

North Carolina's Best Emerging
Poets
An Anthology

Compiled and Edited by
Z Publishing House

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Foreword, or How This Series Came to Be

There is a troubling catch-22 that exists in the world of publishing: in order to be published—at least by any of the major houses—you must already have been published. The logic works like this: Publishing houses want to sell books. What easier way to sell books than by publishing authors who already have amassed large followings of readers to whom they can market? Inevitably, this cycle leaves the aspiring author with the pressing question of where to begin. Sure, the dramatic rise of self-publishing platforms has enabled everyone to put their writing out there, which is great, but it does come with its own set of problems. Namely, when everyone actually does put their writing out there, as has happened, the question now becomes: Where are the readers to begin? With the oversaturation of the market, readers could spend entire lifetimes buying and reading self-published books and still not find that one author with whom they truly resonate. On Amazon alone, for instance, a new book is uploaded every five minutes, and that number is only set to rise as more and more people take advantage of the self-empowering platforms available to writers today.

The good news is that readers want to discover new talent. This we learned firsthand after beginning Z Publishing in November of 2015. What started as a small Facebook group designed to bring independent writers together on a shared platform of exposure soon transcended into a wave of newfound appreciation for independent writing. Within a few short months, Z Publishing had amassed tens of thousands of followers across social media. Once we knew the idea had struck a chord with a growing group of people, we took the next step and launched Z Publishing's own website in March of 2016. Publishing articles from writers of a multitude of genres—including travel, fiction, politics, lifestyle, and, of course, poetry—the website garnished more support from readers and writers alike, and our following continued to grow.

Though writers of several genres contributed greatly in the early months following Z Publishing's launch, the tremendous support from the poets in particular convinced us that Z Publishing's mission was an idea worth pursuing. We began to receive hundreds of submissions from poets across social media. Many of whom thanked us personally for the extra exposure. In fact, we should have been thanking them, the creators of the great content that had brought the readers to Z Publishing in the first place. Regardless, the poets displayed a level of support for Z Publishing that we never could have expected, and so when we decided it was time to take the next step in Z Publishing's evolution and publish our first official book, we knew exactly who to turn to.

Even though we had high expectations, the result of Z Publishing's first book publishing attempt was truly surprising: Fifty talented poets, from sixteen countries, all worked with enthusiasm to produce a volume of independent poetry that could appeal to all readers of poetry, and Z Poetry: An Anthology of International Indie Poetry (Volume 1) was proudly published in August of 2016, officially marking our status as a book publisher.

Since that time, we've produced and published books in numerous genres, but we've never lost sight of our poetry roots. From state poets laureate to poets who have never before been published, we've continued to promote the work of talented wordsmiths across the globe. In our eyes, anyone who produces good content is worthy of having their work seen.

With that idea in mind, we began the America's Best Emerging Poets series, in an effort to find and promote the best up-and-coming poets on a state-by-state basis. At the end of the year, we will invite five poets from each state to contribute to a book showcasing the best emerging poets in the country, and from there, we will offer one poet our first solo book deal. To make these selections, we will rely heavily on reader reviews, so if there are any poems within this book that you particularly enjoy, please give them a mention in your Amazon review.

Now that you know a bit about how this series came to be, we'd like to thank you for taking the time to explore this edition to the America's Best Emerging Poets series. We hope you enjoy this publication, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts regarding how, together, we can build the publishing house of the future.

-the Z Publishing Team

Thoughts, Reflections, and Stream of Consciousness

“All we’ve come to know,
To touch the essence of,
Leaving behind a memory,
A presence of its own.”

– *Scott Hastie*

Female Anger

Sara-Rose Bockian

When I walk into the dining hall
and some six-foot asshole
too tall and busy
for human decency
runs right into me and
“Oh my god I am *so* sorry!”
is the first thing that comes out of me—
That is not Female Anger.

When he grunts and walks away
leaving me picking up my plates
and my dignity
wiping the tears from my face
with the crumbs of my pride
he spattered all over the floor—
No, that is not Female Anger *either*.

And as I sputter away
Hiding my broken face from their disapproving gaze
Already rehearsing the lines that I'll say
when I cross his path tomorrow—
“I am so sorry. I'm *so so so* sorry.”
Though not even sure what I have to apologize for???
But certain that whatever happened,
THIS is the fate I deserve—
Well no, that is not exactly Female Anger *either*.

God forbid I ever actually let the world see
what I *feel*
because if a Female has Feelings
that must mean she's a crazy bleeeeeeeep!

And that's not just Female Anger
No, now we are talking about
Female *RAGE!*

Field Crickets

Britt DiBartolo

Their singing begins suddenly
as if startled into it by this sweet
rain or too much silence,
they sing all night and day.

One morning I woke baffled
by their music, the loneliness of
the tune. Singer with no song,
they sing all night and day.

Suddenly, their singing begins
as if struck by something, some
sense of their own ending, still
they sing all night and day.

Hush, can you hear? This morning
I woke baffled by the light, frost
across the fields. Wait now, my hand
finds yours, finds it in silence.

The Seams of Life

Andy I

I'm hanging by a thread
And I can't seem
 to find a seam
To hold onto anymore
I'm tired of drifting through
 the fabric of life alone
I just want to be intertwined
 With someone like me
But the world has forgotten how to sew
 and here I am
Feeling like the last thread
 without a purpose

June, July
Emily Haaksma

Within the death rattle of an idle mind
Sits an uncanny crispness that rivals
Plunges of fall skies and first frost crunches.

Palo Santo of the furrowed temple,
Harvesting its tricky fragrance takes time:
Observe the passage with steepled fingers.

The nucleus of the dry spell pours forth
Bubbling; a fresh bud bragging sweeter
Than its environing sickly brain-rot.

Even maddening solipsism bouts
Appear to bear fruit once the peel's sliced
And the scuddy tears crust into plain salt.

Coffee Arabica
Threa Almontaser

Arabian coffee is the national flower of Yemen

I.

Desert sun doesn't scorch
our waxy petals,
pure white, star-like faces.

Cut the axils in our leaves,
we spread faster—dense clusters
of dark, glossy evergreens.

Fine by us when field children
uproot our red-ripe beans.
Sweet pulp gathered in small fists
to flavor ice-cream & candies,

harvesting the rest to treat a cousin's flu
or accelerate their mother's labor,
her swift-born baby slippery, red-faced,
smelling of something sweet.

II.

A goat herder named Kaldi
found us when he saw his flock
prancing near our bush.

And so tossed a few cherry-like bulbs
into his mouth,
to be overwhelmed by a sudden exhilaration:

Vigor great. Moonlight strong.
He named the tree *cahuha*, force.

III.

By dawn, the jasmine scent
stretches towards you, heady & full.
The black potion keeps you awake
during nightly prayers,

something close to divine inspiration.
When you bow, the aroma
lulls your mind. You won't recall
how you walked past children

huddled on nests of flimsy cardboard
earlier that day, soot-cheeked and skeletal.
How the youngest dodged cars, scaled a brick wall
to sneak to your side, tugged her torn pants

down for the coins you carried,
sun a red-hot eye on your back.
And you stood there rolling your tongue
around the lingering bitterness
from your morning cup.

When the wind drops
those withered white togas in your path,
be sure to collect a handful
of their dried, half-burnt berries

and place them in your pocket
for when you next walk her path.

Crowds

Violetta Nikitina

A knot, a parliament, a pack
Is neither still nor silent
And answers to a lonely cry.

Only crowds, in cities and in towns,
Can be a lonely susurrations
And remain indifferent
To a call, a sadness, or a sigh.

A croak incites cacophony,
A hoot—a conversation.
But words hang in plain sight,
Stillborn into a moving night.

Cosmos

Andrew Teague McCollister

Through a green light,
a boy watches himself.
Vanilla cream floating in the dark abyss.

The slanted mirror,
reflects a tombstone.
A pair of brown eyes
sink in red glow.

Lies

Taryn Felton

Twisted in lies,
Tangled in deception.
What's the truth?
Hatred fills the empty spaces,
Love slowly starts to drift away.
Mysteries unravel before the eyes,
Darkness seems like home.
Hissing at the light like it doesn't belong.
Howling at the moon,
Telling unspoken truths.
Demons of life show how to play a foul game,
Angels hide their faces in shame of what has become.
The days seem like a game and it gets harder to play,
The rules are now soft guidelines that do not even lead the way.
The truth is further away the more the day progresses,
The anger flings closed doors wide open to let the fury and truth
Fill the room and let the other players learn who is now the master.
Things have changed because of the game,
What was broken is now stronger and has the drive to make things
new.

Winter Sighs
Alexandria Bova

I wondered why
a hollowed heart
never tasted like the poison apple
I was promised in that fairy tale.

My open palm is pressed
against my chest, counting the used-to-be rhythm
the butterflies took with them.

They said they would only be gone
for the winter,
but I learned to mimic the motions
with my outstretched hands.

End of McMinn Ave

Robert Layman

The people down the road from us,
at the very end of McMinn, were
what I called 'angry white trash,'
'borderline skin-head mother fuckers.'
Torn American flags
hung in front of half-built Suzuki's
with Harley emblems welded on &
their mufflers ripped off.
From their yard barked four Rottweilers,
three pit bulls, & nine Chihuahuas.
They had two bunnies but no cats.
Armed with many guns and a plethora
of ammunition: bullets piled up on coffee tables,
so many you could make coasters of them
without even trying. They hung
samurai swords on chicken coops,
fired pellets at the rooster
if he got them up too early.
Their dirt pit yard featured
a part time-trampoline in front of
a basketball goal chained
to a rotting Maple. They wore
leather jackets and coughed emphysema.
Two Bibles sandwiched a shelf
of black, unlabeled video cassettes that
younguns were forbidden to watch.
If there was space on their wall,
it was only because one of their
cow skulls had fallen off and
they were too drunk to care about it,
but the white outline left behind,
saved from years of nicotine build up,
always reminded them of its place.
They had various southern artifacts,
flea market weapons imported from China,

gas cans from wrecked motorcycles,
pictures of bald eagles and wrestlers,
tobacco stained baby pictures—
all spread about their house.
Their arguments started small
and grew large, like life sentence prisoners
they'd bicker over small things:
last sheets of toilet paper,
uncapped toothpaste,
dirty laundry, dirty dishes—
but if someone slammed the door or fired a gun,
Bobby McFerrin's voice would suddenly
come out of the robotic fish in the living room,
humming *Don't Worry, Be Happy*
and everyone always sang along.

Too Pure
Priscilla Perez

I think some people are too fragile,
too pure to live
—myself being one of them.
The state of existence becomes unbearably unnatural
when one feels that
the goodness inside of themselves
outweighs the goodness of the world.
I do not mean this in a self-righteous way,
just that being aware of this truth
in turn, makes you more aware of
all that is wrong within the world—
leading you further and further from
contentment, and closer and closer to
immobility.

A Sheen
Scott Hastie

A sheen, a glow,
A charisma of sorts.

All we've come to know,
To touch the essence of,
Leaving behind a memory,
A presence of its own.

Energies
That eventually settle,
Coming to rest somehow
In the very fabric
Of who we are.

I see this so clearly
In the eyes of others.

Every moment
That has gone before
Bringing us here,
My friend.

And yet with so much
Still left to absorb.

Joy and pain
Spread so evenly
Along time's heavy arch.

Normal Fruit

Gavin Stone

Fresh fruit spoils at the bottom of the pile,
giving the room a citrus burst for a little while.
Only when I get hungry do I see the rot,
the fresh smell was all forgot—
replaced with sickness and suspicion of the rest of the lot.
The vibrancy was good to see,
as if only recently it had hanged from the tree,
but it's all gone, a corrupted memory.

What Distance Does

Lauren Bunce

Everything looks perfect from far away.

No speed bumps touch me as I ride inside
the back of the waxed, white Lexus,
my eyes following the blazing-orange streetlights.
Just look at those pale, pearlescent globes
lining the Palmetto.

I want to study their multitude
with the same fervor of a novel's close-reading,
as we fly underneath a beam
that answers with brightness before it extinguishes,
then reappears just beyond where it last stood.

I try to find where the opals stop,
where they beckon. It's overwhelming
that some things never end,
That streetlights don't change much from place to place.

I find my answer
Atop a sea of concrete darkness—
Chasing those spheres, I would never find the finish line
Because chasers never win.

Mirror
Morgan Parrish

“
Why do you stand there
Staring at me
Accusingly
As if I know the answers?
If I knew why these things
Keep happening,
Why I keep slipping into
This pattern,
Why I keep waking up
Disoriented—
If I knew,
Don't you think I'd tell you?

How can you judge me
So cruelly,
Unforgiving
Of the wrongs I have committed?
I broke myself living
The life you wanted,
Trying to be the woman
They needed,
When I was simply nothing more
Than this woman
Standing here
Looking straight back at you.

Have you forgotten that
I'm human,
Painfully
Trapped in this body?
What perfection is it
You hold me to—
Where did you find this
Set of rules

With boxes to check and
Lines not to cross
That you think
Mere mortals can uphold?

I see me in you
Deep within,
Barely
A vestige of who I was.
I believe I have once again
Failed you—
I again did not live up to
Expectations.
Perhaps next time I stand before
This mirror
Staring at you
I will in fact see me.
”

Balled Up
Anna Mukamal

I am a tin-foil figurine, contorted,
trying to learn how to love myself

a sheet freshly torn, still hopeful to
become a shape with which I can live

not big enough to be on my own, but then
again, too small to really be anything yet

too malleable to commit, too twisted,
too crinkled to be seen as innocent

yet unformed, and if truth be told,
too light for something so heavy

as straightening out and rolling up
into some box for cylinders one day

pedalia

Danny Thomas II

you dragged your feet across
the sighing beach with your
hands jammed so deeply into
your pockets, till they were
straining for air. suffocating.
mumbling something sad, unsure and
coolly blue down into the remnants
of a sandcastle, fighting against
premonitions of a better you.
in its moat you saw a clump
of exposed jelly, wading
in its own shock and toxicity,
throwing you glimpses of its own
seductive translucence—
you wanted to reach there
to guide it back to sea with surety
and float to rebirth with it,
over the currents. exposed
bodies jutting from the surface.

Nowhere
Aidyn Truesdale

Nowhere is a fine place to be
If you're not bothered by the
Irony on every corner
If you're okay with beauty
Not always being so easy to swallow
Or easy to follow
Because even the most lovely things are hard to take sometimes

Nowhere is a fine place to find yourself
If you're okay forgetting things
Sometimes,
Or not knowing who you are
All the time
Which isn't half bad if you know
Who you'd like to be,

Though most people don't.

Nowhere can be quite a lovely place
If you're okay with other people's
Pointed questions and
Insincere affections and
Constant misconceptions
About concepts they don't understand.

If you're okay floating around with
No ones
And noting their altogether nothingness
In this world
Which isn't half so bad

Until you realize you're one of them

Nowhere is a very good place
To get drunk
Or to fall in love
Or to read books
Or to not think about anything
Too much,
As long as you're okay with such afflictions as
Hazy inhibitions
Or heartbroken conditions
Or societal subscriptions
That our lost souls succumb to.

Yes, nowhere is quite a fine place to be
If you're okay with me not being me and you not being you
If you don't mind being a faceless thing,
A weightless thing
Which doesn't sound so bad

Until you try to weigh your worth

There's certainly nothing wrong with being
Nowhere,
As long as you don't get
Greedy
Or needy, needing to be somewhere,
Pleading to be someone.
As long as you're okay with choking on your own tongue
When one of those noted no ones
Asks you who you are.

Hypothermia

Charlotte Stapp Price

The cold creeps in—
into me.

It starts in my hands and feet,
but it crawls, inching toward my heart,
pulling itself forward with icy claws
that pierce my flesh and bone;
I am paralyzed.

Time is frozen,
or am I frozen as it passes me by?
Some brave soul ventures near,
and the warmth of another heart floods mine.
But once I'm alone again,
the warmth bleeds out.

What remains is not only a biting cold,
but also the distinct sting of the loss of something better.
I'm freezing over again. This isn't me.

Life & Memories

“Soon we must learn to say goodbye
As the sun falls from the proverbial sky
And the stars lose their grip on space
We each will find our rightful place”

– *Gina Irish*

Olfactory Chapters

Kimmi Pham

When I was four, I flipped
My favorite toy panda into the air.
It plunged, headfirst
Into a bowl of fish sauce.
Soused and steeped in the scent,
No scrubbing or sun-drying
Will ever release it from
Its devoted fragrant following.
Fermented anchovies,
sweet vinegar, and garlic—

Scent is a savor of memories.

The smell of salty lychee
Reminds me of childhood soccer games and
Jasmine incense wafts into thoughts
Of my twenty-first New Year. The new regime
Reeks of charred bamboo leaves.
Those two weeks in the refugee camp are tangled
With the stubborn scent of day-old fried chicken wings,
While more recent springs tell a story of settlement, aging,
Damp cherry blossoms, and a cocker spaniel.

Scent is a saver of memories.

Gas Lighting

Melody Wolfe

if you are going to gaslight me,
then you might as well pour gasoline onto my skin
onto my open wounds
light a cigarette,
and send me up into flames
into a beautiful, blue and red burning fire

gas lighting by definition is manipulating a person into questioning
their own sanity,
but the thing you failed to remember,
or maybe had no idea at all;
is that i already have been questioning my own sanity since i was in
the ninth grade
you can't gas light me,
not back then and certainly not now
because i already set myself on fire
to keep everyone else around me warm

i've already been reduced to a pile of ashes and a steady stream of
black smoke
i'm already exactly where you wanted me to be,
and you didn't even need to do or say a thing to put me there.
i'm the one that bought the gasoline and matches

Memorial Beneath the Camphor Tree

Heidi L Sherlock

Out in the yard we buried tuna cans
and played golf with a rusted putter,
tapping balls across the sand and camphor leaves.
The fat tree rained berries like black beads
that popped in my fingers and beneath my feet.
From the oaks, we pulled long locks
of Spanish moss to feed the cows who ate
the stringy tendrils in pulses, jaws wagging
beneath their hide. When they were done
we pulled grapefruit from the trees
and threw them into the pasture while
we watched the cows, mouths foaming,
gut the citrus, leaving perfect cupped rinds
at their heavy cloven feet.
At the fence line, I collected pecans
that fell from the neighbor's tree. And farther off I picked meat
from shell in the shade of the camphor tree. My splayed
fingers ran rough over bark and tore the shiny leaves,
releasing the smell of a medicant.
I force the memory, but I fail to force the scent,
buried as it is beneath all the important things
I could afford to forget.

It's Getting Cramped but We Gotta Pretend not to Notice

Mason Lipman

So there's the sidewalk and the dusty footprints leading nowhere,
A tooth chipped, blood running like red syrup
Into the dirt-filled crack between the blocks
That kills everything that tries to grow there.

I'm not in between the sidewalk.
And I am not the tooth,
They aren't my dusty footprints either,
But I'm all the people living in this block.

Forever
Gina Irish

Forever is what we promise
Forever is how we'll stay
No matter what tries to harm us
Nothing will keep us away
Forever is what keeps us young
But our time together is never long
As forever slips through our hands
Like infinite grains of sand
Soon we must learn to say goodbye
As the sun falls from the proverbial sky
And the stars lose their grip on space
We each will find our rightful place

As forever ends, right on time

Please Read Carefully

Laramie Graber

My old bedroom is a window into my mind.
White carpet, white walls, white newly washed sheets,
An expectant blank canvas, waiting
For the gleeful ding of its numberless clock,
To show its worlds built of suppressed secrets,
A sprawl arranged on shelves and desk
In ever-growing stacks of paper,
A black scrawling code of
Words.

And I,
Sat on the edge of my bed
Ready to guide you.
Glass polished.

My new bedroom was a window into my mind.
But
Carpet was wood walls rough cinder-block sheets filthy blue.
Strewn papers formed labyrinths of work
Dorm halls of locked laughter
Slithered through the door's cracks
A spray of black ink coating
The last remaining specks of white
Forcing words into my computer
Flinging the code across cyberspace
Password protected
Invisible.

And I,
Slunk off my bed
Into the corner of my cell
Because you never came.
Glass shattered.

Only a dictionary remains to greet you
Salty with tears and sweat
Merriam-Webster's window highlighted:
"An opening..."
"A means of entrance or access..."
"...capable of being opened and shut."

Why didn't you open it?
Were you confused?
Did you not see it?
It is one of many windows, though slightly cracked.
Or did you see it like everyone else?
Plain, no shouting declarations, no bright decorations, no music, no
wafting weed, no alcohol-induced shouts, no laughter.
Is that what you saw when you walked past?
Yet, I thought I saw you hesitate once.

So I left this here.
On this bench, outside, in the night's embrace.
You've sat here before
You might see this.
If so please, please, read until you
Understand.

The North Tower

C. James Burgin

A lone cloud billowing dust,
ash, into a burnt blue sky
from a jagged cavern
carved, not by nature,
but by creed, religion,
hate. This cliff side gape
vomits black to purge
itself of despair swelling
lungs of its cavemen.

Adam and Eve
 take a leap
 of faith,
 hand in hand. They are
 falling—
And I try to catch
 them, but I can't,
 for they are
 twelve years gone.
 And I am
 twelve years late.

Secret Ingredients

Caitlin Paige Rimmer

A peaceful hum from her methodic mixer,
As secret tastes were twirled together,
Lured in her focused eyes.

With graceful fingers dusted in flour,
She massaged her homely masterpiece,
And pinched off bits for the smallest savor.

She squeezed the dough into a glass container,
Like a thick pale cloud eager to rise,
Pushed slowly into a steaming oven.

Time ticked on while heat waves danced,
The golden crust and bronze insides,
Flavoring the room with delicious aromas.

Carefully taking it out to cool,
She watched the bread stretch up for air,
Towards her stained, warm oven mitts.

Roots and Routes

Connor Cook

Roots and Routes
Both home and away

Across this vast
Collection of memories
I travel

I was there
 I am here
It is all relative

A feeling then
A memory now
Points on a grid
Housed in my head

It's getting rowdy inside this

Minute
Minute

Increments of time across space.

Act of Preservation

Reeves Singleton

Tremulous:
your hand
in the air,

waving away
attachment.
An introduction

to bereavement
is a precious thing.
This is what you

say you've learned.
What you say you've
learned you've learned

is a product of tragedy.
And you tremble,
ringed finger,

bent finger, missing finger
dividing uninhabited space.
Ask us a question;

ascertain your own cognizance
of continued being.

Kalavastos
Faye Goodwin

It has been
one hundred years.
your body
nearly buried in the sand of Kalavastos
your flaxen hair bone bleached, the hot sky, your shoulders
left so long unpolished by soft hands and eyes
the marble of your mind a desert catacomb, all epitaph, all
cuneiform
grown over with the red anemone.
After one hundred years
there is nothing left of you
in the silt of my continent
the wind has taken our white sheets from the clothesline
and blown them, shroudlike, sail-like, out to sea
your endless grave.
is it your love
of lost things
that brings red petals from across the sea
to scatter on the stones
of my sepulcher?

Piñon

Robert Dean

Oh that the desert were my dwelling place,
That I might crawl upon a rock,
Skink-like, and become part of the scenery.
Hot dry sunlight and adobe buildings in dappled shade
Dashed with shards of bright turquoise.

Breathing in juniper and baked asphalt
air shimmers like a mirage in the heat.
As I cross the parking lot
like a pilgrim to the rusted red Toyota,
bearing my offering of rat poison and cleaning supplies.

A brittle dead piñon branch cackles as I step on it.
It tells me I'm dreaming and my desert has died,
Like the perfumed trees upon sandstone bluffs
I once held court in.

Waking I am plunged
into muggy air and tunneled greenery,
Cicadas serenading the curving country roads of Kentucky,
with its long white fences like grinning teeth.

The tangled woods crowd out the sky,
and the dusty, brawny native of my dreams take refuge,
Drenched in smog and sweat, he retreats to my dreams,
A fugitive of this languid summer.

The desert hangs on me like a bushel of dried chilis,
each memory poignant and sun-bleached.
It smells like what I told my father I could smell
as we broke rocks in the driveway,

Like the ozone in the air before the thunderstorms that carve rivers
in the sand.

Anadyomene Invictus

David Koppang

It's really quite something
This vitreous ruby crystalline wonder
Copper clockwork ticking on
Through rust and seawater
Taking those icebergs in stride
You've been in service 29 years now
And you still glide on
Glad rags and all
Let nothing you dismay
Living through that black bear
Devils and gods
Apollo and the Aten
Now you curl up in Teutonic felt
Warming fragile gears through the ages
And you call back to yesteryear
"Oh but if you could see me now"
Swimming backwards
Through sopping apologies
Wondering where you really thought you'd be
Was it really worth your time
And now it is
Here in this midnight hollow
Dreaming through all the noise
You braced yourself against
Never realizing what was on the way
And aren't you glad you took it on the chin
Aren't you glad you took the worst of it
Diving through the nights
Some drunk nyctonautic dream
Hanging off of his lashes
He'll remember you at the worst possible moment

And wonder how he missed the parade
Yes you
You lightheaded corybantic wonder
You're an Atlantean Mardi Gras
Held over from before the fall
And you never begged him for anything
Long may you wind down those hours
Unabashed
Anadyomene with an attitude
You made it after all

Negotiations

Nadia Kirmani

we are
smokescreens
for God

scattered fractals
without teeth
no taste
sans eyes

collapsing stars
that wrinkle
space

•

promises I keep
are for myself

on nights
when I'll forget
to swallow

and bleary memories
shoulder lost language

governed by
laws of ice

when asking & re-asking
becomes ritual

and
the only thing
that belongs to us is
estrangement

we're recyclable

cardboard
stretched on carbon cloth

suctioning saliva
to breathe,
sanctioning delirium.

those nights
compulsory words
unwind and secure

your fingers
on glass beads
fracturing
pale
moonlight

List
M. S. Kenna

it's the last song of the night

and

the other stripper on the table
pulls folded bills from her G-string

lets them fall to the ground

raucous: primal hoots and hollers

she shuffles her feet,
kicking the money into a pile

garish lights

cast over the accumulation
of gray, green crumpled payment

she does not hear the thump of
the bass

her mind is preoccupied by better things:

her grocery list
(and if she needs to buy more detergent)

I smell Tide

Family & Friends

“I loved the mosaic of flowers
depicting you in the garden,
raising every blade of grass like a child,”

– *Wyatt 'y' Bond*

Shingles

Lauren Moore

In the car, my mother and I
would play a game: start with a long word,
like *shingle*, and shed one letter at a time
to build something new. We tore this one down
to make *single*, *singe*, and *sing*,
then finally *sin* and *in* and lone
individual *I*.

She had shingles once,
and I assumed the virus turned her skin
to a blistered etching: hard layers
one over the other, chipped and peeling.
What if she slipped a fingernail
underneath to scratch, and cracked
the surface, and made it fall away?
If she lost her shelter,
her shell?

In the end the virus
trickled from her nerves
down to mine like rain down
a sloping roof, remaking itself
in me.

Ovation

Samantha Davis

My father, brother and I have the same clap, palms and long digits matched to create the percussive chamber, a rushing snap of air deeper and louder than the whispering patter of polite appreciators. We can clap and clap with no pain, an efficient union and reunion of flesh. Our hands are made the same—long bent knobby fingers, green veins a nurse could easily puncture, the same convexes, the same concaves. When there's a standing ovation, we applaud with elbows swinging wide, half-clutched jackets falling to the floor, rumpled clothing unattended to. At first the palms smart, flushing as blood flows to capillaries, but then they fade to numbness, our echoes the only record of their meeting.

Tonight
Ella Mowad

Tell me why the moon tonight
is like the lit stem of a firecracker,

strung up gold in the corner of the
bedroom window. Tell me why

the light that falls in blisters worse
than skidding hard on the sidewalk after

school. Worse than standing up on the back
of the truck, planting your feet strong

and going over anyway. Will you slam
the breaks? Rush to me writhing by

the roadside? Spring's new daisies are
all crushed beneath my battered shoulders,
but it's the harvest moon that's rising tonight,
exploding like shattered glass on the kitchen tile.

You won't see it—
It isn't bright enough to reach you.

It won't even scratch the surface
of the cool, dark grass.

Christmas Eve Communion

Sarah Jeter

It is Christmas Eve and we go to church, my mother on my left sitting with her hands in the fold where her legs meet. Trumpets play *Mary Did You Know* and a baby cries in the third row where we almost sat. I don't like the front. Eleven minutes go by. Pastor Larry announces we will take communion. *You do not have to be a member of Turning Point Church; if you believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, that he died for you, we invite you to take it with us.*

He selects a piece of broken cracker from a golden tray. Shallow like the first three feet of the ocean. The tray circulates the sanctuary. My mother takes a piece of cracker the shape of Florida and holds it between her fingers. She has arthritis in her thumbs and knuckles like raspberries. We bring the crackers to our mouths, crumbs falling into laps. We are dirty. The lights on the Christmas tree next to the altar glow butter on my mother's face. She folds toward the floor. Creased at the middle. Bed sheets in linen cupboards. We receive the blood of Christ. A plastic cup of grape juice.

Thank him for what he has done in your life and drink with me.

Pastor Larry raises his cup to his lips. Juice escapes. Coagulates on the dent in his chin. The congregation raises glasses to crusty lips. Whispers *Amen* because Church should be soft like fried eggs. My mother does not raise her glass yet. Pauses. Head bent toward the wine-colored carpet she thanks God for her bleeding nipple and arthritic toes. The lump in her breast pulsates to the beat of the keyboard piano. She lifts her cup to her lips. Drinks three tablespoons of sanctified grape juice. Rises singing *O Holy Night*. I stand with her. Open my mouth but I can't hit the high notes as my mother slides her communion cup into mine, grape juice dripping from her palm as she lifts it in worship.

My Grandmother's Funeral

Wyatt 'y' Bond

My brother and I got them in the mail
from time to time,
second-hand memories.
Sometimes just an envelope
dusty with pollen and the smell
of sunflowers.
Sometimes boxes upon boxes
glowing with filament light
and words, faces, and emotions
half-remembered, glossed over,
made electric with exaggeration.

Once we got a Christmas tree
decked in the entrails of saints
and I learned how you gave and gave.

I loved the mosaic of flowers
depicting you in the garden,
raising every blade of grass like a child,

I laid it next to the old wooden clog
my father swears missed his head
by inches- you never had good aim.

All of these gifts were marked
with a certain charm in the saying
Caution: Memories fonder than reality.

Still, the pictures of white, blonde you
next to my darker skinned grandfather
always give me something to believe in,
the part of you I know for sure loved the man
from Armenia with his disapproving mother
and her way of trying to make you Armenian too.

Maybe she succeeded in some way,
because yesterday
I found a new package on the stairs,
a case of despair,
old wooden thing
passed through generations of family,
dripping with an inky grief
that stains my fingers
like the juice from pomegranates.

Whoosh

P.B. Greene

I know her
in the way she sashays
the listerine and lemonade
to cover up the smoke in her mouth
and the flames in her throat
I know her
in the way she blows out a candle
like a knife to the back
and I know her
when all she tastes is flight
in a damp honeysuckle
I know her
when her tongue knocks to be released
as her teeth chatter out the secret code
that I myself never bothered to learn
and I know her
when she says my name
and forgets how gravity is supposed to sound

At the Crooks' Residence, 1999

Thomas Madray

Jesse gave up his bed for me those nights
when I would lie awake listening to trains.
His body carved a crater like some stain
in the sheets. He did not want to fight
with restlessness—he tried with all his might
but was choked below cotton cellophane
that kept him still. Those nights I heard the rain
beat the windows on a drum skin pulled tight.

I know I could not fit inside your form—
a prison built too big for boys my age.
Your bed still haunts me, digging out a pit
to call home, but bless you who kept me warm,
who lent your twin-sized bed—a shallow grave
to ride a storm—sallow, sweating, split.

Nursling
Maggie Shoup

Sometimes in the night
insistent fingers pinching at my raw breast
his head smelling of soil and mangos,
there is nothing left to take.
What else can be pillaged?
Bones have been rearranged, my skin carved into.
Even time was thieved
by his suckling mouth,
that new fast clock bearing down
on the obligations of birth, sustenance, death
moments between essential steps compressed.
My bright-faced babe, he is Einstein's wicked train
altering what I know even of the passage of time; his death would be
mine.

Fingers flutter against my navel, excavating a line
between what is his and what I retain
a vicious gulf laying out so broad, into it drains
even the brightness of my mind
with his sweat-soaked curls
and perhaps I am too tired to eat. Perhaps
my nails blacken and
the glib illuminations of my face sink,
drawn by the swirl of his cavernous mouth.

Once I teased death. Now I plead and supplicate
for my milky bird-boned love.
Every ounce of me goes in offering,
torn to pieces by bitter crows
and by the sharpness of men
or boys who will be men
given, or stolen.

Love, Romance, & Heartbreak

“Now they say you will not return,
so I stumble to the precipice, where I see you
in the blue mountains flung across the sky,
ready to embrace me again.”

– *Laura Traister*

Blatantly, Hope

Sara Beaster

I refuse to be lonely.

Lonely looks like when you settle in with
20 cats and a coating of their hair,
ooze of the less than ordinary in the air,
and more rosé than roses on your counter.

I keep finding gray hairs, sleeping less
and slurping more coffee,
starting every morning sighing,
every meal with panicked frenzy of cooking for one,
every day in a half-empty bed,

but I keep starting.

Lonely cannot survive with *fervor*:
quickstepping melodies on wooden kitchen floors,
cursing at burns from my oven and lighter and life,
singing too loudly, laughing too loudly,
walking out into the sun like I own the horizon.
I am alone with nothing, and everything,
but there is too much *much* in me to be lonely.

Cassandra's Question

Chloe Hooks

six months after my parents met
my father with the dark and swirling hair
had a vision

of a sunset swept patio
where grandbabies run circles around
rocking chairs made years before,
when his hands were steady still

and he and momma
sit in a porch swing
spitting sunflower seeds and chuckling over
the familiar shrieks of the kingdom when

he turns,
looks into her face,
an honest map,
and she, not needing to ask,
uncurls a weathered smile

and now their child wonders
what many have before:

do you share my vision?
tell me whose wrinkled hand you'll clasp —
will a glance be enough for you then?

Voluntary Evacuation

Andrew Hachey

The morning caught me like a thief
looking over the arroyo. Air gauzed
with brush smoke below, the kindling of our house
painted orange.
At this distance steam gathers a little,
then forces its way off our skin—
not enough to kill the strutting embers,
the red in your eyes.
Love, I am drawn to silence
holding your dirt spotted elbow,
but the witch finger twigs & branches
chime their brittle hymns in the breeze.
By late afternoon we have enough
of musty hotel bed & windows,
of burnt light at impossible angles.
The day has dried to salt on your skin
& there is no end like want of a beginning.
In the farthest corner a bucket,
sweating, so when you refuse to rise
I rest my ear on your stomach,
hollow like the world now.

The Truth

Liyah Foye

Together
Finally, united
Our love, ignited
Passion
Mistaken for disdain
Yet
Smoke covered the mirrors
My eyes opened to the horrors
Our love, ruined
The truth, uncovered
Deceit
Mistaken for passion
And my heart
Broken

Jump Off Rock

Laura Traister

We met far above home, near the clouds,
on nights the moon curled back her visage for us.
She lit the forest path as feet skirted ruts and roots,
fallen limbs, pounded finally onto gray rock.

Spying the stars, I emerged breathlessly,
thinking I was alone, until you
stepped out from behind a pine or rose
from crouching in the snow.

My father had chosen another for me.
The other maidens fed the night with whispers
that hung like branches in the wooded air.
My own heart doubted each time until I saw you.

Your arms, strong sinew dressing bone,
jaw set like your flint-tipped arrows.
Your eyes sharp as eagles' talons,
lips soft as feathers as they brushed my neck.

War sounded in the distance, splintered the rock
but cemented my promise to you.
I have waited for you here, my spine
melding to the mountain.

Now they say you will not return,
so I stumble to the precipice, where I see you
in the blue mountains flung across the sky,
ready to embrace me again.

Fading Love
Brittany Perloff

Make a note of me when you leave
Mark it in your calendar next to
Just getting by and
Don't forget to breathe
Do you have time to
Whisper words
Of solitude
Maybe just once when you're in the
Mood.
Lingerie,
is it better on or on your
Bed.
When our mouths do more talking
Than what is actually said.
I like it hot and you like it cold,
So the blanket only covers half of one heart
While the other is unraveling.
Did the monsters at night feed you fallacies?
Were you not used to normalities?
Like social situations and love.
Is it cold in your bed?
Colder than that freezer you sit in
When you let out a scream.
Is it comfortable anymore?
Something you couldn't possibly see
So I'll imprint my body on your sheets
So one day when you can't breathe,
Letting out another scream,
When you open your eyes,
You'll see me.

A Haiku
Alex Petercuskie

Like a silky book
I touch you, but can't read the
Layers of your love

The Possessive Particle

Nicky Vaught

You were the core to the ship of Theseus,
The ownership, the possessive particle,
Everything now is gone or new,
Nothing managed to outlast you.
Like my old things, though, you've left.
Am I still the ship I was?
Still the watch?
I can't tell time.
I can't tell a captain where to go.
Now she and I are drifting without destination—
At least not specifically—
And comparing missing parts.
We're both missing the same parts.
We can't complete each other.
But the company hasn't been so bad.
Is there meaning in identity
Without someone calling me theirs?
I can't tell.
Never mind all that I said
I can't tell who I'm talking to—
Like the first android
Whose facial recognition is working askew.
Can I ask you, "Who are you?"
Would it hurt to be forgotten?
My watch face needs replacing
Once again...
Does it still?
Some old parts I abandoned
Might actually be just fine.
Is it too late?
I can't tell time.

The Color of a Broken Promise

Alycia McDaniel

It's the color of the fire
as it dances in the wind, alone.

It's the hue of her stain
as she leaves a trail on his neck,
like a sentence that would never be finished.

It's the color that rushes to your fingertips
when you grasp for her heart one last time.

It is the color that abandoned you when she left.
When you stopped breathing.
When you gave up.

It's furious, vigorous, vibrant, and fierce.
And it is the last color you will ever see again.

When Algeciras Consumed Your Heart

Patricia Patterson

Sometimes I trace the space
between my pillow case
and the other and pretend
you're still beside me,
not some thousand miles away
drinking foreign air and filling
veins with wine and dreams
and water.

Here, my fingertips are chapped
from cold air, split
lips slip words unintentionally,
summers too hot,
showers too scalding.

Here, a picturebook tells me,
"Distance makes the heart grow
colder," and I think
I'm not cold, but maybe
I am,
or maybe I'm too restless

to admit that when I'm alone
I count the seconds between
heartbeats. I fall asleep
this fragmented way, rearrange
morning rays to fast forward
to another tomorrow
where I start again.

Ebony Deep
Thelathia Singleton

You know my every need way down deep in parts unknown to many
My black thoughts are scrupulous, good and plenty
Making you feel me like a good dime bag giggling silly
My aroma makes you love-dizzy
Committed, love tired bodies woven together like dreadlocks
My sweet ebony canyon will knock your socks off
We meant to be
Ink on paper
Verses flowing easy and free
You my sweet lick daddy
Specially made just for me
Like a stop-traffic booty sitting pretty
No complaints made from your love-soaked lips
I make you blush when I mention my hips
Loving inside and out one another
Loving surpassing our full potential
Loving you until breathing is steady
Until all is still
Until our hearts less heavy
Until we are no longer in need of a refill

Shallow Bodies of Water

Philipp Lindemann

I can't expect you
To come around
The pond you've never been to.

I tire of you
Gradually
As the water evaporates.

There are the sweetest tales of
Dogs
Waiting on the owners until their end.

But, me,
I am no dog.
I can leave any minute.

My feet are already moving,
But
No rush, love.

Once your actions
Catch up to your words,
I'm sure you'll put on your shoes.

Undone
Elizabeth Isaiah

I'm tired of being here,
Alone
Where are you when I need you?
Hiding behind lies you tell
To keep from becoming
Undone
Follow me down to the point of no return
No one knows who we are or what we were
We can cross lines
No one will know you are becoming
Undone
Look into me
See the truth you are blind to
Take a breath,
Say your prayers
There is no going back
You are
Undone
I look into your eyes
It takes one moment
One breath
One heartbeat
To come
Undone

Beauty

“I think of us
winding through the night like
two colors with a third.”

– *Grey Wolfe LaJoie*

Telling a Fib

Eeyi Oon

233

We are no fractal river,
No photographer's frail infinite droplets
Dividing into two and two and two again
We are only amorphous puddles,
Accidents of construction and of time.

144

The blue glow on the ground as the rain leaves
Its signature in the red brick pavement.
Child of both sunlight and shower.

89

Sorry mum.
Boots love puddles—it couldn't be helped!
You see, it was destiny,
That nice big splash!
And really not my fault.

55

What is it like, to be born of the rain?
To live a few days, less under a sunny sky,
To spend a short lifetime staring up
At obscured stars.

34

What things must puddles hear?
White House puddles, college puddles, New York puddles—
Much grumbling of course, about the weather,
They've broken up.
Such-and-such professor impossible.
"Look the sky's clear again."
They've gotten back together.

No one talks about a puddle.

21

Leaves sometimes come to visit.
Red leaves, fractal-veined, floating on the surface.
Orange-yellow-green leaves, who haven't decided what to be.
For the first time someone bends down to look,
And the puddle holds its treasure importantly.

13

Coated with the hope of spring,
Vibrant yellow under the weight of nature's expectations,
Ignorantly staining pathways and cars and everything
Yellow to-be-plants idly turning in the after-shower sun.
A cheerful stain on sidewalks and cars.

8

Plish, plink, plop
The puddles are singing
Of springing and greening and growing
Things.
Secret quiet things deep down in the dark ground
Plishhhhhhhh....
Brave little things, yellow on the witch hazel bush
Plink!
And, part of something bigger, buds on the sweetgum tree
Plop.

5

Pixies trapped in puddles cannot fly:
Mud would weigh your wings down, too.
If you were only six inches high.
I've never seen a fairy—it is true,
That it simply is too wet in North Carolina.

3

The unexpected dip of the sidewalk
Under a silver-drop sky
Fills with water,

Until, unawares,
it seeps into old shoes.

2

The many limbed trees,
Delicate yet strong in their branching
Deign to drop some petals for me,
They float, creped-pink and sakura-white and mei-plum-purple.
I catch them and let them float on display,
Drifting and swirling.

1

Even in winter we have puddles,
Much to the woe of those
Who could very much use a day off;
For them ice is perfect.
Don't be so welcoming, puddles—
No one wants to see their face
Staring back at them
On the way to class on a snowless morning.

1

Sometimes words skim off,
Hitting the surface at an angle less than the critical.
Reflecting rather than refracting,
My face in the puddles, as through a glass darkly.
Sometimes words pierce through,
Slicing through, bouncing off yet distorting,
The surface underneath.

Prayer

Grey Wolfe LaJoie

Thinking of smiling again,
I go out into the night, which is
hunger, which is,
playfully,
nothing.

The stars
sit on their black slab
like lint while I
wander toward a drugstore,
cupping my heart between
my hands. The wind
tries itself out on me, enters
my lungs. I stop to hug
a telephone pole
as if I'm just
about to fall
a hundred stories.
I fall a hundred stories.

If I spoke to you
in riddles this way all the time,
then both us kids would get quite
tired and grumpy,
and possibly so hungry.

I fall a hundred more, or

I think of us
winding through the night like
two colors with a third. No falling
or else mad falling, up
toward the sky, indelible sky,
wry black wish I made
when I was born.

Nature, Wildlife, and the Outdoors

“Where blue meets blue
In a sharp and contrasting hue.
It echoes the tide’s approach in force
As it keeps a fervent and steady course”

– *Nick Otranto*

Anatomy of Electricity

Hannah Quinn

A smooth and polished rubber at first glance
Is marred, in fact, with scrapes of duller hue,
The scars of some forgotten circumstance

Thus does wire remain, placid and subdued,
Until a heedless creature lacerates
And unassuming copper nerves protrude.

Rampant force, unconstrained by rubber case;
Steroidal synapse driven mad by pain
And seeking retribution for disgrace

Some errant sparks, but otherwise restrained;
As docile flakes precede an avalanche,
So current trickles from electric vein

The surge of hot and cultivated wrath
Leaves twitching justice in the aftermath

Fishing

Jonathan George

Patient in my endeavor,
I cling to the wood
Careful as ever, not to sever
The connection that stood.

Whispering to myself only,
The thoughts fly in and out,
Seeming to me a bit lonely,
Filled with more and more doubt.

I cast my shadow, my reel,
My bait flies overhead,
A mixture of orange and teal
Hits the water, as if dead.

Light glimmers, capturing reflection,
Engaging the presence below,
With focused attention
By this new radiant glow.

I am in stillness,
Awaiting the rupture
Of excitement that lurks
About, ready to
Pounce out of the water.

A Soliloquy of Stardust

Nikole A Brand

When at the end the stars go out
I will be there to cry
Everyone deserves a dirge
When it decides to die

The last strain of starsong
Echoes in my mind
Burning through my blood
Ebbing out my eyes

I sing the silent note triumphant
Pure harmony of truest black
A scorching light of symphony
Conveying deepest morning

Spotting the First Flower in Winter

Megan Hutson

What beauty this is I think I know.
Her yellow blot the first to grow;
She will not mind as I gaze in shock
At how she sprouted after the snow.

My peers whizz past and slowly balk
At how I kneel before you and talk
Between midterms and Spring Break
The rushing around is their great fault.

They think their cellphones so great
Only to miss beauty of Spring wake.
Their single memory of this sign
Is an Instagram post of a joy fake.

The Spring beauty is bright, full of life,
But I have moments to make mine,
And sun to see as it shines,
And sun to see as it shines.

Come and Return

Nick Otranto

The silence of the waves crashes into shore
As the wind gathers speed more and more
With every gust, carrying the mist
And dust of swells gone by.
It is a tale told by birds of the sky,
Who with every dive and call cry out
The story written in foam on the sand,
Where feet have passed and many
Will stand and embrace the brine
Of ages in work upon the line of the horizon,
Where blue meets blue
In a sharp and contrasting hue.
It echoes the tide's approach in force
As it keeps a fervent and steady course
Up the slope to kiss the rocks
Who sit and mock a fruitless cause.
But soon they will be nothing more
Than the dust scattered along the shore
To feed the story of the oceans charging roar.

Details

Aedan Hannon

Smiles on faces
Neat lines drawn between teeth
Indents in cheek

Creases in creek
Created by currents
Glittered with sediment
Occasional whitecap from change in flow

Needles numerous as the stars
Each slightly different in shade and shape

Trees living and rotting
Wood splitting in crystals
Standing resolute in their own forest
Giving life to ecosystems of insects

The lost world of fields of grass
Most see the waves
Yet more lies underneath
Boulders of sand amongst swaying yellow redwoods
Beasts of considerable size fumble about
A hurricane rages above
Mountainous terrain providing formidable opposition
Valleys carved by raging rapids
All underneath a step

Lost in the magnitude of experiences
Celebrating motion
Celebrating the Earth
Existence
Speaking to the great beauty of the unnoticed
Of life beyond tunnel vision
Eyes trained forever find
Sublime miracles
Details

In the Harlow Lab

Bradley Allf

I no longer hate you
because I no longer see you,
because in your absence
these metal walls fracture

into geometry that comes
from a microscopy of thought,
from a wandering of spirit. So I see
whatever I feel, only,
and all I feel is cubes.

I've embraced the limitations
you've placed on my imagination—now
a gray monkey mother
is a good monkey mother,
better even if she's shiny.

You call this the pit of despair
because I am trapped in cold
and shake to keep time, hold
myself close. But what runs
vivid in my skull

you will not know,
not know I've discovered
the further I get
from your biscuits,
your hand the more I can chew
the threads still tying my head
to that shrivel of fur.

Homecoming in a Tourist Trap

Alysoun Gough

the ever-hopeful smell of east coast hose water
seeping into crab grass and urging it to grow.

the floating ashes of carbonized leaves that fall like snow
confusing the sensations for seasons during brief languid moments.

the blanket of humidity covering already damp skin
welcoming everyone to sea before it can even be seen.

the persistent sun not so much beating down as dripping
lulling bodies of dogs, people, cicadas back to shade, to sleep.

the shimmering, nearly tangible heat mirages
coating the pavement, reviving its asphalt stench, making the
children reach out—

the hypnotized sleepiness of beached suburbia
greeting bodies impartially, pulls even shipwrecks back to shore.

Nature's Time
Quashona Renee

Feel the breeze coming in
Sweet smells in the wind
Sliding my soft scarf past my chin
Feeling sand between my toes
Crinkling my nose
At the tingling sensation as I go

This world we live in today
Has come and gone to change
While passions fade away
Free-willed in spirit, no more
Occupation has control
No star gazing on the floor

Where is nature's time
When will we realize
This life is not guaranteed
We gotta take control
And we will see it's fine
To just unwind
We gotta know that there's more to life...

An Orange Tree

C.H. Lovelady

Perspiration grown cold underneath foliage
Hanging those bright bulbs.
The breeze, too,
Dangled them above a shadow's camouflage
From the static sun causing some
To fall from the highest branch
And bounce wildly.
These were my youthful merits
For running carefree and indulging in the immediate;
Pulling back tart, white flesh for a nectar
That stung the pores.
Now, like a milky tang,
A permanent stain in these callus hands.

This Place
Jennifer Peedin

This is a place of broken fluidity,
flowing like the clear Appalachian stream.
Its quiet murmurs and thrum, a symphony,
echoing music, you heard in some distant dream.

It's haunting with the echoes of hymns
that bounce through the hollers and valleys,
shaking the believer free of their sins.
Out of the body and to the sky it furies,
In this place.

This place is sensual like sweat rolling down
hips of women in a dance that men can't understand.
To the beat and hum of a land to which they are bound.
Hands rove over the sloped thighs of the damned.

Mossy oaks twist and turn in a silent dance
for the drunks and dreamers, sinners, and lovers.
Bourbon and whiskey clink glasses with a sultry glance,
getting lost in the humid night, never to be discovered
In this place.

Valediction in La Jolla

Anna Cantwell

Two girls with thick black hair
basked on the flat of a rock
overlooking the ocean
like seals, and stones were
cemented in shoreline so long and rounded
by pounding waves that they too
almost looked like seals, with shiny steel-gray backs.

To dig my hand
into the sand was scooping treasure
from a chest—a palm full of scalloped vermilion, something close
to amethyst, yellowish-green sea glass, perforated coral.

I saved these pieces, for they had traveled so far
to meet me here, to meet my palms cupped,
filled with prayer and gratitude for the voyage—mine and theirs.

I saved them, all lovely, in a little box:
the miniature onyx stones, bits of indigo, shards of sea glass,
the coarse grains of sand,
all broken and lovely.

I climbed the crag, not sure if I would be dashed
on the rock-face, or fall,
and I stared into the tide pool
as if it were a microscope. The fat koi—
I think it was a koi, or maybe a clownfish—
seemed to be on fire. The sun igniting clear ocean,
a kaleidoscope of the broken pieces.

Frozen Discoveries

Suzanne Cottrell

Sagas hidden within firn,
years of snowpack accumulation,
compacted snow transformed into ice
Ancestors trekked along river banks,
climbed through mountain passes,
donned woolen garments, leather leggings and shoes
Armed with willow bow and shafts,
stone arrowheads, bird feather fletching,
pursued caribou, bison, bear

Mummified humans, carasses, artifacts, microbes
originally encased in ice coffins,
like insects ensnared in tree resin
Once icebound, authentically preserved
climatic changes caused ice patches to melt
revealed ice man, woolly mammoth, coins, viruses
Archaeological conjectures:
lost, starved, injured, buried
findings jeopardized by exposure to elements
Significant historical evidence or
potential biological threat
salvaged at what cost.

Inspiration

“Don’t let their words turn your heart colder,
And keep on dreaming.”

– *Lazaro Gutierrez*

Dreamer
Lazaro Gutierrez

Dreamer,
Coming to a foreign land,
Trotting through without a plan,
Fighting hordes of wicked men,
Yet, you dreamed.

And only after battles fought,
You learned that words are not enough,
To combat hatred can be rough,
Yet, you dreamed.

And from this dream,
You planted seeds,
Fruits you were never meant to eat,
But with hope your heart still beamed,
And you dreamed.

And once awakened—lonely soldier,
With heavy weights atop your shoulders,
Don't let their words turn your heart colder,
And keep on dreaming.

Tough. Mudder.

Jasmine Bamlet

Muddy hands.
Dirty ears, brain is mush.
North Carolinian red clay.
Sticking
between every ridge and crevice.
Each obstacle is
 another challenge,
 another chance
 to prove yourself.

Be wary,
Be determined,
Be strong,
just don't lose sight
 of the good
 right
 in
 front
 of
 you.

You are precious.
You are important.
You are perfect.

And I find you to be beautiful, you tough (mudder) you.

Another Foggy Night

Frank Daddyo

Another foggy night, alone on the deck
Controversy abounds, but a thought appears
In the dark, a revelation of sorts
That we have a basic choice—
There is Faith, or there is Anger
Even the most agnostic puts her faith in Something
The sad alternative is obvious
As long as we believe, we have purpose

Miscellaneous

“And I remember sitting in the empty parking lot,
the silhouette of life reeled out along the brick wall,
and the calmest cadence is when there is no time,
there is no sleep, and there is only the stars.”

– *Rachel van Aalst*

If My Body Were Terrain

Vance Alan Graves

The terrain on the right side is larger, rougher, more challenging than the left, but this journey is still worth the reward.

As you wander my body, follow the dotted line from the top of my hand to the side of my foot, make sure you stop to enjoy the view.

Peer into my iris, slide down the bridge of my nose, lounge on my arm.

Take in this queer mountain of flesh.

And while you're here, don't forget to check out my butt.

The Wind Before the Storm

Julia Lauren Chabai

Tired legs not from work,
But from a restless night,
Struggle up the hill to take me
To the place where I might
Find some reprieve,
From the wind that is cutting,
From the storm that is coming.

The wind blows golden locks
With long lost keys,
Away from the windows
That they secure.
The nefarious breeze
Whistles at passing maids
As they try to evade,
The wind before the tempest,
The gale before the menace.

Cycles

Will Francis

I

He wants to know
a reddish thought
that beams with light
and fills his face
and makes her
know him
though he's shy
and can't remember how

II

She wants to know
if he can try
or she can try
but silence reigns
and hunger pangs
before the storm
that never breaks
and lives in names before

They live and die
without a death
that lives inside their
little brains
and taunts them like
a little thing
that bounces
down and strange

III

They meet again
and feel the same
but trees fall down
and knock his head
she dies and cries
and starts again
to be again
and he again

Bread and Water

Zak Cowell

Her eyes
Were a denim sky
With traces of a lightning cloud.

We were snowed in
with each other in the middle of July
We were stranded in the ocean at the end of October

We were driving through
Connecticut And I felt my heart move, And I told it to hush.

And now I wish I had just listened.
But I told it, "Hush."

Bed Time
Kate Goldbaum

I find it so peculiar that

after little Chiclet teeth have been brushed
and soft pajamas have been wriggled into
and stuffed animals have been arranged just so
after water has been fetched,
and shades have been drawn,
and monsters have been banished
after the last word on the last page of the last book has been read
after I close your door,
and you close your eyes,
and a neat summary of your day lingers among your eyelashes
before dissipating

next, you will breathe in Tomorrow,
but I step into the hallway
and keeping breathing Today.

Little Tricksters

Kayla Gibson

Within the forest there dwelled
a mystical land of fairies and elves.

The trees were lush
and the flowers always bloomed
their sweet elixir like a perfume.

The fairies would gallivant,
the elves would play,
always they would have a serendipitous day.

But one day there came
a soiled knight untrue.
A bastion of hell
and a swashbuckler, too.

It was said he groveled
to the devil below
and was gifted with the arcane
to defeat his foe.

As the draconic knight drew near,
all the frolicking stopped.
The poor fairies and elves found their
escape was blocked.

Quickly they ran
this direction and that
for they were not skilled in the art of combat.

But the elves knew alchemy,
and the fairies had ether.
If they wanted to lacerate their foe,
they would have to do so together.

The fairies flung their flasks;
the elves turned them to boiling gold.
The knight frothed at the mouth
and lost his threshold.

When over he fell,
they all mused with delight
for his golden head
was such a mollifying sight.

The Raven Sits

Andrew Edscorn

I sit on my bed looking out
Across the almost pitch-black night sky,
The only light comes from the moon's soft blurry glow,
And I can faintly see the outline of the raven.
He sits on the very top of the tree outside my window.
He sits there as if he might be a watchman,
I wonder what he guards.
Perhaps he guards my heart,
From the one who took his away from him long ago,
Searching for the love he could never find.
Or he might be an angel,
Guarding my soul against damnation,
Watching, protecting me from evil.
Or he might be a ghost of one long ago,
Wanting to come back to this world,
But knowing that he can never be human again.

In the morning when I wake he will be there,
But only for a short while before he goes,
I know he will return again in the evening as he always does.

The Crack of a Knuckle

Jacquelyn K. Loy

A still pool of silence,
fingers groping one another,
leathery tips flock upon bone,
pressure increases slowly,
just enough to nudge open a door
releasing a tsunami of sound
flooding the calm silence
pulling out as swiftly as it came.

Persistent Reign

David T Kirstein

Face the consequences of the checkered past
Look dead in the king's eyes while the jester laughs
Comedic relief smells like sweet perfume
When the king's blood's spilled on the day of doom
A crimson flood passed but the past is still stained
Whose hands are the ones who handled the blade?
Was it God, Satan, or the visiting foreigner?
Was it the baker the hunter or even philosopher?
Only one man cared, and no one was there
When he declared that he was the rightful heir
Because the prince was the one who took the king's life
Whether the man was wrong or the man was right
We'll never know in light of what happened next
The man that day breathed out his last breath
Now the prince took the thrown with a gaunt iron fist
And to this day his reign persists

So the prince took the throne and upon many he scoffed
But the jester was there and there he still laughed
For many believed the story was finished
But karma's cruel hand has only beguneth
For there was another who dreamed of his throne
A desirous one who lived in his home
With a devious mind a plot he devised
For the citizens' heads to be filled with lies
So one night a harlot slept in the king's room
With lips of black flowers and a bosom of doom
Unbeknownst to him it would soon end his life
For the king believed it had been his wife
Morning came 'round and with people enraged
No one would believe the things all kings say
So fortune bestowed a fitting joke
As the old king reached the end of his rope
The brother took hold of the land of no end
And the king ruled again with a gaunt iron fist

My Exorcism
Gabrielle Fortunato

Bristles scrape against gums, against tongue
until the coppery taste of blood mingles with mint,
swirling around my mouth, down
my throat. White foam and phlegm bubble
up, gagging me, dripping down my chin
and splattering into pennies around the sink,

erasing the taste of cottonmouth and every parent's
worst nightmare when their little girl leaves home,
because I am one in three daughters—the statistics stacked
against us so heavily that it was only a matter of time.

Dehydrated and disoriented, I tiptoed soundlessly,
searching for my Cinderella slippers
while it was still dark behind his curtains,
not able to remember when he slipped
them off—was it before or after midnight?—
only able to remember how it felt

to hold my breath for so long, certain that my lungs
had shriveled inside their cage. Will I ever breathe
again? The bear woke before I slipped out
of his den. He offered to drive me home, and I let him.

Everything tastes different now—
the spearmint, wintergreen,
arctic blast I paste on until my teeth
wiggle. I hope for the tooth fairy
as I pluck out each tooth one at a time
and strand them beautifully

into a pearl necklace, and even then
I keep brushing, scrubbing myself
into a rabid animal, once bitten now foaming,
performing my own exorcism
to remove the devil that was inside of me.

Vampire
Kathryn LeBey

You mastered the art of leeching,
Some time ago.

First,
You crawl onto a leg,
(or arm or back or neck)
With a light enough touch that no one realizes
Your Presence,
Until after

You've glued yourself to them,
With a brew of some mucousy substance
That you store inside yourself.

You feed on blood;
You don't much care from what.

Once you've eaten your fill,
though,
You make your escape
down
Into the murky swamp-grasses,
wet and warm,
That conceal you

for your Year of satisfaction.
Bloated and belly-aching,
You sit.

Meanwhile,
Someone
Will scratch at their body,
Searching the source of
A little red spot,
Like a scar but not.

Maybe they'll wash it out,
The sting of their soap prickling,
Even after they scrub at it

But you, you'll have what you want,
And you'll scramble into a patch of mud,
Where you'll bury yourself so
deep
that the next to cross your path
Won't notice your scissor-sharp jaws
Until you've fed on them, too.

Sketch, in the Radcliffe Camera

Madeleine Saidenberg

Over the toxic buzz of fraying cords
(which dangle perilously from each cowled lamp,

each hymnal spill of light), a profane prayer
sifts loose around the shadowed library.

Is it the cockeyed glances, tossed too high,
like tennis balls that will not ace, and are caught

back for another try? or blind new faces
finding old eyes, peering through the lime?

The pages ebb and flow and gasp and sigh.
Filaments bustle in their tiny globes.

A searcher runs a whispering finger down
the spines at clock points; maybe a million clocks

for invisible giants, stacked ceiling high,
in tandem spin their soundless minute hands.

The whistle of sparking minds, or the dread groan
of obsession; the moon turns and frays

the longest shadows traveling the lawn.
Or is it just, they wonder, yawning as one,

rushing pipes? The great janitor Pan
giggles in the boiler room and plays

the old scrapes of world on carpet and stone
as it rolls and rolls, radiant with thought.

A Calendar's Appetite

Graham Horne

Blind, I chased the red lighter
To the bottom of my pocket,

like when I chased a red rake
around my yard of leaves,

trying to burn piles of summoned
autumn. My suede shoes trekked

though afternoon rain on clover,
like the frustrated wires of smoke

that passed through the vacant
Spider web jeweled with dewdrops.

The pyre of forest gimcrack
Has been patiently yearning

for this equinox. These degrees
fall in the pettifogging wind,

and the sun's bluing iris
erases into the trees.

Eventually, like the hawk
that caught the squirrel

at the base of the oak tree,
I was satisfied with a snap.

Leaving
Lauren La Melle

The last time I went,
my mother thought it was last resort.
Everything else failed to cure
the crazy so prayer could not possibly
do any more damage.

I was not humbled in the house of
a dead god. Not impressed by the
hymns or anything done in the name
of a bad idea.

This is why I left:
Think of all the people who
felt like me who did not find
the heaven they were promised.
Think of all the people still
waiting for their rapture.

Blood Rhythms

Rachel van Aalst

The light is too bright to rest
and the pulsing doesn't slow.
I try not to keep time
because I fear that I will waste it.

I don't like being away from home,
the things that I forget.
I don't feel very worried,
but the tempo increases with an unknown urgency.

And I lay there in the stagnant dim
trying to feel the cool entering my throat and lungs,
attempting to rearrange the furniture of my heart
until it feels right.

Later I wonder if rest comes
by letting water pour over stillness.
The ridges of the shower's soap ledge
are fingers reaching towards me,
their bony ambition easing me
into the thought of another existence.

And I remember sitting in the empty parking lot,
the silhouette of life reeled out along the brick wall,
and the calmest cadence is when there is no time,
there is no sleep, and there is only the stars.

Hiding

Mikaela Morgan Fleming

To live in this body
A body of curves and rolling hills,
Blanketed by yellow sunshine and hay.
Hey I am bountiful and I am wild.
But to live in an invaded body,
pillaged.

Stripped of its grain and gold.
No one wants this trampled territory
Rape.

He hid behind the nametag teacher, and he taught me a lot of things.
He taught me what baby fat looks like under the body of a man,
he taught me how no has no meaning when only the devil is around to
hear it, and he taught me how to hide.
He taught me how to go eight years spilling out *I'm okays and I'm fines* for
people who were only victims of pity. When I should have been
screaming, *look at me, see me*. I was too busy hiding behind my hand so I
wouldn't be your inconvenience.

Rape.

It makes you want to run into the nurturing embrace of your mother
and though you have spent nine months inspecting and learning her
insides
she will never see how your stomach clenches every time someone looks
at your body. And you can't even look at your own body because you
know not a single inch still belongs to you, for
you have become their buffet. Greedy strange hands grabbing at your
thighs,
breasts,
and wings,
and the only form of special you are is all you can eat.

Rape.

It throws you into the arms of a skinny boy. You climb into the jungle
gym of his body. You
play house throughout his rib cage. Grasp his protruding hip bones like
the chains on your swing set, you feel safe behind these monkey bars.
But you can only be a child for so long.
They tell you ignorance is bliss.

But what do you do when a teacher teaches you that playgrounds rust
and skinny boys always leave.

You close your eyes when you fuck because eyes are windows to the
soul and you can't let them steal it,

your soul,
it's the only piece of you, you have left.

The police will bound you in a blanket of

victim blaming

Tie up your neck with rope of

innocent until proven guilty

To save you,

we must silence you.

I am David, he is Goliath, and they have stolen all my stones.

This will not last my entire life time.

No

one day he will die.

And on his judgment day he will be stripped of his pants of lies and his
shirt of deceit,

he will be forced to face the bruises on my cheeks because before God
you are naked,

and this time it won't be me.

Note to the Reader

We hope you enjoyed our publication! If you have, we ask that you please consider writing a brief review for the book on Amazon.com. In your review, be sure to mention the title of the poem (or the name of the poet) that you enjoyed the most—we will take reader reviews heavily into account when it comes time to decide who will be invited to the nationwide edition of this series in 2018!

About Z Publishing House

Begun as a blog in the fall of 2015, Z Publishing, LLC, has since transitioned into book publishing. This transition is in response to the problem plaguing the publishing world: For writers, finding new readers can be tremendously difficult, and for readers, finding new, talented authors with whom they identify is like finding a needle in a haystack. With Z Publishing, no longer will anyone will anyone have to go about this process alone. By producing anthologies of multiple authors rather than single-author volumes, Z Publishing hopes to harbor a community of readers and writers, bringing all sides of the industry closer together.

To sign up for the Z Publishing newsletter or to submit your own writing to a future anthology, visit www.zpublishinghouse.com. You can also follow the evolution of Z Publishing on the following platforms:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/zpublishing

Twitter: www.twitter.com/z_publishing

Author Biographies

Bradley Alif

Bradley is a science writer and communicator, poet, and biologist whose work has been featured in publications from *The American Naturalist* to *The Invisible Bear*. He currently spends his free time catching snakes, climbing rocks, and searching in vain for a joint graduate program in evolutionary biology and creative writing.

Threa Almontaser

Threa is a Yemeni-American writer and a MFA candidate in poetry at North Carolina State University. She is a winner of the ninth annual Nazim Hikmet Poetry Competition and a finalist for the 2016 James Hurst Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared in *The Baltimore Review*, *Track//Four Journal*, *Kakalak Magazine*, *Gravel Magazine*, *Day One Journal*, and elsewhere. She currently teaches English to immigrants and refugees in Raleigh. Besides writing, Threa enjoys traveling to places not easily found on a map.

Jasmine Bamlet

Jasmine is a craft beer drinker (sometimes writer) who lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, with her boyfriend and pug. Her poetry was published twice in the *Windover*, North Carolina State's literary magazine. She's great at drinking beer, okay at poetry. Cheers!

Sara Beaster

Sara is a high school English teacher living in Andrews, North Carolina, who enjoys writing in her free time (though limited it may be). She can be contacted through her email at sarabeaster@gmail.com.

Sara-Rose Bockian

Sara-Rose is a recent graduate from Claremont, California. She enjoys experimenting with the aesthetics of her poetry and hopes to pursue an MFA once she finishes paying off her liberal arts school debt.

Wyatt ‘y’ Bond

Wyatt is an MFA candidate at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina. He lives with his dog, Virgil Cane.

Alexandria Bova

Alexandria is currently an Assistant Editor at a magazine publishing company. She has an English degree from University of North Carolina-Greensboro. Alex received her M.A. in Humanities and Social Thought from New York University. She is a Plathophile, a self-described grammar nerd, and she collects typewriters for fun. She can be reached at abcerretani@gmail.com.

Nikole A Brand

Nikole credits masters such as Frost and Tolkien for her love of the written word. Nature is a reoccurring motif in her poetry, which features a combination of metered rhyme and free-verse to create pieces meant to be vocalized. She can be reached at 2ndstarsailor@gmail.com.

Lauren Bunce

Lauren is a writer of poetry, short fiction, and to-do lists who lives in Durham, North Carolina. She was the editor-in-chief of *The Archive Literary Magazine* at Duke University and will graduate in 2018 with a degree in English and gender, sexuality, and feminist studies.

C. James Burgin

C. James moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1998. He later enrolled at Appalachian State University, where he majored in creative writing and Spanish. There, he developed his poetic style and interest in poetic form. Now, his experiences growing up in North Carolina shape and define the themes of his poetry.

Anna Cantwell

Anna grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, and her childhood in the South inspires much of her writing. Her passion took her to one of the only creative writing programs in the country at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Here, she completed her first chapbook, was published in the *Cellar Door*, the university's literary magazine, and explored poetry with James Seay, Michael McFee, and Alan Shapiro. Delving into creative nonfiction later on, she worked on several freelance projects, including the Jazz Loft Project and Bull City Summer with Sam Stephenson. She cultivated a love for education and led a youth creative writing camp in North Carolina post-graduate. Then, she taught high school English and received her Master's in Teaching for secondary English education. Now, she is a freelance writer, editor, and yoga teacher.

Julia Lauren Chabai

Julia graduated from Wingate University in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts in Biology with a chemistry minor. She plans to attend Wingate's PA program in 2018. She works currently as a medical scribe in the Emergency Department. While her life revolves around healthcare, she still makes time for poetry.

Connor Cook

Connor is a film composer who resides in Los Angeles. When not scoring pictures, Connor enjoys writing poetry and screenplays, playing her accordions, and daydreaming. Since she was young, Connor knew she wanted to create. She has always spent part of her time in a dream world imagining and creating beautiful things.

Suzanne Cottrell

Suzanne lives with her husband and three rescue dogs in rural Piedmont, North Carolina. An outdoor enthusiast and retired teacher, she particularly enjoys writing and experimenting with poetry and flash fiction. Her poetry has appeared in *The Avocet*, *Naturewriting*, *Haiku Journal*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and *Dragon Poet Review*.

Zak Cowell

Zak is a graduate of Appalachian State, where he studied marketing and creative writing. In his spare time, he enjoys writing poetry and short stories and walking along foggy mountain trails. You can find more of his work at zakcowell.wordpress.com.

Frank Daddyo

Frank lives in Durham, North Carolina. He is married with three children, two dogs, and four cats. His goals in life are to never have to learn how to write code, never have his fingerprints taken, and never end his search for beauty. He is a mountain man at heart.

Samantha Shea Davis

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill alum and winner of the 2016 Anne Williams Burrus Prize in Poetry, Samantha lives in a tiny house in Durham with two cats and two roommates. Software engineer by day, aspiring poet by night, she spends whatever time she has left cooking and reading. Please contact Samantha at samantha.shea.davis@gmail.com.

Robert Dean

Robert is a graduate of Elon University. His writing is influenced by his experiences growing up overseas in an expatriate family as well as his passion for travel and discovery.

Britt DiBartolo

Britt is a student at University of North Carolina-Asheville where she studies literature and philosophy. She calls home western North Carolina where she lives with her partner James, three chickens, three dogs, and a cat. She can be reached at britt.dibartolo@gmail.com.

Andrew Edscorn

Andrew was born and raised in Kannapolis, North Carolina. He received his B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He currently lives and works in Greensboro. A few of Andrew's interests and hobbies include hiking, running, cooking, reading, and exploring the world.

Taryn Felton

Taryn is a full-time childcare provider who has written poetry since she was young. It helped her graduate college degree and helped her overcome her anxiety. When she is not at work, she loves her two pups!

Mikaela Morgan Fleming

Mikaela is a spoken word poet, actress, and professor of communication studies. Check out her website www.mikaelafleming.com for more info.

Gabrielle Fortunato

Gabrielle was a creative writing student at Elon University in Elon, North Carolina. Since graduating, she served a year with AmeriCorps in Washington, D.C., and is now a law student at George Washington University.

Liyah Foye

Writing has played an integral part in Liyah's life. As a child, her nose was always in a book and she was inspired to create her own stories and write down her thoughts. Through her poems, she expresses her sentiments on life and the experiences that come with it.

Will Francis

Will is a junior at Duke University studying literature and film. He loves all cats and dogs equally and gets migraines every now and then. Inquiries at will.baker.francis@gmail.com.

Jonathan George

Jonathan was born in India and moved to the United States. He took a poetry class while studying music at Wingate University under Dr. Sylvia Little-Sweat, who inspired him to keep writing poetry. Today, he is pursuing writing music in hopes of being a singer/songwriter. Contact him at jo.george@wingate.edu.

Kayla Gibson

Kayla is a copy editor and Wingate University graduate living in North Carolina. A lover of all things fantasy, sci-fi, and cat-related, she can be contacted at kaylagibs@gmail.com.

Kate Goldbaum

Pursuing a lifelong fascination with the intersection of art and science, Kate attended University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, where she studied creative writing, the American education system, and cognitive science. She obtained her degree in biology and her teaching credentials and currently teaches high school science in New York City.

Faye Goodwin

Faye is a Durhamite, playwright, poet, and nascent ecologist. Her work has also appeared in *Paper Nautilus* and *After the Pause*.

Alysoun Gough

Alysoun, a North Carolina native, earned her Bachelor's in English at University of North Carolina-Greensboro, where she learned to love poetry as an art form instead of just hitting the enter key when it feels right. You can follow her on Instagram [@alysounbookish](https://www.instagram.com/alysounbookish) and maybe she'll design a real website one day.

Laramie Graber

Laramie is a college sophomore. He likes dogs, soccer, and writing, because writing is the best. You can follow him on Twitter [@laramie_graber](https://twitter.com/laramie_graber) and he intermittently writes a blog at laramiegraber.blogspot.com.

Vance Alan Graves

Vance is from Concord, North Carolina, and is a junior at Davidson College. He is currently studying psychology and gender and sexuality studies. Aside from occasionally writing, in his free time he enjoys acting and sitting in quiet coffee shops.

P.B. Greene

Phoebe doesn't fully believe in reincarnation, but if it does exist, she would like to come back as a sanderling bird. She hopes you like her poem.

Lazaro Gutierrez

Lazaro is a young writer from Charlotte. He is currently a senior at Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, North Carolina, where he majors in educational studies with a minor in English. He enjoys writing in his free time.

Emily Haaksma

Emily is a recent graduate of Guilford College who lives in Asheville, North Carolina, and spends a lot of time looking at the sky. She holds the deepest appreciation and love for her myriad of supportive communities. Emily can be contacted at emilyhaaksma9@gmail.com.

Andrew Hachey

Andrew is a poet originally from Toronto, whose work has appeared in *Quiet Lunch*, *Atlantis*, *The Arrival*, and is forthcoming in *Fjords Review* and *The Occulum*. He is the editor of *Carbon Culture Review* and an assistant editor at C&R Press. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, with his son, Abbott.

Aedan Hannon

Aedan is an aspiring poet and writer originally from Colorado. He currently resides in Durham, North Carolina, and is an avid adventurer and outdoorsman. He gains his inspiration from the natural world, his travels, and his friends and family. Feel free to contact him at hannaedan@gmail.com.

Scott Hastie

Scott enjoys spending time gathering inspiration high up in the tranquility of the Great Smoky Mountains overlooking Maggie Valley. In recent years, the revealing spiritual tone in his work, showcased at scotthastie.com, is starting to draw acclaim from an increasingly worldwide audience, especially in the U.S., Asia, and the Middle East.

Chloe Hooks

Represented by Principato-Young Entertainment, Chloe is an actress, writer, and student at Duke University. Texas-born, Chloe is a 2017 recipient of the Academy of American Poets Prize. Her work, steeped in lyricism, myth and Southwestern idiom, explores inherited speech, feminine self-possession, and love. For inquiries please contact chooks1@me.com.

Graham Horne

Graham currently teaches literature and creative writing in Jamestown, North Carolina. Horne began writing as student at University of North Carolina-Greensboro, where he wrote often for *The Corradi*, the university's literary arts publication, and received recognition as a Poetry Prize winner in the Spring 2012 publication.

Megan Hutson

Megan is a graduate of Mars Hill University and small-town writer located in Asheville, North Carolina. She writes about her Southern heritage, family ties, and feeling out of whack with a growing technological world. She can be reached at meganlhutson@gmail.com.

Andy I

Andy Insanity is back at it again. She is still an unbalanced writer freeing her feelings through her poetry. The moment she learned to read and write, she started sailing through heartbreak and fantasies. Catch her on Tumblr with her other works, andy-87-renee.tumblr.com. Currently living in Thomasville, North Carolina. Born in Lexington, North Carolina.

Gina Irish

Gina is a sophomore in college who writes poetry and short stories as a hobby while she studies toward a degree in the culinary arts.

Elizabeth Isaiah

Elizabeth is a fiction writer, although she does have a few nonfiction stories in the works. She is currently doing the final edit for her first novel.

Sarah Jeter

Sarah is a recent graduate of Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. She now lives in Arequipa, Peru, working at a home for girls that gives her a lot to write about. She hopes to eventually write a book of poetry and subsist off of only tacos and guacamole.

M. S. Kenna

Mark was born in rural Virginia but spent half of his childhood in the Midwest and the other half in North Carolina. A graduate from Appalachian State, he enjoys writing, reading, and being outdoors. He currently resides in Charlotte.

Nadia Kirmani

Originally from Orlando, Florida, Nadia is a third-year undergraduate student at Duke University studying biology and English. Her current poetic project explores the relationship between memory and existence. She cites the works of Maya Angelou and T.S. Eliot as major influences on her writing.

David T Kirstein

Tenacious and passionate, David has used life's hurdles not as excuses to quit but as motivators to prove himself. Scientist, writer, lover, friend—all titles that describe the author. David lives by the adage: "What you put in is what you get out." This applies both in work and in spirit.

David Koppang

David is a poet whose work is primarily confessional in nature, dealing with his personal history, as well as LGBT issues. His work has been featured in his university's literary magazine, *The Coraddi*.

Grey Wolfe LaJoie

Grey is a creative writing undergraduate at University of North Carolina-Asheville. He is the senior poetry editor at *The Rhapsodist*. His work can be found in *Jersey Devil Press*, *TalkingBook*, his chapbook *A Commando in Floral Remembers His Mother*, and the anthology *Bits of Sugar and Other Stories*. He is also capable of doing a variety of silly voices.

Robert Layman

Robert is a poet from Brevard, a small town nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. He served a few terms on the poetry committee at *The Peel*, the campus literary magazine at Appalachian State. He now works as a news photographer in Vermont.

Kathryn LeBey

Kathryn is a sophomore English major, French minor at Davidson College. She has been writing poetry—along with the occasional play—for as long as she can remember. She also enjoys reading, painting, perfecting the ultimate hot chocolate recipe, and spending time with her friends and family.

Philipp Lindemann

Philipp is a 2015 alumnus from North Carolina State University and has actively written since his junior year in high school. Beyond poetry, Philipp is involved in several creative disciplines in Raleigh, North Carolina, such as theatre and photography, while working full time in retail merchandising and marketing.

Mason Lipman

Mason is a writer and poet from western North Carolina whose abiding belief is that poets should write honestly instead of hiding their truth behind their sense of style. The poems selected here are from an unpublished collection that is about losing. And being a loser. And having lost many familiar things.

C.H.Lovelady

C.H.Lovelady studied English at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

Jacquelyn K. Loy

Jacquelyn is a writer, designer, and costume technician. Each of these passions led to several national awards and recognitions for her work. She would like to thank her parents and her poetry professor, Dr. Janice Fuller, for their encouragement and excellent guidance.

Thomas Madray

Thomas currently resides in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Andrew Teague McCollister

Andrew was born in North Carolina. He attended Catawba College where he majored in English-writing. After college, Andrew traveled to Boston to earn his MBA and MSA at Northeastern. He currently lives in Cleveland, where he works, and somehow enjoys, the profession of accounting. His greatest loves are his family, friends, swimming, and, of course, writing.

Alycia McDaniel

Alycia is currently a student at Wingate University. She is an English major and a psychology minor, and she expects her degree in May, 2018. Alycia is passionate about British and African-American literature, and in her free time she enjoys painting, reading, and spending time with friends and family.

Lauren La Melle

Lauren is a video artist and student at the Pratt Institute earning her Master's in Media Studies. Lauren has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro where she directed the third annual Intercollegiate Poetry Slam. She has produced videos for the Bull City Slam Team and is the founder and creative director for the video poem archive Punchkickslam.

Lauren Moore

Lauren is a poet from Cary, North Carolina. Her work has previously appeared in publications including *Cellar Door*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Red Mud Review*, and *Gamma*.

Ella Mowad

Ella is a student currently based in Asheville, North Carolina. You can reach her at ellamowad@gmail.com.

Anna Mukamal

Anna is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in English at Stanford University. She specializes in 20th century British-American modernism. Mukamal graduated summa cum laude from Duke University, where she studied Spanish and French, and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. She hopes to become an English professor.

Violetta Nikitina

Violetta and her family immigrated to America from Russia when she was 6 years old. She is a graduate of Wingate University in North Carolina with an English degree. Currently, she is studying for her Master's in Library Science, writing poetry, and watching bad horror films.

Eeyi Oon

Eeyi recently graduated from Duke's Pratt School of Engineering and spends most of her time screaming into the void and reading.

Nick Otranto

Nick grew up in the rolling hills of the Uwharrie Mountains in central North Carolina where he spent summers in the Blue Ridge Mountains and much of his free time camping, hiking, and rock climbing. He is a current Ph.D. student of literature at the University of Dallas. Find Nick at nicholasjotranto@gmail.com.

Morgan Parrish

Born and raised in North Carolina, Morgan has been writing ever since she could hold a pencil. She studied architecture at North Carolina State University and, after working in Raleigh/Durham at BuildSense Architecture + Construction, is currently pursuing her Master of Architecture degree from Columbia University in New York City.

Patricia Patterson

Patricia studies English literature and creative writing at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. Some of her hobbies include painting and overthinking everything. Supposing that reincarnation exists, she would like to come back as a goldfinch.

Jennifer Peedin

Jennifer is from a small eastern North Carolina town where she learned the value of story-telling and the art of spinning a good yarn. She can be found on the hunt for Southern folklore, gothic tales, and the perfect cup of coffee.

Priscilla Perez

Priscilla is an indie-pop singer-songwriter from Concord, North Carolina. She is a self-proclaimed word enthusiast, coffee addict, and crazy cat lady. Perez recently released her debut EP, *Weirdos Like Us*, which is available on all major digital platforms. To discover more music news, please visit www.facebook.com/priscillaperezmusic.

Brittany Perloff

Brittany has been writing poetry ever since she could have fully formed thoughts. It's been her passion, her expression and her way of seeing and understanding the world around her. She is formally from New York but resides in the cozy corner of North Carolina. She has two novels that are self-published, one she wrote when just a pre-teen and the other a few years back under the pen name B. P. Morgan. She expects to finish her current novel within the next couple of years and is excited to see how her writing career progresses.

Alex Petercuskie

Alex writes as a witness to the beauty, hardship, and triumphs of people, and to the ultimate power that lies in surrender. She is an English as a Second Language teacher with an MA in teaching and BA in media communication. She loves Mexican food, dancing, and the outdoors.

Kimmi Pham

Kimmi is from Baltimore, Maryland. She studied English at Cornell University and graduated in 2016. Currently, she is a J.D. candidate at Duke University School of Law.

Charlotte Stapp Price

Charlotte is a marketing wizard, the wife of a disabled Veteran, a loving pet mom, and an avid reader and storyteller. She regularly writes content for businesses but also writes poetry and nonfiction. She firmly believes that writing is revision, regularly destroying and rebuilding her work.

Hannah Quinn

Hannah is a senior in college, double majoring in history and English. She plans to pursue a career in archaeology or conservation work.

Quashona Renee

Quashona holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music, double majoring in music business and popular music, and minoring in worship arts, and is both an independent artist and music instructor. She has spent many years writing, performing and teaching. Creating lyrical compositions has helped her with writing poetry pieces.

Caitlin Paige Rimmer

Caitlin is a North Carolina native and a senior at Catawba College. She is double majoring in writing and literature and minoring in environment and sustainability, while taking a few visual art classes on the side. She aspires to become a successful writer of fiction novels and children's books, along with continuing her poetry and beginning some nature writing. Email Caitlin at crimmer12@gmail.com.

Madeleine Saidenberg

Madeleine is an actor, director, and writer. She began writing poetry at Davidson College in North Carolina and has taken it with her to England, New York, and Ireland, where she is currently a Master's student at Trinity College Dublin.

Heidi L Sherlock

Heidi is a landscape contractor and designer in the mountains of Western North Carolina. She has a Master's in English from Western Carolina University. She is a newcomer to the realm of creative writing, but the rampant thoughts that comprise that writing have been with her since her youth. For Heidi, the world is a subject that never stops giving.

Maggie Shoup

Maggie is a lover of travel and a mother of three who resides in Asheville, North Carolina.

Reeves Singleton

Reeves lives in the mountainous western portion of North Carolina. You might reach him at reeves.singleton@gmail.com.

Thelathia Singleton

Thelathia a native of Charlotte, North Carolina, is an artist, poet, and the author and illustrator of *Gifted: A Collection of Poems Uplifting And Encouraging African Americans*. Please visit giftedsistah.com.

Gavin Stone

Gavin is a journalist based out of Rockingham, North Carolina. He went to college to study engineering before switching to communication media, in which he got his degree in December 2016. He does not have any pets. He is 25 years old.

Danny Thomas II

Danny is an artist and poet from Jacksonville, North Carolina. From his thoughts on intimacy to his thoughts on blackness, he aims to bring into question everything around him.

Laura Traister

Laura first thought of herself as a writer in second grade, when she penned a riveting poem about bubble gum. Since then, she has been published in literary magazines in the U.S. and the U.K., and has taught English in India. She lives in Asheville, North Carolina. She can be reached at lrtraister@gmail.com.

Aidyn Truesdale

Aidyn is a Jesus lover, Meredith College student, and sock enthusiast. Her hobbies include eating many tacos and writing bad author bios.

Rachel van Aalst

Rachel is a follower of Christ with a love for alliteration. She studies Spanish and creative writing at Appalachian State University and hopes to do literary translation and to never stop learning or writing. She is also a musician and released her debut album, *Transfiguration*, last fall.

Nicky Vaught

Nicky lives in Raleigh, North Carolina. He was asking about you, actually.

Melody Wolfe

Melody was born and raised on the beaches of Wilmington, North Carolina, and spends most of her time kayaking, running, or having a glass of wine with her dog, Buddy. A student at Cape Fear Community College, her poems were published twice in the college magazine, *Portals*, and also won Best Overall Literature and Best Poetry. For more information or to contact, email doveseyesphotos@yahoo.com.

