

TRANSOM ISSUE 15: PARADOX
[wherein we absurd the alien of language]



Untitled
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Natosha Cundiff

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Kristina Erny
 - ◆ “praxis, too”
 - ◆ “In the Days Before”
 - ◆ “Cause”
- Libby Maxey
 - ◆ “Steepletop Elegy”
 - ◆ “Watching the new roof go up next door”
- Carlota Gamboa
 - ◆ “Cien años de soledad”
 - ◆ “Oscillations”
 - ◆ “Horse-Woman, Pickled Heart”
- Darcy Cleaver
 - ◆ “Tender”
- Ashley D. Escobar
 - ◆ “ANYWAY”
 - ◆ “Adult Child at the MASS MoCA Kid Space”
- Laine Lloyd
 - ◆ “I don’t want to sound unreasonable”
 - ◆ “Someday I’ll Love Elaine Lloyd”
- Delilah Silberman
 - ◆ “Love”
 - ◆ “A Functional Tambourine”
- Robert Eric Shoemaker
 - ◆ “Fortune-Teller”
 - ◆ “Blue Horse Elegy”
- Yousuf bin Mohammad
 - ◆ “Dreaming”
- Wally Swist (trans. Pablo Neruda)
 - ◆ “Ode to the Book (I)”
 - ◆ “Ode about My Sorrows”
- Mervyn Seivwright
 - ◆ “Duality in Mountain Memory”
- Carmine di Biase (trans. Ernesto Livorni)
 - ◆ “After the Rain”
- Brady Alexander
 - ◆ “Every Star is Rotting”

KRISTINA ERNY

Kristina Erny (she/her) is a third-culture poet and artist who grew up in South Korea. She holds an MFA from the University of Arizona. Her work has been the recipient of the Tupelo Quarterly Inaugural Poetry Prize and the Ruskin Art Club Poetry Award, and a finalist for the Coniston Prize appearing in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Yemassee*, *Blackbird*, and *Tupelo Quarterly*, among other journals. She lives in Shanghai, China, where she teaches with her husband and three children.

praxis, too

a reassemblage of wendy xu's "praxis"

When I had my reach towards malice, against you without description

(War, a white hand) (Earth fabric)

The numbers of time, the anyone of it

A fear pastoral, pined for

Do imagine thorn your poem

Do clean your want; blue what you are

Does newness, not satisfaction, push me over equally?

The will of finite writing, our arms an oration

Be out, you concentric eye, you sound, you put-down

Water's tedious margin, the inventory of me was the fantasy

And the done world down, not taken up

Act of rebellion's closing (good one)

Blue of the space ring I lie in, I move into, through, out of

In the Days Before

In the days before the actual end there were many smaller heartbreaks. Moths ceased their incessant tapping against screen doors. Cows shivered and dropped to their knees. Milk was poured casually down the drain.

At the edge of the field, a gyre of common starlings, kudzu like a plastic bag over the forest's face.

Once there was a tree so stalwart and wide a family of five circled round and the children slapped its trunk with joy. Under the pavement, there was a field ripe with wildflowers, in the field, foxes, instead of vinyl siding.

A person used to be able to split through the husk and know there would be seeds.

Cause

If not atom, then air-conditioning,
if not baby scream, then boo-boos, dead bees,
if not sun-screened coral, then incubator, cheatgrass, curdled milk
if not clogged ducts, then a dementor, or dog poop,
if not E. coli, then Easter baskets, or eczema, or empire,
if not friends, then their frenzy,
if not gringos, then growth hormones
if not hair with rat's nests, then horses beaten dead,
if not imposter, internet, incisor,
if not jackals, then jokesters,
if not kudzu, then lack of kindness,
if not personal limit, then destruction of liminal space,
if not meatloaf, then broken mitosis,
if not niceness, then a child's nautical death, thin and never-ending cord of bubbles, rising up,
if not organ failure, then oregano, origami, false optimism,
pustule, permissiveness,
loss of quilt patterns, too many quaaludes,
if not reality tv, risk assessment,
if not starling, then single-syllable response,
if not burnt toast, then endless talking,
if not umbrella, then umbilical cord,
if not varicose, then only one version of events,
if not waste, then our want,
if not xenophobes, then extravagant spending,
if not yesterday, or the lack of the color yellow,
if not zealots, then what made us all zeroes?

Transom Interview with **Kristina Erny**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

K: Language in poetry is always pushing in multiple directions at once. Meaning pulls from what came before and meaning is developed by what comes after. This is one of the definitions of paradox - language used in a poem could seem at first just surprising or even absurd, but when it exists in the context of the universe of the poem, is truth. Language is never something we can exactly put our fingers on, which is why it feels so true as a medium for art making, I think. I love poetry that leans hard into all the mushy layers and potential inconsistencies or glitches in language, how a word or phrase might be used repeatedly in work and each time it's revisited, it's different, or more true. Or how a word could misfire initially, or be misheard, and now echoes even louder in the way the poet's placed it just so. I've learned a lot from poets in my community, like Kristi Maxwell and Jessica Farquhar, who are brilliant at doing this.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

K: I am a contradiction, so I think everything that I write comes from that alien point of view. When parts of a person's story inherently are at odds or in tension, that inevitably infuses what they will write and how those poems make some kind of (contradictory) sense of the world. As a white American raised abroad in South Korea, I inhabit this "third-culture" and am an outsider everywhere I go; therefore nowhere (and everywhere) is home. I long for a sense of deep connection with a specific community or neighborhood in the US, but also feel deeply connected to Seoul, and to all of the neighborhoods and communities I've been able to live among in my life. Contradiction. Both &.

Identities are inherently full of contradictions: of preference, of time, of history, of story. of... I'm a mother and a full-time teacher. A wife and a friend. An artist and an athlete. A poet and maker of kimchi. City dweller and rock climber. I could go on and on. Most people I know (and love) could too.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

K: Two of the poems (and maybe even all three) could be called apocalypse poems, poems written by a human living during the heights of the Anthropocene. It surprises me that they still contain something that feels very much to me like joy, and also like hope.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

K: My work very much inhabits both of these worlds at the same time. To me, the surreal is always made manifest in the stuff of the real (world of the sensorium). That is how we attempt to understand it. The beauty of an image is that it communicates the surreal, emotional, metaphoric, and interior in more complex and interesting ways than any abstract language could. In my work abstract ideas are always built from the ground up, out of the stuff of the dirt.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

K: Everywhere. I'm obsessed with the particular, the mitochondrial, the nitty-gritty, and the discrete.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

K: Because all poetry has a speaker, if you are reading it, all poems have a listener. When I first started writing poetry it was from a place of deep, deep loneliness, wanting to speak and desperately wanting someone to hear my voice. Even in those early private poem rooms, I wanted someone else to be able to enter in. Now as an adult, the same motivation exists, even if I just want to connect with my own self as a listener. The poem is always an invitation to enter, pay attention (also Oliver) to listen more deeply. To me that is urgent and holy. That sense of urgency, that please someone HEAR ME, is present in my work. I think that writing is a communion (with self, with other, with place, within and without time).

LIBBY MAXEY

Libby Maxey is a senior editor at *Literary Mama* and a winner of the 2021 Princemere Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared in *Emrys*, *The Maynard* and elsewhere, and her chapbook, *Kairos* (2019), won Finishing Line Press's New Women's Voices contest. Her nonliterary activities include singing classical repertoire and mothering sons.

Steepletop Elegy

for Edna St. Vincent Millay

When folly proves itself, it pulls no less.
Its froth spills downward, fouling measures set
Aside to save, and yet pretends to bless,
And yet persuades with promise to forget.
To drink a day fermented never was
A sacrament nor wine a sacrifice
To any muse unless poured out. Yet does
Belief make space where truth will not, and vice
Without belief. And pain—it sanctifies
The falsest salve, demands another. Down
Together and the work undone, so dies
Tomorrow: glass and bottle watch to drown
It on the stair. The notebook waits, your own
Last love, your last a night not spent alone.

Watching the new roof go up next door

The first frost's done but the trees still covered green
gold full beyond the open ridges
of the old house. It doesn't know
October's clock is running and it's not
enough.

Its wrapping paper drapes silver black
over new wood, like a suite of birch
unfurled in sheets, as if that crackling bark
were smooth as strong and curled down to the core.

Now slow wings, the wide edges lift
with the surrounding branches
as tomorrow's changing wind moves in—
all a flock of geese gathering the air to rise.

Transom Interview with **Libby Maxey**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

L: I think poetry tends toward paradox because a poem wants a crux, and uniting contradictions is a subtle and (perhaps paradoxically!) satisfying way to get to one in only a few lines. The satisfaction comes of revelation; however open or closed a poem may seem, it's possible to see it as an elegant proof that nothing in our experience is univocal—not a glass of wine, not a half-finished roof, not a life or a death. Poetic word choice insists on more; homonyms, amphibology, unintuitive metaphors, destabilizing line breaks—all of these devices lead us away from simple presuppositions toward deeper understanding. I suspect it's true that paradox is essentially poetic, so well does poetic language lend itself to the paradoxical.

In my own work, because I favor short, compressed poems, I hope that I've already set the reader questioning in the first few lines, that there's already a sense of riddle or puzzle, and that moving through the poem enriches that questioning experience, even if the end also feels like a completion. The reader's perception of meaning must shift along the way because of what each line adds.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

L: It's typically the latter, since what arises organically in my writing usually seems inadequate to me. I'm rather terrible at writing practice, and I need to have a pretty compelling reason to sit down and create. Even when I give myself the freedom of a retreat, I struggle to write for the sake of writing; I seldom like my poems when they grow out of prompts, and I almost never find that my revision efforts can make a mediocre poem better. I would say, though, that attractive contradictions eventually arise organically in the long thought process that precedes the writing. I often ruminate on an idea for months, or even years, before I come up with an approach that seems worthy—and indeed, “worthy” means structured by the right framing tension.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

L: Neither of these poems was particularly well liked by the members of my writing group, whose opinions I value highly, so I'm a little surprised that I like them as much as I do—enough to have kept them as they are, and enough to have submitted them for potential publication. Each is a bit challenging in its own way, but I'm attached (almost in spite of my apologetic self) to the notion that poets shouldn't have to apologize for a challenge.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

L: I suppose I almost always straddle both realms, starting from a place, or a point in history, or a moment of observation, then leaping outward or inward from there. I'd say that the surreal, as defined above, should be assumed in a poem even when the real seems omnipresent. A poem doesn't need to have a literal "I" for there to be a strong sense of the speaker's presence in it, and it can access an interior/emotional world through a very small chink in the real. My poetic sensibility was shaped, in part, by the English poets of the 17th century, who were experts at having this particular cake and eating it, too (hardly surprising given that paradox was their daily bread).

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

L: I strive especially for specificity in metaphor, since metaphors can't do the work they're meant to do if they're not finely tailored. That isn't to say that a conceit has to align just so in every particular; slippage can be its own kind of accuracy. But a metaphor can be the most memorable part of a poem, the image that will stick with a reader, and if there's some disharmony in it, that's likely to be most memorable—in which case it had better be intentional! In "Watching the new roof go up next door," the images of the roof-in-progress are a bit strange, especially together. At first, the roof is as if papered with a whole birch tree unspooled, and then, it's ready to fly off with the geese. But the time spent on those images, I hope, gives a vivid reality to the perception of something manifestly man-made as nature's rightful property. In "Steepletop Elegy," metaphor is especially complex because it's wrapped up with another writer's metaphors. The language of sacred ritual echoes Edna St. Vincent Millay's own way of speaking about drink and its relationship to her writing in letters to friends, but leaning into that language here means scraping up against the reality of addiction. The last line echoes her last line in the sonnet, "I too beneath your moon, almighty Sex," in which she speaks of her artistic edifice as a structure built on what she is—sometimes "neither noble nor complex," but proud and honest about her "nights not spent alone." Here, the reference speaks both to the sad reality of her solitary death, but also to the enduring value of her work as source of sustaining, immortal connection, at a time when the loss of her spouse and her long-term health problems, both physical and psychological, had left her feeling unmoored.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

L: The answer to this question arises quite naturally from the previous answer. I consider poetry an organ of connection, which invites empathy even if that's insufficient. The connections that poetry creates and illuminates don't dispense with loneliness, but they do stand up against it, insisting on a world in which we see more and can be better seen.

CARLOTA GAMBOA

Carlota Gamboa is from Los Angeles, California. She is an MFA candidate in poetry at Washington University in St. Louis.

Cien años de soledad

I would later be asked to remember
remote afternoons in which I learned about theft
of sleep, the many names for one face.
Balconies threw overgrown ornaments down

like descending coins into a fountain. One by one
had been stolen: the red flowers, the river's
direction, the guns used during the final act. The United
Fruit Company with their verandas & white wicker

ceiling fans saying *I won't* forget the row of pink
houses & always do. Where we choose to hang
our disbelief. Memories are what's left
in the green smoke of a leaving train.

The slow departure of endless windows still
draws boxes of light that land on my floor in the dark.

Oscillations

The past is a moon that can be
heard? Speckled rocks
of stranded glass dull & dragging
 on a shore. Being swayed

from here
 to here is boring
 foreground. Calypso spilled across
her copper shore, lounged, again like
her own king. This jagged-palmed

island is an uninsurable crown of trees. Home is
where the money is. All that summer gossamer.
All that encombining shoreline. Time makes little
likenesses of us. Let's not remember

the loss. Some things we know.
No use in the end.

Horse-Woman, Pickled Heart

Let's bury what we can't
lead to drink. Whistles sharpened
through the canyon made a current.
Days exhaled into. The tensed mouth
desert that follows desire. The mares
you kiss & the mares you marry—
A constant collision of two
charms on a bracelet. Someone got
a mirror in exchange for a blanket. O
of fruit
 flies circling again &
again. *You like it:*
flogged, dead in a jar, the beating of
a brined thing. I hoof a hill that's not
 a home, a losing lottery ticket.

Transom Interview with **Carlota Gamboa**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

C: Meaning must be shifting since we're constantly evolving (or devolving??).. And the tone of a poem can so enormously modify the images within it. Chirping is terrifying if that's how a poet teaches the reader to approach their work... I suppose what's inherently paradoxical is that the poet is on a mission of discovery just as much as a reader. The argument can be altered in an instant, and suddenly what's been previously introduced by the poem undergoes complication ...

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

C: I don't frame opposing forces on purpose. I find it natural to contradict myself because I am so often morphing, therefore my poems experience the same kind of rollercoaster. Am I my persona or my principle? Do I want love or do I want to be left alone? I know, but then I change my mind. It's environmental.. But I'm also aware that why I began writing isn't always going to be what the poem wants to be about.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

C: That it exists! It all seems a bit surreal that these are needs.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

C: Haha! My writing and I both exist in a place between worlds. I have often prioritized fantasy over pragmatism. I really believe that we can only see so much. I am so comforted by the knowledge that my understanding is limited. Sure, things are physical and tangibly real, but I refuse to value a lot of what others consider important. Feeling alive is priority number one, so I'm willing to throw a lot of shit out the window in order to better appreciate the spiritual value of my experience.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

C: Gosh.. That's been a real challenge for me. Specificity creates so much texture! I'm not always going to create cohesive narrative scenes, but I think my poems capture the particular senses of certain emotional experiences, like they're mood studies. That's not very specific! I'm always just trying to color in or around the complicated ordeal of existing in proximity to one thing or another.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

C: The writing is an answer. I'm a deeply lonely person but that's not a sad thing, it's an opportunity. I've got to do something with the time I have, so might as well try to make sense of things in one way or another. It brings me joy and excitement. That's so healing.

DARCY CLEAVER

Darcy Cleaver is a playwright, poet, and teacher in Louisville, Kentucky. Her most recent work will be included in Sarabande's *Anthology of Louisville Poets*.

Tender

My father is eavesdropping again. Poorly, at that.
His dishrag hovers, a silent gavel.

Later, he will tell me: “Your mother,
she’s a fire...” (Of all the things I’ve inherited, I want to believe
anger is not one.) “Consuming.” He’s telling the trees.

Yesterday, my mother cut peaches, rich meat with red bristles
where fruit cleaved stone. One, two, three, fat slices,
Ziplocked for me.

“For later.” But she held them still,
the juice already pooling, fermenting, oily. I took the bag.

My marriage was going. The softness spoiling.
It surprised no one, except us,
over and over, and over.
Like that, it was both final and finally over.

I found them, hot on the dash,
the nectar brown as tobacco spit. When she calls, I will not lie.
“They were delicious,” I will say. “Not bruised a bit,” I will tell her.
“Thank you,” I will say.
I will say thank you.

Transom Interview with **Darcy Cleaver**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

D: The easiest example is dear ol' Romeo's sweet sorrow, and in my work and in others, I love these moments when language can convey how joy and pain coexist. Of course... I only hope readers can feel those shifts; a good poem has movement and fresh surprises.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

D: For me, I often have a dilemma in mind when I begin, something I'm puzzling through, so I start with a conflict and as I draft and revise, I see how those tensions will untangle or further knot up.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

D: "Tender" is a piece about begrudging acceptance; I suppose I'm surprised that the paradox of resentment inside acceptance shines through, but I'm pleased that Transom selected it for this issue.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

D: "No ideas but in things." I try to inhabit the real world in my work. We live in the concrete world, and our hearts are broken here. Everyone can relate to the real world. Everyone can relate to heartbreak.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

D: Yes! "This grasshopper..." I wring out sensory detail as much as I can without getting gooey.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

D: Oh! What a question! Writing is such a solitary act that it is always lonely. Then, when your work is read, it can be a glorious connection. Writers write for thousands of different reasons, of course, but I have always written to see and hear myself a bit better, to connect with myself, really. The publication of work makes me feel seen and heard in a way that validates me, connects me to the world beyond my writing garrett.

ASHLEY ESCOBAR

Ashley D. Escobar is a fiction MFA candidate at Columbia University. She is the author of *SOMETIMES* (Invisible Hand Press, 2021) and co-founder of *Wind-up Mice* art & literary journal. She was selected for the 2020 Catherine Morrison Golden '55 P'80 Undergraduate Writing Fellowship in Fiction. Her work has appeared in *The London Magazine* and *Hobart*, among others.

ANYWAY

today & tomorrow's bliss
loneliness is watching trees

our time—a window, looking
out onto an empty street

winter stretched its arms open
we hid until the blueness

caught us, gravitate towards
Distance (silence) sit & stare

february nearly killed
you, dawn is no longer mine

our repentance holds what we
keep unsaid our dreams stay pure

owls are no longer strangers
night fall reflects in your eyes

everything here is slowly
turning (patient in the rain)

and the trees stand like people
and the people will stand like trees

Adult Child at the MASS MoCA Kid Space

Spotted Mule.
Mad Dog Monkey.

Archival, revival.
As you arrive...

Have you ever catered
The last gathering

Through a window?

Do I walk?

Can I talk?

Is that Kafka?

Or a large beaked moth?
Adult child, I—

My friend hears “the gays”
Every time I say “gaze”

I do more than eat hot chips and lie.
She doesn’t know I want to kiss her.

She claims I’m afraid of butterflies.
I’m no good at counting.

I was underpaid at the curiosity shop,
selling black diamonds to debutantes.

I haven’t debuted to society.
I’m afraid the entrance will be premature.

I can’t tell slopes from sides.
I skipped the math portion of the SAT.

Clean hands will damage the art.
I used to play four square in fourth grade

when I read *The Metamorphosis* to seduce the
school librarian. She never thought I had brains.

I am a chalkboard.
I am hazy.

Don't you hate when things are irregular?
I am unsure how a color band should behave.

I was put into therapy before I could tie my shoes.
Bunny ears sure beat the loopity loop.

Transom Interview with **Ashley D. Escobar**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

A: I find my favorite poems to be inherently absurd. Ben Lerner's *The Lichtenberg Figures* comes to mind, subverting expectation and boundaries. Language twists and bends in shapes that seem impossible but unravel a greater truth. The way I place and separate a certain word/phrase defamiliarizes the meaning within a particular poem or line. There's room for reinvention and recollection.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

A: I love working in opposition and parallels—sometimes my contradictions become circular. They tend to occur naturally, a certain rhythm I inhabit when I begin digging into the poem. I never tend to frame any tension beforehand. I turn to a specific word or image I'd like to sink my teeth into. Lots of wordplay. I love listening to Pavement for seemingly silly yet brilliant turns of phrase.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

A: I wanted to capture the trees in "ANYWAY" in an uncanny way, because there was such a strange stillness watching them as I flew into Chicago one February. I like maintaining the gaps, the distance. In a way distance creates new meanings. I love MASS MoCA as not only a museum but a space—it resides in an old factory building so the structure and layout feel like they shouldn't work but they do in a beautiful way. I'm surprised now that all the friends I meet tie their shoes with bunny ears!

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

A: Everything I seem to write are fragments, interwoven, with one foot in reality and one foot in a dream, no way of differentiating.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

A: In the details—more so in "Adult Child at the MASS MoCa Kids Space," but the "window," "empty street," and "trees" create specificity within the vagueness of "ANYWAY."

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

A: Windows are the ideal symbol of loneliness and solitude, creating a balance of still knowing and seeing the outside world. Writing invites both the reader and me into another world of very little consequence, of isolated occurrences and inhabitants anxious to be elsewhere yet somewhat nostalgic in the end.

LAINÉ LLOYD

Laine Lloyd is a senior at Louisville Collegiate School in Louisville, Kentucky. This is her premiere publication in a literary magazine.

I don't want to sound unreasonable,

but do you remember lying on my grandmother's quilt,
our careless legs dangling off the roof
and the stitching too nice for asphalt?

Collecting little moments like balloons from the sky.

Moments that never lead up to anything, but wishing
they did. I don't want to sound unreasonable,

but can we lie here, glazed eyes gazing up at the clouds and finding
nothing, forever? Searching for shapes out of nothing

is what got us here in the first place. Will you take me swimming

in the jagged-toothed quarry? My dive shattering heaven's reflections, searching
for the mirrored world above. I promise I'll float if you promise not to drown
me. Do you remember the dream where we were kids again?

Transforming cloud fluff into chairs and balloons for the Kindergarten Derby,
arts and crafts without guilt. This time I won't fall

behind the horses. I don't want to sound unreasonable,

but I hope you're proud of me.

Is this what you imagined for my life, a field of fog clouding my vision?

Is a child just an extension of yourself? Was I just someone to play house with?

Sitting around a fire, we sang songs and roasted those big puffs of marshmallow.

You watched as clouds disbanded and dissolved in thin air,

but did you ever notice the smoke in my eyes?

Someday I'll Love Elaine Lloyd

Elaine, don't worry about the days ahead.
Memory has always been a faulty friend to you.
Don't fear time spent in passivity.
Somedays, you will look in the mirror
And expect to see a girl in pigtails
Who knows nothing of hard things.
Elaine, come sit with me.
Remember when we would walk
Hand in hand under street lamps
Of the sleeping suburbs?
How the air would stick
To our skin like the way we ran to our mother's
Room after every nightmare?
Elaine, don't scream when I try to brush your hair.
As you grow, you will long for the same sense of care,
But let the knots accumulate.
Elaine, can you feel the hole in your head
Begin to fester?
Sleep never comes to visit anymore.
Do tell them to come by when they get the chance.

Transom Interview with **Laine Lloyd**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

L: I think the work of a poem is to balance the order and disorder of language, and that work cannot be done without the creation of paradoxes. Poetry is paradoxical due to the challenge of creating structured chaos that still holds meaning to the reader. And, meaning must shift throughout poems if the narrative really succeeds.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

L: I think this question truly depends on the poem. For me, I think a lot of poetry sparks when I'm trying to sort through a particularly challenging internal dilemma, and those always come with contradictions. In my poetry, contradictions serve to function as insights into the narrator's inner turmoil as well as highlight the humanity of constantly contradicting oneself.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

L: When writing, "I don't want to sound unreasonable," I began by detailing a dream I had the night before that was filled with scenes of my childhood and the feeling of being a little kid again. I was surprised that my writing turned into a poem filled with so much more, and the struggle for innocence plays out thematically in both "Someday I'll Love Elaine Lloyd" and "I don't want to sound unreasonable."

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

L: When writing, I try to simultaneously embody the physical environment in which my narrator lives as well as their emotional state. I think that their physical world often serves to elucidate their interior world and gives the reader something concrete to latch onto. In all of my poems, I try to balance the cerebral voice of a character with the imagery of their surroundings.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

L: In “I don’t want to sound unreasonable,” my main goal is to use the specifics of the narrator's memories to ask the grander questions they really feel inside. The use of clouds as a motif throughout the poem serves a specific purpose, as clouds are both innocent and dreamlike, as well as blinding.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

L: “Someday I’ll Love Elaine Lloyd” attempts to encapsulate the loneliness of living with nostalgia. Even though memories serve as a “faulty friend,” I use them to comfort me and sit with me during present moments of turmoil. I don’t think that writing of loneliness necessarily serves as a solution, but hopefully it forms connections between the reader and writer, so that no one is quite so alone as they felt prior.

DELILAH SILBERMAN

Delilah Silberman is a poet from New York City. She is an MFA candidate at The Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her poems have appeared in *Adroit Journal*, *Bat City Review*, *Guesthouse*, and *Hobart*.

Love

I took the thorns from my legs,
planted them in the dark
wood. Soon I had a forest,
a bramble you had to tramp
through to get to me.
At least you have an ax.
Can I? Borrow it?
Your hands are terry cloth.
My bramble is rotting,
the berries plucked out.
Will you be always the one
just pushing open the door?
If all day I stayed in bed
would all day you stay
by my side and would
all my body ache
after the napping?
You say you are worried
about the many apples
I eat, but you just
don't know how many
seeds the arsenic
needs to kick in.
Let me tell you.

A Functional Tambourine

I can tap and I can ring
on your downstairs door

if you let me
drag off your blue sheets

if you take me
to lunch in the complex

after I attach my arm
to a slinky on the stairs that will

give me a break
I have no major or minor

purpose besides keying
the piano in the house

with three windows
what's the use

of anything besides holding
a fork what can I do

now with the root
growing in my mouth

I can tap it
I can sing

Transom Interview with **Delilah Silberman**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

D: For me, the most interesting moments in poetry happen when form complicates meaning either with line-breaks or strange syntax. When there can be multiple readings of a poem and each word is complicated by what is placed in front of it, it becomes most exciting. A comma, period, or one particular word can altar everything. That alteration and the belief I have that there really can be no true meaning of a poem, makes poetry an inherently paradoxical art form. In my poem "Love," I tried to work through the complications of a codependent relationship through enjambment, which can affect the reading of each line. In a moment like "Will you be always the one/" which I follow with "just pushing open the door?" the meaning shifts, the "you" is not being asked if they are "the one," but if they will always be there, forcing their way in. "A Functional Tambourine," deals with the other side of that kind of relationship, the speaker finding their purpose within the relationship with the "you." I tried to make the lack of punctuation create more complicated and darker images than what would be there otherwise. I hoped with that poem that every line would work in a paradoxical way, subverting the idea of being something that can "tap and ring on your door" to really having "no purpose."

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

D: I think contradictions are always present in my mind when writing, but I try not to force them. I think they happen organically because of the poets I read obsessively, people like Marianne Moore, Olena Kalytiak Davis, and Jorie Graham, poets whose work is constantly complicating and transforming itself.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

D: These poems were written three years and two years ago respectively. Coming back to them now, I think what surprises me most is the use of a "you" in the poems. I don't usually write with a second person addressee anymore, but with a third-person subject, which I think allows for more specificity in the relationships that I try to create within a poem.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

D: When I'm writing, I am not usually thinking about the place my speaker inhabits at any given moment, but I try to let that place travel. When I let my poems travel and not stop myself during

the writing process, the jumps between the real and the surreal become blurrier. This is when I find them working the best, when they can really move between a metaphor and a mundane household object.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

D: I think specificity comes through the movement between the surreal and real. When working in an emotional space, I find that I need to create specific and strong images that can be used to complicate the line or the sentence. I don't usually write with content, but more thinking of how a sentence can travel in a transformative way or how sound can create tension within an idea. With these poems, the specificity comes with line-breaks.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

D: These poems particularly deal with loneliness and trying to force or find a connection with another because they came out of a time in my life where I was thinking a lot about care-taking and codependency. I find now that in my writing, I'm less interested in the content and the emotional world, so my poems really do feel like a different thing. These concepts of loneliness and connection in poetry feel more outside of the poem than within it. I think the connection comes through the stringing together of words or sentences or images that can expand upon each other. And the loneliness aspect is that I find writing to be both a solitary and communal act. I write alone and try to figure out what I want out of a poem, but being in an MFA poetry program, my own ideas about poetry get continuously challenged. It becomes a communal act, and I could never finish a poem without someone else looking at it.

ROBERT ERIC SHOEMAKER

Dr. Robert Eric Shoemaker is a poet and interdisciplinary artist. Eric holds a Ph.D. in Humanities from the University of Louisville and an MFA in Creative Writing & Poetics from the Jack Kerouac School at Naropa University. Eric's work focuses on magical poetics, queer theory and poetry, public history, translation, and gender and sexuality.

Eric has published three books of hybrid writing, poetry, memoir, and playwriting: *Ca'Venezia* (2021, Partial Press), *We Knew No Mortality* (2018, Acta Publications), and *30 Days Dry* (2015, Thought Collection Publishing). Eric has published scholarly work in *Signs and Society*, *Jacket2*, *Entropy*, and *Gender Forum*; translations in *Rattle*, *Asymptote*, *Exchanges*, *The Adirondack Review*, and *Columbia Journal*; stage plays in *Plath Profiles*; and poetry in *Transom*, *Analogies & Allegories*, *Tiny Spoon*, *Bombay Gin*, *The Gordian Review*, *Barely South Review*, *Verde Qué Te Quiero Verde*, *Kairos*, and other journals.

Eric is the Digital Archive Editor at the Poetry Foundation and is the Poetry Editor for the interdisciplinary journal *Plath Profiles*. Follow him at reshoemaker.com, and find Eric on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter @Robert.E.Shoe.

Fortune-Teller

The flower, the flower
The cosmic Iris
Ballooned, bulging with eternity:

Yellow anther crawls out speaking
Pistil, stamen, bend ears to the supernova
Waves of understanding, speak.

The flower, the flower
A red rose garland
Is thorned, wracked on the green wave.

Heart, heart
Broken open with mortality
Yellow tongue rolls out whipping red:
Red as gold.

All that is red is gold.

*

My shoes are pointed,
My hat, crowned
Rising in the distance, fortune's city
Burns with bright red-gold geometries
Promise.

*

No,
Teach me the meaning of
Star
Other side
Teach me
Lie down
Lie down
Teach me
Promise

Promise
Eloi eloi lamma sabachthani
Fuck you

*

Father, you follow me
Too much.

A split lip casting shadow
Over an open door.

*

A bomb bomb the heart a bomb
A phylactery
Holding him
Little glass boy
At the edge

Boom

*

Read me
Reflection
: Who burns like what-now
In zero gravity, your servant
Eloi
Elohim
Shaddai
Father

*

Give me body
Give me cry
My open heart black for
What cannot be regained
Re-fathered, father

Shock my open
Shock my
Reabsorbed!
Reabsorbed!
Black and blood
I groan with you, poor banished children of Eve
I moan and tear to
Give me body
Give me
Lament
Lama
Lament

*

At red zero
Awash, the sea
Dawns:
Me.
Mea
Mea Culpa
Mater
Stabat
And later
And me.

Blue Horse Elegy

for Grandma Shoemaker

At midnight, the rotation of the overhead fan lunges like the kitchen faucet's drip

Drip

I see wild horses sweeping off, like the paintbrushes of some forgotten sky, your
delicate body

So different from the one I touch now lying in your permanent bed

So different from the fixed hand praying covered in your husband's rosary like
wax sculpted

So different from your painted lips painted by the brush of god and you sculpted
like wax

The lunging fan reminds me of impermanence, cyclical

While the wild horses, blue like shimmering cobalt, prance and carry on above

Prance like fawns like my father said

Just then at the dinner table

Fawns remind me of impermanence

So different from the way you wove stories with the silken thread of sarcasm or
the coarse yarn of circumstance

So different from the grace with which your son plays with the dog in his back
yard, the dog formerly known as Charlie, now Rusty,

These things remind me of impermanence, change, the way

A faucet drips and is turned off

The way

A fan lunges around, around, never advancing, the drone whirring like cicadas on

a hot summer night when we spat watermelon seeds at the dog, Shadow, no,
Weaver, and the dog chased them

The way you chased your future husband up mechanics hill and then ate
watermelon in the hand

The hand so desperately waxen now, the hand I hold, the son I hold so
desperately

These things remind me of impermanence

The paintbrush of some forgotten god

The blue of horses running

The wax dripping making

A seal on the stilled canvas

Freezing you into place.

The fan whirs.

The faucet drips.

You are stilled in your permanent bed.

Yes, grandmother

I write this elegy to keep you

To keep you ticking

This mechanism a clock of cogs buzzing

Like cicadas

To keep you warm

And wild horses

To move you

And cicadas
To give you speech
And wild horses
To give you flight
In every breath of the blue night I will hear you
Speaking from across the field whatever distance
And in every whisper of the fan
You will keep whispering
And in the fawns dancing
You will dance with me
It is so
And so it shall be
At midnight in the country of a forgotten god
Where we two dance and sing a chorus of gladiolus
at your sisters wedding
Where we dance at my wedding
Whose weathered news clipping you kept
All these years
And now gifts to me
You know it
The laughter of the horses
Disappearing across the prairie
The blue horses

Painted and still painting blue across the horizon

The blue, laughing clouds

Dancing on the wind that is always, still,

turning, turning.

Transom Interview with **Robert Eric Shoemaker**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

E: The metaphor is a paradox. That thing is definitely not this thing, but if you say it is inside of a poem, the two become one. Paradoxes are little brain flips that open new neural pathways, and the poem is a brain flip sandbox. You could start any poem with a wild metaphor and, by the end of the poem, the paradoxical concepts will elide, if you let your brain do the work.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

E: I like problems, in poems and in thought and just generally talking through problems. Most of my writing projects begin with one problem or another (most recently, white-savior-anti-racism, yikes), and I write to and through them, but not to a conclusion. If that happened for all the world's problems, poets would sit in political office. There's still contradiction, in the solution and in the poem, and that's why it's an art. I like to foster that contradiction and allow spaces for insight to poke through naturally.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

E: Both of these texts are magical poems - one a spell and one a prophecy. I'm surprised by how much the spell still feels fresh, to me. "Blue Horse Elegy" is a spell to conjure my grandmother, who passed away last year. I wrote the poem to try how spells, poems, can literally bring a person back to life in the mind. And here it is, still working. I love that about poems. You can read this poem over and over and each time, Grandma starts the poem as a body and ends it as a memory dancing with me. You can't beat that.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

E: YES. Text is a fixed object, sure, but it's not... "real" in the way we describe our cat living in front of us (shout out to Rico the cat). Writers have to transfer the "real" and the living into text, into language and attendant abstraction, so I think you have to be between these things to try to write at all. Then again, I am not a realist!

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

E: The moment I repeat Jesus's words (which is itself a repetition of a Psalm) "eloi eloi lama sabachthani" (which I tend to misspell but which means, in Aramaic, "my god my god why have you forsaken me"), I'm invoking a really specific reference to Christianity and to cries for help and then immediately subverting it with "fuck you." This is playful on my part and I hope it reads as such, and it takes me to a really specific sort of rebelliousness that I think we all go through at some point, normally as teenagers. The father in the next stanza is and isn't mine - he's everyone's father, the boss, everyone's object of rebellion.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

E: I don't know. I love this question. I think poems, when they're crafted to do so, connect us to meaning. "Blue Horse Elegy" takes me to my grandmother, and that's not lonely. "Fortune-Teller" sends me to an angry, angsty place somewhere between history and prophecy, and that feels lonely in a way and also nostalgic, meaning not so lonely because one version of myself is there. I guess, if the poem is made to evoke and for certain things to come up, maybe evoke the thing you want to sit with, if you want that poem to make you less lonely.

YOUSUF BIN MOHAMMAD

Yousuf bin Mohammad is a student of comparative literature and a multilingual poet. His English poetry has been published in renowned journals like *Eastlit*, *The Society of Classical Poets*, *The Ghazal Page*, *Rigorous*, and others. Yousuf's first anthology '*Screeching of The Quill*' is in the pipeline. Apart from English, he also composes poetry in Urdu; his Urdu poems can be found on rekhta.org, *Deedbaan* and *Daleel*. His Hindi poems can be found on *swargvibha*, poshampa.org and *dainik jaagrran kavita-kosh*.

Dreaming

When dream transcends reality
and truth, illusion-enmeshed, leave
coffee silently untouched,
a silent cigarette burns away
unkissed.

Speak silently of dreams
unsaid and dreams unheard,
and leave a void of a rising moon
within the lake where swans would play
and dance and sing to dreams unheard.

This coffee, cigarettes, beers and dreams
And swans dancing on unheard dreams –
When this gigantic chimera breaks
and shatters
in the wind – would it be disillusionment
or yet another drunken dream?

Interview with **Yousuf bin Mohammad**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

Y: I am of the opinion that the language of poetry, to bring depth of meaning and differentiating it from plain prose has always been paradoxical to a certain extent. You can take the example of sonnet, arguably the most popular form of Western poetry. The volta is a defining feature of any English sonnet, where a complete reversal of the whole flow of the poem takes place. For example in Sir Thomas Wyatt's famed sonnet Whoso List to Hunt, the whole sonnet completely changes it's flow on the famous finishing couplet:

"Noli me tangere, for Caesar's I am,
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame."

Yes, I do notice a shift in meaning throughout my poem, especially through the fourth to sixth lines:

"a silent cigarette burns away
unkissed. / Speak silently
of dreams unsaid and dreams unheard"

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

Y: I basically start up writing with a framing tension in my mind. Framing tension wouldn't be the correct term here, I'd rather say there's an anxiousness or a sense of anxiety when I start writing a poem. In this particular poem as well there was a feeling of anxiety over a no-show, which worked its way out as a contradiction in people's commitments and actions or beliefs and behaviors.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

Y: The thing that surprises me most about poetry included here or elsewhere is how in such a short space and such few words so much depth can be introduced. How compact yet how deep it can be at the same time.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

Y: In my view everyone, without any exception, cohabits in both which you define as "real" and "surreal". No matter how materialistic we get there's always a "surreal" or metaphorical heart and soul within us that keeps us connected to the otherworldliness of this world. My writing doesn't get tested by these divisions as I use both mundane and other-worldly to express myself. And I do actually travel on both the boats at the same time, with ease.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

Y: I don't completely agree with Mary Oliver that the language of Poetry is the language of Particulars per se. But still I'd say until now where I have noticed specificity in my poems is in their themes.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

Y: The whole poem is centered around loneliness and an urge for connection. This poem is neither a solution nor an answer to loneliness, rather a sort of vicious cycle of loneliness and yearning for connection. It also has an aspect of disillusionment from connection so you can say that yes it is a cry of sorts.

WALLY SWIST
Translations of PABLO NERUDA

Wally Swist's books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), *Evanescence: Selected Poems, and Taking Residence* (2021), with Shanti Arts. Recent poetry and translations have or will appear in *Asymptote*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Commonweal*, *The Montreal Review*, *Poetry London*, and *Rattle*. *A Writer's Statements on Beauty: New & Selected Essays & Reviews* was published in 2022 by Shanti Arts. His translation *L'Allegria/Cheerfulness: Poems 1914-1919* by Giuseppe Ungaretti is forthcoming from Shanti Arts in 2023.

Oda al libro (I)

*Libro, cuando te cierra
abro la vida.
Eschucho
entrecortados gritos
En los puertos.
los lingotes del cobre
cruzan los arenales,
bajan a Tocopilla.
Es de islas
nuestro oceano
palpita con sus peces.
Toca los pies, los muslos,
las costillas calcareas
de mi patria.
Toda la noche pega en sus orillas
y con la luz del dia
amanece cantando
como si despertara una guitarra.*

*A mi me llama el golpe
del oceano. A mi
me llama el viento,
y Rodriquez me llama,
Jose Antonio,
recibi un telergrama
del sindicto "Mina"
y ella, la que yo amo
(no les dire su nombre),
me espera en Bucalemu.*

*Libra, tu no has podida
empapelarma,
no me llenaste
de tipografia,
de impresiones celestas,
no pudista
encuandernar mis ojos,
salgo de ti a poblar las arboledas
con la ronca familia de mi canto,
a trabajar metals encendidos
o a comer carne asada
junto al fuego en los montes.
Ama los libras
exploradores*

libros con bosque a nieve,
profundidad a cielo,
pera
odia
el libra arania
en donde el pensamiento
fue dispoiendo alambre venenoso
para que alli se enrede
la juvenil y circuandante mosca.
Libra, dejame libra.
Yo no quiera ir vestida
de volume,
yo no vengo de un toma,
mis poemas
no han comida poemas,
devoran
apasioonados acontecimientos,
se nutren de intemperie,
extraen alimento
de la tierra y los hombres.
Libra, deame andar por los caminos
con polva en los zapatos
y sin mitologia:
vuelve a tu biblioteca,
yo me voy por los calles.

He aprendido la vida
de la vida,
el amor lo aprenda de un solo beso,
y no pude ensanar a nadie nada
sino lo que he vivido,
cuanto tuva en comio con otros hombres,
cuanto luce con ellos:
cuanto expresso de todas en mi canto.

—Pablo Neruda

Ode to the Book (I)

Book, when I close you
life opens.
I hear
breathy screams
in the ports.
The copper ingots
cross the sand banks,
they go down to Tocopilla.
It is night.
Between the islands
our ocean
palpitates with fish.
It touches the feet, the thighs,
the chalky ribs
of my country.
All night it touches the edges
and with the light of day
it wakes up singing
as if a guitar awakened.

The force of the ocean
calls me. My name
is called by the wind,
and I am known as Rodriguez,
Jose Antonio,
I received a telegram
from the *Mina* union,
and she, the one I love
(I won't tell you her name),
is waiting for me in Boculemu.

Book, you haven't been able
to paper over me,
you haven't filled me up
with typography,
of celestial impressions,
you haven't been able
to bind my eyes,
I come to you to populate the groves
with the hoarse family of my song,
to work burning metals
or to eat roast meat
by a fire in the mountains.
I love books

that are explorers,
books with forest and snow,
profundity and sky,
but
I loathe
the book of spiders
where thought arranged
its poisonous wires
so that the newly hatched fly
is surrounded and is entangled there.
Book, set me free.
I don't want to go dressed
like a volume,
I don't come from a tome,
nor do my poems eat poems,
they devour
passionate events,
they are nurtured outdoors,
fed by the earth
and by people.
Book, let me walk the roads
with dust on my shoes
and without mythology:
go back to your library,
I'll go through the streets.

I have learned life
from life,
I learned love from a single kiss,
and I couldn't teach anyone anything
except what I have lived,
how much I had in common with other people,
how much I fought with them:
how much I expressed of everyone in my song.

—Wally Swist, Translation

Oda de mis pesares

*Tal vez algun, algunos
quieren saber
de mi.*

*Yo me prohíbo
hablar de mis pesares.
aun joven, casi viejo
y caminando
no puedo
sin
espinas
coronar
mi corazón
que tanto
ha trabajado,
mis ojos
que exploraron la tristeza
y volvieron sin llanto
de las embarcaciones
y las islas.*

*Voy a contarles como
cuando nací
los hombres, mis amigos,
amaban
la soledad, el aire
más lejano,
la ola de las sirenas.
Yo volví
de las
archipiélagos,
volví de los jazmines,
del desierto,
a ser,
a ser,
a ser
con otros seres,
y cuando fui no sombra,
ni evadido,
humano, reche los cargamentos
del corazón humano,
las alevosas piedras
de la envidia,
la ingratitude servil de cada día.*

*Regresa, Don, susurrant
cada vez mas lejanas la sirenas:
golpean las espumas
y cortan con sus colas
platedas
el transparente
mar
de los recuerdos.*

*Nacar y luz mojados
como frutas gemelas
a la luz de la luna embriagadora.*

Ay, y cierro los ojos!

El sussurro del cielo se despide.

Voy a I puerta a recibir espinas.

—Pablo Neruda

Ode about My Sorrows

Maybe someone, somebody
will want to know
about me.

I do not forbid
myself to talk about
my sorrows.
Almost old, I can still walk
despite my age,
no thorns
crown
my heart,
which has
worked so hard,
my eyes
that explore sadness
and return without weeping
from those boats
and islands.

I'm going to tell you
how it was when I was born:
mankind, my friends,
loved
solitude, the rarest
air,
the waves of the sirens.

I returned
from
the archipelagos,
I returned
from the jasmines,
from the deserts,
to be,
to be,
to be
with other beings,
and when I was no longer a shadow
nor evading,
soulful, able to receive the cargo
of the human heart,
the treacherous stones
of envy,

the servile ingratitude
of every day.

“Come back to us, Sir,”
the sirens whisper,
becoming more distant:
splashing into the foam
and with their silver tails
slicing the transparent
sea
of memories.

Mother-of-pearl and wet light
like twin fruits
in the heady moonlight.

Ah, and I close my eyes!

The whispering from the sky ceases.

I go to my door to receive my thorns.

—Wally Swist, Translation

Transom Interview with **Wally Swist**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

W: Rainer Maria Rilke suggested to the young poet in his letters to him that he stay clear of paradox. However, in both of the translations of Neruda I submitted to you paradox is imminent and significant. In "Ode to the Book (I)," it is in Neruda's persistent search for freedom from the book itself that offers clear paradox since as much as Neruda attempts to loosely conceal it the poem is a perfect conceit for a bookish poem despite his faux disdain expressed for books. In "Ode to my Sorrows," it is Neruda's claim at the beginning of the poem that "Maybe someone, somebody/ will want to know/ about me," but do we ever really get to know him in the poem except that he exemplifies the intrinsic nature of paradox by returning to "the sirens," a metaphor for the active principle in life itself, by returning to the intimacy and beauty of accepting to "go to the door to receive his thorns." This being an image of Christ accepting his fate, but he apparently does so as Joseph Campbell writes about how some priests in captivity of Native American tribes during the French-American War went to their deaths "as a bridegroom to the bride." Certainly in this poem as well Neruda exacts his ability to use paradox as a literary tool in explorations of depth within both of these odes, in particular.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

W: In my own poems, I don't begin writing with a "particular framing tension in mind." Contradictions appear organically within the music of the lyric and definitely within the tautology of the expressions within the language that arise from the initial music of the verse.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

W: What surprises me most is Neruda's reach and ability to go deep within what may seem to be a simple veneer of language. The poem continues to speak to us long after the poem has been written. Actually, the poem continues to write itself in Neruda's hands. There is a presence and a sense of the eternal in the simplicity of the premise, which continues to surprise, because the poems' depths not only open within themselves but also within us as readers.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

W: It depends on the writer. Neruda, with some apparent ease, has one foot planted in what appears to be the "real" world, and I believe in both poems here, has another foot not necessarily in a "surreal" world but in one that is ostensibly "emotional, metaphoric," and quite an inner or "interior" one. He likes to balance and explore possibilities in his poems and in these two examples, as elsewhere in his odes and other work, he uses paradox as a tool.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

W: Specificity is always a surprise an outstanding writer uses when least expected, as in "Ode to my Sorrows," Neruda expresses: "Mother-of-pearl and wet light/ like twin fruits/ in the heady moonlight." Or when he offers his Whitmanesque cri de coeur, "I come to you to populate the groves/ with the hoarse family of my song," which are central lines in "Ode to the Book (I), the lyrical element qualifies the syntactical tautology to create an viably luminous "language of particulars."

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

W: Loneliness is an existential issue, whereas connection is a practice, be it spiritual, psychological, or actively practical (as in a necessity). Writing is actually often "something else entirely," although almost never quite a "cry," and usually not a "solution." Writing is work, active work. Accomplished writing offers "connection." "Connection" is the result of the "work," which is the practice, and essentially the craft of writing, which is the accomplishment, sans ego.

MERVYN SEIVWRIGHT

Mervyn Seivwright writes to balance social consciousness and poetry craft for humane growth. He is a nomad from a Jamaican family, born in London, England, and left for America at age ten, now residing in Schopp, Germany. His performance poetry highlights include events in nine countries, with features at The Jazz Café, and as a finalist at the UK's Word-for-Word National Poetry Slam. Mervyn completed a writing MFA at Spalding University and has appeared in *AGNI*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Salamander Magazine*, *African American Review*, and forty-six other journals across six countries, receiving recognition as a 2021 Pushcart Nominee & Voices Israel's Rose Ruben Poetry Competition Honorable-Mention. He has a pending collection due in Autumn 2023 through Broken Sleep Books.

Duality in Mountain Memory

When my Granddad passed
I found out we were mountain people
in Jamaica, my mum scaled trees
on dirt paths, no safe road cliff barriers
except for the flowers, colors of warning
connecting to this German village I have found.

When my Granddad passed,
I remember the dominoes clanging
on tables in a village, a decade past
kerosene lights in the present,
where chickens roam freely
unaware of hot water, and their last cluck.

I found out we were mountain people
as the one I live on, both
share a fusion of forest flayed
between fields of tall grass,
walking miles winding trails for water
in and out the trees.

My mum scaling trees
reaping sweet starfruits, mangoes,
plum, papaya as a spider,
then called Tomboy,
she had fierce courage,
hearkening the stories,
she told me, endeavors
gapped amid store market strolls.

On dirt paths, I wondered
of my mum in the fields, working
before school days, dancing
in puddled potholes, shifting
for honking horns of cars
around corner. I wander
the cobblestones, considering
the history in my village,

far across the Atlantic Sea.

The daffodils, tulips, buttercups
brightly lead me into a forest shaken,
stirred by nature's twisting force
pulling strings of harmony,
snow, wind, and thunder
lightning's chaos in our eyes,
until nature's painting has dried.

Connection finds me
coupled with my mum's youth,
the hills I am scaling, lost
in Hansel and Gretel hinterland
country, syncopated scents
of fruits and flowers, hidden
with green moss fluorescent on the rockface,
a chorus of finches claim mornings,
a thread stringing this homeland in me.

Transom Interview with **Mervyn Seivwright**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical?

M: I believe a poet can use craft, especially the balance between the concrete and abstract in a natural paradoxical way. It is layering in a specific image or setting while using metaphors, similes, etc. to slant the view of the concrete expectation. In my poem “Duality in Mountain Memory,” a simple description of a flower, which society’s majority would view as soft and beautiful was flipped into a warning symbol of the possible cliff dangers. I believe the paradoxical in a form can create a more inherent language. I adore the contrapuntal form for this reason with its two columns of poems independent as their own while being able to clash together as one poem. An example of this kind of contrapuntal is in my poem “I See Signs of Autumn,” published in *Salamander*, <http://salamandermag.org/i-see-signs-of-autumn/>

T: Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

M: I believe American society loves the happy endings in a complex story, even when our society’s reality doesn’t always have that norm. My poems are varied, but I enjoy twisting the dream view, with a reality-type perspective. I have a nomad lifestyle living in different countries and the perspective are different, therefore creating the opportunity to clash the perspective on the page to draw interest.

T: How do contradictions function in your work?

M: Interesting question. Across the spectrum of my work, it is different. In my poem “Duality in Mountain Memory,” it pulls in the comparison of a mother and son’s timelines while not always glorifying the expected settings. Calling to the chickens being free on one line and on the following line they are freed from life, or the beauty in the forest flowers before twisted into destruction from nature’s extreme weather. The use of this technique I believe pulls the reader from expected results in the text, awakening a different image the reader knows in existence but is surprised by organic contradiction.

T: Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

M: For this writer, I believe this is an organic process of writing. My perspectives have probably been molded by my nomad life in England, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Germany, etc. Though it has been a growing process learning the different types of craft tools I can use to display the tension. Each poem, I see as a multidimensional image of layers. The tension, for me, is formatted against

the words, line breaks, word sounds, structure, and content puzzled in layers between reality and intent.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

M: This was my first time using this structure creating the first stanza and then pulling from those lines to feed the following stanzas. My surprise was how connected I felt after the initial draft, the connection of mountains between the ones in Jamaica and my current one in Germany. The form allowed me to dive deeper into the following stanzas, applying the natural contradictions in their truths. The poem shares a truth in this writer, that feels comfortable in cities but safe in a mountain residence and why.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing?

M: The poet that inspires me most is Pablo Neruda. Neruda loves to bring life to the mundane. In his book, *Odes to Common Things*, poems are written about tables, soap, scissors, bread, or just things. The details we pass by in blurring speed, allowing things to have a moment of importance if we write about them. I enjoy peeling back the names of plants, trees, and birds in a forest to find natural and symbolic meaning. I enjoy sitting at a city center bench watching the animals and people while tuning into the sounds and scents around me. This level of observation taught me, from reading Neruda's work, to find the real and contrast to the surreal in my work.

T: Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

M: I believe the speaker can exist in both and can make each firm with a level of concrete grounding balanced in the specifics shared with the imaginary. We as readers question the speaker's truth and how real it is along with the belief in the speaker's imagination, grounded with clarity. So with the correct balance of craft, the scale can measure both ways.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

M: One of my early craft books was Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook*. In this, the lessons of tone, voice, sound, imagery, and solitude applied some comparisons to the framework I found in Neruda. I enjoy taking written pictures, being the photographer taking candid pictures of unknowns but with words. It is adding sensory details to the image along with the motion. Driving specific language popping and swimming in the sounds of words while placing the reader into a four-dimensional image not felt in the photograph.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry?

M: I mentioned the part about solitude in Mary Oliver's craft book. In my seasoning as a writer, I had to find this place, as my early writing looked to persona poems and not facing the mirror. The writer of now finds me allowing myself to embrace solitude even in a crowded room. When I am in the forest during winter, stopping to listen to the echoes, the wind's whistles, analyzing the hoof prints in the snow, or sensing a supernatural presence, the isolation carves the voice placed on phone notes to be written.

T: Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

M: The writing is a choice left to the reader. It is the speaker's responsibility to create a puzzle of clarity. In my writing my intentions are different, so I try to provide the reader with options and as I develop, the options tend to be more open. I provide possible answers, moments pictured, a cry, but rarely if ever a solution. I mean what does the writer truly know like Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays," lines "What did I know, what did I know, of love's austere and lonely offices?"

ERNESTO LIVORNI
Translated by CARMINE DI BIASE

Carmine Di Biase's chapbook of poems, *American Rondeau*, has just been published by Finishing Line Press. His poems have appeared in various journals, such as *Italian Americana*, *The Road Not Taken*, and *South Florida Poetry Journal*. He also writes about English and Italian literature for academic journals and occasionally for the *Times Literary Supplement*. He is Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus at Jacksonville State University in Alabama.

Ernesto Livorni teaches Italian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His scholarly publications include *Avanguardia e tradizione: Ezra Pound e Giuseppe Ungaretti* (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1998) and *T. S. Eliot, Montale e la modernità dantesca* (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 2020). He has published articles in Italian and in English on medieval, modern and contemporary Italian literature, English and American literature, Italian-American literature, and comparative literature. Livorni has published collections of poems now gathered in *Onora il Padre e la Madre* (Honor Thy Father and Mother) (Passignano sul Trasimeno (Perugia): Aguaplano – Officina del Libro, 2015). The English translation of *L'America dei Padri* (*The Fathers' America*) prepared by Jason Laine appeared in 2016 for Bordighera Press in New York City.

After the Rain

After the rain, a cooler, fresh evening
welcomes me under these clouds, which linger,
streaked fiery red by this fading summer
sun. Among the glimmers of this dying
day, one vague image remains, the paltry

fruit of lost illusions. Quite defiant,
they return now and then, and though silent,
such musings are the stuff of poetry.

They rise up in my memory to reclaim
their space, then, like the phoenix, down they fall
and burn to ashes, helpless in the thrall

of some elusive power that can call
the past to life, only to let it fall
once more, and all that lives now is your name.

Dopo la pioggia, la sera più fresca
m'accoglie, tra nubi ancora striate,
e nel tramonto, che rosso d'estate
balugina il giorno che muore, resta

una figura inconcreta, soltanto
il frutto di fantasie perdute
che tornano di tanto in tanto, mute,
pure quel vagolare è per me canto.

Tu nel ricordo ti perpetui come
una fenice che s'alza, risorge
e poi ancora cade nelle morse

di qualcosa che ci sfugge, risorse
di un'esistenza andata che risorge
e quel che vive è solo il tuo nome.

Transom Interview with **Carmine di Biase** and **Ernesto Livorni**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

C: From the beginning, poetry, especially lyric poetry, has always served the purpose of expressing in words what cannot be conveyed through ordinary dialogue between two people. That is, lyric poetry attempts to express in words what words fail to express elsewhere: grief, bewilderment, awe, love, doubts about the meaning of human existence. It is no surprise then that the language of poetry should often be paradoxical. When Macbeth, for example, is alone with the witches, which really are his own conscience, he asks them what exactly is it that they do. And they respond: “A deed without a name.” That is, without naming his crime, which is literally, for him, unspeakable, they tell him he has committed the crime of murder. As Macbeth slowly comes to realize what he has done, he also in a sense becomes a poet. This is the example that always comes first to my mind when I ponder the inherently paradoxical nature of poetic language.

E: The very tools that often the language of poetry employs are inherently paradoxical. Metaphor and oxymoron are paradoxes that language and especially the language of poetry exalt in their ability to convey what may otherwise be unsayable. The paradox that metaphorical and oxymoronic figures elaborate is, on the one hand, the possibility of saying what could not be said in literal terms and, on the other, the inevitable possibility of addressing what may not be defined in any other terms. Between these two paradoxical tropes that language allows, among the many, dwells the coincidentia oppositorum, that challenge to logic that allows opposites to coexist and indeed to collaborate in the rising surgencies of new unforeseen meanings. The paradox that the language of poetry inherently carries within itself may also be apparent in translation, in that movement from one language to another, in which metaphor and oxymoron often present one of the highest challenges and the risk of untranslatability. In “After the rain,” the two tercets live on the semantic ambivalence that some of the terms (ll.10, 12-13: “risorse” “risorge,” translated here as “rise up” and “bring the past to life”) seem to carry.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

C: In the best of moments, contradictions come up organically, or I begin with an idea whose contradictory nature I don’t quite understand at first. I’ve just finished a poem about autumn, for example, in which I was compelled, in one line, to call the sadness of the falling leaves “cloying,” and in the very next line to call it a “balm”. And only then did it occur to me that actual balms do cloy: they stick to (the word is related to “nail”) wounds in order to soothe them, and that is not at all what we associate with the word “cloy,” and this seeming contradiction

cracked open that word for me and released unexpected meanings for me. First, though, I had to use it in an honest way: I do think the sadness of fall is cloying, cloying in the usual sense. And only after saying that did I come to realize that not all instances of cloying are repulsive—some are healing.

E: Contradictions are fundamental, as poetry is a work within contradictions that we often experience in any aspect of life. In that respect, poetry may help to overcome those contradictions, but it may also be the best path to take to affirm those contradictions, to work around them, while defining their contours. Several poems find their intimate coherence around a particular framing tension, as is the case in “After the rain,” in which the temporal adverb already marks the tension between a time preceding the rain and one following it. Contradictions are very powerful when they move within the poem, as though there were two different flows only apparently moving in opposite directions.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

C: So, my contribution to this issue of *Transom* is a translation of a lovely poem in Italian by Ernesto Livorni, called “After the rain.” What surprises the most about this poem is the unusual use of this common setting: the calm and clarity after a rain is usually associated with spiritual peace and clarity of mind. And yet here, the fading red streaks in the sky, after the rain, evoke the illusions, turbulence, doubts, perhaps about a love now lost, and the ending of the poem is unexpectedly bracing, as bracing as the chill that often follows a rain storm: “all that lives now is your name.” Loss, here, is associated, strangely, with the peace and clarity that follow a storm.

E: It is always amazing to see what a poet translator identifies as a poem worthy of translation. “After the rain” is a sonnet included in a collection of sonnets (love sonnets, of course). I had written that collection as a sort of exercise in the closed form of the sonnet in hendecasyllabic lines because of the possible tension between the concision of the sonnet and yet the malleability of that form in a coherent and meaningful organization. In this sonnet, “una figura inconcreta” lives in its constant memorial life of memory and oblivion, finding its anchor in “solo il tuo nome,” that is, only “your name.” However, it is a figure capable of perpetuation and continuity.

T: The boundary between the “real” (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the “surreal” (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

C: In “After the Rain,” Livorni mentions “some elusive power that can call / the past to life, only to let it fall once more.” The fading red streaks of sun in the sky are the manifestations of this power: they are what evoke for the speaker everything that is associated with the loved one’s

name. Those streaks are concrete—we can see them—and when they fade, so does everything in the speaker’s imagination which is associated with the loved one, except for the loved one’s name, which may be hollow, a momentary vibration of the air—or is it too endowed, now and then, with the power to evoke a more palpable reality. What is that power? Something external to the speaker? Or something internal? We can’t know. Nor does it matter. What matters is that we know it’s there, and that it is at once real and surreal, “above” the real, that is, and coexists with it, even perhaps creates it.

E: The emphasis I put on the role that metaphor and oxymoron play in the paradox that the language of poetry feeds may already be a strong hint to seeing how I inhabit the realms of the “real” and the “surreal” in the poetry that I write. I may mention a poem of mine titled “Epitaph,” in which the reality of a given subject disintegrates according to two different directions. The moment that we may be tempted to define as the real one is such perhaps because, even unbeknownst to us, it contains that which is “surreal.” Often, a memory surprises us, a recollection of some sort, to which we tend to give importance according to the degree of reality with which we can reconcile it; actually, that unexplainable fragment of memory is much more powerful when it seems to be disconnected from the reality of our present existence.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

C: Most poets will be familiar with T.S. Eliot’s belief that that poet must find images which without the help or assertions of the poet will evoke a certain emotion from the reader: this, in short, is what he called the “objective correlative.” Livorni is a scholar of Eliot’s work and of the work of Eliot’s Italian counterpart, Eugenio Montale, who felt that he knew about this “objective correlative” before he had read Eliot. Mary Oliver, whose poems I admire to the heavens, is surely right about the language of poetry being the language of particulars: no poetry can survive long in abstractions. Poetry is about the sensual world; it conveys, or recreates, our experience of walking through time and space and colliding with the objects that come our way. In a poem I have not yet published, among the images I use are 1) Michelangelo’s unfinished slaves, whom he left partially trapped in their marble blocks, 2) the bust of the infamous Renaissance sculptor, Benvenuto Cellini, on the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, and 3) bats on that bridge and at Sauta Cave, in Scottsboro, Alabama. All of these images, in my mind, are associated with a central abstraction: my own former terror of bats, and the consoling power of antiquity, or to be more precise—because I don’t mean the Renaissance—pre-history. In short, to know that bats were around before human artists were, is to be afraid of bats no more, to discover, that is, a kind of serenity.

E: “After the rain” is in a collection of sonnets, in which my aim was that of writing love poems around quotidian aspects of the life of a self who often addresses the counterpart (you) regarding

their respective, apparently meaningless activities. In this poem, in which the initial temporality points out the psychological condition of the speaker, specificity arises when “*quel vagolare è per me canto*” (that is, “such musings are the stuff of poetry”), which in turn generates the simile of the phoenix as emblematic of the difficulty of that specificity, its recurring process of destruction and resurrection, which the nomination of the last line grants. In my poems, depending on when they were written, there is often the desire to offer a specificity that becomes at least to some degree universal. In this respect, perhaps the strongest examples in my poetry are the poems in the collection *L’America dei Padri* (The Fathers’ America).

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

C: Isn’t this a paradox too? One writes lyric poetry, in part, to give voice to a sentiment that otherwise might have no other expression. I often find myself writing about the spaces between the worlds I inhabit: American, Italian, literary. And those spaces, where I spend much of my life, can be terribly empty, terribly lonely. Poetry is indeed a kind of solution, a cry; and the fact that it gets written, that it is put into print in some permanent form, presupposes a listener, be it some reader in the present or the future, or the lonely poet who writes it all down. If poetry is an objectification of sentiments, then might it be true that those sentiments—love, grief, jealousy, rage, regret, and so on—are what make the poet a lonely figure, a figure in need of such objectification of such isolating sentiments, sentiments that make it impossible for the poet to participate in the life of society as ordinary people do? Perhaps it is no coincidence that so many poets, from Ovid to Milton, to James Joyce, were all in some way exiles. They wrote out of real or self-imposed isolation; and yet they wrote for everyone, reaching out to a world they wanted somehow to rejoin.

E: I appreciate the semantic difference between loneliness and solitude; it would be interesting to check how languages around the world stress that difference, if they do. Certainly, *L’America dei Padri* is a collection written also on the friction between the recognition of solitude and the desire for connection, although it remains to be seen what the cause of that solitude is, and the strength of the solution to it, on the one hand, and what kind of connection the solitary person seeks (sometimes it may be the seemingly simple connection provided, at least at some moments, by “*una bella chiacchiera*” “a nice chat,” as a simple line in a poem in that collection puts it. Other times, the connection does not necessarily grant the possibility of overcoming solitude, but only to hide it, more or less successfully, in the common destiny that a group shares, even unwillingly. In this respect, poetry may very well be a cry, a denunciation of a given condition, the indication of a possible path toward a solution that needs to be elaborated in the reality that humankind shares.

BRADY ALEXANDER

Brady Alexander is a writer with obsessive-compulsive disorder and a contributing editor at *Miracle Monocle*. When not writing, they protest and pine for healthy oceans. Their work is published in *Catamaran*, *Miracle Monocle*, and *InclusiveWe*. They're looking for an agent for their novel/novella, *P*.

Every Star is Rotting

Note: an earlier incarnation of this piece previously appeared as a work of prose in the White Squirrel Literary & Arts Magazine, Volume XVII.

“‘Seek a fallen star,’ said the hermit, ‘and thou shalt only light on some foul jelly, which, in shooting through the horizon, has assumed for a moment an appearance of splendour.’”

—The Talisman, Sir Walter Scott

Mrs. Crouch lie
in the grass, enormous splats of meat
beside her. Had she been inside when
it occurred, she wouldn’t have believed it. Yet,
atop her stoop, she’d mashed the lard and lye
and water from the well
to shape the soap—then the meat slopped down
like slabs of rain.

The wooden town was squirming
with the folks all round the area
and way far out. The meat attracted
flies as well as diners. “Looks like
beef,” her husband said, but after tasting it
remarked it must be venison.

The scientist from Lexington attempted, “Well,
it tastes of lamb.” Someone had
a nostoc theory: algae in the ground

invisible in dry spells suddenly all
swelling up from rainfall. “Saw it
drop,” old Crouch replied, “and I don’t think it’s algae.”

Someone figured out beneath a microscope that it was
lungs that fell, and cartilage, and muscle.

All the while, some big author theorized that
planets break apart in space through impacts, and the meat
that aliens have stockpiled go flying into orbit,
thus resulting in great stellar belts of cosmic victuals.

Someone else deduced
that vultures can spit up when they get scared, and if
they see another hurl, then out it comes—
the acid and whatever lies inside.

The townspeople thanked God for grub, regardless of the distance. Imagining the whole blue sky
encased inside, Mrs. Crouch felt every blood vessel irrevocably filled with air.

In 2012, a sea fell down in showers over Dorset.
The tiller cradled seven in his palm, and looking
at the rainbow, scratched his head. Turquoise
spheres lay resting in the tulips and
the daisies underneath a bruised and sallow sky.
The hail had stopped a bit ago and melted in the moss, but there
the orbs of glassy slime remained.

When the newscast and the scientists rolled in,
one made this small offering of explanation: “Birds
carry marine eggs—well, those of invertebrates—
among their toes for miles,” she had said. “It’s possible
the hailstorm frightened them so much,
they dropped their cache. We’ll take some to the lab for
testing to be sure.”

After filming ceased, a correspondent took the gardener
aside. “Between you and me,”
she hushed, “I think it’s angel sweat.”

“It’s what?”

“You know, that astral jelly stuff,” she said. “Angels make secretions all the time: you’ve seen their hair, haven’t you?”

Imagining an angel like a mollusk in a coat of slime, or some kelp-wrapped crustacean waxed with resin, sun-white filaments, and other meek and mild drippings which all drift their way to

Earth like deep sea snow, the gardener had smiled at the correspondent, shook her hand, and asked if she would like to tell him more about the world.

* * *

Moses stood within the desert valley, the oases of Elim a dozen suns behind. The Israelites’ dates and cakes they brought from Egypt had been eaten. The people begged Moses to fill them up.

Moses promised he would try. Moses had forsaken laws of old and brought down law anew. Now, he tilted up his head to face the sky and begged for sustenance.

The next day, morning mists upwelled from somewhere far and all the land lay heavy with its drink. No one saw the sky release its snow, but as the water parted from the air, they saw the ground was smothered with a sugary expanse of flakes.

Contemporary ethnobotanists, biologists, and theologians have suggested that manna is a lichen that, like nostoc, can appear miraculously after contact with water.

I suppose hydration's certainly a miracle.

Moses ordered everyone to harvest. "Gather as much as you can! We have no idea just what tomorrow's sky might bring!"

Sagan: We are star stuff. Solomon:

We're dirt; to dirt we will return.

In Medieval and Modern Europe and the places which those people settled, it was common to believe that meteors were oftentimes the source of astral jellies.

Like all the world and every world is filled with cosmic waste and made of cosmic waste and populous with organs and their slime.

Nostradamus translated these visions of the future and the past and present to his dead talking mate, Berkeley:

Berkeley: Are we all just cells within God's squirming, slimy flesh?

Vonnegut: Well, even angels sweat and cry and bleed.

Mrs. Crouch: I think that skymeat gave my husband indigestion.

*Hildegard of Bingen: Hush
now, every thought. This is not a wasteful space
if every living thing can still enjoy
the aftermath of everdying spheres.*

Berkeley: *Well, I want to know,
am I God's dream or am I in The Body?*

The Correspondent: *Angels—tell me
that they're made of stuff like us.*

Moses: *When I say, "Behold," and "I am
about to rain bread from heaven for you," can I be sure
that I'm not skinning God alive?*

Hildegard: *Come inside for breakfast, everyone.*

Philosophers began to pour inside her house, a convent in the forest underneath a shell of autumn
oaks.

The table spread was full with jams and jellies, amphibian eggs and those of all marine
invertebrates, and meteors and birds, and angels' hair and exoskeletons, and nostoc, sodium
polyacrylate pustules, and all the multihued ideas swarmed round and round the table, spinning
with a speed at which the people could not follow. Growing dizzy, many felt as though they
would be sick as vultures.

But their nausea and anxiety soon melted into air.

Everything became awash with Hildegard's viridity, and every person realized they, like fruit
suspended in a gelatin, exist in worlds of being, not cutlets, and that jelly has no start, no end, no
edge—it only lives, it ripples.

Butterknife and bread in hand, Hildegard could only smile, reach for something on the table, slap
her toast with jam, and take a bite.

Transom Interview with **Brady Alexander**

T: In what ways do you think the language of poetry could be inherently paradoxical? Do you notice meaning shifts throughout your poems?

B: I'm not sure that poetry is inherently anything, so much as what the poet makes of it, but I do think that poetry can really take advantage of paradox and contradiction because of enjambment. For example, one of the lines I have in my piece is "'Looks like beef,' her husband said, but after tasting it remarked it must be venison." --- but it's enjambed like:

“Looks like
beef,” her husband said, but after tasting it
remarked it must be venison.

I like the back and forth here, especially within the second line, and I think that the enjambment throughout this piece works to capture a sense of these characters throughout history grasping for answers to some really big questions.

T: How do contradictions function in your work? Do they come up organically as you write, or do you start writing with a particular framing tension in mind?

B: I think that contradiction is an easy way of building and resolving tension, since it's a place of instability. Then, resolving that instability, creating something new from those two contradicting forces, helps create a kind of synthesis between them. When I write, I always try to approach contradiction with love and curiosity.

And I'm a bit of a planner, so most of the themes I tackle when I write have been in my thoughts for a good, long while before they make it to the page. They do arise organically when I first think of them, though, long before I consider grappling with them through a story or poem.

T: What surprises you the most about your poetry included here?

B: That it is a poem, I suppose! This was originally a flash fiction piece (and still has some fiction blood in it). I was surprised that this lent itself as well as it did to being mutated into a poem.

T: The boundary between the "real" (natural, mundane, exterior world) and the "surreal" (emotional, metaphoric, interior) gets tested by the works in this issue. How do you inhabit these places in your writing? Can you/the speaker exist with one foot planted in each, or is the line firmer?

B: Oh, for sure. I think that the surreal is just as real, phenomenologically, experientially speaking, as the real is. We live not only as exteriority, but also just as much, if not more so, inside of our reactions to the outside world. Our cognition is a filter --- not reality, but an approximation of it. There's always action and observer. And that's totally okay. Something can be inscrutable and still be very real.

T: We learn from Mary Oliver that the language of poetry is the language of particulars. Where in your poems do you notice specificity?

B: I haven't really thought about it before, but that's a great quote. I think a poem without particulars isn't very interesting. We usually want things like themes to be universal, so that they can resonate not only with ourselves but with other people too. But specificity is flavor and texture and sensation. And I hope that, in my case, talking about big questions like the search for certainty is a little more novel and a little more tangible when it comes through the lens of astral jelly.

T: How do loneliness and connection appear in your poetry? Is the writing an answer, a solution, a cry, something else entirely?

B: That's a good question. A lot of what I've been writing recently has featured themes of deepening connections, whether that's loneliness turning into companionship or a preexisting relationship becoming deeper. I think that the writing I've been doing lately hasn't been a cry for help or an answer or anything, but a moment of connected tenderness, however tongue-in-cheek. It's been akin to holding one another's necks, pressing each other's foreheads together in the rain. My most recent project was a long, narrative poem about ocd, so it's more about empowerment, but it's only possible through a connection with the self. The next one is about family, and why we create family, so it's a big theme there, as well.

TRANSOM ISSUE 15: PARADOX
[wherein we absurd the nature of language]



Untitled 2
Digital
Natosha Cundiff

AUTUMN EQUINOX 2022

SPECIAL THANKS

***Transom* lives again in 2022 thanks to our Guest Editor, Jodi Hooper. Jodi is an attentive and engaged reader, who took her time to consider each submission of our contributing poets. Jodi showed herself as a heart-led editor as she revised our acceptance and rejection letters as well as responded to each inquiry to add her personable sentiment into core communications of the journal. Every step of the way, from conception to actualization, Jodi has blessed *Transom* with her creative eye, passionate drive, and keen observation skills. We are very grateful for her professionalism and friendship as we release *Paradox*. We are thrilled to announce that Jodi will lead our next issue releasing *Spring Equinox '23*.**

Jodi Hooper (she/her) is a poet and fiction writer based in Louisville, Kentucky. Her work explores themes of the self, learning to embody that self, and the fraught experience of human connection by the way of carnivorous plants, vampirism, and the ever-closing gap between monster and man. In May of 2022, Jodi led the writing workshop “Monstrous Poetics: the Abominable Self” as a part of the Poetx in Flux writing program series facilitated by River City Revue; she plans on holding an upcoming companion workshop focused on monstrosity and writing through fear. Her writing has appeared in Folx Gallery’s *Absolute Pleasure* exhibition, *Raptor Lit* online, and Miracle Monocle’s *MONSTER* micro-anthology. Jodi's editorial credits include Prose Editor (2016-2018), Co-Editor in Chief (2018-2019), and Editor in Chief (2019-2020) of *The White Squirrel Literary & Arts Magazine* at the University of Louisville, and one of several Poetry Editors for *Exit 7: A Journal of Literature & Art* at West Kentucky Community & Technical College for the Spring 2016 edition.

Jodi's Thoughts on *Paradox*

Where my mind has been going lately in terms of paradoxes is the Fermi Paradox, which tries to reason out why there is such a lack of evidence, but such a high probability, of the existence of extraterrestrial life. The idea is that a) by the numbers, there *must* be intelligent life that developed to the point of space travel and we *can't* be alone in the universe, but b) there is no real basis for us on Earth having *ever* encountered these other beings thus far and we *are* alone, regardless of their assumed existence. I'm touched by the loneliness of shouting into the void, sending out our knowledge and music and desperate *hello's* to the furthest reaches of our celestial neighborhood, and how we keep doing so even when met with silence. That really resonates in an era of large-scale disconnect and our personal pleas for understanding from other people, institutions, and environments that *must* be hearing our cries and yet meet that same silence. There's a paradox in always being surrounded online, in public, in our homes, et cetera, yet remaining isolated and unknown to those who are ostensibly "there" for us. This tension has had a massive influence on the way that I've been thinking, both as a creative and a human being, over the last couple of years. (There's also a great two-part Kurzgesagt video about the Fermi Paradox that I highly recommend! ! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNhhvOGsMEc>)

Thank you for reading.