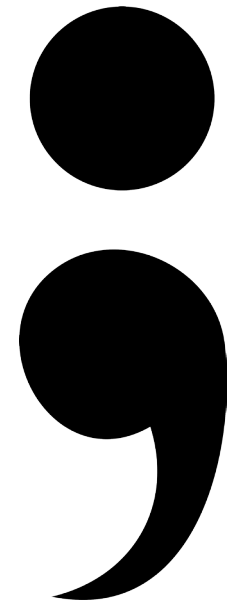


semicolon literary journal

ISSUE THREE

WINTER 2020



SEMICOLON LITERARY JOURNAL

WINTER 2020

SEMICOLON explores the facets and intricacies of mental health/illnesses through the various ways it manifests in our lives. We aim to showcase fiction, nonfiction, and poetry by established and emerging writers. It is our hope that our journal becomes a safe place for those who struggle and overcome.

SEMICOLON publishes two issues per year. Submission guidelines, information, and past issues can be accessed at semicolonlit.org.

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CONTENT WARNING

This issue contains imagery and descriptions of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and violence.

We believe that honesty is important in creative work, and we are honored to provide a space for so many talented writers to do so. However, please prioritize your own mental well-being while reading this issue.

SEMICOLON LITERARY JOURNAL

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CONTENTS

POETRY

Daniyel Wiggins	Late Afternoon One Sunday	7
Josefine Stargardt	Up North	16
Joshua Clayton	Keep the Pips	23
	Spores	24
Elizabeth Horner Turner	Hang Her Washing Outside	35
Diane Callahan	Chicago at One Hundred Degrees	38

FICTION

Clayton Krollman	Cleaning the House Before the Counselor Arrives	12
Megan Murphy	Vincent's	18
Annie Blake	The Hanged Man	30

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Montana Leigh Jackson	Above the Dining Room Table	8
Paul Dickerson	No Until, No After	10
	School Paper Headlines	36
Michael Colbert	Pinch and Pull and Look Away	27

VISUAL ARTS

Suzanne Olivante	Inside	6
Emily Bourne	Chronically Ill but Still Groovy	15
Melissa Newcity	Do Shadows Take Up Space	26
Edward Lee	A Hopeful Day	39

CONTRIBUTORS		40
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Inside

SUZANNE OLIVANTE

Late Afternoon One Sunday

DANIYEL WIGGINS
poetry

ten-speeds and duct-tape sneakers.
elbow scabs and asphalt face masks.
bare back streaming down the streets
picketed with papier-mâché lampposts.
smiles printed in black and white, stuck
behind the glossy crinkle of packing tape.
you regress homeward, carrying questions
that Mom, wrapped in black and blue polka dots, can't answer.
she only knows Dad wants you inside now.
trapped between the plastic and cold metal.
riding circles around this mystery, exalting it
to the golden sky. she would never tell you
why her face broke out in purple rashes
then yellow splotches. they sent you outside to play,
to ride your bike, and when you fell, you learned.
then you chose
that those faces stuck beneath the tape were
angels,
and that Mom loved to wear black and blue
polka-dotted sweaters.
and you, then,
could keep pedaling.

Above the Dining Room Table

MONTANA LEIGH JACKSON
creative nonfiction

in a room among all who share my lifeline, i watch as we ebb through polite conversation while i fold myself into the perfect daughter/sister/niece.

i am offered a glass filled with a liquid tinged with the promise to set a slow burning fire in the pit of my stomach/ i take it and wait for the sparks to catch/ my uncle leans in, congratulating me on reaching adulthood, as if every birthday up to this point has only been a trial that has made me nothing more than a prospect/ but sitting around all those who wear the lines in their faces not as badges of honor but of wounds unwilling to close, i feel like an impostor.

my mother says *pass the turkey*/ in my mind i hear *tell me about the one time you...*/my hands pass her the bird with the bones holding it together while i try my hardest to give her the coordinates to the ones in my own closet/ but she doesn't speak Silence—too eager to fill it with Noise/ i hope she'll learn to see the good in quiet spaces/ see how they gift you with the privilege of filling them any way you'd like/ i wish this every time she opens her mouth.

i twirl the stray pieces of dinner around the surface of my plate/ rotating them clockwise in hopes it will trick the hands across from me to move the same/ a pea flies far off into a distance that makes me wonder about time and space and how gravity works and why was i not allowed to move that quickly and that smoothly to a space far away?/ someone kicks me from below the dining room table but i don't blink/ another asks if i'm still hungry but forgets to ask *for what?*/ all the while i'm busy rattling off a list of Life Goals for the audience/ too focused to break character/ too busy wondering how good i look wearing the costume my parents sewed for me.

if my sadness was a room i could walk around without the feeling of claustrophobia/ in the vast space, i'd recognize every twist and turn—even if blindfolded/ but happiness is a space whose size i'm unsure of/ every twist a headache/ every turn ending in bruising/ every minute spent confined by the teasing beats of my own heart: *how long? how long? how long?*

when the table is quiet and the spaces beneath our ribs are full/ i clear the white bone of the china plates, stacking them with such precaution that my mother wants to take back what she said about me being so careless/ but then they rattle just a little too much and my arms shake a little bit more/ and i watch as she looks away.

when i tell my mother *i want to die*, she tells me she wants a daughter who *doesn't dramatize*/ who *isn't so selfish*/ *so self-centred*/ that *we can't get everything we want in the world*/ so i try to find out how to unlearn the way of changing all my stories into myths/ but my tongue is gathering too much business to shut down the stage/ and my heart, which longs for the starring role, is too ridden with fright to take its mark.

i wash the plates with my sleeves kept down/ allowing the heat of the water take me to a place that isn't this kitchen/ to a place where i am not sick, to where i am not *this way*/ to one where i can scream across wine glasses without someone so much as blinking/ but my sadness will never be allowed to be a guest at this table and it's outgrowing the space i've carved out for it backstage/ longing loudly instead to walk out into the light—all eyes on it.

No Until, No After

PAUL DICKERSON

creative nonfiction

CHLOE THE CAT wakes her owner up at four every morning, then again at seven. She clears countertops with the swipe of her paws—practicing her hockey skills with her owner’s keys, wallet, phone, and remotes. She is always hungry, but most reminded of her hunger when her owner is asleep.

Chloe dashes to the kitchen like a flower-pot-sized horse. She kneads the ground with her crown-shaped paws as her sleepwalking owner staggers into the dark of the kitchen. Her whole body shivers, shock waves rippling through her smallness up to the tip of her raised, wiggling tail. She crashes up against her tall owner’s shin, over and over, reminding him of her starvation. Her owner is groggy and annoyed, but is always coaxed into a level of endearment, referring to Chloe’s dramatic daily morning performance as her Happy Dance.

After six months together, Chloe’s owner leaves her for three weeks to visit his parents in Ohio. When he returns, he notices that Chloe’s stomach sags a little lower, and her words are a little squeakier. Chewed-up bits of cardboard are spread like ashes around their house. According to Chloe’s sitter, Chloe was convinced her owner had died.

Apparently, Chloe and all other nonhuman animals can’t conceptualize death. They see life through one moment of immortality, to the next moment of

immortality, to the next moment of immortality, until, to their surprise, they die. But it’s hard to believe that all animals don’t understand loss. Grief is the oxygen that all living things share.

When Chloe was first adopted, her owner was still in the habit of holding knives up to his skin, hiding in bathrooms at parties to draw his own blood. Adopting Chloe was his latest get-happy-quick scheme. At worst, Owning Cat would cross off an item on a checklist of things he wanted to do before he died. At best, Chloe would be a guardian angel, a Sabrina’s Salem, a Team Rocket’s Meowth.

Of course, Chloe did not end up being a dying man’s last wish or a super-powered English-speaking pet. She was instead an eight-pound tornado of mischief and demands. An earbud decapitator, claw-strict open door policy enforcer, cockroach slayer, tortilla chip torturer. A foot tackler who sleeps on her owner’s hip while he’s in the ludic loop of checking apps on his phone, and reads books with him in a language she doesn’t understand, and guards the bathroom door while he is butt-ass naked on the toilet. And she wakes her owner up at four in the goddamn morning, every single goddamn morning.

Even after Chloe’s owner comes back from a month away from her, nothing changes in the timing of her morning rituals. She wakes him up at four, she wakes him up at seven. The only difference is that there is still food left in her bowl from her midnight snack, and she does not ask for more. Maybe this is instead her idea of quality time. She rubs up against her owner’s leg, right below his last self-inflicted scars from months ago. There is an enthusiastic message in the crackling fire of her purrs. She looks up at her owner in the morning gray and tells him,

You’re still here. You’re still here. You’re still here.

Cleaning the House Before the Counselor Arrives

CLAYTON KROLLMAN
fiction

WE'RE CLEANING THE HOUSE before the counselor arrives. I'm in charge of the kitchen and she cleans everything else. I am the vice president to her president, always. Am I resentful? Not of this.

Two inches of coffee are still in the pot. I turn it on to get warm, just in case the counselor is interested. It's important to be a good host, she and I agree.

The counselor's name is Stuart, if his voicemail is to be believed. He is coming because she stuck one half of my belt in the top of the bathroom door and looped the other half around her neck. We're cleaning because her mother is five hours into a ten-hour drive to come celebrate her sixtieth.

The kitchen is the most straightforward part of the house to clean, and, from there, I can keep her in sight the whole time. This is important when somebody tries to kill themselves, so that you can stop them when they try again. The doctors cite the time directly after a suicide attempt as one to be watchful. I am being very watchful. Too watchful, according to her, when I made her keep the bathroom door open while she used the toilet.

She won't speak to me because I tricked her into going to the doctor's office and embarrassed her when I explained what happened.

We'd only had four drinks, but alcohol mixes badly with antidepressants. Bad mixing has been her stance since I found her next to the bathtub. When she passed out, her weight slid the belt out from the top of the door and she hit the tub on the way down. The doctor called the bump on her head a "hematoma," which seems very dramatic, however technically correct. The doctor also called her lucky.

Once you tell a doctor you've attempted suicide, the doctor has a legal obligation to call in a psych specialist. In our case, they let us go home to wait for the counselor, so long as we each promised the doctor that we would be there to answer the door. We didn't promise to answer the door, but it was implied.

The dog has been troubled since the original crash of head-on-tub. After the first fight we came down to garbage strewn across the kitchen. The vacuum has been a point of contention. I am not looking forward to the barking once the counselor arrives.

We have a reservation at a vegan place downtown for her mother's birthday later today. She does not want to know how close she was to never being happy on her birthday again. If they take her to an inpatient facility, I will not be able to keep her mother from the bad news.

A wife who loses her husband is called a widow, and a child who loses her parents is called an orphan. There is no name for a parent who loses a child.

I leave it up to you to decide how guilty I should feel. I want it out of my hands. We've had four drinks before without event, but last night included a screaming match. Now, I did not instigate the fight, but I can be so cruel. There is no limit to how low I will stoop in order to win an argument, and boy did I stoop. Let me complicate things further by telling you about her chronic pain disease. No doctor has taken it seriously in the last five years. There is always something to be done. If I loved her as much as I say I do,

wouldn't I go to medical school and become a brilliant doctor and develop a cure?

Maybe we should all feel guilty all the time that we haven't fixed the world already. Forgive me the sentimentalism; the woman I love tried to hang herself with my belt. What is there to do but feel responsible?

This whole time, I've been cleaning the same plate. In here, the story, time moves the way time moves inside a brain. Almost instantly. In the time it's taken me to clean this plate, she's finished dusting the blinds and has moved onto disinfecting the banister. If I didn't know any better I would think she is trying to impress the counselor, whose name is Stuart if his voicemail is to be believed.



Chronically Ill but Still Groovy

EMILY BOURNE

Up North

JOSEFINE STARGARDT

poetry

There were cows outside,
rubbing their muzzles
against each other's necks,
breathing steam and gazing at the car.
She had parked by the side of the road,
turned in her seat and spoken about authenticity,
about living life authentic to oneself.
My eyes roved the car,
touched the windshield, the dashboard,
her hand resting on the steering wheel.
I held my own hand, reminding myself of my body—
knuckles, bones and layers of skin,
a stomach curling in on itself.
Fear pushed my diaphragm upward
against my lungs; my mind ripped itself to shreds.
I was taking up too much space,
I needed to be less, to be almost nothing,
a shallow sip of breath fogging up the window
of a car up on some hill—

she reached out her hand, let it rest on my forearm,
a crooked curve of warmth,
she held me together with her touch.
Are you coping? she asked.
Ahead, the road sped downward, dipped
toward the town whose houses always clung so tightly to their
roofs.

Vincent's

MEGAN MURPHY

fiction

THE GALLERY OPENED on a perfectly ordinary street corner on a perfectly ordinary night, wedged between a barber shop with a faded, pinstripe sign that had lost all of its color and a bakery that was really just a counter with deflated soufflés on display in a smudged glass case. The Gallery was something bright and altogether unexpected. The space was really just one room divided by a single piece of drywall. Buzzing fluorescent lights swung precariously from the ceiling, illuminating the shiny, paneled wood floors. The walls were stark white, the kind of clinical shade particular to hospitals and art museums. A few paintings slouched on them, but none that demanded attention. The dead bolt, a sliver of gold against the peeling black paint of the doorframe, invited the curious to come closer. The sign above the door said "Vincent's." A piece of paper taped to the door read "Come in!" in loopy, broad Sharpie letters.

You will find this place eventually. But not yet. Be patient.

WEST WOULD NOT SAY he was an artist, if you were to ask him his profession. He would tell you that he was a student, a chronic consumer of caffeine trying to do something meaningful in the world. He worked in a pet store

uptown, which mostly meant he spent his days stacking bags of dog food on unstable shelves and helping stressed-out moms buy fish for their kids.

West would tell you that he was not an artist, and this would be a lie.

The thing about lying, West knew, was that there were a few different kinds: the lies you told other people and the lies that you told yourself.

He found the Gallery coming home after closing up the pet store. Well, *home* was a tricky word. West lived in a small apartment with two bedrooms, the tiniest toilet, and a constantly stoned roommate. It was not home. West was still looking for one of those.

He was walking back to his apartment when he passed the Gallery. He noticed the sign first, which is also undoubtedly the first thing you will notice, too. The letters flashed sharp and bright, the color of sunflower petals; the writing was a bit sloppy, but not in a pretentious way. West read the sign on the door. Peered in the windows. Saw the white walls, the wood floor. Looked at the gold dead bolt. Then he sighed, whispered a choice cuss word under his breath, and stepped inside.

Nothing dramatic happened when he opened the door, which was part of the Gallery's charm. It simply *was*. West looked at the white walls and the crooked rendition of *Starry Night* hanging in the back. The Gallery looked back. Breathed.

West wandered through the space for a while, running his fingers along the walls, testing the floorboards with his boots. In the back of the Gallery, by the far wall, West found three gallons of paint. One blue, one black, one red. A note, written on old newspaper, fluttered on top of the blue paint can. The print from the newspaper faded to little more than the faint impression of red and black ink, so the Sharpie-written note stood out clearly:

What do you feel?

West stared at the note and the paint for a long time, lying, lying, lying. If he were an artist, he might have dipped his fingers into the paint. He might have stuck his arms in the color up to his elbows: one arm in the blue, one in the red.

But West was lying to himself. He did none of those things. He stared at the paint and the canvas of the white wall. He breathed in and out. The Gallery waited.

Finally, West poked the red paint with the tip of his right index finger. He didn't smear it on the wall. He held it up in the buzzing fluorescent light and looked at the paint. The Gallery waited.

TESSA, ALTHOUGH YOU MIGHT call her Tess when you meet her (most people do), was an artist. She had a degree in the damn thing. She made her money off commissions and painting and the digital art she posted and sold on her website.

She learned the definition of the word *burnout* last week but still needed to work.

Tessa found the Gallery while walking away from work: away from her apartment and her home and her girlfriend cooking dinner and their adorable Great Dane named Munchkin. Tessa wasn't looking for art, and she wasn't lying about who she was to anyone.

She just wanted to *feel* something.

Growing up, Tess drew fairies hiding in tree trunks, their wings all dewy like butterflies. She always colored with the boldest, brightest markers. Somewhere along the way she'd lost the color. It had been a long time—longer than she could remember—since she'd drawn something for herself. She'd stopped doodling in the margins of her notebooks. Tess missed *that* kind of art: the sacred, personal kind that rooted in her belly, that wrapped warm fingers around her rib cage and hung on her bones like laughter.

Art had become gray and mundane and tedious. When Tess drew now, her pencils scraped blank pages, grasped at empty air. Then she found the Gallery.

She knew this street's particular character—its quiet edges and loud, quirky shops. She walked this way quite often for the cheapest coffee place in the city, so the Gallery was not exactly a surprise. But it did make her pause.

Vincent's shouted at her with its bright yellow cursive, and because Tessa was an artist, she thought, *Van Gogh?*, and went inside.

The white walls of the space overwhelmed Tessa, at first. She wandered for a few minutes, straightened the crooked *Starry Night* painting, spun in a circle with her arms out under the glaring lights and thought, *Hello, hello, hello*. The Gallery sang back a greeting in the creaking of the floorboards.

Eventually, Tessa found the wilting sunflowers near the back. They sat in a clear round vase full of browning water that vaguely resembled a fishbowl. She straightened their slumped stems. She pulled a pencil from her pocket and sketched an outline of the sunflowers. When she touched the dull edge of the pencil to the wall, something shivered inside her, lifted its head. Heat tickled her stomach. She made something faint and barely noticeable, but something true.

POPPY WANTED, quite desperately, to be happy. She was writing a paper on mental health and the dangerous trope of the tortured artist and she was finding the whole thing frighteningly relatable and depressing. She'd never really understood the trope, to be honest. She couldn't create when she felt this way. There was no relief in it. School was hard and life was hard and paying rent was hard and waking up was hard. She wrote down lists of good things in her journal, because her therapist said that would help. She'd already written two things the day she found the Gallery: that her train arrived on time and that she saw a dog. She would add a third later, and it wouldn't fix anything, but it would help a little.

The streetlights started to wake up along the mostly deserted street when Poppy found the Gallery. Warm light stretched out along the crack in the half-open black door, a welcome change from the dull, brown-orange flicker of lampposts and faded sunsets that usually illuminated her walk.

She stepped inside because she wasn't doing anything else and the sign on the door said she should. Poppy noticed the yellow paint first: something new for the Gallery's visitors. The single can of open paint sat in the center

of the room with a brush sticking out. The note beside it, scrawled on old newspaper, the edges yellow and faded, read, *Do not eat*.

Poppy laughed. It felt good to laugh in that space, where everything was open and echoing. This was a blank canvas of a room. She dipped her fingers into the yellow paint and splashed a little on the walls, dotted a pencil sketch of sunflowers with color.

She would write down later, in her journal, that happiness didn't come very often. Not for a long time, anyway. There were moments, though, where she could surface. Moments where there was a quick burst of color. Moments where she could laugh without choking. This was one of them.

YOU WILL FIND the Gallery on an ordinary night under very ordinary circumstances. You'll be there, sharing space with the ghosts of old paintings and crooked picture frames and white canvas walls begging to be colored with something new. You'll be there, and you'll think of dipping your fingers into paint. You'll write down in your journal that this is what art is, what love is: an open space where the walls are white and the air smells faintly of sunflowers.

Keep the Pips

JOSHUA CLAYTON

poetry

If I were brave enough to dream of being held it'd be in the arms of somebody who keeps me still but sways me like a sleek steel sieve, as if my solid whole could lie across the diamond-slatted wires, a bottomless bowl above the sky—and every unwanted wisp of me could slip into a waiting dish. One of those roomy yellow ramekins my mother keeps over from her favourite lemon posset pots, perhaps, or a drip tray, you know (candle-warm and glossy-black), or a flower bed that somehow thrives on my worst, my left-behind, my effluvia, my shavings, my sawdust, my zest. Or what if I could have been a drizzle veining through her favourite cake, or the marbling on her kitchen countertops, that silver slate pricked all over with purple stars. Or what if I could be one of those *stars*. Every year I buy her the same Sicilian chocolates from the same place in town, and every year she finds it freshly notable that I've remembered. As if I hadn't always remembered, as if buying those chocolates isn't the best part of Christmas, the one choice I know to be right. As if one day I would stop remembering, long after the shop doesn't make them anymore, long after there is nobody to buy them for. You know today I bought a slab of fancy lemon fudge on the central parade of the city she grew up in, where I now live and she no longer lives—she's alive, don't get me wrong—because I knew it's the flavour she'd have chosen. I queued up like a tourist and I ate it all alone, and now my teeth are singing in pain.

Spores

JOSHUA CLAYTON

poetry

I'm hearing drills and it's midnight.
When I feel like flattening something

I clear space on the floor and press
my whole front down. I have nobody

to confess to that under my belly here
was where I knocked and spilled six cups

of blackest red, three cups of black-
laced rum. This wood has done so well

to swallow my secrets: I would kiss it
thank you but I've forgotten how. I sleep

with my lips splayed open so I can skim
and chew the wet dead skin in the morning.

My tongue is grayer than a winter pelt.
Somehow the mantle candles have spread

cherry wax over the wall like a sneeze,
a ring of rose rust, a hardy sea spray

of blood flung from my nails. Most days
I scratch myself in fits. The blood has no

taste, but once I'm done I arrange my body
the best for my mouth to get at the wounds.



Do Shadows Take Up Space

MELISSA NEWCITY

Pinch and Pull and Look Away

MICHAEL COLBERT
creative nonfiction

IT STARTS ON THE SCALE. Except it doesn't, because something else got you to step on the scale. It started a while ago.

You've never been good at sports, but you've always worked out. Your older sister has good workout ideas. When she's home from college for vacations or long weekends, she asks if you want to go to the gym or the high school track to do a circuit workout. Boston Sports Club in town is nice. It's on the third floor of the building, three long flights of stairs up, so you feel like you're getting a good workout before you even start.

When you go to the gym, you see people from high school. Except they're not your friends, and you don't ever acknowledge that you know each other. They're athletes; you're not. You feel proud that you're in the gym too, working out, running longer than they do, but you also know you're not going to bench because you'd make yourself look dumb.

You're on the scale again, and you're not seeing any changes. You think back to when you were little. Every year you dreaded the annual physical. You were told to eat healthier. When the doctor asked you about sports you played and foods you ate, you always lied a bit. Yes, you ate veggies and really didn't eat that much crap and you didn't know why you weighed what you did.

Which, objectively, isn't that much more than you should weigh, but you feel the weight add and add. You pinch and pull skin during dinner with friends. You clench glutes and abs and suck on the inside of your cheeks during class to keep working at it, working away at your body. You decide in college to get more serious because it's when you're supposed to be in your prime, and you want to look like it. You get into swimming laps at 7 a.m. before class. You start getting good, but you stop once the team starts practicing and you're embarrassed to share a pool with them, to hop in with love handles and bigger thighs and no good arm muscles to carry you through ungraceful breaststrokes and forward crawls.

You've always liked running, and that's good. When you run with your friend on the cross-country team, he remarks that it's nice to take a break some days and slow down. You're red in the face and have run farther than you have in months.

You go up and down. You only have a scale at your parents' house, so when you're home for breaks, it's either a little victory or defeat. A defeat that won't be helped by favorite meals made by Mom. The summer is worse because the scale is there every day.

Senior year is a low point. Working out doesn't help. You can't get comfortable in your jeans, your T-shirts, your button-downs. You pull them from your body in class and at work. One day, a friend pokes your bulky sweater, *looking thick*. You go for a run and swear off dining hall desserts.

When you graduate, you move away, far away, and start eating differently. Your shorts fall lower on your hips; shirts billow from your chest and shrinking stomach. You buy new clothes. Layers of skin fall away from you. When you're at your parents' you see that those layers are forty pounds. You feel good about it, but you start to feel scared. People are talking about your body. They're looking

at you and saying what they want. They're compliments, in a way. *Don't lose more or it'll be concerning. Wow, you look great.*

And you think so, too; you can feel it in the smaller sizes you now have to buy. But you realize that the eyes have been on you all along. When you look at pictures from college, you feel good about the change but squirm at who you were. When you're not at home anymore, you start to worry. Is it getting to be too much? But you also feel bad when you eat dessert or skip the gym. You wonder about tattoos or a new haircut so people have something else to comment on.

When you move back home, you feel the eyes on you, and you know they'll be there if your body changes again. You'll know it in the things people won't say.

The Hanged Man

ANNIE BLAKE

fiction

for Annie Rose

i hung things with pegs on a line inside the house / linen / then skins / then bodies / my face
spirals red and hot like a stove element because / my real self transpires with my ego /

*

i heard a dog barking like men in the army do / the way my mom and my husband used to /
it sounded like a ghost /

*

a wax doll / a woman with scored skin like a candle / was stuck in his beard like a web / he is
meticulously trimmed / she burns in his straw like a sacrificial offering /

*

he didn't understand that i didn't want to be part of anyone else / i just didn't want to be part
of him /

*

if i sleep more than eight or nine hours i start getting hot and roll around like a rotisserie
chicken /

*

ant legs / shifting in the dunes of deserts / ants / arimasps who rolled gold

from the ground of india / to unstick the hem of the dawn / ants are resourceful / enough to
roll up the sun from the grains / here / human legs are bought by the pound / legs in the sand
/ skewers devoid of meats and capsicum / and onion / barbecue tongs unable to grip sand /
writhing and writing messages on the shore / twisting / rotating / attempting to walk on feet /
on soles / i'm turning meat in a hot frying pan / some cuts of meat are more expensive than
gold / i'm cold even in the warm colors of the sand /

*

he inched toward me / *you know what i want* / i felt lustful /
so i stepped back into the icebox /

*

antarctica is a desert / frozen and white / not like weddings or daisies / in a celtic legend /
spirits grow the field with daisies when a child dies / the day's eye / disc and ray floret /
it is one and it is two / and a morning wedding ring /

*

preceding the ceremony / a layered wedding cake i refuse to walk around my house with / i
have noticed that i love summer more in the winter than when i'm swimming in it / i leave
the cake near the front door / the layers collapse / i still need to peel carrots and darn socks /
the host of the ceremony covers the layers with tissue paper

and inserts them in fine paper bags, for they are a special gift for me / the floor of the cake
is a subterranean roof /

*

the girl got scared of her bear shadow / she could smell cum on his skin / she thought he was
a man but even my most filigree spell wasn't enough to save her from breathing in the well / i
sat on the step but it crumbled beneath me / i was on concrete words again /

*

i remember my childhood room / my neighbor / i could see her through the window / she
always kept the blinds down except on rare occasions when she got up at five in the morning
to prepare to go to work / there was a girl in her / the girl moved like scenes in a movie / she
dyed her hair again / peroxide blonde / she was almost unrecognizable / and our fathers were
the same / the window is my mirror / he pulled down my eyelids because he could see

that she was about to hang / in her mother / while she was stacking last night's unclean
dishes /

*

the father was crying for her / he called her a harvest or a gathering / listening to this call
was the most difficult bird to swallow / then i was the father and i had my charge next to me /
the boy / i wondered if he would ever become a man / should i call for a siren or a healer /
or should i leave the boy unhang from my strings /

*

i don't understand why i can't climb onto a step or over a wooden table / mothers are tables
because they grow from the earth / the island of madeira was a forest and that is the material
i'm made of / materia / mater / with pitchers of milk / we are not a tabula rasa / there are
shadows who walk around with me / i don't know how to persist if the window keeps shifting
/ it slips and slides like a snake / canopy feeding of the black heron / i have lived long enough
to know we all lull the fish to our beaks /

*

the wagon feeds the barn with wheat / i open a door for a crosswind / beat wheat against
the granary board / the grains are payment for my debts / for being a woman in my house / i
wear perforated veils for awns can stick in my eye / chaff is carried away because it's futile /
wind winnowing / chaff and mot / mote in her eye / a beam in mine /

*

wool scarves are more warming around necks than ropes / the neck / in medias res /
because the admixture is more profound than the heart or the head / an old man approached
me when i was feeding my child / i fed her cottage cheese and eden's apple / he was proud of
me and gave her a silver spoon /

*

in the snow / one horse open sleigh or a convertible car / in the '60s thunderbirds
looked like rockets / riding in a roofless car or a bus / is traversing the world and through
all its people / the collective unconscious is open to the sky / it was christmastime /
for the first time i received handwritten letters in my mailbox / bells on bobtails ring / to
avoid tangling the rope / i tie rope and guide the horse / to reign over my drive or spirit /

sometimes reins / bobtails cannot swish or swat /

*

i carve more than one world above my children's beds and hang them from the sky like
birdhouses / it's how i bless them / giving them a home to return to when they're afraid
in their dreams / birdcages enclose those who cannot carry their wings / they constantly need
people because they don't realize they require their own integration / birdcages / i'm under the
ground / night roots poke through / their fingernails shine like a million guiding stars /
crib mobile and a revolution /

*

i'm driving the grey pigeons up / a dawn like rising bread / the way the bodies of children
grow / fire blackening the early trees / curdled clouds / sour milk is all i have left / seemingly
static holocaust / fresh bread loaves instead of clouds / manna / my daughter said when i
surrounded her with my arms / she felt as warm as oven bread / skeleton television aerials /
charred / how the underneath is blue / forging of the sea /

*

coniunctio / augmentum plumbi / the expression of agency and surrender to survive
the great birth / poetry is my recovery /

*

when i wake in the morning dark / i walk down the stairs and when on the floor i feel
for another step /

*

i was in silver water or it was above me / a tree inside which i was inside / its crown
made of childhood summer leaves and branches / the higher part of me that could feel /
transpired and reached out to breathe / the crying out of my helicon / coiled silver spring /
the binding and pulling out of crocodiles from the ground /

*

i lie down under a thatched roof / the spring is here and the grass is still green / i'm
polymorphous / i fly away / an oreb eating from the sins of the deluge / then to save elijah /
rwti and the golden sun / and aker /

*

ANNIE BLAKE

when i hang upside down on my child's playground / the world is new /

*

the other day my husband of twenty years surrounded me in his arms / i sighed as usual /

why do you always push me away / because i don't want anyone to touch me / i have too

much in my head / he didn't get angry / i was surprised he said / i'm scared you don't love me

/ i'm scared i'm going to lose you / i continued the conversation like i was acting in a play or

a movie / sometimes i see things you don't and it scares me /

*

he leaned in close / *how do you know you'll ever love me /*

*

i don't / extrapolation /

faith /

THE END

Hang Her Washing Outside

ELIZABETH HORNER TURNER
poetry

A ghost worries her out to an Appalachian cabin

with a pine wraparound porch. Pitch

sticks her fingers together, presses her tongue to the roof of her mouth.

What do you want? stays stuck inside her throat, but she pushes

against the door until it gives way.

Over and over and over, this dream, until even when she wakes

the ghost rests in her skirts, a pair of red boots,

under her mother's old sweater.

She knows the movies where someone else comes back to do the saving—

the strong pair of arms pulling up or out—

then they always become lovers. But not this.

She doesn't get the candlelit hair-washing or the wooing

by debt-clearing superheroes (save that one Triple-A man

with a knack for finding keys).

In her windowed corner, there's always the empty chair.

Every dust bunny's been cleaned out by her fingernail;

every word scratched in linoleum by her hand on the ice pick.

She knows she's got to remember this herself:

breathe, then write it down;

wash out her clothes and find something that's not sharp but round.

School Paper Headlines

PAUL DICKERSON
creative nonfiction

FIFTH GRADER DISSOCIATES at recess. Good at geometry. Walks in circles while the boys play football, girls play on the playground. Same speed, same circumference, same direction. *Anywhere but here. Anywhere but here.*

Fifth grader washes dead skin like cobwebs from his palms until it burns. It burns. The germs don't like the friction, the solitude. Fifth grader eats lunch at the boys' table. He is afraid to talk to the other boys, but his hands are clean.

Fifth grader digs headspace into his arms, cries. Clandestine tears. He cries in class while his teacher demonstrates long division. He cries like he brushes his teeth. It just seems like something he's supposed to do. It keeps him warm.

Fifth grader responds to short answer homework question—"Why did the worm lie to the bird?" He writes a series of short answers on the topic. So many possibilities. His answers intrude on the spaces provided for the next four questions. His words wrap around the corners of the page. His words move like recess. Circles. Not enough room. Never enough room. Never enough. When will it be?

Fifth grader checks windows for dark clouds. On the school bus. At the assembly. In the science lab. Negotiating with the sky. Scared of thunder. His brain—a balloon filled with too much airwaterblood. His life—a series of checks. His checks—a series of re-checks.

Fifth grader has more interests than hiding from people (he swears with his deformed pinky).

Fifth grader loves Hot Cheetos, and root beer, and PlayStation, and basketball in the driveway, and the Loch Ness Monster, and the dreamy class president, and the fat cat with the lawnmower purrs who falls asleep in his lap, and big trampolines, and the potato bugs sleeping under rocks at the reservoir.

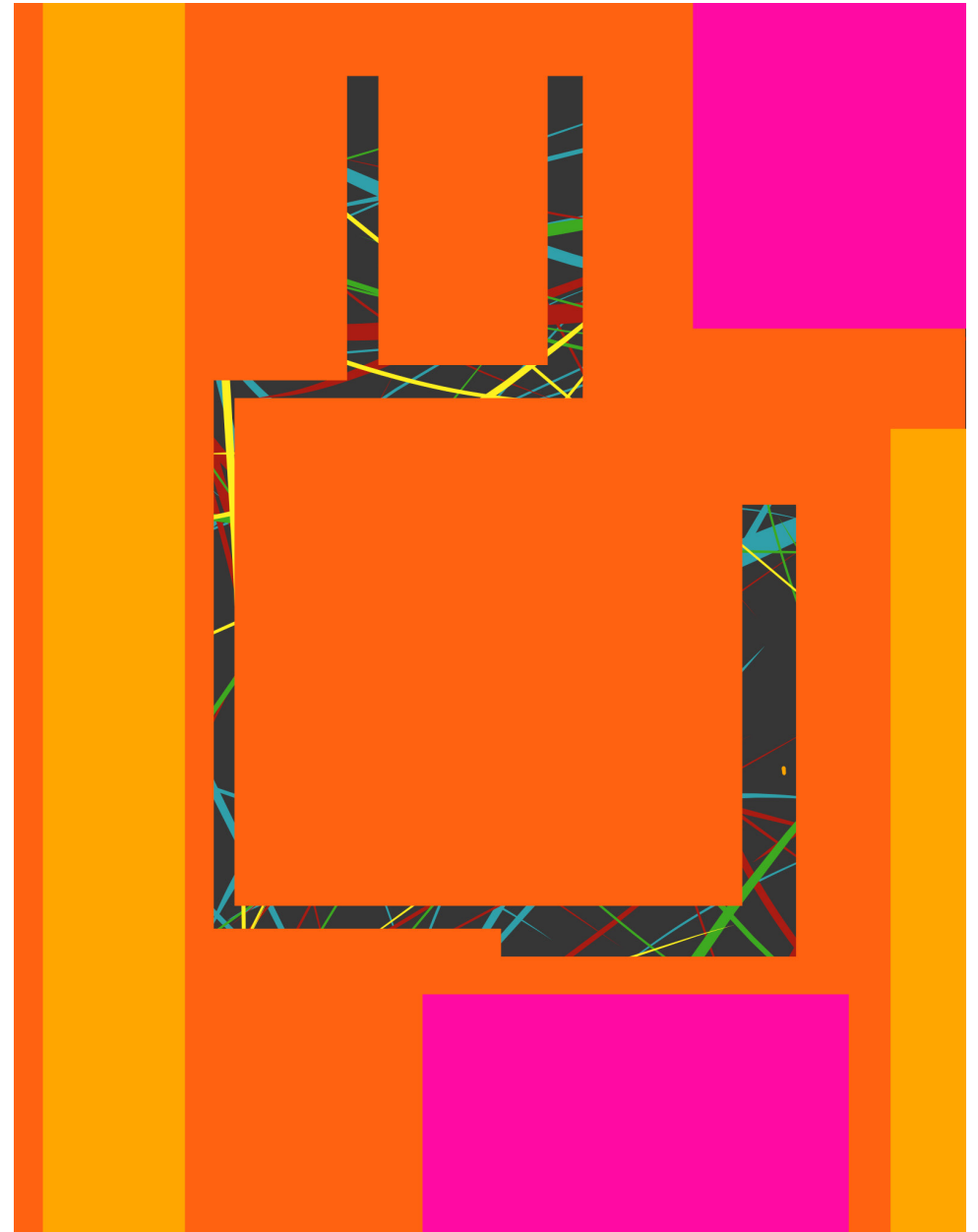
Fifth grader wants the other kids to know things about him, to know even just one thing about him.

Fifth grader opens his mouth to speak, but prefers looking up, counting the tiles on the ceiling. One day he'll learn to talk to the numberless world in front of him.

Chicago at One Hundred Degrees

DIANE CALLAHAN
poetry

Tell me the heat don't bother you,
tell me the sun don't dare
touch you 'cause it got nothing
on the swelter of skin
fighting for its right
to exist on this goddamn crusty planet—
and when the heat wave
kisses you, it only takes a little
blood, till the cold rush comes
picking through you and slakes
the earth with beads of wet,
steam dancing off the pavement.
Tell me even the rain don't cool you,
tell me you burn white-hot at your core.



A Hopeful Day
EDWARD LEE

CONTRIBUTORS

ANNIE BLAKE (BTeach, GDipEd) is a divergent thinker, a wife, and a mother of five children. She commenced school as an EAL student and was raised and continues to live in a multicultural and industrial location in the west of Melbourne. She enjoys experimenting with Blanco's symmetrical and asymmetrical logic to explore consciousness and the surreal and phantasmagorical nature of unconscious material. Her work is best understood when interpreted like dreams. She is an advocate of autopschoanalysis and a member of the C.G. Jung Society of Melbourne, Australia. You can visit her on annieblakethegatherer.blogspot.com.au and <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009445206990>.

EMILY BOURNE is a 19-year-old artist, freelance writer, and activist from London. Her love for creating things to make the world a little bit brighter is what motivates her to keep making and questing toward different things. She is currently an editor and writer for *Risen Magazine* and an assistant at *Able Magazine*. She is also doing activism work on her Instagram, @floteren. Her never-slow-down attitude awarded her an A in A-Level Fine Art, despite her struggle with fibromyalgia. Her disability weighs her down sometimes, but she gets by. Despite it, she will never stop creating. Some of her favorite accomplishments are having her art exhibited in Sonder in New York and having many articles published in magazines all over the place. Emily is currently working as a freelance writer and is always looking for new opportunities! Email her, emy.bourne@gmail.com, to get in touch!

DIANE CALLAHAN strives to capture her sliver of the universe through writing poetry, nonfiction, and fantasy. As a developmental editor and ghost-plotter, she spends her days shaping stories. Her work has appeared in *Short Édition*, *Riddled with Arrows*, *The Sunlight Press*, and *Rust + Moth*, among others.

MICHAEL COLBERT loves horror films (his favorites are *Candyman* and *Get Out*) and coffee (his favorites are Ethiopian and Costa Rican). His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in such magazines as *Avidly*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Kyoto Journal*. Currently, he is pursuing an MFA in fiction at the University of North Carolina Wilmington.

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EDWARD LEE is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, 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, Lewis Milne, Orson Carroll, Blinded Architect, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His blog/website can be found at edwardmlee.wordpress.com.

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MELISSA NEWCITY is from Savannah, Georgia and currently lives in Wilmington, North Carolina. Her work has been published in *Atlantis*, *Collision Literary Magazine*, and *Underground*. Currently, she is diligently working on a collection of illustrated poetry. You can follow her work on her Instagram, @newcitym.

SUZANNE OLIVANTE is a multidisciplinary visual artist and writer based in England. Her artwork has been exhibited in galleries, and her poetry has been placed in competitions, short-listed for awards, and published in anthologies. Her most recent publications include poetry for *The Head That Wears a Crown* by The Emma Press, plus poetry and illustrations for *Battalion* by Sidekick Books. *Inside* is a 3-D mixed-media artwork. Components include graphite pencil, homemade rust, wire, sawdust, sand, and photography.

JOSEFINE STARGARDT is a bilingual poet based in Germany and the UK. She is currently completing a BA in English at Leipzig University. Her work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Homology Lit*, *Honey & Lime*, *The*

Cardiff Review, and several anthologies. In her spare time, she sells ice cream and works on her image as a cat lady.

ELIZABETH HORNER TURNER’s poems can be or have been found in *Cutbank*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *H_NGM_N*, and *Nightjar Review*, among others. Her chapbook, *The Tales of Flaxie Char*, was published through dancing girl press. She’s been awarded a Tennessee Williams Scholarship to attend the Sewanee Writers’ Conference, and was selected as a Poetry Scholar for the Tin House Writer’s Workshop. She lives in San Francisco, and tweets (sometimes) at @lhornert.

DANIYEL WIGGINS is a Native American writer currently living in central California. While his primary focus is poetry, he explores many genres including novels, short stories, and nonfiction. He is currently studying English literature and creative writing.

