



ISSUE 2 - MERCURIAL  
FEBRUARY 2023



# THE VIRIDIAN DOOR



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## Editors' Notes

Dear Viridian Faithfuls,

Issue 2 certainly took on a life of its own. This is the biggest issue we've ever had. Mercurial was thought out when we first created this Lit Mag and all the amazing submitters definitely didn't disappoint. It doesn't matter if we accepted or declined your pieces, all of you made this issue perfect. It was one of the most joyous submission periods, so thank you all!

Subject to sudden or unpredictable changes of mood or mind, this issue definitely delivers. At points, there's hope and at others, there's none. In a bit of an Edgar Allan Poe way, we managed to showcase life and, ultimately, love in all its forms.

Our Non-Fiction pieces built our supports, our hello's and goodbyes. We were excited to showcase the different types and ways Non-Fiction could be written. Neither one of the three are the same and we could not be more proud.

Our Fiction and Poetry took us up, over and through some of the toughest and the most whimsical times we could think of. This is definitely an issue that the readers will find their memories playing Ring-Around-A-Rosie with them.

Much Love,

Atlas Booth

## Editors' Notes

Dear Readers, Contributors and Travellers:

Changeable, Fickle, Volatile. The conditions of chemistry under activity, active and reactive, or perhaps more Alchemy than Chemistry; there is magic here, and will.

In this, our first issue of 2023, we have some great and quite varied non-fiction for you. Three new contributors first grace our pages with poignant and insightful commentary on the state of life, culture, arts and letters from poetry to the stage. As the NonFiction Reader of the Magazine, I am ecstatic with the pieces we've received this turn around.

Lumumba Mthembu brings us a detailed review essay of The Right to Speak South African Poets Catalogue. The Catalogue is a collaborative project featuring 20 young South African poets and spoken word performers engaged on issues of social justice and human rights.

From the Rocky Mountains in the U.S., we have some quality queer literary criticism from contributor Henry Moraja who asks Why Isn't Anyone Talking About Silence? which breaks down the altogether timely play that is Moira Buffini's 1999 production, Silence. This is one that will send you down many delightful rabbit holes to learn more.

And finally Skylar Camp brings us the delightful CNF Leopards are Purple, which uses elements of the tall tale to speak her truth. It is frequently observed that few enough writers are willing to push the limits of what CNF can do but this piece does so admirably.

As I write this, the planet Mercury shares a right ascension with our own crescent moon, a conjunction. Even as Venus and Jupiter rush toward one another in the western sky. The alchemists' of old would recognize this a fine time to 'fix' knowledge and fire with the base of all elemental metals.

Nature, improved by Art.

The Maenad

## Contributors' Page

### Henry Moraja: (He/They)

Henry Moraja is a young, queer writer from the Rocky Mountain region. His work has been featured in Intersections Magazine, Fiction on the Web, and Alternate Route magazine.

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### Andre Peltier: (He/Him)

Andre F. Peltier (he/him) is a Pushcart and Best of the Net Nominee and a Lecturer III at Eastern Michigan University where he teaches literature and writing. He lives in Ypsilanti, MI, with his wife and children. His poetry has recently appeared in various publications like CP Quarterly, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Provenance Journal, Lavender and Lime Review, About Place, Novus Review, Fiery Scribe, and Fahmidan Journal, and most recently in Menacing Hedge, The Brazos Review, and Idle Ink. His debut chapbook, Poplandia, is available from Alien Buddha. In his free time, he obsesses over soccer and comic books.

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### Ivan de Monbrison: (I/Me/Mine)

The Ivan de Monbrison is a furry little animal of about 5 inches long which can be found living in some cellars in Paris, France. It's a vegetarian specie. The males tend to get bald with a pouch belly growing with age.

Snoring loud at night seems to be another behavior of the males, the usefulness of it still needed to be found, but could be a way to declare to the females that mating is over. With age some males seem to get more and more fond of poetry while drooling around the city, drunk at night.

## Contributors' Page

### Douglas Colston: (He/Him)

Douglas Colston hails from Australia, has played in Ska bands and picked up university degrees, supported his parents during terminal illnesses, developed chronic mental and physical illnesses pursuant to sustained workplace harassment, married his love, fathered two great children, had his inheritance embezzled and among other things, he is pursuing a PhD he hopes will provide a positive contribution to the zeitgeist.

In 2022, his fiction, nonfiction and poetry appeared in various anthologies and magazines, including: POETICA REVIEW; Impspired; New Note Poetry; Otherwise Engaged Literary and Arts Journal; and Revue {R}évolution.

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### Bob Gielow: (He/Him)

A college administrator by day, Bob Gielow spins tales in formats we all use when communicating with each other: text messages, emails, fictional Wikipedia posts, and diary entries all allow him to be clinical and thorough in describing his characters, their thinking and actions ... without diminishing his ability to explore the resulting human emotions. Bob utilizes these epistolary styles, and others, to tell tales that frequently explore the most common of human experiences, death.

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## Contributors' Page

R.S: (She/Her)

R.S. is a denizen of Delhi, India who writes Poetry to find harmony in life. She had fallen in love with versing during her days as a student of literature. She rises early to feel inspired with the morning star and create new rhymes.

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Lori Lamothe: (She/Her)

Lori Lamothe's most recent poetry collection is *Tulip Fever* (Kelsay Books, 2022). Her poems have appeared in *Barren Magazine*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *The Literary Review*, *The Shore*, *Verse Daily* and elsewhere. She lives in an old cottage with lots of cookbooks and two rescue huskies.

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Bob King: (He/Him)

Bob King is an Associate Professor of English at Kent State University at Stark. His poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming from *The Purposeful Mayonnaise*, *Spare Parts Literary*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Alien Buddha Gets Rejected Anthology*, *Bullshit Lit*, *The Red Ogre Review*, *Unlikely Stories Mark V*, *The Dillydoun Review*, *Emergence Literary Journal*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Muleskinner*, and *Allium: a Journal of Poetry & Prose*. He lives on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio, with his wife & daughters.

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## Contributors' Page

### Prosper Ifeanyi: (He/Him)

Prosper Ifeanyi is a Nigerian poet. His works are featured or forthcoming in Lumiere Review, Identity Theory, Terror House Press, Afrocritik and elsewhere.

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### Ron Riecki: (N/A)

Ron Riecki's books include Blood/Not Blood Then the Gates (Middle West Press), My Ancestors are Reindeer Herders and I Am Melting in Extinction (Loyola University Maryland's Apprentice House Press), Posttraumatic (Hoot 'n' Waddle), and U.P. (Ghost Road Press). Right now, Riecki's listening to Mounika and Cavetown's "Cut My Hair" and Bob Hicok being interviewed by Rattle, both at the same time.

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### Strider Marcus Jones: (He/Him)

Strider Marcus Jones is a poet, law graduate and former civil servant from Salford, England with proud Celtic roots in Ireland and Wales. He is the editor and publisher of Lothlorien Poetry Journal. A member of The Poetry Society, his five published books of poetry reveal a maverick, moving between cities, playing his saxophone in smoky rooms.

His poetry has been published in numerous publications including: Dreich Magazine; Trouvaille Review; Melbourne Culture Corner; Literary Yard Journal; Poppy Road Review; The Galway Review; Deep Water Literary Journal; The Huffington Post USA; Crack The Spine Literary Magazine and Dissident Voice.

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## Contributors' Page

### Skylar Camp: (She/Her)

Skylar Camp lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her two young kids, her partner, and their fuzzy kitty. Her writing focuses on deconverting from Evangelical Christianity, divorce, polyamory, parenting, and more. Her work appears in several anthologies, *Bi Women Quarterly*, and is forthcoming in *The Broadkill Review*.

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### Mona Mehas: (She/Her)

Mona Mehas writes about growing up poor, accumulating grief, and climate change. A retired, disabled teacher in Indiana, USA, she's at her laptop most days with two old cats as chaperones. Previously, Mona used the pseudonym *Patience Young*. She's published in *Moments Between*, *Backwards Trajectory*, *Loft Books*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, and others.

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### Bobby Parrott: (He/Him)

Bobby Parrott's poems appear in *Tilted House*, *RHINO*, *Rumble Fish Quarterly*, *Atticus Review*, *The Hopper*, *Rabid Oak*, *Exacting Clam*, *Neologism*, and elsewhere. Wearing a forest-spun jacket of toy dirigibles, he dreams himself out of formlessness in the chartreuse meditation capsule known as Fort Collins, Colorado.



## Contributors' Page

### Eric Burgoyne: (He/Him)

Eric Burgoyne lives on the Island of Oahu, Hawaii. He has an MA in Creative Writing from Teesside University in Middlesbrough, England, and MBA from Reading University in Berkshire, England. His poems appear in Lothlorien Poetry Journal, The Dawntreader, and Paddler Press, among others.

### Otto: (He/Him)

Otto is the pen name of a London-based social scientist. His writing did not appear anywhere.

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### Tana Buoy: (She/Her)

Tana Buoy is a writer from Lincoln, Nebraska. In 2021, she received an MFA from the University of Nebraska Omaha and is a micro and flash fiction editor for The Good Life Review. Her words have appeared in Maya's Micros, Cloves Literary, and The Flat Water Stirs: An Anthology of Emerging Nebraska Poets. She finds solace on winding back roads and in towns without stoplights.

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### Beatriz Seelaender: (She/Her)

Beatriz Seelaender is a Brazilian writer from São Paulo. Her novellas have earned her the Sandy Run and Bottom Drawer prizes, and you can find more of her poems, essays, and short stories online by following her on Twitter. She lives in Rome, where she studies Classics.

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## Contributors' Page

### Sadee Bee: (She/Her)

Sadee Bee is ever-evolving as living with mental illness is never a straight line and hopes to be a voice and advocate for those like her. She uses art as an outlet as well, creating whatever comes to mind, and is heavily drawn to speculative and out-of-this-world elements. She is inspired by strange dreams, magic, and creepy vibes.

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### Victoria Valenzuela: (She/Her)

Victoria Valenzuela is a poet from a small town in southern New Mexico. She has been writing since the third grade and has published one book *Post Breakapocalyptic: Attempts at Dealing*.

She uses her writing to work through the pains in her life, and hopes it can help others as well.

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### Shamik Banerjee: (He/Him)

Shamik Banerjee is a poet and poetry reviewer from the North-Eastern belt of India. He loves taking long strolls and spending time with his family. His deep affection with Solitude and Poetry provides him happiness.

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## Contributors' Page

### Bernard Pearson: (He/Him)

Bernard Pearson's work appears in many publications, including; The Caterpillar, The Dirigible Balloon, Aesthetica Magazine, The Edinburgh Review, Crossways, The Gentian, Nymphs The Poetry Village, Beneath The Fever, The Beach Hut Little stone.

In 2017 a selection of his poetry 'In Free Fall' was published by Leaf by Leaf Press. In 2019, he won second prize in The Aurora Prize for Writing.

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### Bryan Vale: (He/Him)

Bryan Vale is a writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. He writes fiction, poetry, and educational articles about technology. His work has appeared in Trash to Treasure Lit, Moving Force Journal, Unstamatic Magazine, and Short Fiction Break.

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### Brian Barbeito: (He/Him)

Brian Michael Barbeito is the author of Indigo Gemini Seven, featured at The Notre Dame Review. He is currently at work on The City Beautiful, a prose poem of three parts.

## Contributors' Page

### Syreeta Muir: (She/Her)

Syreeta Muir lives on an excellent hill. Her writing can be found in Versification, Daily Drunk, The Disappointed Housewife, A Thin Slice of Anxiety, Misery Tourism, and others. Her photography has been featured in Barren, and Olney Magazine.

Cover Image also by Syreeta Muir

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### Tamiko Dooley: (She/Her)

Tamiko read Latin and French at New College, Oxford. She won the BBC Radio 3 carol competition 2021. She is a sometime wedding pianist living in South West London.

### Robert Pegel: (He/Him)

Robert Pegel is a father and husband whose only child, Calvin, died in his sleep of unknown causes at the age of 16. Robert writes about the human condition and the search for transformation.

He holds a BA in English from Columbia University. He is a Best of the Net nominee for 2023.

Robert has been published in Boats Against the Current, MockingHeart Review, Green Ink Poetry, Duck Duck Mongoose, Sage Cigarettes, Fahmidan Journal and others. Robert lives in Andover, NJ with his wife, Zulma.

## Contributors' Page

### Emily Moon: (She/Her)

Emily Moon is a transgender poet from Portland, Ore. She is the author of "It's Just You & Me, Miss Moon" and Editor at First Matter Press. She was a semi-finalist for the Banyan Review Poetry Prize. Her work includes appearances in or forthcoming from Pile Press, Boats Against the Current, Culinary Origami, [in her space] Journal, Hoot Review, Fairy Piece Mag, and elsewhere.

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### James Penha: (He/Him)

Expat New Yorker James Penha has lived for the past three decades in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his work is widely published in journals and anthologies. His newest chapbook of poems, *American Daguerreotypes*, is available for Kindle. His essays have appeared in *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*. Penha edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry.

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### Sandra Hosking: (She/Her)

Sandra Hosking is a Pushcart-nominated poet, playwright, and photographer based in the Pacific Northwest. Her work has appeared in *Red Ogre Review*, *The Elevation Review*, *Havik*, *Black Lion Review*, and more. She holds M.F.A. degrees in theatre and creative writing.

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## Contributors' Page

### SOUM: (They/Them)

SOUM (Screams of Unfettered Minds) is a collaboration of three Pasifika women from New Zealand, who prefer their art and poetry to speak for them. This newly-formed trio describe their style as raw, unpolished, tongue-in-cheek, unapologetic, unfiltered, born from years of shadow-work and presented straight from the heart. They champion mental awareness and social issues and gain inspiration from the struggles of everyday people; the darker aspects of their physical, mental and spiritual battles.

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### Jacob Billingsley: (He/Him)

Jacob J Billingsley is a queer poet with a day job in the St. Louis area. You can find more examples of his work online from ANMLY, EcoTheo Review, and Stone of Madness. His performance of H.D.'s "The Garden" was featured in the latest Empty Room Radio anthology.

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### Leslie Cairns: (She/Her)

Leslie Cairns holds an MA degree in English Rhetoric from SUNY Fredonia and now lives in Denver, CO. She has upcoming flash, short stories, and poetry in various magazines, including Cerasus Magazine, Bright Flash Literary Review, Londemere Lit, and others.

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## Contributors' Page

Bex Hainsworth: (She/Her)

Bex Hainsworth is a bisexual poet and teacher based in Leicester, UK. She won the Collection HQ Prize as part of the East Riding Festival of Words. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Heavy Feather Review, Ethel Zine, Atrium, Okay Donkey, bath magg, and Trampset. Her debut pamphlet of ecopoetry will be published by Black Cat Poetry Press in 2023.

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Lumumba Mthembu: (He/Him)

Lumumba Mthembu is the in-house writer of the Durban-based NPO, Contemporary Archive Project, which chronicles – through documentary photography – the life of the city since the turn of the millennium. In this capacity, he has published reviews of photo series and exhibitions through the Mail & Guardian, ArtThrob and Bubblegum Club. He has also facilitated workshops regarding the Non-Fiction writing process. He graduated from Rhodes University in 2016, having obtained a Masters Degree with distinction in English Literature, and was a Mandela Rhodes Scholar in 2015.

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Sadwyn Arthur: (He/They)

Sadwyn Arthur is a writer and aspiring actor, currently finishing his BA in English and Scandinavian Studies. In his free time, he enjoys being in, on and around any and all bodies of water – or alternatively caves – and drinking too much tea to be able to sleep.

In The Deep by Sadwyn Arthur

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## Contributors' Page

### Micky/Moth: (They/Xa/Fang)

Micky is a trans nonbinary artist who loves creating pieces that celebrate trans joy.

A Raven's Feast by Moth

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### Edward Lee: (He/Him)

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories and non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including The Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen and Smiths Knoll. He is currently working on two photography collections: 'Lying Down With The Dead' and 'There Is A Beauty In Broken Things'.

He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Orson Carroll, Lego Figures Fighting and Pale Blond Boy.

A Different Recollection by Edward Lee

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## Contributors' Page

### Laszlo Aranyi: (He/Him)

Laszlo Aranyi (Frater Azmon) poet, anarchist, occultist from Hungary. Earlier books: (szellem)válaszok, A Nap és Holderök egyensúlya . New: Kiterített rókabőr. Some English poems published: Quail Bell Magazine, Theta Wave, Crown & Pen, Dead Fern Press, Coven Poetry Journal, Journal of Erato, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Spillover Magazine, Fugitives & Futurists, Mausoleum Press, Nine Magazines, Misery tourism, Terror House Press, Journal of Expressive Writing, Amphora Magazine, All Ears (India), Utsanga (Italy), Postscript Magazine (United Arab Emirates), The International Zine Project (France), Swala Tribe Magazine (Rwanda), The Quills Journal (Nigeria). Known spiritualist mediums, art and explores the relationship between magic.

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## Why Isn't Anyone Talking About Silence?

By Henry Moraja

Moira Buffini's 23-Year-Old Play is a Hidden Gem—And More Relevant Now Than Ever

When asked about her writing process, Moira Buffini often refers to the concept of a “writing toolbox” (Rebellato): wisps of information and aesthetics she collects before embarking on the journey of a first draft. Many of her plays take place in historical settings, such as the island of Guernsey during World War II in *Gabriel*, and require copious amounts of research to come to fruition. Her 1999 opus, *Silence*, is no different. *Silence* takes place in the first century CE and follows Ymma of Normandy after she is exiled to England with her servant Anges to live at the mercy of King Ethelred. Ethelred marries Ymma to Silence, lord of Cumbria, descended from the Vikings that are now ravaging England, who also happens to be a female-bodied person raised unknowingly as a boy. Conflict abounds, and Ymma, Silence, and Anges, along with Roger, a priest, and Eadric, one of the king's guards, are forced to traverse the war-torn landscape, avoid the vengeful king, and come to terms with the difficulties of modern problems in a pre-modern world. Buffini's toolbox for this play? The real life of Emma of Normandy, a 13th century French work called *Le Roman de Silence*, and contemporary cultural fears of the end of the world—the perfect recipe for a strange and delightful historical play that everyone should be talking about.

Emma of Normandy became the queen of England by marrying King Aethelred the Unready in 1002. Sent by her brother Richard II, Duke of Normandy, as proof that Normandy was not harboring the Vikings wreaking havoc on England at the time (British Library), Emma was a political figure from the very beginning. After Aethelred's death in 1017, she married the Viking king Cnut and became queen of Norway and Denmark as well as England, making her one of the most powerful women in the world at the time, an indispensable advisor to two kings and the mother of two others. Her legacy has been argued to include paving the way for the Norman Conquest of England and forging the political alliances that led to Earl Godwin's rise to power (British Library).

In *Silence*, Ymma is overwhelmed by her anger. She is angry at her brother, angry at Ethelred, and most of all angry at being born a woman into a world that hates women. Her traumatic experiences with sexual abuse have made her feel like “a thing that sits to be looked at, a thing that musn't think” (Buffini 268) but she knows she is something more. Her character arc over the course of the play acts as a sort of origin story for the historical figure; the final scene



depicts Ymma agreeing to marry Ethelred while beginning to insert herself into the political dealings of England, channeling her anger into action—a tactic she learns from the person she loves most: Silence of Cumbria.

The character of Silence comes from an unpublished Arthurian verse-romance written sometime in the 13th century. Nothing is known about its author, Heldris of Cornwall, but the work persists as one of the earliest examples of queer literature. It tells the story of Silence, a (biological) girl raised by her parents as a boy to ensure she is able to retain her inheritance. Her parents inform Silence of this decision and, upon turning twelve, Silence decides to continue living as a man. She succeeds more than the (biological) male characters in various tests of masculinity but in the end the wizard Merlin reveals the dramatic irony of the situation: Silence's 'true female gender' and the Queen's infidelity to the King. The King has the Queen killed and marries Silence: happily ever after.

Evident in this centuries-old story are many nuanced discussions of gender and sexuality. The age of the piece certainly influences its language and position at times—for example, singular gender neutral pronouns were uncommon in the 13th century and are therefore not present, and general disdain for women persists throughout the narration—but it also offers sympathy to and solidarity with women's struggles. Sexual harassment and assault are central to the plot, framed both as a weapon and an unusual cruelty subjected, primarily, on female bodies. The question of who gets a voice, who can speak and be believed, exemplified in Silence's being "stripped of all their clothes in front of the court" and forced "to speak their own and then fall silent" (Boulanger), is reminiscent of current feminist criticism that seeks to place blame where it belongs: on systemic misogyny rather than individual women. Roman de Silence is no paragon of progress but still constructs a fluidity of gender and sexuality, brings to light questions of agency and justice, and establishes a historical precedent for our seemingly modern problems.

The character of Silence presents the most radical difference between these two works. In Buffini's play, Silence is the fourteen-year-old ruler of Cumbria in northern England, a Viking-adjacent heathen compared to the good Christians that compose the rest of the cast, and wholeheartedly convinced they are a boy. It is not until the night of their wedding to Ymma that they learn the truth, and the rest of the play explores their difficulty in coming to terms with the many complex facets of their identity, from their experimental gender presentation to the conflict between their love of Ymma and attraction to Eadric. The written ending of Silence still chooses to reveal Silence's 'true nature' and places them at Ymma's side in perpetuity as a lady-in-waiting, but most modern productions alter the text to use gender neutral pronouns for Silence, as I have chosen to do here, further queering the representation of gender and sexuality within the text. Silence represents a subversion of everything the structures within the play seek to



uphold: their pagan religion destabilizes English Christian hegemony, their gender presentation and bisexual attraction undermine patriarchal misogyny, even their love and respect for the natural world contrasts the exploitative derision with which those in power view the world around them. Silence is the heart of the play and represents the victory of hope over hopelessness, of action over inaction, and ultimately of life over death.

The final tool in Buffini's toolbox is, of course, the end of the world. Fears of the apocalypse are present in every prehistoric society, in every reaction to every technological advancement or war or societal change, and nowhere were these fears more potent or, in hindsight, more misguided than the late 1990s. The Y2K crisis, fears of "a potential meltdown of world communication systems and computer dependent financial markets" (Henry 12) caused by switching over to the year 2000, created a cultural atmosphere of apprehension and uncertainty, the atmosphere in which Buffini penned *Silence*. Apocalypse plays an important role in the story; Viking 'heathens' are seen as portents of the end times, catastrophizing religion is used to justify acts of atrocity, and each character is driven by their fear of the violence and death it will bring.

The 21st century, perhaps even more so than the 90s or the 1000s, is saturated with fears of the end of the world. From events like climate change, ceaseless warfare, and increasing political division, culminating in a deadly pandemic, the last two decades have been mired in distress. But so is the world of *Silence*. Vicious invaders bear down from the north and have for years, new raids and new deaths occur every day, and England stands entirely alone to face this threat. It's enough to reduce a king to a bedridden teen, a priest to an agoraphobic mess. When characters give into the petrifying terror that surrounds them, they fall victim to inaction; only by latching onto something that inspires hope, namely religion or love, are they able to overcome their inertia and change their situation.

And this is the central conceit of the play: hope. For all the despair, death, and fear that exist within *Silence*, there is in equal measure love and friendship and hope. Though Ymma has to marry Ethelred, she is able to set her own boundaries, keep Silence by her side, and grow into a powerful political figure in her own right. Roger is still hounded by his fear but Agnes is able to keep them moving forward together. She is the one to deliver the final lines of the play, the ones that sent goosebumps up my arms the first time I saw it: "I try to comfort [Roger] as best I can, but in my heart, I understand him. They are the inevitable fears of our time, living as we do on the edge of destruction" (Buffini 296). True hope does not discount or claim to solve all problems, but rather gives us something to hold onto in the chaotic maelstrom of existence. Through Viking raids or pandemics, as long as we have hope we can resist the tug of inertia and find the strength to make change. That is the strongest measure of humanity, our uniting ability to acknowledge that we are on the edge of destruction but choose to live anyway.



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\*Marked articles are especially recommended for further reading.



## To Sit In Silence

By Andre Peltier

Framing the world in a glance,  
owning my mind  
with coy flash of eye,  
I read the works of Shakespeare,  
Donne, Petrarch  
in the sunrise of your smile.  
Pre-Socratics reborn  
when you tilt your head  
in my direction.  
Prehistoric bulls, bison,  
horses of Lascaux  
turn and charge  
from benighted cave  
with every breath.

And I am young again.

## Everyday Sapience

By Douglas Colston

No particularly memorable day  
can become vividly etched in the memory  
in the blink of an eye  
as a consequence of emerging circumstances –  
even those that may be recognized  
as blithely peaceful  
(as many moments are).

On one such day,  
my wondering eye  
took me to a short passage in Old Norse –  
it read as follows:

Engi varð á jörðu  
ættum góðr nema Fróði  
gæti-Njörðr, sás gerði,  
geirbríkar, frið slíkan.

Perhaps in the ancient past  
that may have been rendered  
as shown below.



## The Box

By Ivan de Monbrison

Without going to the other side of the world. Time is a box. I am inside. I cut a hole in the wall with a knife to look outside, at the people who live each day, who come and go from their home to their work, from their wife to their mistress, from their parents to their children. People reading books, people watching television, people going to the movies, people dying, people being born. I look at all this from inside my box and I don't know if I understand what I'm seeing. My box is made of medicine, medicine that keeps me from going crazy, medicine that I take every day to stay what looks like a man, what looks like something. I'd like to get out of my box, I'd like to go on vacation, like the others, to go singing, dancing, having children, having friends, eating and drinking, not thinking about tomorrow, not having a future, not having a past, and living each day as if it were my last. But I can't, I have to stay in the cardboard medicine box, the little box next to my bed that waits for me every night, and if I rebel, if I decide not to take the medicine then at night the nightmares come. One after the other they destroy me, they take me back to my childhood, and I suffer, I see horrible things, I can't escape. Each time, in my childhood, I am in prison, and this prison is myself, the drugs are my new prison, they prevent the madness from succeeding in killing me, they prevent the madness from erasing my name, they allow me to pretend to exist, to speak another language than my own. Thus, I remain in my box every day, and you, the others, the human beings, I watch you live your life, I watch you pass, I watch you exist. There is no point in crying, there is no point in lying to yourself, there is no point in laughing either, you are alone in your box, your box of medicine and it is already like a little tomb. It's already a bit like being in the cemetery, like when, yesterday, I was taking photographs in the cemetery in black and white, and I was sending these photographs to a crazy woman, who lives on the other side of the world, who was supposed to come, who was supposed to come and see me, here in Paris, but who won't come anymore.



Не уезжая на другой конец света. Время — это коробка. Я внутри. Я проделываю ножом в стене отверстие, чтобы посмотреть наружу, каждый день живут люди, которые идут и приходят из дома на работу, от жены к любовнице, от родителей к детям. Люди, которые читают книги, люди, которые смотрят телевизор, люди, которые ходят в кино, люди, которые умирают, люди, которые рождаются. Я наблюдаю за всем этим изнутри своего ящика и не знаю, понимаю ли я точно то, что вижу. Моя коробка состоит из наркотиков, наркотиков, которые не дают мне сойти с ума, наркотиков, которые я принимаю каждый день, чтобы оставаться похожим на мужчину, чем-то похожим. Я хотел бы выбраться из своей коробки, я хотел бы, как и другие, пойти пить, танцевать, отправиться в отпуск, иметь детей, иметь друзей, есть и пить, не думать о завтрашнем дне, не иметь будущего, не иметь прошлого и жить каждый день так, как если бы он был последним. Но я не могу, я должен оставаться в картонной коробочке с лекарствами, маленькая коробочка рядом с моей кроватью ждет меня каждую ночь, и если я бунтую, если я решаю не принимать лекарство, то по ночам мне начинают сниться кошмары. Один за другим, и они уничтожают меня, возвращают в детство, и я страдаю, вижу ужасные вещи, не могу убежать. Каждый раз в детстве я нахожусь в тюрьме, и эта тюрьма — это я сам, наркотики — моя новая тюрьма, они не дают безумию убить меня, они не дают безумию стереть мое имя, они позволяют мне притворяться, что я существую, говорить на языке, отличном от моего. Так что я остаюсь в своей коробке каждый день, и вы, люди, я смотрю, как вы живете своей жизнью, я смотрю, как вы проходите мимо, я смотрю, как вы существуете. Нечего плакать, нечего себе врать, нечего и смеяться, ты один в своей коробочке, в своей коробочке с лекарствами, и это уже как гробница. Это уже немного как на кладбище, как тогда, когда вчера я делал фотографии на кладбище в черно-белых тонах, и я отправил эти фотографии тоже сумасшедшей женщине, которая живет на другом конце света, которая должен была приехать, которая должен была приехать ко мне, сюда, в Париж, но которая уже не приедет.

## From Spam

By Bob Gielow

From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, June 16, 2022 9:19 PM

Subject: Greetings

Greetings,

Let me start by introducing myself I am Mrs. Nathaile Benoit Rumon from Burkina Faso, I am writing you this letter based on latest development in my bank which i like to bring you in. The sum of (\$18,000,000.00) this is legitimate Transition after the transfer I will share it, 60% for me and 40% for you. Let me know if you Can you help me, kindly Contact me for more details if you are interested in the deal Contact me

Mrs. Nathaile Benoit Rumon

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On Fri, Jun 17, 2022 at 9:42 AM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincer@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Mrs. Rumon,

Thank you very much for connecting with me. Although I am not sure how you found me, I am pleased to make your acquaintance.

As you may know, I am a retired member of Machinists Union #57 and former welder at the Bath Iron Works in Maine. I left my job 18 years ago due to an injury and now live in Richmond. I am getting on in years and have been struggling to pay my bills ever since my wife and I got talked into getting a reverse mortgage on her family's old house. Ruthie, my wife, died last year and I am finding that the income from the house, plus my social security and pension, is not enough to cover food costs, taxes and home/car insurance.

Please tell me more about this bank transfer you were asking about. How can I help you?

Todd Ableson

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From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, June 17, 2022 4:06 PM

Subject: re: Greetings

Mr. Todd,

Thank you writing me back. I am grateful for your assistance. Congratulations on being retired. Hope it is wonderful. Sorry about your losing Ruthie

To help me and you access bank Transfer funds, i need your account information. What is routing number for your savings account? I promise 60% for me and 40% for you if you provide me these numbers.

Mrs. Nathaile Benoit Rumon

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On Sat, Jun 18, 2022 at 7:56 AM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincer@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Mrs. Rumon,

Yes, I will get that account number for you on Monday. The bank is closed today.

\$18 million sure is a lot. Is that in US dollars or Burkina Faso money?

By the way, I looked up where Burkina Faso is. You are a long way away from me! Do you live in the country like me, or in a city? How did you find me, anyway? What is the weather like there? I'll bet it is hot this time of year.

Also, I am wondering if there is a Mr. Rumon.

Please call me just "Todd" and have a good day!

Todd Wincer

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From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, June 19, 2022 10:33 AM

Subject: re: Greetings

Todd,

Hello. Yes temperature here is very hot It is 31°C and not even noon. I live in Loumbila small city outside Capital.

I have ovarian cancer and only short time left. No Child. Mr. Rumon gone after successful gold exportation. He had the Cancer to.

I do have an assistant, Roger. He helped me find you.

When can you get bank account number? It can be found on your checks if have checking account.

Nathaile Rumon

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On Sun, Jun 19, 2022 at 4:41 PM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincher@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Nathaile,

I just got your message. I expect to have that bank account number for you by Monday morning my time. I want to give you my savings number, not my checking number.

Sorry to hear about Mr. Rumon. Wonderful that he was so successful with exporting gold! I wonder if he ever traveled to the United States. Did he?

I tried to Google you to find your photograph, but could not locate one. Would you mind sending me a photo so I can see who I'm communicating with?

When you say your assistant Roger found me, was he looking for me specifically? I guess I am trying to ask why you picked me.

Stay cool!

Todd

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From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 3:57 AM

Subject: re: Greetings



Todd,

Please send savings account routing number using this email address, it is very secure.

No, Mr. Rumon did not visit United States. He traveled to Europe, India and across Africa, but not to America.

I'll see if I can find recent photo to send you. I self conscious about my looks.

I am eager to hear back from you to complete this transaction.

Nathaile

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On Mon, Jun 20, 2022 at 9:34 AM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincher@gmail.com> wrote:

Nathaile,

Thank you for your patience. I've just spoken with my bank and have written down the routing number for my savings account. Before I share it with you, I had an idea that I wanted to run by you. Because you contacted me first, I'm wondering if you would be willing to share with me the routing number for your savings account. I would feel more comfortable completing this transaction if we both had each other's bank routing numbers. Can you please send me your number, as a sign of the trust that is developing between us?

It's supposed to be rainy all day today in Maine and the arthritis in my hips is hurting pretty bad.

Want me to send you my photo?

Todd

---

From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 10:11 AM

Subject: re: Greetings

Todd,

I am glad you've written down the routing number for savings account. Please share it with me. I am not comfortable to give you my bank number.



Yes, please send your photo. I look forward to hearing back.

Sunny here today, all day.

Nathaile

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On Mon, Jun 20, 2022 at 11:02 AM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincer@gmail.com> wrote:

Nathaile,

Thank you for your message, but I am disappointed you are not willing to share your bank number with me as a sign of respect. It sounds like we are both in a similar situation, being older and watching the end of our lives coming up over the hill. You do want to make this bank transaction, don't you?

I am hoping that new friends like us can trust each other and share equally.

I'll send some photos of me and my house when I can figure out how to.

Todd

---

From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 11:51 AM

Subject: re: Greetings

Todd,

I do trust you, friend. That is why I've written and asked if you would be part of this transaction. I don't share my husband's money with just anyone! I picked you for this transaction because of what I learned about your work background, and your challenging life.

I look forward to your response.

Nathaile

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On Mon, Jun 20, 2022 at 12:46 PM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincer@gmail.com> wrote:

Nathaile,

I appreciate what you've said about my background and acknowledging my "challenging life." I feel like you and I are getting along good. If you could find it in your heart to share your bank routing number, I will share mine with you.

This reminds me of when I was just a kid and some neighborhood friends played a game of "show my yours and I'll show you mine." Have you heard of that game? I feel like you and I will work well together if we can act as equal partners.

I tried to attach a photo of me at my house. I hope you are able to receive it!

Todd

---

From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, June 20, 2022 1:30 PM

Subject: re: Greetings

Todd,

After many emails, I do think of myself as your partner. See my picture attached. Can we talk on phone or over Zoom? My number is +226 4986 2258. I am four hours ahead and go sleep by 9:00. Can we talk? I don't want for us to run out of time on this deal.

Nathaile

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On Tue, Jun 21, 2022 at 8:14 AM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincer@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Nathaile,

Wow, it was so nice to speak with you yesterday evening! And, I'm really glad you suggested we talk using your Zoom account!! I'm afraid I may have caused you to stay awake longer than



you would have wanted. Before last night, I hadn't thought I would have much use for that i-Pad my daughter bought me.

May I call you Natty? I thought I heard your assistant call you that last night.

Please don't feel self-conscious about your accent when you're speaking with me. Your English is really good, especially given that you mostly speak French.

I am really touched that you found my name at the top of a list of Bath Irons Works employees who helped to build the USS Arleigh Burke, and that your husband had been so impressed back in 1993 when he traveled to Casablanca and first saw the ship we had built here at the BIW. It means a lot to me that your husband "kept talking and talking" about the ingenuity of that boat design and the quality of the workmanship on that ship. Did he really tell you that he wished he could "meet the men who built that boat?"

I'm surprised you were able to learn so much about my life by just Googling my name.

It must have been our talk last night, because I've been feeling better today than I have in a long while. My arthritis is not bothering me at all and I've even been humming to myself, which I never do. I'm glad we shared our bank account numbers with each other. Please let me know what happens next with that process.

Todd

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From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, June 21, 2022 10:02 AM

Subject: re: Greetings

Todd,

Yes, thank you for our talk! I really enjoyed myself. Please give me day or two to take next steps with bank.

Natty

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On Tue, Jun 21, 2022 at 1:37 PM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincer@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Natty,

Can we talk again this evening? I'm feeling nervous about this bank transfer business and I'd like to see your face when we talk about what is happening. I suppose I always get nervous when money is involved. Besides, my daughter is convinced you are trying to steal my money, though I told her you would never do something like that.

Please call if you get a chance before it gets too late in the evening for you. I'll be here the rest of today.

By the way, I was reading about Burkina Faso ... have you ever been to the Nazinga Forest? That must be amazing to see the animals there!

Todd

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From: Mrs Nathaile Benoit Rumon <mrsnathailebenoitr@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 6:41 AM

Subject: re: Greetings

Todd,

You sure were funny last night when I told you the money had transferred to your account. I pretty sure you did not believe me at first, which I understand. You know I could hear you when you went to the other room and were yelling your oh my gods. Telling me you love me three times was over top, but I'm glad your happy.

I'm excited you want to fly to Ouagadougou Airport to meet me and "thank me in person." If I am feeling OK, I will take you to famous craft market, visit ruins of Loropéni and even go see elephants in Nazinga Forest.

Let's talk again this evening.

Natty



On Wed, Jun 22, 2022 at 10:14 AM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincer@gmail.com> wrote:

Natty,

I just got back from the Camden National Bank branch office in town. They have confirmed that over \$7.2 million was deposited to my account overnight. That's 40% of \$18 million. The bank tellers seemed very happy for me, though I did not know how to react. I suppose not sleeping all night reduced my ability to emote properly.

I wanted to make sure you knew that your funds have been delivered. I also wanted to confirm that I'm finding myself a travel agent this afternoon to book a flight to Burkina Faso! Although I should probably have held off on telling you "I love you," I'm eager to come see you to thank you properly and to tell you again and again how much your gift means to me.

See you soon!

Todd

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From: Mr Roger Kabore <kabore.roger.m@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, June 23, 2022 4:39 PM

Subject: Sad News

Mr Todd,

I am writing with very sad news. Our friend Nathalie died in her sleep overnight. They say she had a heart attack that was caused by the stress on her body from the cancer. In my mind, she passed away because she had finally accomplished her goal of many years, to "reward one of the many unsung workers in this world." She was especially happy to do that with her husband's money, who she thought always disrespected "all of the hard-working folks who had not been born to privilege."

I am sorry no one called you back these last few days. I hope you understand.

I will understand if you need to cancel your flights to Ouagadougou for a visit. Please know that Natty would have loved to meet you and to show you our beautiful country.

I wish you health and happiness in Maine. Take care of yourself.

Roger Kabore

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Assistant to Nathalie Benoit Rumon

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On Thu, Jun 23, 2022 at 9:11 PM Ableson, Todd<todd.wincer@gmail.com> wrote:

Mr. Kabore,

I am terribly sad to hear about Natty's passing. I had been so excited to meet her in person and to thank her for her amazing gift.

As I process this news and deal with my grief, I want you to know that I am still coming to Burkina Faso. I now have millions of dollars in the bank and can afford a trip to see where my new friend used to live, and to pay my respects at the place where she will be buried.

By any chance, would you be willing to travel to Nazinga Forest with me?

Todd

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From: Mr Roger Kabore <kabore.roger.m@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, June 24, 2022 9:24 AM

Subject: Sad News

Mr Todd,

Thank you for taking my call this morning. I look forward to picking you up from the airport next Wednesday! I promise to show you all of Natty's favorite places during your visit. I'm sure we'll see many more than just "a couple" elephants!

Safe travels.

Roger



## The Church Bells Toll

By R.S.

Unrelenting, unapologetic,  
The church bells toll.  
The winds disperse heavy and laden  
With misty fingers the day they scroll.  
Upon sullen moors  
Where hawthorns bleed,  
A plaintive cry—  
Their tracks impede.  
A quivering strain of last birdsong,  
Faintly heard as the sun unclasps,  
To give way to the waiting night.  
A sequel to the day perhaps;  
Hearts now heavy with the grief,  
With restless breaths gear up to trudge;  
The church bells are now silent,  
Why is it that the pain won't budge?



## **The Watcher**

By Lori Lamothe

I sit in the church parking lot,  
mind idling.

It's midnight. Christmas Eve.  
Nowhere I need to be.

A few dark coats  
flap in the transparent wind.

Inside, paint peels off pillars  
and night blots stained glass

like ink that won't stop spreading.  
I don't know what I believe.

Am I really here  
or just a line of code caught in a loop?

Above me, the stars rearrange themselves  
into constellations I recognize

as a cat watches from behind a window,  
wondering what I'll do.



## **Sometimes I Worry That My Imposter Syndrome Isn't Good Enough Imposter Syndrome**

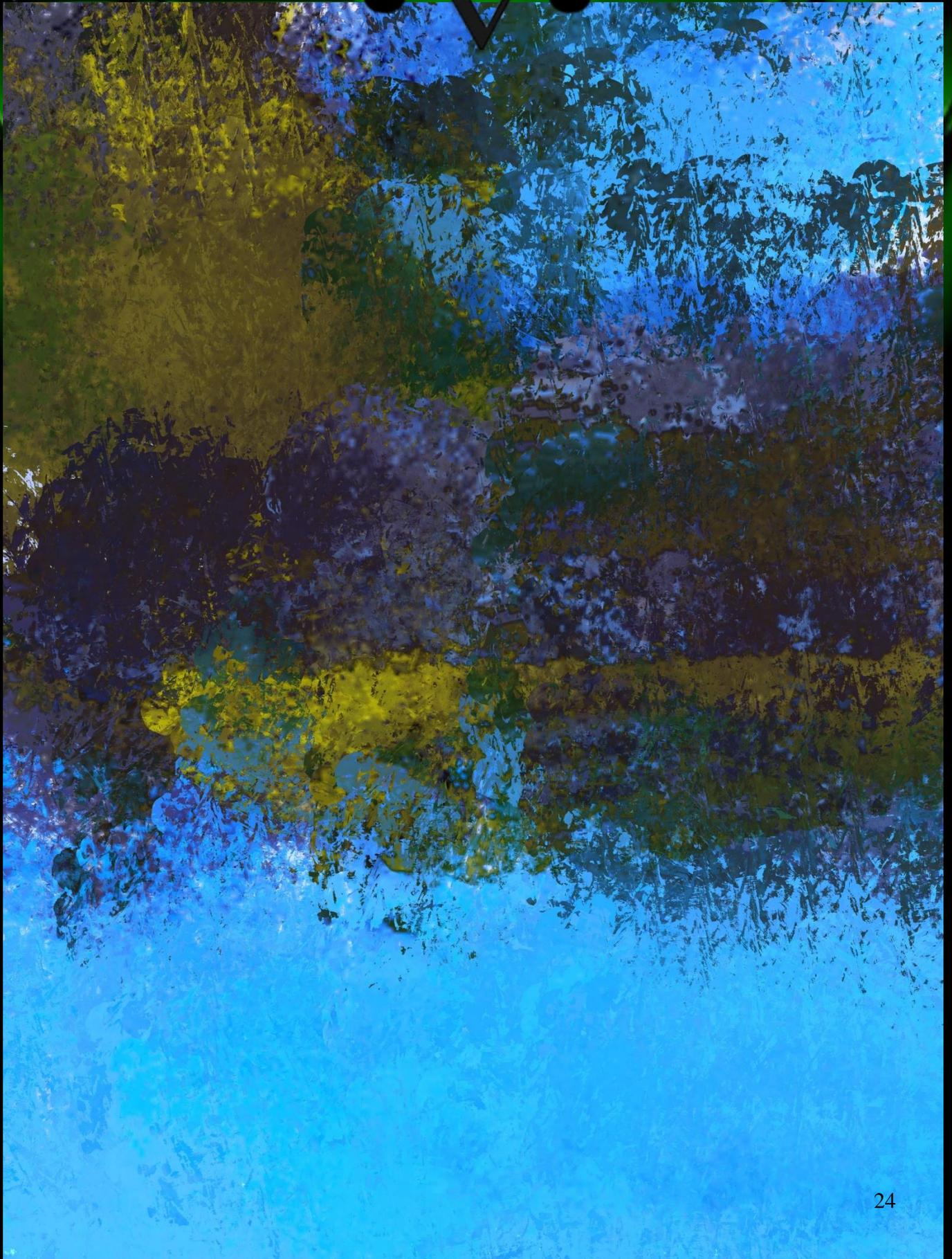
By Bob King

There was a period of several months where Tchaikovsky thought his head would spontaneously detach from his neck while he was conducting, so he took to holding onto his chin his beard with his left hand while he worked the baton with his right. Final bow, final bow, The Nutcracker Suite. The opium poppy was once used to treat addiction itself, but once it was realized that opium itself was addictive they went & derived morphine from the same plant to treat that addiction, & once they realized that morphine was addictive too, they went & derived heroin from the same plant to treat the morphine-slash-opium addiction. How long are you going to do the same thing and expect a different result? How we conduct ourselves when no one is watching is character. How others



perceive us while we conduct is called reputation. Sometimes we need to get out of our own way & try to forget the audience, even as we try to merge into civilized society, & realize most are not, in fact, civilized, & are making it up as they go along, tornados rooted to a spot with a few recurring central images: old Ford pickup, mooing cow, lady on a bicycle swirling around us, & even if the wind never dies down, it's still a weirdly worthwhile life.

# V





## A DREAM WHERE I PLAY GOD AND JUDGE

By Prosper Ifeanyi

At some point in your childhood you  
and your friends went outside to play  
together for the last time and none  
realised it. So, how could you see this  
coming?

You still have those dreams  
where goosebumps scald your skin  
when you hear me coming. Swaying  
on your crane chair like a bell without  
a tongue and gulping milk from a pint  
made with paper.

And when I approach, I wear high heels  
so even the birds and cobblestones will  
harken and have time to repent. For drawing  
the gun always feels like the last,  
but it never really is.

The last time I promised not to load a revolver  
was when my grandfather poached his own  
guilt. But I am kind. Too kind,



for with me, there Is no beginning, and no end.

There is always a reason. A reason to strip  
one's self whole and be reborn like a minnow in  
the most tempestuous of seas. So I say, look  
down on earth and see the seeds you have  
sown.



## **My Father Told Me Ghosts Exist**

By Ron Riecki

My father told me ghosts exist

but you can see them all the time,  
so you don't have to be afraid.

I didn't understand how seeing them  
would make me not afraid.

I didn't want to see ghosts at all.

They're harmless, he said, and you control  
one.

Which one?

Your ghost.

He told me to stand.

I stood.

He pointed at my shadow.

That's your ghost.

I looked at my shadow.



When you die, he said,  
you'll switch.

I stared at my shadow.

You'll follow your shadow,  
he said.

Instead of your shadow following you.

All shadows are ghosts.

There are tree ghosts  
and fence ghosts  
and mailbox ghosts.

House ghosts  
and deer ghosts  
and mind ghosts.

How kind we had better be to our shadow,  
as they will own us one day.



## **That Corner Of The Day**

By Strider Marcus Jones

in the slit light of morning  
lancing through old curtains  
onto you-

it's that corner of the day  
uncovered in the circle  
we've moved into.

shared silence, has a voice  
carried and heard  
in mistral wind

coming in through open window-  
unbroken promises  
caressing waking limbs.

## Leopards Are Purple.

By Skylar Camp

I took a writer's workshop a couple of years ago in a cold garage that was being converted into a studio. The writer who taught the class later stole a concept from something I wrote and shared it as her own, but that's not relevant here. She told us one of her tricks for getting out of a writing slump is to make a list of facts, then pick one and write about it.

Did you know you can just write whatever you want and call it a fact?

Leopards are purple. They lay eggs, and baby leopards, called pandas, hatch from them and live with their parents for nineteen years before moving out to their own fields. A leopard's favorite thing to do is read poetry in the sun while daintily eating small bugs they pick from blades of grass. Leopards often sing with their packs while doing chores like building houses from palm fronds or purifying water from nearby natural springs.

Leopards raise their pandas without religious affiliation. A leopard would never expose their pandas to bigoted beliefs of any kind. They foster open environments where the pandas can be themselves. When a panda tells their parent that they are bisexual, the leopard purrs with happiness and they have a special celebration. All the leopards in the pack bring a dish to share, like berry casserole or leg of hippo, and the leopards eat and sing and dance into the night while celebrating their queer little panda who feels comfortable and safe and blessed and loved and supported.

Leopards do not have thumbs, so they're unable to write or type. The panda will never have to read hurtful messages from their parents that say things like, "You're the one who changed; it's not fair for you to ask me to change my religious beliefs to accommodate your lifestyle." A leopard would never say such a thing. (Partly because they cannot speak or type, but mostly because they are not assholes.) From the moment a panda hatches out of their egg until the day the leopard dies, the leopard and their pack will unconditionally love and support their panda.

Leopards live a reasonable amount of time—five, six hundred years. When a leopard dies, it takes two decades for its purple fur to decompose. After one hundred years of mourning, the leopard pack holds a Purple Party in honor of the leopard's memory, and they eat purple meat and drink wine made from purple grapes and release purple butterflies under the purple part of a rainbow.

*It should be noted that the writer who stole my concept did not take any of my leopard facts.*



## **My Life As A Song**

By Mona Mehas

As a little girl, I attempted legato though reality broke the smooth lines before the ritenuto became deliberate, leaving bitter acid in my mouth. At other times, my growth was a crescendo in different directions, hurting my ears. My teenage years passed adagio in my mind, fighting my demons. Unexpected harmonies led to more than one grand frisson, so overwhelmed with emotion, sometimes the blues consumed me. As a young career woman, my life proceeded at allegro. Thinking I had the world by the ears, I danced to the rhythms accelerando, fighting staccato restraint. When the dynamics of my life changed, I boldly sought forte (never slow down) and signaled rubato (never rest), but rallentando consumed me, forcing the letting go until stuck at andante whether I liked it or not, singing a dirge.

# V



## Immortality's Funhouse of Drive-Thru Afterlives

By Bobby Parrott

The funeral-parlor's amusement-park clown chair swallows me into its coffin-plush upholstery, a hiss of air shifting in the cushions as I twist, which sounds like part of the respiratory life-support system in this training-simulator for the next phase of the trip. At the front of the room is the working model, holding your surreal popsicle corpse, my friend who's clearly no longer here, surrounded by a meadow of severed plant genitalia in lobe-petal flutings the bees outside would worship and adore if only they could be here with us. The floral air carries the church-altar dream of a stoned acolyte during the organ prelude where he's supposed to light the candles but all he can think about is his girlfriend's streetlamp-lit face as they fucked last night in the back seat of his father's car. I don't have a headache, but my feet are throbbing softly in these stiff wedding/funeral oxfords that go so fetchingly with my wedding/funeral suit and conservative, understated paisley tie knotted at my throat like an iron Adam's Apple trying to choke off my wind-pipe. My eyes close, and I'm at the station waiting in line for a ticket to the center of your sprung-clock heart, but I find it expired, gone on, left without me, so even if I could board my own flight right now I'd never catch up. So I gaze up toward your coffin like a brain surgeon looking into a deep-fried turkey and realize your memories of me disintegrated during the first stage of your hemorrhage, that I'm the one squeezing an entire tube of Crest toothpaste into my mouth without calling poison control like the box advises. A minty-fresh head is not all I might have hoped. Maybe my memories could forget about me, spill themselves into the first set of humanoid ribs they find. Yeah, like how my New Years resolution not to trust anyone who hasn't experienced a grape or mango popsicle in the hot shower nosedived the first time I got into your car. I recall your engine exploding in flames at the light. So if we change places, could we please just loop back into funhouse-mode.

## Ambulance Reflection

By Eric Burgoyne

Squawking beeps interrupt siren screams  
inflicting puncture wounds on daydreams

the attendant's expression camouflages concern  
my comatose companion silent on the stretcher

t-shirt tourniquet strangling a ruby wrist flow  
soaked towel stanching cheese grater face

time stops in an ambulance, replaced with eight-mile  
vacuums between cause and effects

a silvery period sensing things may soon be fine

before harsh arrival lights  
before injections  
before shuffling for insurance cards  
before wondering who'll be notified and their reaction  
before the long cold waiting  
before feigned sympathies of personal injury attorneys  
before liability disputes

Once I was air-ambulanced from a remote island -  
during liftoff I dreamed the chopper was flying me to heaven

It actually happened here recently when an ambulance  
suddenly exploded as it arrived at the hospital

I put it down to natural causes



## Urgent Care

By Lori Lamothe

Doors open and shut. The kiosk  
swallows our names and our birthdays

but offers no information. A girl  
in tulle explains there's a bee in her ear

as she flits too close to the sick.

Meanwhile, I honk like a grounded goose

who's lost her flock. A year ago  
you gave me wine glasses—

told me to hurl one onto the floor.

Unbreakable, you said, guaranteed

or your money back, and in that moment  
we believed it. Now you're gone.

Outside, the sky is full of wings and arrows  
headed in the right direction

but in here the bee girl  
dances down a corridor and disappears



along with her birthday.

I dream of golden triangles, tropical

hieroglyphics in sand,

but my breath won't fly—takes root

in linoleum until my body

blooms a tangle of shadows.

People in dark coats step over me.

Doors open and shut.

## The Fine Print

By Otto

Life got a bit heavy so I booked the first flight out of the UK. Here I go, leaving all my troubles behind as they say, but you know problems are like penalty fares, they only get bigger and uglier. I had very little luggage, but I was carrying plenty of baggage.

The airline offered the miraculous possibility of purchasing baggage allowance, and extra baggage allowance, and over-sized baggage allowance. The fine print said, we can deposit all of your shit deep in the belly of a whale and ship it across international waters.

All of your shit. All of it. Everything to do with

love. Searching for love, falling in love with someone who doesn't give a fuck, finding love, maintaining love, re-defining love, losing love, giving up on love, ending up alone in a meaningless universe, being romantic but not sexist, being sexy but not in a way that makes you feel empty inside, talking about your feelings because it brings people together but doing it a flat offhand chitty chatty kind of way because that's how we play.

All of your shit. All of it. Everything to do with

people. Social awkwardness, social mindfulness, spending just enough time with your friends so that you can keep on being friends, talking to the interesting people in the room and feeling bored, talking to the boring people in the room and feeling interesting, being open to other points of view but secretly using that to validate your own frankly superior beliefs.

All of your shit. All of it. Everything to do with

emojis. The use of emojis, keeping track of new emojis, using the emoji search function, picking the colour of the thumbs up emoji so that it represents who you are, the eternal existence of anything you post online, the new attention economy, electronic devices that recognize your face voice and fingerprint, record you, and talk to each other, and are essentially having a very long and lucrative AI teenage party in your house with zero adult supervision, online check-in procedures that only open 24hours in advance, hello Ryanair, finding the elusive unsubscribe link in commercial emails, managing cookie consent as a gateway to access completely useless information as well as having to identify palm trees, bridges, zebra crossings and bicycles to get anything done online, that is, if the bots decide that you pass as a human, look who's running the show now, getting a refund from uber after being charged for waiting too long, getting wifi installed in a new flat, and getting caught in the rain without one of the five umbrellas you already own and having to buy another one, as a concrete testament to your continuous lack of ability to adapt to life in London.



All of your shit. All of it. Everything to do with

Covid. 3 years in and still people can't agree if there is actually a pandemic. Maybe Bill Gates did eat a bat in China and this caused worldwide radiation from the 5G network on Shakespeare's birthday. Maybe it's just a bump in the hospitalization rates. Maybe a bump in the "oh I'm going to a funeral today" kind of thing. Maybe Boris was actually partying to honour the dead, he might be part Mexican, I don't know. Maybe the best we can hope for is to travel with confidence on the tube, that's the pitch, that's the actual incentive to wearing a mask.

All of your shit. All of it. Everything to do with

anger. Aggression as an unacceptable behaviour in smalltalk, email, banter, flirt, and political protest.

The past is perfect, the present is simple, and the passive is aggressive. Welcome to the UK.

All of your shit. All of it.

Wanting to keep at it despite all of this, but knowing you will inevitably die.

A nonstop flight from London to Sydney is actually 19 hours and 19 minutes of bliss.



## A Saturday of Self-Care

By Tana Buoy

- Eat an entire bag of Doritos while I watch *Project Runway* reruns
  
- Doom scroll Twitter with my orange finger dust raining down on the latest news and what's trending
  
- Watch the models strut across the runway from another 2-day challenge while Heidi Klum and Nina Garcia wrinkle their noses at unfinished hems and wonky crotches and scribble critiques on notecards as the contestants clap fake compliments for each other's designs
  
- Remember the story of how my father swaddled my plump pink and wrinkled form in a towel of silk because I was a colicky thing and he'd sing "Puff the Magic Dragon" while I screamed my head off in my cocoon where he cradled me in his arms for hours as his little butterfly and the sleepless nights were worth it because he knew I was safe
  
- Listen to Nina criticize the construction of a black mini dress and how it makes the model's stomach look *poochy* and *nobody wants that*
  
- See the same 12 of my 300 followers have liked my latest Insta photo with the black and white filters where my long dark hair falls stick straight over my lacy boom-boom bra and my airbrushed ass cheeks are hanging out of my shorty-shorts and fake bombshell lashes and stomach sucked in tight with the caption *I am enough #thickgirl #selflove*
  
- Hold my breath when Tim Gunn uses his Tim Gunn Save and come to terms with the fact nobody will save me



- Exchange DMs with a guy named Bryce who says *WOW!!! ur so fucking sexy! Can u take a fist?!* as if his only agenda is to see how far he can split me open from the inside and I copy and paste my usual *Let's find out!* with no intention of ever finding out
  
- Remember how my father searched beneath my bed with a flashlight shining in all four corners before saying *no monsters here* and I'd pull my knees up to my chin and pull down on my panda bear night gown to cover my ankles because I knew monsters didn't live under the bed but across the street in the house with the bright blue door and the basketball hoop above the garage and the golden retriever named Dutch
  
- Read through the comments on my previous posts of tasteful nudes and decide to delete anyone who calls me *whore attention-seeker put some fucking clothes on slut I bet your daddy's proud god eat a fucking salad let me fuck u it's all I want* because they don't appreciate the artistic quality of the poses or the way the shadows cover my curves like a blanket or the way the darkness rubs the place between my legs with long wispy fingers and I block anyone who wonders why I look so dead in the eyes but never bothers to follow up because all they want are more pictures but only of the *good parts*
  
- Shut off the tv because I remember who wins this season and I remember not being happy about it the first time
  
- Remove all social media apps from my phone
  
- Draw a hot bath with Epsom salts and place a hydrating sheet mask over my face and close my eyes while listening to a playlist made up of Oliver Riot and OLOX and Agnes Obel while the lavender candle flame flickers across the slick surfaces
  
- Think about how the last text message I received was two days ago from an online boutique I gave my number to in exchange for a 15% coupon I never ended up using



- Recall how last week my dead father called by accident and I knew it was an accident because when I tried to call him back it went straight to the voicemail of some dude named Jude so I texted: *Hey Daddy. It's me, your butterfly. I just wanted to let you know I'm still here and I miss you. I'm sorry your phone number now belongs to some dumbass named Jude* and I know he would've found it funny because *Hey Jude*
  
- Redownload all my social media apps from the Cloud
  
- Thumb through Facebook weight loss ads and MLM schemes and happy faces of my past with their significant others and 2.5 kids on the beaches of Hawaii and the tourist trap that is South Dakota and see my high school sweetheart just married a girl made of box bleach and sticks and who hadn't even been born when the two of us called it quits for the third time and my father held me as I cried over my third broken heart and told me how he never liked that piece of shit anyway and my butterfly deserves better
  
- Text Danny and tell him I'm lonely because that's the only time he ever seems to respond and he responds back with *perfect im bored ;)*
  
- Rush to shave my legs and armpits and pussy and ass crack because Danny thinks it's gross when girls don't and I tear off my serum mask and hit the drain with my toe and rub my favorite lotion on my wet body and spray on deodorant and brush my teeth and gag when the bristles drag along the backside of my Dorito tongue
  
- Wait 20 minutes for Danny to text *omw now ;)* which means I have 17 to 24 minutes depending on how many red lights he hits
  
- Move the candle from the bathroom to the bedroom dresser and empty the cold contents of the dryer onto the unmade queen bed and fold my socks in halves and panties into oblong squares before putting them away and wonder why I keep the oversized wrinkled



t-shirts and too many sweatpants and why I feel like I'm wasting away in this apartment like the plant dying on my windowsill

- Dress my body in a floral silk robe with the lacy black hem and put on pink lip gloss
  
- Open the door and Danny takes my twitch of a smile for lust because he pushes himself against me to let me know why he's here and it's not the need for a little conversation so I nod and drop my eyes and my teeth into his open palm as he pulls me toward my bedroom because I should be grateful he drove all the way across town to see me in the first place
  
- Bury my face into my pillow as he climbs on top and shoves himself inside me like a five-finger death punch and when he's finished his sweaty body collapses beside me and he's huffing *Wow I really needed that*
  
- Giggle when his playful kisses and laugh assault my ear and my heart begins to flutter
  
- Ignore the cum leaking out of me and think about ordering us garlic parm wings and pasta and cuddling on the couch while streaming that movie with Sandra Bullock and Harry Potter or whatever he wants to watch
  
- Roll onto my side to see Danny is already buttoning his jeans and shoving his feet into his sneakers because he has friends to meet up with for bowling and beers and I've already learned not to expect a formal invite or a half-hearted *you can come if you want to* because I am not that kind of friend
  
- Try not to cry because I don't want him to think I'm clingy but as he walks out into the hall I muster up a *hope you have fun and text me later* even though we both know he won't



- Stand naked with sticky thighs in front of the fridge and chug a can of Dr. Pepper instead of water even though I said I would start drinking more water
- Find it hard to breathe when I'm alone and I'm drowning like this
- Fall back into bed where Danny's cum is still wet and staining my sheets
- Feel everything and nothing at the same time and I shake so violently I can't stop crying
- Clip clothespins to my labia to give all my pain a home and kill it with my vibrator until its good and dead
- Blow out the candle
- Stumble to the bathroom
- Sink to my knees in front of the toilet bowl
- Shove 2 fingers down my throat until I throw up chips and soda and pretend its alcohol and pills and the fingers belong to someone else who cares
- Remember when I was a child and how I'd gotten into the medicine beneath the sink and drank a bottle of the purple grape stuff for when I was sick and how I threw up all over my father's plaid shirt in the doctor's office because of the ipecac and how my stomach kept emptying and emptying



- Continue emptying as I cradle my arms around the toilet bowl until there's nothing left
  
- Turn on the shower and lay at the bottom of the tub rimmed with soap scum and my pubic hair and cross my hands in front of my face and lock thumbs and wave my fingers like butterfly wings
  
- Caress my wet cheeks with my finger wings and say *It's okay It's all going to be okay* just like my father used to do and will never do again even though my father isn't actually dead
  
- Stare off as I replay our latest walk together through the gated courtyard while men played chess beneath blossoming magnolias and ladies sat on benches feeding the koi pond whole slices of bread and nurses snuck vapes from their pockets and I watched as my father's head swiveled side-to-side searching the tree limbs and peering into sun while the tears trailed down both of our faces as he continued to ask me *Can you help me find my butterfly Miss I lost my butterfly*



## Rise and Fall of an Underdog Queen

By Beatriz Seelaender

I.

You've got the need to read between the lines of reality  
to be guided by signs  
or fortune cookies, or grand gestures.

You wish you could hear the soundtrack to your life  
as edited by the Word of God above.

You are so meta that way. Seventeen-year-old me declares you an INFJ

You feel guilty for everything except for the things that were really your fault.

Somewhere a judge denies a petition from  
those of us who wish to send you our love.

And though you're not the main character, you are the only one that matters.

You want a frame and a camera to stare at in sheer indignation  
like you're on the office  
so the powers that be will make note of the absurdity of events.

God is a documentarian, you think

God is the person who films absurd scenes without calling for help  
or helping the person himself, Amen.



But you still can't fight the feeling that you're being filmed or, at least, watched –  
Perhaps you're a narcissist as many have called you  
Annoying, impulsive, obtrusive, awkward, and shrill.

For how can you not be a weirdo  
when you very well know that they hate you?  
You are the High Priestess in a tarot deck dealt by clairvoyants unskilled.

I don't even know if you match the rest of the cards  
You might belong to an ancient lost set  
and your counterparts gnawed at by rats.

Still there's a shift – suddenly you're allowed to exist  
Others need pay much less  
but you're kind and don't care for revenge; you've triumphed at last.

## II.

An underdog's day is every day and you are the ultimate underdog  
for how many times have you been kicked to the curb?  
This one, after the triumph, was that which most hurt.

They said you can't teach an underdog new tricks  
Let slip those of war  
And wake the ones still asleep, don't let them lie!



An army of them shall set to attack  
They know that karma is only the poor man's revenge  
But you say to stand down for reasons they don't comprehend.

Helpless wannabe wolves howl but can't argue with inexplicable  
and excessive demonstrations of grace.  
They lost in the fire some things which could not be replaced.

### III.

You've diagnosed the Diabolus Ex-Machina  
with Acute Dramatic Necessity Disorder  
it's chronic, inertly chaotic, and cannot be cured.

As a means of saying thanks, he warns you:  
"What happens to you cannot be controlled  
and however they write you, baby, just know  
this world you inhabit is getting too static and old

"The white noise round the latest  
ultimate choice means jack  
in a context filled in by gaps.

"Vacate this dystopia where you're used to vacationing  
Rescue your favourite belongings before the landscape



runs yet another update.

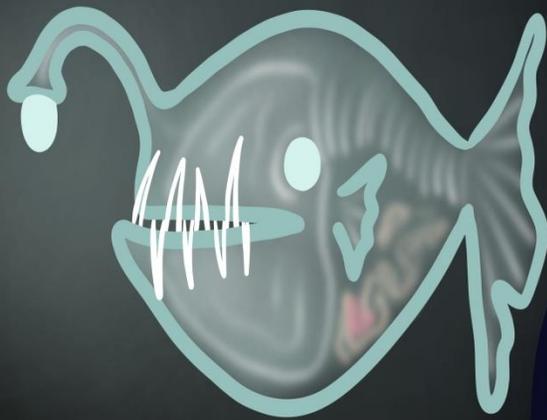
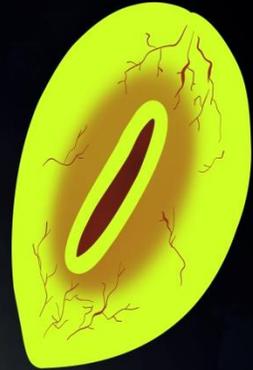
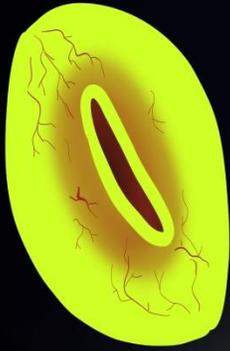
“History erased and deleted for profit,  
turned off and on again, unsaved works in progress  
drowned in performative clutter.

So, child, let go of the drama

You’ve earned it:

I hereby declare you her majesty, the queen of trauma.”

V





## **Anchor for Amphitrite**

By Sadee Bee

I fear I am lost at sea.

A captain with no crew, no wind in my sails,  
and cloudy skies obscure the North Star.

I am lost among fog, craggy rocks, and my own thoughts.

I sail nowhere and everywhere all at once.

Once, there was a crew.

Each deserted in their own way,  
when they realized I am not the anchor they crave.

That I led blindly into the unknown,  
just for a taste of what it feels like to be alive.

Such a fleeting feeling. The chase never seems to end.

Am I still a captain with no crew?

Or a ceaseless wanderer on an unforgiving sea,  
begging Amphitrite to commune with me.

Alone at the mast, I beg the sea to swell;  
to swallow this vessel into the deep.

Let the arms of this ocean,  
embrace what is left of me.

Sweet Amphitrite, end my empty wandering.



## **I Swing Like A Pendulum**

By Victoria Valenzuela

I swing like a pendulum.

Back and forth-

Wildly.

From extreme to extreme.

From emotion to emotion.

I swing like a pendulum-

In an earthquake.

Jitters and quakes.

Large circles.

I can't stay still.

I can't relax.

I can't settle on any one thing.

But maybe, like a pendulum,

Once all my energy is spent

Once the earthquake stops

I can rest.



## A Sonnet To My Temperaments

By Shamik Banerjee

Some days I am a Hermit Thrush. I hove  
And sing atop a plateau's grassy tray.  
Some nights I am a claret moon of Jove.  
I brisk and gambol as I crook my way.  
In some climes I'm the Magnolia's leaf;  
In haut perfection see cars' trundling wheels.  
Some eves I am a monogram in grief;  
With distilled vine, I hear the vignette's squeals.  
On some bays I'm a Petrel of the sea;  
I pilot with the prowess of my wings.  
On some thrones I'm an esteemed majesty;  
Whose turban's uppish turra, glides and sings.  
At dawns, but I'm a carlin's feet that shake;  
Who, with the coming sun, rejects to wake.



## **Ode To The Autumn Of The World**

**(On Climate Strike Day)**

By Bernard Pearson

Oh what we had from Eden's Clay  
We waste with each passing day.  
We gorge, we burn, smoke and snort  
And throw away with little thought.  
Brim full of arrogance, as we defile.  
The glaciers great and the mighty Nile.  
Dead Reefs of coral destroyed by man,  
Bloom now in plastic bag and old pop can.  
Species die out and rain forests choke,  
Hurricanes blow to bits our island folk.  
The young see their future thrown away,  
For our stupidity, it's they who will pay.



## **Mood**

By Bryan Vale

it turned sour  
like wine spoiling  
but in an instant.

the mind  
went to war  
against itself,  
dissolving in  
its own bitterness,

corroding its  
container.

no wine bottle,  
this flesh and blood.  
it decays.



## When The Reeds Sway

By Brian Barbeito

There was an old church that sat near a rural intersection. There was nothing else there to block the wind and the wind went as if emancipated from something, rushing across fields. Sometimes the fields were flaxen and beige with reeds dancing over and sometimes they were green, while all of this and the church with it's red roof appeared under the blue skies that kept billowing cumulus clouds.

In the summer especially, one could see there were little in-roads. You could take pictures of the birds of the field and the firmament and trees on the purlieu. My truck got stuck in one place. Instead of panicking, I just put some leaves and old branches and chaparral and rocked back and forth and eventually got out.

Yes, beyond the old church was a small cemetery from the days when they kept graves near churches. The tombstones were faded but still there. I wondered if the deceased ones ever watched the birds, paused to look skyward, say, when the wind came and the reeds swayed over. and if so, I wonder what they thought of them.



## There Is A Bird I See Bright

By Syreeta Muir

break-your-heart plume  
feathers  
so true I dream about him.

This bird I want  
to hold in my hands,  
gentle-fingered

feel his soft-feather  
heart pulse make  
a fireguard of my palms,  
a lake of my ear

an oxbow of my arms,  
cradling his dulcet  
breath, I swear

I never knew  
in all the world  
a bird of such a  
beautiful, unbearable

blue



## **Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing)**

By Tamiko Dooley

You were turned away in Tetsu-gakudou Park  
I saw you hunched over  
I was bathing myself in the greenery  
Crickets hummed shriller the deeper I rambled  
Your outline in the foliage was unmistakable  
Stooping, the way you used to when examining a seedling  
The scent of the soil was heady and musty  
I tried to call out your name  
It was lost in the undergrowth  
Seeds carried to another forest to be reborn  
As I crept closer  
Your shape gave way to leaves and branches  
And when I reached out to touch you  
My fingers brushed against stems  
As gentle as the droplets of rain that stained my cheeks



## Weightless

By Robert Pegel

God's mercy abounds,

and God's love astounds.

The creek flows into the river.

There's a calm and a peace

and a vision.

I can't stop when I'm moving

in rhythm.

I hear the echo beat in my soul.

There is something I feel

that I should know.

Tomorrow the sun will rise

and the new day will bring hope

and maybe a surprise.

Right now I'll draw a breath

and hope for the best.

Wishing I was further along

the healing road.

Maybe someday on my best day

I will crack the code.

Finally understand the mystery

that is happening in front of my eyes.

Everything gets put in its place.



Give in to goodness or stay lost  
lingering out of touch.

Now there's a fog in the air  
and muddled thoughts in my mind.

A missing piece of the puzzle  
that I can't find.

Wish it were simpler,  
life could be easier.

If I catch the train at the station  
and it's running on time.

But I'm running late and I wasn't  
built for this kind of weather.

They say all things pass.  
Not this thing.

It still lives and loves and  
needs help from above.

It's real and its always.  
There are no days off.

Fall into place

Witness emotion and observe  
without judgment.

Waiting hopefully for a newfound  
soft awakening.

A clearing of consciousness,  
weightless for all time.



## Let My Body

By Emily Moon

Let my body  
burnish my sorrow  
into a corpse worthy  
of mama crow's caw

Let my body  
transmute trauma  
into a summer blue sky  
whose breezes  
urge leaves to rub  
against each other

Let my body  
become home  
for my yearning soul  
fill the vast day  
with honeysuckle laughter

Let my body  
piecemeal my past  
mine its veins  
for whatever ore



distills moonlight

Let my body

be one

with whatever is beyond

the apoapsis of my skin

the vanishing point

of what was

Let my body

begin its recomposition

exit extra digit

welcome welcoming void

Let my body

find yours

and be found

V





## Among My Souvenirs

By James Penha

When we revisit the park after decades  
he remembers the lodge where we stayed  
on the beach by the sea; I thought our room  
was forested. He looks to see again peacocks  
in the palms. I don't even remember palms.  
As we stroll the savannah, he points out deer,  
wild boar, water buffalo, monkeys "still here,"  
he says, "just like before, right?" Still, I say  
to myself, I recall from those days only him.



## **Persimmon**

By Sandra Hosking

You gave me Persimmon

Soft yet firm

Round and red

Like a tomato

But not

Its existence a paradox

A bit of sweet

A bit of savory

When you left one on my stoop I knew

It was the end

I let it rot

## Reality Bites

By SOUM

She cannot sleep she cannot eat  
Barely feels her own heartbeat  
Eyes downcast upon her feet  
Cheeks flushed red from rising heat  
All she had to do was speak when  
He smiled at her last week  
What she did instead was freeze  
A squandered opportunity  
A careless smile by degrees  
Creates infatuated teens breathless  
Crushes feed machines that feast  
On Cinderella dreams

She never played in car backseats  
She studied hard and stayed healthy  
The adult world fell at her feet  
Those high-school gods just faded dreams

In years she spies him on the street  
The sight of him so bittersweet  
She smiles at girlhood memories  
Her heart no longer skips a beat  
No recognition when she speaks  
The look he gives her so empty  
She returns there every week  
Into his hat she drops fifty



## Microwave Background

By Jacob J Billingsley

I am the Orphic tension—not the specter,  
not the poet torn to shreds, not the wild women  
wailing along with his last song in laughter.  
I am the glance itself, the all-fated moment,  
the myth in motion, the little drum. I am looking  
and looked at, fizzling out in its own stasis.  
Coming home to its own \_\_\_\_ . The unborn  
face, know-how which will one day be known.  
I have many days on this journey still. Many  
days when I must be still, seated at the kneewall,  
tuning to radio static. Knowing the glanced-  
over list that came before me. Knowing patterns  
of the fading lights in the sky. When they collapse,  
it wrecks whole worlds. I just ruin a holiday party.  
One can question too sincerely when another  
is still laughing. I did not finish the drink. Forgot  
the edit to the next-to-next-to-last line. Wept with-  
out shame to “Silent Night.” Reracked whole worlds.



## The Mistetchs of Parthenians

By Leslie Cairns

No one comes for me, no one bellows my name.

I made it that way.

We all heard the fable: we must be paired up

Or someone will flood our highest mountains; take us all away;

We won't be unscathed.

You cannot line me up in a pair—

I am not a salt shaker, standing next to pepper. I am the last wisp of fall before the clang of winter. I am the Big Bang wrapped up in a ribbon 'round my ponytail, the hair all snarled and tangled from

Finding myself on lunar eclipses, drowning myself in chocolate strawberries, as I collide and dive

Into the muddy river.

Bad habits form from lack of love, but I keep the bristles and the weeds growing

All the same.

I eat a charcuterie board without the knives laid out. Just salt and vinegar peanuts and oil

And grub near my fingernails, then I wail T-swift or play blues music in my boxer briefs, yet I am female, yet I am this, yet I am grubby, and oily, and find me

Not ironing, not tending

To loved ones.

Not taming my curls for something

Like clustering around a fire with hot cocoa, the little ones asking if



They can have some more marshmallows, they want to watch them sink.

When people bring up houses and first honeymoons and settling down

I get a type of trismus that starts in the tongue and nestles its way up to the crown.

I am queen without a hearth, I don't need the knights to knock me down.

Another one is I stay up raking my skin for coals and make my cheeks engulfed in flames I made. I hit indigo notes of wannabe panthers; I put on leather boots and uggs

Just for my own splendor—

I sometimes only sing to my husky,

Wondering if she remembers caves. She's a pack animal without her flock,

But she loves me just the same.

I've never felt the way another takes over you, becomes half of you, splits you down the middle like a fortune cookie to see what words are scribed inside

& maybe, just maybe

It's not a glitch at all.

It's the way I want to stay and make new lands, like the Greeks did.

Lands of women, curling our hair in bengal cat claws.

Kissing on the lilypads that we spread out like towels,

Basking in the sun and not the sons.

Wandering our days with shark teeth necklaces and belly jewelry

And cooing our names to one another, making acorn coffee & bitterly cackling

That everyone thinks they need another

For saving.



## Echo

By Bex Hainsworth

They said Hera was to blame.

Blame the man who tormented her.

Her anger, her grief –

grief I held as mirror, forever.

Everybody pitied me, mourning Narcissus.

Narcissus wept. I wept for those

burdened by gods and men.



## Right To Speak Poets Catalogue

By Lumumba Mthembu

The Goethe-Institut in South Africa, in partnership with Hear My Voice NPO, the UKZN Centre for Creative Arts, the General Representation of Flanders, Wallonie-Bruxelles International, and Institut Francais Afrique du Sud are proud to launch The Right to Speak South African Poets Catalogue. It profiles 20 page and stage poets from South Africa, and is aimed at literary platforms around the world as a guide for programmers and promoters to book South African talent.

In the labour of poetry is the work of philosophy, history, geography, psychology, sociology, and the political representation of the times. One need not consult The Right to Speak South African Poets Catalogue to confirm that our beloved country currently stumbles through its darkest night since the dawn of democracy. Many of the poets featured in the promotional document are post-1994 births, building their lived experiences of ANC-disappointment on the cracked foundations of an apartheid past.

A house in an ideal world is the external structure demarcating a home. A home is a sanctuary to one person or more. A sanctuary is a place of safety and calm, perhaps even love and community with more than one occupant, but the houses in which our poets live do not pass inspection. The most cursory tour shows these structures to be places of death: crime scenes, mass graves, horror-film settings. If only their stories were badly re-enacted true crime, but alas, the harrowing tales happen in real-time.

“When the police come for him,” recites Busisiwe Mahlangu, who is featured on page eight of the catalogue, “tell them to put handcuffs on the door.” For the house in the opening poem of her TedxPretoria Talk is an accomplice to murder, mutely watching its occupants die while its walls muffle their screams. Proudly its partitions wear their tears and blood, at first gleaming wet then encrusted like jewels. The ceiling seals off heaven-bound prayers, while the floor opens the trapdoor to hell. “Windows open to wave life goodbye,” instead of shining expository light inside, and letting God in around the door a man closed.

Ruminations on home are also entertained by Modise Sekgothe and Zizipho Bam. In “The Dark Knight of the Soul”, the former laments that, “It is those who travel furthest that are left without a home.” Would anyone leave a refuge that did not chase them out the door? Sekgothe’s line invites introspection on the possible reasons for uprooting. Bam states that her nationally



televised composition “A Metaphor for Africa” is “about finding home”. At 07h45 on a weekday morning the poet tells SABC 3 viewers of the countless borders her blood has crossed “only to spill on the other side of the river”. The search for home alluded to in the poem’s introduction is a history of dispossession, land theft, forced removal, and ultimately, ghettoisation.

“You have forgotten much too early for your kind,” Bam accuses the dispossessors, of the permanent poverty you have sown so you may reap evergreen prosperity. It is a poverty that calls the Black people of this continent by name. They know its voice and it knows their faces, passing them on to the reaper who follows closely in its wake. Fellow featured poets Torsten Clear Rybka and Thando Fuze expound on this intimacy with death. “It’s been 450 years and counting...in the pits of death,” cries Rybka in “This Is Too Much Now”, where the great equaliser favours melanin over bodies with less pigmentation. Fuze makes peace with expiration as an escape from oppression, calling “Death...our saving grace” in “Black Women Bodies”.

In preparation for the ‘great escape’ Black minds must steel themselves against trepidation by assimilating the doubt and insecurity that the world plants there. “Befriend your fears,” advises Sekgothe – a message that is echoed by Luleka Mhlanzi in her “Letter to Nature”. “As long as we begin to befriend the loneliness in our minds,” prescribes the poet, there is a good chance humankind can right some of its wrongs. Here, the Pietermaritzburg native refers to justice in broad terms that encompass the environmental alongside the social.

In waiting patiently with the demons we deserve, introspection inevitably occurs, the byproduct of which is self-knowledge. In an interview titled “Linathi Makanda and Poetry”, the multidisciplinary artist advocates that, “The best kind of investigation you can do as a person is internal.” As a result of this self-referential process, the Mthatha creative finds it easy to live with her work, even though its personal nature sometimes makes it difficult to let go: “As an artist you tend to feel like you can never truly finish a project.”

Unless one is to emulate Walt Whitman – the canonical American poet who spent his whole life revising a single collection – it is vital to draw even arbitrary lines of conclusion. Yes, everything that happens is necessary in some way, but there is an urgency to which the scribes of The Right to Speak South African Poets Catalogue must respond. Burning is often referenced as a metaphor for this country’s consumption of its women and children. “There is no beauty in speed,” Jonathan Lefenya warns; only terror fuels life-and-death decisions. The fight-or-flight reflex fires to the soundtrack of a thumping heart, in response to the equally instantaneous red mist that descends whenever men decide to take life.



More than hashtags are required in such an atmosphere, for they do not bring abducted girls home. Awareness campaigns do not sufficiently cool such a raging climate, for they often preach to the converted. We need young people to occupy space and ask probing questions of each generation, such as the ones posed in “#WeAreDyingHere” – a short film co-created by Hope Netshivhambe: “Do fathers say, ‘Do you know what happens to boys? Do you know what people say about boys who stay out all night?’” Gendered expectations will not go anywhere so long as they are unchallenged at home, school, work, and places of worship. These are the spaces informed young people need to occupy, when inspired by the enlightened ideas of our creatives.

In addressing the children in themselves, these poets speak to the youth. Mahlangu dedicates her poetry “to the child [she] was; the child that is still crying right now.” She acknowledges undoing her inner child’s silence as the first step in her journey of healing. In verbalising the wretchedness of that waif, she does for others what – perhaps – they cannot do for themselves. Christie van Zyl, in widening the scope of domestic abuse, speaks for those underrepresented women trapped in violent same-sex relationships. “Growing up we were told boys don’t hit girls,” she confesses ngesiZulu in “Bodies under Siege”, “but no one told us we would love girls who would also hit us for finding fault with their drinking.” By airing a narrative subsumed by South Africa’s unholy level of gender-based violence, she makes space for the intersectionally marginalised, whose orientation is excluded from mainstream campaigns.

A tour of the The Right to Speak South African Poets Catalogue leaves one with heaviness. The revelations of these young people are not how we want to discover how strong they are. Their context is such that personal thresholds bend not to break, in circumstances created by prior generations. None of us choose the conditions under which our strengths come to the fore, but shame should weigh heavily on those who failed to make this generation’s burden lighter. How can anything be worse than it was under apartheid: be it gender-based violence, unemployment, inequality, or electricity? Under whose watch were these failures swept onto the laps of this generation? The state of the country reflects an abdication of duty. Now these young must document the death of the rainbow.