

**Bear**

**Review**





*Bear Review* is an online literary journal of poems and micro prose out of Kansas City, Missouri. Published twice a year, in fall and spring, *Bear Review* is made possible by its readers' help and support. The editors, Brian Clifton, Marcus Myers, Andrew Reeves, and Ruth Williams, would like to express their gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the journal.

We read submissions year-round at [www.bearreview.submittable.com](http://www.bearreview.submittable.com). Send up to five poems or one to two short prose pieces (maximum: 500 words). We will consider a long poem, as well as a sequence of interconnected short sections of a short story, as long as it promises to keep the fire stoked. We are open to simultaneous submissions but ask the writer to notify us immediately about an acceptance elsewhere.

Cover art from *The Drolatic Dreams of Pantagruel* by François Rabelais. For the odd story behind this woodcut, [click here](#).

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*Mark Waldron*

## My boneheaded brain

is relaxing by the pool drinking  
'Tia Maria for its reportedly high

zinc content. My brain has slipped  
out of its uncomfortable skull,

that has my scalp and hair on it,  
popped that safely under the lounge,

and is lying on its front  
on a hotel towel

taking it easy after  
a hard morning's "fiddling" as my

brain puts it. It's lathered in factor  
50 that a passing celebrity chef

has helpfully massaged into it  
because it has no hands

or any other means  
to do that for itself,

and it would certainly burn in no time  
in the Canary Island's sun

without any protection  
against the UV rays.

Down on the beach yesterday  
my klutzy brain got

sand in its cracks, and  
the celebrity chef just unexpectedly

fished some of it out as he  
applied the sunscreen, working it deep

into the sulci.  
It glistened on his fingertips

like a cluster of minuscule jewels,  
and looking up from those

glinting constellations  
he wondered for a moment

at the whole world's dreamt-up  
system of values. My brain sensed

his wondering and smiled.  
Have you ever seen a hot

brain smile beneath the noonday sun?  
It's kind of cute.

## Dream of the Dog

A golden retriever with a map of home shaved on his back,  
wiggled into my arms. I explained  
to the dream-lawyer I had dream-hired  
this dream-dog was now mine own blind guide.

His owner has no way to find him, I lied,  
my hand on the back map, hiding the truth. Meanwhile,  
morning mounted the stair with all the indifference of a departing train.  
Just then the dog's owner ran in, gathered up his dog-bouquet,

furious as I'd be, as I was, since I was playing every character:  
dog-stealer, dog-owner, dog-lawyer, even the dog itself, tail agog.  
Used to be my dream animals bit my hand so hard I'd cry.  
but here, for once, it panted, stolen, sure, but a pure circle of good.

## The Animals

Each morning, after I bring you the duck eggs,  
I let you scrub my hands red in the sink water.  
After I've watered the horses, ankle deep in the trough,  
I let you sit me on the table,  
pull the tangles from my hair, the grass from my feet.

I say, *maybe it will rain*, because you like me to guess,  
but today you don't want to play even this game.

I reach a thumb out to find the scar,  
the knot on your neck from the winter you were nine,  
and you catch my fingers, hold them there.



*Christiane Wöhler*

*from Reality Sucks*

*Sandy Longhorn*

## Petition

~after Malinda Markham

On the days I am heavy, leaden,  
bid me swallow the chemical thorn

meant to pierce the pleated marrow,  
meant to prod both singe and song.

Bitters also serve.

You say I slack & limp, am muted static,  
the gutted end of the wick.

Rouse me with a platter smashed,  
your fingers bloodied by the splinters.

Then, I might rise to fetch swaddling  
strips, the sting of antiseptic,

and the heart-heat needed for the charge  
of one tethered to an injured creature.

*John Gallaher*

## Prairie Economics

The farm's asleep again. Don't wake it.  
There are plenty other things we can do  
for the afternoon. A little down the highway  
is another, among other things, like music  
you're not supposed to listen to, which exists  
only as an answer to a problem it posed for itself.  
Less the value of barns and more the doctrine  
of barnishness. The goats seem to agree,  
up around the heather and soda cans littering the field  
across from the sweet corn we nestle  
behind a few rows of feed corn to keep people  
from stopping. All the best farms are psychological  
not formal, which is another thing we learned  
from the confession, when we thought  
it would be the other way around. I would've even bet  
it was the other way around, and now look at us,  
lined up at the astrologer's office, goats  
watching from out in the truck. They want information  
and you're not sure if you should give it to them  
or not. Maybe you should. They're looking at us  
that way that makes you think you should,  
the mistiness of their gaze, the droopy mouths,  
the earnest way they got when they last asked  
to borrow that book on soy. Suddenly it's all the rage,  
like that list of the cultural differences in response  
to pain that left us feeling implicated. "You won't  
feel a thing," they chanted outside the bedroom window  
that night. It was a long night. Maybe this  
is the information they want and you've  
already given it to them. If you're anything like me,  
your body language gave you away long ago.

*John Gallaher*

## The Venus Effect

What are they looking at, over there? I can't make out  
their line of sight, like on that chemistry test we did  
so poorly on back in high school, where the base seemed  
OK, but then there were all these random numbers across it,  
waving, as they're now waving and if it's not at us  
then who could it be? Turning around to see  
would be giving away too much, like how my mother  
used to say "if I lose my mind shoot me," and then  
when she lost her mind, we couldn't agree on  
what she'd meant. "Take me out back and shoot me"  
isn't on the DNR forms, so we stand by the hospital window  
looking out at nothing in particular, still waving at us,  
like it's trying to get our attention. Maybe it's simply the wind  
that writes these things down that make of themselves  
something completely foreign to any conception  
we were working from. They look like flags, but made-up ones,  
like in movies, where you want to have a villainous  
enemy country, but you don't want to piss off  
any real ones. They fly over us as if we exist solely  
to be flown over, like the Republic of Anchuria. In the end  
there are so many they don't seem like many at all.  
Like knowing, from the Greek word for heavy,  
Barys, Barium is pronounced as BAR-ee-em.  
It's never found free in nature, and once we make the joke,  
saying "barium in the backyard backyard backyard,"  
we say it again more slowly, "backyard backyard  
backyard," where the past will have consumed all this  
by then and any stray thought that might've saved us.

## PAIRENT

***Mom's Name:*** Allison Kim

***What's The First Thing People Notice About Her?*** She's very nice.

***What Does Your Mom Like?*** Honey Oat Cluster Cereal, Reading, Mountain Climbing

Alison was as skeptical about Pairent as she was about Geoff's spelling skills. How had he already learned about the double-L spelling of Allison that had haunted her since her own school days? And what of the boy's observational skills? When had he ever seen her do anything that resembled mountain climbing? She could explain reading, at least, because she insisted on reading books with him every night. And she *did* love Honey Oat Clusters.

Pairent had grown popular enough to break through Alison's focus on work and her son, and her insistence on otherwise doing nothing but watching old episodes of *Friends* on Netflix while she ate Honey Oat Clusters—comfort foods, the show and the cereal alike. But Pairent had become the subject of conversation at her work at the Keurig, first for the outlandish concept, then for how cute their image of a father-son pair was on the ads at the margins of Facebook. Then there was the CNN story, and then one of the accountant's neighbors started using it. All of this, before one of the middle-aged women with thick glasses and hair dyed to different shades of brown asked Alison why she didn't give it a try.

The concept was simple enough. Single parents asked their children to complete questionnaires about themselves and submitted them to the Pairent online dating platform. The site advised that children make selections, too, but Alison was immediately wary of

Geoff picking someone not in spite of, but *because of*, his goofy looks, or someone who was cute but listed Ayn Rand as his favorite author.

She decided they'd try Pairent. The injection of kids in the mix seemed to stem the tide of guys sending unsolicited dick pics or calling you a bitch if you didn't respond to their private messages. And then there was the reality. For all of Alison's jokes about how Geoff was her surrogate boyfriend, anyway—she cooked and cleaned for him and spent all her time with him and obsessed over photographs of him—there was some truth in the idea that he may know her better than anyone else. Maybe, even at seven years of age, he could see through layers of what might make her attractive to someone else, or maybe he could see through the superficial red flags she'd spot, to someone's good core.

It would be nice to have someone.

The first date was a disaster. She thought the point of online dating was to build a life outside of the house. She got a sitter, put on makeup and skinny jeans she'd bought for the occasion, a blouse she used to wear on dates. She drove to the address of a place called Pizza Palisades, which sounded a little informal, but wasn't informal more practical anyway? Casual, no pressure. No worries about wasting money if the date went poorly, besides which she wouldn't get drunk at some bar and need to leave her car and figure out how to get back to it with Geoff in tow the next day.

Except Phil—her date—brought his daughter Clara.

Clara was eleven—no, *twelve*, she corrected him with a roll of her eyes, the first time Alison saw her eyes leave her cell phone. When Alison explained that she didn't know they were bringing kids, he gave a fumbled response that he'd thought that was standard, but it was his first Pairent date, too, and his daughter said that she'd told him so.

The place sold pizza by the slice from a glass counter. Pizza with red sauce, garlic pizza, pizza with onion and jalapeno, pizza cut to child-size square pieces. All of it certain to make a mess or leave her with bad breath, but she was also so hungry. She made note of this being a good place to bring Geoff sometime.

Phil paid for everything—a slice for each of them and two for Alison, who mostly just ate the toppings. Three sodas that he insisted on carrying himself, including the Coke which he spilled over himself and over Alison, so they finished the date stained and sticky. Clara didn't bother to hide a cruel smile as Alison peeled the fabric of her blouse from her chest where it had stuck to her flesh at an odd angle. Alison didn't apologize for taking Clara's napkin to clean up.

Phil didn't call and Alison couldn't say she was disappointed. Notifications showed up on her phone of other supposed Pairings, but she ignored them, and when she logged into her email to find them in message form she decided it was time to unsubscribe altogether. She suspended her account, though didn't delete it. Not yet.

One night Geoff piled his toys high in the middle of the living room floor, all except for a little doll of a black-haired woman that Alison didn't remember buying for him, and thus immediately worried he'd stolen from another child at school. He compelled the woman to climb the mound of toys in slow steps, often losing her footing and sliding downward, but never giving up despite what looked like incalculable odds. She tried to access his imagination and see not a untidy pile of playthings, but a misty, maybe snow-capped mountain. To see not a doll, but a woman.

Alison watched the scene play out in the middle of the living room floor. She stretched across the couch, eating Honey Oat Clusters dry from the box and not worrying

when some tumbled loose from her fingers, into the couch. Between her and Geoff, who knew how many crumbs and scattered remains hid behind cushions and in crevices? Who knew what they might find later?

## Bullet Points

Think of the passive-  
    aggressive bay, your office,  
green waves of deprivation;  
    think of the stalls—  
longing scrawls; gentlemen-walls—

keeping your creeping  
    at length in the violent hour.  
As it all starts to sour.  
    Forbid your staff  
to laugh, devour the massive

overflow, Stilton  
    with a cracker moat. Your coat.  
There is so much to withhold  
    in like, in life,  
and you have been voluntold

by your beard *slash* wife  
    to crash the discharge party  
for those who chose the package.  
    (Your type? Sporty.  
We have all seen the intern's

biceps and lightly  
    drawn bullet points. Just say cheese.)  
Failure is like an adverb:  
    how politely  
you wince at chauvinism,

cheers. For years, you called  
    your assistant, Jim, *Jizzum*—  
to yourself. Think of the guests.  
    No one should guess:  
you compete with your blood tests.

*Cindy King*

## Decree

When a Guest positions his hands  
around an Associate's throat,  
applies pressure to her windpipe,  
let it be known as diplomacy.

When an associate cries in the Team  
Leader's Lounge, positions her arms around  
She-of-the-Pencil-Skirt or He-of-the-Clip-On-Tie,  
let it be known as coercion.

When an Associate eats a peanut butter  
sandwich in the Team Member Lounge,  
head positioned in the cot of her arms,  
let it be known as bacchanalia.

Sometimes when we work, duty  
is a martini with too little vermouth,  
a driver without loft, a canoeing cigar.  
How will we ever love each another?

When an Associate ascends, passes  
a Guest who is descending the escalator,  
let their eyes meet:  
this will be known as democracy.

## Discipline

John looked at the pile of meat. He'd done sixteen shaves, which is what he'd been taught, and he was sure that he'd used the right thickness. John looked over at his neighbor's pile, even though they'd been told not to worry about anyone else's meat. John's neighbor's pile looked a little bigger than his. Or maybe it was just his imagination. He leaned in a little and looked at his slicer. It was dialed exactly three clicks in. He had to be right.

One row over, the weighings were starting. Three fleischmeisters were there. The first one weighed the meat, the second one typed the weight into a tablet, and the third talked to the apprentice that was being normed, pointing at the pile of meat and asking questions. The talker was the fattest, and he had a beard, which meant that he had to wear one of those nets over it. John had been careful to shave cleanly that morning.

They went fairly quickly, moving from apprentice to apprentice. Sometimes the bearded meister would slow the operation down a bit, but never all that badly. Still, by the time they reached the end of the first row, John's feet were already beginning to bother him. He pumped his legs just a little, not so that anyone could see him do it. He put his hands behind his back. They'd told him not to fidget.

The fleischmeisters started down John's row, going the opposite direction from how they'd gone down the first row. John tried not to eavesdrop, but it was impossible not to. ".44 pounds? You should probably double check your slicer work."

John could feel himself starting to sweat even before the first droplets came. He closed his eyes and breathed slowly. He opened his eyes back up. The fleischmeisters were one table closer. He looked back to his neighbor's meat. Maybe it was the same size. During the training, he'd always been with someone who had undercut, so maybe he was just used to having the biggest pile.

Jon was thinking about the nature of ham and piling when the fleischmeisters got to his table. "How are you doing today?" the bearded one said.

John nodded. "Not bad. You?"

The bearded one nodded back while the weigher slid John's meat onto the scale. John held his breath.

"49 pounds. Nice job."

John let himself have just a little smile. "Good trainers," he said.

The tablet guy punched in the numbers.

"Right," the bearded one said. "Well, you keep having a good day."

"You too," John said. He breathed a sigh of relief.

\*\*\*

Chrissy made sure that her moan started low and built up slowly. Even at its peak, it wasn't all that loud, but she held it for approximately two seconds before letting it start to trail off. When she was done, Chrissy opened her eyes and looked at Jamie. Jamie's face didn't show much emotion. "Was that it?" she asked.

Chrissy gave a little smile and shrug. "I can try again," she said.

Jamie sighed, and not sexily. "Maybe we should listen to the sample moans again."

Chrissy put her hands together, palm-to-palm in front of her. "No," she said. "I can do this. I know I can."

Jamie gave a little frown, then she shrugged. "Up to you, but keep in mind that you need to be phone ready by Friday."

Chrissy moved her hands apart and shook them a little. "I know. I'll get it. So, I need to go longer or louder?"

"More louder. And you need to vary it a little more. Guys don't get off on one-trick ponies."

Chrissy nodded and tried to not to overthink things. They'd told her to be natural, not to second guess herself in the moment. She gave a short, quiet moan with her lips shut. She paused, opened her mouth and gave a slightly longer one. She took a deep breath and went louder, this time trying to alternate between low and high. She gave a drawn out, "Oooh," followed by a fast and emphatic, "Yes." She did two more medium-sized moans, then tapered off with a long but quiet one.

Chrissy let herself catch her breath before opening her eyes. When she did, she saw Jamie's face in full bitch mode. Eyes half shut and edges of her mouth turned down. "We're still on moans, Chrissy," she said. "Let's get this right before you start trying out words."

Chrissy looked at the floor and nodded. She told herself that she would not cry.

"And don't make your alternations so mechanical. Let yourself surprise yourself." It was one of the company pieces of advice. Chrissy felt gross, hearing it now. But she nodded again. She could do this. Chrissy closed her eyes, pictured Hugh Jackman, and started to moan.

\*\*\*

"Not straight in," Krag said. "At an angle."

Rax pulled his mini pitch out of the thing. He looked at it and saw that there was very little blood on the tines. He pulled his arm back and tilted his hand up. "Like this?" he asked, stabbing the thing hard. It groaned a little.

"No," said Krag. "Downward angle, not upward. That's how you'll get your momentum."

Rax pulled his mini pitch out, and the thing squealed a little. Before he could stab again, Krag said, "Like this." He took his mini pitch and jabbed (at a slight downward angle). The mini pitch went in deep, and the thing howled loudly. After the tines were in, Krag bent his wrist a little, and the thing gave a high whine. Sure enough, when Krag pulled his mini pitch back out, the tines were covered in blood. Rax tried not to stare.

"You'll tire yourself out," Krag said. "You have to stab right so you can do the most damage with the least work."

Rax nodded. He felt bad that Krag had to keep showing him these things. It had taken him most of the day to get the hammer work down. Rax brought his arm back, tilting his hand a bit. Before he could even stab, Krag said, "Choke up on the handle. It will help you to be more accurate."

Rax repositioned his hand. It felt strange. He tried to jab the thing, but he ended up scraping a bit of the skin, and his mini pitch didn't go nearly as deep as Krag's. Rax tilted his mini pitch before pulling it out. The thing cried out.

"It's not quite there yet," Krag said.

Rax nodded. He knew it was true. He looked to Krag, who nodded once, quickly. Rax pulled back his arm, took a breath, and stabbed as hard as he could. The thing howled, and loudly this time. Rax was pleased. But when he yanked the mini pitch out of the thing, he saw that one of the tines was still in it. He didn't have to look at Krag. He knew that this was not good.

## and death is an immensity

the way the oceanic depths are an immensity,  
fish moving on the bottom, and eyeless tubeworms  
making, with the grotesque  
geometries of their bodies, a space  
which is not-death,  
not-depth, which is to them  
a surface sensation  
of hunger all around,  
a skin saying this inside  
water is body, that water not, and eyeless I see them  
as my eye sees through the sky  
stars at night distant, cold in the north breeze  
as I am, shivering out here but not wanting  
to go in yet, home that place where the light  
pushes out to the windows and scales them to mirrors  
and arms and love and everything which makes life worth living,  
and says *this is you*.

### Eyeless

fish, alone with your hunger, your body, skeleton shaped  
to accommodate the immensity  
pressing in all around you, loneliness which would crush me  
but which you need to live, up here you die  
when we pull you  
out of your element, reconstruct you as we might  
for our museums.

*Jon Boisvert*

## ANEMONES

You walk along the rocks by the sea,  
gently stroking the green anemones.  
You let them suck on your fingers.  
They thank you in small, wet voices.  
When the moon comes up &  
everything else is dark, the sea &  
anemones glisten. You tell me you  
want soft, green children.

*Jon Boisvert*

## STORM

I look out the window again. This time the sky is black & a storm is lifting trees & water into the air. Through the chaos, a man floats down. He puts his hands on the glass & asks if I've seen you. Have I? The wind tears off his clothes & hair. He cries because you haven't called.



*David Rodriguez*

Gentleman 3



*David Rodriguez*

Gentleman 2

*Matt McBride*

*from* The Mourners Forget Which Funeral They Are At

\*

In the dream,  
I was on the set of a sitcom,  
crawling behind furniture  
to avoid the camera.

Extension cords  
wrote drunk signatures  
over the surface of the lake,

and in the street, waving  
mannequin limbs like flags,  
the children, eyes red  
from the chlorine fog.



*David Rodriguez*

Lady 2

*Matt McBride*

*from* The Mourners Forget Which Funeral They Are At

\*

The stories of scaffolding  
skeletoned no buildings.

I was walking  
across the face of a statue  
I'd never see.

Each event was only  
a first repetition;

her throat an extra letter.



*David Rodriguez*

Lady 6

*Christine Gardiner*

*from* AS SEEN ON TV

Q: What goes on behind the scenes?

A: Good girls don't eat meat or  
keep parakeets in cages. We only  
eat organic but sometimes slip  
& dress like fallen angels  
bc deep down we know plastic  
makes the world possible.

Q: You can't put a price on human life but  
what kind of guy do you like, what's your type??  
a good guy? a bad guy? a fist fight?

A: Hm. Good question! Hard to say...

I mean my best bad boy  
looks like danger, a gangster,  
legs & a black leather jacket.  
I am in love with his imagination.  
He imagines me poised & undressed  
draped in capitalism & casual sex, but

I also have a good guy who is always there for me.  
Every night he meets me backstage, streaming  
internet tv. Desperate with pornography  
to rape & save young women from rape.

## Lower Third

My sister explains that all of the most talented young artists work commercially, have too many student loans not to make the animations that couch Teen Mom 2 from the Always My Fit™ commercials that blare: *Sixty percent of women are wearing the wrong size pad.* If the baby shower is too much of a disaster, nothing will appear on the cartoon yearbook. The tension is too real to animate.

The company that invented the way text superimposes on television broadcasts no longer exists, merged, changed spellings, and then changed back. Its creators call their original impulse *lofty*:  
    *lofty* simple font,  
    *lofty* electronic text field,  
    *lofty* arrivals and departures.

It was *Chyron*, after the *wisest* and *justest* centaur, he had front legs of a human, and a back half of a horse—this made him more respectable, and truthfully his name was spelt *Chiron* but this was a registered trademark in California, a *y* is as good as an *i*.

Before, the method was handwritten cards and then it was all scrolling felt, dissolves, and knowing in advance what was going to happen on camera.

I'll never betray my handwriting, why would I let you know. The hardest part of learning calligraphy is understanding that it's not handwriting, it's shapes.

This was all just waiting there for me. In seventh grade mythology, I wrote my name And *SA* at the top of my yellow lined paper as instructed.

This was very funny. But this exceptional centaur lived on a hook-shaped Mount covered in tart fruit, a golden apple, swaying gap-toothed daisies—I *essay* to tell you that nothing has changed.

*Dorothy Chan*

## Chinese Girl Videotape Leaked II

Somewhere in Singapore  
there's a video of me lap dancing  
a British businessman,  
and I remember him fondly,  
ordering Pellegrino for us  
outside the club for a cooldown,  
saying to me, *You really are  
the world's most adorable girl,*  
stroking my cheek, me at  
twenty-three, a real minx  
in a borrowed Gucci dress,  
and daddy, daddy, daddy,  
once you learn seduction,  
you know everything  
there is to know about life,  
or as the French say,  
losing your virginity  
is equivalent to shedding  
your stupidity,  
and after fish and chips,  
he hugs me goodnight,  
escorting me back inside,  
a face that looks younger  
than the forty he claims,  
but why would he lie about that,  
those big macho arms,  
that really can't protect me—  
no, I don't want you to protect me  
ever, I want to stand outside,  
smoke a cigarette,  
yes, I know I have asthma,  
and more importantly,  
I'd rather have the perfect  
woman than the self-proclaimed  
Adonis—1999 Fabio  
attacked by a goose  
on the Busch Gardens Apollo  
rollercoaster    *I'm so sorry  
about your face.*

I'm not your baby doll,  
or that heartbreaking  
Batman villain who never  
grows up, trapped  
in the funhouse of mirrors  
until she stumbles upon  
her own reflection  
aged naturally forever  
or what about Phoebe Cates'  
Linda from *Fast Times*  
locked eternally in that topless  
waterfall scene before  
she devours Judge Reinhold:  
replay replay replay  
that VHS from the last  
Blockbuster on Earth,  
and it's tragic,  
and my garter's not for you  
to strip, and I never  
gave you or your boy  
permission to film me—  
no, I'm not whoring  
in Singapore.  
I'm just having  
the most amount of fun  
a girl can have  
in a Gucci dress.



*Aidan Jones*

Zook

## Chromatophores

At the age of six I transformed into an octopus. This was the sort of behavior that led to me being classified as a “difficult child.”

Being of a shy disposition, I would squeeze into jars or tiny gaps between rocks. When my brother tried to prod me out of hiding, I would explode outward and wrap my tentacles around his arm. He would cry out “Mom, he's doing it again!” and I would be given a long lecture on how the suction of an octopus has been known to tear skin.

At night I would sneak down the stairs and raid the fridge for smoked oysters. More often than not, I would fall as I attempted to scale the door, making a loud wet slap. My parents carried me back to the aquarium as I cursed my inability to mimic the checkered pattern of the floor.

At school I was considered a constant source of disruption by teachers who failed to see the educational value of watching me trap snacks in my arms and tear them apart with my beak. Gym class was especially difficult. I would slop around the floor, leaving a slick trail in my wake that others slipped in. I decided to play goalkeeper, but whenever I caught the ball it would become stuck to my arms and I wouldn't be able to let go. The other kids yelled at me for ruining the game.

I watched a special on NOVA: “The Octopus is a Master of Disguise,” and I knew what had to be done. I altered the patterns of my skin to mimic the latest fashions. As I grew, I learned to balance on two legs, use two more as arms, and wrap the other four around one another to create a torso. Even my parents do not suspect. They threw out the aquarium and the tins of smoked oysters. They comment, “look how you've grown”, and I can see them light up when other parents say, “what a nice young man.” It's amazing how quickly one can adjust. Only rarely now am I overcome by a wild desire to cast everything off and leap into the sea.



*Marlinde Van Zessen*

Tentacle Love.

## Sourtoe

My father lost his big toe while hiking, and he never stopped looking for it. He would take us for long drives at the foot of the mountains, where we would search while he muttered “maybe it rolled.” He would tell us again about the bar up the street that was serving a new cocktail where a dried toe from the pioneer days was wedged on the side of the glass. “If a toe can last that long, then surely...” he'd trail off and survey the horizon.

We checked if the bar had his toe. My father sipped back the drink and let his lips linger on the toe long after the whiskey was gone. He was fairly sure it wasn't his. We were not welcome back.

We heard about a place off the coast of Vancouver, where severed limbs, once they made their way to the sea and cleared customs, would wash ashore. My father threw his shirts into a bag and took off in the pickup truck. When neighbors asked where he went we explained he was “finding himself” and they would nod. He sent us a postcard explaining he would search the world over, and when he found his toe he'd come back. My mother shook her head and tossed the letter aside.

I heard about a place in New York where severed fathers, once they made their way to the sea and cleared customs, would wash ashore. They would gather under the trees in the summer, or in cafes in winter and play games of chess. I threw my shirts in a bag and took off walking. I wrote a postcard back explaining I would search the world over, and not return until I found my father again. My mother did not write back.

Mark Wagenaar

## Orpheus in the Dirty South: Triptych

You gotta roll with it,  
the other dancers told her, speaking of the landing  
after a leap, & when she didn't roll just right, broke

her next-to-little toe.

*La Bayadère*: Nikiya in the kingdom of shades,

already forgetting

the world above, her descent,  
everything around her unnamed—  
is there anywhere names enough

for a hundred shades of shade—

her language failing her, as it fails us,

when we behold

the unprecedented.

\*\*\*

The now & the not-yet, a preacher Sunday called this world

& the next,

& in this now

Gregg Allman's just passed into the not-yet.

You gotta roll with it, he said of his habit.

At last I've a word for my friend's text, *three months sober!*  
*but I got a Disney cruise next week with my daughters...*

A word for myself too,  
as mine's putting me to bed on the living room floor:  
spreads a little blanket across my face  
& chest, pats me *night night daddy*—

her serious babyfatted face there  
then not there.

I'm worried I'm already forgetting these moments,  
as she, all twenty months of her,



*Hannah V. Warren*

## Self-Tarot Reading // Prairie

even if I made a map of everywhere  
I've been, I'd still be in Kansas  
    the same bare-boned trees  
    the same wind-soaked prairie

when I landed the five of cups, I knew  
I should forgive my husband   should  
let his hands skim my vertebrae again

    but I can't stop thinking of Kansas—  
open sky peeling skin from my chest  
ragged air cracking my neck and face

        next time,  
I'll rifle through the deck—tuck  
the five of cups at the bottom, pull  
only from the top  
        I'll find the moon,  
maybe the chariot

## All dressed in white

A word of caution here Gas line buried here Line forms here Sign here Map says you are here Check here Here you will find Refer here Much of the information that follows here Go here Was here in this stall Is here at this bar Here to stay Click here Here's how Tear here Choose your board from the list here Here, select your preference Here is an example They have lived here most of their lives I have only just moved here My friend here can tell you Same here Stop here See here young man To come to here Here is your paycheck Here I must dissent This here dog is injured Our dog is injured just here From here, you can take in the full view Be here now Here there and Here's to all of you Here today, gone Look here Neither here nor Here goes nothing Here we go again Here he is, finally Here's your cut Here comes your man Here comes the bride Rachel Mindell Present Here



*Mark Peter Drolet*

The Tree

*Jory Mickelson*

## Motherhood

When my child  
died, correction—  
my child

didn't, when she was  
born, correction—  
formed in my

womb without  
a brain, delicate  
helm of bone

destructible—correction  
corruptible and empty-  
headed, absolve me

of what couldn't  
be, the unfinished  
into which

she'd evaporate

*Chelsea Dingman*

## January

As if love is transmutable—, the snow  
haunts the bare trees. Nowhere to be

caught. Like me, now, do snowflakes  
long to collect & hold tight to the tree

still upright? The stink of last night's trash,  
absent. Even the dead wouldn't stink

in this subzero cold. I waited the night  
for another person to pass. People turned

to parcels in the corners of the room. I opened  
the windows to snow. From the dying man,

I learned to pray, little birds broken  
like teeth in my mouth. In the end, god,

I wanted to learn none of this: the snow,  
the stink, the end. Don't make me sorry.

What is the greatest struggle of this life,  
if not the struggle to survive it?

*Chelsea Dingman*

## a brief history of how I found you [hanged]

hemmed—

the heart  
in its small sac, you hanged

not for the heart's sake

but for forsaken rooms your brain  
became, sound

torn & rent

from your tongue. you didn't fall  
asleep & not wake, no matter the new

gossip, your hanged

body that speaks of its deficits:  
the rivers of veins

too shallow

for your blood not to flood,  
your stare

from a closet

in a hotel room, unfamiliar  
with blood—; did you hesitate

to make a mess of

your limbs, paling  
like orchids?

speak: claim a stake

in this hurt, this heart  
-stroke,            this heat

that long-drained the rooms

of your body,  
each radiant centimeter—

the impossible self

-love you once reached for  
with coffee & a bagel

over breakfast, sun

-hurt in a morning  
without walls or sky

-lights, nowhere to hang

like a wire hanger, hooked  
in the hollows of

a closet,

the body left  
to float.

## god don't like

my mother says god / don't like ugly / she says it like a joke / the way a joke /  
can admonish / the cut it makes /

the cut I am always / making / at my sister's / solitary heart / I cut / my sister / with a joke  
/ and see every part of me / is ugly / all the way / to the bloodied bivalve / the vulgar clam  
/ I press / with a knife / to open and open / for anyone who'll see / I press it open /

my mother says / cherish / your sister / you only have / one sister / my mother is talking /  
to herself / she had two / sisters / one sister left / and none of us / want the pressure / of  
knowing / a sister can end / snap / like that /

snap / shut up / how ugly / a clam / when it's closed / ugly / makes a pearl / clasp clam /  
bear down / enough compression / would there only be a pearl / a pearl

my mother says god / don't like ugly / but I saw a clam / I opened / opened it / and I  
believe / in an ugliness / god loves / so I will open / every ugly thing

## Contributors

**Jon Boisvert** was born in Elkhorn, Wisconsin, and now lives in Oregon. He studied poetry at Oregon State University and the Independent Publishing Resource Center in Portland. You can sometimes see new writing and art at [www.jonboisvert.com](http://www.jonboisvert.com). *BORN* is his first book.

**Dorothy Chan** is the author of *Attack of the Fifty-Foot Centerfold* (Spork Press, April 2018) and the chapbook *Chinatown Sonnets* (New Delta Review, 2017). She was a 2014 finalist for the Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Academy of American Poets*, *The Common*, *Diode Poetry Journal*, *Quarterly West*, *Blackbird*, and elsewhere. Chan is the Editor of *The Southeast Review*. Visit her website at [dorothy-poetry.com](http://dorothy-poetry.com).

**Michael Chin** was born and raised in Utica, New York and currently lives in Georgia with his wife and son. His hybrid chapbook, *The Leo Burke Finish*, is available now from Gimmick Press and he has previously published work with journals including *The Normal School*, *Passages North*, and *Hobart*. He works as a contributing editor for *Moss*. Find him online at [miketchin.com](http://miketchin.com) or follow him on Twitter @miketchin.

**Emma Crockford** is a high school senior at Rising Tide Charter School in Plymouth Massachusetts, where she is the editor and founder of her school's newspaper. Most recently, her work has appeared in Brown University's *The Round*, *Gravel*, *Liminality*, and *Parallax*. In the spring of 2017 she was the recipient of The Helen Creeley Poetry Prize. As the winner of the Helen Creeley Prize, she was given the honor of opening for headlining poets at the Massachusetts Poetry Festival.

**Chelsea Dingman** is a Canadian citizen and Visiting Instructor at the University of South Florida. Her first book, *Than*, was chosen by Allison Joseph to win the National Poetry Series (University of Georgia Press, 2017). Her chapbook, *What Bodies Have I Moved*, is forthcoming from Madhouse Press (2018). In 2016-17, she also won *The Southeast Review's* Gearhart Poetry Prize, *The Sycamore Review's* Wabash Prize, and *Water-stone Review's* Jane Kenyon Poetry Prize. Her work can be found in *Ninth Letter*, *The Colorado Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, and *Gulf Coast*, among others. Visit her website: [chelseadingman.com](http://chelseadingman.com).

**Merridawn Duckler** is a poet, playwright from Portland, Oregon and the author of *INTERSTATE* forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press. Recent work published or forthcoming in *Ninth Letter*, *Juked*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Disquieting Muses Quarterly*, the anthologies *Climate of Opinion: Sigmund Freud in Poetry* and *Weaving the Terrain: 100 Word Southwestern Poems* from Dos Gatos Press. Her fellowships/awards include Writers@Work, NEA, Yaddo,

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**John Gallaher** is the author of *In a Landscape* (BOA, 2014) and the forthcoming *Brand New Spacesuit*, also from BOA. He lives in rural Missouri and co-edits *The Laurel Review*.

**Christine Gardiner** writes poetry, memoir, and fiction. Her first book, *My Sister's Father*, was published by Black Lawrence Press in 2017, and her experiments in confessional poetry can be found at [www.petmurmur.com](http://www.petmurmur.com). She holds a MFA from Brown University and a PhD from the University and is an Assistant Professor of Liberal Arts at the College of New Rochelle, School of New Resources where she is edified by her students and their stories.

**Stuart Greenhouse's** poems have most recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Boulevard*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Yes, Poetry*.

**Zeke Jarvis** has had work in *Bitter Oleander*, *Moon City Review*, and *Posit*, among other places. His books include *So Anyway...*, *In a Family Way*, and *Lifelong Learning*.

**Cindy King's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Callaloo*, *North American Review*, *African American Review*, *American Literary Review*, *jubilat*, *The Louisville Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Blackbird*, *Cortland Review*, *River Styx*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Collagist*, *Cimarron Review*, *Black Warrior*, *Folio*, *Barrow Street*, *New American Writing*, and elsewhere. She has received a Tennessee Williams Scholarship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference and the Agha Shahid Ali scholarship from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Currently she lives in Utah, where she is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Dixie State University and editor of *Route 7 Review* and *The Southern Quill*.

**Sandy Longhorn** is the 2016 recipient of the Porter Fund Literary Prize and the author of three books of poetry. *The Alchemy of My Mortal Form*, her latest book, won the 2014 Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press. Her other books are *The Girlhood Book of Prairie Myths* and *Blood Almanac*. Her poems have appeared in *The Cincinnati Review*, *diode*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and in many more literary journals and anthologies. Longhorn teaches in the Arkansas Writers MFA program at the University of Central Arkansas, where she directs the C.D. Wright Women Writers Conference.

**Randall Mann** is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *Proprietary* (Persea Books, 2017). New work appears in *Poem-A-Day*, *Lit Hub*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Court Green*, and *jubilat*. He lives in San Francisco.

**Matt McBride's** work has appeared in *Cream City Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *FENCE*, *Forklift*, *Ohio*, *Mississippi Review*, *Map Literary*, *Ninth Letter*, *Packingtown Review*, and *Typo*

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**Jory Mickelson** is a queer writer whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Rumpus*, *Ninth Letter*, *Vinyl Poetry*, *The Florida Review*, *Superstition Review*, *The Collagist*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and other journals. He is the recipient of an Academy of American Poet's Prize and a Lambda Literary Fellow in Poetry. His most recent chapbook *Slow Depth* was published by Argus House Press. You can follow him at [www.jorymickelson.com](http://www.jorymickelson.com).

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**Molly Bess Rector** recently earned an MFA in poetry at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. She currently co-curates the Open Mouth Reading Series. She has served as poetry editor for *The Arkansas International* and is the recipient of a residency from the Edward F. Albee Foundation. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming *SAND*, *Hobart*, *Cobalt*, *Raleigh Review*, *FreezeRay*, *Nimrod*, and *The New Guard*.

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**Mark Wagenaar's** most recent collection is the Saltman Prize-winning *Southern Tongues Leave Us Shining*, due from Red Hen Press in summer 2018. He is an assistant professor at Valparaiso University.

**Mark Waldron** was born in New York and lives in London. He's published two collections in the UK with Salt Publishing, *The Brand New Dark* in 2008 and *The Itchy Sea* in 2011, his third, *Meanwhile, Trees* was published by Bloodaxe Books in 2016. He was selected as a Next Generation Poet by the Poetry Book Society in 2014. His work has appeared in numerous magazines in the UK and US.

**Hannah V. Warren** teaches poetics and literature courses. She serves as the poetry editor for *Beecher's Magazine*, and her works have recently appeared or will soon appear in *Whiskey Island*, and *Spirit's Tincture*. She writes and paints and tends her plants in Lawrence, Kansas.

**L. A. Wheeler** is a writer and artist in Lawrence, Kansas. *Abandoners*, her first book, is forthcoming from The Operating System in 2018. Her photo-essay "A Little Hell of Its Own" won the 2013 *Bone Bouquet* Experimental Prose Contest, and other work has appeared

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