



# THE PICKLING

— *Poet* —

*Presents*

# BRINE

*POEMS*

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Isa Guzman

## **Meditation**

And so, I believe the soul to appeal  
to a region ghostridden with poetry. I: a matter  
of bones intertwining over a village muffled  
with ancient voices and a haze of heartbeats.

Nights line the eyes with commas.  
Incorporeal drums hang from trees like fruit.  
Once heads hung there too, histories waiting  
for the tide of time to catch up with them again.

Faith is in question, alchemical in structure  
and consistently in pain. What equations of metal  
can decipher abandoned buildings? What hands  
held in hurricanes make up this empty field?

And so, the soul never comes to rest.  
Caves full of clairvoyants prophesize poetry:  
a lightning splitting palms. An I lost in Id, searching  
the source of his heart's own churning. Found.

Isa Guzman

### **La Casa de Titi**

Home: a cubist house where white paint  
peels in tears exposing boney concrete.  
Mortar holds together her arthritic joints  
dusting with recluses and centipedes.  
The Last Supper hangs over an empty  
table. Crested anoles guard poems &  
dreams on every slat of the slanted jalousies.  
Abuela's ghost hides in mirrors alongside  
the armies of ants making up her threads  
of hair. Beware this cinereous war between  
the living & the dead. Beware emptiness.  
The doors & gate still open and close on  
their own. Coffee still brews on the stove.  
The house stands there, a bruise of time  
my child-self still weaves in circles through.

*Isa Guzman is a poet from Los Sures, Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Invading the invisible borders of his mind, he writes to explore his puertorriqueñidad in all its rich history and personal testimony. He recently received his B.A. in English Literature from Hunter College. When he's not Titerando in the tri-state area, or obsessively reading a book, he is publishing his work in magazines such as: The Acentos Review, Somos en escrito, The Casita Grande Lounge, and The Good Men Project; he is also featured in the anthology The Other Side of Violet (released by Great Weather for Media). Read more on his blog: [Isawrites.com](http://Isawrites.com). Also, follow him on twitter: @Isa\_Writes*

Melinda Giordano

**I Feel as Contrite as the Ocean**

I feel as contrite as the ocean:  
A repentant object  
Convulsing beneath the sky -  
A victim of the planets  
Wrapped in gravity and light.  
I am the target that yearns  
Towards the dusk harvest  
Of scarlet and bronze  
Of tangerine and cherry.  
I am the quarry  
Of the pale scythe  
In the heavens  
Feeling the same pull and tickle  
That captivates the tides  
And draws their sinews  
Into a lunar orbit.  
A prey to an astral hypnosis,  
Kept in a trance of exaltation  
For the ashen satellite,  
I am faithful:  
And as meek as the helpless ocean.

Melinda Giordano

### **Lovely Wounds**

When I was in Oxford  
There was rain:  
A city fragrant with petrichor  
And running with torrents of bicycles.  
In my memory it rained without respite  
The city might have floated away –  
A confused, sodden island  
Alone with its knowledge  
And melancholy history  
Of plagues and colleges.  
When I was in Oxford  
I found bookstores  
Dark and dank as ossuaries  
Rippling with spines.  
Outside, crimson vines  
Wrapped around houses  
Like saturated tourniquets.  
And I'd never seen such lovely wounds.

*Melinda Giordano is from Los Angeles, California. Her pieces have appeared in Scheherazade's Bequest and Vine Leaves Literary Journal among others. She was a poetry contributor to CalamitiesPress.com and nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize. She writes about the possibility of remarkable things – the secret lives of the natural world.*

R. Gerry Fabian

**Anointed Aphelion**

If there is any  
wicked, wary warmth;  
ordinary has dusted it.  
Whatever celestial  
or astrological connection,  
fused our moment  
became a biorythmic disaster.  
What heat you inject  
will never reach me.  
I am  
too long cold.



R. Gerry Fabian

### **Since You Asked**

I've been looking  
for someone to find me.  
Not a lover per se  
or a dominant force;  
just someone to find me.  
Give me a chess player  
who appreciates a stalemate  
or a friend to share  
a last call drink.  
It's more than that though,  
I'd like nature in reaction:  
a slender glint of sun;  
the dust call of crickets;  
the sad song of the last summer moon.

I want someone to find me  
amid the curl of smoke strands  
and the quiet of still water.  
There are too many  
artificial corner dancers-  
those who don't breathe  
the bass riff - drum beat life.  
If someone should find me  
I'd appreciate a tear.  
Not as a sadness past  
but as a false dawn awe  
about to bring  
the wild birds to song.

*R. Gerry Fabian is a retired English instructor. He has been publishing poetry since 1972 in various poetry magazines. His web page is <https://rgerryfabian.wordpress.com> He is the editor of Raw Dog Press <https://rawdoggpress.wordpress.com> His novels, [Memphis Masquerade](#), [Getting Lucky \(The Story\)](#) and published poetry book, [Parallels](#) are available at [Smashwords](#) and all other ebook stores. [Seventh Sense](#), his third novel has been published by Smashwords.*

Lana Bella

**AS I SEE NOW I COULD HAVE**

sailed an ache where red incense  
puddled in a bowl, like hollow-  
ribbed prayers for the dead.  
Blunt weight was two brief hands,  
I keel-hauled black sea out of  
the china for a wash where I'll soon  
bend over against the grey, blank  
wall. Yet the only claim I had on me  
was memory, of waterlogged body  
contrived to undo flesh, of fingertips  
flicked avers anent the crystalline  
mist of pocking shadows. But  
for a while, I composed tears in  
which I went wading, as if I, too,  
was expecting a less variation of life  
to show up, wounding my way out  
like starlings in the language of water.

Lana Bella

## LITURGICAL

You turned my moving plane on  
the flare of your wrist, the way  
I was taught the epithet of faith.  
How sudden the night has spun on  
the window, growing slender as  
we chased love about the hem of  
jazz, knowing in reverberation,  
we lived in echoed sounds. Arch-  
back and smoother lines, we were  
breath and smoke by the idiolect  
of footpath, where I was a terrene  
grass grew long through the ruts  
of our dance, shearing sprays into  
the weight of your chest. This need  
between skin and skin wrapped  
as gown around our hips, scarring  
at our reckless balance through air.

*A four-time Pushcart Prize, five-time Best of the Net & Bettering American Poetry nominee, Lana Bella is an author of three chapbooks, Under My Dark (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2016), Adagio (Finishing Line Press, 2016), and Dear Suki: Letters (Platypus 2412 Mini Chapbook Series, 2016), has had poetry and fiction featured with over 450 journals, Acentos Review, Comstock Review, EVENT, Ilanot Review, Notre Dame Review, Rock and Sling, Lampeter Review & The Stillwater Review, among others, and work appeared in Aeolian Harp Anthology, Volume 3.*

*Lana resides in the US and the coastal town of Nha Trang, Vietnam, where she is a mom of two far-too-clever-frolicsome imps.*

Heather Saunders Estes

## **Bread**

My daughter's company-  
she doesn't own it, she works in it-  
transforms yeast so it will make  
fragrances, cloth, and medicines.

When I was her age, I made bread  
for the small town health food store.  
Heavy cloth bags of whole wheat flour  
tipped awkwardly into a huge, clean  
metal can in a cascade of abundance.

Rising every morning to mix  
two double batches, eight loaves,  
we transformed the tiny kitchen  
of our first apartment into a bakery.  
No wonder that year we decided to get married.  
With the yeast smell of promise, welcome and warmth,  
everything was possible.

I kneaded dough the color of rich oak and molasses,  
with strength like the the ceramics major I was,  
until the warm satin mound of dough  
was a round baby's bottom.  
It rose like dawn, slow, sure and mysterious.

I rolled up the turned-out dough,  
folded the ends under to snugly fit the pans.  
The traces of those seams still seen  
as I flipped over the loaves and,  
with a watermelon thump,  
tested to hear if they were baked just right.

Toast is our pale attempt  
to regain the perfection of eating the loaf heel  
with melting butter, and blackberry jam  
from berries we picked ourselves,  
with sun and scratches.

Heather Saunders Estes

### **Cans of Baked Beans**

A surprisingly heavy cardboard box,  
with my 8 year old name on the address label.  
I had won a contest.  
Maybe I guessed the date of the first snow  
or the number of jelly beans in a jar.  
My prize was cans of food.

I took them carefully, a couple at a time  
down to the spidery, damp cellar.  
There my earnest father excavated dirt  
late into the night, building cement walls.  
I added my proud contribution  
to our nascent family fallout shelter.

We practiced drills in school,  
huddled under third grade desks  
as emergency drill sirens screamed over our heads.  
Taught to shield our eyes from the blinding light,  
then the imploding glass of the first pressure wave.  
At night, we dreamed of nuclear bombs.

Excited by the shelter, I would play  
kitchen or scientist in the small musty crypt,  
lining my precious cans up on the cement,  
reshuffling them frequently  
according to color, size, cuisine.

My parents never said why  
the shelter was never finished,  
at a loss how to explain  
surviving nuclear war was moot.  
So the tins and air masks stayed there.  
Mice ate the labels.

*Heather Saunders Estes lives in San Francisco. She walks the city adding to her map of best vacant lots and corners of parks to pick blackberries. Poems and photography of hers are in multiple publications including Sisyphus, The Plum Tree Tavern, These Fragile Lilacs, Pangolin Review, Vistas and Byways.*

Senia Hardwick

**print out**

“you’re always so nice to me, miss.”

he's older with a soft raspy voice.  
old enough that I don't try to explain  
what I am or am not,  
    put the wound aside for another day.

he owns two blue sweaters and one Yankees cap.  
he can read auroras and see gateways.  
his ex-wife is sick.  
I don't ask how.  
    “my mother says it doesn't cost anything to be nice...”

    “...unless they're a fascist.”

his home town is gone.  
battered by two hurricanes,  
and shore side neglect.

    “that and money can't buy good taste.”

but we're in the present,  
where Barnes and Noble stands over us  
and eats all sin.

    “I don't have a printer cause this is the register, so just show them  
    this number and say you want a print out, ok?”

he doesn't know about the things I broke  
or lost  
at the altar of clear liquor.  
or the way the turn of a ceiling fan becomes hands on a clock  
while one lays beneath a maggot disguised as a lover.

“You got it. Have a good day, miss.”

he pulls his suitcase behind him, bright red with wheels that click.  
the intern at information looks confused.  
so I speak up:

    “he just needs a print out.”

Senia Hardwick

## B L O O D F E A S T

Haley's having a blood feast for her birthday.  
a blood feast? a // b l o o d f e a s t //  
think Dress Code: Satanic Panic,  
Troma Chic, and Sex Magick Coven  
think \$1.09 for hand soap  
and \$4.98 for food dye.  
think coconut cake in the freezer at Barnes and Noble Union Square  
(my freezer's too small).

standing on the edge of a chalk pentacle.  
"Cass, blood me across my chest."  
blunt but refined.  
red down my arms.  
wet shirt.  
my green eyes,  
my cat people stare,  
meets Haley's.  
twins stand // split //  
across the threshold,  
dead and living (bʊɪvɪŋ pɹæ pɹæp)  
trade places (səʊəld əpɹeɪt).

because practice makes perfect,  
my rehearsals pay off.  
my thigh fits between her legs,  
I'm the jigsaw ripper I've always longed to be,  
even if I prefer men.  
Happy Birthday, Haley.  
the plastic knife's blade sinks into its own handle.

Haley once planned a twink stripper for my whole furry necrophilia thing,  
so weird is ok.

sometimes you gotta tell it how it is.  
consequences be damned.

Angela Merkel could daddy dom Putin.  
"are you allergic to coconut? I brought two sexy demons to feed you blood cake."  
apparently he's not flirting,  
just touching my hips and telling bad jokes.

my favorite kink is humiliating fuckboys in the philosophy aisle.

“please don’t talk to me unless my husband can watch me choke you.”

I always know more than them.

Jenn keeps chanting the word cuck.

2017 is about emotional authenticity and having the grossest possible sex  
before the vice president electrocutes you.

I only know how to escalate.

I’ll eroticize anything.

//// you can’t fucking stop me. ///

blood is gender neutral fashion and doesn’t break sobriety. sometimes you gotta  
pour cough syrup down the sink. make a wish on the star drawn on the floor, seal  
it with a steel kiss simulated in plastic. make a wish on a comet, red and terrible.  
peak me is calling Napoleon the Antichrist and deciding to kill him, I would have  
joined the masons if I had the chance. if my ex fucked her brother she’d be more  
interesting.

for context she was an only child.

I buy all my socks and underwear during Halloween season.

we made two types of fake blood,

edible

and inedible.

maybe that’s how I should categorize everything,

can I eat this or not?

maybe, for once, I wouldn’t try to fuck it.

sometimes it’s 4am and you gotta eat cold lasagna by hand,

covered in fake blood and leftover cake,  
wearing bat boyshorts and a pizzagram shirt.

the two cats sit, hungry,  
down by your feet.

*Senia Hardwick is an MFA candidate at Queens College. They are the author of four zines: SEXTS? Volume 1 & 2, FUTURES, and down in the fuck cave, and have been published in several print and online journals including Necronomicum, Tattoosday, and Hoax. Their general topics of academic interest include medieval studies, classics, political theory, spectrality, Marxist theory, deconstruction, aesthetics, and queer theory. Their website is [www.seniahardwick.wordpress.com](http://www.seniahardwick.wordpress.com) and their IG is [necro.pharmakon](https://www.instagram.com/necro.pharmakon).*



Vivian Wagner

**Beached**

At 4 a.m. pelicans  
sleep, cormorants  
nestle into  
hidden nests,  
and waves  
whisper about the  
sun's distance, the  
sand's acquiescence,  
the way, when no  
one's looking,  
the stars slow  
toward stopping

*Vivian Wagner lives in New Concord, Ohio, where she teaches English at Muskingum University. She's the author of *Fiddle: One Woman, Four Strings, and 8,000 Miles of Music* (Citadel-Kensington), *The Village* (Kelsay Books), and *Making* (Origami Poems Project).*

Richard King Perkins II

**Pirates of the Southern Desert**

Beneath the sands of the outback;  
an incoherent drumming of monitor lizards.

History drains into the scrubland;  
an old man with a metal detector

sweeping in the goldfields  
the howl of a wild dog loosened

into the low-cut plumage  
of the Australian sky.

The incomprehensibility of a million  
feral camels stripping trees,

bringing drought to waterholes  
and raiding aborigines

like pirates of the southern desert.  
Unplanned obsolescence—

replaced by trains, machinery  
and the bullwhips of black roadways

ever edged in red.  
Beneath the sands of the outback;

an incoherent drumming of monitor lizards.  
Species shy from the hand of man,

one old man in a salt pan of old men  
with speechless throats,

unable to articulate the great random  
discoveries hoped for—

forgetting how skin could be any different  
than today, exposing the timeline of dreams,

the empty canteen of tomorrow.  
Beneath the sands of the outback;  
an incoherent drumming of monitor lizards  
sends warnings as ships of the desert plunder on.

*Richard King Perkins II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He lives in Crystal Lake, IL, USA with his wife, Vickie and daughter, Sage. He is a three-time Pushcart, Best of the Net and Best of the Web nominee whose work has appeared in more than a thousand publications.*

John Grey

**HARTMAN**

Magic man. Now he's an airplane He wants to fly home.  
Then he's rain with no will of its own.  
He's keeps filling, over and over, the once dry creek bed.  
He's an ear. An insensitive one.  
Then he's the stock averages on a day of their decline.  
He's a male tree rooting the female earth around him.  
Or a flashy car. Look out yellow neon highway.  
But come midnight, his eyes are broken bones.  
Or paintings of a withered moon.  
He's a junkie who just hasn't found the right breed of graveyard.  
Right now, he's slumped against a plaster wall in Japan Town.  
Sirens are scripted and the lights are blind.

*John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in Examined Life Journal, Studio One and Columbia Review with work upcoming in Leading Edge, Poetry East and Midwest Quarterly.*

Michael Alpiner

### **Departing**

At a time when I need you most,  
you are drifting away,  
mariner, father, salt sea cares  
rocking in the aged cradle, unaware.  
The skies inside your mind are swirling,  
networks tangled like nervous fingers  
gripping the wheel, steering, steering.

I age with you, graying at the fringe,  
a rotting vegetable, a seagull circling  
through icy air, unable to sing,  
recalling sweeter days, the carefree landscape  
you created, as my own grew bitter.

Sad news is kept from you;  
we let you sail within sight,  
place you in your chair, feed  
your need for self-reliance,  
like a child wearing a costume all day long,  
falling asleep with your pirate hat still on.

It would be easier if you simply disappeared.  
But each dawn, you wake before everyone,  
wait in costume for your ship to come in.

Michael Alpiner

**Jeopardy**

What is “The Grapes of Wrath?”

Father answers, no buzzer in hand,  
no money rewarded for this small accomplishment.

The disease attacks short term memory first,  
so the Pulitzer Prize novel of 1936 is fresh  
in his mind, as he remembers himself,  
a boy of nine, the gray shadow of The Great Depression  
still cast across his poor Pennsylvania town.

Smoke from the steam trains clouds his smile,  
thick pretzels dipped in mustard, soda pop fizz,  
the rolling hillsides pierced by silos and crops  
boxed in distant, serene, downward gradations

Who was Rasputin?

He responds a bit unsure,  
memory bubbling under icy waters –

Was he the one with the Romanovs?

Stroganoff, Rachmaninov – it begins to jumble.

The Russian music lingers like a far-off balalaika,  
sounds that spun for him on ten-inch plastic,  
then twelve-inch vinyl, working for RCA, then CBS  
whose logos lived on all our pens and notepads.

If only Rasputin were here to cure his illness,  
bloodline cut, mad deception;

I am his Anastasia.

With the category of Contemporary News  
came my father's silence.

Perhaps it is akin  
to reading the bottom line on an eye chart,  
or trying to read lips through opaque glass,  
however,  
if the category were Alzheimer's Disease,  
I'd have no answers either.

*Michael Alpiner is a writing professor, published poet, and travel journalist living in Richmond Hill, NY. He is currently writing for Forbes.com, NY Lifestyles, and [extremeluxurygetaways.com](http://extremeluxurygetaways.com), the website he co-published with travel journalist, Gretchen Kelly. He lives with his wife, Heather, and daughter, Emma.*

Lennart Lundh

**Travel Journal #2**

I remember Menominee, the reservation  
where culture was for sale to tourists  
at the weekly fire and tribal dance show.

I remember Bergen, the young American,  
the young waitress, making an evening date  
without a word in common except loneliness.

I remember Skansen, the glass blowers  
and the costumed re-enactor docents  
among the ancient red buildings.

I remember Hong Kong, the heads of oxen  
and rope-bodies of headless snakes  
for sale in the street market of Aberdeen.

I remember Danang, the fantail watch,  
cradling a 12-gauge loaded with rock salt  
while watching for swimmers with mines.

I remember Olongapo, kids begging,  
the bar girls with the ready smiles,  
and the meal at the Tokyo Hilton.

I forget the foreign tongues we spoke,  
recall instead the commonalities  
of daily people doing daily lives.

*Lennart Lundh is a poet, short-fictionist, historian, and photographer. His work has appeared internationally since 1965. Books and broadsides may be purchased through <https://www.etsy.com/shop/visionswords>*

Nicole Pergue

### Meeting My Erotic Double in the Last Dirt Alley of New York City

Crossing puddles of fresh rain and  
unhinging the u-lock,

screeching open the chain link fence  
to meet her in the last dirt alley  
of New York City—

greasy rainbows wrap themselves  
around dive bar garbage, rat shit  
piled up high against brick—

in a shadowy corner  
the silver clasps on her jacket's collar  
shine like spider's eyes—  
hair swept back from  
her long, pale forehead,

everything fastened and snagged  
and stiff where it needs to be—

*strike or stroke?* she asks—

*show me both—*

she grins a row of small, perfect teeth  
and opens her jacket to reveal  
my past-futures:  
smoldering microphone, spinning cigarette

northern streaks of light, the regal tip  
of a strap-on cock and the last  
dirt alley of New York City—

*do you want to hide from me?*

*No—*

I reach inside her jacket  
but all I could pull away was soil—  
fresh soil—  
hot and healthy  
as a leather belt



Nicole Pergue

**Mythic Beauty**

I've had fantasies of  
white sushi rice sticking  
to my lips—

butterfly knives spinning—  
fog-light through a  
grey window.

In this one I've turned  
all the he's to she's—  
I've accepted it.

Back in the real world  
I've expected you to turn  
into Athena—and here you are.

Your marble nose  
chips against my cheek,  
your bronze belly falls apart.

In my fantasy  
I've accepted you, ancient—  
your archaic hand pressed

to the crotch of my jeans  
perhaps forever, forever  
your Ares.

*Nicole Pergue was born and raised in New York City. She received her MFA in poetry at Hunter College, where she was the recipient of the Mary M. Fay award. Her work has appeared in the online journal Impossible Archetype. She can be reached at [nicolepergue@gmail.com](mailto:nicolepergue@gmail.com).*

Layla Lenhardt

### **Five Stages of Remembrance**

1. one minute I didn't know  
you & the next you  
were on top of me on  
Sara's back porch, tasting  
like flowers and Christmas.
  
2. when we tore my room apart  
looking for your phone, I saw  
your father's anger shine  
through your front teeth.
  
3. I remember lying  
to them all & driving  
to the beach, drinking  
whiskey from water bottles  
we hid in a picnic basket.
  
4. sometimes my heart still swells  
for that time, fumbling around,  
not being able to control  
where we were going & not  
wanting to because we  
liked how it felt.
  
5. when I drive by  
your parents' house I still  
get that feeling, I still look  
for your bedroom light. When  
august feels like autumn,  
I remember.

*Layla Lenhardt has most recently been published in Peeking Cat Poetry's Yearly Anthology, Door is A Jar, and the forthcoming Third Wednesday and Muddy River Poetry Review. She is founder and Editor-in-Chief of 1932 Quarterly and she currently resides in Indianapolis with three cats.*

Hibah Shabkhez

## **HAILFLAKE**

In Quasimodo's jostling stone-cobbled street  
From the gulls' wings upon the river's soft thrum  
Through the colombes around the clochard's feet  
The stray flake of hail flits lurchingly down to me  
A little button of water, all stolid and blythe  
A gift of water borne by the wind that will be  
Slicing through the brown sherlock-coat like a scythe

In the wind, in the sleet, in the drizzletty rain  
Flutters the soul that the sun spurs to pain  
The screen-burnt eye looks into the grey sky  
Where steel birds stir cloud-firni as they fly  
And whispers: "Paimana bideh ke khumar astam."

Hibah Shabkhez

## NIGHTSUN COUNTRY

Shall all birds fly to roost in the gloaming  
Even those nestled of old in my heart?  
Those upon the sea in the high tide foaming  
Would they let night nest them apart?

Come sleep, wash away travail and toil  
Bear the grit of misery out to sea  
Wring out the sands, let the waves uncoil  
The star-mantle of night – and let my birds be

Let them awhile in a twilit dream  
Be reborn upon a moonray to forsaken joy  
Let in not day's whiteness, stark as a scream -  
Let it not my dream-birds oust and destroy!

Sleep, be thou their vale of soft rainbows  
Be thou the land where the nightsun glows

*Hibah Shabkhez is a writer of the half-yo literary tradition, an erratic language-learning enthusiast, a teacher of French as a foreign language and a happily eccentric blogger from Lahore, Pakistan. Studying life, languages and literature from a comparative perspective across linguistic and cultural boundaries holds a particular fascination for her.*

*Blogs: <https://hibahshabkhezicc.wordpress.com/> and <http://languedouche.blogspot.fr/>*

Valentina Cano

**Creature Comforts**

Webbed appendages would be useful.

I might, with them,

be able to dart through the folds

of traps you've laid in the room.

I might speed away

from the words that ricochet like shrapnel.

Propelling myself through the waves

of fuselage into the deadest of seas.

Valentina Cano

**De-Composition**

The selling of the dead comes naturally.  
There's no trick to chiseling out  
congealed blood  
from veins that bend like licorice  
or to scrape the marrow with a fingernail.  
Bones tinkling together with the voice of porcelain.  
The dismantling of the mantel.  
The taking of what's already sold.

*Valentina Cano is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time she has either reading or writing. Her works have appeared in numerous publications and her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Web. Her debut novel, The Rose Master, was published in 2014 and was called a "strong and satisfying effort" by Publishers Weekly.*

Ed Higgins

### **Homonyms Explicated**

Right/rite:  
Your touch smooth as impulse/  
Swaying my mind

Soul/sole:  
The sky applauding sky/  
Only your smile's affection

Hear/here  
Feast of beating, our hearts/  
Your tongue slips off mine

Dye/die  
Skin rendered to flush/  
Taking us into steep ravines

Its/It's  
Possessive touch/  
Love's torn membrane

Scene/Seen  
Delicate dawn on rising/  
You retrieved all morning

Taut/Taught  
Swirling words,  
Undertows, kelp waving

Road/rode  
Traveling this present/  
Everyone's frail journey

Lesson/Lessen  
The heart as trapdoor/  
Sinking into love

*Ed Higgins' poems and short fiction have appeared in various print and online journals including recently: Peacock Journal, Uut Poetry, Triggerfish Critical Review, and Tigershark Magazine, among others. Ed teaches at George Fox University, south of Portland, Oregon. He is also Asst. Fiction Editor for Ireland-based Brilliant Flash Fiction.*

Carla M. Cherry

**Simplicity**

The best lesson  
I ever learned  
about life was  
to spit out  
watermelon seeds  
and to suck  
all the meat  
off the bone.



Carla M. Cherry

### March 8

Today was International Women's Day.

When I got home and undressed,  
found a hole had burst through the left thigh of my jeans.  
This pair lasted less than a year,  
and others are already pilling up.  
It's great to have our feminine achievements celebrated worldwide  
but in this cold weather  
what I could use are denims  
with cotton fibers tough enough  
to honor these thickset thighs  
that make music brushing against each other when I walk,  
these gatekeepers that bulge and kiss,  
that hug my man,  
make him hum in half notes.

Maybe I have sinned,  
thinking this Western garb was meant for a sister like me  
who never had the  
pert rounded breasts  
flat bellied, cinched-in waist  
hourglass hips  
bottom shaped like an apple or an onion  
to fit in with the clan of the slim thick.

Time for another trip to Fulton Street in Brooklyn.  
The fabric of Moshood's pants/tops/dresses  
flow around me like a zephyr,  
finesse my curves,  
forgive my bulges,  
free my thickset thighs  
to kiss.

*Carla M. Cherry is a teacher and poet whose work appears in various publications. She has published three books of poetry through Wasteland Press: Gnat Feathers and Butterfly Wings (2008), Thirty Dollars and a Bowl of Soup (2017), and Honeysuckle Me (2017).*

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*Website:* <https://www.carlacherrybxpoet1.com/>

*Amazon author page:* <https://www.amazon.com/author/carlacherry>

Rachel Calderone

**A Mess: A Cento Poem**

When there is nowhere to go,  
I sleepwalk.  
Between awake and sleep.  
Mother, I am bad, not  
Of flowers and leaves.  
I'm scattered and various.

*Rachel Calderone is pursuing a degree in English, Secondary English Education, and Spanish. While studying at IUN, she is Co-Editor for IUN's literary and arts magazine, Spirits; the president of Sigma Tau Delta; tutor at IUN's Writing Center; and member of The National Society of Leadership and Success. She has hopes of becoming an academic and accomplished writer. She's had six poems, one essay, and one short story published.*

Angela Yuriko Smith

### **Origami People**

Origami People are flat and sharp.  
They are made from yesterday's news.  
They hide the Classifieds in their creases.  
They give paper cuts to those that come close.

They are made from yesterday's news.  
Old gossip glossed up to look fresh  
They give paper cuts to those that come close.  
If they ever unfold, they expose their secrets.

Old gossip glossed up to look fresh  
The words of others makes up who they are.  
If they ever unfold, they expose their secrets.  
They are fragile, but we pretend not to notice.

The words of others makes up who they are.  
They hide the Classifieds in their creases.  
They are fragile, but we pretend not to notice.  
Origami people are flat and sharp

*Angela Yuriko Smith's work is published in print and online publications, including "Horror Writers Association's Poetry Showcase" vols. 2-4, "Christmas Lites" vols. 1-6 and "Where the Stars Rise: Asian Science Fiction and Fantasy" anthology. Her first collection of poetry, "In Favor of Pain," was nominated for an 2017 Elgin Award. Bitter Suites, her novella about a hotel that specializes in recreational suicide experiences, will be available on July 13, 2018.*

John Reinhart

## **Supernova**

i want  
to be a dandelion  
cracking through the asphalt  
yellow sun in black hole  
radiating mischievous power

i want  
to grow old and gray  
standing tall, knowing  
the wonders of morning and night  
whistling in the wind

i want  
to die quietly on the breeze  
sowing future promise lightly  
exploding supernovae into space  
little yellow suns between the cracks

*(First published by Moon Pigeon Press)*

John Reinhart

**The Humaniverse**

*an occult relation between man and the vegetable*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836)

peering out from  
his garden lot  
into the public road,  
sheepish, nervous  
about what happens  
between man  
and vegetable  
as if we were only  
here to eat—

man appears a little  
lost among the weeds  
obscuring more civilized  
fauna, and, kneeling  
in the mud,  
redeems a little patch  
of hearty turnips,  
thistle and dandelion  
crying for more sun  
amid the collage  
of variegated green,  
purple, white, and yellow,  
a little care warms  
a thousand years  
of glaciers, inspiring  
angels and dung beetles  
shaking hands  
with noon-light sun,  
blossoming infinities  
that offer a new  
communion,  
praising the wealth  
of a delectable  
universe

*(First published in Silver Blade)*

*John Reinhart is an arsonist. He was the recipient of the 2016 Horror Writers Association Dark Poetry Scholarship, and he has been a Pushcart, Rhysling, Elgin, and Dwarf Stars Award nominee. His latest poetry collection, 'arson,' has just been published by NightBallet Press. Find his work at <http://home.hampshire.edu/~jcr00/reinhart.html> and @JReinhartPoet*

Margarita Serafimova

**Untitled**

The sea on the beach was thinly spilling, a mirror of gold.  
The afternoon time was calling the night time:  
Bite my tail so that I bite yours.

*Margarita Serafimova was shortlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize 2017. She has two collections in the Bulgarian. Her work appears in Agenda Poetry, London Grip New Poetry, Trafika Europe, European Literature Network, The Journal, A-Minor, Waxwing, Nixes Mate Review, StepAway, Ink, Sweat and Tears, HeadStuff, Minor Literatures, The Writing Disorder, The Birds We Piled Loosely, Noble/ Gas Quarterly, Origins Journal, etc. Some of her work: [https://www.facebook.com/MargaritaISerafimova/?ref=aymt\\_homepage\\_panel](https://www.facebook.com/MargaritaISerafimova/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel).*

J.D. Smith

### **Catfishing on the National Mall**

I stride past the Jefferson's marble mound,  
around the Tidal Basin's curves  
from FDR to MLK, beneath  
the brief-flowering cherry trees  
toward the happenstance sundial  
of the Washington Monument  
until I stop—because my dog stops  
to snatch a chicken bone  
or lesser scraps on greasy paper  
and I call her "catfish," the way  
my father called his dogs  
for scavenging and bottom-feeding,  
floor and lawn their river bed.

I scavenge, too, in sight and metaphor  
among the tourists and footworn grass  
for traces of falafels and their makers,  
the folders of tacos and rollers of big burritos,  
remnants of fries, cheesesteaks, cheese slices,  
gyro and the inevitable burgers.

Someone hungry enough could salvage  
from all this a flawed, complete meal.

So might one piece back together a country.

*J.D. Smith's fourth collection, [The Killing Tree](#), was published in 2016, and in 2007 he was awarded a Fellowship in Poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts. He is at work on a fifth poetry collection and a fiction collection.*

[www.jdsmithwriter.com](http://www.jdsmithwriter.com), @Smitroverse(Twitter),  
<https://www.facebook.com/JD.Smith.Poet.and.Writer/>

Jennifer L. Collins

### **Melon Rinds**

Our dreams run down our chins  
like juice from watermelon,  
trickling and sticky with taste,  
with possibility gone from view  
into the dirt at our feet.

Held in static air, we watch  
them land off their ends,  
rumpled and sightless,  
unbuilt with their falls from grace,  
and we scowl at the sloppy landings.

Once as natural as cloudcover,  
and so simple as the breath from our lips,  
they dribble down now after gone  
yesterdays, stubbled and disfigured,  
more over than if they'd never begun.



Jennifer L. Collins

### **A Taste of Tomorrow**

It was like the lingering sensation of a meringue pie  
flavoring her tongue  
with cream and with the sour-  
sweet touch of what was.

The way his touch walked away from her,  
across the floor and out to the sidewalk,  
into some space she wasn't quite  
willing to pursue.

Drifting on the high of what was  
came too easily,  
turning back to the bar being too natural,  
ignoring his sudden absence  
something that felt temporary.

With their conversation drifting in the air  
and in memory,  
she could pretend that presence  
meant less than it did.  
That the stools to each side of hers  
were signals of the usual,  
nothing extraordinary to be overcome.

But the fleck of a tingle on her arm where he'd touched,  
and the hair at the nape of her neck,  
and the curls that had turned as he'd whispered  
into her ear, as if it was nothing—  
these were the seeming seconds  
that repeated,  
echoed,  
and plastered themselves to the touch  
of her fingers on her drink  
as she sought comfort  
in the taste  
of what was  
that she was almost forgetting.

*Jennifer (@wytwavedarling) is a tattooed poet and animal lover who grew up in Virginia and has recently relocated to Cape Coral, FL., where she and her husband have five rescues – one neurotic hound and four very spoiled cats. Her first chapbook, *Oil Slick Dreams*, is available from *Finishing Line Press*.*

Christine Wright

**Inevitable**

in the {hollow} where  
our breaths danced;  
before our mouths met  
and our tongues touched  
I wondered how we'd end

*Christine Wright is a former therapist, rock journalist, and ecommerce business tycoon (darn that economic collapse!). Now, she's a writer, actor and greyhound whisperer who likes power tools, red shoes, and white wine. Learn more at her new website [ByChristineWright.com](http://ByChristineWright.com) and follow her on twitter @WrightChrisL*

Sarah Etlinger

### **Crossroads of America**

Elkhart, Indiana, July—hot with a thick thick heat;  
skies hold a heat you can taste.  
Beyond the hood of my car the road stretches west  
all the way to crimson California and east to New York.  
Beneath the gray road a creek jammed up, jammed  
to bursting from the water of hot summer rains.  
Fields far beyond my eyes' reach show off their bare midriffs  
as they tan in the sun—green and rust with corn and soybeans and and and...

Past the fields houses sit so delicately, white and weathered  
like the earth for carpet. Inside them, I imagine  
(for I cannot see anything but for an instant  
as my car thrums the pavement good god good god good god)  
boys wash dirt off their fingers; from the cracks in their skin  
flows water so gray it stains the sink. Girls clean up the shadows  
of a trickle to eat what Mom made from the land that burped the plants.  
After dinner they poke at a fish or a bird outside near the creek  
or catch fireflies as the horses doze.  
Teenage girls, hair pulled back or cropped hugging necks, in cutoff shorts,  
prop naked feet against the porch.  
I see them all, stuck in a sort of trapped dream,  
where tomorrow is more plowing more eating more fireflies  
more picking more more more.

From the road none of this matters, each house only a blink;  
from the house each car a blur, a rush, gray with speed. Heat,  
and then more heat. Rain, and more heat.  
Good God it's gray, gray like Syracuse,  
the road below good god good god good god (like the prayer before eating)  
each mile a revelation,  
each car an incantation, an amen to America.

*Sarah A. Etlinger is an English professor who resides in Milwaukee, WI with her family. Her work appears in "The Poetry Professors" podcast (episode 107) and in a forthcoming issue of The Magnolia Review. Interests include cooking, traveling, and music (as well as canning!).*