly shifts into its message, an exploration of the speaker's early programming: "did you know daddy that not seeing me would lead //here." Her father's lack of acknowledgment leads to a "coding of abuse that purpled my body" and even to the heartbreaking statement, "I thought love was suicide."

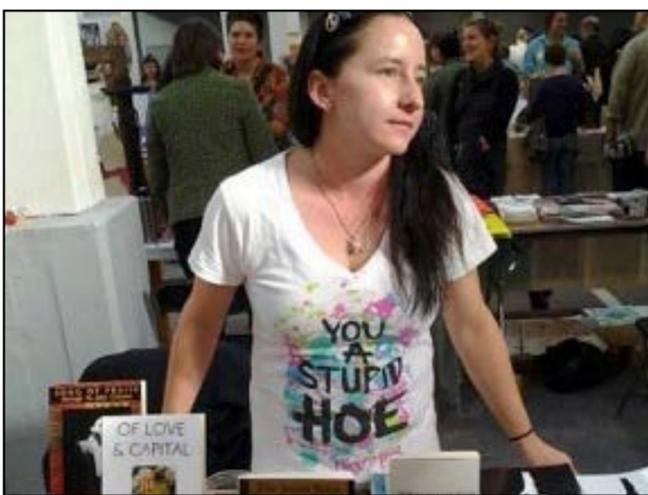
Repeatedly, Burns visits the theme of intimate relationships as lethal traps: "lover, boat me shore to shore/ cement blocked." "Next Fetish" admits to "confusing healthy, safe partners for boring" and "loving people who can't love back." Was it the early inevitability of abuse that led to such lines as, "that tiger devours you say thank you"?

This book's biggest surprise is the two long poems that juxtapose *Wuthering Heights* with the titles of songs by Bob Dylan. Here Burns asks, "how did Emily write attachment theory so accurately?," noting the clarity with which Emily Brontë motivates her characters to ruin each other. She returns to the theme of parental betrayal, making the point that all fathers in Brontë's story fail their children in some way and perhaps answering her own question.

In the last section, four poems titled "Coding" all return to the suicide of Burns' brother, leaving his sibling "trad[ing] sisterhood for a death mantle." The passage, "when I went back into our bloodline/ coding cleared/ now we speak tongued," draws on the heart of the energy that drives this collection. If not seeing leads to silencing leads to intimacy with partners who alienate, then the explanation is to be found deep "in the house of suffering we built/ and called 'family.'" The heartbreak of this poem is that a sibling also thought love was suicide and acted on that thought.

Anne-Adele Wight's most recent book, *An Internet of Containment*, was published by BlazeVOX at the end of 2018. Her previous books, all from BlazeVOX, include *The Age of Greenhouses*, *Opera House Arterial*, and *Sidestep Catapult*. Her work has been published internationally in print and online and includes appearances in *Apiary*, *Philadelphia Poets*, *American Writing*, *Luna Luna*, *Bedfellows*, *Oz Burp*, and *Have Your Chill*. She has read extensively in Philadelphia and other cities and has curated readings for two long-running poetry series. She has received awards from Philadelphia Poets, the Philadelphia Writers' Conference, and the Sandy Crimmins Poetry Festival.

Megan Burns (<https://solidquarter.blogspot.com/>) is the publisher at Trembling Pillow Press (<https://www.tremblingpillowpress.com/>). She is the co-director of The New Orleans Poetry Festival (<https://www.nolapoetry.com/>) and runs The Dragonfly: A Poetry and Performance Healing Space in New Orleans (<https://www.noladragonfly.com/>). She has been hosting the Blood Jet Poetry Reading Series in New Orleans for the last six years.



The poem implies, as does much of the book, that we're all programmed to seek attachment, no matter how much pain the seeking may bring. When attachment breaks violently and tragically, we must all suffer.

Isn't it Romantic?

Keats is Not the Problem

Brett Evans and Christopher Shipman
Lavender Ink, 2018



Keats is Not the Problem is a shared wish/will to carry the torch of John Keats and the Romantic tradition through the streets of New Orleans and the miasma of the 21st century. Brett Evans and Christopher Shipman ponder their place as partners-in-a-kind-of-crime, chasing a dream of canonization into the pantheon of poets. And they succeed; their paired vision rises above the jarring image of Keats on the cover of their book and lands "somewhere between Collected/ and Selected and arcane parlor/ bets," assuring the reader that language still has the power to touch souls, no matter how jaded the world.

The idea of Keats and the literary canon creeps up on the reader—who is lulled initially by the message that "Poems require no maintenance" (and reside in the pill drawer). It is not until page 77 that the signature poem shatters this aura of tranquilized lethargy by mixing "canon" with "cannon" and tying ink shot from a cannon to Evans' wish to "canonize/ the masses meaningful/ without them knowing/ anything/ ever happened." In the next breath, Evans suggests a connection to dead literati: "maybe my gifts are best given/ in another world/ where we ain't afraid/ of no ghosts." The language of ghosts, ancestors, souls, reincarnation, and time machines builds on this notion of entry into literary history/ sainthood as canonical poets whose poems dare to have meaning. At the same time, the third chapter of the book, *Meaningful Poems*, announces the wish to be taken seriously in the present world.

Shipman's voice comes in halfway through this shared narrative, and it is in the chapter where it enters the text—"BERRYMAN VS BERRIGAN: THE BOARDGAME"—that the rumbling for meaning grows louder and allusions to more recent masters redouble. Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams seep into titles—"Marianne Moore Cherry Apocalypse" and "William Prince Williams"—while John Berryman's *Huffy Henry* shows up in the form of "a huffy muffet," alongside the living poet Edmund (Eddie) Berrigan. The inclusion of Frank Stanford, who committed suicide at 29, reminds the reader of the untimely death of Keats himself, who died of tuberculosis at 25.

While the voices of Evans and Shipman and the forms of their poetry differ, their quest is continuous and shared. Along the way, they forge a shared stylistic trademark that serves to unify their text: the turning of nouns into verbs. Phrases like "apex the bridge," "palimpsesting on all," "to Cousteau off the side," "can Lazarus back," "hula-ing this now," "we pier," "magics a path," "I'm forgetting how to forest," "staircase down," and "eyes blued in" add zest to their poems and increase their chances of joining the pantheon. —Ellen Bluestone

The idea of Keats and the literary canon creeps up on the reader—who is lulled initially by the message that 'Poems require no maintenance' (and reside in the pill drawer).

Ellen Bluestone is a professor of English and women's studies and principal of Bluestone. Write. For the past seven years, Ellen has been teaching online in an M.A. program in English and creative writing at Southern New Hampshire University, where she received the 2017 Excellence in Teaching Award as an Outstanding COCE (College of Online and Continuing Education) adjunct faculty member. Bluestone received a B.A. in art history from Wellesley College, an M.A. in English from Villanova University, and a Ph.D. ABD in English from Rutgers University.

Brett Evans is the author of several books of poetry, including *After School Session* with Brett Evans (Buck Downs Press) *Ready-to-Eat Individual* (with Frank Sherlock; Lavender Ink), *Slosh Models* (Factory School) and *I LOVE THIS AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE* (Trembling Pillow), along with the chapbooks *Steaks of the Buddha Cow*, *Tang Dynasty*, *Bacon Assegai*, and *Nectar Mine*, and is a frequent contributor to *One Fell Swoop*, *Lungfull!* and *unarmed* magazines. His *K-Doe* Codas were featured in the anthology *Another South: Experimental Writing in the South* and in the book *K-Doe: R & B Emperor of New Orleans*.

He is a founding member of "tit-Rex, New Orleans" New Orleans' smallest mardi gras parade, which served as inspiration for The T. Rex Parade. (see also <http://titrexparade.com>)

Evans was born and raised in Bucktown, La. and New Orleans. He fractured his skull by falling off the altar during mass at St. Louis King of France, where he attended grammar school, before matriculating with the Sacred Heart brothers at Brother Martin High School, and eventually taking his first writing class with Rodger Kamenez at Louisiana State University. He earned a Master of Science in technical and scientific communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia, and now teaches as an instructor of English on the West Bank of New Orleans.

Christopher Shipman earned an M.F.A. from Louisiana State University in 2009. As a graduate student Shipman received a scholarship to attend the month-long Prague Summer Writing Program, where he worked closely with poets Mark Jarman and Carol Ann Davis. He also served as poetry editor for *New Delta Review* and helped start the first Delta Mouth Literary Festival, now the premiere literary event of Baton Rouge every spring.

Upon graduation Shipman was awarded a fellowship to remain as a full-time instructor at LSU for two years, teaching poetry workshops, poetry survey courses, and composition. During this time Shipman became poetry editor for *DIG Magazine* of Baton Rouge, ran the River Writers reading series with Vincent Cellucci, and acted as publicity coordinator for LSU's Readers and Writers program. Then, after a brief stint teaching community college Shipman found his home in New Orleans. He currently teaches creative writing and English lit to high school kids and plays drums for the New Orleans punk band The Call Girls, fronted by poet and publisher Bill Lavender.

Shipman's poetry has been featured on *Verse Daily*, appears in journals such as *Cimarron Review*, *PANK*, and *Salt Hill*, among many others, and has been anthologized in *Fuck Poems* (Lavender Ink 2013) and *The Mississippi River Poetry Anthology* (Louisiana Literature Press). Shipman was a winner of the Motion Poems Big Bridges prize in 2015. He has been a finalist for various poetry book prizes including the Eric Hoffer Award, the Akron Prize, the De Novo Prize, the Carolina Wren Poetry Prize, and others. In respect to Shipman's first full-length collection of poetry, *Human-Carrying Flight Technology* (BlaveVox [books]), Larissa Szporluk says, "He writes calmly and beautifully about what reads like actual life." In the year of his debut Shipman also saw the release of his chapbook, *I Carved Your Name* (Imaginary Friend Press), another chapbook coauthored with DeWitt Brinson, *Super Poems* (Kattywompus Press), and the collaborative poetry and art book with paintings by Benjamin Cockfield, *Romeo's Ugly Nose* (Allography Press).

The Slow Burn of Small Fires Press



BY MICHAEL WENDT

Small Fires Press is a letterpress print shop and bindery in the front parlor of a shotgun in New Orleans. Run by printer and bookmaker Friedrich Kerksieck, Small Fires has produced chapbooks, broadsides, and other small press publications, including the journal Matchbook, with every issue bound in a different vintage matchbook cover. Friedrich was kind enough to talk by phone offering insight into the history, process, and ongoing work of Small Fires.

Can you say a bit about the history of Small Fires Press - how, when, and where did you all get started? And what about Matchbook? Is its history concurrent with that of Small Fires Press?



Small Fires started in 2004 with the first release of Matchbook. That came about after I'd been working with a friend who published a chapbook of my poems by hand, and at the same time I was seeing work from Ugly Duckling Presse and other people who were working with handmade methods. As an undergrad I worked with North American Review [at the University of Northern Iowa] as a reader. I liked reading the fiction and poetry, but I also really liked the tactile function of handmade books. I liked letterpress printing and things like that.

Walter Hamady of Perishable Press came and gave a presentation [at UNI] and I just happened to wander in as it was starting. Seeing his work influenced me a lot. I didn't really know anything about him, but it just appealed to me. I'd been doing a lot of collage work and one-offs, but wanted to do something a little more extensive, and the fact that he was making these elaborate collages in editions, as well as these handmade books in editions, interested me. That night I made books in a whole bunch of weird little packages and pamphlets. I cut up little text blocks and stuck them on matchbooks, and that's kind of how Matchbook began. At the time I wasn't familiar with any other journals or publications in matchbooks, though at this point I've found that there were very many before and after me. Including a poetry magazine out of Iowa City, I think, where they just printed one word on the matchsticks I think. So at the time I thought it was an original idea.

So that's kind of how I got started. It was just kind of being influenced by UDP, some friends' work. And my sister is Jen Bervin, too, so she introduced Ugly Duckling to me and I got to see their studios early on when I was visiting New York. So that's kind of the origin story. I didn't actually put out another issue of Matchbook until I was in grad school, like four or five years after the first. So I put out that first issue and was

in Ames, Iowa for a year. I worked at used bookstores and stuff like that. At that time I went to Austin and hung out a lot with the Skanky Possum folks, Hoa Nguyen and Dale Smith, and Scott Pierce of Effing Press, and Farid Matuk and Susan Briante.

I rode my bike from Iowa to Texas and, on the way, I stopped by Tuscaloossa's Book Arts Program. I applied there and that's where I ended up making most of the Small Fires Press titles that are out in the world.

Is it fair to say—and please elaborate or correct me—that choosing publications is more interpersonal, working with people you know? Or is there a submission process? What is the publication process like at Small Fires?

A little bit, but I really wound up publishing a lot of people I didn't know at all, or got to know after the fact. Scott [Pierce of Effing Press] was the first person I put out a chapbook by, but after that it was mostly people I didn't know beforehand.

I've really only put out one book and a few chapbooks that I would call Small Fires Press books since I've been out of grad school – Feelings Using Wolves by Zachary Schomburg and Emily Kendal Frey, a chapbook called Fossil with the Dusie Kollektiv that was a self-published collaboration between me and a couple other people. But mostly right now I do design and printing for a few magazines and chapbook publishers and things of that nature. I've done some artists books. I've done some stuff for Granary Books. And I've done a ton of broadsides, that's really the majority of the small press work that I've done recently and continue to do. Other than Matchbook, which is in its fifth issue now.

I rode my bike from Iowa to Texas and, on the way, I stopped by Tuscaloossa's Book Arts Program. I applied there and that's where I ended up making most of the Small Fires Press titles that are out in the world.

How does your home city of New Orleans inform your work? Can you situate the amazing work you're doing within the larger context of the printmaking, publishing, and/or poetry communities in New Orleans?

I interact with a lot of publishers and poets and folks down here, and I do work for some galleries and things like that. And I work out of the front room of our double-shotgun house.

I've been making broadsides for New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. I've been doing one of four broadsides for the last five years, and the other broadsides are printed by local printers Planetary Magnetics, Southern Letterpress, and Fitzgerald Press. Sometimes we collaborate on one or two as well. There's a reading series called the Room 220 series that Antenna Works puts out, and I've been doing broadsides for them semi-regularly.

Friedrich Kerksieck studied letterpress printing, design, fine binding, and papermaking at the University of Alabama, receiving an M.F.A. in book arts. While studying, he started Small Fires Press (<http://www.smallfirespress.com/>), which is currently based in New Orleans. Kerksieck has printed numerous broadsides, artist books, chapbooks, and other works, and has collaborated with other publishers, including the Dusie Kollektiv and Granary Books.

Michael Wendt lives in Milwaukee, where he is the program director at Woodland Pattern Book Center (<https://woodlandpattern.org/>). With WP co-founder, Karl Gartung, he edited and published the occasional chapbook series tinder | tender.



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Take Your Pick NOLA Music, Over Easy

BY TODD CIRILLO

"I'm not sure, but I'm almost positive, that all music came from New Orleans."
—Ernie K. Doe, Emperor of the Universe



Getting ready to head out onto the streets of New Orleans for an afternoon or evening holds a special ritual in the hearts of New Orleanians, visitors, poets, and partiers. It is less about preparing for the evening, much more about preparing for the experience. It is entering a tradition that New Orleans has participated in for over 300 years. Stepping onto these sinking streets you can feel the piracy, parades, and parties, which is all still alive in one form or fashion. At the heart of it all is our music.

If you just take the time to wander, this city will provide you with a soundtrack, your own personal playlist to accompany whatever comes your way: love, lust, loss, bad craziness, blackouts, or beautiful memories of epic proportions.

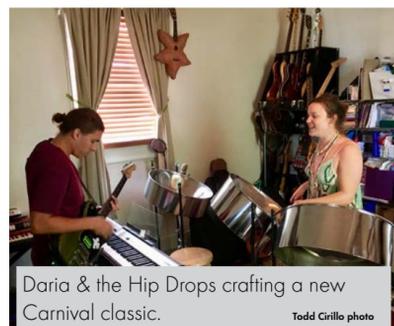
New Orleans offers every size and style of music venue, from its looming Superdome, to backyard gettogethers, street corner singers, and second-line parades. And in between you have neighborhood joints like Bullet's Sports Bar, DMAC's, Carrollton Station, One-eyed Jacks and others where you can catch a variety of well-known acts on any night of the week such as Rebirth Brass Band holding it down at the Maple Leaf Bar every Tuesday night, John Boutte at d.b.a., Kermit Ruffins at his Mother-In-Law Lounge, The Soul Rebels funkin' it up at Le Bon Temps Roule on Thursday nights or any number of the Neville family playing the many venues they frequent often. Or the legendary George Porter Jr. and his Runnin' Parners or whichever band he sits in with to bring the funk, and, if you're lucky, Ms. Irma Thomas, the Soul Queen of New Orleans.

New Orleans offers anything and everything your musical soul desires. This city is the all-day happy hour of music. When in town you can check out shows at venues such as The House of Blues, The Fillmore, The Saenger Theater, or local favorites such as the legendary Tipitina's, Chickie Wah Wah, One-eyed Jacks, The Howlin' Wolf, or smaller clubs like BMC, Blue Nile, Santos bar, Circle Bar, Dos Jefes Cigar Bar, The Maison, and the Hi-Ho Lounge. You can catch it all from traditional jazz with three free shows a night at Preservation Jazz Hall on St. Peter in the French Quarter, or Fritzel's and at Snug Harbor on Frenchmen Street. There's Zydeco on Thursday nights at Rock 'N' Bowl in Mid-City, burlesque shows all over, you can get your 1980s cover songs anytime of the day at The Famous Door on Bourbon Street, Karaoke at Cat's Meow or karaoke and lube wrestling at the All Ways Lounge on St. Claude Avenue in the Marigny with punk at Siberia, and Corey Henry & the Tremé Funktet at Vaughn's Lounge in the Bywater on Thursday nights.

To really get local, you will find a virtuoso violinist who can play any song you request at the corner of Royal Street and St. Louis, or stand in front of Rouse's Market in the French Quarter where a street band always plays, or walk towards the river on either St. Peter Street or Decatur Street and there will be a couple who have been singing Gospel songs there, sans accompaniment, since before their daughter was born about 15 years ago. There are infinite places here where a musician is doing what they do best—perform.

If you are not in the mood to track down specific bands, you can grab a drink in a geaux cup and just roll out on to the streets on any given day and let the musical currents pull you. There is a sweet spot for live local music that occurs from 6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m.-3:00 a.m., particularly on a Friday or Saturday when you can find lesser known bands hitting the note. This is what I decided to do this past weekend and this is what I found.

First, I crossed the Mississippi River to Old Algiers and attended a backyard jam with Daria & the Hip Drops. Having just released their brand new single, Day Too Long, they are riding a wave of incredible reviews and publicity for their particularly unique contribution to the New Orleans music scene. This band provides a pre-party soundtrack to any evening. It is that first sip of a cold drink, that first step onto the dance floor and the pure excitement of the entire evening ahead of you. With a



Daria & the Hip Drops crafting a new Carnival classic.

Todd Cirillo photo



Jesse Tripp and the Night Breed midnight at the Portside Lounge.

Todd Cirillo photo

rock/island Talking Heads, early No Doubt and Vampire Weekend. Daria & the Hip Drops are adding the newest dimension to New Orleans music in the oldest of ways by bringing their musical ingredients to the Northernmost Caribbean city all while soaking up the swamp sounds of this town.

The band is built around singer-songwriter and steel drum player, Daria Dzurik and bass guitarist, arranger, Graham Robinson, along with a guitarist and drummer. They perform with intensity and elation that inspires one to move your body. There are no bad days while listening to Daria & the Hip Drops. I was fortunate enough to be present as they crafted a future New Orleans Carnival classic, blending the road songs of Trinidad with the Sunday second-line culture of New Orleans. The band has been playing in New Orleans since 2010 and has released two albums along with their latest single. Daria says that having her creations come alive onstage and watching the audience fall in love with the songs are her biggest joy.

Next up was Jesse Tripp and the Night Breed at the Portside Lounge in the Central City neighborhood. A solid rock 'n' roll band with grit and pop sensibility. Jesse Tripp, writes gutter dirty jams with power chords catching everything that spills into our streets; branches, beer bottles, Mardi Gras beads, love letters, broken hearts, and booty shaking hooks. She describes their sound as "Queens of the Runaways", like if Queens of the Stone Age and Joan Jett had a baby. Jesse Tripp and the Night Breed provides a darker Hoodoo for the audience through originals and covers like "Voices Carry" by 'Til Tuesday, "I Wanna Be Your Dog" by The Stooges, or some "Sweet Leaf" by Black Sabbath. The band is a fantastic mix of heavy rock, glam, punk, and goth with Bob Seger songs of common experiences.

When asked about her show, Jesse Tripp says, "playing live makes me feel like a super sexy super hero," and I don't disagree with her. There is a way the audience responds to her music as if she saved us from the "one that got away," but instead of letting us drown in our sorrows, she kicks their door in for us, tells them to fuck off proper while strutting away lighting a cigarette, pouring us a drink, and putting her arm around us. The band has one album out, Pocket Rocket, and is set to release their next album, Retrospectacle, by December. It will be a record release party not to be missed.

The sound of a drummer solidly in the pocket led me to Ecirb Muller's Twisted Dixie at The Spotted Cat on Frenchmen Street. Immediately upon entering, the band was tearing the place down with their 10-ton high energy performance that gets the audience involved and up dancing. This five-piece band with trumpet, trombone, guitar, bass, and drums made the little club feel as if it were as big as the Superdome.

The band was at their peak, switching between My Blue Heaven and Hey Pocky Way, then transforming into Mystikal's Shake Ya Ass, some N.W.A. and back again to all the shrieks and howls and ass-shaking of two bachelorette parties from Connecticut in the house. The singer/trumpeter, Ecirb Muller, preached and pushed the girls forward through sermon-like sexuality, humor, and pure musicianship. The band provided them with a soundtrack for their experience as if the band's entire set was played just for them alone. The bachelorette parties will never forget their moment in the Spotted Cat nightclub, 7:28 p.m. on a summer Saturday night in July.

This band is a genre-bending concoction of jazz, funk, Go-Go, brass band, old school R&B, and NuTrad who have rightly earned the title of America's FUNkiest Traditional Jazz Band. Ecirb Muller's Twisted Dixie are righteous and wicked in the same note.

I was allowed to speak with the mysterious Ecirb Muller, as long as I met him with a fifth of Crown Royal atop The Pontchartrain Hotel roof at exactly 12:02 a.m., which, of course I did. Ecirb states that the goal of his live performances ultimately comes down to the audience having "a good ass time" in addition to making everyone smile, laugh, dance, and cry. Above all, though, he says, "music should be fun." The band released their first album, What Had Happened Was, in May



Ecirb Muller's Twisted Dixie doin it right at the Spotted Cat.

Todd Cirillo photo

2019. They put on a regular Sunday night dance party at Cafe Negril on Frenchmen Street and play the Spotted Cat once a month.

If you want to get to the heart of the New Orleans music scene, know this...We sing standing on street corners to no one and to everyone. We sing at funerals, we sing while standing in line at Hansen's waiting for a snowball, we sing on the back of garbage trucks at 7:26 a.m., we sing while driving the carriages through the French Quarter, we sing on bar stools and on the neutral ground. There is song somewhere at all times.

Our Sewage and Water Board might let us down, our massive pumps that are supposed to keep us dry might let us down, our politicians always let us down, but our music never lets us down. It lifts us up even when the floodwaters try to wash us away. "Wade in the Water" indeed, someone somewhere will be singing that song and they will sing it better than anyone anywhere else can sing it.

The legendary Allen Toussaint said in an interview once "any music made in New Orleans is New Orleans Music" and the bands featured here exemplify that. So take your pick, no matter what neighborhood you find yourself in; Uptown, French Quarter, 7th Ward, 9th Ward, Mid-City, Black Pearl, Riverbend, Central City, Lower Garden District, Tremé, Marigny, Bywater, etc., you will find the soundtrack for your adventures or it will find you. So listen closely, do you hear it? That's New Orleans singing a song just for you.

To find out more about the bands and, most importantly, to support them by purchasing their albums, following them on social media, or putting some money in their tip jar the next time you are in New Orleans:



Daria & the Hip Drops
<http://www.dariaandthehipdrops.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/DariaAndTheHipDrops/>
Instagram: @hipdropdontstop

Jesse Tripp and the Night Breed
<https://www.facebook.com/jesstrippandthenightbreed/>
Instagram: @jesstrippandthenightbreed



Ecirb Muller's Twisted Dixie
<https://twisteddixienola.com/>
<https://tinyurl.com/yxkfhoyc>
Instagram: @iambricemiller

Todd Cirillo (<https://www.toddcirillo.com/>) is a writer, poet, publisher, and pirate. He is one of the originators of After-Hours Poetry and co-founder and editor of Six Ft. Swells Press. His books include: *Burning the Evidence* (Epic Rites Press), *Sucker's Paradise*, *Sexy Devils*, *Still a Party*, *This Troubled Heart*, and *ROXY* and *Three For the Road* (which he co-authored), among others. Cirillo is widely known for his poetry performances. He has been published in numerous national and international publications and on cocktail napkins everywhere. He lives in New Orleans and can be found soaking his pirate heart in second lines and smiling under the neons searching for shiny moments. You can find books, videos, poems at the above url.

Kyle Patrick Nugent New Orleans

<https://ghostgonerogue.com/>

Bio

Patrick was born in New Orleans, 1985. Heir to (The Original) Krewe of Motha Roux Social Aid and Pleasure Club. Chief Facilitator of New Orleans Artist Collective The Mothship. Beloved of the Whole Tree. Court of The Jockamo.



Judith Beheading Holofernes Acrylic and Oil on Canvas, 48" x 30"



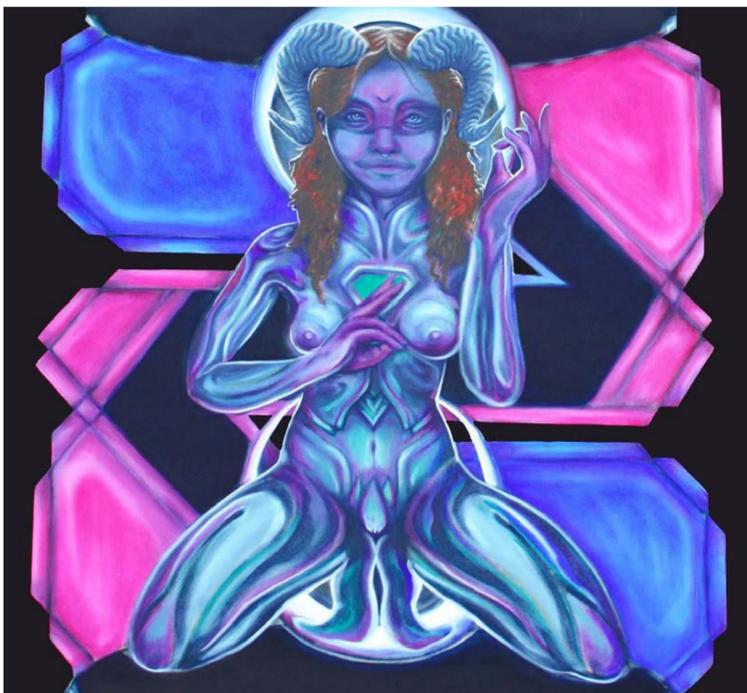
Indra's Net Spray Paint and Oil on Wood Panel, 8' x 4'



Mysts of Avalon (Detail) Spray Paint on Brick Wall, 8' x 32'



Genesis Harmonic Oil on Wood Panel, 7' x 4'



Aristera Oil on Hand-Cut Wood Panel, 24' x 12'

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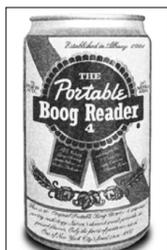


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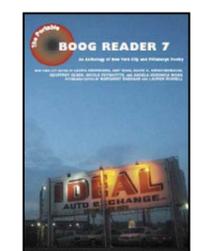
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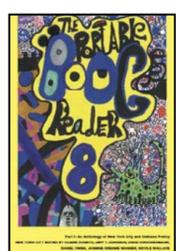
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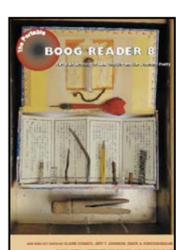
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