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Gabrielle Showalter  
Bren Booth-Jones  
Ciaran McDermott  
Nidhi Gandhi  
Derville Quigley  
Melissa Nunez  
Bob King

**lean and loafe.**  
a journal of new ecopoetry  
*issue two*



# lean and loafe.

a journal of new ecopoetry

*issue two*

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# nicholas loney on saturday afternoon

Eric Abalajon

Dark moss is starting to grow between marble tiles behind him, a few with cracks in the corners as he eternally faces chin up toward the river's mouth, surrounded by parked government vehicles, serving offices that trace their origins to textiles and machinery he brought along as a young man. In front of the mighty profile of the former customs house, some leave behind their fishing rods tied to the stone railings as they wait elsewhere. Across the street, families fall in line to use a deep well under the shadow of idle ships, a few with rusting hauls. The breeze is kind, not salty, during twilight when men return for their catch. A monument for someone who failed. There is now a slower pulse on the pier where the world used to enter the city, one that still prides itself to be subject to an absent Queen.



# sugarland

Eric Abalajon

The image of the train was rendered on the wall of a warehouse occupying an entire block, its prominence measured by its proximity to the water. It prevents you to notice the high windows, still made of wood, with broken ones completely covered. Sunlight forbidden to enter certain corners. In front of the closed rolling steel door, a basketball ring takes up an entire lane, the game suspended on the rare occasion a car passes by. One can hear the chatter from eateries that serve government employees near by, honourable family businesses protruding from shanty houses who found roots between art deco and brutalist structures. Inside the coaches there are smiling children larger in scale compared to freshly harvested sugarcane, that traced the island's veins in the form of railway tracks, formerly the first one outside the national capital. What is left in the streets, in history to be reclaimed by such an image?



# street art

## Eric Abalajon

after Archie Oclos

Graffiti has already colonised the wider walls of the abandoned warehouse, while the profile of the indigenous woman was placed in the bend of the same building where two streets meet. She was inserted in a setting completely alien to her, as a reminder of an even older origin story still ongoing. On her left cheek a tree has grown since then, while a bit beyond the bridge of her nose, a concrete pole was erected to hold the wires embracing the city block. She is in a contact zone, between auto shops and windowless clubs, and banks and offices of law firms. Across the river a feed mill with large silver silos appears taller during the low tide. The spot for garbage collection is her prison and her refuge, with scavenging cats standing guard. Cars parallel parked in the sidewalk empty after office hours, wise not to leave their property when night falls. A time when the neighbourhood becomes completely dead, a time when it becomes quietly alive.

# pastoral dreams

Eric Abalajon

Beside the wide lanes are makeshift stalls  
made up of nipa and bamboo selling live catfish  
or compost. Occasionally you pass by gates awaiting  
their communities, perpetually groundbreaking  
as lots take time to sell. Motorists are animated  
from the chance to speed up as they avoid the city,  
but become weary at night as the lack of streetlights  
restore the expanse's original gloom, or original peace,  
depending on who you ask. At the Hibaoan intersection,  
vehicles congest as they tiptoe beside the pillars  
of a flyover appearing like an assembled fossil in a museum.  
Months carry on waiting for the concrete to harden. Before  
you turn you can see grazing carabaos oblivious to traffic  
and urban time. If you pay attention to the edges, the grass  
sometimes overtake the road by a few inches,  
a minor defiance in this landscape of divides.



# check point

Eric Abalajon

After the first ten minutes, your foot  
on the break pedal will start straining.  
The lights behind the cars falling in line  
are like sleepless eyes, not expecting  
to experience the morning heat at the city's border.  
Just so they can show a piece of paper  
with their name, occupation, and reason for travel.  
The boredom in the line frequently shifts to anxiety as the long  
screams of ambulances pass you by freely going in either direction.  
The pandemic in this neighbourhood is seen  
on their street, where time either crawls or accelerates.







# umami trip

Christina Hennemann

I've always wanted someone who grows tomatoes like earlobes. You braid the vines together, plait of spikes and tentacles. Reaching for plump fruit, juicing and slushing; my obscenity and your green fingers somehow find each other even on the coarsest soils, on graves of cracking earth. There are nights when my tongue curls around the snail of your ear, and then some days you plough my fields with rigour and stern. By the end of summer, there would always be tomatoes. Ripe and fleshy and dripping. My teeth sink into the peel and tear it like wrapping paper, whereas your lips close around the puckering shape. You often shake your head at my fire and arms, but your cool hands tame the flailing limbs. I would then sigh and call you witch, gardener; the soft gum and warm of a kiss for the growing of ears.

# heidegger in conversation with his homeland

Christina Hennemann

I never cared that you don't love me back. But blind  
to the eye of herons & whales, eagles & deer—  
I began to wonder, doubt the bubbling of your blood.  
Aren't we both being-in-the-world, and clinging?

*You rape me into human shape with every word  
and sword, the sails you set and ships that sink  
are all mine. In the end, I will prevail and persist,  
my victory will pass with no pinch of emotion.*

For eternity I long to see you in turmoil, in peace,  
dive into your cool and splash, soar in a dream  
across your sunset-surface, carried by the wind.  
You're my magic mirror, always telling of myself.

*Your countenance doesn't sway me. You laugh  
like a sinner and cry like a saint, as if the flaps  
of your tongues and tentacles carried force.  
You grasp more than you can swallow, you thief.*

And the Alps, my beloved, so wild and rugged  
they call out to me: live like a hungry lion, live

only once and dance on the edge of the cliff. Be  
The Fool for only the curious enter God's heaven.

*I shift shapes and appear to you as in dreams:  
I'm a killer, god and hellish angel, the rainbow  
spectre, and all your foolish plans to tie a leash  
around my seeds have your conjured home in rubble.*

When I leave this summit, I will miss you dearly,  
for you have shown me my soul. Through you  
I learned to love myself and every warm being.  
Way too late I understood your coldness as sublime.

*When you're crumpled to ash, I won't miss you,  
for you taught me nothing of myself. Through you  
I saw the lust for life, the longing for a mirror.  
Way too late I understood your greed as love.*

If I got one last chance to love, I would start over.  
Let's not speak of me or you, but only move  
our lips for the brittleness of a breathing body,  
raise our hands for the dazzling Dasein you create.



# the killing kind

Christina Hennemann

As I'm speeding on the N4 to Sligo, heading to my sunset  
yoga at the beach, the trees bent  
under fiery clouds, I see a Badger spreading over the asphalt,  
  
on the edge of the white  
line severing grey and green.

A neutral voice on the radio tells me that women's  
wombs are being combed now in the States,  
seeking for living crumbs in every egg,

while Wolves and Orangutans crumple  
their stomachs into little balls of cosmic dust, sinking stars,

but the voice doesn't tell me that, it's just in my head,  
like a hammer on the pit of a cherry. They quickly move on  
to the war that's raging in Europe: at home, my people

are scared again, *What if the bullets patter upon us next?*  
*Berlin isn't so far from Kyiv*, hushed screams or roaring whispers.

I never cared for Berlin, but I like my Münster; the first settlers  
called it Monstre, an honest name at least  
for something built by humankind, its pretty bourgeoisie a shroud

for the unseeable, the stiff collars a pillar of  
consensual myopia.

I pass a cemetery and think of all the Badgers, Foxes, Martens,  
Deer that should be mourned  
right here, or someplace,

and that my car should be boasting  
a black cross, this coffin.

*Violence in Gaza, rising oil prices, inflation,*

I'm going to freeze in the winter, they say, yet here I am,  
spilling into the sunset, my seeing eyes, capable blood-pumping heart,  
and I'm still not on the pill.



# Undone

Derville Quigley

Picture him running through ploughed fields, arms outstretched. The crows lifting, then settling in his wake. His was no flight of fancy; he had mouths to feed. But they didn't care. The banks were knocking, he was shook.

So, he made a scarecrow in his likeness. From a wooden cross and manure bag stuffed with straw. Dressed him in an old coat and hat. Tied baler twine around his waist. Hoped this totem would make a stand. But they saw a perch, not a person.

He bought a banger from the hardware store. Wheeled it downhill. Running on gas cylinders, it fired loud at intervals. Made them jump when caught off guard. But they grew deaf to those too.

In the evening while travelling back over singed horizons, under a burnt orange moon. The milk pan lay cold on the hob, the half-cigar unlit. Some wild notion had grabbed him, and his dog. Fired them up in a frenzy. We could hear the hectic rounds.

He'd tell you himself, he got carried away.

The next day my dad and I collected the dead crows. He told me how to tie them by the legs onto trees. A warning to others.

In the days that followed, I got carried away—hung far too many from this one tree. A carousel of crippled wings dangling.

It was a warning, all right, and he stopped.

Not without casualties, the barley grew, and our mouths were fed. Nests lie empty now. The young sit someplace else. While our eggshell hearts take shelter under sycamore. Not even the rustling can shake what has been undone.



# mrs. hasty's geese

Derville Quigley

We swung into Hasty's yard in our Datsun Bluebird, holding the car door shut with baler twine. My granny swapped soap with her during the war. She had reached out when I was born, offered beestings from their finest cow. But my mother, from Tullamore, a young nurse, awkwardly declined. It was unpasteurised — its properties unknown.

This time I was eight, we were there for her eggs. Rapping the iron knocker on the door. Her dog going ballistic, drawing her up from the belly of the house to greet us. "Stop it", she'd say in a quiet hoarse voice, but he didn't listen. Her grey straight hair bobbed around the corner. She needed her glasses to see us. To take our order. To get to the hens. Past all the geese in the shed. Their white necks swaying in anticipation. She counted six, eight, a dozen and my mother paid her with thanks. Knowing those eggs were worth more.

Years later, stood amid the bustle of Rosemary Street, Belfast, the smell came to me. A mix of bleach, poultry and sweet pastry. Conjuring the flourish and movement of the woman in my hand. Her skirt swishing against the wind. White sheets billowing on the line, daffodils trumpeting on the lawn. A smell I would lean on, to bring me back. When office politics and angry emails get the better of me, I dream of being one of Mrs. Hasty's geese.

# part-time protester

Derville Quigley

Up a tree, high on mushrooms picked by a guy called Tone, the anthropology student enquired after his name. “No son of mine will be called Wolf”, his mother had said, so they called him Tone. His English accent – Sherwood. She wondered if it was real.

“Open your Crown Chakra”, he said. Her unawareness opened wide. “Don’t do this for anyone else.” The mushrooms were taking effect, and the student was higher than she’d ever been. Sprawled across a fishing net spanning five tall trees. Fractal grid-patterns shapeshifted. Until a line snapped with the weight, unraveling like a snake towards them. Her knuckles turned to teeth. Tone’s voice bellowed up — “Get the hell down from there. Use the rope”.

With rising fear of burnt hands, she refused. And then the rant came tumbling— One broken leg and it would all be over. Ambulances called. The Gardaí. Their huts bulldozed. Get back to class. Stop playing ‘tree protester’. She was cursed. The Celtic Tiger now unleashed. The authorities would fell the ancient oak. Build the bypass. A fierce wind rattled through the leaves. She closed her eyes, summoned the might of Gráinne Mhaol, and jumped.

# natural convictions

Gabrielle Showalter

in this stuffy kitchen I am shipwrecked, keeled

over

what's the going rate for reclamation

these days?

I want to shout over the

phone, I want to make a soup and chop

the vegetables and spice,

add stock, wait until it grows cold,

unloving

and then i want to hurl it at the wall

tear the curtains from the rods

pinch the stars til they crumble

i am not being facetious here—

tell me when it's done

(and if) that's (too tall) an order,

tell me of those oxymoronic delights—

english wine,

californian snow

virtual reality,

brand loyalty

a songbird goes extinct

an ecosystem collapses

whilst you are polishing off your

supper

over a sink full of dishes



look– the bobbleheads speak  
with the soft voice of a  
veterinarian,  
about to euthanize your dog

# first thaw

Gabrielle Showalter

soft fingertips of sunlight,  
climbing the roses of my cheeks  
to press

gently  
on my eyelids, temple, along the bridge of my nose

after a doleful, single-glazed winter

it is

~~nice~~ miraculous

to watch the wildflowers emerge through pallid frost,

to feel this warmth for myself

# preserved

Gabrielle Showalter

inside the shade of red oaks,  
among the new york asters and sassafras berries  
and mosquitoes and wasps  
and green-cloaked algal ponds  
I dreamt of crowded parties  
and coffeeshop chatter

I walked until the green grasses  
crunched yellow beneath me  
and the sweet blooms of april  
succumbed to august heat  
forgive me too, for fading

within such  
oppressive / languid  
summer, unpierced by  
laughter  
only the gulls came and went  
I wished for you  
and you, and you  
nameless one to-be  
said / hoped

I will tell you of this path,  
if the summer ever ends

# to keep my nosy eyes askance

**Bren Booth-Jones**

Tonight, I sit on a bench overlooking the Amstel River, wrapped lightly in mild winter. The moon's white flames ravel and writhe on the river's black screen. I try not to worry about the way winter fails to shake out its feathers and descend in a sequined swoosh. Houseboats huddle against gentrification. Houseboats like art deco barnacles lining the river to its vanishing point out west where brooding factory farms fume and fume. Tonight, I strike two bits of sin into a spark. I smoke a notion of the colour blue. I keep my nosy eyes askance. The moon hurries home in her gown of satin light through the drunk parts of town. Knife fights and congestion clog Amsterdam's soggy arteries. I try to focus on the floaty component of being here. But if the life I love starts killing me, what then? Don't tell me to forget the politician pretending to cry on TV. The ribcage of a beached shopping trolley gleams in the mud. Isn't this fun? Don't tell me to let go of the fantasy of galloping into the COP and suing every suited and booted motherfucker in sight for their answers full of false opposites, their addiction to the sticky black blight they mine from our children's DNA. Don't tell me to graffiti the back alleys of my mind with vomit and then be silent in six languages! Another humid winter night collapses into the vast shivering arms of dawn. So it glows. I wrap my rave up and swallow it whole. Rings of light spangle in the reeds. I breathe, I breathe.



# radiant paraphernalia

Bren Booth-Jones

I

Snowdrift in the streetlamps, shoals of fleeing fish

living in the West      6AM

lukewarm   lucky   lost

biblical hangover

ten-ton job around my neck

I trundle down the glimmery blackness of this bad January  
morning

my brand-addled bag of bones wrapped around my glitchy

heart

if you must

dig a hole

flee this corporate heaven

sick of raving angels

and their radiant paraphernalia

it doesn't mean you're making light of the light.

## II

Snowdrift in the streetlamps, flocks of fish in flight

if metaphor is equivalence in a trick mirror

then mirrored equivalence

quivers in a trip of matadors 6:15AM

I balance these decrepit ledgers

of my personal dystopia

with methylphenidate and Shakespeare

in my veins

—isn't that not okay?

## III

Fuck it—bury me

alive

under this truck-riddled capitalist cavalcade

surrounded by centuries of dead dreams

clogging under weathered cobbles

Europe's forgotten and famous entwined

ferment

into fungoid

mycelium filaments

and sentences

and sestinas

and slime.



# lovesick in the park

Bren Booth-Jones

We lie in the green, white and rose  
hot and fragrant snow

of blossoms and hazy spring sun.  
April in Holland. Fumes and flowers.

Drunken bumble bees drone dizzily.  
*Systemic cherry blossom downpour*, I say.

A disconsolate ant  
hikes the hillock of my shin.

Surrounding the greenish vacuum  
of this lovesick park

the city spills:  
systemic neon, chrome nightmare, trend

and tumour mutating into  
muzak, melting into molten

miasmas and muddled  
notes.

The whole goddamn glittering shitshow  
we forced the earth to swallow.

McAmsterdam and a million  
weed-riddled visitors.

Ephemera  
fizzle

in the binary guts of capital.  
If you look closely

at the angles of  
the trees

you'll see  
everything

is about to fall  
apart.

*That's not what systemic means, you say,*  
unbuckling your Satanic boots.

There is a ragged chaos  
folded into manicured peace.

An ant shoulders a crumb  
up the analogy of my ankle—

O little Sisyphus! Must we keep up this  
systemic shopping?

Little kids nearby on the grass  
are absorbed in skywriting.

Their fingers tracing gaps and caverns  
where the ozone used to be

they stitch apocalypse into luminous syntax.  
Their message stretched into elliptical thinness

says something like this:

*Dear Mr. President please*

*keep our grandkids*

*a freeze-dried leaf*

*make history believable*







# interglacial

Ciaran McDermott

Beyond the town's huddled suburbs of stone  
the bleak hills rise, steep and severe,  
glazed in the bleached gleam  
of dawn's sudden phantom. Each knuckled mound  
veined with glistening fissures  
carved by the grinding pressure of ice, hooded  
in fume-glare, a descending blindness  
that like some long-ago volcano's creamy spill  
swaddles the world in scorched pearl.

I leave the den's skyless porthole  
to brew green tea on the hob, and when  
I return the glass pane has cleared,  
the spent storm calmed by its own fury.  
The horizon leaks an oily gloss of crimson, the year's  
first rumour of summer, unspooling  
a petalled eye of flame  
that runs the earth's shuttered flesh  
to milk, that thaws  
the marrow in my bones.

# quercus robur

Ciaran McDermott

Squat neck set in a moist crust of bank,  
unfathomably thick, and solid  
as a bull's torso-bulge  
of veins, yet poised with the upside-down  
grace of a gymnast flexed  
in precarious  
mid-balance, legs splayed in branching  
up-curve thrust, each as stout  
as an average trunk, snug in a purple-grey hide  
rivered with dry canyons, too ragged  
to ever be leather tamed, shelved with grooves  
where even moss struggles  
to grip, frilled by green tassels that dangle  
thin yet triumphant  
against February's stark white, lobed lungs  
of roots that dive subterranean  
under tawny lily-pad savannah  
as though the tree wears the whole loch for a head.

# old man of the woods

Ciaran McDermott

Quicksilver beard of the forest

pitching the leather of its dome here and there  
throughout sporadic slopes  
of brush-tangle

survivor of meteor-impact  
cataclysms, haunting old-growth with spectres  
from the age of scales

though slinks in leopard-print, spotted  
and fur-slick, ready to bristle into barked pinecone  
at the whiff of snout, bunkered down  
in shade-moistness among ancients

at first sun flickers its strobe of sponge  
robed in a pelt of pure light

mimics the dance of stars.



# I awoke without surprise

Amanda Kooser

to find myself a garden  
serrated green saw leaves filling a dry pouch of throat  
coins of elm seeds swelling against the pink skin of a belly  
fingers sprouting roots, hair threading into orb weaver webs  
this is not a tale of horror

this is not a tale of death  
this is the moment of spring after the gray frost has faded  
when the starlings drop diamond canticles from gilt beaks  
their feathers pale stars that constellate the morning  
our songs are not of the sky

but of seeds pressed in soil  
suspended in the hours of longing for water and light

# the aspen and the pine

Amanda Kooser

I met an aspen entwined  
with a ponderosa pine  
their branches close as lovers

on the high bluff  
above the East Fork  
of the Jemez River

the pine wore needles  
green as oxidized copper  
arms splintering into shadows

the aspen wore a bleached husk  
of remnant white skin, leaves long fallen  
where it had died in the boughs of the pine

roots inseverable inside the earth

# to build a forest

Amanda Kooser

of sunflowers wooing black-chinned hummingbirds  
who see their own complexity mirrored in the Fibonacci  
sequence of seeds / of arborvitae reaching to touch  
the electric wire with green fans and dusty clubs of seed  
heads as sparrows hide in its thickness / speaking  
of morning / of foresteria / New Mexico privet /  
curve-billed thrasher cleaving the mulch  
with a scimitar beak / in search of beetles

chase the bermuda grass beneath the soil / tracing clever  
roots like electricity along a wire / pull it from the ground  
to wither in the blank sun / the old elm sheds green coins  
knowing time is short / willing its children to take hold  
in waves of seedlings born of monsoon rains / I become  
the despoiler of elm offspring / a ruthless goddess  
who finds them not fit for her curated forest of rosemary  
and raywood ash / birds feast on fruits of plum and apple  
and jujube / eat your fill / bright darlings / this forest  
is for you / it is our garden / our paradise to the fenceline

# this might be the spring she finally eats our lilac tree

Bob King

Anatomically, lilac trees carry their lilac stress & lilac anxiety in their lilac scent releases, just as you might in your neck or limp-laced iliac crest, or she in her jaw clenching & teeth grinding, or me aback my throat, one slick black ball swelling and contracting, depending on the predator near, not unlike the eastern savanna's Acacia trees slow-releasing their ethylene stench as a giraffe tower approaches, & in the distance, the hills across the valley very much look like white elephants—I just meant the colouring of their skin through the trees. When the measure of a tree is how comfortable you feel around, under, or inside it is little different from the measure of a person. Trees keep their private parts hidden, & outside of a couple springtime weeks, there's no possible way they could be confused with a confessional poet, though Anne Sexton's Mercy Street no doubt is lined with lilacs & Peter Gabriel's version is best served with a healthy dose of lilac clusters about your face, bunches



of drupelets still sprinkled with droplets  
from a misty springtime rain, a rustling  
blue plastic grocery bag filled with more  
plastic grocery bags, a playground ball pit  
filled with endless balls & endless pits,  
a science fair project molecule where all  
the glittery atoms shed their Styrofoam  
dust, shed their variegated hues of purple,  
violet, plum, periwinkle, or lavender.  
Amethyst or orchid—can we really define  
one flower with another flower, one flower  
with a gemstone or seashell? A bumblebee  
coated & drunk on the burrs of pollen &  
burrs of pollen Velcroed to burrs of pollen,  
backlit with fuzzy bokeh & Impressionistic  
Monet purple clouds with only the occasional  
highlight of precision, much like life. Much like  
life, the composition of X is often a collection  
of many mini-X's, for better or worse,  
as when one chlorine scent often carries  
a stronger chlorine scent when the community  
pool is most in dire need of disinfecting.  
Stained glass inside stained glass, ice inside  
ice, or in your book, your match always  
in danger of lighting the tightly clustered  
other matches, sparks into a conflagration,  
& a simultaneous desire for & escape from  
social distancing protocols. Evolutionarily,  
organisms smell for a very precise reason,  
& that reason is often survival, or survival  
as sacrifice for salvation through another,  
conscious decision or not. Water Lilies

composed of too many delicate brushstrokes  
to count, as when a mother gives birth,  
her infinite infant daughter is already  
carrying inside her the seeds of the birth  
mother's future granddaughter. When will  
you realize that everything you love  
you don't need to consume, but there's  
still a revolution inside you, & likely inside  
that, more revolutions, as if pomegranates,  
as if some mystical & dreamlike magical  
escape into the nighttime embrace of that  
Flowering Judas tree: She pictures  
the broken glass, pictures the steam / she  
pictures a soul / with no leak at the seams  
Everything needn't leak or bleed into  
or be because of you. This isn't about you.  
It's about her. Or the Sexton inside her,  
or the Sexton inside her, or the Sexton  
inside her. And as much as you may  
not like it, it's still her choice, her freedom  
to release her perse-hued scent. Or not.

+ *Inspired by The Hidden Life of Trees: What They  
Feel, How They Communicate by Peter Wohlleben  
(2016), "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest  
Hemingway (1927), "45 Mercy Street" by Anne  
Sexton (1974), "Mercy Street" by Peter Gabriel  
(1986), Water Lilies by Claude Monet (1915-  
1926), & "Flowering Judas" by Katherine Anne  
Porter (1935).*

# in australia, fast zombies are called zoombies

Bob King

Likely, that's not true. But whether it's the truth or not, truth is always mostly hope that the settled version of things remains settled. The person who wronged you once remains wrong forever. The dead remain dead, the buried, buried, even down under Down Under because the people who threaten our assumptions we then need to classify as absolutely mad, as if a necessary act of self-preservation. What's nuts to me is that in-the-shows-in-the-movies all the zombies are either especially slow or World War Z wicked fast. Amblers or speedsters. They don't account for the fact that when the virus or bacteria or fungus took root & spread faster than a-bug-a-thought-a-meme, some of those pre-zombies were very likely sedentary: some sofa-bound & not even trying anymore to stave off the mushy lump of the middle-aged dad bods. Some

like the kind smiling lady in the oversized straw hat with sunflower emblem & sunglasses who neighborhood strolls nodding & peace-signing everyone every day, as if the calendar never changes. And some, training for their next 5k or half marathon. You never see the undead all moving at their own pace—wheel-chairing (what zombie flick ain't ableist?) or wandering or limping or sprinting, chafed nipples bleeding or hamstrings seizing or heck even falling off—toward the finish line of their next victims. Some happy & entirely content to be part of the slow-moving-cheerleader procession. When did everyone become one thing? When did everything begin to remind you of something else? When will we arrive at the original antecedent, the prime mover, initial explosion, as if truth isn't constantly evolving in a series of small mutations, delicious & gnawed right down to the bone? In this family, as in most, we've the gift of speech, but we won't use it for the things most vital, generational reticence at its best. Do you know most zombies would kill to be able to communicate how they've been hurt, the wounds & scars of youth they still lug into their absurdist present? Do you realize the ridiculous good in the world



squirrels, zombified or not, could do with speech, unfurling their treetop wants & desires, fears & fantasies, traumas & aspirations to do some good with that amazing power? And yet, there you remain, sullen & arms crossed on the couch, determined not to talk about how you're falling apart & for some reason ashamed that you can't reassemble all on your own? Healing was never meant to be a solitary sport. And so, this spring all the tulips are wearing our castoff N-95s, dirty roadside empathy, but the daffodils are not. This is the rule of time. We exist for others, & then we don't.

+ *Inspired by World War Z (2013), The Last of Us (2023), & The Body Artist by Don DeLillo (2001).*

# the precision test's success

Bob King

For Connie

Depends upon whether or not your machine  
can make other machines, with the accuracy,  
precision, & elegance of a ghostly Rolls-Royce,  
even if Royce got shafted by Rolls on the  
naming rights, even if not quite et al'd—  
when hasn't the money throttled  
the mechanic? It happens all the time  
with questions, this test birthing another  
test, but can your poetry make other  
poetry, your body other bodies, your  
teaching not students, but other teachers?  
Or are you only a consumer? Can you be  
very accurate with your arrows-conclusions,  
but not at all precise, as when you're not  
even close to bullseye, far-flung & nowhere  
near inspiring a new industrial revolution?  
Could you give a flip about being a boring  
machine that hollows out cannons with  
exactitude, no accidental naval deaths  
on your hands, or are you ridiculously  
consumed with what might be considered  
canon & what's enchanting about being  
on the margins—rusted, pock marked,  
perhaps fluking into success, even if

the occasional one unexpectedly explodes—  
very unlike Westinghouse, Edison, or Ford?  
Wilkinson, Maudslay, or Bramah? Sure,  
Eli Whitney's famous gin was marvelous  
if we forget about what it really helped  
fuel in that Antebellum South, if we forget  
that he was a con artist-slash-terrible  
engineer when it came to gun production,  
his damage already done, as damage is  
more likely than not always a child to  
damaged parents. Would you prefer  
to be handmade or assembly lined?  
Shakespeare was great & all, but  
dude never even used a dictionary,  
even though now all dictionaries spawn  
other dictionaries, but English dictionaries  
hadn't even been invented yet, & to be fair  
he didn't make other Shakespeares either,  
but did make love test after love test, only  
occasionally kings, but kings don't always  
produce other kings, but almost always fools  
are guaranteed to produce other fools.  
That's wild to me, the no dictionaries  
bit—only a few usage pamphlets. But  
it also makes complete sense. Like  
electricity. Or photosynthesis. Or that  
we even have names for chloroplast,  
electrochemical gradients, mitochondrial  
machines, proteins, or that a fungus is  
the Earth's heaviest organism, or that  
now we can take language in reverse,  
crisply define a process like ATP synthase:  
$$\text{ADP} + \text{P}_i + 2\text{H}^{+\text{out}} \rightleftharpoons \text{ATP} + \text{H}_2\text{O} + 2\text{H}^{+\text{in}}$$
  
Does all mill grist produce more grist,  
or if we roll this stone long enough

will we truly produce something new,  
or maybe only discover contentment in  
the recycled, reconstituted, resurrected  
zombie moldy old? Does every stockyard  
slaughterhouse get counterbalanced  
by a slow-moving conveyor belt that'll  
even bring back Lazarus? Are we deemed  
or doomed or both only to ever be precise  
to ourselves? Hey Mary Shelley, please  
pass me the calipers, a wrench, & that  
asterisk-impersonating screwdriver,  
I found a glitch inside another glitch,  
one thought not inside another, but  
more like simultaneously occurring,  
like lightning, inspiration, like how  
one love can't produce another love,  
except in the precisely accurate &  
simultaneously messy & inarticulate  
love you're able to provide to all three  
of your daughters at once at once at once.

+ *Inspired by The Perfectionists: How Precision  
Engineers Created the Modern World by Simon  
Winchester (2018), "One Train May Hide Another" by  
Kenneth Koch (1994), King Lear by William  
Shakespeare (1606), & Frankenstein by Mary Shelley  
(1818).*







# nocturne

Adesiyan Oluwapelumi

after the Famous painting "Starry Night" by Vincent Van Gogh

The night illumines the dark path  
and the road's asphalt gleams with  
brittle light. I walk the steps of a thousand  
solstice and slowly, I become eventide,  
a pool of murky water depressing in bleakness  
under the starry night and lustrous mornings.

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik—Mozart plays  
in a garden chandeliered by light bugs.  
A prism of music and light dispersed  
into a spectral of melodic hue. I prattle  
the eulogy of night and my soul swoons away.



## Adesiyan Oluwapelumi

in the garden a chrysanthemum wilts  
its petals fall into the soil like skyscrapers  
i am mostly grieving my lips a pallet  
for the leaping of coronach my skin  
a deluge over the memories of its fuchsia scent  
beethoven plays the für elise in reverse  
there are no butterflies here the owl is dead  
i scream into the tunnel of night and its echo  
returns formless voiceless like a throat  
ripped of its larynx silence persists  
crows blanket the azure sky there is blood  
in my hands it's a mourning season  
and everything i hold in my hands  
wilt my hands clasp my body i shrivel  
the myth of the flesh is true somewhere  
in the distance i can hear the cry of a distant  
animal it hollers beckons to me like a bell  
i want to run but death stills me

# an ode to extant cycads

Adesiyan Oluwapelumi

Perennial corpse, live—you must.  
Dine until the night of your encroachment.

Living fossil, breathe soulfully.  
Stare graciously, walk vividly.

Water bowels, stomach drowns.  
Scalpels lurks, kick suicidal instincts.

Let this soil mother your undying.



# on my way to AWP, I started to think about woolly mammoths

Nidhi Gandhi

you ran amid soft tufts of snow  
your tusks gliding through peaks

perfectly at peace, unaware of your  
impending demise.

I'm on a plane to Seattle right now,  
the United Airlines aircraft flying

over the snow-covered Cascades.  
soon, we'll be flying over cities

steel replacing wilderness  
nature Ozymandias-d.

these mountains were there before me,  
they've seen births and deaths

for hundreds of thousands of years,  
survived the shift of tectonic

plates from Pangea to North America.

they've seen your demise woolly  
mammoth. what is born

shall inevitably die, we will all one day be  
carrion. animals and plants now

dead bring life to others, nourish  
ecosystems around us. what are we?

we're selfish even in death,  
afraid to be eaten by animals, perfectly

embalmed in our coffins, people make  
businesses out of death.

someone can tell me that undertakers  
provide a service, restore

bodies to perfection, sewing bullet  
holes – man's work. we love to conquer

planting our flags on the moon,  
inserting lead into bodies, playing god.

but at the end, nature wins as we all  
will die. these snow covered mountains

have survived every single death.  
but I do wonder that by evolving humans,

did nature bite itself  
or did it suicide?

# the man-eater

Nidhi Gandhi

moonlight beamed  
                    against  
its coal colored skin  
                    as it danced  
fluorescing  
                    bright blue  
in the Arabian night.  
                    you could hear  
the rustling of  
                    crinkled corpses left  
caked out  
                    in the sand.  
the exoskeleton as  
                    hard as a  
hammer harnessing its  
                    toxin in the  
telson at the tip of the  
                    tail,  
sharp  
                    ready to  
strike  
                    ready to  
breach your  
                    caramel candy colored smooth skin  
ready to  
                    act  
ready to  
                    inject you with

chlorotoxins

scyllatoxins

agitoxins

charybdotoxins

ready to

make you

paralyze

in an instant

blood curdling

as you

wrinkle

from the inside out

shell turning into

jelly

turning into

sludge.

will you

dare to

knock on my door

delight in my

sting

dilate your

eyes

from my venom?

will you

dare to

trip tremble and drool

on my

acidic bulb?

shall I

reach forth and

grab on with my

pincers

and show you

what I have in store  
in my body?

careful now.

I have no taste  
for violence,  
only lunch.



# the cockroach

Nidhi Gandhi

how easily we stomp on  
disgusting, parasitic, hideous creatures  
how easily we go up to a cockroach  
squash its body,  
hear its exoskeleton  
crunch as we bury it  
underneath our feet,  
condemning and celebrating  
its unworthiness.  
we even look at our shoe  
to make sure  
it's not still breathing,  
hasn't attached itself to us  
but alas it has,  
sometimes the whole body  
flakes of parts  
clasping to our leather boot  
in one last desperate attempt  
to cling to life,  
and then  
disgusted and horrified by the reminder  
of its existence,  
we scrape its carcass  
on the sanitized white tile floor,  
the smell of bleach  
permeating the air,  
extinguishing an innocent life,  
a spark  
we could not understand.

# ars poetica with bees

Melissa Nunez

I cannot sleep for the bloated buzzing  
bees bumping behind my eyelids.

The ones—bodies soda-drunk—bumbling  
around gas station trash cans now plaguing  
my mind in wonder of honey and its making  
from such a synthetic source, but find lack

of consensus as to whether the saccharin syrup detracts from their  
journey toward true nourishment, luring them to the folly of false  
energy that leaves them stupor stuck at garbage bins instead of  
participants in the give-and-take dance of pollinating plants, or if  
food does follow soda swallows despite the lesser quality. I can't say  
why it matters in this moment except for my name, which is to say  
they are something like me—and now I realize that my head is all  
wrong, my neck too sharply angled, and I am missing my good  
pillow but am too tired to seek it out, and this pillow is here and  
should be good enough, but still, I want for sleep. The way I want  
for words beyond placeholders, not quite filling spaces that should  
carry them, slipping past tongue and lips, spilling into cheek and  
teeth and pooling more than their share of room; but I slot them  
together in some incomplete alchemy in hopes they are transformed,  
transcending base beginnings, becoming bolder—more than sole  
dimensions can contain.

# welcome

Melissa Nunez

Welcome to Mexico,  
my phone tells me. It is  
no longer in range of the tower  
sitting on U.S. soil. Closer  
to those rooted across the river.

What is range to a bird, how far  
and fast can it fly, how much  
sprawling land below looks of living desire?

The bat falcon has never before broached the  
border north of Mexico. Never before crossed over  
the land and water dividing here and there.  
But it is here now. So are all the people.  
Cameras and binoculars, all manner of lenses  
lined up and locked onto its form. To document  
the sighting is a prestigious prize. The black  
head and back. Ring of cream around the collar, burnished  
bronze of underbelly and legs.

But what of range? Why are we  
not asking why he comes? Delighting  
in the disaster his presence proclaims. Why are we  
not asking what can be done? This crossing made by people  
and creatures alike—for reasons of burning and blighting, a  
drowning loss of life—welcome

only for those whose coming is cap-feather. Coming here, where even our most advanced technology cannot clearly determine range. Welcome to Mexico, my phone tells me.

Enjoy your trip.

# roadrunner

Melissa Nunez

A roadrunner does not always go fast  
sometimes it lifts

and

lowers lever tail

looks left

then right

pecks at parched earth

perhaps exposing

seed or snail

so close

so as to differentiate

frill-feather crest

brindled bark body

flecks from farther distance

make phantom his form

fold and fan of

rudder retrices

long legs

lean and linger

reflecting on

wound web curved carapace diamond-dappled skin curiosity calls me to follow

x

x

x

x

footprints of one

who more than most

any one of us

is ready

for the race the chase but still

he knows

slow deliberate wonder







# contributors

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Eric Abalajon is currently a lecturer at the UP Visayas, Iloilo. His works have appeared in *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, *The Tiger Moth Review*, *ANMLY*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Asymptote*, and *Footprints: An Anthology of New Eco-poetry (Broken Sleep Books, 2022)*. He lives near Iloilo City.

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Nidhi Gandhi (she/her/hers) is an emerging writer and MFA candidate at City College of New York. She will be graduating in December 2023. Her poems have appeared in *433*, *Honeyguide Literary Magazine* and *Up the Staircase Quarterly*. Nidhi completed her first poetry residency with Poets Afloat and is currently working on an interview series about emerging writers and their enculturation into the larger literary world. She is the founding editor of *The Marbled Sigh*, a poetry journal by emerging writers for emerging writers.

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# melissa nunez

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Bren Booth-Jones is an Irish South African writer and co-editor of *As Much Heart as a Vending Machine* (The Hungry Ghost Project 2021). Bren's debut collection, *Vertigo to Go*, won the White Label III competition and was published by The Hedgehog Poetry Press in 2020. A second book, *Open Letters to the Sky*, was published by the same press in 2022. Recent work has appeared in *Loose Dog Magazine*, *Outcast* and at Dutch Design Week. Bren lives in Amsterdam.

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Ciaran McDermott grew up in rural Staffordshire but currently lives in Stirling, Scotland. His work has been published widely in journals and anthologies and has appeared in *Acumen*, *Poetry Birmingham*, *Dream Catcher*, *Rust & Moth*, *Obsessed With Pipework*, *The Journal*, *Short and Sweet* (Soor Ploom Press) and *Sun-Tipped Pillars of Our Heart* (Black Bough Poetry), among others. He was longlisted for the Erbacce Prize in 2021 and 2022, and longlisted for the Dai Fry award in 2022.



# the editor



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