



# pass, past, passed

Carolina Gutfreund

i lose myself in the memory of his backseat  
night after night after night,  
stench-filled, sweaty, car-rocking.  
i wonder if when i'm 40  
i'll be the same 19  
year old girl who sits  
in countless rooms thinking of you.  
maybe if carve myself  
to blood-let you  
i'll feel you leave me  
in rich red river run.  
maybe the sadness will pour out?  
the weight, lifted off my shoulders  
and i can breathe  
after ten long months  
of hesitation.  
i've risen from the dead  
not yet alive all this time  
consumed by the past  
and pasts passed.



**Carolina Gutfreund** is an aspiring writer with a few publications and has been previously published by *Thread Magazine*, The USF honors college, and The Library of Congress. She is studying the fields of English and Environmental Science and wants to work in the conservation field and further her writing about nature.

# What I Was Raised By

A father. Two brothers. The big dog and the laundry basket sleigh he carried me in, tied to his collar by a chain link of quilts, hand sewn quilts, the grandma quilts, not named as such because they were made by grandma but because they smell like the platonic ideal of a grandma. Grape-stained floorboards and the chandelier that held Christmas ornaments in June. Heat and sweat. Peaches and cream. The house mule and the barn cat, her naked pink kittens, the rooster and the hen. Veal calves and milk cows. I was raised by the foal ripped hock to flank to barrel and the coyote that done it, by the bullet we put in them both. One mercy, one justice. My mother up until she cut a square door in the sky, opened it, and left. The hot glue gun that patched it over with another plot of heaven. A glass wall. Visitation hours. The white heads of dandelions, promising that something would come true, anything at all. I waited for the blue door to open but when it did I realized what the bullet was for: helping you sing Auld Lang Syne. I turned away and followed the trail of sugar that caught the fly. The jar of vinegar that caught the butterfly,  
the bright green wing  
shining like an oil spill.

a.k. barak

a.k. barak (they/them) was last seen poorly erecting circus tents in Columbus, Georgia after a TNR attempt went awry. Their work has been published or is forthcoming in coalitionworks, *Dead End*, *Robot Butt*, *Oakland Arts Review*, and elsewhere.

“I put on some make-up / Turn on the eight-track / I’m pulling the wig down from the shelf / Suddenly I’m Miss Punk Rock Star of Stage and Screen / And I ain’t never / I’m never turning back!”

—Stephen Trask (*Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 2001)

Growing up as a queer child unwittingly is an interesting experience, to say the least. Other people seem to know your identity better than you do yourself. I vividly remember coming out to one of my brothers, who instantly turned to me with a look of seeming confusion and said, “Yeah, I know.” I was quite taken aback by this in the moment. How come others were more in touch with my own identity, than I was myself? Did I truly not know myself for this long?

It wasn’t until I heard those first, defiant and bold words, boom over the big screen’s speakers and demand my attention—“Don’t you know me Kansas City? I’m the new Berlin Wall... try and tear me down!” (*Hedwig*). I was entranced. But it wasn’t as if those words were speaking to me—rather, they were speaking for me. Although, why exactly these particular words had spoken for me, I was unsure. In the moment I shrugged it aside—it was a queer film, it only makes sense for me to connect to it this way, right? For now it didn’t matter, but it felt as if there were still something in my head that hadn’t clicked yet. I was happy just enjoying the wonder of the film. If

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**John David Hunter (she/her):** I am a disabled trans woman native to South Carolina. I am a writer, advocate, and instructor, whose research deals primarily with Film Theory. I am currently an Adjunct Professor within the English Department at Midlands Tech. I have one sweet and quite energetic lab/pitbull mix named Magnolia or “Maggie” for short. She gets her name from the flowers of the Southern Magnolia tree, which possess a bright white color, much like her own coat. On any given day, you may find me watching one of the many films of the brilliant director John Waters.

you aren't familiar with it, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is a powerful punk rock musical—based on the original, off-Broadway theatre performance by the same name—and is a story about Hedwig's search for their own gender identity, something which they were never allowed to define for themselves. Hedwig, assigned male at birth, is a transgender person who is the victim of a botched—not to mention, forced—sex-change operation. They subversively embrace their own abjection and jokingly refer to their genitals as an “Angry Inch,” hence the title of both the band and the film. Coming to know themselves more intimately, the film ends as they break through the oppressive chains of the heteronormative gender binary (Man/Woman) by realizing that they do not have to be defined inside these limiting constraints of heterosexuality, and thus embrace gender non-conformity rather than being forced into one of these categories. Spending more time with this film, I realized why it connected with me so much—I felt the exact same way. Not just with my non-conforming, genderqueer identity, but with most other areas in my life as well. I had constantly been defining myself through non-conformity, particularly in how I approached analyzing cultural texts. I fell in love with the things most of my other classmates hated. Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* was a text that disgusted everyone in the class—but not me. I was captivated by this ingenious work—and when I read George Washington Peck's review from the year of its publication (1852) in the *New York American Whig Review*, only to see him say it was “A bad book!

Affected in dialect, unnatural in conception, repulsive in plot, and inartistic in construction. Such is Mr. Melville's worst and latest work,” I became even more thrilled with the joy I experienced from this book.

Then it hit me. Just because I was not completely aware of my identity for a large part of my life didn't mean that I wasn't already performing it. Performativity creates the identity, and I was already quite an efficient performer. Queerness has nothing inherently to do with one's sexuality or gender identity; instead, Queerness is a particular way of relation, which subversively identifies meanings in a way which disarticulates cultural sites where singular, monolithic meaning has been previously declared. Queerness is about exposing the plurality of meanings where we have been told by the dominant institutions that only singular meaning exists. I had been queerly reading cultural texts for the entirety of my life. Being constantly insistent on meanings which others couldn't find, or just simply didn't want to agree with, had been quite a familiar experience to me. I had once even been told by a math teacher, “I don't even understand how you did that problem, but somehow you ended up getting the right answer anyway, so I guess it works,” in response to my unique way of completing a problem. Not only did I fall in love with the things everyone else didn't care for, but I also found meanings within them which no one else did. I was more interested with relating intimately with texts in a way which changed my own perception of myself and the world around me, rather than passively

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identifying what others thought was important in them. In her essay “Queer and Now,” Eve Sedgwick states that “‘Queer’ seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation” (Sedgwick 9). I had no reason to feel that I was any less connected to my identity than others who became familiar with theirs much earlier—I had been performing it the entire time. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* helped me to understand myself on a much more intimate level, and it also changed the way I approach reading and analyzing cultural texts. I have learned to embrace my instincts and to follow them to the places that remain undiscovered, in hopes to bring new meanings and ways of existing into the world around me. I no longer doubt the conclusions that I come to when no one else has reached a similar conclusion—instead, I dive headfirst back into the text to find more evidence for my subversive claims. The limits which once constrained me became the sites by which I reclaimed my own agency.

## Sources

*Hedwig and The Angry Inch*. Directed by John Cameron Mitchell, performances by John Cameron Mitchell, Miriam Shor, and Stephen Trask. Killer Films, 2001.

Peck, George Washington. “*Pierre; or ,The Ambiguities Review.*” *Melville.org, New York American Whig Review*, <http://www.melville.org/hmpierre.htm>.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. “*Queer and Now.*” *Tendencies*, Routledge, 1994, pp.1-24, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203202210>.

# All [self-vanishing] farewells are sudden



## Phi Phi AN



**Phi Phi AN** is a Vietnamese independent multi/interdisciplinary artist-director-curator-producer-researcher-activist. Since 2011, she has multifaceted herself with echoes—chambers, deep understanding, building, development, reformation and involvement in closely over the stages, the scenes, the spaces, arts and intercultural forms; locally and internationally. A thoughtful way to resurface after a lengthy hiatus passed through fire.

[Phi Phi AN's Linktree](#)

*Eurasian Eagle-Owl, March 15, 2010-February 23, 2024*

In his twelve years of life,  
Flaco never left his cage in Central Park  
until the February night  
when vandals stole into the zoo  
and cut the steel mesh imprisoning him.  
He flew as far as Bergdorf Goodman,  
half a mile away.

In those first hours of freedom,  
Flaco hunched over a midtown sidewalk  
in the rain, dazed and confused.  
His talons gripped the sidewalk,  
his large, round orange eyes  
dazzled by revolving police lights,  
his sensitive ears deafened by sirens.  
He ignored the pet carrier baited  
with frozen rat, placed next to him.

A long-buried instinct stirred.  
Unfolding his long wings,  
Flaco took off again,  
returning to the park.

The initial rescue efforts  
were hampered by crowds  
who interfered with zoo staff.  
That night Flaco caught his first rat,  
flushed by a garbage pickup,  
and took it to the treetops.  
Eating, he paused to hoot softly.  
In the zoo, he'd hardly ever hooted,  
and he hadn't yet found his voice.

His first efforts at flying were clumsy.  
He crash landed onto branches  
and made a racket. But he persevered  
to become a graceful flyer,  
gliding silently and swooping soundlessly.

Wherever he went, people tracked  
and broadcast his movements,  
shot pictures and videos.  
He'd become a celebrity  
in a city that venerates celebrities.



Anne Whitehouse (she/her) is the author of poetry collections: *The Surveyor's Hand*, *Blessings and Curses*, *The Refrain*, *Meteor Shower*, *Outside from the Inside*, and *Steady*, as well as the art chapbooks, *Surrealist Muse* (about Leonora Carrington), *Escaping Lee Miller*, *Frida*, *Being Ruth Asawa*, and the forthcoming *Adrienne Fidelin Restored*. She is the author of a novel, *Fall Love*. Her poem, "Lady Bird," won the Nathan Perry DAR 2023 "Honoring American History" poetry contest. She has lectured about Longfellow and Poe at the Wadsworth Longfellow House in Portland, Maine, and Longfellow House Washington Headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

*cont'd*



Succumbing to public pressure,  
the zoo abandoned rescue efforts.

A myth developed about Flaco:  
that he had chosen freedom,  
that he wanted to make his home here,  
that he was like the rest of us,  
cooped up in the pandemic  
and now let out, discovering his city.

By nature a feral bird far removed  
from his native habitat  
who had never lived on his own,  
Flaco wasn't living a wonderful life,  
but eking an existence in an urban park  
between a compost heap  
and a construction site,  
with no chance of encountering  
another of his kind,  
the only Eurasian Eagle-Owl  
in all of North America.

His continuing survival  
astounded everyone.  
As he gained confidence,  
his ethereal beauty grew,  
his expressive tufted ears,  
his delicate feathers striped  
orange, white, and brown  
puffed out around his body,  
his slightly devilish face.

Seeing him behave like other owls,  
claiming a wildness  
he'd never experienced,  
was awe-inspiring.

One summer evening,  
he chased a rat into the fence  
next to a ballfield, trapping it.  
He ate part of it and saved the rest for later.  
Another night, he waddled  
from tree trunk to tree trunk  
on his thickly-feathered legs,  
searching for his cache.

After he ate it, he bathed  
in a puddle on the playing field.

Serene with the sunlight  
on his face in the summer morning,  
his gular fluttering to beat the heat,  
preening and radiant,  
or camouflaged among  
dying leaves in the autumn,  
Flaco attracted attention.

In November he disappeared  
from his roost in the park  
and was seen five miles away,  
in Tompkins Square.

In the winter, he returned uptown,  
but he didn't remain in Central Park.

Flaco perched above water towers  
atop the roofs of apartment buildings,  
like an eagle-owl alight on a cliff.  
Resting on scaffolding

*cont'd*

twenty stories above the avenue,  
Flaco leaned forward and hiked up his tail,  
and his wings drooped down,  
his ear tufts ruffling in the wind,  
his white throat patch enlarged  
and shining in the moonlight,  
as a lovely, soft “hoo” emerged.

A gentle sound that travelled  
surprisingly far, it could be heard  
by pedestrians two blocks away.  
Sometimes Flaco hooted for hours.  
Avian experts worried he was distressed.  
Manhattan had become his prison,  
full of invisible dangers,  
where no large owl has ever survived  
more than eighteen months.

Early one February evening,  
just past a year since Flaco’s release,  
the super of 267 West 89 Street  
came across what he thought  
was a rock lying in the alley

just outside his basement door.  
On closer examination  
he recognized Flaco,  
lying face-down, wings splayed.

The cause of death was traumatic injury,  
a hemorrhage under the sternum  
and around the liver. A necropsy  
confirmed high levels of rat poison  
and an infection from a pigeon virus.

We made too much of Flaco,  
without considering what he really was:  
an animal estranged from his habitat,  
living on borrowed time.

# (She's Actually a Succulent)

Lauren Dodge

Stand again naked at the open terrace doors, imagine my silhouette, glazed by the flames of my bay leaf candle, resembles the shadow of our old cathedral cactus- lumpy, grey, soft clones drooping from each arm like cellulite, a dipped torso and lean to the left, tied to a useless wooden crutch. But in the fine Tuscan daylight the cactus ripples green and muscular, and she holds thousands of pups in each of her seven thick prickled arms, her cripple, not a sign of weakness. Maybe Galileo didn't drop a musket ball from her spines, and perhaps her fleshy stems don't contain seven bells cast in bronze, but she was sculpted, too, by a visionary- a breeze knocks her from an arm, reborn from the soil, thousands of times for thousands of years, and she tolls not for the worship of a lurking god, but the respect of the Great Supple Mother that cradles her.



Lauren Dodge (she/her) is an emerging poet from Midwestern America. She recently moved to Tuscany with her husband and two poodles. She enjoys drinking cappuccinos, walking her dogs through medieval streets, and smelling flowers. Her work has been published in *Stone Poetry Quarterly*.

# Home Writing

Abdulrahman M. Abu-Yaman

They asked me to write about home  
When there is nothing to write home about  
They want me to feed their minds with gory JPEGs  
But I don't have the stomach for that  
Since we are what we consume, I try to  
Watch my intakes and try not to upset my ulcer  
With perishables - which is like feeding depression  
With anxiety

Therefore,  
I've chosen to write what offsets them:

Like how his she garnished herself on the vanity  
before going out to see him & how he  
eenie meenie mannie moed between her  
favourite colours before picking the shirt  
to their date

Like how my neighbour's cat preys on milk  
& cohabits with her chickens

Like how our landlord's Alzheimer's makes him  
believe we have already paid the rent every year

*cont'd*



Abdulrahman M. Abu-Yaman is a Nigerian writer and poet. His works have been featured anthologies like *Ann Arbor Review*, *Afritondo*, *The Lagos Review*, *London Grip Magazine*, *Aké Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Blue Minaret* and elsewhere. His artworks have been exhibited during Kaduna Book and Arts Festival (Kabafest) and Borno Book and Arts Festival (Bobafest). He is the co-founder of Minna Literary Society (MLS) and winner of Wakaso Poetry Prize and Hysteria Writing Competition 2021. Abu-Yaman is a fellow of Ebedi International Writers Residency.

Like how we used to rush to get the remote control  
to determine which station stays

Like how he quit his job to be with her  
Since relationship with co-workers is outlawed

Like how people lie to friends on Facebook but  
Tell strangers the truth on twitterlik

Like how garri's price is higher than cornflakes but  
Is still regarded as an inferior good

Like how song beats overshadow the lyrics in Afro pop

Like how your village people are always on time when  
Collaborating with the universe to rain on your parade  
But are always late to the village meeting

Like how the hundred naira bill was featured in  
La Casa De Papel & how G.O.T crew hailed Nigerians for  
their views by staying up late to stream new episodes  
Like i said, I've chosen to  
Offset the upsets with those unsung moments

Not captured in positive JPEGs

These are what I want to write because I can't be  
Oppressed and still oppress myself negativities  
Or like we say in Nigeria,  
I can't come and kill myself!

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# Consecrated by Use

When we were growing up, my mother collected S&H Green Stamps. She referred to them as her “mad money.” She got them every week at the grocery store as a bonus for the money she spent on groceries. The stamps accumulated until there were so many that it was time for her to cash them in. Then we would hold a Green Stamps party, where my mother, my sisters, and I sat around the dining room table, each equipped with a stack of empty books to paste the stamps in and a bowl with a sponge sitting in a puddle of water.

The stamps came in perforated sheets. We separated the sheets of stamps at the perforations so they were size of the pages in the books—five stamps across and six stamps down. The backs of the stamps were coated with a glue that was activated when wet. The trick was not to wet the stamps too much—just enough to get the adhesive sticky but not enough to soak the stamps through.

It was pleasant work, sitting around the table, wetting the stamps on the sponges, and pasting them in the books, while our hands turned green from the dye, and Mom discussed with us what she was planning to buy. In this way she accumulated a blender, a steam iron, a toaster oven, an automatic “baconer,” and other useful objects. We loved to pore over the Green Stamps catalogue, calculating what she could buy, converting the amounts into what they would cost in dollars, and finding the best deals. One of my favorite items Mom bought was a three-tiered sewing box that cantilevered open. The exterior was white-and-blue wicker, the interior quilted blue satin. I thought it was beautiful, and I enjoyed helping Mom organize the spools of thread in different colors, embroidery scissors, tape measure, pin cushion, and thimble; the flat paper packets of sharp needles with eyes of different sizes; the little plastic boxes holding buttons, snaps, and hooks-and-eyes. Mom had been a home economics major at the University of Alabama, and she insisted that we all learn how to sew. I learned to sew but not to enjoy it, though I loved the accouterments and supplies.

*cont'd*

## Adrienne Pine

Adrienne Pine's creative nonfiction has appeared in *Feminine Collective*, *Masque and Spectacle*, *You Might Need to Hear This*, *The Good Life Review*, *The Sheepshead Review*, *Carte Blanche*, *Gravel*, *The William and Mary Review*, *Saw Palm*, *Metonym Journal*, and many other publications.

When I was accepted into college, Mom promised to use her Green Stamps to buy me what I needed. For once, I had permission spend her capital, and I was determined to enjoy it. One hot June day after I'd left high school forever, we drove to the S&H Green Stamps store with two shopping bags of Green Stamps books and a list. I used Green Stamps to buy an electric pot to boil water for tea, a pillow, a mattress pad, a light blanket to start out the year with and a heavier one for when it grew colder, two sets of sheets for a twin bed, and bright orange bath towels, so mine wouldn't get confused with anyone else's.

I had ideas about the sheets I wanted, and I wasn't sure I would find them at the S&H Green Stamps store. Its linen selection was from J.C. Penney's. When I expressed my reservations, Mom called me a snob.

"I'm not saying I won't look," I explained, "but I don't want plain white sheets; I want a pattern, with nice colors."

To my surprise I found two sets of sheets I liked right away; they seemed to jump out at me as I walked down the linen aisle. Blue was my favorite color in those days, and one set of sheets was blue and white in a geometric design. Its design featured two sets of parallel lines that crossed diagonally, meeting at right angles. A third set of parallel lines intersected the squares at every other row. The lines appeared to be woven through each other where they met; the effect was like an abstract trellis in Grecian blue and white. The fitted bottom sheet was blue on white, and the flat top sheet was white on blue, with a matching pillowcase.

The second set of sheets was in a floral pattern in shades of dusty blue, blue violet, lime green, and yellow green. The flowers appeared to be roses and cosmos. I liked the fact that the colors of the sheets did not correspond to the colors of the flowers in real life; it gave them an abstract quality, and they also matched my color palette.

All through college I slept in my two sets of sheets, alternating them with each other, and they grew softer with repeated washings. After I graduated, I moved in with the man I would later marry, and we slept in a full-sized bed. I no longer had a use for the sheets, but I kept them on a closet shelf. They had a second life after our daughter was born, and she used them after she graduated from a crib to a bed.

My sheets became her sheets, though we bought her other sheets as well. And when she went off to college, she couldn't take any of her sheets with her, because the beds provided by her college were longer than standard beds, and we had to purchase special sheets for them. Once she left home, we turned her room into to a guest room, replacing the twin bed with a full-sized bed.

Though I no longer own a twin bed, I have held on to my old college sheets. Now I use them only once a year, when I rent a house at the beach in August. Here I come to spend time alone, and then my family comes to join me. Before my family arrives, I sleep in a twin bed in a little room overlooking the sea. When my husband comes, I move to the big room with the larger bed. It is a nice room, but it only looks out to the yard. *cont'd*



# Consecrated by Use cont'd

Adrienne Pine

I come alone to write, think, dream, and end each day watching the sun slip into the sea. I come when I am sick at heart, for the wide vistas and the silences, the healing sun and birdsong and rustling breeze, the fogs and drenching rains. I come for the moon-and-starlit skies, rolling surf and crashing waves, the sand between my toes, and the piles of rocks worn smooth as eggs by the surf. I come in search of my essential self, the girl that I was before I evolved into who I have become, the person I would still be even had I not followed the paths in my life that beckoned me.

Built by an artist for himself, the house dates from the middle of the last century, which means it is as old as I am. From the first time I saw it more than thirty years ago, it seemed to me that the owner might have been designing it for me. Its siting on a hill sloping down to the sea. Its modest scale, its grays and blues. The handmade attention to every detail. The artist's paintings on the walls, the drawings of his friend. Here I have always found everything that I need.

Like my old sheets, I bring old clothes with a talismanic quality—a white cotton smock I use for writing, an ancient gray sweatshirt. Faded beach towels, a white cotton nightgown, old jeans, cut-offs, stretch pants. I bring a needle and thread, and like my mother, I mend what is torn. I wash my sheets and clothes and hang them to dry and bleach in the summer sun, smelling of roses and the sea. And when I leave, I put my old clothes and my old sheets away, and I hope I will return the following year.

# The “master of the death match,” Nick Gage

Christian Hanz Lozada

looks like my cousins with his sharp brow  
ledging over deep-set and close-together eyes  
and teeth wedging forward like a ship’s bow

As kids / my cousins and I would watch wrestling  
at times vaguely / at others overtly racist  
and always toxic with measurements of “testicular

fortitude” // their love for wrestling ended  
after attending their first live show  
where they saw the villain cradle and tuck

the hero’s head to keep them safe from devastating  
finishing moves // “it’s so fake” they said  
complaining that paralysis was the freakish

and not the norm // but they never saw Nick Gage  
this dude who looks like we’re related  
with his broken knees and hips and scar-tissued

forehead that puckers over that familiar brow  
in poorly organized hashtags // they never saw  
light bulbs shattered on heads to signify

the industrial everyday used in violence  
if they had / they might have changed careers  
from loading docks and handyman work

to cracking someone over their shoulders  
with a folding chair, filling each swing  
with the rage of unfulfilled and unmelanated

american promises up until that last moment  
before metal meets skin / when you pull back  
and misdirect the trajectory just enough

to keep the bang and lessen the pain  
while the suckers and marks in their seats  
cheer or boo but pay to see you

do something with this body that can take  
the pain and break and heal  
and keep going / going / going



**Christian Hanz Lozada** (he/him) aspires to be like a cat, a creature that doesn’t care about the subtleties of others and who will, given time and circumstance, eat their owner. He wrote the poetry collection *He’s a Color, Until He’s Not*. His Pushcart Prize nominated poetry has appeared in journals from California to Australia with stops in Hawaii, Korea, Africa, and Europe. Christian has featured at the Atrium Museum and Beyond Baroque. He lives in San Pedro, CA and uses his MFA to teach his neighbors and their kids at Los Angeles Harbor College.

# Healing Streams



## Ojo Victoria Ilemobayo



Ojo Victoria Ilemobayo (she/her) is a Nigerian Literary Enthusiast. She is a dynamic poet and a creative smartphone Photographer. Some of her works be found in brilliant magazines and anthologies. She tweets @ilemobayo-ojo

# 1. Sipping: See; Water

Madi Morelli

1. Sipping: See; Water
  - 2.
  3. Anytime I read someone else's writing, there is the sudden knowledge that the fonts I use are out of style. There is a sort of lake-water cough-up sensation, no saline cleansing, no ion-clearing, no tart and French-fry-esque taste like a desperate attempt at clearing throat pain, just a Lake Ontario-stylized musky sort of Loon smell. The bird not the coin, but it also tastes a bit like metal. Local metal. Sudbury metal, maybe. There is the sense that Garamond is out now, and Comic Sans has made an ironic resurgence that will be tired and passé once I finally break down underneath enough beach glass to attempt it.
- I They don't use numbers, not like they use numerals. A boy lays, some sort of prostrate on my couch, as I write and rewrite the same sentence, some sort of putting on a show that he keeps on in the background as he does pull-ups. Do grown men still do pullups? I dream of having the sort of nose I could look down. I dream never of seeking and usually of being sought. I would seek the boy on my couch, but he's already here. He's pulled up. He'll do his best to pull out. There's a very specific sort of being sought I seek, and to do it, I have to hide for most of the evening. So I debate capitalization. If it's to be numerals, it should be lowercase, shouldn't it?

*cont'd*



**Madi Morelli** (she/her) is a queer woman from Toronto with plans to publish a romance novel, a poetry collection, and a play in the next ten years. Her work can be found in *Wild Greens Magazine*, *Commuter Lit*, *Spell Jar Press* and *The Passionfruit Review*. She can be reached @madimorelli on Instagram, and she is currently singing in public.

# I. Sipping: See; Water cont'd

Madi Morelli

ii There is a perfection to his body that i don't enjoy, and a goofiness to his face that ii much prefer. There is a lack of study to his eyes that iii trust, and a confidence in his hands that iiiii do not. Upon reading someone else's writing there is the sense that they wrote it in one take and the celluloid simply never caught, no matter how many cigarettes they smoked and eyes they rolled and necks they bit. iiiii don't think they tried even for a moment, and it breathes through their pieces without ever tearing the edges. No one could ever accuse me of not trying, of not seeking. They'd probably call it the cardinal sin of my writing, rewriting that sentence for an audience. They'll only seek when iiiiii stop being sought.

is three sections too biblical? How many eyes does it need?

# [with winter sky]

The absence remains impalpable, so unlike a grief, more breeze than anchor.  
A blueprint asks nothing of me, but that I ruffle my throatfeathers and hum.  
Wordless, a tune is less normative. Decades might pass. Desire, you tell me,  
is a room full of doors, but *I dwell in possibility*, between cemetery and forest,  
drawn to the uncanny dance of crows, their not quite scorn, their wheeling.  
See how their wings gleam and dusk? I too am inhabited by weather, yearn  
for hours for clouds.

## Ceridwen Hall

Ceridwen Hall is a poet and educator from Ohio. She is the author of *Acoustic Shadows* (Broadstone Books) and two chapbooks: *Automotive* (Finishing Line Press), fields drawn from subtle arrows (Co-winner of the 2022 Midwest Chapbook Award). Her work has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Craft*, *Poet Lore*, and other journals.

# Water Gigantism

Kyle E. Miller

The cold may have had something to do with it. On the last day of summer, I walked up to the river around four in the afternoon and decided to go in. It was the warmest hour. My head was full of the most delirious clouds, and the sun had already begun to pull back the day so that the light delicately tracing the riverbank was completely unreliable, its relationship to time still being decided. The changing of seasons here is like an illness, it scatters all reason. I let out a painful sneeze, half-echoed in the open air; no one else was at the river that day; the banks were busy with inhuman life. My senses were usually drawn to and consumed by other people, watching them squabble, listening to their small gossip, which left no attention for any other phenomenon, but in the absence of others, I began to watch the river. Where the water passed over several flat angular stones, it expressed a white edge. A buckthorn dropped black fruit into the water. A bat flew above the river, skimming for insects, and then dove for a sip of water. It made several circles in the air before flying off toward the train tracks, which crossed the river farther down. I hadn't thought about any of these figures for a long time, the water, the sun, the buckthorn, the bat, the place where the water came from and the place that it went, and on the little trail up to the river, I saw other reminders of these things I hadn't properly thought about in a while, such as the exposed roots of a tree I couldn't name. But I felt no remorse—what did they have to do with me?



Kyle E. Miller can usually be found wandering Michigan's forests, turning over logs looking for life. He currently teaches college writing. His writing has appeared in *Clarkesworld*, *ergot*, and *Propagule*, and he won first place in poetry at *Poetic Visions of Mackinac 2022* and again in 2024.

I put my left foot in. The water-green, ochre, mustard, gray, and mauve waters under the influence of September light folded over the river— wasn't quite autumn cold. Were cold baths a cure for colds, or warm ones? I couldn't remember the folk wisdom, or my mom's advice. *Stay warm and dry*, the water seemed to say, while everything else was silent. I was in a rebellious mood. Why not go all the way in? I thought, but I couldn't hold onto that thought for very long, or any other: they streamed away, sluggish and mollusk-like, soft, dim, rolling carpets of thought, flowing from the water's colors to the work I was missing this week being out sick and then back to the river, to a young duck screaming out of the grass on the bank, grass so long it dragged in the current. I put my other foot in. The rocks were furry and gross; a bright green glob, broken off from the bottom, floated on the surface like a frog's heart. I blinked; the sun's reflection was too bright and active, piercing with its constant movement on the water. I slipped and fell in, already aware of the blood leaking from the gash in my palm. Ah—by a trick of weary light!

My head went underwater and I heard the suffering voices of dinosaurs. What else could they have been, those soaring, creaking, inexplicable voices in whose syllables I could taste the red starry violence of a meteor? Things have been put into motion. Things can't be undone. They cried out after years of conquering each other. What was lost with them? What did they take with them into the sand? So much, and yet my cells drew a membrane

around all the feats they had accomplished. Water poured into my ears, quieting everything down to a muffle. I struggled to find the air, any oxygen at all, and it seemed not to exist, as if the air and the sea were mixed into each other as they had never been on this planet. Water filled me like smoke and abolished every thought of my cold. I forgot what I had been doing, why I had come, and even where I was, which city, which state. The delirious clouds' vapor trailed into infinity...

I finally managed to separate water from air from earth and took a breath, rising out of the river. And there was already someone there, a blue-faced man with an enormous belly, though the rest of his body was proportional to itself, skinny even. He was two men pressed together, and when he stood up, the lifting of his belly out of the water caused a small whirlpool to form. He looked as if he were about to speak and then silently handed me the shaft of a broken spear. The blade was long gone. The handle was wrapped in worn leather. He seemed proud of me for having taken it from him, which was also the exact moment I became unsure that I should have taken it. I blushed, bewildered. Even though he was physically repulsive, I wanted to entangle myself with him, with the two bodies he appeared to offer, using one for pleasure and the other to break some unspeakable taboo. I wanted him to abuse me, to reduce me to insignificant molecules, to puddles of mud and algae, fragments of that original bed of lowly wonders

*cont'd*



that rose to blue jays and missile defense systems and sequoias, that rose to everything around us. Either there was another man in the river, one who had held his breath the whole time I had been on the bank, and my desire now gathered in him, or he was the gathering itself, the work of my body and my mind, of chemicals and currents, some small inner pulse enlarged and made material. I wouldn't be able to change this—the desire, I realized, was lodged in me, and while I could forestall its fulfillment, I couldn't do anything about its origin: it would stay with me, like so many other things I can't talk about.

# Crash, A Shape

Its way to bend, move, pull, throttle. The line between you is distinct and invisible. It is sun, star, moon and flesh. Your eyes don't stop seeing when they close. All you see is eyelids, warm and twitching. It could be an angel. Eyes upon eyes upon nails through fingers. A stigmata speckled along and yet holeless. It sounds and forms shape and drips onomatopoeia. "Tears," you think. They aren't. It can't communicate with you like you cannot with your children. You have accepted and excepted your place in this world. What are you? A man. What is this object, but you? Yet, not you, as it is yonic and phallic in a way of intercourse. Forever shoving its shaft through its heart. Longinus and Jesus made one; together inseminating false idols. It makes you rip off your own cock. Slamming it into the ground. The hens die next to it. You weren't supposed to see this like you weren't supposed to know you're a man. Well, once a man. Now, you are a eunuch standing next to a shape and fig tree sapling. The object stares back. Or you think it stares back; but, it's not. Any face you find reflected is your own. Organs spill out of you. Now lying on the ground is your meat, muscles, and brain shambling away from your skin and bone. You know the object is watching you. Your blood is merging with its ichor. In this moment, you can understand it. Your heart races up the grown tree. You slither towards the top. You smash your brain against the branch; burying the fig. It makes you convulse into the shape of a crash. You, the newest bearer of the first sin, fall and die. Your skin and bones get up with new insides grown. Looking down at you, who is fully formed in rebirth. He says words that feel worse than goodbye and vanishes where the creature was. Everything is now you and you aren't sure how to tell everything who you are. But you are alive.

## Azalea Geist

**Azalea Geist** (she/they) is a collector of words, an appreciator of bones, and the only member of her family to her knowledge to win a spelling bee with only one contestant.

I don't wanna be medicated  
I wanna eat your face!  
I want MAO noninhibitors.

The shrinks said my brain shows  
female schizophrenic neuron patterns  
and they wanna fix them.  
But they're mine, all MINE.  
Keep your hands off my hysteria, my brain.

Here in the bathroom I could slash my wrists  
less messily than in the kitchen.  
Or drown in the tub  
(but it's too shallow).

Red lipstick orange pink black.  
Shimmer shimmer shimmer!  
All shades for my mouth which must not speak the truth.

Lipstick is magic.  
My mouth is magic,  
so must tell the truth.

Here I raze my face and leg hair,  
apply concealer to my bloated eyes to conceal my real  
thoughts.  
Stare into the mirror of my life  
the life not reflected back by your "real" world.  
Scrubbing the toilet of my life that always backs up  
and doesn't flush shit.



Lorraine Schein (she/her) is a New York writer and poet. Her work has appeared in *VICE Terraform*, *Strange Horizons*, *Scientific American*, and *Michigan Quarterly*, and in the anthologies *Wild Women* and *Tragedy Queens: Stories Inspired by Lana del Rey & Sylvia Plath*. *The Futurist's Mistress*, her poetry book, is available from Mayapple Press. Her book, *The Lady Anarchist Cafe*, is out now from [Autonomeia](http://www.autonomeia.com).

# Stay in the Garden, Get Civilized, Procreate, Muck It Up



## Cleomé Morra



**Cleomé Morra** (they/them) is a pseudonym for a photographer who wishes to remain anonymous. They've been making photographs since 1980.