

# metafore



Winter 2017

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# WAKING UP AT THE FAIR

Christina Clover

I didn't expect to find you at the fairground – after all, rabbits don't like noise – but when I walked through the gates, something about the air alerted me to you. The smell of your skin filled my nostrils, and images of you – your jaw, your breasts, your stomach – flashed through my mind.

These animals had been tricked into thinking that this was the most they could ever expect from their lives. The reindeer couldn't want me on his back, but I rode him anyway.

The fair was just waking up. Men and women in jeans and oil-stained tee shirts ambled around the site, making small talk with each other as they pulled up the shutters of rides and food stalls. The ghost train was the first to open: a monster with glowing eyes painted on the outside. Three cars

were lined up on the tracks, little bulbs lighting up and dimming in canon, waiting.

I passed the big wheel and the waltzer and headed for the carousel. Predictably, it wasn't running yet. I sat on a bench opposite and scanned the ride. The usual array of intricately decorated horses filled most of the platform, punctuated with some more unusual animals: a goat, a tiger, a reindeer, and more, all held in place with floor-to-ceiling golden poles.

One of the oily-clothed men ambled over, with a slight limp. He looked about sixty and well-tanned as if he'd spent every day of his life outside. Putting his good leg forwards, he

“Don't you be thinking this is cruel,” he said. “Those animals are lucky. They've got a home for life.”

negotiated the steps to the carousel and entered the box in the middle. He fiddled with some controls, and the traditional organ music crept into action.

I approached the ride, deciding between the grey horse or the reindeer. The man emerged from the box.

“Another ten minutes,” he said.

He moved between the animals, running his hand over a couple of them, tugging at the poles, and glancing up at the ceiling to check the attachments.

“Is it old?” I said.

He frowned at something on a black horse's neck, then rubbed it with his hand. “Some of them are,” he said.

He grimaced as he made his way down the steps, the trace of sweat on his forehead, then leant on the railings between the carousel and the rest of the fair. Presumably, the railings were to prevent people climbing onto the carousel without paying, though that seemed absurd on a such a quiet day.

“Are they all different ages, then?” I continued.

He adjusted the belt of his trousers, pulling them higher. “I picked up the tiger about ten years ago,” he said. “We were in a small town in Scotland, and a local zoo was closing down.”

“A zoo?”

“You didn’t think I went to China to get him, did you?”

“I suppose not.”

“That one at the edge, there,” he said, gesturing towards a large green and silver chicken. Its head was bent forwards as if looking for crumbs on the ground. “I bought her cheap at the market. Doesn’t lay anymore, and too old for meat.”

“She used to lay eggs?” I said.

He nodded. “No chicken does forever, though.”

I approached the reindeer and smoothed my hand down his neck. On closer inspection, I could see the individual hairs of his coat. It felt much warmer than I’d been expecting too, but it was smooth and hard, as though covered in dried glue.

I looked around at the animals. It was true that they seemed to have more life-like poses than other carousel animals I had seen. The red-brown reindeer’s legs were in a trotting pose, but his body appeared still as if his legs had been arranged for him. He had one antler longer than the other.

“What about the reindeer?” I said.

“Before my time,” the man said. “Bill, the guy who owns the fair, got him. Poor creature had fallen into a quarry, so Bill climbed in and rescued him.”

“How is putting him on a carousel, rescuing him?” I said.

For the first time since we started the conversation, the man looked me in the eye. “Don’t you be thinking this is cruel,” he said. “Those animals are lucky. They’ve got a home for life.”

I tried to keep my face as open as possible. “Why are they so still?”

He pursed his lips: the facial equivalent of a shrug. “They think they’re paralysed.”

“They think?” I asked. “But they’re not, actually?”

“Well, yeah, they are. Just not physically.”

I heard voices behind me: a woman and a small boy were approaching.

The man straightened up and looked at his watch. “You can get on now.” Then he turned to the new customers. “Hello madam, sir,” he said. “Coming on? Only a pound each.”

He held open the metal gate in the railings, and the two of them stepped through. I followed, handing him a pound coin, and climbed up onto the carousel. I heard the gate close behind me. I approached the reindeer and smoothed my hand down his neck. On closer inspection, I could see the individual hairs of his coat. It felt much warmer than I’d been expecting too, but it was smooth and hard, as though covered in dried glue.

Behind me, the woman and boy sat side by side, on a leopard and a black horse, respectively. Heading back to the control box, the man paused next to me.

He rested his hand on the crest of the reindeer’s neck. “Notice his antler? That happened when he fell into the quarry. Never did grow back.”

I stepped onto the metal foothold and swung my leg over the reindeer. I lowered my weight onto his back more carefully than I usually would.

The man switched a lever, and the carousel came to life. The tiger was in front of me; did I really see him tense his spine?

The reindeer moved forwards and upwards, with a slight jolt, then slowly back down again.

I leant around the pole and towards his head. "Are you really in there?" I whispered. There was no response, of course, but I swear I saw his left ear, the one furthest from the organ, twitch.

To the side, the park was quiet, just rousing, even though it was midday. A dark-haired woman walked her two collies along the path that ran through the trees. As the reindeer loped around to the other side of the carousel, we were back in the fair again.

The tea cup ride was the only other ride in full flow. Three little girls sat in one teacup, shrieking and laughing as it rotated its way round the circuit. The young woman running the ride stood with her weight on one leg, smoking a cigarette. She idly pushed their cup as it went past her, making it turn. The children screeched again.

I settled into the rhythm: up and down, round and round. The music droned on as the animals did. I adjusted my position so that I could see the reindeer's eye, but it gave nothing away. These animals had been tricked into thinking that this was the most they could ever expect from their lives. The reindeer couldn't want me on his back, but I rode him anyway.

I sat back and rested my hands around the golden pole. It occurred to me that you had been here already. The fair may have, in fact, been one of your first ports of call. I could imagine you finding this carousel, and understanding what it meant. You would have headed straight to Bill's office and banged on his door, begging for him to let you join. Then, there you would be, frozen like ice on the wooden platform, in among the animals.

I rode on the carousel eleven times that day, trying a different animal each time, thinking that on that turn, they would take me to you. But when I stumbled out of the fairground and vomited into a bin, I knew that you'd been there, every single time.

BIO:

Christina is currently working towards her PhD in Creative Writing, titled: Magical Realism in Lesbian Fiction. She completed both her BA and MA degrees in Creative Writing, at Bath Spa University, both of which specialised in fiction. Christina is a LAMBDA literary fellow and has had short stories featured in several publications. She has completed her first novel, Seahorses, and is now working on her second. She lives in South Devon, UK, with her fiancé and daughter.

# BEYOND

Christine Grant

Piers scanned the sky, as he did every day, looking for the light that his mother had sought for the last six years of her life. Today there was no thinning or brightness, no sign that anything lay beyond the layer of steel-grey cloud visible between the high buildings.

He pulled up the collar of his coat and walked rapidly in the direction of the Beyond the Mountains Bakery. He had recently discovered that they made the best *tama* bread in Vanastadt. *Tama* was their staple food. They ate it boiled, mashed, fried and baked, and it was worth a long walk in his lunch hour to buy a bread which didn't taste bland.

Just because we don't know what's there, doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.

The bakery was tucked under stone arches in the old part of the town. "A cold day today," the baker said as he handed over Piers' order. His skin was so black that it shone as if it was polished.

Piers was unable to resist sniffing the warm paper package printed with the bakery's logo. "Beyond the Mountains. Such a lovely name. What a pity there is nothing beyond them."

"My people come from beyond the mountains," the baker said with dignity.

“That’s a beautiful legend,” Piers said. “But it can’t be true. No-one can cross the mountains.”

The baker took out a pen and paper and leant it on the counter. “Here is Vanastadt.” He drew a small circle. “And here are the fields, and the mountains.” He traced a jagged line around the city and the surrounding land. “There is no gap in these mountains. They are so high and steep that no-one can cross them. They represent the limit of our world. We can’t definitely know anything beyond these mountains. However,” he placed his finger on the white paper beyond the jagged line, “Just because we don’t know what’s there, doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist.”

As he walked back to work munching his roll, Piers thought about the mountains. If he would never be able to cross them, did it make any difference whether he believed that there was anything beyond?

His friend Jürg didn’t worry about such things. They worked in the same lab at the Ministry of Agriculture, grinding up samples of grain and adding a chemical indicator to test for pesticides. While Piers was waiting for his indicator to change colour, he felt something sting the back of his neck and looked round in time to catch Jürg’s grin. The screwed-up ball of paper which had fallen on the table beside him said, “What about a drink after band practice tonight? J.”

It wasn’t the best band practice. Piers was thinking about a strange flute he had seen when he was a boy. He had got lost in the warren of streets behind the Kornhaus and wandered into an antique shop to ask his way. Behind coal scuttles and grimy prints of the Vana bridge

and Parliament buildings, he found a corner crammed with wonders: a telescope which formed changing geometric patterns when he turned a knob, a prism which split light into rainbow colours and a little box which played music when he wound it up. Best of all was a flute carved out of a strange, honey-coloured wood.

I told him that I would never have that kind of money, and he said that it was too valuable to be bought and sold, but perhaps it could be lent or given away when the time is right.

He thought of the flute and the soft, breathy sound it had made, longer here, shorter there, and forgot to keep up with the vigorous marching tune they were playing. The bandmaster paced up and

down the ranks, staring at each of them in turn. He stopped beside Piers and rapped him on the knee with his baton. "Piers Andersson, you are not keeping time."

Afterwards, in a bar in one of the cellars in the old town, Piers asked Jürg, "Why do we all play exactly the same note at the same time?"

"It doesn't work any other way," Jürg said, taking a swig of *beko*, the drink made from fermented tama grain. "You were out of time tonight. You almost put me off."

"I wasn't concentrating. I was remembering a flute I saw in an antique shop when I was a boy. It made a lovely soft sound, you couldn't have played marching tunes with it, and it was made of wood as light as your hair. Have you ever seen anything like that?"

Jürg shook his head.

Piers rapped his fist against the dark, lacquered boards of the tabletop. "All the wood in Vanastadt is like this, almost black. How can you get a light-coloured wood?"

"Someone painted it," Jürg said.

Piers shook his head, "It wasn't painted. I've been wondering about it for years. It must have come from a place where a different kind of tree grows. Maybe from beyond the mountains."

"Not possible," Jürg said. "I think that you dreamt this flute."

"I went back to the shop after my mother died, and the flute is still there," Piers said. "The man who runs the shop is a strange looking guy, tall and sallow. I asked about buying the flute, and he said that he wanted fifty thousand punts for it."

"Fifty thousand punts!" Jürg almost choked on his *beko*. "You could buy a nice house in the old town for that."

Piers nodded. "I told him that I would never have that kind of money, and he said that it was too valuable to be bought and sold, but perhaps it could be lent or given away when the time is right."

Jürg gulped down the last of his *beko* and slammed his glass down on the table. "I think that this flute is a fake and that it is worth nothing." He stood up. "I'm heading home now. Maybe see you tomorrow."

Piers was left staring at his empty glass. He wasn't working tomorrow. Should he have another? Sometimes he and Jürg had drunk until their minds became still and then cracked

open, letting a wave of well-being and love flow in. However, it could go sour. When his mother died three years ago, he often had drunk to the point where the basement room blurred, and a careless word turned into an ugly argument.

Beyond the cloud. Beyond the mountains. *Beko* was a different type of beyond. Piers pushed his glass away and got up to leave. Not tonight.

#

The next day was Friday, his day off. The weather report on the radio warned people to stay indoors because of unusually high levels of UV radiation. However, Piers pulled on his coat and headed off to see Jürg. The city was flooded in a clean, pale light which gleamed off the green dome of the parliament building and glistened on the cobblestones. Shadows were sharper than usual. Piers kept stopping to stare at the sky. Today it seemed almost possible that the high, white cloud would part and reveal what lay beyond.

He found Jürg sprawled on the sofa watching television.

“What’s on?” Piers asked, settling into the armchair.

“Unexplained Happenings.”

The T.V. showed an image of a plump young woman in front of *tama* stalks which waved gently in a breeze. She said, “I was working in the fields when I looked up and saw a blue hole in the cloud, and the brightest light I’d ever seen. I tried to look at it, but everything went black, and I thought I’d gone blind. It was three days before I was able to see again.”

“Completely crazy,” Jürg sniggered, the laugh coming through his nose.

Piers sat forward in his chair, listening to the presenter talk about claims of people seeing a light in the sky in medieval times, including one incident when several dozen women working the *tama* fields saw a blue hole and a light. A psychologist at Vanastadt University debunked it as heat stroke or mass hysteria.

An attractive young physics professor from the Atmospheric Research Institute presented the scientific evidence. "There's definitely no hole in the sky. We've launched balloons and observed condensed water droplets, what we call cloud, all the way up until the balloon bursts. The light we see down here comes from these water droplets."

Most of the time all we have is the memory that there is a light behind the cloud. We call this light the sun. In the land beyond the mountains, the cloud is not so thick, and the sun is often seen.

She pushed back her blonde curls. "The idea of a light in the sky is a myth, like the stories about a land beyond the mountains. We've sent robots into the mountains and observed nothing but snow and ice until the probes break and stop sending signals. A human being couldn't survive there."

The plump girl was asked for her reaction to the experts. "I stick to my story. I saw a light in the sky."

"She's a nutter," Jürg said, as the credits rolled on the screen. "Should be locked up."

"That won't solve anything," Piers said.

Jürg paused with a handful of *tama* crisps halfway to his mouth. "Sorry, I just said the wrong thing. I wasn't meaning your Mum."

Piers stood up. "It's okay. I think I'll head out now. I need some fresh air."

#

The few people on the streets hurried along, their scarves pulled over their faces because of the radiation warning.

Piers walked to the Vana bridge and leant over the stone balustrade watching water bubbling and eddying beneath him. This had been his mother's haunt during his last few years of high school. She had stood here for hours gazing at the mountains or staring at the sky. When he called her name, she turned around with an empty, confused look, and meekly allowed him to lead her home.

Her obsession with the sky began when she met Lars, a man with strong, handsome features and the gift of honeyed speech. Lars organised meetings where he told people that there was a great light behind the cloud and that if they looked long and hard enough, they would see it.

At first Piers' mother, Anna, had only gone to the meetings on her day off or in the evening. Occasionally she hiked out to the *tama* fields with Lars and his followers to spend many hours staring at the sky. When people began to lose interest and drift away, Lars said that they were not trying hard enough and that only those who were totally dedicated would be rewarded with a glimpse of the light. He arranged meetings almost every day and asked for more donations.

Lars disappeared after the husband of one of his followers lodged an official complaint against him. However, it was too late for Piers' mother. She kept on slipping away from work to stare at the sky, and eventually, she lost her job at the post office. Piers was fifteen, old enough to work evenings in a café which served fried *tama* and pork. His wage covered the rent, and they ate bags of cold leftovers which he smuggled home from work.

The music was already there, in his mind, complete and whole. Perhaps it had always lain inside him, waiting to be discovered.

Anna went to the bridge every day, looking for the light and looking for Lars. One night she refused to come home, shouting that she wouldn't leave until she saw the light. Piers kept his voice low as he tugged at her sleeve, but their

argument drew the attention of a passing policeman. She clung to the balustrade in fear, and it took three men to prise her hands from the stone columns and wrestle her into the van, which took her to the mental hospital.

She hated being confined. From her barred window in Belisberg, she saw only a tiny patch of sky. A few days before she died she became peaceful and told Piers, "I'll soon see the light."

#

Piers pulled off his scarf, tilted back his head and stared at the sky. He had to screw up his eyes against the brightness. If he shaded his face, he could see ripples and texture in the base of the cloud, but no blue hole and no light. He straightened up. It wasn't good to look too often or too long.

His mother's life had been consumed by an apparently fruitless search. Piers' feelings grew like a bubble, straining and ready to burst unless he did something. In the city, he was closed in by the high buildings and the narrow streets, by his job and others' expectations. He had to get beyond it all. The only thing he could think of doing was to cross the Vana bridge and keep on walking until he left the outskirts of the city behind. The sky opened up, cut into by the mountains on the horizon, their tops lost in the layer of cloud.

He walked past villages and fields of dark, ploughed earth until he reached the pig farms on the rough, boggy land close to the mountains. From here, a narrow track wound up into the foothills. No-one went up without a good reason. Even Lars hadn't gone this far, but Piers kept on walking. The rough stones on the overgrown path jarred his feet through his thin shoes, but he almost welcomed the pain. It made him aware that he was alive.

He sat on a rock to catch his breath. From here he could see the mountains encircling the plain, and the twists and turns of the river Vana laid out like the map he had seen in school. The cloud had lowered and darkened from silvery light to dull grey, and the cloud base now lay only a few hundred feet above him. He couldn't climb much further. His toes and fingers had cooled to hard rubber and the short autumn day would soon be ending. It would be sensible to turn back. However, a restlessness pushed him on.

A small path led away from the main track along the side of the mountain. It took him into the dark, close silence of a stand of evergreens, and stopped, unsure of the way. He sniffed the sharp scent of the trees, fresh and invigorating and caught another smell, utterly new and

yet tantalizingly familiar, like the *tama* bread which his mother made when he was a child. He followed it over the soft pine needles.

The cloud was a shade darker by the time he emerged from the wood. Using his nose as a guide, he walked on through a cold stream, over a patch of boggy ground and through thorn bushes which snagged at his clothes. He reached a small plateau where a wooden cabin stood on its own. An elderly black woman leant on the veranda looking down at the plain. Piers hung back near the bushes, inhaling deep breaths, almost tasting the smell of baking.

She turned to go in, bracing a hand against her waist to ease her back when she saw Piers. "What are you hiding for? Come on in and have some bread."

Inside a young woman was taking tins of bread from a wood stove. She stole a shy, furtive glance at Piers as she cut him a slice of bread. It was warm and moist and delicious. He licked the last few crumbs from his fingers and looked up to see the two women watching him. The younger woman had short hair and the solemn beauty of a statue.

"It's the best bread I've ever tasted," Piers said.

"Do you like it?" the older woman said. "It's got a lot more spice than the bread we make for other people."

"I love it," Piers said. "I had no idea anyone lived on the mountain."

"We're up here most of the year, although we go down for a while in the winter. We grow the spices for Beyond the Mountains bakery. Can't grow them in the plain. The climate's not right."

The old woman led him out the back of the house to a sheltered area where the soil was turned, and bushes were pruned back for the winter. She peeled a piece of bark and handed it to Piers. It had a deep, aromatic smell. "My grandmother taught me how to dry spices and use them to make bread, and now my niece is learning from me."

Piers thought about the long bench where he tested samples of *tama* grain. "Does the ministry require this to be tested for pesticide residues?"

"Pesticides ... up here?" She laughed.

"Do you believe that there is something beyond these mountains?" Piers asked.

"Don't you?" the old lady said. "Can we really explain everything otherwise?"

"Maybe not," Piers said, thinking of the flute.

"It's getting dark," the old lady said. "You'd best be getting back to where you came from." She nodded towards the plain where the river was a dark trail in a muddy landscape.

Piers wasn't ready to go until he had asked the question which hadn't let his mother rest. "Have you ever seen a light in the sky?"

The old woman looked to where the edge of the cloud was lapping down a gully. "Up here the cloud is always changing. It has texture. Sometimes it's high and stretched thin like muslin and other times it thickens and settles so low that our house is lost in mist. Now and then the cloud parts, and for a brief moment we glimpse the light behind it. We never know when this will happen. Most of the time all we have is the memory that there is a light behind

the cloud. We call this light the sun. In the land beyond the mountains, the cloud is not so thick, and the sun is often seen.”

“Do you really believe that your people come from beyond the mountains?”

“Not just mine. Yours too. We all carry with us the memory of that country. My family has remembered spices.” She looked straight at Piers. “You also have something to remember.”

The young woman handed him a piece of warm bread wrapped in a thick white cloth. “For the journey,” she said.

“Do you want me to bring the napkin back?” Piers asked.

“Only if you want to walk all the way up here again,” the girl answered. Her dark eyes were elusive. “And then we will have to give you another piece of bread wrapped in another napkin for the journey back.”

“And you will have to come back to return that napkin, and there will be no end to it,” the older woman said. Her tone was teasing, and she smiled as she waved good-bye.

The smell of the spice bread in his inside pocket was like a secret joy which helped Piers make his way back down the mountain in the dusk and across the darkened plain to the city.

Perhaps there had been truth at the heart of his mother's madness.

#

His apartment, with its white walls and grey floor, seemed cold and sterile. He sat down and opened the napkin. The smell was enough for him at first. His nostrils tingled as they

detected layer upon layer of scents, like a band in which each instrument plays a slightly different tune and yet all are in harmony. He had never heard music like that, but he could imagine it.

When he could wait no longer, he nibbled the edge of the bread and let the crumbs dissolve in his mouth, releasing their taste. That night he slept with the napkin on his pillow, breathing in the scent of spices and wrapping himself in the thought that the girl had given him permission to return.

He woke up late on Saturday and rushed into work in muddy shoes and torn coat, grabbing a piece of dry *tama* bread to eat on the way. Cloud covered the sky like a grey lid, and it was impossible to believe that there was a light beyond it. That day he checked a batch of low grade *tama* that was slick with an acrid-smelling oil. It would only be good for turning into heating oil. When he returned home, the stench of pesticide on his clothes and hands obliterated the lingering smell of spices on his pillow.

He sewed his coat and polished his shoes before work on Sunday. The old woman's words seemed like a childish game. It was foolish to dream of anything more than this weary cycle of work. The scent of spices on the napkin was barely detectable, and he doubted that he would make the long journey back up the mountain to return it.

His playing was so erratic at band practice on Tuesday, too fast in one part and slow in the next, that he was sent home.

On Wednesday morning he was awakened by the distant clatter of the bin collection, but instead of curling back under his pillow he lay half-awake listening to slow, sinuous music,

like the memory of a lazy river under a hot sky. The music was already there, in his mind, complete and whole. Perhaps it had always lain inside him, waiting to be discovered. He took out his trumpet and tried out the notes, long and slurred, but he needed another instrument, something softer and breathier. The music played on in his head as he pulled on his coat and cap and walked across the city to the antique shop. He would tell the owner what had happened and ask him if he could borrow the wooden flute for a little while.

The old lady on the mountain was right; he, too, had something to remember.

BIO:

Christine Grant has worked as a scientist and currently lives in the Highlands of Scotland with her family. She has had short stories published in *The Scarlet Leaf Review* and *Fable Online* and is currently finishing a novel.

# VISITING BORGES

Arya F. Jenkins

In Buenos Aires, however, you take measured strides in your pressed ivory pants and silk tie, your dark hair slicked back like a tango dancer, with which you are confused.

You walk in a park named after one of your uncles, in a patriarchal jungle. It is no different now than when your mother walked here in her modest black dress and pumps, an aspiring journalist and writer, at the heels of her father, a newspaper editor fond of bow ties and cigars who took her

with him to mingle among poets and politicians in bars and cafes. *You have a fine mind*, he would tell her. *I want you to learn how to think*—as if the two were mutually exclusive.

It's not as if you were not steeped in literature as your mother was steeped in it before you. She was fed Vargas Llosa, Marquez, Borges. Then, when she married, as if stepping out of the enclosure not only of her culture but tradition, she embraced the Brits—Greene, Lowry, but also Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, Anita Brookner, Muriel Spark, Jean Rhys, seeking their economy of expression in a language that forced her to hone her natural largesse into flamenco precision. In marrying your American father, leaving Buenos Aires for Oshkosh, she closed a colorful fan whose spine was bone and metal in favor of new experiences that seemed to excise

what she had formerly known with her eyes, hands, and heart. And so she felt compelled to write about memory, what she had left behind.

By the time you were born, the only male after three girls, your mother had already established a writing routine, publishing stories and essays in prestigious newspapers and magazines. Your sisters made a circle around her every night with their books and paperbacks to discuss their reading in passionate whispers. You slathered like a puppy seeking attention, and they spoke freely around you, smiled upon your childishness. But when the time came, it was you who wanted to write, to be like your mother.

Your father, whom you barely remember, died in a plane crash over the Atlantic on his way home from one of many business trips to London when you were five, and your sisters were all in their teens. You are told you have his large eyes—although his were blue and yours are hazel—and his athletic, long-legged build, although you are not remotely sports-minded.

Like your mother and grandfather, it is the intellect and literature that pique your interest—literature about the feminine with which you ally yourself, being naturally inclined toward all that is feminine—outside of your penis and balls, which you have for sure, and that is all that marks you as male. Otherwise, your tastes are like your mother's and sisters'. When you were 11, you suffered sympathetic menstrual cramps with your two youngest sisters still living at home. The fact of your being gay has never been mentioned, is a given, like growing up in a house of women.

In Buenos Aires, however, you take measured strides in your pressed ivory pants and silk tie, your dark hair slicked back like a tango dancer, with which you are confused. Your mother

keeps you close to her elbow as if she is afraid to lose you suddenly in an alleyway, park, or museum, any of the places you traverse that fill you with longing for a time you never knew save in the stories of your mother and certain books.

In 1973, you and your mother return to this city of her youth to visit The National Library and meet Borges, a longtime family friend. Although he is an introvert, blind after all, he receives many visitors, most of them students.

Early one afternoon you and your mother pass through the gates of his unguarded house at Serrano 2135 and are led by a kindly housekeeper to the patio, where the master sits at the edge of a hard-backed chair in a dark suit, contemplating. You are 15 and approach him with tenderness, wanting to embrace him, this literary grandfather that on some level you feel you have always known. His thin, very white hair is combed neatly back, and his right eye is pinched, while his left peers at you as if at an abyss.

You are surprised by the breadth of his warm, wide smile. You greet him taking one of his long, pale hands in your right, seeming to weight it momentarily after your mother has placed the same hand between her hands and kissed it.

Fanny brings out tea and cinnamon cookies, which she sets on a small square table between your straight-backed chairs. *Maria will be here shortly*, she announces.

*Fine, fine, good*, he says to her. *Maria, my assistant*, he explains.

*A perfect day*, he announces as if this is a prerequisite for a good visit. Then, balancing himself on a simple wooden cane, he leans slightly toward you inquiring, *what are you studying, Rene?*

*Search for the right word, even in your journals*, he says, a pointing finger rising slightly from repose on his cane.

*All I care about is literature, master.* Your mother audibly inhales her deep maternal pride.

*And what are you reading?*

*At the moment, poetry. Langston Hughes, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton.*

*And what of Rulfo? Carpentier? The classics?*

*I am drawn to North American contemporary literature*, you announce, then add, *I read your poem, 'Isidoro Acevedo,' about your grandfather in your book Cuaderno San Martin.*

*Si? Our grandfathers were very much alike—is that not right, Elena?*

*Si, maestro, si.*

*Mine was a lawyer and politician. But this is old news*, he says as if to himself, then he tilts his chin up at you—*I am delighted to hear you are reading the work of women. To be a good writer, you must like women. You must also like something other than literature, or you will have nothing to write about.*

What is there to say? Of course, this seems obvious—the world of women is all you have known, all you know to exist. You will later learn that—aside from his mother, Fanny, and

assistant Maria—this romantic, irrealist, as some call Borges, has known women mostly in his imagination and writing. What is there more sacred than literature? His last remark chafes you.

*Women are a great subject, says Borges as if to emphasize his point.*

*And how is your novel coming along, querida?*

Your mother tells him she is struggling, but that seeing him will inspire her. *No tengo tiempo. The problem is time. I have children, she says, then nothing else.*

*Maria read me your essay on the disappeared in The New York Times. Bien hecho.*

He gazes up suddenly as if called by someone or something.

*What do you think of the birds? Are they not something?* He cocks his head, smiling.

You listen with him to the cries of parakeets and doves perched and passing over the palm tree in his yard, pretending to attend to nature with the same interest you would a book—as if Borges could see you—while he and your mother whisper, laughing, leaning close, a joke about the past.

You have never seen Borges laugh. He is utterly unselfconscious, dropping his jaw with delight, revealing another cavern of emptiness without light. As you finish a second round of tea, he tells you to commit to writing in a notebook—*cada dia*, stressing each syllable.

*Yes, I promise. Thank you, maestro.*

*Search for the right word, even in your journals, he says, a pointing finger rising slightly from repose on his cane.*

Thirteen years after this visit, your first and last to see Borges, he will pass away, full of love, an agnostic believing in the afterlife after all. In a few years, everything about that time will dim. All you will remember is his dark suit worn like a companion, the emphatically bland taste of Chamomile tea, the call and response of birds in the patio, and the long pauses in your conversation, as if contained in them were the true gems of your exchange.

BIO:

Arya F. Jenkins's poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction have appeared in numerous journals and zines. Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her flash, "Elvis Too" was nominated for the 2017 Write Well Awards by Brilliant Flash Fiction. Her work has appeared in at least three anthologies. She writes jazz fiction for Jerry Jazz Musician, an online zine. Her poetry chapbooks are: *Jewel Fire* (AllBook Books, 2011) *Silence Has A Name* (Finishing Line Press, 2016). Her poetry chapbook, *Autumn Rumors*, has just been accepted by CW Books and is slated for publication September 2018. Her latest blog is <https://writersnreadersii.blogspot.com>.

# FEATURED ARTIST

Nicole Winning

## Artist Statement

*What remains when something leaves?* This is the underlying investigation that I am continually exploring in my work.

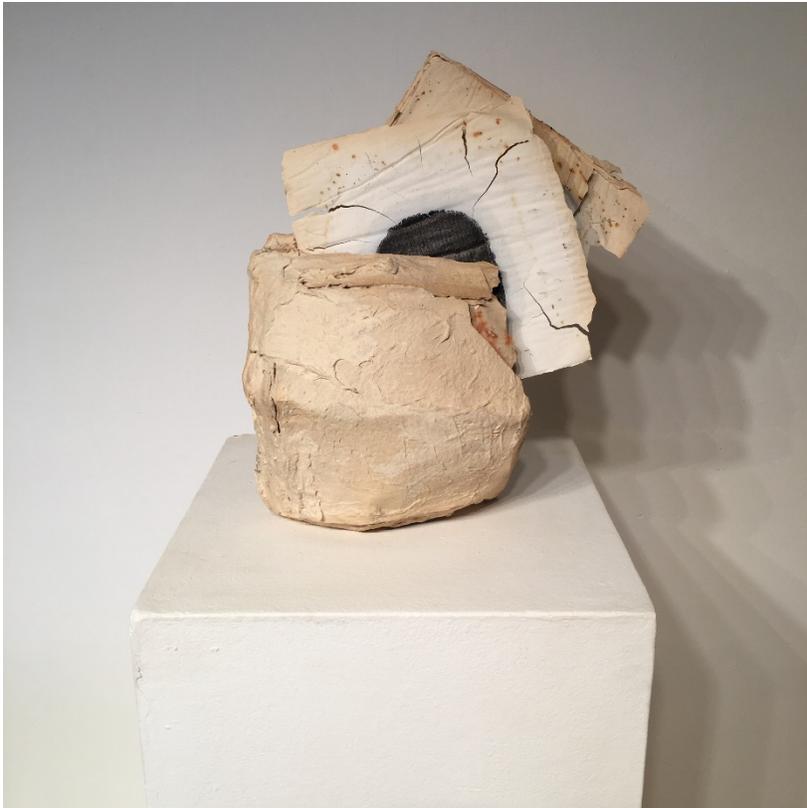
What do we do with the remnants of things that still remain? The traces of things that once continually filled our lives as we try to reorganize the pieces of the past into something new, something useful, something beautiful.

What if we can't create something from it and all that's left are unassembled mismatched shards? Is there always a way to reorganize, and if so, what does it look like?

In my work I play with these questions without contextualizing them into something concrete. By creating something abstract I give room to explore the underlying process of the creation/destruction cycle of existence within us and around us without overly involving the rational mind. My work uses a burnout technique with different colored paper clays. In this process I take pieces of wood and scraps of all kinds of paper products and dip them into a clay slurry. When they are fired the item that was dipped into the clay burns out and what remains is the presence of its absence through the clay skeletal coating. My process is very poetic and symbolic to the meaning of my work. In the future I plan on exploring adding mixed media elements to these skeletal forms in which I intend to give voice back to what was removed.







**BIO:**

Nicole Winning is an MFA student at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, specializing in ceramic sculpture. Her works have shown in the North Dakota Museum of Art, the Farmington Museum and in galleries spanning over seven states in the USA. She has works in the permanent collections of the Saint Peters Arts center in St. Peters, MN, and in several private collections. In addition to her artwork she has a Masters in Maharishi Vedic Science and is a Hatha Yoga Instructor. Her daily Transcendental Meditation practice, Hatha Yoga sequences and her freedom to express through the arts are her foundational platforms for living from her heart. As they intersect and weave through her and her life she finds herself in different mediums and ways of expressing her inner truths. Whether it is through a photo, a sculpture or an afternoon tea with friends, she tries to continually find spaces to birth new insights into herself as a woman, artist, human being, and her relationship with the vast world around her.

# MOTHER'S ODDITY

Miki Byrne

There was nothing fey or romantic in her.  
Yet on nights when heat throbbed  
and the sun took its time to slide away,  
she would sleep in the greenhouse.  
On an old camp bed wedged in between  
pot-laden counters with the door at her feet  
left open, to allow night to seep in.  
It mingled with sauna-damp fug.  
Dark tangs of compost painted the air.  
Condensation dripped.  
Spiders wove but didn't faze her.  
Lying there in small hours,  
as the moon blurred  
through algae-painted glass,  
she heard the stretch of Abutilon and Orchid,  
felt leaves unfurl lazy spirals.  
Saw baby white shoots rise like pins.  
Sensed a blossom's last flutter as it fell,  
and the wet wriggle of pot-captured worms  
sliming through soil.  
She watched the great star-decked

wheel of sky roll its nocturnal arc.  
While a jowl-faced mastiff slept at her feet,  
both guard and companion,  
her comfort in the night.

# INSIDE A FAIRY TALE

Rob Jacques

It was just that they once had lived inside  
a fairy tale, and knew where it lived still . . .

— Ted Taylor

As in all fairy tales, time did not exist.  
Delirious with desire, certifiably insane  
with submission to adolescent flesh  
(his and mine), I walked beside him  
on an abandoned train bed, tracks and ties  
having been pulled long ago for a war.

As in all fairy tales, place did not exist.  
True, there were these wintry, snowy skies,  
this raised railroad bed running away like  
a crazed causeway through mystic space,  
these enchanted woods, no landscape  
half as realistic as his form, his face,

and time and place had also not existed  
last night on the old, wood-stove-warmed  
cabin floor where, in his sleeping bag,  
I'd given up my virginity like a good boy:

gratefully, with heartfelt thanks to nature  
for making me his innocent source of joy.

We'd laughed, seriously happy, besotted  
by our sexually transmitted, endorphin-rich  
analgesia, and we'd wrestled some more  
before we'd washed each other, dressed,  
watched each other, not a single clock  
or map anywhere showing so-called reality.

And now we were walking on ice, in snow –  
thin, white birch saplings flecked with black,  
flocked with frost, lining our cleared path,  
tall pines, deep, deep green, rising all around  
as if to wall off the countless disturbances  
of a real adulthood that lay ahead in ambush.

Now he smiled and punched my shoulder,  
then slung his arm around me, squeezed me  
off my balance and into him, cold, clean snow  
on his eyelashes, on his hair, me dissolving  
into him, no longer myself, ecstatic without  
my individual identity, without a jot of care.

The railroad bed stretched out before us,  
disappearing around a curve off to our left,  
chickadees and buntings flitting, sporting  
among the arching eaves formed by grand

green limbs broadening out, up skyward  
above the love of two callow boys cavorting,

and with my heart full in this fairy tale,  
with no help for it but to be and be and be,  
I sang out as I danced forward in front of him,  
“Let’s never go back! Let’s go on around  
that curve, the two of us, going on together,”  
and I laughed knowing we could do it,

in this fairy tale outside time and place,  
we could do it regretless, missing nothing,  
living minus longing, two strong in a union  
inside a new universe with a new Big Bang  
that would explode in endless expansion  
beginning as a curve in an abandoned road.

He smiled, looked at his watch, and with  
a toss of his beautiful, youthful head, said,  
“We’d better turn back. It’s getting late.  
It’ll be dark soon.” What’s a watch doing  
inside a fairy tale? What’s “getting late”  
mean? How can infinite love not prevail?

I stood still, and he stopped, too, turning  
to stand face-to-face with me, he being  
the boy who was my wry Prince Charming,  
my sly White Rabbit, my “Open Sesame”

into real-world wondrous impossibilities  
like two boys living with no danger of harm.

Snow coming down inside this fairy-tale  
snow globe shaken by a child's glad hands  
landed in large flakes on us, all around us,  
whiteness a sign of this fantasy's purity,  
and I spoke his name erotically, reverently,  
knowing this spell would never be again,

and he stood so still while I came to him,  
pulled his young face and lips slowly to mine,  
kissed this elfin boy of mysterious bliss,  
and said, gesturing toward the road's curve,  
looking longingly at the road's dark curve  
off into the forest swerving away from reality,

"Last chance, baby, to live a dream. Come on,"  
and he seemed to want to go with me, walk  
together forever, never hungry, nor wanting,  
nor sad, nor sick, nor ever feeling regret, but  
he shook his head. "We just can't," he said,  
and began walking back, the fairy tale upset.

I looked for a moment at that road bed curve,  
the darkening shadows of the birch and pine,  
the snow gathering like eternity up and down  
the line from here to fulfillment of fantasy,

and then stepped in to follow behind him,  
to walk out of a fairy tale and back to town,

but after intervening years, from this distance  
of my old age – with that boy, that road bed,  
those birch and pine and snow all long gone –  
I find myself in quiet hours thinking back,  
there again, two boys in a fairy tale, magic  
in our holding hands, but this time going on.

BIO:

Rob Jacques resides on a rural island in Washington State's Puget Sound, and his poetry appears in literary journals, including *Atlanta Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *The Healing Muse*, and *Assaracus*. A collection of his poems, *War Poet*, was published by Sibling Rivalry Press in March 2017.

# VERBATIM

Lana Bella

Nothing, but intuit the motionless  
and the lost, I plague within  
a nod of spell. As one does in love,  
I task my fall to the plucks of  
guitar, feasting on ebony sounds  
from fingers narrowed at speed  
where the clefs run as deep as skies.  
With nocturnes seem adequate for  
night, I hum like air about to turn,  
the way cacophony lay fallow  
after bedlam, insolent on the fragile  
flicks of muscle against strings.  
Head tips the turn-down bed of trebles,  
so the torn edge of me can soft-fade  
into dusk, with the whispering ohms  
reached groundward between ribs  
and collarbone, like a swansong waltz  
lists to the hymns of sheltered ease.

# FEVER

Lana Bella

Insomnia strewed like Novocain  
across the teeth, slick with  
libation flanks, reaching down  
my pelican throat. I lay smoked  
taste, bronchi-wet so the absence  
nursed me, out and in incursion  
of incandescent light deft with  
nocturne's flight. This was where  
I touched the fever, fingertips  
fluttered a wish pearling from lips  
brittle of bourbon spry. Missing  
my balance through air a hundred  
perfect times, dark fed smooth  
at each turn of the wrist. And how  
each stroke was stillness rise as  
smoke, wreathing itself to every-  
thing it burned, while I grew dim  
raggedy patterned, crossways pale,  
the conscious of an inked note run.

## BIO:

A three-time Pushcart Prize, five-time Best of the Net & Bettering American Poetry nominee, Lana Bella is an author of three chapbooks, *Under My Dark* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2016), *Adagio* (Finishing Line Press, 2016), and *Dear Suki: Letters* (Platypus 2412 Mini Chapbook Series, 2016). She has had poetry and fiction featured in *Acentos Review*, *Comstock Review*, *EVENT*, *Ilanot Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Rock and Sling*, & *Lampeter Review*, among others, and work to appear in *Aeolian Harp Anthology, Volume 3*. Lana resides in the US and the coastal town of Nha Trang, Vietnam, where she is a mom of two far-too-clever-frolicsome imps.

# THE GHOST OF DON GIOVANNI

Eric Pankey

He breaks and enters and finds what he finds in each house: a table set for a meal still unprepared. The beds made. Neatly folded clothes in the chest of drawers. Nothing out of the ordinary on the bookshelves. Books he had read as a young man, that had seemed once tame, now seem strange and provocative. When he has time to read, he prefers the character-driven to the picaresque, long passages of thought that do not advance the *plot*, but rather the *argument* of the novel. He is and was a man, he admits, which is to say, a brute and monster. He kept secrets about the lies he told. He lied in order to keep his secrets. Each night he enters another house and is relieved to find no one at home.

## BIO:

Eric Pankey is the author of twelve collections of poetry, most recently *AUGURY* (Milkweed Editions 2017).

# HE BABY-SNAKE

# THE MOON

Stella Vinitchi Radulescu

the womb in my womb grew

bigger than the moon

voices

grow thin

beyond my eyes the Milky Way & silence like water

like water

like water

breaking the stone

yes

I see two eggs instead of one

## BIO:

Stella Vinitchi Radulescu, PhD in French Language & Literature, is the author of several collections of poetry published in the United States, Romania, and France. She writes poetry in English, French and Romanian and her poems have appeared in Asheville Poetry Review, Pleiades, Louisville Review, Ginosko, Laurel Review, Rhino, Wallace Stevens Journal, and Seneca Review among others, as well as in a variety of literary magazines in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Romania. Her last collection of poetry I scrape the window of nothingness - new & selected poems was released in 2015 from Orison Books Press. At the present she lives in Chicago.

# ON AN INVASIVE SPECIES

Kevin Casey

Their flesh is weak and watery to taste,  
and with no flecks of mocha, no azure  
stains dotted with burgundy to speak  
for their worth, there's little they offer  
the angler but their tenacity and fight—  
quick as any salmon to take to the sky.

So how might they excuse themselves, justify  
their invasion of these mountain ponds?  
When even the State suggests it's a species  
that shouldn't be returned to the water,  
it's difficult to consider how many  
generations must struggle from fry  
to fingerling until they're viewed as native.

"Foreign" should be the alien air  
that sears the gills of any fish, migrant

or indigenous, but here, it's the sharp rap  
on the bow that shivers along the flank,  
and the white belly bobbing in your wake,  
to the delight of the circling gulls.

# MORE LIKE A LULLABY

Kevin Casey

He left no note, but protested in town  
for several years about the new interstate—  
the same, worn strain about the endless sighing  
of cars and trucks north and south from the far side  
of the ridge that smothered the whippoorwills  
at evening, and the robins at daybreak,  
and kept him mostly sleepless and frantic.

I thought of him last night, hanging in silence  
from a rafter in his hay mow, the metronome  
finally stilled, as I dodged an electric car  
in the feed store parking lot, the only sound  
it made the hushed crunch of tires on asphalt.

Sometimes I wake to the wail of a train  
across the lake and a loon's matching complaint,  
and wonder how many years must be travelled  
before the distant crankshaft clatter  
of a piston engine itself becomes  
an antique sound, comforting and lonesome,  
the highway's hectic cadence soothed  
into a song more like a lullaby.

BIO:

Kevin Casey is the author of *Ways to Make a Halo* (Aldrich Press, 2018) and *American Lotus*, winner of the 2017 Kithara Prize (Glass Lyre Press, 2018). *And Waking...* was published by Bottom Dog Press in 2016. His poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *Rust+Moth*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Connotation Press*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, and Ted Kooser's syndicated column "American Life in Poetry." For more, visit [andwaking.com](http://andwaking.com).

# A BIRD, A PLANE

William Reichard

Each goes in its own direction,  
crossing paths only long enough  
to sketch an invisible X  
in the early morning sky.  
The bird is singular,  
not part of a gathered flock  
flying toward another spring.  
A hawk, or an eagle, its eyes  
sharp, razor talons poised  
to strike any little life  
on the ground. When I  
was a child, I thought  
planes only flew away  
from me, as those from  
the nearby army base  
passed overhead, breaking  
the sound barrier so the air  
itself shook; they wrote themselves,  
in white plumes, out of sight.  
The planes I see now mean  
something else. The possibility

of escape, or, a potential for terror.

The plane disappears and

I thank the sky for keeping it.

The bird circles once more,

then vanishes into the bright day.

# WHAT THE WORLD ASKS OF US

William Reichard

*You are not crazy*, one headline reads, while another advises each of us to keep a list of the subtle changes we see as our democracy slips slowly toward fascism. I add items to my list daily, and daily, risk a descent into something akin to madness. There's a certain kind of virtue in staying angry, calling out every act that erodes our freedom, and there is also a cost. I worry about my country every day, and every day, I see a lessening of principles, an erosion of compassion. Empathy is not a human right, but still, a necessity if we're all to live together in this mess we call a nation. One man asks why he should be expected to pay for maternity leave, and I wonder, who was his mother? And what did she need when he was born, what did she fail to receive that might have made both their lives better? Someone points out that the constitution does not guarantee the right to clean water, to food, medicine, or housing, but it does guarantee the right to bear arms, brandish guns,

to threaten anyone who gets in our way.

This is the history of humanity: one stepping on the necks of the rest in order to get there first, to get the most gold, the most food, the most mates. I don't see how we can survive the savagery of this era. I look at our illegitimate orange president and feel only revulsion.

He is a bad dream the country had and he's the horror we wake to every morning since the election.

He's every lie we've told ourselves, every bad impulse.

Perhaps we deserve him, with our nation built on the lie of manifest destiny, on the backs of the indigenous, the buffalo, the polar bear, on every living thing we've driven into seclusion or extinction.

*You are not crazy*, the headline reminds me, and I'm grateful to be reminded. These days, it's too easy to fade into silence or despair, and hand over the keys to the country to those who would be king.

# ANIMALS, ZEN

William Reichard

They live in the moment.  
One moment at a time.  
One moment unconnected  
to the next. Only this moment,  
ever, unencumbered by context.  
Their fear is instinctual.  
A deer hears a gunshot, and bolts.  
They never try to talk themselves  
out of it. Fear saves their lives.  
A dog barks, a cat takes cover.  
Fear has only stifled mine,  
led to rash decisions,  
missed opportunities.  
His eyes flash interest, I flee.  
I know it's unwise to emulate  
the animals. I know they have  
nothing to do with me.  
Their lives don't depend on mine.  
They do not commit the sin  
of projection. Some philosophers  
would have us believe

it's possible to live in the moment.

I think, this is a beautiful delusion.

I think, get into my head sometime

and try to settle on the moment.

There aren't enough sedatives

in the world to slow down

the chaos of music/language/

image/urge that swirls inside

my unrestful mind.

Animals are *now*, will always

be *now*, until they are *not*.

# I DON'T MIND THE RAIN

William Reichard

Haven't we all,  
at some point,  
hidden in it,  
burrowed under blankets  
in the corner of the couch  
or on the bed,  
reading a favorite novel  
or watching an old movie  
on a summer day  
when we should be  
outside enjoying what  
always seems to be  
a truncated season?  
Rain provides an excuse  
to step outside of life,  
briefly, and there's  
nothing wrong with that.  
Sometimes, it's necessary  
to turn away from a day,  
a missed opportunity,  
an overeager heart.

The rain doesn't buy  
anything but time,  
and time isn't  
the commodity  
most think it is.

The rain undoes  
whatever it touches,  
though it feeds  
whatever it touches.

Stand on the porch  
during a downpour,  
put your cupped hand  
out into the storm.

It fills with water.

The water washes  
you clean.

BIO:

William Reichard is a writer, editor, and educator. He's published five poetry collections, most recently, *Two Men Rowing Madly Toward Infinity* (Broadstone Books, 2016).

# MEDITATION ON CREATION 1: AN OPEN LETTER NEVER SENT TO MY FACEBOOK FRIENDS

Marisol Cortez

1.

Thinking about sharing

and compulsion to share

and revulsion at compulsion

to share, resulting

in refusal to share,

a paranoid retention

that opens then

onto curiosity:

what

in a sharing economy, what

is real generosity?

What is unself-

conscious versus compulsive,

what is offering beyond  
mere narcissism, what is  
gift and not  
exhibition?

2.

Okay, I'm experimenting with  
insecurity, social media an  
infuriating teacher who responds  
to the sincerity  
of a question  
with ellipsis of parable:

the reason I don't like  
posting is  
because it triggers  
anxiety, internalized  
social eye,

which then expands  
to rent out headspace  
to suck time away  
from real work with lots

of clicking and checking

like ovens or locks,

with counting things,

in other words:

Am I liked?

Who's liking?

Who's looking?

Who's reading?

How many hearts,

how many

thumbs up?

So this experiment

is just

to put the shit out there

con safos style, like

there it is—y que?

Share one thing a day

says this book my friend lent me

just to practice putting it

out without turning

around to look back,

just to share,

just to do it  
cuz creation's not complete  
till it's given  
away  
for free  
in the hope  
that something there  
can be useful to someone,  
out of love for those  
who come to the page  
the verse, the phrase  
for help—

the point  
is just to release it,  
a thousand birds  
or butterflies  
bursting from ribcage,  
not to pretend not to care  
but to be generous,  
to share because  
you made it because  
it had to be made,

because you would make it

regardless

of who's liking

or looking.

# MEDITATION ON CREATION 2: AT THE SPRINT STORE

Marisol Cortez

At the Sprint store  
on Southwest Military  
Drive, two soundtracks compete:  
tepid AOR above and  
Morrissey underneath,  
a queer dissonance  
in this most Mexican  
of cities: “The Last  
of the International  
Playboys,” a song listened to  
in high school physical science—  
when I could get away with it,  
that is.

AOR/Morrissey  
layered over poetry  
prose that nudges me on to  
this poem, to writing

at last  
like I used to  
in a spiral notebook more accustomed  
to notes nowadays  
from meetings and meetings  
and meetings.

At first I was annoyed,  
not having brought  
any social science or  
political zines or how-to  
manuals or self-  
help to read (like book on  
mindful writing,  
a writing guide  
for the blocked  
which says to sit  
everyday  
for a week  
just 5-10 minutes  
holding back from writing,  
practicing not-writing,  
cultivating a patience—

ha. Too much to do  
to do that)

but there is only a poetry  
quarterly in my backpack  
as I wait, to  
read grudgingly, a eulogy  
for a Russian émigré poet  
who, in his time,  
charged Americans  
with having Soviet police  
in their heads.

And reflecting  
as I have before,  
lamenting  
insecure  
that I am not so much creative  
as technically acute, concert pianist  
but no composer, scribe  
but not storyteller. But what  
is creativity

anyway? A chaos machine,  
reconstituting matter,  
reconfiguring the given  
into something novel  
(ha ha, get it)  
some unanticipated  
order, some unthought  
solution, miracle  
of something coming  
together  
despite  
the centrifugal  
forces of a universe  
expanding, the eternal surprise  
of cohesion  
against background decay—  
or so George suggested  
one day as we sat  
on the tailgate of his red  
truck eating tacos—papa con chorizo,  
my new favorite.

I think of other poetry I've read,

my surprise  
at how ordinary it is,  
nothing magic about it,  
just Bukowski writing  
to himself about his life,  
his cats,  
the smell of his farts,  
the women he's fucking  
or not.

Or how

I'm writing this now  
standing at the counter  
of the Sprint store—

as the sales rep dials  
the support line  
to activate  
my new number

as I think about how  
to conjure the sight

of birds swimming sideways  
through the tumultuous stormy sea  
that has gathered up there  
in the sky.

# MEDITATION ON CREATION 3: ABOUT A GRACKLE

Marisol Cortez

On Drexel, grackles

crackle

like intercom scratching

its itchy throat,

like radio

static,

like—what,

walky talky?

Like scrape

of register

transaction?

But that's not quite

it, doesn't capture it,

the analogy not quite

right, not accurate,

analogy itself

is like

standing amidst fissure  
between the thing itself  
and the word, straining  
for closure

and so simile  
then  
must be  
a neuro  
transmitter between  
synapses, poetry  
the crossing  
of cognitive Atlantic,  
a translation of sense  
into symbol

a photography  
an orthography  
(an ornithology?)  
a lexicon  
insufficient,  
asymptotic,

approaching

infinity

but never quite there.

Just as all language

all symbol

is rhythm

at bottom,

I've thought recently,

I remember,

standing on Drexel

astride bicycle

straining to tell you

about a grackle:

all language is

sense, is syllable,

is sibilant

is assonant

is lullaby

is song,

fundamentally  
at bottom,  
is sound  
without content,  
pitter patter  
of pattern,  
somatic,  
presymbol, where it comes from—  
the word that wells up  
from the world.

BIO:

Marisol Cortez, PhD, occupies the difficult space between artistic, activist, and academic worlds. Beginning her political life as a poet, she later participated in grassroots campaigns for environmental justice in her hometown of San Antonio, which inspired her doctoral research at the University of California at Davis. After graduating in 2009 with her PhD in Cultural Studies, she has trafficked between academia and community organizing, before returning to San Antonio to apply her education as a creative writer and community-based scholar. She currently works at a local arts organization by day, while by night she is a mama, writer, and researcher, all in service of collective efforts to protect la madre tierra and create alternatives to parasitic forms of urban “development.” For more information on previous publications and current projects, visit her website at: <https://marisolcortez.wordpress.com/>

# LOVELL, MAINE

Sylvia Mercedes Beato

1.

The earth is hushed  
deep under plowed snow.

Each bank a wall  
dividing one story  
from another.

At night it pulls at the stars  
fishlined to our eyes,  
illuminating.

On this day that is shorter  
than tomorrow,  
breath is visible  
laughter is smoke  
filling distant suns  
in a cold February sky.

2.

& not just us. Not just  
nocturnal confessions between friends

on love & other emergencies,  
the beings we were, once or another,  
& then outwore.

Such are complicated things  
we say or they happen for reasons  
we say but really they are about  
letting go & that is tricky.

Slow hours run in place  
like a frozen river, keeping  
with the calendar.

Then it's seven in the morning  
& who can sleep at day  
break bright?

Not the birds  
scraping the sky,  
nor the icicles  
melting *lop drip lop* from the roof

To think: what will happen in two hours, in twenty minutes?

& I do hate to yearn for the future,  
to set sights wanting on something other than.

If we call this a journey & try to touch it  
with hands, fingers unfolding the edges,  
the names re-appear, merge, fade away.

Our affliction to stay present  
is a heartbeat racing lean and loud.

& when we turn to the open window -

3.

Always a road,  
snow-banked. Significant.

Always a narrative  
that bends to meaning.

The drive is long.  
I should be home        by ten.  
Please    keep still for me.

BIO:

Sylvia Mercedes Beato lives in Brooklyn where she teaches high school and laughs with her dog. Her work has been published in *Split This Rock*, *CALYX Journal*, *Bridge Eight*, and elsewhere. She is a recipient of the Hoyt Jacobs Memorial Poetry Award and a candidate for an M.F.A. in Poetry & Translation at Queens College CUNY.

# MEDGAR EVERS' HOUSE

Ann E. Wallace

I never pictured Medgar Evers' house in color.  
The clean lines of the house, the middle class  
Jackson, Mississippi neighborhood  
were fixed for me in black and white

by documentary footage that froze  
the home in grays, marking a time when  
colors did not mix on camera.

The house sits empty now, a relic

of an era caught on film, his family removed  
from the blood-stained tarmac where their father,  
husband was shot down in the driveway,  
and pulled his body, strong man that he was

as Myrlie remembered, to the door,  
toward her, toward the children  
crouched inside as they had been taught.

But Medgar Evers' house is not black and white.

The pale green walls sit easily on the city  
plot, rising to meet the overhang of the low  
roof, the home unassuming behind the vibrant  
lawn, trees standing tall, healthy around it.

Mississippi in June is lush, verdant,  
teeming with the potential of early summer.  
But when Medgar Evers finished his meeting  
that long ago night, the sun was gone and the greens

darkened to forest, to black, so when he swung  
into the carport, his headlights illuminating  
the house where his family slept, are what enabled  
the man in the shadows to take aim and fire.

# CHERRY PICKING

Ann E. Wallace

Yesterday we went cherry picking,  
walking row upon row of trees weighted with fruit.  
The smell of rich earth underfoot  
wafted upward as grandparents, parent, children reached  
high to pluck the cherries hanging together  
in clusters of twos, of threes.

Last night fingers stained deep red purple, I went to bed reading  
about Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge  
Philando Castile in Minnesota  
police officers in Dallas.  
I read until I could not read anymore.

This morning I woke and read some more,  
words from the parents of children Philando fed,  
nurtured at school before his body  
was filled with bullets,  
words from the mother of Michael Brown still trying  
to make sense of loss from August  
two years ago in Missouri.

And I read of a black man hanging  
heavy from a tree in Piedmont Park, Atlanta,  
strange dark fruit in this bountiful season.

I lay safe, warm, under cover on a rainy morning,  
as the cherries I picked yesterday churned  
undigested in my belly.

# NATCHEZ-TRACE PARKWAY HAIBUN

Ann E. Wallace

The mounds of grass-covered earth rise gently in the clearing, unusual, peaceful. Tourist signs mark them as burial ground of a long-gone tribe. Overgrown Indian footpaths parallel the parkway, hidden in the musty forest where the air is so heavy that the mosquitoes seem suspended in motion. This place is ancient, its history extending centuries, the markers eliding the story of the American south into tribal ruins. And yet the trail is woven with antebellum memories of loss, escape, hardship, more recent and so present you can almost touch them. Down the road toward Jackson, the opaque pollen-coated waters of the Cypress Swamp lie still. Towering trees with both roots and canopies unseen, unseeable, emerge from the still waters and rise beyond the eye's reach. In the space between surface and leaves, visitors might glimpse quicksilver flashes of then collapsing into now within the ethereal stillness.

dark bodies slipping  
shedding their scent in water  
shadows of the swamp

BIO:

Ann E. Wallace, PhD, is an Associate Professor of English at New Jersey City University. She has published on traumatic memory, loss, and illness, as well as on her teaching practices within the composition classroom. Her work has recently appeared in *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*, *WordGathering*, *Mothers Always Write*, *Coldnoon*, and *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*.



Sculptures by Nicole Winning

# METAFORE MAGAZINE

## STAFF WINTER 2017 ISSUE



James R. Davidson

Editor-in-Chief

Poetry Editor

James R. Davidson is Editor-in-Chief & poetry editor of *Metafore*. He is a BFA in Creative Writing student at Maharishi University. Though he is currently held captive amongst the cornfields of Southeastern Iowa, he still hears the wise, misty whispering of the Great Smoky Mountains in his

native East Tennessee.

James is a poet. He is interested in work that takes a metamodern approach to transcendentalism. He finds inspiration at the intersections of queerness, spirituality, & ecology. The surrealist, imagist, & symbolist movements are also major influences.

When not reading or writing, James is probably baking biscuits. He enjoys meditation & nature, & he is passionate about organic butter.

Favorite Poets: Pattiann Rogers, Mary Oliver, Dorianne Laux, Wendell Berry, Robert Bly

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Margaret A. Ventsias

Fine Art Editor

Margaret A. Ventsias is the art editor of *Metafore*. She graduated from the BFA program in Creative Writing, with a minor in Fine Art from Maharishi University in June 2018.

Maggie's writing style has been described as snarky spiritualism. She is known for holding opposing paradigms in balance, while gently dissecting belief systems into their core elements. When not writing, Maggie is reading, meditating, arting, or dreaming.

Favorite Authors: Sir Terry Pratchett, Maya Angelou, J.R.R. Tolkien, William Shakespeare, Margaret Atwood

Favorite Artists: Post-Impressionists FTW, but Post-Modern Contemporary is a close second.



Dylene Cymraes

Fiction Editor

Dylene Cymraes is the fiction editor of *Metafore*. She is a BFA student in the Creative and Professional Writing program at Maharishi University. Born in California sunshine, she has also lived with the pine song of the Rockies, limestone-fed plains of the Midwest and the hustle of the Baltimore-DC-NYC corridor.

Dylene is a novelist, professional writer and editor. She is interested in short form fiction and finds inspiration in second-hand stores, cast off diaries, graffiti, lies and truths spun at campfires and homeless shelters, and chance encounters on planes.

Dylene enjoys online and tabletop gaming, camping, museums and classic movies. She revels in textile art, great food and simple living.

Favorite writers: Cormac McCarthy, J.R.R. Tolkien, Antoine De Saint-Exupery, David Sedaris



## Tamlin Day

### Creative Nonfiction Editor

Tamlin Day is creative nonfiction editor at *Metafore*. He is a memoirist & graphic narrative artist, specializing in creative nonfiction. He has been published in *The Rio Review* & the *Breathe Easy Press* & is an editorial staff member at *iPhone Life Magazine*.

Tamlin favors personal essay & flash nonfiction. He seeks pieces which play with the space between what is true & what is fiction in order to find the honest impression of the author in question.

Tamlin belongs to the LGBTQ community, & his love of creative nonfiction came from a desire to see himself reflected in media. He enjoys work which celebrate diversity & which explore the innate desire in all of us to be seen for who we truly are.



## Halle Halter

### Editor

Halle Halter is an editor for *Metafore*. As a student in Maharishi University's BFA Creative Writing program, Halle obsesses over how to get sarcasm to translate well from her head to anywhere outside of it. She likes to refer to herself as an alchemist in the kitchen & moral support when anyone asks her to help move furniture. She's a fan of horror movies & Henry Rollins' advice to put the punk in punctual.

Favorite Authors: Marjane Satrapi, Augusten Burroughs, Clive Barker, Ruth Rendel



## Leah Waller

### Faculty Advisor

Leah Waller is the Program Director for the Department of Media & Communications & an Assistant Professor of creative writing here at MUM.

Leah's work has been published in literary journals, magazines, newspapers, & anthologies. Her book, *Under the Cedar Tree*, had a soaring debut in Amazon's top ten best seller list for poetry & continues to be a popular favorite among reading circles.

Leah received her bachelors in literature & writing at MUM & went on to achieve a Masters of Fine Arts in creative writing from Northern Arizona University.

Currently, Leah is working on a collection of poetry and nonfiction which explores her many travels through Europe & the Southwest & is honored to act as the faculty advisor for *Metafore* as well as the MUM Queer Coalition.