

BERKELEY POETRY REVIEW

Berkeley Poetry Review: When the World Moves On

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Dear Readers:

Welcome to Issue 53 of the Berkeley Poetry Review! We are excited to present our first unthemed edition in two years, featuring some of the finest work we have ever published. While themes structure and shape, we missed the marvelous serendipity that attends an open issue. The poems in this edition exhibit unexpected synergies, traversing love, war, seasonality, and more.

“The Bartered Leaf” opens our issue with a meditation on the exquisite torture of writing. The speaker imagines his brain and pen conspiring against him: “I will be cleaning / ink-dipped words / until hell releases the lien / on this bleeding pen.”

“Ink-dipped words” evoke the physicality of the creative process. In our digital age, much writing and reading has moved to the screen. There is convenience and ubiquity in the two-dimensional world, but something tactile is lost: the crisp paper; the cracked binding; the “bleeding pen.” That is why we are committed to print issues—now and forever!

We hope you enjoy turning the pages as much as we do.

With gratitude,
William Rumelhart
Sabrina “Sab” Kim

The Berkeley Poetry Review is created on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Lisjan Ohlone, the original inhabitants of the East Bay. We encourage our non-Indigenous readers, especially those in the UC Berkeley community, to contribute to the Shuumi Land Tax, an annual contribution that non-Indigenous people living on traditional Lisjan Ohlone territory make to support the critical work of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust.

Find more information at <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org>

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The Bartered Leaf

My pen oozes and more blue seeps out—
if I write fast enough, it will not leave
the tattoo on my fingers or clothes

Perhaps ink is
that sign of damnation
and a season of giggles
before the sulfur descends

The brain and pen meet me
at the bartered leaf—
they strike a deal,
I watch their faces shrivel,
they grin.

They know
that I will be cleaning
ink-dipped words
until hell releases the lien
on this bleeding pen.

Applewood sawed, stacked under the tree from which it fell

California hibiscus cut to its dark wood leaves raked away dry clay soil

wisteria's given up its ghostly tendrils after my mother's shower

my eyes skim from mirror's fog to sink sunken pelvis and white whiffs

one breast carved to lift out a lump inches higher than the other

She complains the end of daily delivery flips the PBS channel

from hog sausage to Muhammad Ali sunday paper comes sometimes

rolled and neatly placed in plastic hysteria I set it at her morning door

Dear Adrienne Rich,

Of the daily violences I somehow feel
you shore up in Necessities of Life,
line breaks are less ambiguous, sharp.

If I had been gasping, would it lessen
despair? The remaining windpipe, now breached,
is a vesper for dead children. Language

hides as sounder cannons, contaminants.
For the Gilded Age of overreach, one walk
for flowers, filament. For optics televised,

the glint. As condemnation stoked
the blood, our slain fell through the spray-tan, cowed.
For clammy politicians bore, like opioids,

a nook. Therein, the soft-white meat, exposed—
our slain fell through September sod. The yet green
veins of rapt praise songs, whose round-kill eyes

rolled back. To nebulous vows, pat seeds
so gingerly set. The crux,
each dying hour, a ferrous ditch—

Language, of the wild solitudes.
I think of you and me.

For sleeplessness, the carousel.
For daily wars, a budding hand.

Dear Rosa Luxemburg,

i.

In his lithograph, The Martyrdom
Beckmann renders a boozy spectacle,
Batter in a basin, your body.

Can you picture man in dowdy dress?
Pocket protectors sullied by death.
Splayed like a punctured steam cake?

By now, your beloved cat Mimi
has turned over in her grave.
The cut of your body, angular lines.

Beyond Beckmann's star-studded sky,
boughs of holly, loose cannonball—the IDF
hit home. Sclerotic knuckles, a prison

wall, and the unpopular view.
Had there been more at the margins?
People, dazzlingly

blue with impatience,
fed up with unlawful detainments,
virtual touch, munitions. Death

is so unremarkable this Christmas,
despite the birth of our Arab prince, it
touches me and you. The morally ambivalent

coil of history about the mandrake vine
is not yet sleep befallen, is not yet sleep.

ii.

Grappling with the terms of your own Jewishness, your letters throw light on tribal fealty. Born to Polish parents in 1871, the year of the famed Paris Commune, amid Black Reconstruction, would not your gender and disability grant you pause? Perhaps, to you, such strict loyalty to religious and cultural dictates is where nuance goes to die. Where fascism lives.

Is being drunk on one's own exceptional nature what you're getting at when you ask about the 'special suffering of the Jews'? That a touch of abnegation is healthy in a society so hellbent on unseeing the other person one or two rungs below on the economic ladder? What exactly is a social inferior? A privilege? Plessy vs. Ferguson, when troubled, mirrored an infatuation with social status, that a contingent of the black middle class in America would be lumped in with and treated like their "lesser" and loathed, bruised loves was infuriating.

In a rural stretch of Alabama, the Johnsons were one such example: mulberry black, loudish, wild, uncouth in the 80s, unkempt. A matriarch, leaf snuff pocked corners of her mouth. And scene, not a nation unto herself. Uncultured, green to the sloven disregard. The dirt yard where once thrived a groomed, verdant testament bore the joyful, savage stampede of child patter. No greener spring than this, unaccompanied by letters, council. Hominy grits all spent. Storm door screens punched clear-out with holes, the Johnsons let in every foul creature one could imagine. Ants, cicadas, water bugs.

Whose ease with nature is the natural order of things?

Flora's Newfound Fauna

Flora divorced and took the train to Barcelona in May, where her father chisels heavy faces from Luna calcitic marble, pulling white shadow from sea foam. She hasn't spoken since Lent when her Vasco ex-marido moved out. She drove down south to Sitges where Papa keeps an apartment on the gusty strand, and the past misplaced its gravity. The old town rose with expats, set with misfits, the hybridity bred her to ecstasy, a queer cacophony slipping the streets like a whited metaphor of exiles, soldiers dopesick for war, a velvet diaspora sucking everyone's salt, essential players on a stage for nestlings, sheltered on the lunar surface of Playa del Hombre Muerto. Flora moved in and joined a theater troupe Sunday. No one would discover her here in a bright lit room interrogating a mirror. But tricksters always tell time, a fable begins and ends, her father returning to insert his new fiancé, Kat. What grief can follow a straight line? Kat sank her tongue into Flora's worn myth as if she was author, and the nuptials winked out fast. Her father fled to find another stone to coax eyes out from darkness found, a trauma that swung from tree to tree a vine to climb a night sky blossom, incandescent genre of flowering, fragmented thirst, caves of dream. What wounding of loss cannot be shared across the void? Flora's story to fight again for rhizomes to flow overground across mosaics once lost to chance, a champing, savage equatorial jungle, for her to reflect another bride-to-be, another spouse, an undiscovered dowry to share among interlocked Greek islands all sprung from pure, hot springs, to wed the manifestation of a volcano pouring oranges into the sea, the way Flora loved her olive tree cultivar, this Kat, who wore a ripe garland of them, who trussed up their locks together in a grove to farm oil from pit and flesh for centuries to come.

Spells

We stole a billboard from the student center, the boys and I, prospecting it as a table for beer pong—toppled it off its easel feet and scrambled it skyward

up the stairwell and through the claret emergency exit into the dark, the rain-wet asphalt spotlighted by streetlamps like a stage before curtain call opening night.

We were a comradely cast and I had their door combination—always welcome, but maverick like a cute cat without a bell. I'd slip in and sphinx on the forearm

of the couch or the precipice of the counter where my palm was greeted coldly by a Kölsch, a frozen tender hot from the oven, glossy red cups lined up

like totems ready to fall, huddled against each parabolic drop past the autograph of my lips red on the rim. The house snuffed of yeast and philosophy, the boys

alternating between spells of obsession and apathy, but not quite to the extreme as the one who said to me I might have loved you.

Hypnotic

[FLASH]

The trail to you was organic, left piecemeal, my thighs chafed
Our evenings, porous as glass, crystallize into searching headlights
that creep across the hair-shorn window, incrementally–
knobs of bones traveling down a spine. I follow you deeper
into dissolution, deeper into urgency–our breath syncopated,
pulsing in the way our hands do, wound together. The pain
is temporary and ordinary–vagrant with tumult. At last
I remember the fugitive deer, last spring: one antlered, one
leg folded, hobbled by injury. My car, leaf-plastered, our
eyes held as dark twins, the neighborhood quaking omens.

[FLASH]

Dear dreamer, there are no omens. The story
holds the story. The vehicle is just the vehicle.
You were conquered. You were illicit. You
looked for a way out, you looked for a way
in. Your burning emanated a fear
of roaming. Your roaming mind
the burn of it, rippling.
A mastermind suppurating.

[FLASH]

What can I say of the deer: its wastral want standing stock still in the street emblem-like? I was late for work—the deer’s frozen stance like all my idiot moves when it came to self-preservation. Like that late marriage aflame—a catapult of trees brimming the horizon.

I was late for work—the deer jolted. We were conscious; we were unconscious. The mastermind, that trickster, told me it didn’t want the deer to die. So I sped off, kept going beyond my tree-filled urban neighborhood. The emblems walked, or huddled, or lay pooled on traffic medians under trash-bags spilling their innards. What can we say of it? Like a great screw loosening; like the bees returning to an invisible hive. One voice split into many. A moon that rises but leaves no shadow. In times of crisis, we quote the poets; otherwise, the petals unpetal. Otherwise what we thought we had could be nothing but a somnolence.

[FLASH]

My lover the fox, the mouth, and the wolf.

My lover’s mouth foxes the wolf.

Our making signaled first by your sandpaper tongue on mine, then your eye carrying a depthless freight; your past face mimics the now. Your mammal aspect—hairs lift sensorially, animate imaginary anatomies. We tremble in the after-shocks of love. What transforms our plummet into the real only the doorway we enter to get there: wordless grinding into the other’s projection until, astonished, we pass through.

Route 84: Dec. '23

Sheep skeleton by the side of the road.

This is Lamb County
where boneline windmills spin down
woolen clouds – radius / cirrus / tibia / nimbus –
humorous, carding words –

like, *Paddock Head*: an affliction
when nose is punched tart with cowtown,
keeled with beeftown carnage.
Leonard Cohen sings *hallelujah* in the cab
and in my palm, a father raises his dead

child to the camera. Kept him
alive for seventy-six days only
to have him wholly bombed in pieces
to the clouds, wooly with martyrs.

Fireworks, TNT: Buy One Get One Free

Less Winter

More thunder.
I opened inside
it. Boredom was
superior to pain
for a while. Then
pain superior to
boredom. It bloomed
across my skin. No
spring, only sudden
heat, pressing in
from all sides. The air
emptied; there was
silence and then no
pain at all. I am
an indecent person. I
keep unraveling myself
to get to something
inside me that might
feel like a core. I'm
not describing pleasure
well enough. It shattered
me. I'm in pieces.
I'm on the floor.

I had a girl in the shape of you

I came in, hood dripping
then slumped in the sofa
then dancing, from the whisky
If someone could stroke my hair
If a knuckle could scan
the parenthetical of my ear
I dredged of looking
and draught of breath
If the dancer could soothe
the choleric sitter
If I were convivial
If dinner were canceled
of lozenges. I came
through the passage of
dampened slipped nightwalk
darkening, sandblasted and lacquered
for petting, and twirling
The promissory boyfriend
received me unto beds and
beds of

Greeting bounds

I couldn't rid myself of fraught
could not expel the bristling tax
idermied recall Santa Fe
through azure door to sunsplit road
side I was walking on the windrend
wizened gauze of Spring and oh,
inflated lung who tries
escaping in my gasp of grief, I need
for you to be my mooring post
elated that Apache Plumes
did burst utensil puffs upon
my heat-stained coppered part of hair
the viscous air with pinyon pollen
boundless glutting breath inhaling
urgent down the mesaface
I felt I was in ambercase,
if any eye at all had followed
down inert and lovely beam
and piercing inoffensive through
a parted seam, in onion skin
in hairline body crack diffuse
and lanced with glamors like the sa

cred heart which aptly doesn't bleed
I couldn't feel martyrdom
but gratified in flightless vulcan
izing silver eyesing up terrain I turned
the pining sprouted wedding veil
to shushing caul and fleeced the rockfield
sheer as day and gentle, also
serial, if every after
noon was then a tabernacle
wombing brighted straw of blond,
but really it was nothing. I could
not be parted from this country.
Wept myself into the rind
of earth was rippling sentimental
round the gash of the arroyo
pause was nesting somewhere, dear
inflated lung, I should have shorn it
gathered on the knife point there
a milky bit of discard fat
I double back through years
of gritting recollect
when life was that

& across the pueblo

see yr Tucson monsoon
showers bring summer poppy

flowers—blooming bright—
& right now a cholla's

arm bursts thru a crumbling wall—
& desert winds will win—

& down in South Tucson
a corrido plays tonight—

& fingers touch—hold—grip
& across the pueblo

two different hands mold masa
into balls—pat—into discs—toast—flip—smoke—

& stack tortillas
& across the pueblo

saguaro brazos
stretch to July's sky—barrio

translation—son primos

all stars sing these songs—
that no line marks change—that no

human being's marked—

thunder July night—

monsoon flashes—bright—yr eyes—
pajaro ascends—

tried to bury us—
didn't know we're semillas

—each & all of us—
agave blossoms—

a hundred desert moons
& after seeds new days

Tucson, 2017, 2021, 2022

Poem of a Tumor

This verse has no thought
to toss overboard, like the fish
too old and toothy, or toxic,
but rather a feeling of being,
a captured nucleus in her boat
nonetheless — a message
that believes it's an empress,
or a pattern among the arteries
that spells out a midline lure
for my heart, by virtue of ink,
a contrast dye spilled sweetly.
But the poem isn't mine,
nor is the node of cancer.
To finish it off like a mob hit
with a club to the head?
Or to drown it in the dry air
just above the collarbone
of this inherited sea of fire?
It's her blaze to fight or feed,
I suppose you'd say
that in the twilight of ICUs,
we all must choose the shimmer,
whether to stay back behind
the guardrails, inside the lines,
or to leap across to save her body
from the surf of fat, red letters,
just a matter of the preposition,
dripping her blushing consent,
a hook near the frame to hang
around it, her name, this end,
like a poet asked to stand up
in front of a room, microphone,
to report on how she knew then
that all the ever-caught ones fight
to stay vital, to compose the will
to refuse.

Ziplock: One Hellova Bag

or

Simple: Effective: American

I have decided to name my balls Enceladus and Europa
even though they never orbited Jupiter or Saturn
and it's damn cold out there so count me out
and while the rings are more spectacular through an orbiting telescope
than willow trees sagging along the banks of a bubbling brook
everyone knows Kubrick opted for Jupiter simplici
avoiding the orderly chaos of orbiting snow balls
transparent without even knowing transparency in a mirror
unreflective of mere light recoiling having ultimate origins
on the surface of a fusing heavy element birthing cloud
filling Behemoth and Leviathan with fear and trembling
knowing stellar alchemy can make iron and uranium
but only humans can make a plastic bag

American Sonnet

O strawmen everspoken by talking heads filled with straw
O trans panic defenses for the most violent of offenses
O NFTs & infantile tweets & hyperreality TV
O culture wars & oil wars & wars on drugs
O rainbow capitalism & commodified revolution streaming on Twitch
O post-racial pats on pale bourgeois backs
O one pill, two pill, red pill, blue pill
O thoughts & prayers crying out for nothing in particular
O bread & circuses & big beautiful walls for this our coliseum
O voting blue no matter who, you've no other choice, do you?

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—

It's so elegant / so intelligent

Let our eyes not stray, may it hold our gaze

For all the rest of our godforsaken days!

Leaving

Her fingertips slip mine and she's gone. Away into the swaying crowds, off to her terminal, off to her dying father's side. She rises through clouds as I worry over her landing, her comfort, her soft brown eyes and what they must endure. I think of her father, how she will meet him at his deathbed, at the end of his story. The once young soldier who fell for a Korean woman stationed far from home. He flew with her back to Michigan and made children. A son and a daughter, the woman I will know. I drive away from the people and the planes, away from her, my heart in her hands taking leave of me, on her way to hurt in St. Louis. It is strange to see heartbreak coming, to prepare for it, to make a seat for it to weep upon like an old and tired man who knows that heartbreak never ends, but expands and touches all else. Sweetens every joy and sharpens every grieving. But heartbreak can be shared, can be held by another. We will watch her father leave like children young enough to watch the sun fall below the land and wonder if it will rise again. We know it will, we say, we know it will.

April

I read out loud so I don't skip ahead. Force attention through the slush.
I say *muneral fourmer*. *Word* instead of *world*. *Bewildermists*.
My mom used to tell me I was too literal, was surprised when I understood
what she meant by *the sky is bigger out here*. I install a grammar application.
It hates my poems. Suggests *morality* for *emeralite*, *being* for *is*.
As in, *she meant by the sky being bigger out here*. But that isn't what she said
as I pressed my hand to her hitchhiker's thumb. I don't know what I mean to say.
I read a poem called *The Last Poem About the Moon*. The next
features an *unholy moon*. I try to ban myself from returning all the time.

The Cricket's Sirens

The cricket's sirens sing today,
On a day that is most unholy.
It is only when the air is beyond warm
That they whisper their blessing
Ceaselessly, like the unhampered grief
That billows through the unremarkable golden street
Into the hearts of men, who, like me
Know far too well what the dirt tastes like
And what the gravel feels like under fingernails.
The soft and silent melody
Is a comfort to such wavering men,
Seems a prayer, to un-remit as they un-remit
As the decadence brings forth an illusion far from true,
Of a warmer time and place, where the sun
Was bearable on the skin
And the light was a marvel to be drunk.
But it may just as be
That the crickets are in collusion with the heat,
To blow far the barriers we hold,
And melt us into the fresh arms of Grief.

headlights, blinding

i love the silhouette of
everything once the sun
dies, light leaves us
to navigate our own

that white line -
headlights, blinding
rumble strips get us
back on track

i don't want to lose a second
of your laughter
a second of
the sunset

touch my leg,
exquisitely
and i'll drive
forever

Definitions

Economy – the libido of a state

Photograph – the face of a second

Salt – inverted prisms of taste

Bureaucracy – the shadow of a country

Socrates – the model traffic rotary

Shadow – the opacity of Genesis

Mountain – the lonely egotist

Sky – the eye of the universe

Monsoon – the menstruation of the earth

Descartes – the straight line

Tear – a brook stuck in the mind

Sand – the crumbs of time

Sorrow – a trumpet without a player

Bridge – the hair-clip of a river

Nietzsche – a carousal in a fest

Air – a shoal of short breaths

Home – a seed in the head

Love – a warrant for the lost half

Sex – the exercises of love

Night – colours leaked from a bat's wing

Memory – a ghost limb

Expectancy – a sea dazed by its waves

Gravitation – the fall of lightness

Passover: Karpas

The oxalis has lain down, yellow
and dry brown filaments matted
into a loose layer, adorned by tawny
leaves, wizened from their heart's
shape. *Greens mark spring's new life*
my mother's blurts out of turn. I ask why
god wants me to drink so much I get
dizzy. *Straighten up from your walking*
questions, I tell my mother.
My feet sink into the new layer
with prickly cones and lavender
petals. *I can't* she says. The irises
spider out their green legs, a many-
pointed star stretching over
the reddish-brown of spring's
drought. *I'm old* she says
At night a lame doe chews
the wild parsley, beds down
under the pineapple guava
a place to fawn in May. Mom lets
her eat what's left of the garden.
I'm decrepit and suddenly dying.

Augury

I awoke August sixth, 12 ½ years since my grandmother Rose died
and my horoscope said, Encourage radical honesty with yourself,
you are more brave than you give yourself credit for

In the dream
a fox slinks towards me with a feather in its mouth

I think my grandmother's hand gesticulated inside of me
as something the pond coughed up

We both crossed our hands, right over left the same
as if bound to

something unremembered that
still stings and burns

In the kitchen she covers the table
(once a door) with individual bamboo place mats
she is inspecting their weave, the scales falling

from her eyes, the farthing in us she sees

curved knives on the counter below jars of green in the window
and me out the door to the pond

lithe-stepping across fields of corn and squared bales of hay,
rows of apples and peaches to protect the driveway and loosening
the hems of the branches throwing parachutes of shade

Censorious, my cousin tells me grief is not
linear, to go up the hill above the pond where she's buried
whenever I'm feeling sad

(brownish photo of a marble church) futurities neglected
the smell of wet grass in the rakes smelly boots on the steps at dusk
a fistful of clay on the wheel rosary beads a threadbare apron

Washing our mouths out with a thimbleful of vinegar
comparing green and purple colors casting their shadows dark and growing
borage out of work boots we'd eat from in the garden

My uncle takes a yellow apple wet with cold rain music
from the driveway
and tries to plant

me my own orchard by the pond

a lone goose egg cracked some
easing my tempo I follow drops of blood
up the concrete staircase

around the front porch's leaf-work in wrought iron reverie: snowshoes, tufts
of fox fur and veneers of the old guard: a muted black and white playing
behind a threshold of beads

a homespun geometric rug angling a stool's legs still morphing

like the roof of my mouth

I can trace variegated wrinkles without seeing them
the minor tar road
bisecting Palladino

PALLA meaning arms bearer / palace / a large square of cloth
DINO in vulgar: different / small people / little sword

displacing each as winds do wings

I grew up in a small palace
of the outdoors
from where I have planned and failed

Men slamming their fists on the table, puddles of snowmelt by the radiator
plates of different foods.

A Poem Tucked Away

Running, cheeks red with the season,
and chubby hands just protruding
from that Goodwill coat.
He stoops lower
wrapping several rocks
in his still-growing hands.
He clammers up higher
with his prize clutched tight,
silent at his task.

At last, standing like an arbiter,
with great plumes of steam
rising in languid anticipation:
he gathers up within himself.
Hurling the first rock downwards
with what little might a child can muster.

It smacks the pond's thickening ice
with a crack like the gunshot
which just last week brought police streaming down.
He could see them from the top
of the ancient pine in the front yard,
moments after which the world cannot seem quite the same

from (7) Tekiah Gedolah [Dream Script Sonnets]

The bird in the house is a bird in a book. Worth a poem.
Not the book of the dead. Or the book of love 'long and boring.'
Or the book of conjoined twins. Or the book of brutalist
architecture. Or the book where the bird is a god or the god is a bird.

Or a herald on a carved clock. Are you reading in the dark. Are you dead.
The bells that can ring ring and 'there is a crack a crack in everything
that's how the light gets in.' Imagine—the dust motes and the ghosts
downwind. They don't dance. 'Knives all flashing. Hair all streaming.'

Sun streaking. Oh wild g-d. The problem with imaging. Engine idling.
In chile the people crowded the streets. To protest. To insist.
To say *no*. To say *yes*. To pass. Stop. Open the rusted door. Steel
flakes. Though the hinges still hinge. Exit the vehicle. Cueva.

The shibboleth. Be the white bee. Who doesn't worship a wall. Who shakes
down the house of praise. Shutters. See you in the dirt. Love. Look.

//

The doctor tapped my forehead and said *The pain you feel
is really here. The nerve damage here.* And I could not swallow. Estaba
furioso/a. Enraged. Now and still now. The myelin stripped.
Aflame. Still. Now. Beating against the redundancy of all this nowness.
Can your cry be heard across the earth. Now.
Still. May my whole body being tremble
with praise. Please. So you can breathe. Easily. Truthfully.
Are you in for the drift. Look. I can look Anywhere. Turn

toward or away. With you. Not the same if paging through
an arbus or parks folio and/or are taken in by the reflection
of eyes. Now and still now. Where are you. Are you the punctum
the spirit the accident which 'pricks' and 'bruises.' *The we*
that is *they* say we have become so adept at hiding our dead. We live
with the burning tumble of rubble beyond our senses smoke in our cells.

from *American Sentiments*

...here we walk on ground where the bombs, somehow, just don't fall.

—Farid Matuk

Tonight, a night like any other, the bombs do not fall
On us. Nor do they not burst in air

Like a limb or a cheek, or like a
Family sheltering knowing there is no knowing and there is only knowing,

Or like a generation holding the next generation dead in their arms.
Theirs is the rubble of knowledge, the knowledge of rubble.

Killable children are the master sign, the evidence,
The point. Shadows and data, targets and storylines.

Through a dead cloud the
Developers plan the future with a drone's eye view.

The only poetry is dead poetry,
The only hope, dead hope

Or the hope of the dead, who are unsafe in history and memory and body.

/

Tonight, a night like any other, the bombs do not fall
On me while I look at the photographs of Mohammed Abed, at a horse

That with such beauty pulls a cart through the rubble
And a man who walks at his side.

Where are they going?

/

The olives rot.
The people inspire.

The people who are
Everywhere, brave, alive, staggering forward, shouting, crying out,
digging, digging, the
 people who gather themselves together,

And push, and pull, and feed each other though there is no food, and
find water
For each other though they thirst, though there is only thirst, hunger,
dread, and dust.

They are the position, the substance, of me, of us,
Though they are not me, are not us.

I want anything and everything for them, they who are seldom me,
seldom us,
But who like me, like us, must be where the cart, and the man, and
the horse are going,

Out beyond the end of the photographs of
Mohammed Abed, toward the future that is called Palestine,

Toward the harvest of
Necessity, of desire, of peace like wild mustard flowers

And people picking them, and freshly broken
Watermelon, warm and lush, shared on a day

Without bombs,
A day of shared blushes, and looks of agony, and laughter, and
memories held

Together—though it staggers
The faith, though there are only warplanes now,

And counting, and numbers, though there
Is only this finite calculus of death and death

/

There is also this: no colonial project has ever
Been successful in the history of the world.

There are only dying colonialisms.
There have only ever been dying colonialisms.

The kill to save, kill to
Save, kill

To save
Song has never found finally a home

In which to sustain itself. It always must destroy itself, it, too,
Rots, but it never comes back,

It knows no way, finds no way, other than repetition
Without variation—

/

And yet
In the photographs of Mohammed Abed

The hands of the people find a way,
The hands of the dead

And of a stunned and grieving people
Find water, the side of a cart, some rebar,

Some cloth, some air, a triangle of concrete space, and various hands
To hold on to, again and again

They find they make a way out of no way
And there the sky.

Cathedral of Seville

Mighty Cathedral of Seville,
begging like a small man to be worshipped.
Your size is unnecessary.
Do we humans grow bigger in the afterlife?
Do we become giants?
I always thought heaven would shrink to the size of the house I grew up in.
How long can we children play hide and seek with our faith amongst your
giant columns?
There is enough space here for Jesus and Mohammad to have been brothers.
And yet you chose one over the other.
I see gold behind the altar radiating with conquered new world light.
I see the tomb of Columbus.
How much bigger is the tomb than the man?

Waking Series I

To bear weather.
Gathered for that in will.
Organized to trundle thick
through slick streets. Gaze at shame,
eyes on the asphalt; gaze at ease
with other faces. A rolling stone
chunked up with street
adhesions and interactions. The moss
of engagement and evasion. And forest
forms fallen in the same stiff wind
that fanned the flames of forest fire,
swept police stations away
in its wake, leaving the taste of being
near the end. Leaving our shoes
at the door, we made wreaths
with it and other storm-torn stuff
in our socked feet. Breathing
masks stacked in the corner.

Waking Series IV

To brook brightness
before the eyes have adjusted to the light.
Blinding white-gold ridge- and eye-line-level cloud-edge.
What can be borne, barely, by the eye, the whole
panorama scrolling northward, right to left,
cloud forms appear serially
in each pane of glass as though the skyscape were
on a dolly set rolling by a person holding a handle
affixed to the balsawood back, guiding the cloud-
painted panel in its track. *trailing clouds of glory*
Sound, too, carries brightly, crisp and more quick
than on other days. The traffic transmits right into the room. Its
shirr rushes in with the air, cool small and sharp, slips
through the latch gaps. This is just it.
The rotting rice is outside in the stuff pile of a life that left
the building in the pool of rain beneath the rain, the ants
that died in the orange oil in my corner of the hive
still in the corner, speck vestige.

Reverse Migration

I.

Housefire morning. The day
water becomes road.

Two willow trees & our folded porch roof
reflecting in the ripples from the dozer's
approaching track.

A duck hen abandons
her nest where we piled
our charred furniture for the river to lathe
the smolder from the heartwood.
Stillborn beneath the current, her eggs
muck into the cold unbirth
of their mud womb.

Just wash them off, my mother says,
hillbilly vowel deep as taproot.

Later, a dinner fry up of them
their porch light yolks runny,
bright as an afterthought.

2.

Tonight, a winter float. Reservoir dam
underpinning the wall of lake. Walls

this fog can't scale. Cairns sleepwalk
between concrete and limestone.

The Arsonist and the Scorched

*So she is hidden in the woods
and never can be seen on mountain slopes,
though everywhere she can be heard, the power
of sound still lives in her.*

- Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (trans. by Allen Mandelbaum)

1.

There—
sitting on the green grass. By the water's edge.
Your fingers caressing the water.
Your lips chasing ripples in the water.
Your desire reflected in the pool
reflecting my own.

2.

You, the arsonist. You, the scorched.

3.

You waste away like summer's end.
Sultry days spent longing, and weeping,
until the chill creeps in
and all that remains
is a bodiless love.

4.

I once had a body.

5.

Before I was consumed by hidden flames
and tossed aside
like torn silk in the breeze,
I had sisters and a wealth of words.

Oh, the joy of loose conversations!

6.

Not just the weight of wrong love,
but the terror of stolen speech.

Not just the boy,
but the distance from him. And everyone else.

7.

Flowers circling the pool.

Hidden voice in the mountains.

I waste away,
trying to find myself.

8.

Love wasn't the end of me, but I carry your name between my lips, still.

After the Wake

We were talking about Joyce's "fuckbird"
vocative and the scatological parody of the staid

middle class epistle last Sunday night
when everybody rose from near the hearth,

groggily considering their drives home
and that week's work. If Here Comes Everybody

smashed the HCE six-cylinder coupe
into the median at the Rotunda bend,

the car must've canted for a brief second
before the steel collapsed into the firewall.

There is not a sound you could love
in the Dorian modality of scraping metal now.

The clap, clap, clapping of dray horses
on Chapelized stone is no exculpatory

chamber music. Redundancies
like "brief seconds" begin to libel us.

Our anachronistic man is stuttering, puking,
bleeding, falling, farting avuncularly

and singing of one who carried a hod
to rise in the world. Is it all too vomitous

and esoteric? If you put the question
in a headline the answer would be no

(Betteridge's Law). If I'm anyone, you said,
I'm Biddy the Hen, unwitting

courier of stories that aren't mine to tell,
the most engaging character in all

of Western literature retrieving and reassembling
scraps of an incriminating letter

from the alluvial stuff of the midden heap,
waddling to the stoop of Fin MacCool's Pub

with the evidence to fell the fallen patriarch—
Earwicker stoppered with wax of sleep,

your mother at the screen door, dark lintel,
river's breadth of black ink over which

the voices of the damned must travel.

In Memory of Being

It's late. I get in the car
and drive on and on. Down the highway,
past city lights and sounds
and factory smoke rising
across the Bay.
Silver light poles line the road
like night watchmen.
The empty road. And all the secrets
we hide in solitude.
That old urge to master invisibility
because nobody taught
me how to be human.
How a limited language
can only take us so far.
Another toll bridge. Somewhere
an indigo sky meets indigo waters
and I am already half mourning the dawn.
I keep glancing in the rearview mirror
but only the stars or years look back.
Is it desperation or determination?
To think that, despite it all,
our daily rituals
might translate to
a disclosure of being.
That a love for small things,
and other people, too,
can carry us through the long, long nights
and long days ahead.

From a Vantage Point That Is Me

Your name
Has no meaning but

Definitely a shape
An irregular curve

Like a lioness' neck
Bending into the river

Or the body of a diver
Right before touching the waters

That half-spin of earth until
Light fades in our continent

A broken bangle
Embedded in someone's shoeprint

On a festival ground or briefly

When my tongue curls to say

Love or labyrinth
The sound that bends around

A solid obstacle
Cat pose swivel of my leg

The pause after a deep inhalation
....two, three, four let go

Your name is
Every beautiful thing

That struggles halfway to itself
And simply hesitates

Mama

I feel the sun and the unbearable heat
of the kitchen
the scent of ghee
Stains my dress
Mixing with the air of the jardin downtown
Long after the diner has closed.
Confetti litters the ground
The one I never see my
Mother's hands
Throw.

My heart is in another country
My mother's tongue is not fully mine
I trace my teeth and feel them crooked
Inherited from her
and not from him.

Heavy is the shell on my back
That guides me to the mountains
Away from the water
Away from it all.

STEVEN ALVAREZ is the author of the novels in verse *Manhatitlán*, *McTlán*, and the Fence Modern Poets Prize winning *The Codex Mojaodicus*. His work has appeared in the Best Experimental Writing (BAX), Berkeley Poetry Review, Fence, Huizache, The Offing, and Waxwing. Follow Steven on Instagram @stevenpaulalvarez and Twitter @chastitellez.

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SHARON COLEMAN is a fifth generation Northern Californian with a penchant for languages and their entangled word roots. She has translated poetry from Yiddish, the language of her mother's family and has studied the Portuguese of her father's. Her poetry and prose appear in *Your Impossible Voice*, *Faultline*, *The Ana*, *Dream Pop Press*, *White Stag*, *Rivet*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*.

She co-curates the reading series *Lyrics & Dirges*, and co-directs the Berkeley Poetry Festival. Her books include *Paris Blinks*, micro-fiction by Paper Press (2016) and *Half Circle*, poetry by Finishing Line Press (2013) She received the Maverick Award for her poetry from the Ruth Weiss Foundation (2022), a Luso-American Fellowship for the Disquiet Literary Conference in Lisbon (2018), the Brereton scholarship for the Napa Valley Writers Conference (2021) and was a finalist for the Jane Underwood Poetry Prize (2020). She teaches at Berkeley City College and U.C.B.'s Fall Program for First Semester.

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CAL FREEMAN is the music editor of *The Museum of Americana: A Literary Review* and author of the books *Fight Songs* (Eyewear 2017) and *Poolside at the Dearborn Inn* (R&R Press 2022). His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals including *Image*, *The Poetry Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Under a Warm Green Linden*, *North American Review*, *The Moth*, *Oxford American*, *River Styx*, and *Hippocampus*. His poems have been anthologized in *The Poet & Quest for God* (Eyewear 2016), *RESPECT: The Poetry of Detroit Music* (Michigan State University Press 2020), *I Wanna Be Loved By You: Poems On Marilyn Monroe* (Milk & Cake Press 2021), *What Things Cost: An Anthology for the People* (University Press Kentucky 2022), and *Beyond the Frame* (Diode Editions 2023). He is a recipient of the Devine Poetry Fellowship (judged by Terrance Hayes), winner of *Passages North & Neutrino Prize*, and a finalist for the *River Styx International Poetry Prize*. Born and raised in Detroit, he teaches at Oakland University and serves as *Writer-In-Residence* with *InsideOut Literary Arts Detroit*.

RICHARD HAMILTON (he/they) was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey and raised in the American south. Hamilton earned his MFA in Poetry from the University of Alabama and an MA in Arts & Politics from New York University. He is the author of *Rest of US* (Re-Center Press, 2021) and *Discordant* (Autumn House Press, 2023). He presently holds the 2023-2025 post-doctoral creative writing fellowship at the Center for African American Poetry and Poetics at the University of Pittsburgh.

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J.D. HIBBITTS (he/him) grew up in Southwest Virginia, but roamed the globe for a few years as an enlisted member of the U.S. Air Force. He holds an MFA in fiction from McNeese State University. Some of his poetry and fiction have appeared in the following journals: Boulevard, Cold Mountain Review, Sugar House Review, Kenyon Review Online, Jelly Bucket, and The Sierra Nevada Review.

STELLA HO is a writer from the Bay Area. Her work is featured or forthcoming in Eucalyptus Lit, Berkeley Fiction Review, and Surging Tide Magazine.

HOGAN writes because nothing else makes sense to them, and in their writings they attempt to make sense of a sociopolitical present in which nothing seems right or makes sense.

MELISSA MACK is a writer. Her most recent work appears in Hot Pink. She is pursuing a PhD in Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

JOHN MARVIN is an 84-year-old cancer and cardiac patient who still feels young. He has been published in over 200 journals and received 6 Pushcart nominations. The dark woods between art and science are his favorite haunt. He loves his dog, Hugo.

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AMY PENCE authored two full-length poetry collections, including *Armor*, *Amour* as well as a hybrid book—[It] *Incandescent* (both Ninebark Press)—and two chapbooks. Her most recent is *Your Posthumous Dress* (dancing girl press, 2019). She's a part-time tutor and has taught poetry at Emory University and in other workshop settings.

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NICHOLAS SKALDETVIND is an Italian American citizen.

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