

# Rust + Moth

*Autumn 2021*

Edited by Josiah Spence,  
Suncerae Smith, and Michael Young.

© 2021 Rust and Moth  
ISBN: 978-1-716-30742-3

## In This Issue

**8**

Lynne Schmidt

+ *Driver's Ed Test*

**10**

Michael Quinn

+ *Reading Poetry*

**11**

Dilys Wyndham Thomas

+ *Fairy tale ending*

**12**

Lorrie Ness

+ *Deadfall*

**13**

Isabel Su

+ *In which I am both a woman and unclaimed land*

**14**

David Higdon

+ *When Pagans Once Lived*

**15**

Alain Goulbourne

+ *Scotch Bonnet*

**16**

Sarah Carey

+ *You Can Stay In A Place Too Long*

- 18** Rachel Chen  
+ *Fall: A Disambiguation*
- 19** Brittany Atkinson  
+ *Aubade*
- 20** Alexandra Munck  
+ *Shu Kang*
- 22** Zoe Cunniffe  
+ *when the blood has finished dripping*
- 23** Claire Drucker  
+ *The Life You Gave Me*
- 24** Claire Drucker  
+ *Great Blue Heron*
- 26** Nat Dodd  
+ *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*
- 27** Audrey Gidman  
+ *Spring Poem*

- 28** Nancy Hightower  
+ *September 2020*
- 29** Lucia Owen  
+ *Paperwork*
- 30** Joshua McKinney  
+ *Semantics*
- 33** Paul David Adkins  
+ *Visiting Attica Prison 16,768 Days After  
the Rebellion*
- 34** Somendra Singh Kharola  
+ *Inflexion*
- 36** Nadine Klassen  
+ *Hourglass*
- 38** Barbara Daniels  
+ *Doll Procession*
- 40** Sheila Wellehan  
+ *Boom Town*

- 41** Wesley Wang  
+ *Walking to Bart*
- 42** Lynne Thompson  
+ *Seeking Paradise*
- 43** Tresha Faye Haefner  
+ *My sister wants me to come home now.*
- 44** Heather Truett  
+ *Almost-Sonnet for Learning to Love Myself*
- 45** Issa M. Lewis  
+ *Hanged Man, 1913*
- 46** Meghan Sterling  
+ *Brooklyn the Color of a Hospital Gown*
- 47** Jory Mickelson  
+ *Plunder: History*
- 48** Pepper Cunningham  
+ *Femme Vers/e*

**50** Ella Bartlett  
+ *The moon as lucid elegy*

**51** Jamie Sullivan  
+ *The Buick and the First Pall Mall*

**52** About the Authors



## Driver's Ed Test

—after Joan Kwon Glass

I am closer to seventeen than most of my peers  
when I take my driver's test.

My mother in the backseat,  
the instructor evaluating beside me.

When he tells me to merge,  
I do not.

When he repeats himself,  
I tell him, I will when it is safe.

When he checks the mirrors finally,  
he gasps at the row of cars in or near my blind spot

and says "Wow, good call."  
My knuckles as white as the divider lines,

my intestines tied in the knots of memory.  
When the instructor asks,

"What do you do if someone is going to hit you head on?"  
the sharp collision of oxygen is sucked out of the car.



Behind me, my mother gently reminds me,  
I need to answer this question.

I want to tell him,  
that the air bags didn't go off.

The seatbelt didn't latch,  
and they peeled my best friend's face

off her steering wheel.  
I tell him through glass teeth,

"Try to avoid it,"  
and I pass my test.

## Reading Poetry

—for C. J.

The voices tell us stop enjoying it,  
O won't we someday, when the garden sprigs  
Of the new clime hold our marrow for  
Plenty. No, today we'll read something new.  
A handdrawn image in ink, a dissociated body  
Tying veins together like cherrystem knots,  
A wide shore for the narrow frame of two  
Eyes and barely, meekly, a single heart.  
Read on, we say, the rediscovered country  
Those callus hands left behind for us—  
Won't they long to know what we thought  
Of the pained burlap they emptied and made  
Into new clothes for the children? Garments  
We wore on holy days, and wear no more.

## **Fairy tale ending**

The city skyline; a cardboard cut out  
where port and river dawn picture-book bright;  
glass-cut silence glinting towards sunrise.

This, the setting, then; this, the premise.

Hear heels click—once, twice, three times—staccato,  
head hushing heavy with whirlwind echo,  
fields of fingermarks wilting on your thighs.

This, your story, then? This, your witness?

Let the steam fog mirrors, obscure the welts;  
your face a self-portrait of someone else,  
a map of sleeplessness and alibis.

This. the ending, then. This, a stasis.

From midnight-strike keepsakes, moonshine yearnings,  
bed to bed and daydream awakenings  
to this: your deadbolts and double-locked guise

ever and after.

## Deadfall

I have yet to spot them,  
branches rubbing together, creaking  
in the breeze. Somewhere in the tangle, limbs have crossed  
and bark falls as powder to earth. I rest  
on unleavened ground, where grass does not rise  
to the occasion. On the forest floor, only weeds  
have the courage to poke up  
where I settle.

I was never any good at trust,  
the act of falling backwards into someone's arms,  
except once, sweating and sticky from the broken milkweed.  
That day it didn't matter if they had my back. My heels  
were already tilting, my arms—false wings.  
A suddenness of clouds, as the tree line  
tugged the sky before my eyes.

A gamble is the form of faith  
I practice. Laying with outstretched limbs  
groaning in the canopy above—my body adjacent to prayer.  
Boughs sweep the sky into view,  
sweep it out again.

## **In which I am both a woman and unclaimed land**

I bleed the consecrated  
wreath of red; I am  
wine-drunk womb-deep  
baptized, crowned  
in crimson birthed  
anew, birthed  
screaming—Tell me  
if I bruise open, you with teeth  
sunk in annexed flesh  
    I with rolling hills  
unclaimed; bequeath me a  
mark on bone where I  
calcify into a possession, where  
I am possessed, your  
name so like filigreed captivity—  
Ignite me in hot  
iron shackles, make me  
your home but oh,  
corpse-papered, drained-white,  
how mistaken I am for a bride.

## **When Pagans Once Lived**

It's a ruined house, held in the arms  
of a hedgerow, where ivy clutches  
like a wounded child and peppermint  
dots the brick. Moles furrow under  
the clover, turn blind eyes to sky.  
There's a ragged hole torn in the eave  
where music pours down, pouring  
like a deluge from a clogged gutter.  
Notes pour like thinning skin  
or paint flaking—it caroms, blunders,  
it is a ball lost down the stairsteps  
of a root cellar. I pause, listening.  
The rhapsody drops like a glacier,  
and the sun stands defiant at my side.  
Spring hostas creep, their clumsy  
introductions unfurl like loose tablature,  
hangars where birds pick the worms,  
green ribs arching to catch the music  
coursing its tributes to dirt beds.

## **Scotch Bonnet**

Deny not my bone and tightly packed meat under skin  
like concrete, for why should I be soft?  
I am a chip off the old mother-block,  
on the old mother-shoulder,  
a pebble in the tired mother-shoe.

Loud morning misunderstandings quake  
the kitchen, and shifty, you  
rinse emotional misdirection from the peppers in the sink.  
A tectonic slip of the flint tongue draws blood, but this body holds  
no kindling for burning, bleeding heart apologies.  
Today I dip your thin, soft skin  
in our thick, prideful tar sin.  
Through this gravel throat, I refuse to plainly say  
*I'm sorry*  
for joint hypocrisy and shame.  
This is my heritage, the Jamaican mother's way.  
Tar and feather the fool who thinks this stone will burn.

## **You Can Stay In A Place Too Long**

Even our homes tire of us—  
the once-bold area rugs,  
red madder root patterns bleeding

from light they lay in  
year after year, tread upon and admired  
in equal measure. Dirt ground into tile

seals secrets like kisses, like passion  
flowers in the overgrown yard  
we debrided like a wound, suturing

a new landscape when our hands flew in and out  
of pots, when no heat could make us stop,  
until we just gave up. Frayed edges

fill familiar rooms—  
in each corner, a context  
begs forgiveness, justifies

those times we dug into our digs  
before the walls closed in  
and off, like power



flipped. We weren't at fault for wanting  
envelopes in which to hide, to live,  
make work our life, make love

to last forever. We were blameless believing  
occupations could belie transience.  
We were blips. We know this now.

## Fall: A Disambiguation

As in, the first leaves slouching against pavement. A river carving rock. A slant, a slope. As in, the quiet of rain crouching in the rafters—a steady surrendering to gravity. In the legends, they say Rome: a dissolution, an ending. Here, I peel back smaller wounds—a yielding to that predator I'd name temptation—to steep my body at dusk in this small hurt, this oxidation of a memory of a memory. This indulgent loss of balance.

As in, fell in love. Fell short. Fell apart. To be clinical: a decrease in magnitude. As in, these mosses and moths coaxing my fingers colder, the numb lodging of night near. That which we do not see—time an acrobat tripping through the cracks. As in, head over heels. As in, falling action: concrete hurtling up to meet your paper-mâché hands. As in, asleep.

## Aubade

We wake from the wheezes of the old German Shepherd  
whining outside our apartment window. Every limped

step she takes in the summer-dry grass inflicts panted  
breaths: a *suffèr, suffèr, suffèr* until she lowers her head.

Our legs rest twined like the vines of my childhood  
home—an ivy quick to grow, yet slow to wrap its neck

around wooden fences. The dog's owner above us  
does not flinch, does not open his door, does not

say, as the landlord yesterday did, *The best thing  
for that dog is a bullet in the head.* So, you unfurl

your limbs from mine and head into the thick-dark  
of an approaching dawn to offer a morning

pet on her neck, slip a *Good girl, Nala* into the fold  
of her ear, then climb back to bed. We doze in silence,

in soft snores. We sleep through the sunrise: a howling  
white that mounts the horizon as a headstone.

## Shu Kang

We know our mother is proud of her father, Ho Shu Kang,  
the way his jaw made the corners of a square. She framed

his medical diploma and hung it watching the front door  
of her house, so we think he evaluates our entrances and exits:

their frequency, how the latch clicked softly or slammed,  
in his cap and gown as though he isn't younger than we are

now, fresh on the world, an army surgeon with eyes of dew.  
Chiang Kai-shek, on the other hand, is dead history between

two blue skies with white suns. When my adolescent jaw  
began to make the corners of a square, I held my hands up

to hide them in the mirror and imagined eyes like cartoon  
circles. My mother tells me I look white, I don't know

what she means by that. Is she reassuring me? Is she  
disappointed? She used to say Shu Kang came to Minnesota

with one suitcase and three dollars in his pocket, as if his  
American Dream was the lark of a hopeful childhood. Now

she hosts Zoom parties with unfamiliar cousins, sharing  
old lists and photographs glued to cardboard, a sword.

I discover war running behind him in his retreat to Formosa.  
I read evidence of the siblings he mourned:

*Two females. Died from Japanese bombers.*

*Male. Very handsome. Died early.*

My mother may or may not have done less mourning. He died  
in 1972 of cancer related to hepatitis. *Everyone who grew up in*

*China at that time had hepatitis*, she says. I remember her thin  
mouth and tucked chin, reading journal articles on HPV vaccine

trials, her single-minded quest to inoculate her children.

Even my brother will not get cervical cancer. One by one we

leave her house, passing Shu Kang's diploma. Seeing our squared  
jawlines in the glass, we know we did not get here on our own.

## when the blood has finished dripping

& it dries like red-wine scabs  
    on bleach-white marble  
caramelized & crimson  
    & these cracks glaze over into  
phantom healing & stainless skin  
when our eyes don't twitch  
    veins don't throb  
    hearts don't race  
when we don't cry out at these  
    split second flashes of  
        hair-trigger pain  
when these hidden hands can't  
    seize us  
        peel us inside out  
will our skin still chafe & flake &  
    shine scarlet in the summertime  
or will we breathe with lungless bodies  
    bloodless & celestial  
the sky weeping as our hands graze  
    with none of the ancient aches  
none of the paper cuts & winter-shivers  
    & stomach cramps  
only the shadow of trickling blood  
    now rinsed & scrubbed away

## The Life You Gave Me

*—for my grandfather, Hermann*

It could not fit in a velvet box with a  
velour ribbon tied twice nor could it be worn,  
an evening gown blue as the generous, sad sea.  
Not a stone, not a car, not a dog with pleading  
eyes to please get the bone before it's gone forever.  
It wasn't green, it didn't sing but started quiet,  
as an egg splitting in the waters. Not chapped hands  
in winter, not webs behind the bed, not the pitch  
perfect way oaks whip in a storm.  
Listen to this gift burn. Air coming and going  
in a nostril. Upper eyelid drooped and creased,  
a delicate gate. The way I open the door with my left,  
close it with my right. Footfall on tile. You watching me  
in my dreams, reaching your eyes out as if to say  
*take it, I don't need it where I'm going*  
arms laden with white roses, one for each year  
you lost, one for each of mine.

## Great Blue Heron

*—for my grandmother, Ella*

Jogging the track in early morning hush, trucks in the distance  
ripping up concrete, I remember my grandmother, how she told of

standing in the New York subway, two small sets of hands in her own,  
how she wanted to throw herself onto the tracks, but their faces

peered up at her, those sad, empty mouths, and this stopped her. I  
wonder now how she made it through, how she forced herself to turn

on the tap, scraping last night's dishes. How she sewed  
and sewed until her skin cracked. A great blue heron

wings into the center of the wet field, its body an  
exclamation point, neck like a pencil, turned toward the east.

Its elegance unmoors me and I turn back every few  
seconds to watch it glide without touching ground, like the stone

statue game I used to play in the woods by the creek.  
The heron elongates, plumage a steely gray touched by the sky.



How do we keep from throwing ourselves in? How do we stand  
still and listen? Blue heron jabs her beak into the moist grass, throws back  
  
her serpentine neck, oblivious to my presence. She could be the center  
of everything, all of us rotating in concentric orbits, spinning  
  
with the shifting light, flailing our arms in a dance of form and shadow.  
Now the heron hears a noise, opens her wings, lifts the sun over  
  
my head. My feet dig into the soil, my voice in that other  
lifetime, so quiet, begging to be released.

## **mysterium tremendum et fascinans**

He greets us in the clearing and  
Looking up at us  
Attempts to initiate conversation.  
The Hermit Thrush is named for his alleged reclusivity.

I have a certain affinity for expectational defiance.

My beloved  
Also a lapsed Catholic  
Reminds me of Genesis 1:27  
And I can't help wondering  
If God Themselves is this unsteady on Their feet.

The rocks are all slick with mud  
My joints threaten to give way in precarious places  
And I keep alternating between  
*I'm gonna die*  
And  
*This is so beautiful*  
Which I think is maybe the closest I've come to truth.

## Spring Poem

I see my face in the river when it cracks  
down the middle, sun becoming

more than it's been all winter & the ice  
shifting its weight underneath a warm gaze & splitting

finally apart, heaving—cold water & debris, crow carcasses & shoelaces  
streaming like damp confetti, undone & gathering

at the banks under bridges near the black locust trees  
stout with their bristled bellies, thorns & bright bark & soon they will  
flower—

billows of white pearls in the forest, thick groves bushing between hawthorn  
& old barns, sheets of rusting metal, gravel pits, wild roses

sweet with the holy scent of something  
ready to emerge—as if to say *yes I remember your face.*

## September 2020

The world is a red dwarf star  
made from sweat and ash  
and Santa Ana winds promising  
winters too warm to recognize.

Another hot flash  
sweeps up my back  
like brush fire.

*Entropy*, the nurse assures me  
as she rubs a transducer  
over each breast,  
her face blank as snow.

She drives in on one particular spot,  
thinking she's found  
an uncharted moon.

What was once hourglass  
is turning desert, an alien  
landscape I still call home.

The sky remains blood red  
for days, a long lost memory  
of the fire she used to be,  
one no baptism could quench.

## Paperwork

The skilled nurse admitting you to the skilled nursing facility  
tells me the paperwork will kill me when I was sure our old age  
and your fall and fracture would kill us both.

Stacks of forms  
stacked against me help the bureaucracy of injury  
up to and including death guarantee that no matter what happens  
to you or when everyone will be paid in advance.

I sign here  
then there. Just initial or write our address next to the SSN  
again.

Write all the numbers you can think of. Turn the pages  
and the screed doesn't end. Flip the pages faster and faster.

Finally  
there is nothing but fine print as fine as the facility of skilled nurses  
who admit no margin of error or safety and our lives have no margins left  
and bleed

off each page  
o my dear.

## Semantics

“niggard (n.) – A mean, stingy, or parsimonious person; a miser; a person who only grudgingly parts with, spends, or uses up anything. Also in extended use with reference to emotion, etc.”

—Oxford English Dictionary

“—a small fire, neat, niggard almost, a shrewd fire; such fires were his father’s habit and custom always..”

—from “Barn Burning,” William Faulkner

“Words are things. The words he is in possession of he cannot be deprived of. Their authority transcends his ignorance of their meaning.”

—from *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy

I was queer as a kid, an oblique, off-center  
boy who preferred books to baseball. By high school  
I was merely odd, and these days, in old age,  
I’m trending strange to weird, though without, alas,  
the power to control fate. If poetry has taught me  
anything, it’s the alchemical nature of words.  
And yet, I feel a certain melancholy, er, I mean  
sadness, that a word I loved as a child for the sound  
of its voiced velar plosive, is reviled for its homo-  
phonic disposition. I first heard it in my head  
as I sat reading in the synchronous shade of a California  
black oak and a loblolly pine in Yoknapatawpha County.  
Years later, I learned that no explanation of its origin—  
likely Scandinavian, though uncertain before the late  
14th century—will mollify a room full of people

inflamed by the sound of a word whose meaning they're ignorant of. Nor can its meaning appease them. It's just too close to the N-word. And I get it. After all, it was Faulkner who said, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." So where *niggard* might be desired, or rhythmically required, *parsimonious* will have to suffice.

As for the N-word, I appreciate the verbal jujitsu by which a target group turns a taunt back at the oppressor. To my grandmother I was a "gay boy," the word's current usage only beginning to unfold as slang, unless you look back further, which I don't recommend. What if my granny had read Chaucer?

*But in oure bed he was so fresh and gay,  
And therewithal so wel koude he me glose,  
Whan that he wolde han my bele chose;  
That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,  
He koude wynne agayn my love anon.*

Etymology glosses every word with its past, and often, that past is dark. Even here I'm self-conscious.

I mean, I don't mean to say the wrong thing, to be insensitive or mean, but words tend to turn from sheer sound and to take on weight, to mean so meanly.

And as we've seen, sound, too, can be a problem.

As with *niggard*, a missing letter here, the slip of a phoneme there, can create hatred. Consider the word *poem*: from Latin *poema*, and on back to the Greek, *poēma*, literally, a thing made or created. Leave a hump off that *m* and you've got *poena*,

Latin for punishment, penalty, retribution. A few centuries later it will become the word *pain*. *Poema/poena*. No doubt this explains some things. I mean if poetry has taught me anything, it's precision. Know the nature of a thing. Sound it. And don't leave words lying around when you finish playing with them. Thankfully, context counts. Otherwise, one couldn't enjoy some cool *shade* on a summer day; for there is no word for darkness that has not been weaponized. As for Abner Snopes, let us hope his stingy blazes fade like sparks blown down the wind. S'plood, man, the word-horde is vast; there are always alternatives! I'm just saying that it hurts to be discriminating.



## Visiting Attica Prison 16,768 Days After the Rebellion

I approach the prison gates, a man, because that is how you have to walk  
to look at the memorial.

A guard comes up. A guard's got questions.

*Are you here to visit someone here?*

I'm here to meet forty-three ghosts.

I'm here because there may be living men who heard the chopper pass,  
who breathed the gas through t-shirts, dodged bullets between the  
loudspeaker's

*You You will will not be be harmed harmed*

who stand right now a .270 shot away, mopping shitters, dusting halls,  
sweeping the terrazo.

I'm here.

I wanted to heave my whole life the second I left I-90, knowing I would  
come,

and all along the route saw signs of Jesus' love, *Hay Bales for Sale*,

and, hung beneath the eave of every house, red stripes.

## Inflexion

I am of the tribe of a different *Kshatriya*.  
One who widens the sweetest part of his chest  
to embrace the incoming meteorite.  
But these days, I have begun to listen  
to the sound that warm *rotis* make when I tear them.  
They sound more cartilaginous than herbivorous.  
More incisive, than molaric. Indeed, I, a devout Hindu,  
desire the solace of an *abrahamic* God, of  
the Negative Commandments. The clean, unimpeachable  
demarcations of what is, and what is not.  
But this, of course, is contrary to the axioms of art.  
Hence at least let me help you tear everything down,  
and begin anew, and tear that down too. Penitence  
of the human condition. A layer added, obliterated,  
added, obliterated, added, obliterated, *ad infinitum, ad infinitum,*  
*ad infinitum*. Desensitised, resensitised,  
desensitised, resensitised, oscillating madly  
between the deciduous bounds  
of the Representative and the Post-modern,  
till one is desensitised to all such reversals. Then what?  
Then, one shall neither be intrigued  
by the foreword nor by the afterwards, neither  
by the new nor the old, but only by that sharp,  
precise point of nuclear inflexion  
when the new becomes the old and the old becomes the new.  
Not by the hunger nor the digestion, but by that asymptotic  
moment when firm berries quiver and just tend to burst between teeth.

Hence, even these new children  
continue to ever-sculpt finer details into their sand castles:  
*Battlements, keeps, corner towers, drawbridges,*  
*baileys, palisades, causeways, a chapel,*  
*bastions, arrow-slits: low entropy, low entropy,*  
and lower still. The greater the magnitude of order and symmetry,  
the more potent the bliss so elicited  
from bringing your knee to its cool, firm sand.  
I too, therefore, shall wait for Byzantine to embroider  
and ripen sweet. Eternal mastication, abject peace.  
Pray, continue to build and craft. *Barbarika! Barbarika! Barbarika!*

*'Barbarika: As described in the Mahābhārata, an ancient Sanskrit epic, Barbarika was the bravest of all Kshatriyas. He, however, did not swear allegiance to either of the two warring factions involved in the Righteous War of Kurukshetra. This is because Barbarika understood the inherent vacuity of righteousness and the vanity, so associated, of the human species. He, therefore, requested to watch the proceedings of war as a mere spectator, who—with a 'laughter louder than thunder'—reveled in the destruction that unfolded all around him.*

## Hourglass

One night, when my body was without  
a title and I underlined want instead,

he said only *hush, hush*.

I picked him up at a bar, like a cherry

stone out of wet grass. What a bird-  
like thing of me to do, to expect something soft

from someone all backbone.

He was beside the sand in the hour,

like a fish caressed

with a rock. And the stars

had so much foam in their mouths –  
mother taught me not to stare;

sometimes I am bitten with wishes  
that could only be male.

There, his moon berries in fox piss,  
there, my mouth's allowance

spent on baskets. There was a man  
at the train station, who hypnotised

the nicotine out of my lungs with the way  
his yellowed fingers dragged the smoke

around his body, like he was cloning himself  
into a version of eternity.

How men can make themselves  
into anything they want to,

a language beside the tongue.  
In bed, I reached for my cigarettes,

filtered his hot sand from lip to lip  
until it was glass and he was running

through himself like memory.  
Until he couldn't remember himself.

## **Doll Procession**

This doll has a torn dress. This one  
bruised herself trying to fly. It's cold

where she lives in the white city.  
This one squeaked Mama, Mama

for forty-five years. This doll  
has its own doll tied on with twine.

They embody sweetness and gravity.  
This one was cut from a Sears catalog,

dress drawn in blue pencil, strapless,  
floor-grazing, aching, adult. This doll

has nothing between her straight legs.  
She's lost. No one helps her. This one

drips water through its small hole.  
This one's a martyr to hair brush

and arm twisting. It's ready to die  
and has been for decades. The dolls

touch a red oak for luck—bud,  
trunk, branch, crown. They know

sunlight means heat, moonlight  
means silvering. They know

how to fall, stuttering, stumbling,  
pressing their faces into the dirt.

## Boom Town

You never know where  
the next wound will appear,  
which cherished place will vanish.  
Woods are slashed to stumps  
in every city and town.  
There's even a clearcut at the cemetery  
where my mother is buried.  
The management said,

*We have to make room  
for more graves.*

Everyone wants  
their piece of the landscape,  
so bulldozers and backhoes  
are carving it up.  
Logs are flying  
down every rural road and urban highway,  
stacked tall into timber lorries  
that carry out the dead.



## Walking to Bart

We speak of our fathers' traumas,  
the orchid ripe smell of sorghum wine  
mixed with cheap cigarette smoke.  
The lives lived that we could never.  
My father says he loves this country,  
speaks of cannon balls he had to fire  
at Chinese ships, accuracy necessary  
to miss, he tells me *this is the illusion,*  
*scare them without touching them.* The fate  
of a country lives in his anxious fingers.  
He speaks of the cadet that ran into the mountains  
with a machine gun believing a broken heart  
could only be mended with moving lead.  
They searched through soft green leaves,  
until they heard the weeping of a boy  
scared to pull the trigger.

## Seeking Paradise

Don't tell me how I came to be born by a river. Instead, won't  
you bring me honeysuckle, an applause of Mexican marigolds?  
Tell me it's true stardust bequeaths its anthems and won't die so

you can bring me a *rebanada de cielo* that's stopped its weeping.  
Tell me Sam Cooke had it right singing *a change is gonna come*  
but do not tell me about a child who crossed the Rio Grande to

come here, but has been lost to her mother, doesn't know when  
she will eat again. Don't you know this girl will withstand, then  
without warning, kill you while you sleep between twisted sheets?

∞

I wish you would bring us jalapeños baked into sweet cornbread

and with it, some green tomatoes, capers, a subtle Casa Madero.  
Won't you bring us memories of a dog, a ball, or all of Saturday

to do what children want Saturday to do?

Why can't you be kind?

Why won't you imparadise us?

## **My sister wants me to come home now.**

Trees grow guns.

Money putrefies in the bank. The stink  
seduces us. The smell piped through ventilators,  
rising like bread. She wants us to buy a house now  
before we get priced out in the cold.

In her mountain town the sea is far away.

I've been collecting shells. The homes  
of mollusks who have died.

What she shows me are one bedrooms,  
adorable as band-aids. Walls, scream-colored.

Every failure tucked behind the teeth  
of splintered fences. Birds wallpapering  
storm-dark colors in the sky.

## **Almost-Sonnet for Learning to Love Myself**

Frida caught me plucking my eyebrows, pursed her lips, and smacked the tweezers from my hand, kissed my fingers, leaned her forehead into mine, the bone of our skulls hard and unyielding. Our noses were mashed, cartilage more forgiving than the artist, her slender

brush made from tiny hairs I'd discarded. She pushed me down on the tile floor and started painting me back into myself. I gave her tears for watercolor. She licked her thumb to smudge dark from beneath my eyes. Her strokes careful, then reckless, covering me in my

own words, sponging yellow sun down my throat and helping it burst, orange fire to red flame above one breast. She left her hand prints on my shoulder blades, the swirls of her palms branding me my own property, her teeth ripping open a package of paint before she was gone.

She left me wine stained and lip slick, blood turned to thick black ink, notebook splayed on the floor, my broken tweezers in the sink.

## Hanged Man, 1913

One cannot argue with the decisiveness  
of a wooden beam. The fact of a roof slant.  
Hard edges speak to finality, to a choice  
firmly made. In Ryder-Waite, the hanged man  
is head-down, suspended by a single foot,  
The other leg crosses behind, a casual dangle.  
It may be interpreted as *surrender* or *sacrifice*  
or *breaking old patterns*. I see  
a straight line between a painful present  
and an ecstatic oblivion.

Another interpretation is *suspended in time*  
and that's what you became: a nameless man  
cut from a rafter and laid in the ground  
with no ceremony, no stone, nothing  
to remember you but a scant entry  
etched in a ledger: *unknown male,*  
*hanged himself, 11/4/1913*. This  
is your conclusion, to obscure yourself  
in rest. A hundred years later,  
I only know where you are, never  
who you were. *Old patterns broken,*  
*a missed opportunity*.

## **Brooklyn the Color of a Hospital Gown**

Tonight the sky is moonless black as my tongue  
after curry and Pepto Bismal tablets when I ran  
to the hospital on Dekalb convinced I was dying  
all summer, reading Calvino into the cold gusts  
of the air conditioner that jutted over twisted roses  
quivering with the drip drip drip of ice blue condensation  
as if this machine had tears enough for all of us  
while I would sing into the fan unit, watching the vortex  
shed from the trailing edge of the blades slice my song  
into pieces. Where was the sense? A certainty of dying  
like the odor of elephants after a rain and how I had become  
only ashes of who I had planned to be, now a hypochondriac  
at the ER when I found a lump on my leg, or a blackened tongue,  
or the rain that cooled everything for just a moment,  
the air becoming clear as a church. I knew I would be leaving soon,  
since we couldn't admit to each other there was no moon,  
only hazy stars above the stalls of the carriage houses  
on Waverly when I would venture out to move my car,  
the streetlight a finger in my eye, the moon a bridge waiting  
behind clouds thick and pink as bismuth, the boom boxes  
on the stoops playing all the old songs, only smaller.

## Plunder: History

Moon of Green Grass. Moon of Hatchings.  
Somewhere between here and then—

*terra incognita*, endless series of vistas,  
of horizons, of claims to the land.

Let us name this place after  
its original possessors or near

enough, but their name translates  
to snake, read as copperhead—

too deadly. Let us honor the terrain  
we have crossed, and in crossing

have gathered to us, made seamlessly  
our own. Land of hides & bone,

of gold & earth yet to be plundered,  
of council groves and fence lines, wind

farms & silos dug into the earth  
for missiles & yet we can never say

enough. Still it shines & we grasp for it.

## Femme Vers/e

For every person at the gay bar who reads me  
as straight, another arrow punctures my spine,  
quivering under the waxing crescent  
neon. I am gutted and ground  
into a fine paste of body parts,  
what mascara is made of, thorax

and proboscis and antennae.  
Classicists say that Artemis was chaste  
but we know they really mean femme,  
that ancient weavers leave out the hot butch  
looming unwoven just off the tapestry's edge.  
Artemis also would have hidden

a knife in her boot to go to the ATM alone  
while her friends stayed at the bar.  
She also would have hurried through the streets  
with a fistful of keys, no different than through a forest  
with darts, safest in pools of light, penumbral  
street lamps, traffic signals blinking red.

Straight men hover outside the club,  
a wake of featherless vultures.  
They hiss *you're too pretty*  
*to be a dyke*. They hunch closer,  
grunt *I bet I can change your mind*.  
Confirmed: we're not real



until we're picked apart, flesh  
and bone. Classicists say that Artemis  
murdered her nymphs. We know  
this really means she turned them  
into pools of light, safe from prying eyes,  
the original invisible femmes, just passing through.

I dart into the bathroom  
to readjust the target  
bullseyed on my lower back.  
I arch an eyebrow, paint my lips  
into a bow. I check my purse  
for the trappings of what we carry.

It's all there:

the vials of rose oil,

the spoils of pelts, the powder

keg.

## **The moon as lucid elegy**

Flocks of small birds with paper wings  
and cracked smiles, wide eyes—they find  
the back of a church to dine together  
in the watery hold of night. One takes out  
a gun, says Here on Earth we Wake to God  
and points to the stained-glass arboretum  
across the alleyway. Shaking arms & slits  
of light, the throat opens so he can take in  
the moon, pass a message, pray with no space  
between the hands. Glass breaks, stones  
fill the air, like rain but easier to fall apart.  
Every corner, full of flight, sudden harmonies  
of clapping—there might be transcendence,  
silence, when everyone wants to weep  
but can't. Those who couldn't do anything  
about it trace the memory of the night  
into their wrists. Hold it up to the light now. You'll see  
lines of blood that move like river inlets,  
the red that glows.

## **The Buick and the First Pall Mall**

The summer I pulled a mummified  
possum from beneath the hog house,  
Grandpa and I sat in the kitchen,  
the front porch on one side  
the back porch on the other.

I knew by then the corn  
rising in the fields around us  
was feed not food.

He tried to teach me  
the use of a stick shift.

The Buick bucked and died,  
lunged and died again.  
Heat pulsated on the hood  
as he drove us back on the growl  
of the gravel road. And  
we never mentioned it again.

He was the first adult  
I smoked with, as he  
exhaled his Pall Mall  
and said he wanted  
another year to walk his land  
before moving into town.

I slept in his bed  
the night before the funeral,  
the imprint of his head  
in the pillow.

## About the Authors

---

**Lynne Schmidt** is the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor and a mental health professional with a focus in trauma and healing. She is the winner of the 2020 New Women's Voices Contest and author of *Dead Dog Poems*, *On Becoming a Role Model*, and *Gravity*. When given the choice, Lynne prefers the company of her three dogs and one cat to humans.

**Michael Quinn** is a poet born in Philadelphia.

**Dilys Wyndham Thomas** (she/her) is a Belgian and British writer based in Amsterdam. She has lived in Saudi Arabia, Belgium, France, Germany, Jordan, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. Dilys is a reader for *Passengers Journal* and runs a fortnightly poetry feedback group for Strange Birds Migratory Writing Collective.

**Lorrie Ness** is a poet writing in Virginia. Her works have appeared in numerous journals, including *Palette*, *Thrush*, *Typishly*, and others. Her chapbook *Anatomy of a Wound* was published by Flowstone Press in July of 2021.

**Isabel Su** is a high school senior from Connecticut and Beijing. She has been recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, the Live Poets Society of New Jersey, and the Scribe Writing Contest, and her work has appeared in *Short Vine Journal*, *Eunoia Review*, *Blue Marble Review*, and more.

**David Higdon** is a writer from Kentucky. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *Exposition Review*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *the tiny journal*. He lives with his family in Louisville, Kentucky.

**Alain Goulbourne** is a Jamaican immigrant to New York, who is drawn to the encapsulating power of language. She minored in creative writing during her studies at New York University, and her work has appeared in the New York University-based journals, *Caustic Frolic* and *brio*.

**Sarah Carey's** poems have recently appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Grist*, *Yemassee*, and elsewhere. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks, including *Accommodations*, winner of the 2018 Concrete Wolf Chapbook Contest.

**Rachel Chen** studies neuroscience and creative writing at the University of Rochester. Her work has been recognized nationally by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and received the American Voices Medal in 2019. She drinks excessive quantities of lukewarm tea.

**Brittany Atkinson** is an MFA candidate at Western Washington University. Her work can be found in *The Shore*, *Barren Magazine*, *Electric Moon Magazine*, and *Picaroon Poetry*. When she isn't writing, she enjoys roller skating, thrifting, and drinking vanilla oat milk lattes.

**Alexandra Munck's** poetry has appeared in *Bodega*, *SOFTBLOW*, and *Sweet Tree Review*. Her recent fiction can be found in *Strange Horizons* and forthcoming in *The Southampton Review*. She lives in Illinois.

**Zoe Cunniffe** is a poet and singer-songwriter from Washington, DC. She has previously been published in literary journals such as *Blue Marble Review*, *New Reader Magazine*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and *Small Leaf Press*.

**Claire Drucker** has published her poems in numerous journals, including *the Women Artists Datebook*, *Epiphany*, *Puerto del Sol*, and many others. Her last chapbook, *The Fluid Body*, was published by Finishing Line Press. She teaches English at a local community college and lives in Sebastopol, California, where she loves to swim, dance, and play marimbas.

**Nat Dodd** is a queer poet and social worker in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Inspiration for their work includes bizarre dreams, questionable habits, the inescapability of being raised Catholic, and experiences with the sacred.

**Audrey Gidman** is a queer poet living in Maine. Her poems can be found or are forthcoming in *SWWIM*, *Wax Nine*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *The Shore*, *Luna Luna*, *The West Review*; and elsewhere. Her chapbook *body psalms*, winner of the Elyse Wolf Prize, is forthcoming from Slate Roof Press.

**Nancy Hightower** has been published in *Longleaf Review*, *Entropy*, *Sundog Lit*, *Barren Magazine*, and *Drunk Monkeys*, among others. Her first collection of poetry, *The Acolyte*, was published in 2015 by Port Yonder Press. She teaches at Hunter College.

**Lucia Owen** moved to western Maine fifty-one years ago to teach high school English and has lived there ever since. She considers herself an emerging poet because she began writing and submitting in 2019.

**Joshua McKinney's** most recent book of poetry is *Small Sillion* (Parlor Press, 2019). His work has appeared in such journals as *Boulevard*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Kenyon Review*, *New American Writing*, and many others. A member of Senkakukan Dojo of Sacramento, California, he has studied Japanese sword arts for over thirty years.

**PaulDavid Adkins** (he/him) served in the US Army from nineteen-ninety-one to twenty-thirteen. He holds an MA in Writing and Oral Tradition from The Graduate Institute, Bethany, Connecticut. He counsels soldiers and teaches students in a correctional facility. Publications include *Barzakh*, *The Mark*, *Crab Creek*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Badwater*, and *Spillway*.

**Somendra Singh Kharola** is a student of mathematics and evolutionary biology. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in *The Missing Slate*, *Vayavya*, *Strange Horizons*, and in *the Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction*, an anthology that will soon be published by Hachette, United Kingdom.

**Nadine Klassen** (she/her) is a German poet living in her hometown. Her work focuses on identity, mental health, and trauma. It has been published by *Wild Roof Journal*, *Gnashing Teeth Publishing*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, and others. She writes songs occasionally, practices painting, or crochets sweaters with puffy sleeves.

**Barbara Daniels's** *Talk to the Lioness* was published by Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press in 2020. Her poetry has appeared in *Lake Effect*, *Cleaver*, *Faultline*, *Small Orange*, *Meridian*, and elsewhere. Barbara Daniels received a 2020 fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

**Sheila Wellehan's** poetry is featured in *The Night Heron Barks*, *Psaltery & Lyre*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Whale Road Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. She lives in Cape Elizabeth, Maine.

**Wesley Wang** (he/him) is a Taiwanese American poet from San Francisco. He has previously been published in *Tule Review* and *Forum*. He was the winner of the 2019 Felicia Farr Lemmon Poetry Prize. He received his BA in English at the University of California Davis and is an MFA Candidate at St. Mary's College of California.

**Lynne Thompson** was appointed Poet Laureate of Los Angeles in 2021. She is the author of *Beg No Pardon*, *Start With a Small Guitar*, and *Fretwork*. Recent work appears in *The Night Heron Barks*, *New England Review*, *Pleiades*, and *Best American Poetry 2020*, among others.

**Tresha Faye Haefner's** poetry appears in *Blood Lotus*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Mid-America Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Radar*, *Rattle*, and *TinderBox*. She is the recipient of the 2011 Robert and Adele Schiff Poetry Prize and has twice been nominated for a Pushcart.

**Heather Truett** is an MFA candidate and an autistic author. Her debut novel *Kiss and Repeat* was released in 2021. She has published poetry and short fiction with *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Panoply Zine*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and others. Heather also serves on staff for *The Pinch*.

**Issa M. Lewis** is the author of *Infinite Collisions* (Finishing Line Press, 2017) and *Anchor* (Aldrich Press, forthcoming 2022). She is the 2013 recipient of the Lucille Clifton Poetry Prize and a runner-up for the 2017 Lois Cranston Memorial Poetry Prize. She works as an assistant editor for Trio House Press.

**Meghan Sterling's** work has been published in *Rattle*, *The Night Heron Barks*, *Cider Press Review*, *Inflectionist Review*, *Westchester Review*, *Pine Hills Review*, and others. She is Associate Poetry Editor of the *Maine Review* and winner of Sweet Literary's 2021 poetry contest. Her collection *These Few Seeds* is out from Terrapin Books.

**Jory Mickelson's** first book *Wilderness//Kingdom* is the inaugural winner of the Evergreen Award Tour from Floating Bridge Press and winner of the 2020 High Plains Book Award in Poetry. Their publications include *Court Green*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Jubilat*, *Sixth Finch*, and *The Rumpus*. They live in the Pacific Northwest.

**Pepper Cunningham** (she/her) is a writer and teacher who hails from Texas but now calls home the mountains of Vilcabamba, Ecuador. Pepper is the Translation Editor at *MAYDAY Magazine*. Her most recent work appears in *Ample Remains*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Across the Margin*, *Olney Magazine*, and elsewhere.



**Ella Bartlett** (she/they) is an Iowan-born, New York-educated, Paris-based writer. The recipient of the Gigantic Sequins Poetry Award of 2021, Ella's work has been published in, among others, *Jet Fuel Review*, *decomp Magazine*, *Necessary Fiction*, and, in a multilingual publication, *The International Zine Project*.

**Jamie Sullivan** is the author of the poetry collection *Pack of Lies*. His work has appeared in *Flyway*, *The Lake*, and *The Briar Cliff Review*, among other journals and anthologies. He teaches writing and literature at Mount Marty University.

Cover and layout by Josiah Spence.

All content © Rust and Moth 2021.

Rights to individual poems revert to the authors  
after first publication of the issue.

ISSN # 1942-5848

[rustandmoth.com](http://rustandmoth.com)