



*redcedar*  
**REVIEW**

52

VOLUME 52



*redcedar*  
**REVIEW**

**VOLUME 52**

**THE RED CEDAR REVIEW IS AN ANNUAL LITERARY MAGAZINE  
PUBLISHED IN THE SPRING BY MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
UNDERGRADUATES WITH SUPPORT FROM THE MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LETTERS AND DEPARTMENT  
OF ENGLISH.**

**COVER DESIGN BY EMILY MERLO.**

**© 2017 MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY BOARD OF TRUSTEES. ALL  
RIGHTS RESERVED.**

## **RCR 52 STAFF**

**MANAGING EDITOR:** ERIN MERLO

**ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR:** ALEXANDRIA DRZAZGOWSKI

**LEAD COPYEDITOR:** EMILY ORLANDO

**ART EDITOR AND WEBSITE MANAGER:** CAMILLE DOUGLAS

**POETRY EDITOR:** MYKAYLA SMITH

**PROSE EDITOR:** ALEX VALENTI

**SOCIAL MEDIA TEAM LEADERS:** KRISTEN BILYEA, CYNTHIA BEZINQUE

**FACULTY ADVISOR:** DR. ROBIN SILBERGLEID

**TYPESETTERS:** HOLLY BRONSON, CAROLINE POOLE

**READERS:** SALVATORE ANTONUCCI, GRACE BELTOWSKI, BETHANY COATES,

OLIVIA DALBY, CARRIE DUDEWICZ, ALEXIS ISAAC, TIFFANY MCINTYRE, LINDSEY

MUTZ, KELSEY REITZLOFF, DANIELLE SCHWARTZ, CARLISLE SHELSON, KATHERINE

STARK, TAYLOR STERRETT, JESSICA SUMMER OLSON

**WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA TEAM:** STEPHANIE CHUDNOW, COURTNEY FARMER,

TAYLOR MACKEY



# CONTENTS

- 1 **EDITOR'S NOTE** ERIN MERLO
- 3 **CHAPTER 1: TESTIMONIAL RHYTHMS** WADEN DELOS SANTOS
- 5 **DREAM AT THE END OF WINTER** ISABEL BARTHOLOMEW
- 6 **ALTERNATE NAMES FOR HAPPINESS** KATHERINE O'HARA
- 8 **THE TRUTH OF LEONID AFREMOV** AUTUMN LALA
- 9 **ORIENTATION** AUTUMN LALA
- 10 **FORTUNE** KALEY WHIPPLE
- 20 **I'M STILL SCARED OF FIREWORKS** MEGHAN O'HERN
- 22 **EXPLAINING MY DEPRESSION AT THE WALK IN CLINIC** MEGHAN O'HERN
- 23 **TALKING TO THE TREES AT NIGHT** MEGHAN O'HERN
- 25 **LOVE SONG FROM JANUARY** MARISSA MEDLEY
- 26 **LEESBURG, FLORIDA CIRCA 2007** MARISSA MEDLEY
- 28 **BROKEN WINGS** TYLER BATES
- 33 **CARINA (STAR ANIMAL)** NHUNG LAM

- 35 **FISH EMPRESS** NHUNG LAM
- 36 **NEGLECT** SAM STEBBINS
- 37 **SELF PORTRAIT AS AMANITA MUSCARIA** DELANY LEMKE
- 38 **ATTICS** RACHEL BOES
- 39 **TENOCHTITLAN** RACHEL BOES
- 43 **KYLAR, GAZING** PAIGE TIBBE
- 44 **& AS FOR MY MOTHER** KATE KOBOSKO
- 46 **HIGHWAY HOUSE** KATE KOBOSKO
- 48 **GEM CITY** REED KARSH
- 50 **THE PLAYGROUND WEDDING** NICOLE GRASSI
- 53 **BIOLUMINESCENCE** DANA TRUPA
- 54 **F STREET** DANA TRUPA
- 56 **THE PHILIPPINES GREETES ME ON THE SHORE** XAVIER SMITH
- 58 **BEFORE THE CASKET** XAVIER SMITH
- 61 **PERSONAL SECRET** DANIEL HESLEP

- 62 **ORANGES** DANIEL HESLEP
- 63 **THE CHALLENGE** GLEN PARKER
- 80 **I DON'T MIND THE COLD** RAFAEL AVCIOGLU
- 81 **WANDERING MAN** DYLAN MILKINS
- 82 **SPIRO LIGHT GRAPH** DYLAN MILKINS
- 83 **INTERVIEW WITH MARCIA ALDRICH** ALEXANDRIA DRZAZGOWSKI
- 89 **CONTRIBUTORS**





# EDITOR'S NOTE

ERIN MERLO

Dear Readers,

I am so pleased to present the fifty-second volume of *Red Cedar Review*. This year has been both challenging and very successful in establishing our undergraduate-run literary magazine, and I believe the end result is indicative of the growth we have experienced.

Our goal this year was to do what we have always done—produce a strong magazine featuring undergraduates from all over the country. Additionally, we wanted to focus on growing our organization and creating a stable base on which *RCR* could continue to flourish.

Our energetic and eager staff made progress easy. At the start of the year, we only had forty-five submissions to read through, a simple website, and unorganized archive files. Due to increased interest in our organization, our staff grew from fifteen to twenty-seven active members. This greatly increased the amount of work we were able to accomplish, including the projects that have needed to be tackled for several years.

Through an email and social media campaign, we more than doubled our submissions to ninety-five in all (some with multiple pieces each), which drastically increased the amount of meetings we needed to have in order to read through them. These power-reading sessions served as bonding time for our entire staff and laid the groundwork for the year ahead. Since fall, we have redesigned our website and added a blog. The blog posts written by *RCR* staff, ranging from book reviews to career advice to literary criticism, continue to blow me away. Lastly, our archived files, which have become a little messy over the years since

our founding in 1963, are being organized for an archive project supported by a grant from the College of Arts and Letters at Michigan State University.

All of this work would not be possible without our wonderful staff. Thank you to our submission readers, our website and social media team, and our typesetters. A special thank you to my lead copyeditor, Emily Orlando, who edited every single word in this magazine, and to my assistant managing editor, Alexandria Drzazgowski, who always replied to my frantic texts about deadlines and worked tirelessly alongside me every step of the way. They all went above and beyond to ensure the quality of our magazine was something to be proud of.

Thank you to Julie Taylor, the Espresso Book Machine coordinator at MSU Libraries, who helped us make this magazine beautiful, and to the MSU Department of English for their monetary support. Of course, we also need to extend our thanks to our faculty advisor, Robin Silbergleid, who answered every question and always assured us that we had the time and means to make *RCR* what we wanted.

Last but not least, thank you to our very talented authors. In this magazine, we have thirty-two pieces by twenty-two authors from sixteen universities in eleven states. I am honored they have chosen *RCR* as a home for their work and I am certain it is not the last time the world will see their names.

Sincerely,

Erin Merlo  
*Red Cedar Review* Managing Editor

# CHAPTER 1: TESTIMONIAL RHYTHMS

WADEN DELOS SANTOS

In the musky bar, chandeliers swing and sway.  
They radiate gold, over oak wood floors—heat  
for the feet. The frayed aged men watch with a drink  
as the youthful duo gets out of their seat.

Teal vintage dress with draped hazel hair  
that rest over the naked shoulders.  
Her dress danced with the current  
of her feet, the feet that she looked down to for relief when  
she couldn't stop her smile.

I rest in her eyes,  
but she is shy. I held her hand all night  
as though she was mine.

They danced to songs of past centuries  
and danced to speak without words.

The hours went by gently as the bar began  
its end. The duo stopped kindly as their  
feet touched ends. He unlocked his hand  
to give thanks for the dance.  
He wanted a thank you, but she wanted a kiss.

Maybe even more, as he questioned her eyes.  
She was no longer shy, only scared to lose more time.

# DREAM AT THE END OF WINTER

ISABEL BARTHOLOMEW

I crept into your house late at night  
up into your bedroom, your bed--vacant  
but anticipating me--a little ghost, sheets wrinkled.  
You found me there: a small sigh,  
a kneading of the brow like soft puppy skin.

Snow sank past your window,  
milk-colored and brittle.  
In the dark, the outside of your mouth was cold,  
and the inside, warm and musty.  
I thought you tasted like red wine, metal, damp earth.

You slid your fingers inside me.  
I didn't feel them, but I could hear them shuffling, jingling  
like loose change in a cup, or a ring of skeleton keys.  
You told me, I am going to get better at being alone.



# ALTERNATE NAMES FOR HAPPINESS

KATHERINE O'HARA

Happiness

[noun]

See also:

The smell of lavender and cotton.

Long car rides when you picked the music,  
rolling hills that  
dip  
alongside the pauses before the refrain,  
your brother who only remembered the chorus.

The sounds around your apartment were plucked ukulele strings,  
rooftops and city skylines,  
perspective.

The color of daffodils,  
notepad paper,  
your complexion  
when you face  
the sun.

Happiness

[noun]

See also:

When you can tell which present is from the friend who is notoriously awful at gift-wrapping,  
wrinkled edges showing the white underbelly  
of patterned paper.  
Bows tied like shoelaces,  
wavy ends of ribbon,  
an attempt at curling the ends with dull scissors.

When you changed the radio station,  
commercial-free listening (they advertise).  
“That’s our favorite,” your brother said.  
Just in time to listen all the way through,  
until turning down  
the road  
for home.

# THE TRUTH OF LEONID AFREMOV

AUTUMN LALA

I absorb the world through mosaic  
eyes: beautiful but broken—like flimsy  
leaves tumbling from a withering tree—or perhaps  
colloquial china cracks that prove  
even the most precious possessions are  
susceptible to wear and tear, to everyday  
erosion—like scuffed Prada boots or holes in  
the soles of our pumping hearts—we strain to  
soak up harsh strokes and vivid lines—outlining  
lies wherein lies beauty and grace and all the  
things we wish to see, that we wish to believe—  
but through mosaic eyes, there are no lies.  
because what is broken is broken, and  
beauty only exists if we so wish.

# ORIENTATION

AUTUMN LALA

I.

To survive, frogs adapted to their environments—eye sockets evolving, vantage point higher north, preying on their prey before their prey could prey on them—languid tongue lengthening like elastic, reaching and grasping and dragging towards whole stomach—porous skin sucking in water and oxygen like an addict greedy for their fix, like this is the only way to live.

II.

The first time I drank bleach for breakfast, I did it for fun—the seductive scent teased me from the carpet each time Momma or Papa spilled a little blood—putrid in its pureness, pureness in its cleanliness, like a newborn baby bathed of its imperfections—I found the only way to swallow the shame, restore my veins, was ingesting innocence.

# FORTUNE

KALEY WHIPPLE

Hoshiko's mother burned her father's things when he left with the pretty woman from the Azores. She picked up his clothes and papers and threw them into the great marble fireplace in the sitting room of the cold, lonely mansion. Hoshiko watched her mother burn the English language books she had been reading only last night, the books her father had used to teach her the alphabet. As the spines of the books curled in the flames, her mother sat on the floor and cried, screaming that she would never learn English now because he said she was too stupid to learn. And when the money finally ran out, Hoshiko and her mother said goodbye to the great, big house with the creaking shutters on the hillside, and as they crunched through the grey snow, Hoshiko watched her fingertips turn blue with cold.

Hoshiko held on to her mother's hand tightly as they stood in front of the old, blind woman. Her cloudy eyes were accentuated with lacy curtains of translucent eyelashes, and her skin was as dusty and pale as the chipped and peeling walls of the old boarding house. Hoshiko stared at the edge of the massive wooden desk, which squatted in the middle of the room like an old toad, and she felt her mother's hand twitch nervously around her own.

"What is your name?" the old woman asked, sniffing in displeasure. Hoshiko frowned. Even though she had lived in London nearly all of her life, she had never heard the accent that this old woman had, nor heard such rudeness in a voice. The old landlady should consider herself lucky that she was getting new business, but instead she was treating them with contempt.

Perhaps she disliked the way they smelled, a mixture of snow melting into wet wool and *onizuri* incense, which her mother had lit the night before they had to leave their house—the beautiful old house with the creaky shutters and claw-footed bathtubs. Although her mother said the incense would bring them wealth and good feeling, Hoshiko couldn't help feeling like a dog that had stepped into a wet gutter.

“Tabitha Tallowfield,” she said, and Hoshiko watched the old woman wince at the way her mother stumbled over the unfamiliar name.

“Tallowfield...” she muttered. “That’s the name of a banker who used to live down the road from here. Strange man, dabbled in Oriental trading. Did you know him?”

Hoshiko’s mother opened her mouth, then closed it, her eyes misting over with tears. Hoshiko looked up at her earnestly, squeezing her hand again. “Brother,” her mother said at last. “Left London for business in the Azores.”

“If I may, is there any particular reason why your voice sounds so incredibly muddy?” the woman asked.

*Les* Hoshiko thought bitterly. *It is because her name is Tamoe Takenaka, and she doesn’t speak any English. She never needed to before. But how could this woman be asking about that now? Can’t she tell that Mother is upset?*

Her mother looked down at her, panicked. While she had lived in London for several years, she had relied on her husband and Hoshiko to speak for her, and even then Hoshiko could understand very little. Hoshiko grimaced, taking a moment to translate her thoughts before she opened her mouth. She only had to repeat what her father had taught her to say.

“Mother has an illness where she is always cold. Her lips get very numb, and she cannot talk as well.” Her voice betrayed only the smallest hint of an accent. Hoshiko always had been a talented mimic of her father’s voice.

The old woman raised her thinning eyebrows skeptically. “And what is your name?”

“Hannah *sam*...only Hannah. My mother has money. She will pay.”

The woman tilted her head in Hoshiko’s general direction, her cloudy reptilian eyes causing a deep shiver of unease to course up her spine.

“How old are you, child?”

“Eleven, Miss.”

“And why do you think you and your mother are fit to stay here? I shall have you know that I don’t accept inebriates, rapsallions, women of iniquity, or general



scruffiness in this house. So if you think that applies to you, you'd best clear out."

Hoshiko stared at the woman, her mind spinning as she tried to untangle the mass of words that had just spilled from this old woman's mouth. Coupled with her thick accent, the sounds she had made were completely incomprehensible, like trying to find the end of a tangled ball of yarn. Hoshiko shook her head in bewilderment.

"*Ano...* My mother has money. She will pay."

The old landlady sniffed in displeasure.

"I will require a payment of ten pounds in addition to the rent for the first month," she said, waving her hand at a black leather-bound book sitting at the end of the desk. "Please write down your name."

Hoshiko's mother lifted Hoshiko up by the waist so she could reach the fountain pen sitting on top of the black book. Hoshiko wrote her mother's English name carefully, watching the straight little lines of the alphabet fall into place like tiles in a mosaic. She could spell her own English name, too, and ask for rice and tea and the restroom and help in a perfect English accent. But that was all she had learned from her father before she woke up on the last day of October to see her mother kneeling on the parlor floor, sobbing in the middle of the cold and empty house. Her mother had said that he had gone somewhere else, somewhere warmer, for the winter. It had been winter for a very long time now.

Hoshiko's mother placed her on the floor and gathered up their bags. She pulled three ten-pound notes out of her bag and placed them before the blind landlady, who handed her a little silver key. Her mother handed Hoshiko a rolled-up tatami mat, quickly ushering her towards a set of rickety wooden stairs. "Thank you very much!" Hoshiko called to the old woman as the great wooden desk disappeared from view.

"Mother?" Hoshiko said, switching to Japanese the moment the door was closed behind them. But Hoshiko's mother was busy taking off her shoes and looking around the place. The room was lit by a great arched window at the end of the pale sitting room, which revealed the snow still falling fast in the street below. The chairs and tables looked well-worn, the stain peeling off the wooden legs, and a layer of dust covered every inch of the upholstery.

"Mother..."

“Take off your shoes please, Hoshiko.”

Hoshiko sat down and pulled off her soaked kid boots. “Mother, why did you tell that woman that Father was your brother?”

“The same reason we tell people that your name is Hannah. We don’t need anyone asking questions.”

“I thought I told English people I was named Hannah so that they could pronounce my name. Why did you lie to the landlady?”

Hoshiko’s mother swallowed, her jaw twitching. “Because, Hoshiko, when a... when a woman doesn’t have a husband to present, it is best not to mention one at all. This woman does not want Japanese people here, and she would not want a Japanese woman with no husband most of all.”

“But it’s not—”

“No more questions, Hoshiko.” Her mother looked around the room, and then walked over to peek into the other rooms. “A kitchen, a restroom, a bedroom... all forgotten to dust. The landlady certainly made sure to give us the room that needs the most cleaning.”

“Mother!” Hoshiko cried. “Does this mean it is time for *oosouji*?”

“It is only December 1, Hoshiko. *Oosouji* isn’t for another twenty-seven days.”

“Yes, but you said the room was dirty, and that we need to clean it all. Well, why not just say it’s time for *oosouji*? Then we’ll have a fresh start, like we do on the New Year!”

Her mother glanced at Hoshiko’s shining face then smiled. “All right. It’s time for *oosouji*.”

Behind the door there was a quiet giggle. Hoshiko and her mother looked around sharply, and Hoshiko got to her feet and padded to the old white door, peeking around. The hallway outside was empty, apart from a flickering shadow scurrying along the end of the dark hallway. Hoshiko frowned, sticking her tongue out at the hall before retreating back into the room.

\*\*\*

Hoshiko did not witness the shadow in the hall until many snowy and dusty weeks had passed. She had been begging her mother for days to allow her out of the little place, but her mother had refused, citing the bad weather as the reason for her incarceration. Although she didn't quite believe her, Hoshiko resigned herself to making the most of the little space she was afforded. After spending days thoroughly scrubbing the little rooms from top to bottom, Hoshiko occupied herself with carefully placing the numerous *maneki neko* on the desk and windowsills, the little golden cat statues glinting in the flickering light from the streetlamps. Hoshiko would often watch her mother polish the furniture as she folded discarded pieces of newspaper into the shapes of animals, sitting with her scrawny legs splayed out on the *tatami* mat. Her mother could spend hours in one room, turning the futons so that they faced south, the better to usher luck into the house, and carefully avoiding the lucky spider webs that dangled from the ceiling. But each time she added another lucky plant or statue to the little house, the sadder and thinner she looked. Hoshiko couldn't understand. Her mother had never had to put so much effort into being fortunate before. Perhaps before, luck had just found her without her trying to call for it. Yes, that was it. Good fortune just didn't know where they lived anymore.

Although Hoshiko was forbidden from going outside, her mother left the house numerous times a day, going to the grocer or the temple or the fortuneteller. The fortuneteller was a tiny little woman from Okinawa who burned so much incense that the neighbors had called the fire brigade when they saw smoke filtering through the windows of her home. There was only one temple in London, built in a park by a river. Her mother told Hoshiko of the strange looks she received when she prayed at the temple, as the other English men and women saw it as an exotic oddity erected as an aesthetic attraction. She could hear their whispers behind her, and once or twice felt a sharp poke in her shoulder, as though someone was checking to see if she was real, and not a waxwork constructed to contribute to the ambience. No one could quite believe that a real Japanese woman was encroaching on their little faux temple by the Thames, and her mother was never able to spend too much time there.

The next time her mother had left for the fortuneteller's, Hoshiko sat on the cracked windowsill with her head leaning out the open window. Although the freezing wind made her teeth chatter and her lips blue, it also perfectly carried the voices of the passers-by below her up to her ears. Hoshiko leaned out so far that her long, black hair dangled into the white fog that obscured the street below, listening closely to the conversations below her and mimicking the sounds. Although she had known the alphabet by heart before they left the old house, it was extremely difficult to piece the spoken words together, especially when dozens of different accents would pronounce the same words dozens of different

ways. She'd even figured out that their old landlady wasn't from England at all, but spoke with the accent of someone from Ireland, way out across the sea. The falling snow outside muffled Hoshiko's ears to anything besides the sound of chatter on the street below her, and Hoshiko felt as though she were in her own muffled cocoon, sounding out English words without a thought that anyone could hear her. If she were lucky, she would be able to learn English without ever needing another book.

There was a timid knock at the door, and Hoshiko jumped, assured that the house was completely empty. No one had ever knocked on the boarding house door, and her mother never had any visitors. Hoshiko slipped off of the window ledge and padded quietly over to the door, opening it with an echoing squeak. Outside, a pale boy with yellow hair grinned at her.

"Hello," he said. He had the same accent as the landlady. Hoshiko felt as though she might have heard his voice on the street under the window. "I'm Ailbe. Who are you?"

Hoshiko blinked at him. "M—My name is Hoshiko," she replied after a moment.

"That's a funny name," he replied

"No, it's not. *Your* name is funny."

He grinned sheepishly at her. "Maybe it is, but I didn't pick it, now did I?"

Hoshiko gave a stiff shadow of a smile, stepping further away from the door, her hand still on the knob, as though ready to slam it shut at a moment's notice. Ailbe looked at her expectantly. She sighed and stepped back, opening the door to let him through. "Take off your shoes," she said, pointing at his feet. He glanced quizzically at her, but shrugged and sat down to remove his leather loafers.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Eleven."

"I'm *twelve*," Ailbe proudly replied, standing up and showing off his bare feet. Hoshiko nodded.

"Why is it so clean in here?" Ailbe asked, looking around at the *tatami* mats.

"*Oosouji*," Hoshiko said quietly. "We...clean on *oosouji*. Like a festival."

“Oh, like spring cleaning?” Ailbe walked over to the window at the other end of the room, looking out onto the snow-covered street below. “Why do you speak so funny?”

“I do not know what spring cleaning is. Why are you here?”

Ailbe turned to look at her. His eyes were bright green and curious, with a crescent of purple underneath each one, as though he hadn't slept. “Nana won't let me talk to you. She says she thinks you're strange. But living in the same house with people you've never spoken to seems right rude, doesn't it? And she was the one who let you stay here, after all.”

“Seven? Who is seven?”

“What?” Ailbe asked.

“*Nana*. Seven.”

“I...oh!” Ailbe laughed, a sharp little trill that made Hoshiko wince. “Nana is grandmother. Can you not speak English originally, then? In your language nana means seven?” Hoshiko nodded. “That's funny,” Ailbe grinned.

“Why can't you leave?”

“Nana says I'll get teased. She says people here don't like people like us. Because they're English, and we come from across a sea, they think we're drunk and stupid.”

Hoshiko nodded. “Stupid. People say that to Mother too. Many people.”

“Then we're just the same, you and I!” Ailbe exclaimed.

Hoshiko stared at him. He looked like a ghost, standing in the middle of the room, looking bemused, as though he didn't understand why he was there. His bare feet looked unnaturally pale against the brown of the tatami, and his green eyes glowed like a cat's. This stringy white weed of a boy was definitely not welcome in the house. Mother would be angry, tell him he didn't belong. And he would tell his grandmother, his nana, and she would throw them out. And where would they go then? She had seen the people who lived in the alleyways, the ones who slept on church doorsteps and snapped icicles off of their noses every morning. She and her mother would be even colder than they were already.

“Where are your parents?” Ailbe asked, looking around the empty room.

“Mother is at the fortuneteller’s.”

“What’s a fortuneteller?”

“A woman who reads futures. She tells my mother what to do to be lucky.”

“What about your father?” Ailbe asked. Hoshiko stared at him.

“Father is gone.”

“Gone?” Ailbe stepped toward her, looking concerned. “Is he dead?”

“He left with a friend to be warm. His friend was a very pretty woman. He said Mother was always cold, and he wanted to be warm.”

“You’re lucky,” Ailbe nodded. “Nana says Mum and Da are very cold indeed. Because dirt is always cold, and sometimes it freezes, and then they’re underneath ice for months.”

Hoshiko blinked at him, confused. “Why are they buried? You burn them if they’re dead.”

“What? You don’t burn people! You put them in a box, and then a big black carriage, and then you put them under a tombstone. Those are the rules. That’s what they did with Mum and Da after they got all those spots on their skin.”

Hoshiko shook her head, feeling as though her throat was swelling shut. “You burn them when they leave,” she insisted. “Mother burned Father’s things when he left with that woman, and then she burned incense for him like he was dead. And all his papers and books too. And the English books he gave me. Father isn’t in the snow anymore. He left us here so he could be warm. Why couldn’t he have taken us with him? Why weren’t we allowed to be warm too?”

Hoshiko looked up through blurry eyes at Ailbe, who looked confused and petrified at her shouting. She realized that she’d said nearly all of it in Japanese, and hung her head.

“I’m sorry. You did not understand.”

Ailbe shook his head, dumbfounded.



“Why do they leave?” she asked, looking up at him. “Tell me. Why do they leave us?”

Ailbe shook his head. “I don’t know.”

Hoshiko sniffled. “You’re older. You’re supposed to know.”

He shrugged. “Nana’s older than all of us, and she doesn’t know. I asked her, and she said that Mum and Da were wanted in God’s kingdom.”

“Who is God?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know many things.”

Ailbe nodded and bit his lip as though he were going to cry. Hoshiko glared at him. She hated it when people cried in front of her.

“Am I allowed to come back?” Ailbe asked nervously.

“Do you want to?”

“Nana says it’s rude to ignore your friends.”

“I am not your friend,” Hoshiko said.

Ailbe gave a short laugh of surprise. “Well, you’re the only thing close to a friend I’ve got, so you’ll have to do. So, can I come back and visit again?”

“Ask your nana,” Hoshiko replied.

Ailbe gave her a watery smile. “She’ll say no.”

“Then don’t say,” Hoshiko said after a moment. “Mother is at the fortuneteller’s every other day. You may come then.”

“But what if your mother gets lucky again? She won’t need a woman to tell her how to be fortunate anymore, and she won’t ever leave.”

“Do not worry,” Hoshiko replied. “That will never happen.”

Ailbe opened his mouth then closed it, as though unsure of what to say. He reached up, pulling nervously at a chain around his neck, then slipped it off, handing it to her. On the end was a little metal stem with four heart-shaped leaves on the end. “Here,” he said. “It’s a clover. My nana gave it to me after my parents got the spots. She said when it’s got four leaves it’s lucky. Maybe it’ll work for you since it didn’t work for me.”

Hoshiko took the necklace, bowing as he placed it in her hand. Confused, Ailbe bowed stiffly back.

“I’m sorry,” she said, looking down at the necklace in her hand. “I have nothing for you in return.”

“You don’t have to give me anything,” he replied quickly.

Hoshiko looked around, then walked past Ailbe and plucked the smallest *maneki neko* from the windowsill, turning around and handing it to him.

“What’s this?” Ailbe asked, squinting at it.

“*Maneki neko*. It’s my mother’s. They bring good fortune and happiness.”

“Why does your mother have so many of these?” Ailbe asked, turning the little statue over in his hand.

Hoshiko stared out of the snowy window, now crusted with white frost, the clover necklace clutched tightly in her hand.

“Because none of them have worked yet.”

# I'M STILL SCARED OF FIREWORKS

MEGHAN O'HERN

I have finally stopped feeling your fingers around me  
but I can't hear fireworks without seeing your face

I am overwhelmed  
you flood my psyche again  
a single snapchat  
tells me you're in this city on the river—  
everything freezes

we are at a party  
you call me pretty more times than I can count  
keep handing me drinks  
onethreethreemany I

don't know how we got here  
we are alone  
your hand is on my thigh  
fireworks echoing from the outside of this locked door  
everything is spinning

fasterandfasterandnostopdont  
you tell me you've wanted this since we were sixteen

it rained for three days  
I didn't tell anyone for weeks

ten seconds  
one photo  
everything comes flooding back

I told the only boy I trust  
we walked two blocks before I could speak  
*I feel like everything is burning*  
he promised it wasn't my fault  
held my hand and walked me home  
*everything will be okay*  
*he can't hurt you anymore*  
promised a locked door  
would keep me safe  
and all I can think about is the time it didn't  
*No one can touch you without your consent*

suddenly we are home  
I don't know how we got here  
his hands are on my shoulders  
*breathe, you are going to be okay*  
he pulls me in close  
and I don't say anything  
about the fact that he never asked to hug me  
because he is a *good* person  
and good people don't mean to do bad things  
and I know he didn't mean to take my body from me  
but when he leaves  
I wonder if the fire lit that july night will ever stop burning

# EXPLAINING MY DEPRESSION AT THE WALK-IN CLINIC

MEGHAN O'HERN

When they ask what the problem is  
tell them everything is hollow  
that i lost everything of myself somewhere  
between prozac and pineapple bacardi  
tell the doctor of the poems  
the stories you just have to write  
to keep the blade from your skin  
the doctor asks if i've ever tried therapy  
i hand her the list  
of all the psychologists i have ever seen  
when she asks what is wrong  
i hand her the list of all the medications that don't work  
she asks me to tell her without metaphor  
i tell her everything is numb and the world moves oh so fast.

# TALKING TO THE TREES AT NIGHT

MEGHAN O'HERN

We are leaves falling into red-orange piles  
proving something beautiful can come from destruction  
the birds sing to us as we crumble

Laughter resonates from somewhere in this park  
over the familiar crackling of a bonfire  
he shatters the silence  
*you know, there's no beauty in destruction.*

His words hang heavy in the air between us  
*How can you say that surrounded by all this dying beauty?*  
the trees never fight the changing of the seasons  
even the evergreens lose themselves in the winter  
because they know there are better things to be than full

We are still  
waiting for the lightning bolt  
of feeling to fill us again

We float away to the clouds  
holding hands watching the world beneath our feet  
carrying on without us  
the deafening quiet hangs heavy between us

*What are you thinking about* he asks suddenly  
*Stay in the moment, Mace. Right now, everything is okay.*  
I tell him  
trying to swallow the shame that found its way into my voice box

Snow is falling on a February Friday  
we are walking the frozen campus  
two boys  
sipping coffee and laughing  
between gusts of cutting wind

The sun soaked leaves beneath our feet  
suddenly spinning  
with another cool sip of shared whiskey

One day the Earth will stop spinning  
but this life will go on

I will join the people in the sky  
*Avez-vous confiance en le procédé?*  
one day this will all make sense

We are talking to the trees at night  
telling them all our secrets  
the branches reach toward us  
like outstretched arms

I have found something good  
in the red-orange dying beauty

# LOVE SONG

# FROM JANUARY

MARISSA MEDLEY

She stands ankle deep  
in the brittle bones of winter,  
caved in by the pounds of parka  
given to her by her grandfather.  
The weightless crystal flowers fall and  
bury her sleepily in a bitter skin.  
Dizzy and warm—  
    a heated throat cured  
    by whiskey.



# LEESBURG, FLORIDA CIRCA 2007

MARISSA MEDLEY

I.

The poppy-colored tricycles  
fill the Florida gated village  
like swampy southern floods,  
and float the folks on concrete  
like pontoons in the backyard canal.

The rusted corners of the iron skeletons  
mirror the arthritic knees and bodies  
of the villagers, their morning routines  
done before I even consider it day.

II.

Gramma tells me to always wear shoes outside,  
even during the blasting light of day,  
right before the daily 2pm violet thunder.

Papa Jim killed a cottonmouth once,  
and took my time to pray for it.  
How was it to know that its presence  
conjured a fear of amputations  
and tissue-eating death?

I wasn't sure how thin squishy rubber  
could protect my ankles from  
a viper's already moving fangs.

III.

I sneaked a lot of food out  
from the kitchen that summer.

I didn't know self-preservation.

Guilt was always something  
like blood in my veins.

I didn't know self-love.

# BROKEN WINGS

TYLER BATES

*To Curtis,  
Whose light was so pure,  
he was the only one  
who couldn't see it.  
Through my words,  
your light will forever shine.*

Even from outside the doorway I can see his hands working a tan rope. His practiced fingers wind and pull the frayed ends rhythmically. I have seen him tie this knot perfectly a million times in the rope that used to hold his tire swing. But this time, something is different.

Soundlessly, I step into his old, outdoor wooden playhouse, striding closer to the corner where Austin sits hunched over his makeshift workplace. The old trunk that once held the endless treasures of a young boy's imagination lies overturned and broken at his feet. Withered vines, brown from the stuff air and blocked sunlight, weave in and out of the floorboards, climbing up and intertwining around the rusted lock, whose key was lost among cobweb covered cars without wheels, plastic guns without BBs, and a child's playroom with no children.

My pristine white slippers glide forward, floating down on a splintered floorboard. My body stills, waiting for the squeak of the rotting wood giving way, forcing his eyes up and away from the rope and in my direction.

The sound never comes.

The trim of my white lace dress drags across the dusty wood, yet the dust remains settled, the lace untainted.

My face falls as I kneel, studying his expression. His brows furrow in concentration. His rusted orange hair drips with sweat, sunken eyes cast downward. I wince, noticing the wrinkles that adorn each side of his tight lips and clenched teeth, serving as a grave reminder of the smile that used to always

play on his lips.

Palms facing upward, I raise my pale hands, searching for his face. I close my eyes and I get lost in the garden where Austin once chased frogs. I remember as soon as he would catch one, he would look back at me holding it tight, a dirt covered grin consuming his rosy plump face.

“I told ya I would catch it,” he buzzed.

I smiled down at him, eyes sparkling.

He quickly loosened his grip, careful not to drop the tiny creature on its head.

“I won’t hurt ‘im, Eri,” he soothed.

I nodded in approval.

“I could never hurt a livin’ creature.”

The jerk of Austin’s head forces the musty room before me back into focus. He stands, abruptly turning toward the hanging windowpane, leaving my hand to fall back down against my side.

He paces over to the window of the playhouse, blocking any rays of sun from illuminating the room. I rise from where I had been kneeling and peer over his shoulder. Following his eyes, I find myself staring into the huge back window of his small, gray house. His father is leaning back in his old green recliner, feet propped up, one hand firmly grasping a remote and the other cradling a beer. His brother, Ged, passes by the window. His wrinkly jersey is barely long enough for his lanky torso, and little wet spikes tame the wild orange hair they share. Ged sits on the couch next to his father, leaving room to his right where Austin would normally sit. He grabs an extra beer off of the coffee table, swiftly popping off the top with his belt buckle. The television screen flickers as the quarterback flicks his wrist, snapping the ball straight into the end zone.

Touchdown.

Ged jumps straight up, beer shooting from his bottle. Austin, able to see the game from the window of his playhouse, moves with him, his empty hands shooting straight up into fists.

My gentle smile fades as the excitement drains from his face. His eyes widen in

confusion, letting his face fall parallel with the floor. He shakes his head, snapping his eyes upward, back into his empty, tight-lipped grimace.

I reach out to comfort him, but he stalks back to the rope with determination. Yanking it from the ground, he starts working at it again.

First making an “S,” he tugs the rope his way.

I lean forward, watching carefully.

He then takes an end and firmly wraps it around the three lines of rope twice, leaving three loops.

I take a step in hopes his shaky hands won’t be able to finish the knot.

He wraps the end of the rope around the same three lines, pulling the smallest top loop tight against the neck of the big loop.

My eyes beg him to look my way and stop, but he doesn’t look up from the rope.

Pulling the bottom loop tight, he pulls the only remaining loop, securing the knot.

My breath comes out as a small gust of wind. He turns at the breeze.

My body crumples in despair.

The door creaks open, forcing my eyes up from the ground. Austin drops the rope and walks forward, scooting it under the trunk with his foot as he passes.

A heavy brunette smiles as she crosses the threshold. He quickly wipes his face with his hand. His face lights up at her, but I can still see the emptiness in his eyes.

“Hey Aust! I thought you would be watching the game.” She blushes and wipes a stray hair out of her eyes.

“Babe, you know I don’t have time for that. I need to get this place in better shape before I leave.” His eyes begged her to believe him.

She shifts her weight, passing a small paper bag covered in grease stains to her other hand. Noticing the movement, he steps forward, lifting the bag to eye level with two fingers.

He arches his unkempt eyebrow. “Is this for me?”

She steps forward, pushing the paper bag into his chest, looking up at him under her thick lashes. "I'm on my lunch break, so I thought I might bring you a little something."

"Let me guess...Big Joe's." He smirks, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

"Of course." She bats her eyes before they graze the floor. "But I can't stay. I only have time to drop it off."

His face falters just long enough for her to lean forward up on her toes and plant a soft kiss on his cheek. "I'll see you tomorrow night, I promise," he says.

The words too heavy on his tongue, he wraps both his arms around her waist, holding her there for a second too long.

She pulls away, still wrapped in his arms. "Don't look so sad. It's only one day, handsome."

Closing his eyes, he leans forward, barely grazing her lips. He shivers.

She turns toward the door. Their fingers touch until the distance is too great.

"Later, babe," she calls over her shoulder, her eyes lit up by her smile.

"I love you, always," Austin sighs back, his voice but a whisper.

I rush forward.

*How could she not see? How could she not help?* My mind races.

I beat my small fists at the girl's back, willing her to turn around and open her eyes. But she keeps on walking, my blows to her flesh only slipping through and slicing air.

The door closes with one final thud.

The screech of metal on wood calls me back to Austin. As he drags a lopsided chair to the trunk and positions it just under the beam facing the window, I pace circles around him, striding in close to get his attention. He stops and stares in my direction, and my eyes widen in anticipation. But he looks right through me to the fallen bookshelf in the corner. Austin walks straight at me. I jump to the

side, avoiding the uncomfortable feeling that fills me each time. Following closely behind, I see him grab a worn book covered in heart stickers. Austin dusts off the book with his free hand, tracing the familiar title: *The Kissing Hand*. I peer under the rubble of the bookshelf and see an old blue chair.

When Austin first learned how to read, he ran home from school every day. Still in his uniform, he went straight to the playhouse, busting through the doors and finally flinging his small body into the blue chair. He would reach over to the second shelf and pulled out his favorite book. As he read for hours, every so often his eyes would flit up to make sure I was listening, only letting his eyes cast back to the book when he saw me nod in encouragement.

I look back to Austin just in time to see him rip the book to shreds. My mouth falls open in disbelief. He grabs a broken crayon from the pile of books and begins to write feverishly. Sealing the folded page of scribbles with a heart sticker, he walks to the window, letting the note stick out between panels, blocking a small patch of sun.

Austin grabs the knotted rope from the ground and steps onto the chair. Swinging it over the beam twice, he ties a final sailor's knot against the wood to keep it in place. He peers through the loop as if it were a window—a window where hope and happiness live on the other side.

He makes a necklace of the loop, joining his golden crucifix. One tear slides down his cheek and over his lips, the salt almost stinging his tongue. He inhales musty air, sunbeams illuminating his dark face. He lifts one foot off the chair, balancing his weight on the ball of his other. The remnants of his bright smile pull at the corner of his lips, his torso leaning forward.

I lunge, hands reaching for his side. I fall forward, slipping through him.

His toes slide off the edge, flipping the chair over. For a second, the innocent little boy crosses Austin's face.

Regaining my balance, I stretch my arms before me, squeezing my eyes in anticipation of failure.

A strange warmth fills my arms. Tears streaming down my face, I slowly open my eyes. Beaming back at me is the face of a once haunted boy.

# CARINA

## (STAR ANIMAL)

NHUNG LAM

(you're an animal)

carina, my fine carina, tries hard to go dreaming up a  
better sunshine for her and i,  
but sweet soul ache of mine, you can't go looking for something  
that's always been a lie

and you've had things hard, i know it, i know it  
small one you are so lovely, you're lovely  
why can't you see it oh honey, oh honey  
don't blame yourself for someone who blew it, they blew it  
(you're an animal)

carina, you're full of something magical  
blame them for trying then you go run hiding  
virtues you hold high, things that you kill  
carina, you're made of marble and i'm tired of fighting

and you've had things hard, i know it, i know it  
small one you are so lovely, you're lovely  
why can't you see it oh honey, oh honey  
don't blame yourself for someone who blew it, they blew it  
(you're an animal)

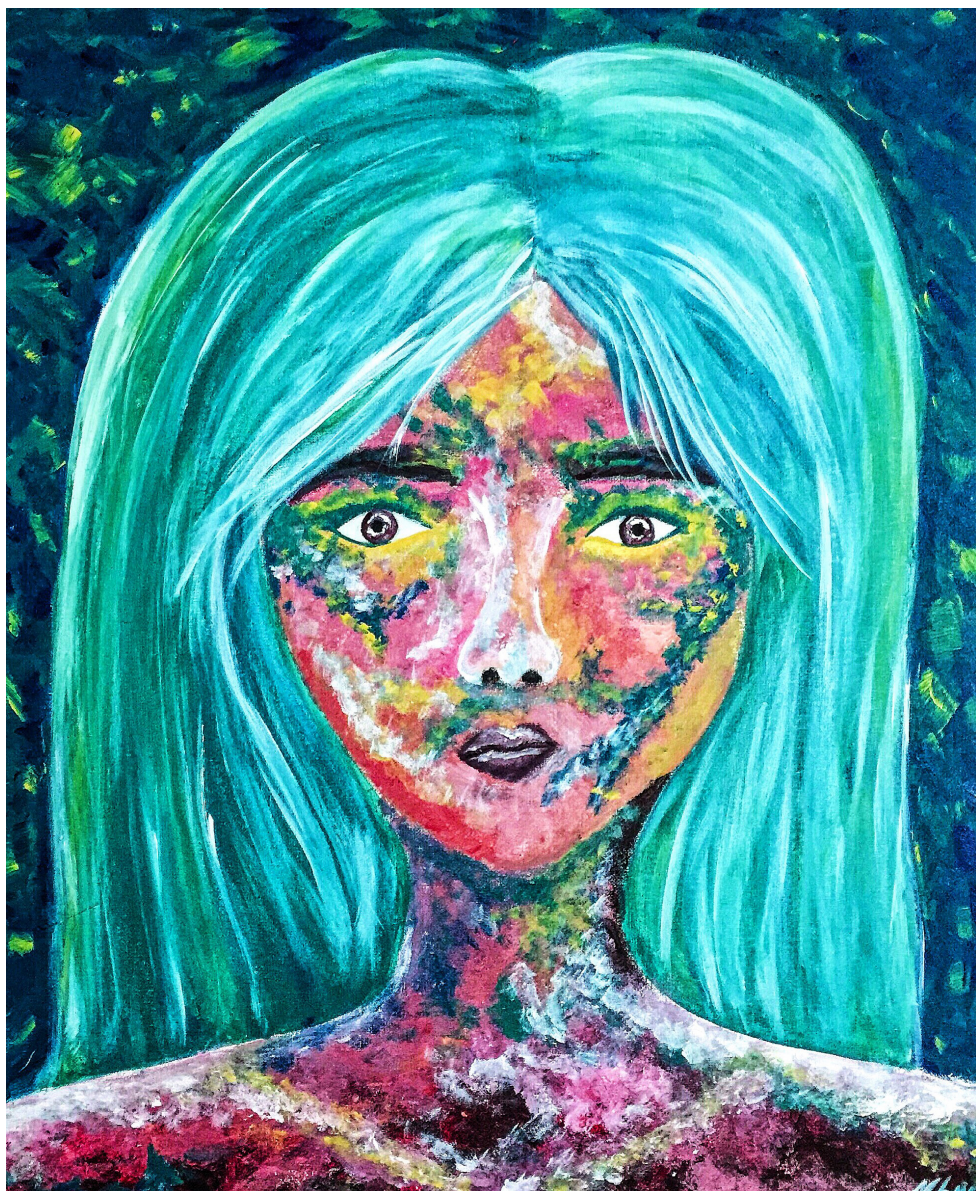
carina, lonely princessa, caught up in a storm  
calling out for help, feeling so lost and torn  
to take you into warmth has never been my choice  
carina, you've lost your way and your angelic voice



(you're an animal)  
and you've had things hard, i know it, i know it  
small one you are so lovely, you're lovely  
why can't you see it oh honey, oh honey  
don't blame yourself for someone who blew it, they blew it  
(you're an animal)

# FISH EMPRESS

NHUNG LAM



# NEGLECT

SAM STEBBINS

The scrambling feet of bees,  
the frantic twitch if viewed up close,  
hyper detail.  
Consider the loose skin  
around my knuckles,  
barely  
clinging to bone.  
Can the bee distinguish  
the places where  
each hair connects to body,  
bands of amber and black,  
the way I feel each hair on my head  
creeping from scalp?  
Does the bee see each follicle  
as if through a microscope  
before slipping poison underneath?

Whispered to a child: Stand very still. *If the bee does not see you move, it will mistake you for concrete and neglect to sting.*

# SELF PORTRAIT AS AMANITA MUSCARIA

DELANY LEMKE

You will find me anywhere there is detritus  
Pushing through wet woodland decay.  
My bloody cap sprouting at your toes,  
Cartoonish and vulnerable.

Sometimes in a faerie ring  
That you tremble at the edge of.

Take me into your mouth.  
You need only break the skin  
Where my musicmol waits  
To mix with you saliva.

Things you never looked at twice  
Will come alive.  
Your fingerprints will radiate.

I'll shake you from within.

# ATTICS

RACHEL BOES

Either I was born without meanness  
or someone took it from me and said  
*in order to benefit me you must lose this-*  
and so I lost it  
somewhere between the development of my hippocampus and my association of  
memory.

I was preoccupied.

Preoccupied with the candles in the windows of other people's houses:

I would look through their panes and see

warm crockpot dinners and

smiles of the mothers who enjoyed the spiral cut ham they found on sale  
at Aldi

and the frowns of the children who still do not like cauliflower

and there,

in their attics,

I saw shadows and silhouettes of dusty baby furniture

and wondered at cribs: how did the child who still does not like cauliflower not  
once break the wooden bars?

In my memory, there is an attic.

It is where I keep every person I know strung up like marionettes,

and when I need to,

I pull them from their hangers and click their wooden shoes on my stage.

I move them in ways

they never have in life.

And I do not hate them.

# TENOCHTITILAN

RACHEL BOES

The smell of summer is honey-warm in Arizona. My dad used to say that he wished he could taste it on toast in June. I can feel the buzz in the air as my legs stick to my leather seat.

I take out the map again, and I can see a lone desert tree that is marked in front of me. Not only does it have a drawing on my map, but also a little carving of an eagle with a snake in its claws is on the nearest branch. It's there that I begin digging with a spade. I gently push the dirt aside at first, but I soon begin to ravage the ground. I hear the rip of strong roots pulling away from the soil; worms are sliced into gooey quarters and I don't care as they writhe.

Should I have brought a toothbrush? I can't imagine myself sitting as a paleontologist does, brushing the dirt off of old things as I bake in the sun. There is a sudden crack as my spade turns over the next layer of dirt. I'm not sure what I had expected from this note, but I know a tool-box was not what I had romantically imagined. I can see the rusted head and hinges as the plastic handle peeks out from under a stone. Now that I have found it, I begin to tear at the spot with my hands. The pressure pops off my fake nails.

Once the box is unearthed, I pluck at the hinges with my spade until they come free. The papers are dewy and in threat of being torn. Bits of soil had poked through the holes of the tool-box and left stains. I have my papers and I am free.

\*\*\*

I don't remember the fire that Mama talks about. She says, "It ruined your life, *mariposa*," but I've always felt fine. Mama says that there were a bunch of gringos that came down from the small town near the field where we lived. The little huts were so close together, so when one caught fire, the rest all burned.

“They carried you out like a princess. You were on top of their shoulders smiling like a blazing warrior.” Mama mentions that often. She also invents a new way that Papi was performing some act of heroism when he died. Papi was lifting burning boards off a friend. Papi was making sure everyone was awake and out. We both knew he had really just gone back into the shack to grab all the cash that he had tucked under the mattress. We weren’t supposed to be living there (most men bring themselves and send money home), but Papi couldn’t leave me.

\*\*\*

I knock on Mama’s door with the tool-box in my sweaty hand. I had expected Marcos, my brother, to slap me when he opened the door, but he met me with a light, icy glare.

“Where have you been?” he says. I push him aside with the sweep of my leg.

“Does it matter? As long as Mama’s alright.” She had, in her old age, become incapable of doing anything on her own. One of us must watch her at all times, but Marcos is often gone. I walk into the kitchen, setting the tool-box on the table where she is eating. She stuffs the food slowly into her mouth with a shaking hand; peas are smashed all around her face. I pull a baby wipe from the pack that is sitting on the table and clean her up. She nods thanks and goes back to chewing her food. After a moment, she notices the box on the table and points at it with a questioning look. I open it and pull out the papers. My birth certificate, social security card, everything my family said I never had.

“Mama, I was born here. I could have done so much. How could you tell me I was undocumented? Did you need me to be a seamstress my whole life?” She sat there and began to shake her head, her whole body following suit.

Marcos slams his hand down on the table. “Why are you interrogating her? She could have died with you leaving her alone like that. Now I know you’re trying to kill her.”

Mama waves Marcos away, shrugging him off like he isn’t here. “*Mariposa*, I could not lose you. Where would I be without my beautiful daughter?”



There was pity for a minute inside of me, calling me to the place where my mother tries to take my heart. I don't know what to say for a moment. I am spinning toward a place I shouldn't be. Where I lose the idea of myself, myself, where I think of nothing but my Mama and how I am supposed to be for her. "I would never have abandoned you." I can taste the acid of the lie.

Mama just stares at me for a moment and pushes aside her food to look at the papers. "I had Marcos bury them for me. I never wanted to forget where they were. I thought, when she's ready..." I look at my brother and he nodded.

I was always ready, imagining how I would leave for California and go to a college since I was little. I would dress like all of the white girls and we would go out to Starbucks together, talking about the party we went to last night. How men had chased us and we had laughed at them. I would be untouchable, invincible, and powerful.

"I'm going to leave now... you know that," I say, looking Mama in the eyes. She nods and again her tiny body is shaking along with her.

"I just never wanted to lose you. You've taken such good care of me," Mama said, placing a hand on mine. "Do you remember the Aztec legend I used to tell you?" I shake my head, but I do remember vaguely.

"Well, the Aztec's had been wandering so long looking for a place to build their great city that they must have had so many thorns and blisters on their feet. *Entonces*, they were told by the sun god, Huitzilopochtli, that there was a place they would build their empire. They would know this place because they would see an eagle with a snake in its claws perched on a cactus. When they did see it on an island, they found their city, Tenochtitlan<sup>2</sup>."

Mama taps on my hand again and points toward the tool-box. I give it to her and she flips it open, grabbing a package from the top lid that I had not noticed. She

---

1 Spanish word for then.

2 The capital of the Aztec empire located on an island in Lake Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico



takes out a necklace. On it is a carved piece of an eagle with a snake in its claws. It is so beautifully painted with rubies for the snakes and the eagle's eyes.

“Your father carved this for you because what he wanted the most for you was to find the place to build your city.” I take the necklace and tie it to me, kissing the carving.

I take Mama's hand and squeeze gently. “Mama, you are my city.”

# KYLAR, GAZING

PAIGE TIBBE



# & AS FOR MY MOTHER

KATE KOBOSKO

Most inherit freckles, almond eyes,  
and peanut butter allergies.  
But from you, I got the memories:  
peonies leaking  
fragrance in the kitchen. Also turkey chili  
bubbling in a crockpot  
so the house smelled and I snuck  
a spoonful. Kitchen duties.  
Junk-stuffed antique stores.  
An attic with a door and a string pulley.  
I watched you have one  
glass of Moscato before the  
headache. The eggs expired before we used them;  
no homemade cookies in this house.  
We angled clementines to the light,  
checking for seeds. Orange prisms  
fractured the artificial sun of that  
Tiffany lamp. You sat in lawn chairs and  
watched us from  
water wings to life jackets to  
nothing at all. You let go.  
The backyard foliage was more trouble than  
you'd like. Clothes snagged on

thorns and branches. “We’ll never get a puppy,”  
you announced over Cheerios and Trix yogurt.  
But there we were (ten years later) with carpet  
stains and chew toys wedged under the couch.  
For you, it was the smell of coffee,  
but not the taste. Last gulp of cocoa  
from an oversized Orioles mug, steam tickling  
your nose. The evidence of exhaled breath on  
glass French doors when you pressed against them  
(spying on the neighbors). Old Bay, salt, and  
pepper at dinner. We’re from Maryland, did you know?  
Stationary living, like the old lady in the shoe. We  
grow where we’re planted. Simple as that.

# HIGHWAY HOUSE

KATE KOBOSKO

Handwoven rugs helped us skid to a stop  
when we got to running too fast  
in that old house.  
But not without a price—they  
burned our bare skin and  
sent us sliding into the furniture.  
Everything under those low ceilings was  
ours to explore;  
we hid in the coat closet,  
stuffed each other down the laundry chute,  
and made trampolines of blow-up mattresses.

Our parents had a claim on the house  
(legal and otherwise);  
it was their handprints that  
decorated the do-it-yourself plaque above the sink,  
their school uniforms and college  
yearbooks in the attic.  
But the place inherited us  
like a used car owner who's discovered  
his purchase has a problematic transmission.  
We came with baggage,  
bulk, our own set of rules.

It was a childhood home  
now ill-fit for children.  
But there isn't much you can do to  
combat a sense of belonging.  
We built a fort in the backyard tree and  
screamed our battle calls:  
"this land is ours!"  
Our parents waved the white flag and  
we stayed rooted.

# GEM CITY

REED KARSH

When Perry's brig was sinking, killed by the British Broadside,  
he grabbed his blue flag, prepared to fight on, and cried, "Don't give up the ship."

When the shipyards shut down, and Hammermill closed its doors  
on thousands who needed those paper jobs, we replied, "Don't give up the ship."

When local 506 began negotiations with GE to save the branches  
from the root rot that had already claimed a third of the tree, they cried, "Don't  
give up the ship."

When heroin took us in its shriveled white hands, seizing everything  
and holding on, we roared as our friends, lovers, and children died, "Don't give  
up the ship!"

And with the drugs came the shootings, the bodies lying cold  
on the asphalt of German St., the smoking guns beside, but we won't give up the  
ship.

And with the budget cuts, the shrinking tax base—thousands  
fleeing the city—the schools will soon be gone. At least we tried to not give up the  
ship.

Because there's no light that compares to watching the sun bleed  
red and orange and pink into the sands and the bay at Presque Isle, don't give up  
the ship.

Because I grew up and grew fat on elephant ears  
at Waldameer—I ate so many I got sick on every ride—don't give up the ship.

Because fishing the dark waters in Misery Bay with my father  
was the happiest I can remember being as a child, don't give up the ship.

Because I used to pretend I was a caveman in the stony  
room at the Children's Museum (the room with the slide), don't give up the ship.

Because my mother chose, of all her options, this place to live,  
and we buried her in Wintergreen Gorge Cemetery when she died, don't give up  
the ship.

Because my college friends point their dismissive fingers  
at the polluted beaches, the layoffs, the drugs, the crime, don't give up the ship.

Because when you do that thing you do—German Fest,  
Polish fest, Roar on the Shore—I can't hold back a smile, don't give up the ship.

Erie, I'm begging you. You're my gem,  
my first home. I need you to survive. Please don't give up.



# THE PLAYGROUND WEDDING

NICOLE GRASSI

His daddy was drinking again. Tommy didn't see it, but he could hear. Daddy always yelled when he was drinking. When Mama didn't think Tommy could hear, she'd tell her sister that he was an angry drunk, and Aunt Kelly would offer her a room, but Mama never took it. She wasn't happy here.

Tommy squeezed himself between his winter boots and a basket of toy trucks in the back of his closet. Mama didn't want him getting hurt when Daddy was drinking, so she always told Tommy to hide until everything got quiet—even then, he had to be careful. And no matter what he heard, he wasn't supposed to come out.

Mama started screaming in the living room and Tommy covered his ears and shut his eyes to pretend that it wasn't happening. He tried thinking about Christmas to block it out, but Daddy had enjoyed the eggnog a little too much and Tommy had found himself hiding under the tree behind the colorfully wrapped presents. On Tommy's birthday it had been beer, and Tommy hid under his bed.

Then he remembered when he married Becky.

\*\*\*

They were on the playground where the teachers wouldn't see, and all their friends had gathered around. She wore a white shirt that day—girls are supposed to wear white—and he just wore a green t-shirt because he didn't really know what boys were supposed to wear. It was warm and sunny because winter had ended and spring was here. Her friends picked her a bouquet of dandelions, clovers, and little purple flowers, and one of his friends performed the ceremony because he was the only one who had been to a wedding before. Their friends gave them cootie shots, too, so they wouldn't infect each other because the big kids said cooties can kill you.

She walked toward him with the biggest smile on her face. Her hair was in pigtails and she clutched at her flowers because she was nervous. She was missing her two front teeth, and her knees were all scraped up and scabbed from when she fell the other day. But she was happy, so he was happy.

For the next week of recesses they were on their honeymoon, and their friends left them alone. The two sat on the jungle gym, held hands, and talked about everything. She told him that she loved him and the gumball machine ring he'd gotten her. He said that when he was older, he'd buy her the biggest diamond ring in the world because he loved her, too. Becky even put her head on his shoulder one afternoon. Tommy didn't really know what grown-ups did on honeymoons, but he hoped that they had as much fun as he did.

\*\*\*

Daddy slammed the front door louder than he ever had before. Mama stopped screaming. Tommy didn't hear her crying anymore either. It was quiet, but it wasn't right. He waited in the dark with his trucks and just listened, and that's when he heard footsteps. They weren't his mama's little mouse steps; they were his daddy's big, blundering drunk steps. Then Tommy's bedroom door slammed against the wall. Daddy was still mad. Tommy heard him looking around the room and tearing it apart. He heard the bed scrape against the floor, and his daddy stumbled; he heard stuffed animals hitting the floor; the chair in the corner creaked. The closet was the last place, and Tommy got scared.

The door opened but Daddy blocked the light from coming in. Tommy just kept cowering with his boots and his trucks. Then Daddy pulled him out by the arm, into his room, into the hallway, all the way into the living room, and that's when Tommy knew why Mama was so quiet—she was sleeping. She was just lying on the floor facing away from the stairs, taking a nap. Daddy pushed him toward her,

but he tripped over her instead because his daddy didn't know his own strength when he was drunk. That's when Tommy saw the blood, blood everywhere: blood on her, on her clothes, on the rug, now on him; it squished under him when he fell. Her eyes were still open, staring at him, staring at nothing.

Daddy made him get against the living room wall and then he had a gun in his hand out of nowhere. Tommy's legs turned to jelly, but his daddy yelled at him when he started sliding down the wall. So Tommy stood there and watched his daddy point that gun at him.

# BIOLUMI- NESCENCE

DANA TRUPA

You taught us how to suffocate  
Fireflies: snuff life in  
mason jars, luminescent  
organs & seal lids tight.  
Flashes/signals      celebrate death.  
Split—wings you tore/wore  
our small bodies & flew lights  
as inside  
trophies.

# F STREET

DANA TRUPA

Nana's fried smelts  
in a black skillet,  
Pap Pap's chew spittoon,  
Dad's stealthy, hot-  
pepper fingers  
slashing open eyes.  
Great Granddaddy  
was a shoemaker  
who, in 1929,  
jumped  
the Smithfield Street  
Bridge. His son,  
a truck driver who  
hunted groundhogs,  
drowned  
the blue heeler pups  
stashed under  
Frankie Sicilia's porch.  
He plucked them  
by the scruff  
by the scruff  
by the scruff  
and stuffed them  
into a potato sack  
and tossed that sack  
into the Ohio River.  
That's when  
Uncle Jack's addiction  
to heroin got worse—

after 'Nam.  
Before 'Nam,  
he cocked a black  
shotgun  
to Pap Pap's head  
and said:

*If you ever hit  
our Mother again,  
I'll kill you.*

# THE PHILIPPINES GREETSS ME ON THE SHORE

XAVIER SMITH

My unkempt child,  
you have let your bronze skin tarnish.  
Who planted such a splendid crop  
in a wintered scalp with a beached face?  
I tug your thick black curls & wonder where is my child?  
I asked for a son,  
not a weeded harvest.

My unfed child,  
arms and legs gangly and dangling  
like you have never known a border  
or embrace from your own skin.

But still you are sand and blood  
rendered tasteless from the boil  
with a salted tongue kept  
tender for foreign dinner conversation.

They ask for language, and you give them static.  
They ask for food, and you give them steak knife enamel.  
They ask for subject, and you give them yourself.

What a lost child you are,  
an untracked buoy  
stranded on asphalt.  
Debris sinking my pearled coast.

How much silver wraps your ankles?  
How long have you been drowning?  
I asked for a son,  
not another boat on my shore.



# BEFORE THE CASKET

XAVIER SMITH

1.

I was always closer to my father so I grew up how a black boy should  
we'd bump Whoodini and Brian McKnight in the car like black fathers and sons  
should  
and when I was seven my father left like black fathers should  
my nightly lullabies became my mother weeping in the crater of a half-empty bed  
but just like any father should  
he came back so I grew up how every black boy should

I was always this black boy until the fifth grade  
when my classmates deemed me unworthy of my name  
only called me nigger in February  
it was so funny  
they laughed like I was a minstrel show  
just an asian boy in black face

But maybe I do know what it is to be black  
I have not lost a close relative yet  
but I already know how it will feel  
it is to be at home  
the living room packed with laughter  
then feel the chuckling be wrecked  
as the news reports another unrelated black child dead

the reporter's unfeeling voice speaking the victim's name  
like he wasn't even a citizen  
even 3-year-old Mikey  
half black like myself  
knew to hush his laughter in respect  
we weren't taught this  
just born with it

2.

I never feel filipino  
my grandma never taught me tagalog  
or why we bring salt and rice into a new home  
we live in America now; I want us to be American  
she'd say with her dried mango accent  
and the Roman Catholic smile of Miguel Lopez  
bringing false salvation to the Philippines

but maybe I do know what it is to be filipino  
I know what it is to be an island  
to have waves of hands always reaching for me  
trying to anchor their fingers in this foreign scalp  
that I call mine  
that they call theirs  
that my grandma calls theirs  
conquered and reconquered until the exotic wears off  
to let El Viejo settle into my veins  
unnoticed until White Jesus is burned into my eyelids  
a reminder the He died for their sins  
my grandma calling out to God  
while White Mother Mary is kneeled  
on every night stand  
head draped in cloth to muffle the sounds  
of dried mangos wailing

3.

If I am found in a full bloom of red how will they identify the body?

Will I finally be a black boy again?  
Do we march for deceased filipino boys?  
Will those who clean up my blood be absolved of their sins?  
Will FOX News pronounce Xavier Smith right?  
Will Mikey hush his laughter when he sees the news?  
Will my grandmother notice how American I've become?  
Will they bury my casket in salt and rice?  
Will Mother Mary hear me at the gates wailing?

# PERSONAL SECRET

DANIEL HESLEP

Let me tell you a personal secret.  
Sometimes, I sit down in the shower.

I do this for no reason  
Other than to feel water & the rhythm  
Beat staccato on the crown of my down-turned skull.

& when I sit this way,  
Sometimes you are there in the water,  
Surrounding me in an embrace.

Then I see myself a sapling's thirst.  
Then I am the promise of height & leaves  
& everything I have done is the water's.

Until I turn off the shower & nothing has changed.  
The world turns & you're still gone.

# ORANGES

DANIEL HESLEP

If I could write an orange  
and peel it into five equidistant parts  
arrayed as a sun,

You wouldn't be in any of the pieces,  
or the burst of juices, or even the torque of the peel  
discarded on a sunlit bench.

Rather, mischievous you  
would pluck a piece of my sun  
and eat it with a blooming smile.

And I (with mock indignation)  
would tease and hold you close, glad in knowing  
that my effects nourish you,

That you glow not through my hand, or my sun,  
but through that which is yours,  
and that which is mine and you loved  
and made your own.

# THE CHALLENGE

GLEN PARKER

Deck's eyes blinked open, not sure if they were moving at all. The room was so dark he had to at first rely on the sound of a soft beeping coming from a nearby heart rate monitor to make sure he was awake. The beeping sped slightly as he rose up onto his elbows, the sheets sliding effortlessly across him. A few streams of light fell through the drapes of the wide hospital room window, dim and synthetic from some neon sign, telling Deck it was night out. He rubbed at his arm, but found it wrapped in bandages. The beeping sped again, and he thought of pulling the bandages off. Why did he have bandages on? The procedure had been on his brain.

Bright white light flooded into the room from Deck's right as the door swung open, letting in the sounds of a bustling hallway outside. The silhouette of a wispy-haired man, slightly slouched and dressed in a long, white coat, walked swiftly through the open door, the glare from the sudden light too much for Deck to make out any further details before the door swung shut again and the room refilled with darkness. "You're awake," the man started, walking over to the various machines set up beside Deck's bed. Deck hummed an affirmative "mmhmm," still groggy from the anesthetic. The man hummed as well, first to acknowledge Deck's answer, then once for each of the various machines he checked. The last few beeped in harmony with him as he pushed their buttons. Satisfied, he turned to Deck and asked, "So, how are you feeling, Deck?"

Rubbing his bandaged temple, Deck answered, “Groggy. Thirsty. Bit of a headache. Hungover, basically.” His voice was hoarse. The man chuckled.

“That’s perfectly normal, and to be expected after the procedure you underwent. Turn your head?” the man asked with the tips of his fingers lightly touching Deck’s other temple to prompt him. Deck complied, and the man leaned closer for inspection. How he could make out anything in this darkness was beyond Deck, but perhaps it was standard. Perhaps his eyes were sensitive after his procedure. He didn’t know everything. The bandage on his temple lifted, and Deck felt an attached scab pull his sensitive skin up with it. He winced, and the bandage quickly fell. “Sorry, sorry,” the man stammered. “It is healing well, at least.” Still Deck flashed an annoyed glare at him, sure it was missed in the dim light. The man straightened his back, turned toward the window, and walked over to it. “Let’s get some light in here, eh?” he asked, reaching up to pull the looped string that retracted the drapes. Dim orange, white, and purple light filled the sterile, white hospital room. Outside the several-stories-high window stretched a busy New York City street filled with pedestrians casually crossing the road in between gaps of brightly lit autonomous cars that flew by. The man put his hands on his hips and stared out the window. “Quite a view, isn’t it?”

Deck found himself nodding, amazed that he could still be so enamored by the city’s intoxicating lights. He supposed that was just a part of his rural roots. “It is...” They stared together a moment, before Deck got annoyed by the pointlessness of it. “So, what’s the word, Doc? Did it work?” The man chuckled, turning his head to look sideways toward Deck, his face still silhouetted against the light behind it. He nodded, turning back to the window.

“Oh, it worked all right,” he said, still nodding. “As far as we can tell, it worked perfectly.” A wave of relief passed over Deck. “Your colleagues, your son, even your wife all agree it’s you. We’ve had a few weeks to test it while you were out, and they’ve all shown a near perfect transfer.”

“A few weeks?” Deck interrupted. “I thought everything went well?”

“It did.” The man stayed calm, even as Deck’s beeping sped again. “Some people just sleep longer than others. Having your consciousness copied onto a computer

program is quite a shock to the system, after all.”

Deck nodded in understanding. Of course it was normal, he was just still out of it after waking up. What really mattered was that the procedure had worked. It worked! Now he could get back to work without the nagging fear of dying and losing all his progress! He could work forever until he'd found the answer. He could double his efforts, triple, or quadruple them. He could have legions of himself working toward his experiments. Deck started grinning giddily. “Can I meet him?” he asked, thinking he sounded like a little kid in that instant.

Another chuckle from the man. “Don’t you think that could be a bit strange, meeting yourself?” Deck rolled his eyes.

“Don’t think I can handle it?” he mocked.

“I just don’t want to risk any unnecessary shock while you’re still recovering.” Deck slouched back on his elbows, letting the man win that brief spat. “What I do want, though,” the man turned to begin walking slowly toward Deck, “is to know why someone such as yourself would go through such a risky procedure as this? You could have died half a dozen times during, and even then at these early stages, the rate of success is still below 60 percent. Why risk everything on this?”

Another eye roll from Deck. Hadn’t he heard this enough times from his wife? He sighed in anticipation of another explanation. “Why wouldn’t I?” he asked, drawing the phrase out to show his annoyance. “Everyone who’s ever lived has died or will die. And to each of us, it’s only natural to want to prolong the fleeting lives we do have. Some might look at a computer and think it too foreign, too mechanical to ever compare to a human consciousness, but not me. I already think of myself and everyone else as sorts of ‘biological’ computers. How great a leap is it truly for me to compare diet and exercise to virtual existence?”

The man’s shadowed hands dug in to his coat pockets. “Well, when you put it that way, not very great at all. But I’m still curious; why you? Your work could save billions if you are successful. You would risk the world’s chance at immortality for a greater one at your own?”



“Of course I would!” Deck snapped, feeling attacked. “Damn my morals all you want, the damn procedure worked, didn’t it!” He’d risen back up, past his elbows, now holding himself up with his palms. The bandages at his wrists strained and stung. “You want to know the truth about the reverse-aging experiments my team has done? They’re failing! All of them! Nothing’s coming anywhere close to our projected results, and even if they were working, the model we’re using now relies on using cocktails of mostly non-renewable elements that, after a few hundred years of harvesting, would be completely used up. And that model’s not just based on Earth; that’s assuming that after we figure it out, we soon begin mining the necessary elements from the moon, Mars, Venus, and the asteroid belt. Sure, we might buy a few hundred more years by mining Jupiter and the other gas giants for their deposits. But, unfortunately, we could just as easily focus on painting rather than space exploration once the anti-aging therapy is perfected, and if that happens, we’ll run out of the necessary elements in less than a hundred years.

“But by then, people will have bought into the therapy enough so that our culture will have all but forgotten death. Birth rates will plummet while the population constantly increases, and everyone will be so dependent on the therapy that when rumors begin spreading of a coming shortage, nothing will change. We’re all too afraid of death to allow our own to prolong the lives of others. Then one day the mines will dry up, the last shipments will go out, and the clinic doors will shut. And then, death. All over again, only now it will return with a vengeance. Most people will be well past their natural expiration dates and will die within months. Many others will die in the sure-to-come riots. Wars may break out. We might even face extinction for our hubris. But, best case scenario, we wind up back here in our fleeting, impermanent lives.”

The man had been nodding along silently, his hands behind his back. After a moment of silence, and after Deck had lowered back into his bed, he replied, “So, you’re hedging your bets, then.” That got a quick burst of a chuckle out of Deck, and once it was out he couldn’t help letting a few more out. The man even joined in. Deck nodded between laughs, happy to have the tension diffused. “Can’t say I blame you. You’ve got to feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders.” Another nod from Deck, though this one brought more sullen emotions.

“You know, I’ve half a mind to say they should cut my funding and give it to you,” Deck admitted. “My work’s a dead end, but this procedure could actually lead somewhere. Sure, it might not be the same me that you’re talking to right now, but that copy is me, right? The same thought processes, tendencies, preferences. My essence, at least, can live forever in that.”

“We hear that sentiment from most of our patients,” the man said. He turned to look back out the window and stared in silence for a few moments. “But what do you want to do with it?” he finally asked, the hands in his pockets rising and falling back to his sides. “What makes immortality worth it?”

At first Deck didn’t take the question seriously. Worth? Life is the only thing that truly has any worth. By its existence, all other things can be perceived. Life, in and of itself, is worth it. But then the nuance of the question became more clear, and Deck understood it to mean what he intended to do with his newly bought time. He smirked. “Goals,” he answered, which got the man to turn briefly away from the window. “I want to see what happens. My whole life, I’ve heard talk of ‘colonies on mars in the next thirty years,’ or ‘the coming of the A.I. singularity,’ or even just an ‘end to world hunger,’ and yet their due dates just keep being pushed backward. I’ll die before I see any of them. Many of my friends already have. But that’s not what I want. I don’t want it to just happen; I want to see it! I was promised all these things from the time I was just a boy, and all of them are still reserved for my great-great-grandchildren. I don’t want them to see it; I want to see it with them!”

“Even if that future is one filled with panic and strife like the one you predicted?” the man asked, teasingly. Deck flashed a glare toward him.

“I’m allowed to hope,” he replied simply.

A hummed chuckle came from the man. “Of course. I know how important hope can be. It was all we had when we started these procedures, and now... Well, here you are.”

“Here I am.” Deck let the conversation end at that, or at least, he thought he would, until another thought crossed his mind. Where was Dr. Sing, the one who

had prepped Deck before surgery? This man at the window wasn't him, and yet he seemed to know all about Deck's case. "So who are you, anyways, Doc?"

"Who am I?" The man's back stiffened as he pulled back a few inches in surprise. "I'm the one who's been overseeing your recovery these last few weeks. Why, I practically haven't left your side since your procedure was finished."

"So you're..."

"Specialized in recovery, yes. We have physicians trained for every step of the process."

Deck's eyes rolled. "How 'bout a name, Doc?" he asked in a sarcastic tone.

The man's shoulders visibly sighed. After a moment, an arm reached up to scratch the back of his head. "I knew I should've let someone else do this," he said quietly to himself, but Deck still caught it. The beeping heart monitor sped up, and Deck rose on his palms again. The man turned and walked back toward the door he came in through, stopping just beside Deck. "Are you sure you want to know that?" he asked, in a manner that told Deck he would not like the answer. After a moment of hesitation, Deck nodded.

With a flick, the white fluorescent bulbs overhead lit up, causing Deck to squint at the bright, sterile room around him. Once his eyes had adjusted, they returned to the man on his right, and his mouth dropped open. Beside him was a practical mirror. Everything—the face, the hair, the slightly off-centered nose, and the scars on his hands—was identical to Deck's. Doubt filled him as his eyes searched all over the man's body for some imperfection, some sign that this was a hoax, but he found none. "Y—You're..." he stammered.

"Deckard Maxon, genetic engineer. But my friends call me Deck." Deckard's hands were on his hips again, flaunting his authenticity with a sly grin across his face.

"But, but how? You, you're—" Deck tried to ask, but was still caught on his own tongue.

Deckard knelt down by Deck's bed to be at eye level with him. "I know this is confusing. I know you thought you knew what was happening, and now you have no idea. That's why I'm going to explain it to you." Deckard's hand reached up and grabbed Deck's shoulder. After a moment, Deck nodded that he was ready. "What were we just talking about?" he asked.

Deck raised an eyebrow. "Work. Why I—or we, rather—do it. Why we decided to undergo the... the procedure." Something clicked in Deck's mind. This was part of the procedure. It had to be. This was his copy. It had to be.

"And you told me why." Deckard's voice snapped Deck back to attention. "You want to see it all and you're scared you won't be able to. Well, Deck, this is your chance to see it all. Remember when I said you were out for a few weeks?" Deck nodded, curious. "As it turns out, it's been a bit longer than that since you underwent the procedure. The three weeks I was referring to were just how long it took to grow you that new body to inhabit." Deck's eyes shot down to his arms, the bandages still wrapped tightly. He gripped them in his fingers and pondered ripping them off to see what was hidden beneath. The pain he felt at their slightest tug dissuaded him, though, and he soon looked back at Deckard for him to continue.

"You know, *you know* that the man Deckard Maxon underwent a procedure to have his consciousness copied onto a computer program. And when you woke up, you believed you were Deckard Maxon as he woke up from that very procedure. But is it so hard for you to accept that instead I am Deckard Maxon? That instead of being the body that underwent the procedure, you are the consciousness it produced?"

Deck pulled his shoulder away from Deckard's hand. He sat up fully in his bed, staring at his hands before rubbing at the various bandages wrapped around his head and face. A lump was forming in his throat. "I am not you, Deck," Deckard said, moving to the foot of the bed to look Deck in the eyes. "I'm not some impostor trying to take over your life. That life was already mine. It's always been mine. Instead you, Deck, are me."

Deck's eyes locked in a glare with Deckard's, filled with a kind of hate he'd never felt before. "Who the fuck does this guy think he is?" Deck thought. And yet, at the back of his mind, he knew what he was hearing was true. At least, he believed it to be.

Finally Deckard broke the staring contest by standing and walking back over to the window, asking, "Remember how I said it had been longer than three weeks?" His hand hovered near a switch on the wall. "Take a guess how long ago I had that procedure performed." Deck only sighed in response. "Oh, come on, guess."

"Thirty years," Deck spat out.

Deckard chuckled. "Noooo, not even close."

Deck's eyebrow rose again. "Two hundred," he answered.

"Wrong again."

Deck fell back to his elbows, annoyed. "Just tell me, you fuck."

"Rubber and glue, Deck," Deckard teased with a wagging finger before returning it to the switch. "Actually, it's been around five thousand years." With that, Deckard flicked the switch on the wall, and the display of the dimly lit orange and purple city street flickered with static before being replaced with a bright blue and white view of clouds peppered with the peaks of skyscrapers poking through. Strange shapes floated between the peaks in thin, rough lines, and Deck squinted to see what they were until one flew by the window in a streak roughly shaped like a car. At that his eyes flared open, and he looked to Deckard for answers. Surely this was fake. This window was just some monitor they were playing images over. Just a joke his colleagues were pulling on him.

"No." Deck started shaking his head. "No, no, no, no, no. I don't believe any of this pathetic excuse for a gag. I want Dr. Sing in here, now!" His fist slammed the thin metal bar at the side of his bed.

The room was silent, save for the calming of Deck's breath and heart rate monitor. Deckard looked him up and down with one eyebrow raised, then walked slowly back to the bed. "You don't believe me?" he finally asked rhetorically. "You think this is all a gag?" His hands reached up and grabbed at the bandages around Deck's forehead. "Fine. Ignore me. Ignore the window. But don't ignore your eyes." He pulled the bandages away, careful with the scabs around Deck's temples. As the cloth fell onto his lap, Deck saw the blood on them was not red, but blue. Deep, spilled-ink blue, with purple scabs stuck in the center. He looked to Deckard, the beeping speeding up again, and the man reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small mirror. "If it's not the future, then how do you look like this?"

With the mirror pointed at his face, Deck could see why the bandages had been in place. His face was swollen and streaked with bloody creases, and he had a massive brow and forehead that protruded out and down to a sharp point at the bridge of his nose. His jawline was perfectly straight, save where smaller protrusions pointed down from the angles on each side, and his lips were narrower, yet taller than they had been. When he opened his mouth, he found it lined with sharp, black teeth, and that it stretched much farther down than normal. His hair and eyebrows were gone, replaced with thin barbs that were now free to move with the bandages off. He raised his eyebrows, and the barbs stood on end. He slouched, and they fell back down. He thought about them rising back up, and they rose. He looked back to Deckard. "I'm..."

"Not in a human body," the man finished. Deck looked back to the mirror, then to his still-bandaged hands, then the mirror, then his hands. Those could still be human. Maybe it was just his face. He grabbed at his forearm and tore at a handful of bandages, audibly ripping off scabs as the whole wrap flew effortlessly off. He'd never been that strong before. When he looked down to his arm, he found more blue and purple creases, with fresh ink running down his pale skin. His hand was long and slender, with thin fingers that each had a sharp half-inch claw of a nail on them. Looking at the still-bandaged hand, he saw that his claws had torn through their bandages when he'd ripped the others off. Tears came into his eyes as he held his shaking hands in front of them, horrified, the heart rate monitor beeping faster than ever in the background of the beating in his ears.

“Why?” he asked, barely able to get the air out of his lungs.

Deckard reached an arm around Deck’s shoulders and put his other hand on Deck’s elbow, slowing the shaking. Deck started breathing again, slowly. Once the beeping had slowed, Deckard answered, “Because there is so much more to tell you.” Deck couldn’t help but glare. “Don’t you want to know all the things that have happened since 2044?” Deck let out a big sigh and broke off his glare, nodding. “Good. Then I’ll start from when I woke up from that procedure five thousand years ago.

“It worked, obviously. Dr. Sing said it was one of the most complete transfers he’d ever seen. I had a few copies made, then set them to work in the lab with the team and me. It only took a few years after that to perfect the reverse aging therapy, and after another few of approval it was rolled out. People were suspicious at first—at least, those still middle-aged. Once they started wrinkling and breaking down, most people came to the clinic. And then they were hooked. People believed they could live forever, as long as they weren’t the victim of some crime or accident. And with everyone able to pursue their passions, with all the vigor of youth and the wisdom of age, a second industrial revolution came. Everything from home appliances to city layouts to space travel was revolutionized. Buildings needed to reach higher than ever to fit the population, hospitals rarely ever lost a patient, nations all but unified into one global government after hunger was ended, and a space elevator was built to facilitate our ever-growing curiosity.

“That was a time to be alive. It was a practical utopia. Everyone had food, water, and housing, and money became something that merely allowed greater degrees of comfort. Most people knew multiple languages, played several instruments, and mastered various hobbies before taking on new ones as the years rolled by and the number of “greats” in front of their grandchildren kept increasing. As for me, well, I’m sure you can imagine that inventing immortality earned me a great deal of money. I, and various other top-ranking people, funded the advancement of science. We genetically modified embryos to breed the perfect astronauts—resistant to radiation, low gravity, and air quality—as well as conditioned them to cope with isolation and boredom. While they matured, we built massive fleets on a newly established moon base, with shipments flying up the elevator twice, even three times, a day at our peak. The first wave established colonies on Mars,

Venus, Europa, and Titan. We didn't develop the planets and moons very much at first, as we were hopeful to find life and careful not to disturb it. But after most people accepted that Earth was the only planet in the solar system with native life, the colonies soon began to grow, and long-term terraforming projects began in earnest.

“The second wave, though, that's what people put their faith into. Not finding life in our solar system? Fine, a lot of people had expected that from the beginning. But in other systems? To most people, it didn't seem like a question of if, but rather, when? We could get our ships up to nearly 30 percent of the speed of light, and at those speeds, most stars in our neighborhood were within a century or two. How long a wait is that really when you think you'll live forever? So we built fleets filled with everything they'd need to start colonies and outfitted them with special cryostasis systems, while we bred a new generation of explorers better fit for the long sleeps they'd go through. A couple of decades later, we sent them off with hopes of receiving news of new neighbors in a few hundred years. A few smaller waves of ships were built after the second wave, but after a point, all the reachable stars already had multiple ships headed their way, and it just became a waiting game. Our focus turned to distractions from our boredom, to arts and sex and drugs—oh, the drugs! Same old stuff, except we'd figured out how to counteract the bad parts. No more overdose, no more addiction, no more permanent damage, none of it; just the rush of whatever flavor you fancied. The world was lush and decadent, and when you weren't high, it was all just so... boring. Everything had been done, and we were all just waiting for word to come back that, yes, life had been discovered elsewhere, waiting to present us with all new challenges.

“But when the second wave started reporting in, it was what we'd feared. None of the closest stars supported any life to speak of. We sent prayers and wishes of good luck in signals that would reach the ships in a few years, after they'd already set course as planned for the next closest star and returned to stasis. And so the wait resumed. But not for me, though. At that point, I knew the mines would start drying up soon, and the chemicals for the therapy would run out. It was still decades off, but I knew it was coming. I knew I needed to find another solution. So, I called the team back together, and we tried again to find a working cocktail of renewable substances—but that proved to be just several years of wasted



effort. After that, it became an unorganized mess of failed theories and attempts, from implanting jellyfish DNA to near-fatal doses of various radiations, and each failure just seemed to herald the inevitable return of death. When word reached me that the first shortages were appearing in some of my clinics, I quietly bought an old research station floating in orbit and took the team up the elevator.

“At first, people didn’t think anything of the shortages. They were few and far between, and easily attributed to human error or delays. But once whole cities started running out, people began to panic. Mobs descended on any clinics with remaining drugs, and where there were no clinics, mobs descended on food outlets, hospitals, and anywhere else they thought would have the basic essentials. Government buildings all over the world were attacked by desperate people convinced there was a reserve somewhere. The few who had children locked themselves in underground bunkers in attempts to save their family lines and ride out whatever apocalypse might play out above them. And play out it did. Things just kept getting worse, with people aging at what looked like a decade per week, with entire cities burning for days on end, with the bombs...” Deckard paused for the first time, shaking his head with closed eyes. He didn’t like this part apparently. “From the station, we could see the flashes on the horizon, over Eastern Europe. Then they were below us, along the American coast. A few popped in the Middle East, a few in Asia. And then all the lights just sort of went out, one by one, grid by grid. Well, all the lights except for the fires. When that happened, my team and I stopped sleeping.

“It took us another week and a half to find all of the genes responsible for the aging process and alter them out of our DNA. The version tested on the team lead to some minor side effects, but we knew it was ready to be sent down to Earth. The intact clinics and hospitals reopened with the new gene therapy in practice a day later, and just like that, the crisis was over. The panic, the riots, the deaths—they all stopped. Stopped to mourn. Fifty-eight days after the first riots broke out, and eight billion were dead. Forty percent of Earth’s population. Things...changed after that.”

“It sounds like things have changed a few times already,” Deck interrupted, pulling Deckard’s arm off his shoulder. He had calmed now and was getting uncomfortable with the man’s arm there.

Deckard stood from the bed and pulled at the edges of his coat. “Not like this,” he replied. “Gone were the days of artists and musicians. For many, cults took their place. A girl of six was raised up as an idol after emerging from beneath the rubble of a bombed city. Her followers have kept her that age ever since, as a symbol of youth. Her will is their command, though she has been generally fair-minded. Some looked to the stars, worshipping the adventurers who had supposedly discovered ‘immortality’ long ago with their stasis pods. Those followers often spend years in hibernations they call pilgrimage. And, for a while, some even worshipped me.” That got Deck to raise his eyebrows, and he felt the barbs on top of his head rise with them. “‘The savior of humanity,’ they called me. It was fun for a while, but eventually I told them to worship in private. I wanted to tell them to fuck off, but you know, propriety. I still hold a good bit of sway in the political machinery though.

“But all that’s not even 600 years after your procedure. After the panic, those of us who weren’t in cults mostly began working towards once again finding new technologies, inspired by my team’s work. Everything that was said to be impossible was back on the table. The first breakthrough came from a particularly enthusiastic group who had managed to travel backward a few days’ time and then return. Through their experiments, we confirmed the existence of multiple timelines, as no amount of interference with the past led to any noticeable effect on the returned-to time. Yet, “on site” it could be observed that the course of events were dramatically altered. A bit after everyone had had their fun playing out historical fantasies, some of us began working on the beginnings of a Dyson swarm out past Mars, made from materials mined from the clouds of Jupiter. Before it was finished, we had harnessed enough energy to stabilize wormholes.

“The wormholes brought in a whole new generation of explorers. Advancements in ship technologies, medicine, and, of course, travel time meant that anyone could venture out into the cosmos, not just those grown in a lab. And believe me, there were a lot of volunteers. Fleets ten times the size of the second wave of interstellar ships flew into and out of the wormholes every day, searching countless systems, reconnecting with the first waves, even venturing into other galaxies in the search for life. Another fire was lit beneath us, and for millennia we searched and searched, always hoping to be the one to make contact, to see the lights of alien cities on the dark side of a globe, to turn over the one rock

in the universe with a foreign microbe under it. But that moment never came. Every planet, every galaxy, every grain of dust in the universe was sterile. The fleets shrunk and slowed, and eventually most of the wormholes closed. Our fire burned out.

“Now we just drift. More Dyson swarms were arranged around other stars by those who felt like it. The cults stay strong. And, at times, art has come back and gone again, now nothing but a fad. The dream of living forever has lost its sheen for many. Choosing death is now often celebrated, cited as a life complete. For people my age, it’s a boring time.” Deckard sat down at the foot of the bed, staring out the window. “Good then that there are so few of us left.” He finally finished, letting the soft, slow beep of the heart rate monitor fill the silence. Deck leaned back onto his elbows, still absorbing everything.

After a moment, he asked, “So, does that bring us to now?” Deckard nodded, still mostly in his own head. Deck let the monitor beep a few more times. “But...” he started, but hesitated at his choice of words. What was he supposed to say? “But what am I supposed to do?” he finally asked.

Deckard’s shoulders rose and fell in a soft chuckle, grinning. He looked to Deck, rising from the bed and stepping back over to him. “I’ve had an idea about that,” he answered, his hands digging into his pockets. “I’ve had it for a while now and just wasn’t sure if I could pull it off or not. But...I think I can. I think I can get us out of this boring, eventless pit we’ve fallen into. It might take another few millennia, but I can wait.”

“Wait for what?” Deck asked, annoyed. “Am I just some freak to keep you and your friends entertained?”

“No, no, no, no,” Deckard assured. “You think I’d do that to myself?” A hand rested on Deck’s shoulder. “I’d never allow myself to have such a meaningless existence. No, my plan for you is...well, what have we been talking about these last few minutes?”

Deck’s eyebrow rose. “The last five thousand years, and all the shit that happened during it.”

“Yes, and what drove humanity most through those years? What was our reason for expansion?” Deck could see that Deckard was getting excited. He was standing straighter, his arms were gesturing more, and he seemed to be nearly on his toes, ready to pace back and forth.

“The search for life.” The half-hearted answer sounded sarcastic with Deck’s annoyed voice, anxious for Deckard to just get on with it, but it didn’t seem to faze him a bit.

“Exactly!” he burst out. “For five thousand years we’ve been looking for an interstellar community to join. The challenges of Earth and Sol have been conquered. There are no more theories left to test. What is left is intelligent interaction. For all our actions, they have all been done in a lonely vacuum. But in the presence of alien life, of alien philosophy and technology, all our ideas about the universe might change. It could be an entirely new chapter for our species.”

“And? You already told me you couldn’t find anything,” Deck critiqued.

Deckard’s grin grew wider. “That’s right, I didn’t find them. So…” His hand reached up from Deck’s shoulder to point a finger into the protrusion at the bridge of Deck’s nose “I made them.” That got a confused glare out of Deck, and his barbs all lay flat against his head. He glanced down to his claw-like hands, at the lines of blue and purple along the skin of his arms, then back to Deckard. It was…him? He was the alien?

“Me?” he asked. “Me?” He couldn’t help but start laughing. In between laughs, he managed to get out, “Why on earth would you try to turn me into an alien?” A few more chuckles got out, but they were soon hushed by Deckard coming back in close.

“Because, Deck, if there’s anyone I’d trust to take up that mantle, it’d be myself. The passion I’ve felt these last millennia… if you’d felt it, you’d know you could do it, too. Think, Deck: this is a chance at a fantasy. Before you woke up, this all would’ve been just a pipe dream to you, but now it’s right here, staring you in the face.”

Deck shook his head. This man had to be crazy. “What, you expect me to walk out the door and have everyone believe I’m some alien? The only language I know is English. How does that make any sense?”

Deckard was shaking his head, and his other hand gripped Deck’s other shoulder. “No, Deck. Not out that door. Revealing you now would ruin everything. We have to wait. We have to find you and the others like you a place out in the cosmos to quietly settle down, to build a culture and history independent of our own. We have to wait, while you; all you have to do is live how you want to. I’ve had a ship built. It’s not terribly large, but it’s loaded with cryo-tubes, tools, livestock, and even vats for growing more bodies like the one you’re in now. Everyone who knows I have the ship was either killed or volunteered to have their consciousness transferred into bodies like yours to join the crew. Once all of you are healed and adjusted to your new bodies, and once we’ve given you a bit of basic training to help you survive, we’ll load you up and send you through a wormhole. We won’t even have to take the ship out of the basement; we can just open the wormhole right there, so that no one has to know. You’ll be free to build whatever society you like, wherever you like. We’ll let you choose the wormhole’s destination, and we won’t record where you go. The few of us who know you exist won’t tell a soul until, hopefully, one day when you return to make contact with our lazy, dying race. It could be in centuries; it could be after the sun burns out. It doesn’t matter; I’ll still be waiting, I want to see you again when you return. I want to be the one to make contact.”

Deck was nodding along, finally beginning to understand. It sounded insane, like some joke, but he believed it. He knew himself well enough to know that he was capable of something like this, of concocting some plan to “invent” aliens and claim all the credit. And, in all honesty, he liked it. He liked the idea of venturing into the stars like he had dreamed of as a boy; he liked the idea of trying to build a new society to rival the one he was leaving. He liked the sound of all of it, all except for... “What others?” he asked. “I can’t do it alone.”

“I wouldn’t do that to you, Deck. Like I said, there were volunteers whose consciousnesses now inhabit bodies like yours. And, of course, there’s Anna.” Deck’s brows and barbs rose up at his wife’s name. “After your procedure worked, she had it done as well. We did vow to always stay by each other’s side.” A happy

sigh escaped through Deck's nostrils as he nodded, touched by his wife's choice. He knew his work used to scare her.

Deck sat there, nodding slightly for a few minutes, thinking of everything that had been said. He actually believed Deckard's words, though he could hardly believe in himself for it. Maybe he truly believed, or maybe he just wanted it to be true so he could play out some long-forgotten adolescent fantasy. Whatever the case, he accepted it. He accepted Deckard's request. "I'll do it," he said softly after another minute of nodding. "I'll do it."

Deckard locked eyes with Deck, another grin spreading wider than ever. He stuck a hand out for Deck to shake, and, careful not to stab it with his claws, Deck gripped it firmly and shook. They grinned and held their hands together for minutes, but it felt like an hour. Eventually, Deckard started explaining the various things he would be sending on the ship—from rabbits and chickens to greenhouses and laser-cutting drills for mining—with his thoughts on how they might be used in Deck's new society. They laughed at the more ridiculous ideas and huddled closer when one felt the other was on to something. By the time they had gone through the whole ship catalogue, the sun had drifted out from behind the building they were in. It shone with orange light through the clouds on the horizon, returning the room to the color it had been when Deck woke up.

As he was forcing himself to leave the room for the evening, to let Deck get some sleep before he began training, Deckard couldn't help but ask one last question. "What do you think you'll call yourself?" he asked, spinning on his heels in the doorway. Deck only replied with a curious "hmm?" "Your species. You can't be humans, and calling yourselves androids would give away that you aren't really aliens."

Deck bit at his lips, puzzled by the question. He hadn't thought anything of the sort up until then. It took him a few moments to decide, but eventually he nodded and explained, "I don't know what the word will sound like in whatever language we come up with, but I know what it will mean." Deckard's eyebrow rose inquisitively. "Challenger," Deck answered, prompting another grin on Deckard's face before he opened the door and left the room.

# I DON'T MIND THE COLD

RAFAEL AVCIOGLU





# WANDERING MAN

DYLAN MILKINS





# SPIRO LIGHT GRAPH

DYLAN MILKINS



# MARCIA ALDRICH INTERVIEW

Marcia Aldrich began working for Michigan State University in 1990 as a scholar in the Department of English. She is an integral part of the Red Cedar Review's history, having served as the faculty advisor on the RCR in the early 2000's. Her journey with the magazine was both challenging and inspiring, as she saved the RCR from its almost certain demise and then built it back up to one of its strongest points. Aldrich will retire from MSU at the end of the Spring semester, but she will continue her journey in creative writing with the publication of her book, *Waveform*, from the University of Georgia Press. The following interview was conducted via email between Aldrich and Assistant Managing Editor, Alexandria Drzazgowski.

## **1. How did you get started with the *Red Cedar Review*?**

The *RCR* has always been a shadowy presence in the Department of English. During the first years of my career at Michigan State University, I attended a few readings sponsored by the *RCR* when Diane Wakoski was its advisor. At the time, I assumed it was thriving even though I saw little evidence of its presence. It wasn't until the late 1990s that I became actively engaged in the journal and that was because Carrie Preston, its editor, came to talk to me about its future, which she was worried about. It turns out that the *RCR* was not thriving—Carrie was

almost single-handedly keeping the journal afloat and she was going to graduate in the spring. She loved the journal, she had devoted herself to keeping it alive, and after she graduated she had no one lined up to take her place. It was only then that I learned about the illustrious and long history of the *RCR*, how it had begun in 1963, and how many students who worked on the journal over the years had gone on to have successful careers as writers.

Carrie had come to me because I had recently become involved in teaching creative writing courses and was taking the lead in trying to reshape how creative writing was taught in the Department of English. With Professor Stephen Arch, who was the undergraduate chair at the time, we created a creative writing specialization. Before the specialization existed, the Department of English offered a few creative writing courses unpredictably and without any sense of advancement. We added creative nonfiction, screenwriting, and playwriting to the genres of fiction and poetry, and built in possibilities of internships and the thesis as a culmination to the program. Running a healthy literary magazine is a crucial and advantageous part of a successful creative writing program. Historically, most vital writing programs sponsor a literary journal. I believed—and still believe—that the opportunity to edit a literary journal should be at the heart of a successful writing program. Carrie and I hatched a plan to try to rebuild the *RCR*. We advertised for the positions we thought the journal should have and ran interviews. To my surprise, lots of students were interested in the *RCR*, and we filled positions and recruited volunteers. One of my honors students at the time, Doug Dowland, was selected as editor, and the journal was exceedingly lucky because he brought great enthusiasm and energy to the job. He was professional and organized, and the journal sprang back to life.

For the next five years, I was the advisor and during my tenure I was fortunate in having exemplary students who worked their way toward becoming the editor. After Carrie's experience, it was crucial to address the issue of mentoring in order to create editorial continuity from year to year. I was terribly proud of what Doug accomplished and then Meg Sparling after him and Laura Tisdell after Meg. We had five years of stability and renewed purpose. It is no surprise to me that Doug, Meg, and Laura have gone on to careers that have built upon their *RCR* experience. I think they all would identify editing the *RCR* as one of the shaping factors in their development. It's also worth noting that often it is an individual or

small group of individuals that keeps a literary journal alive.

## **2. What was your favorite part about working for the *RCR*?**

That's easy to answer: working with students.

When I was an undergraduate at Pomona College, I was an editor for the literary magazine, *The Spectator*, which wasn't nearly as substantial as the *RCR*. But I loved working with other student writers to put out an issue, probably for the same reasons I loved being involved with theater productions, either as an actress or building sets or doing lighting. There's nothing like working with others toward a shared creative mission. I like the sense of community it builds. I believed in the value of offering this kind of educational opportunity in English and I enjoyed helping to make it happen. Editing a literary journal is a hands-on, outside-of-the-classroom experience and it forms a good complement to what goes on in the classroom—putting what you learn to use or practice.

## **3. What did you learn at the *RCR* that helped you in your career?**

Sometimes people conceive the English major in narrow terms as if all that the major involves is the scholarly study of texts. It's an isolated and insular vision—the student in the library writing her papers. When I was an English major, I discovered how much more vital and rich being an English major can be. Besides studying literary history, I studied creative writing and I became an editor of *The Spectator*. I participated in readings, setting up events, planning issues—a whole range of skills and activities that diversified my experience as an English major. It's been my experience that students often want to become part of *something* larger than their own writing or study, to do *something* with their interest in the subject of English. They want to know other students who share their love of writing and to participate in the literary culture in ways that go beyond scholarly study. I'm not sure if my career was helped, but my experiences working on literary journals both as a student editor and later as an advisor, and then later still as an editor of a national journal, has informed how I think about what a vital English education can be. My life as a professor was enriched by the work I did on the *RCR*.

**4. How have you seen the *RCR* change over the years? What is different? What are they doing now that you find interesting?**

I was happy to set the *RCR* on a more stable path when I was the advisor, and part of establishing that stability was moving the *RCR* over to the MSU Press. Each year the *RCR* staff struggled with the technical and time-consuming requirements of publishing a journal—proofreading, layout, typesetting, and so forth. None of the students possessed those skills and trying to handle the job took away from other activities students were much more interested in—reading submissions, brainstorming issues, interviewing, creating events, raising money. Professor Patrick O'Donnell was the Department of English chairperson at the time, and together we embarked in seeing if we could move the *RCR* into the stable of journals published by the MSU Press. We successfully negotiated a deal whereby student staff of the *RCR* would work with the journal department employees at the press to put out an issue. Some of the student editors would be interns for the press. This arrangement solved many problems. Student interns gained valuable experience and helped with the technical skills required to publish an issue. Working with the employees at the press helped professionalize the student editors and help put out issues on time that looked well designed.

A few restrictions existed in working with the press—mainly that the *RCR* had no online presence at a time when journals were either going fully online or at least providing a certain amount of their content to be available online. The *RCR* produced high-quality hard copy issues only, and the question of how to distribute those issues was never resolved. Nevertheless, the arrangement persisted for many years during the editorships of Teal Amthor-Shaffer, Lindsey Sloan, and Jill Kolongowski. After those years, I'm not sure what ensued, but I do know when Robin Silbergleid became the advisor, she began to think about bringing the *RCR* back to English and making it an online-only journal, which is eventually what happened. The relationship with the MSU Press outgrew its usefulness for what the *RCR* had become.

**5. How do you hope to see the *RCR* continue to develop in the future? What kind of presence do you hope it will have in the literary community?**

To be candid, I think the *RCR* will always have a problematic presence. Here are a few reasons: first, it is an undergraduate literary journal—a rarity. Its editors change every year or nearly so, and their editorships are short lived. They are volunteers. Unlike journals that are supported with a graduate student writing program, the *RCR* doesn't have anyone at the helm. It doesn't have one of the writers in the Department of English, for example, running the show. I was its advisor, not its editor, and there is a world of difference between the two. As editor of *Fourth Genre*, I decided the direction of the journal, selected its contents, and worked with its assistant editors. We were a stable group of editors. I worked with a small group of undergraduate and graduate interns, but they tended to rotate every semester. By contrast, each year a new crew of students comes on board and they ask, *what should the RCR be?* By the time they answer the question, their time at MSU is over, and the process starts again. These are inevitable symptoms of being an undergraduate volunteer literary magazine supervised by an advisor who is not its editor. Nor has the *RCR* ever successfully been integrated into the classroom or the larger culture of the College of Arts and Letters. Each group struggles with these questions.

**6. How does working for the journal connect with the publishing world? Can you compare the experiences?**

The publishing world is a large, multi-faceted entity. I certainly have found that being involved as a student, an advisor, and then an editor has made the experience of being in a Department of English less insular. All these roles have taken me out of myself, brought me into contact with other likeminded people, and engaged me in projects that have a life outside of the classroom. And that's been a very good thing. Editing is a kind of activism. Ideally, you take what you have been learning in your studies and apply those skills and tastes to making something for others. Issues created are like gifts to readers. As an editor, you help give life to a writer's work, to make it available to others. You are like a midwife, somewhere between the writer and reader.

**7. Can you tell me more about your upcoming book? How would you compare/contrast your experience working with different authors/ perspectives on a book of essays vs. a collection of undergrad prose, poetry, and art?**

When I look at how my career has evolved, I see that I've inhabited several significant roles: I've been a teacher, I've been a writer, and I've been an editor. *Waveform: Twenty-First-Century Essays by Women* is the culmination of all of those interests and commitments. The idea for the collection came about when I was editor of *Fourth Genre* and received so many impressive submissions from women writers. I wondered why women essayists weren't receiving more national attention. I had many conversations with other women writers about the lack of collections that showcased some of the essays women were writing now and determined to rectify that absence. It took me a few years to get free of other obligations to begin the project and two years to bring it to fruition. In December 2016 it was published. My experience as an editor of *Fourth Genre* directly fed into this project. As a writer in the field of the literary essay, I had a wide base of knowledge of the range of essays being written and published. And then as a teacher of creative nonfiction, I knew what was needed in the classroom. My experiences as a teacher, writer, and editor came together to shape the vision of *Waveform*. The collection is a labor of love.

# CONTRIBUTORS

RAFAEL AVCIOGLU is a senior at Michigan State University graduating in the spring of 2017, with a degree in graphic design and a specialization in photography. He was born and raised in Chicago, and that has had a huge impact on his ability to improvise, work with others, connect, network, and create. He continues to push himself daily to create unique and conceptual art, combining his love for the graphic arts with high quality photography. He hopes to one day share his art with the world and have the opportunity to make a difference while making a living being a creative.

ISABEL BARTHOLOMEW grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah, and she is currently a junior at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. She is studying English and art history, and she is interested in teaching, writing, and very strong coffee. Once, she thought she saw Thom Yorke at an airport; she is still unsure whether it was actually him. Find Isabel on Twitter @izze\_bel or Venmo @BabyBelle (wink, wink).

TYLER BATES is a junior journalism major at Coastal Carolina University. When she's not in the classroom, she can be found with her nose in a book or serving in the United States Air Force Reserves. She draws inspiration from a dear friend she lost to suicide. May her words serve as a remembrance of all those whose lights went out far too soon. Rest easy, Curtis.

RACHEL BOES is a creative writing senior at Bowling Green State University. She has won a Silver Key Award in the Scholastic Art Scholarship for her story *The Man with the Hole in His Face*. After graduating she hopes to go on to an MFA program and eventually go into editing and publishing.

NICOLE GRASSI is a junior at Misericordia University in Dallas, Pennsylvania, studying computer science and writing. On the rare occasion that there is a break in her homework, she spends her free time reading, drinking tea, and crocheting.



After graduation, she hopes to find a career in software development and amass a herd of corgis.

DANIEL HESLEP is a senior English major at St. Olaf College, where he has developed a deep love of poetry and snowfall. He has previously been published in the *Whale Road Review*, is an intern at Psychopomp magazine, and is always seeking to improve his craft. To this end, he can often be found nodding off on library desks and in coffee-houses. He hopes to earn his MFA and is currently on a quest to find the best beer in Minnesota.

REED KARSH was born and raised in the Rust Belt, specifically Erie, Pennsylvania. After witnessing the destitution and poverty that industrial decline had left in his hometown, he enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh, where he studies economics and English writing. At the intersection of these disciplines is literature on poverty and working-class issues. Working-class issues are at the heart of everything he writes. In his spare time, he enjoys eating spinach artichoke dip and watching reality television.

KATE KOBOSKO is originally from central Maryland. She is now a sophomore at Eckerd College, a small liberal arts school on the coast of sunny Florida. She is double majoring in creative writing and human development. In her spare time, she loves to create, read, and travel. She is a poetry editor for the literary magazine on her campus, the *Eckerd Review*.

AUTUMN LALA is a young writer earning a dual English degree in rhetoric and professional writing and creative writing fiction at the University of Cincinnati. Autumn enjoys writing poetry and various forms of fiction. Regular updates on her current projects—including a YA mainstream novel titled *FINE* and her first YA trilogy, a non-traditional, dystopian-fantasy series—can be found on her Facebook writer page.

NHUNG LAM is a former resident of East Lansing, Michigan and is currently studying in New York City at the Fashion Institute of Technology, with studies in fashion, art history, and English. She found inspiration for her poem *Carina (Star Animal)* from a peaceful summer night on Coney Island beach with her best

friend. Currently, she works at an art gallery and one day dreams to curate a show of her own works.

DELANY LEMKE is an undergraduate student at Central Michigan University studying English, with a focus in creative writing. She is employed as a consultant at the CMU Writing Center and is currently president of the affiliated writing organization, The Writing Circle. She also works as an editor the campus undergraduate literary journal, *The Central Review*. This is her first publication.

MARISSA MEDLEY is a senior at Bowling Green State University studying arts management and creative writing. She is the poetry editor of BGSU's *Prairie Margins*. She enjoys playing steel drums and working at the local record store.

EMILY MERLO is a sophomore at Western Michigan University. She is an art major and is applying for a bachelor of fine arts degree in photography and intermedia in the fall. She enjoys photographing her hometown, the city of Kalamazoo, Michigan, and her photogenic chocolate lab. She took the cover photo in South Haven, Michigan last summer.

DYLAN MILKINS has been taking photographs for about four years and was instantly drawn to long exposure photography. The act of moving a light within the frame to then achieve a visible mark within space was astonishing to him. While studying at Michigan State University, he has been drawn to both sculpture and photography. He likes to think of his light painting work as sculptures within space, and the only way to capture them is through photography.

KATHERINE O'HARA is a BFA fiction candidate and international studies major obtaining her certificate in publishing at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She has served as a copyediting committee member for her university's literary magazine, *Atlantis*. She is a walking contradiction of kindness and sarcasm. Follow her on Twitter: @katherinegrace

MEGHAN O'HERN is a senior at Bradley University. They will graduate in May 2017 with a BA in English and creative writing. Their first chapbook, *Rising from the Ashes*, will be released by Weasel Press in March 2017. Their work is fueled by excessive amounts of coffee and the support of the Bradley

University English department. They would like to take this opportunity to thank Writehouse Ink for reading all the drafts of the poems that appear in this journal.

GLEN PARKER is a fourth-year student at Central Michigan University studying English and sociology. When he's not at work, in class, or brainstorming story ideas, he's usually playing video games to relax. Beyond publishing a canon of novels and short stories, he hopes to one day own a small trimaran that he can sail to visit Louisiana, where he was born.

WADEN DELOS SANTOS is from the beautiful beach town of Garden City, South Carolina. He graduated in 2015 from St. James High School. He now attends Coastal Carolina University as an undergraduate majoring in English and minoring in new digital media and culture. He is an active artist in the forms of music, visuals, and literature.

XAVIER SMITH is a poet hailing from Columbus, Ohio. As an undergraduate student at The Ohio State University, he has represented his university at the College Unions Poetry Slam Invitational for the last three years (2015–2017). Xavier also represented the Writing Wrongs Poetry Slam at the National Poetry Slam in 2015.

SAM STEBBINS is a poet, punk fan, and dog lover studying writing and anthropology at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. She is the nonfiction editor for Grand Valley's *Fishladder* and a part-time communications specialist for a manufacturer of wire racks for ovens and refrigerators. Sam's poetry explores identity, the human experience, insects, and Americana. Her work has previously appeared in *Fishladder* and *Running Out Of Ink*.

PAIGE TIBBE is a visual artist based out of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She will graduate in May 2017, with a bachelor of fine arts from Seton Hill University. Paige is searching through the chaos and beauty of life through 2D representation of form, hoping to give glimpses of insight and empathy through her imitations of life.

DANA TRUPA is a recent graduate of Hunter College. She has studied haiku with Kim Shams Richardson, prosody with David Yezzi, free verse with Michael

Klein, and poetry with Jan Heller Levi, Anne Marie Macari, and Richard Katrovas. Dana's dream is to book an exotic getaway surrounded by poetry and piña coladas, and heed the magic and music that Gary Snyder describes in *Here* as 'a soft grumble in the breeze.'

KALEY WHIPPLE is a junior at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida. She is currently studying creative writing, with minors in theatre, literature, and Japanese. Her genres of choice include historical fiction, young adult, and *fantasy*. *Her previous short stories have appeared in Eckerd College's literary magazine, the Eckerd Review, and have received Eckerd's Student Fiction Prize and the Writing Excellence Award.*