

# THE TIGER MOTH REVIEW

## ISSUE 8





## THE TIGER MOTH REVIEW

*A biannual journal of art + literature that engages with nature, culture, the environment and ecology*

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**The Tiger Moth Review** is an eco-conscious journal based in Singapore that publishes art and literature engaging with the themes of nature, culture, the environment and ecology. The journal publishes primarily in English, but also accepts non-English work and their translated English counterparts. We are committed to creating a space for minority, marginalised and underrepresented voices in society.

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## Editor's Preface

This issue celebrates life.

This issue celebrates love.

This issue celebrates joy.

This issue celebrates and sings of the light that continues to shine on endlessly, even after death. This issue celebrates the infinity of time, of love as bending time. This issue chooses to celebrate death as a transition from the physical into the spiritual, as a carrying on rather than an ending of.

Some time after her crossing, Ealga gifted me this message: Strength of heart, from Woodlock's "Forever Ago". This message sustains and nourishes me, and offers me comfort whenever I fall back into the quagmire of grief. And grief exists and abounds in so many ways while we live out our time on Earth.

Short fiction anchors this issue, which was surprising to me as our previous issues have always been anchored by poetry. Each of the five pieces are memorable in their own ways, and serve as gates into refreshing and sometimes heart wrenching ways of remembering, seeing and being on Earth.

The issue opens with **Jessica Bryant Klagmann's** "A Rift is a Monument", where the earth opens up for the weary narrator who journeys inwards and upwards into healing, so as to "mov[e] across that vast wilderness" of her being in newly empowered ways. **Francisco Palemón Arcos'** "Yolatsin ipan nokalpan" ("The Feelings of the Water in My Community") offers readers a new way of understanding water's feelings, as wanting to live freely and give to others "to sweeten their joy". **David Denny's** "Tralanis" is a sensitive inquiry into multispecies entanglements that pose uneasy questions about sense, place and belonging, the boundaries between rural and urban, self and other, and of imbibing grief, pain and loss as part of being human, while nurturing the equally vital aspect of openness and curiosity in honouring the healing process and cycles of life.

**Rammel Chan's** "Birds of the North" serves as an allegory of what selfishness and greed can do to damage our earth, told through the story of the last birds of the north who are poached into extinction. In the face of violence, horror and impending extinction, familial love is the last gift exchanged between the living. The issue closes with "Growing up in the Garden/City" by **Faith Ho**, who responds to a personal essay of mine, "The Field". Faith ruminates on the "blurred impressions of trees, grass, crickets, sandy paths, waves, sunlight filtered through leaves", of the self as apart from yet a part of the natural world that exists in spite of her. The image we are left with is one of "fragmented memories of various shades of green", of the sounds of birds who continue their "incessant chirping", unaware or perhaps aware of but unbothered by the human presence: "they continue to sing".

*Esther Vincent Xueming*

**The Tiger Moth Review**

## A Rift is a Monument

Jessica Bryant Klagmann

The dog went first.

We stepped out of the cabin—the bare, light-fractured shelter alongside the trail—after the rain stopped. The area had burned before, leaving open, grassy meadow interspersed with charred black spruce trunks and bright purple fireweed. Nils had gone out ahead of me, and our black and tan husky had followed him. I lingered a few moments inside, hoping to shake out the swarm of aggravation I felt buzzing in my chest.

After hiking for hours, we were getting close to the tors—large plutons of granite magma that had cooled beneath ground millions of years before, solidified, then emerged when the soil around them eroded away. I descended the cabin steps onto the damp alpine tundra and saw the dog dart to the left—a streak of uninhibited stamina. I assumed she would turn and run back to us, but she didn't. Maybe she'd seen something—a squirrel, a hare. Hopefully nothing bigger. Sometimes she forgot everything else existed and just went after things, her mind set to pursue them as far as she'd need to. Nils kept walking so I called out after his bouncing backpack: "Hey, she just ran off."

"She'll come back," he said over his shoulder.

But she didn't, which forced Nils to stop and turn and look at me. I'll admit he seemed tired, but I was tired too. Tired of talking. Tired of not saying the right thing. Tired of not being able to say the thing I meant the way I meant to say it. Alone on a remote trail in Alaska was not the place to be with someone when you no longer wanted to talk.

Funny, though, that we were there to finally *look* at each other again, to *talk* to one another again. My mother had come to visit, and since she was there, we took the opportunity to go on our first outing without the baby, just the two of us. Friends always used the term "date" at that point in their parenting lives, but the word never felt right to us. "Let's go on a hike," Nils had said when I'd told him about my mother's plans.

She flew in from Seattle and pulled up to our cabin in a rented Jeep with oversized tires, climbing down from the tall seat and stumbling to explain that she thought you needed big-ass wheels to get anywhere in Alaska, which was true in many places, but not everywhere.

Our son had just turned eight months old, and it had taken that long to feel comfortable leaving him for more than an hour or two. This time, we'd be away all day and night. I was still nursing. There was plenty of milk in the freezer, but I didn't know what was going to happen—to my son or to my body—being away for so long.

The plan was to finish the fifteen-mile trail in roughly eight hours, then stop on the way back to Fairbanks to spend the evening at Chena Hot Springs. I pictured us in a little rented room, tense muscles and tired bones. Having walked all day, having soaked until our minds floated out of our heads and we nearly passed out. A couple of beers or a glass

of wine. And then Nils trying to pull me into the shower with him. Me resisting, unable to decide whether I wanted to go or not. My breasts throbbing, leaking through my bra.

But the dog ran off, so we ran off after her. The ground was muddy and rutted with tangled tufts of long brown grass. Every so often there was a lone, wiry spruce tree rising up from the soft earth. I watched Nils ahead of me twist his ankle and shout what I imagined was *goddammit* or something similar.

It's just that I knew him.

He kept running with a limp, calling the dog's name, and I followed. At some point though, I lost Nils too and was on my own. I passed through a pocket of trees to another open field, the trail long gone. I had no idea how I'd find my way back to it, or to Nils, or to the dog for that matter.

I worried about bears.

I was—reasonably, even if Nils thought overly—afraid of them. On the way up, before becoming immersed in forest, there had been blueberries encroaching on the trail. So many I thought for sure there had to be a bear around somewhere looking for breakfast. We hadn't seen signs of any animals larger than a chipmunk all day. Yet, I worried about the bears I knew were out there. Hiding in unpredictable places.

Other things, too, were out there. Equally invisible. Equally frightening.

Nils would probably find the dog, I thought, and for a moment I considered doing nothing. Waiting, frozen there until I heard his voice calling from somewhere in the distance that the problem had been solved. My t-shirt and shorts clung to me with rain and sweat, and I tried to circle back in time, to replay my own history and pinpoint when I had stopped feeling not just strong—forget strong at that point—but capable of even the simplest tasks. Somewhere along the way, this change had occurred, but nowhere could I find the line that I'd crossed.

Still, if the situation's beginnings were a mystery, I could recall the first time I had that feeling of utter dependence. Our son's first camping trip. Four months old. It was a test run—not too far away, one day and one night. We were nervous about how everyone would sleep, zipped up and pressed together in sleeping bags. And although in the past I would have been setting up the tent while Nils gathered kindling for a fire, by some unspoken exchange, I found myself sitting in a camp chair, nursing the baby and watching Nils do everything. When he struggled briefly with the vestibule, and after I could no longer ignore the tugging of two competing desires, I settled the baby into some blankets in the play pen and went to help.

Overall, the trip had been a success. In four months, none of us had slept so well. I thought for sure this was a sign that things would never turn out as bad as I thought they would. But in the morning when we packed up, Nils grumbled as he attempted to jam the tent back into its bag. He muttered and I stayed out of his way and we almost came out of it unscathed, until I was blamed for the bent tent pole. I'd hardly touched the tent, and more importantly, I knew how to handle a tent pole. But this was just the first activity on



what would become a very long list of activities I was suddenly unequipped to perform. It occurred to me later that I didn't know whose list—Nils' or mine—it was.

The air was cold and damp as the three of us dispersed. With the dog lost, and Nils and I more or less lost, I knew somehow that I had screwed that up too. I could have tried harder to keep track of the dog, even though she'd been with Nils when he left the cabin. I could have stayed closer to him, and maybe then we wouldn't have been separated.

Cloud shadows slid across the land. The view was so unbroken the world looked empty, but there was texture everywhere. Hardy, yellow-green bushes and twisted grass. The triangular shapes of trees thrusting out of the ochre fields. Mile upon mile of forested hills in the distance. Layer upon layer of mountains beyond—each layer a shade lighter blue than the one before. Each a little hazier and thin.

A peak, a crest, and then the ground dropped from under me, sweeping down toward the tors. They rose from the tundra like guardians. They were giants—some twenty feet across, fifty feet tall. Solid, dark formations with some kind of unnerving magnetism. Maybe it was my imagination, but my feet began moving involuntarily in their direction.

I saw Nils ahead of me briefly, moving further and further away. He glanced toward the massive tors but veered off into a small grove of stunted trees. I knew eventually he'd come back. We'd find each other again and we'd have the dog back and we'd forget about things for a little while.

Or we'd try to. He seemed unbothered by the way our relationship had evolved, but it was consuming me from the inside, this feeling of helplessness, and as much as I wanted to blame him or motherhood or both, I knew that was inaccurate and unfair. The problem was rooted somewhere else.

It wasn't always this way. When I was a child, my parents were impressed with my stamina for chopping firewood and my ability to fix my own bicycle when I'd been stranded miles from home. In college, I drove two hours round trip for school and work in downtown Boston. I spent nineteen days alone on Vermont's Long Trail. Yet now, I was nervous behind the wheel even in our small town. I grew lethargic at the thought of chores. Apparently, I couldn't even set up a tent without breaking it.

My motherly tasks weren't causing the problem, but I'd begun hiding behind them. Lately, when Nils offered to carry the groceries into the house while I got the baby down for a nap, I was relieved that he wouldn't see me making six trips with the bags, when for him it would take only three. When he started doing all the driving, because I was better at keeping the baby happy in the back seat, it was so much easier than dealing with his criticism about how I handled traffic. Doing only the things that were specific to my being a mother—things that, apparently, I alone was suited for—seemed simpler than trying and failing to do everything else.

#

I looked up at the tors—goliaths of the tundra. Their massive presence seemed impossible, alien on this flat expanse of earth, like black liquid had bled up from the ground, defying gravity, then hardened. Nature had a way of imposing these kinds of monuments in my life, seemingly out of nowhere—reminders that anything was possible.

Once, in a wilderness survival book, I'd read that what we take for granted most in the wild is a good vantage point, and usually by the time we realize we need one, it's too late. Height is an opportunity, a chance for new perspective. What you can see from up high is like gold, especially if you lose your way. And if you know how to read the land around you—hills and tree lines and landmarks—you can figure out almost anything.

I knew we should get to higher ground if we wanted to find the dog.

For a moment, I thought about calling out for Nils to come back, so I could tell him about my idea. But I thought better of it, anticipating the comments he would make about how we didn't need a better view when there was nothing but open space all around us, and how impossible it would be to get any higher anyway, with the tors too tall and the surrounding trees too difficult to climb.

I let him drift out of sight and approached one of the tors, standing close, pressing my hands against the cold, rough granite. My nose touched its cool surface. I looked up at the place where I needed to be, with no idea how to get there.

The sound was clearly not thunder, but that was my first impression. It was more like a groaning than a growl too, so even though my next thought was of bears, at the same time I knew it was something else.

It was the tors, moving. Not traveling across the earth, but vibrating. And then the one I was touching began to crack. It shook until the ground was shaking and I was shaking, and it began to open, slowly at first and then all at once, a fan of light bursting through from behind as it split right down the middle.

Nils's guidebook said that they'd cracked before, so my brain did not immediately register it as shocking. Historically, when water seeped into tiny fractures, then froze, it broke the rock apart. Still, that would take years. This was something else. Something rough and fierce and violent, like the ground beneath my feet was erupting.

An enormous V shape stood before me, full of dense shadow and hidden places. Its weight could have crushed a being much larger than me, but that isn't what happened.

When the tor was still and silent once again, my body still vibrating, I reached into the crack. It was less than two feet across, like a doorway into something rather than a passage through. The inside of the rock was not smooth, but jagged and uneven, like anything that has been torn rather than cut.

There was just enough space for one person to fit inside. I left my backpack lying on the grass. It crossed my mind, as my fingers gripped the craggy surface, that it may close up at any moment.

As I climbed, I thought of the summer before I got pregnant, Nils and I squished into a two-person tent on an unnamed island in Blackstone Bay, south of Whittier, Alaska. Neither of us had ever been anywhere quite so remote, so far away from radio signals and

the conveniences of civilization. We'd been paddling the whole day, novice kayakers at best, a little lost but completely in love so what did it matter. The only sounds had been the calving of glaciers, and that night we'd slept the sleep of the dead. When I woke in the morning, Nils was gone, outside wandering the misty beach. I found him beneath a twisted tree, head tipped back toward a bald eagle on a branch above.

Every time it rained, I thought of that moment, how he was just ahead of me, facing away, looking at something rarer and much more magnificent. Sure, I thought. Anyone can find the glory in an eagle.

But the most interesting thing I'd seen on the whole trip were the tiny, nearly translucent mushrooms that grew upward from the tree behind our tent. I never got to tell Nils about them, though I'd found their vulnerability admirable.

Wedged inside the dark crevice of a broken rock that never should have broken, I remembered these mushrooms and their striking ordinariness. So hidden and unassuming. Maybe no one else had ever seen them before. Maybe any small creature could squish them with ease. Maybe they were boring, the plainest thing that ever existed.

Or maybe they were the heart of an entire ecosystem.

This fractured granite was the answer to my impossible plan. Fingers gripping, I pulled upward. The muscles in my back and shoulders woke. My foot slipped once, my hip scraping against the rock as I caught myself. I emerged at the top of the tor, scrambling onto the peak of it, then stood looking across the tundra, wet with rain, the sky steel blue-gray.

I was taller than anything.

A great division hung beneath me, but I had scaled its height. The earth had opened up for me, but it had not lifted me up. That energy had been mine.

Eight months before, I'd spent thirty-six hours in labor, an indescribable pain roaring outward from my center. Every contraction felt like my entire being was shaking and exploding. *Women do this all the time*, Nils had told me, which had been meant to make me feel less scared, but only made me feel like the experience—which felt overwhelmingly singular and all-consuming—was somehow ordinary. I thought my body was breaking in two.

And then, miraculously, we were looking at our son and it was over.

Except it wasn't. Every experience after was an extension of that one. I had been responsible for growing a human being inside my body. I had given birth to that human being, and had been feeding that human being—also with my own body—his whole life. He woke multiple times at night, but I was always awake just before he started crying anyway, as if I could sense his movements in my sleep.

This kind of thing did not simply end, and the multitude of its occurrences across the globe did not diminish its significance. Even if the initial feat itself would eventually be buried and forgotten, it was a culmination, not the end, of my capabilities.

My back throbbed from the climb up and there was a tear on the sleeve of my shirt. My hip was bleeding. My feet straddling the rift, I looked out over the surrounding land.

There were other tors, all striking in their own ways. One with a flat top looked like a wave, curving inward where wind and sand had blasted it over the centuries. There were two tall, skinny ones, like pillars—one leaning against the other. Just beyond them, a giant fist stretched upward, knuckles pointed to the sky. For a moment, I was dizzy with the elevation and perspective and lost my balance, nearly falling. But again, I recovered.

The dog appeared then. I watched her run like a pinball between the tors toward me. She hurtled across the field and slowed for a moment, like she sensed my presence.

I would have stayed there suspended forever, but I knew I had to move quickly. I sat with my feet hanging into the crevice, then lowered myself in. The effort of holding on was even greater on the way down. My fingers bled. Close to the bottom, I lingered where it was almost too tight to breathe before crawling out.

All I had to do was whistle and the dog bounded up, panting. I clipped her leash and we started walking toward where I'd last seen Nils. There were trail spurs with dead end signs, and I figured he'd gone down one of them, but I stuck to what I could see. He probably wouldn't be impressed by the fact that I'd found the dog, but that wasn't the point. I gripped the leash tighter, the veins in my wrist pulsing.

Eventually he emerged, his baseball hat and t-shirt damp. Thumbs hooked into the straps of his backpack. When he saw us, an expression of relief came over his face, and I knew he had genuinely been afraid. He reached out, his hand briefly touching the rip in my t-shirt, his eyes wandering over my various scrapes and cuts.

Then it seemed he finally acknowledged the presence of the tors. He unfolded his map, which had a tiny picture of the huge plutons in one corner. His eyes lifted from the sheet of paper to the actual tors and then back.

I looked back too, half-expecting the rock to have closed up again. Or to find that it had never broken at all, and I'd only imagined it. But everything behind me remained, even as I found the trail again.

I didn't describe that force of nature, the reason the tors did not reconcile with his maps. I didn't explain how I'd lifted myself to the top and how the height had made everything else seem inconsequential. I stood the moment up—an unshakable tower—before my feet began moving across that vast wilderness.

## **Two poems** by Meenakshi Palaniappan

### **What I Want to Be**

When my son was three,  
he asked me  
what I wanted to be when I grew  
up. The possibilities lit up,  
at the thought I could still be.  
Like a second chance at life  
I said I'd like to be  
a pianist, an artist, a writer,  
but now I wonder,  
could I be a tree maybe?

A seraya if so,  
I'd live more than a hundred years,  
striking straight for the stars  
before I branch out,  
the ribs that run down me  
a ladder to the sky.  
Yes, I'll be a mighty giant,  
one that stands the test of time.

Or perhaps... I'll be the sea,  
writing and revising shorelines  
forever. I'd have lived to see  
dinosaurs roam  
and mosasaurs dive deep,  
the trilobite turning to stone on my  
bed. I'll ebb and flow,  
washing the sins of the past into the future,  
when humans will have come and gone,  
and the next kings of the land rule the  
world.

Have I a tree in me? Or the sea?  
I definitely have birds in me.  
Maybe I'll be a bird,  
the drongo with my two tail  
feathers trailing far behind me.  
I'll fly from tree to tree  
but make the seraya my home.  
Or I'll be the golden plover,  
so small and brown,  
you won't notice me till I'm gone  
to far off lands across the sea.

One thing I know, is that after all  
this, I'll still always want to be  
the mother to this child, who,  
with his questions, so sets me free.

## Butterflies

Meenakshi Palaniappan

I saw two butterflies chasing each other  
as I walked back to work from lunch  
today. The flutter of early love, I supposed.  
They sense April is here, and seem caught  
in a rush of affection,  
a 'can't get enough of each other' attraction,  
in and out of bushes,  
round and round the treetops,  
first approaching, then dancing away,  
now together, at last, on a leaf,  
delicately balanced,  
each holding the other.

Is this love I wonder,  
the almost but not quite there  
kisses that brush the ears  
that tease, invite, and  
torment until release,  
heedless of the sun, the rain –  
the butterfly chase,

or is it in the everyday,  
the way you hold the cold compress  
to my arm after my first date with Moderna  
and pay our bills on time every month,  
the way you buy the best carrots and potatoes  
at the wet market, and check the routes  
on google map for me, before I set out,  
the way you wake up in the middle of the  
night in a thunderstorm,  
to close all the windows?

Yours is a love to hold us together  
from April through to March  
and then again,  
one that lasts even after  
the imprint of butterfly kisses  
fade away.

## **Palindrome: Meadow**

Grace Massey

Notice the meadow  
as you scuff your way to the pond,  
mites hazing about your shoulders.  
Queen Anne's lace, a few orange lilies  
among a sea of stalks.  
Heedless to oppressing earth,  
be the mole.  
Flow through sleek furrows,  
be the snake.  
Stamen to stamen,  
be the insect.  
Watch for whispers in the grass,  
be the raptor.  
To find the snake slipping among the reeds  
you kneel in the road's dusty ruts.  
though you walk on pathways.  
Hold your breath.  
You are human, unattuned to subtle voices.  
The meadow speaks softly.  
The meadow speaks softly.  
You are human, unattuned to subtle voices.  
Hold your breath.  
Though you walk on pathways,  
you kneel in the road's dusty ruts  
to find the snake slipping among the reeds.  
Be the raptor,  
watch for whispers in the grass.  
Be the insect,  
stamen to stamen.  
Be the snake,  
flow through sleek furrows.  
Be the mole,  
heedless to oppressing earth.  
Among a sea of stalks,  
Queen Anne's lace, a few orange lilies,  
mites hazing about your shoulders,  
as you scuff your way to the pond,  
notice the meadow.



## **The Feelings of the Water in My Community**

Francisco Palemón Arcos

Translated from the Spanish version by Tyler Gebauer

Originally written in Nahuatl

Allow me to give you a piece of advice: do not be selfish with water. If someone consumes it or takes it away, let them. If they do, the water will be content, because it enjoys being taken. It knows that this is how it gives strength to humans, or more precisely, how it quenches their thirst, kills it, removes it, and therefore gives them energy. If the water is not treated in this way, it will leave, or even dry out, and then we lose our strength.

Listen, over there at the place you all know of as “the place of water in the shape of hair,” tucked over to the side: at one time water flowed out from there, but they blocked it and built a closed-off house. Then man, animals, and plants were unable to consume the water; it wasn’t given the chance to enjoy entering into bodies of the human, animal, and vegetable species. The water became sad and left; that is, it dried up. If this is our thinking, then let us reflect: look, right over there in *Sakasonapa* the opposite is happening. In that place the water is free; if it runs dry, it comes back again. It is available for all who walk and live in the area; it is available for the plants that have grown in the shape of hair and always retain their moisture. They have even given it an offering of flowers and candles for its happiness.

I say that our God, the one who gives us water, gives it sense and feeling, as well as his blessing. That is to say, water is born to be free, and its veins flow all around the earth. If someone restricts it, he kills it, and then it goes away. It seeks out the freedom to give life to other people, animals, and plants. It goes to other places to sweeten their joy.

**Yolatsin ipan nokalpan**  
**(Original Nahuatl version)**  
Francisco Palemón Arcos

Matemetsontlahtolli in tlamachilistli: on atsintle maka xitlastlakan, tla yakah atleh niman kitikeh; xikawilikan. Ihkon on atsintle pakeh, kwelita ika makonikan ikonewan. Ihkon tlachikawaltia niman ihkon kimiktia amiktli. Tla ihkon xenkichiwa, on atl yaw, waki niman, tameh, kwalli tihmikisew.

San xikitakan, nee inakastlan Sakatsonapan; oameyak atl. Ompa okitsakeh niman okitlahchiwilkeh. Tla ihkon, nin tameh, nin wakaxtin, nin yolkatsintin atliyaw. On atsintle onahman niman oyaw, matikontokan, owak. Aman on komulli waktok; san tlatsintli kipiya; on atl oyaw kampa kitlayolchikawa.

Tla ihkon tikitah matinemilikan; xikitakan, Sakatsonapan sokse tlamantik: ompa xakah kitlastla. Maski tlame atl, soksajpa wahkisa. Ompa atleh tokniwan, ompa atleh yolkameh, ompa noskaltia sakatsintle niman, aman, ompa kitlamanilia; nanikitowa ika totahtsin, wan atl tetsmaka, kiyolitia niman kwalli tetstlachochiwilia. Matikontokan, on atl nelwayo tlamakahtli; totahtsin kimakawa niman kixexelowa ipan tlaltipaktli. Tla yaka kinowachkatia, kimiktia, niman on atl yaw, soksekan ontelyolitia, soksekan ontetsopelia.

On atl ban owak ġenkimati kan on onesitoh? Na nikintowa ika nee, kampa tameh titokayotia Kolosapan. Maske ompa okitlahchiwilkeh, xakah kitsakwa. Ompa ehko, ompa nosewiya, ompa noyekneke niman ompa atsahtsililo. Ipan in tlahtolli temetsihlia; maka matipasolokan on atsintle, nochimeh matikonikan niman nochimeh matipaktikan. Ihkon kentla, nee, tihchiwa Komuhlian, niman ihkon ken tihchiwa Tepec. Ompa kampa atsintle tlayochikawa wan nehnemi niman wan tekutih. Itlamakayotl tetsyolitia.

## **El sentimiento del agua en mi comunidad**

**(Spanish self-translation by the author from the Nahuatl version)**

Francisco Palemón Arcos

Déjenme darles un consejo: no sean egoístas con el agua. Si alguien lo toma (lo ingiere) o se lo lleva, déjenlo. Si es así, el agua se pone contento porque, a él, le gusta que lo tomen. Él sabe que así les da la fuerza a los humanos, de hecho, termina con la sed; la mata, la elimina y, por lo tanto, fortalece. Si no lo hacen así él se va, incluso, se seca. Entonces, nosotros podemos desfallecer.

Escuchen, allá donde ustedes conocen –a un ladito– de “el lugar del agua en forma de cabello”, manó mucha agua, pero lo restringieron y le construyeron una casa muy cerrada. Entonces ni el hombre, ni los animales y las plantas lo podían consumir; no se daba el gusto de entrar en los cuerpos de la especie humana, animal y vegetal. El agua se entristeció y se fue; digamos, se secó. Si este es nuestro pensamiento, reflexionemos; miren: allí justo en Sakasonapa sucede lo contrario. En ese lugar el agua está libre, si se acaba vuelve a salir. Está a disposición de todos los caminantes y vecinos del lugar, está a disposición de las plantas que han crecido en forma de cabello y siempre se conserva en humedad, incluso, le han conferido una ofrenda de flores y velas para su alegría.

Yo digo que nuestro Dios, el que nos da el agua, le da sentido y sentimiento, además de su bendición. Digamos, el agua nace para ser libre, sus venas están sueltas alrededor de la tierra. Si alguien lo restringe, lo mata y, entonces, se va. Busca su libertad para dar vida a otras gentes, animales y plantas, va a otros lugares para endulzar la alegría.

## Alternating Current

Audrey Tan Hui En

I am trying not to think about the sun,  
and the fake waterfall crashing  
behind my back. A fat brown bird  
does not know to go left or right—  
there, in the grass, I'd thrown a snail,  
which Acacia had nearly crushed.  
Upwards, in the sky,  
clouds are moving right.

Later, at home, a baby lizard is climbing  
over the glass pane of my shower.  
Wet and naked, I watch the way it sticks,  
its feet, round and flat and pink. I think  
about the urgency of writing,  
even though this sounds like a way  
to delay the necessary—dishes in the sink,  
items on my list. I don't understand  
how the joy of watching an orange butterfly flit  
over a hedge of red leaves could give such clarity:  
my shadow on the grey ground,  
head hovering over notebook.

The lizard's neck throbs curiously  
as it balances on the edge of glass above me.  
I crab-walk outside, dripping.

**after images**

Daryl Li

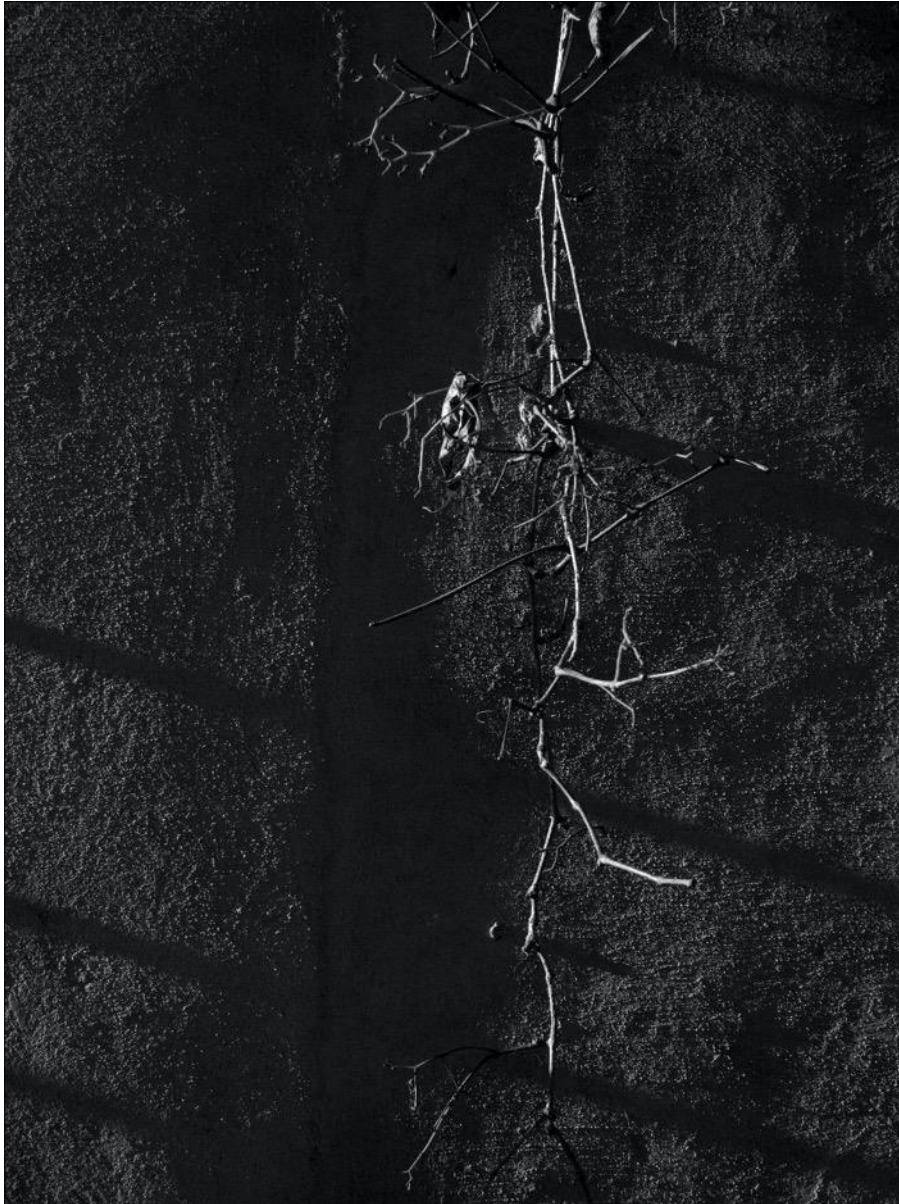
[1]



what compels me to box you in  
these borders and these instants  
to flatten the tangled fact of you  
for the decadent act of reproducing ghosts

what compels me to prejudice histories  
technological wonders artficed  
a hephaestic bias against your unnoticed journey  
the slow account of your being

[2]



after the apocalypse  
after every catastrophe every crisis conjured  
they climb again atop manmade shapes and meanings  
embracing the long-absent silence  
and the disfigured shape of this earth  
finding new geometries and new randomnesses  
sunlight in new places  
in this age after language after images after time



[3]



sometimes a vision like this one comes unannounced  
unexpected beings that have always existed  
and will always exist in the negative of your imagination

perhaps there are ghosts here  
written into the papery bark that comprise  
its dense bone its textured truth

ghosts that understand what it is to be a shadow  
cast by the gnomon of a sundial  
standing in elongated time

[4]



should i die let me be consumed by the earth absorbed  
by wood tendrils that wrap around me encasing me in filth  
let me be eaten by fungus by lice by decomposers  
what am i after all but roots and carbon every language  
every word when broken down becomes letters becomes  
elements leaving not a trace of what had come before



[5]



tell me of the temperament of each seedling and the name  
of every blossom tell me of the way the sun falls on bark  
and bud tell me about your library of plants down  
to smallest cellular detail down to grit and grime

instruct me in ways of care and acts of tenderness  
impart to me methods botanical  
the promise of a life lived slowly  
imperceptibly passing through the mulch of time

## **Tigress**

Sophia Naz

Hundreds of foot soldiers comb  
the jungle, bulldozers  
clear it, sharpshooters, jeeps  
camera traps, a thermal imagery drone  
and five Indian elephants  
in hopes of surrounding the tigress  
so veterinarians riding elephants  
can dart her

*Thirteen moons live in the eyes of the tigress  
At night she multiplies them in the ripples  
subtracts herself in the water*

At dusk they return  
sweaty and exhausted  
line up to guzzle water  
and gobble down *jalebis*

*Mother who outstrips them all  
from you I learn camouflage, the line  
hiding within the line  
as glass in plain sight  
on the night-wet grass*

Reports stack up  
on a plastic table  
in boxes for sightings  
the answers are all the same:  
Nil Nil Nil Nil Nil

*Zigzag, eye, Elle  
these scratches on the surface  
denote untraceable  
writ of the tigress*

Horse after horse  
sacrificial bait to draw her  
out she rips  
devours, vanishes

*The feat of the line  
the line of the feet  
disappearing race-  
course of time.*

## Tralanis

David Denny

1

I heard her before I saw her. I heard the yips and the growls and, when the moon shone upon the dry grass on the hill behind my house, I heard her howl—a long, plaintive cry that rose and fell like a passing siren. I'm told that most coyotes move in packs, often a couple and a litter of cubs. But this one was as solitary as me.

The moon shone through the branches of the tall trees, setting the long grass aflame with a lavender fire. She howled one long cry, followed by a series of barks meant to claim the moon, the woods, the grassy hillside, my house, and me. The trees echoed with her terrible love. Even the grass shivered.

\* \* \*

It had been a long, hot, lonely summer, that summer after my wife left me. The dryness that had cracked the soil had also leached all the moisture from my spirit, leaving me in a desert of self-pity. I spent most days indoors, reading and pacing. I might have taken up smoking and drinking: cigars and something bitter over ice. Instead I read books about grief. I became an expert in grief. I paced with my hands in my pockets and my slippers scuffing around the tile floors.

One day I sat on my back patio, reading. I must've dozed off. When I awoke it was dusk. I heard a rustle in the tall grass and saw something move out of the corner of my eye. Suddenly there she was, stalking a rabbit. I could see its ears twitching in the deep, tawny grass. Then, like a bolt, the coyote leapt and descended upon it. Grabbing its neck in her jaws, she whipped the body from side to side until it went limp. Then she dropped the rabbit and looked around. When she saw me, our eyes locked. She sat in the grass and devoured her prey.

\* \* \*

Six months earlier there had been a shooter on campus at our neighborhood middle school. Before he was dropped by a sheriff's bullet, he killed six children, most of them in the campus library. My wife's best friend was the school librarian. She charged the shooter when he came through the door. He shot her in the face. Then he turned on the children, who were huddled between old wooden shelving units. He sprayed the room with bullets, took a minute to reload, then kicked open the side door, where the sheriff stood with his weapon drawn. Among the dead was our son.

My wife lost her son and her best friend on the same day. Later she would say that I died on that day, too, which was most certainly true. The melancholy that gripped me

made me incapable of providing the comfort and support she needed. I will never blame her for leaving; it was by all accounts the right move. She now lives in another state, in another time and climatic zone. She also lives with another man. For none of these things can she be blamed. She left behind an empty shell of a husband and a house full of painful mementoes.

\* \* \*

At night I sat out on the back patio and examined the sky. I live on the edge of a subdivision, and the other side of my back fence is that grassy hill. Above the hill, woods. Above the woods, sky.

It was under a gibbous moon that I heard her sing. It was a distinctly human song, a throaty lament that defies description. The language was unidentifiable, but the rise and fall of her keening syllables formed a haunting melody that scared and soothed me all at once.

\* \* \*

I was standing at the window the next morning, watching the dawn's light illuminating the big trees from top to bottom. It was eerily silent. Where had the lush songs of our morning birds gone?

She entered my field of vision, crossing the dry grass again, this time in pursuit of nothing. Her movements were elegant in their deliberation. Without hesitation she topped my redwood fence in a single leap, her front paws springing on the top rail and her rear paws boosting her down into my backyard. She stood in the center of the lawn. Then she moved about with caution, her nostrils flared and lifted, her ears stiff and focused.

She walked the perimeter of the yard. She twitched her tail toward the azalea bushes in each corner and left her scent. My yard was now her territory. Or part of her territory. The rest of it stretched, presumably, up the hill and into the woods. How far beyond I can't say. According to recent research, suburban coyotes often mark and patrol a territory of ten square miles or more. Usually they live in families, but everywhere coyotes dwell there are solitaires that roam the boundaries of human development.

I gaped. I don't know if she could see me standing on the other side of the glass. As I watched her move with slow intentionality around the yard, I admired her beauty. Her coat was light gray overall with cinnamon patches mixed in along her muzzle and forehead, her chest and flanks. Her ears were actively twitching and her golden eyes examined each bit of the yard. It occurred to me that she could detect the lingering odor of our cat, who now lived with my wife.

She yipped three times and lifted her chin. She howled long and low, a sound that welled up from the belly, resounded from torso to throat, and emerged through open jaws. With the ease and grace of an Olympic vaulter, she leapt the fence once again, barely

touching the top rail, and bounded through the tall grass and into the freshly lit woods, leaving my gut heavy with fear, anticipation, and yearning.

2

One cloudy afternoon I took a walk over to the middle school. The classrooms had stood empty and silent all summer long. I peeked into the windows of my son's former classroom. The chairs and desks were stacked against the wall. The janitor had polished the floors to a shiny clean gloss. The library was boarded up. Only the front office was lit, where the administrators planned for the new academic year.

The city and the school district and a host of local donors had installed a marble memorial on the front lawn with the etched names and embedded photos of the victims. There was talk early on about renaming the school after the librarian, my wife's friend, but her family asked the district to establish an annual scholarship fund in her name instead.

There was a large outdoor service on the day the monument was dedicated, complete with the speeches of dignitaries, the prayers of the pious, and music by a local children's choir. I watched it from a distance. My wife had already left town.

Once upon a time I was a high school history teacher, before the shots rang out in my son's middle school, and elsewhere, at schools across the country, before our small family became one of the casualties, instead of merely one of the witnesses, in a strange nation that loved its weapons more than its children, and before we collapsed beneath a burden of grief far heavier than we could bear, before my own desiccation, my own death upon the cross of melancholia.

\* \* \*

My front door remained bolted. I no longer answered the bell. Anyone who knew me came through the side gate and went to the kitchen door, or around to the back patio. But the only people who visited anymore were my brother and his wife. They dropped off two bags of groceries and sundries every Saturday. Sometimes they sat with me and drank iced tea on the patio, unless their kids had sports or church activities scheduled. Then it was one or the other—my brother or his wife, who dropped provisions and left. I had not seen their kids in eight weeks. Their sad uncle was unfit company.

So when the coyote walked upright through the side gate and appeared on my back patio in human form, I was briefly startled but somehow not shocked. She was beautiful in her skin. Her hair was the same mix of light gray and cinnamon, and her eyes had golden flecks among the hazel. She was poised and elegant and spoke in a low but distinctly feminine voice.

She sat on the patio with me and seemed to enjoy the cookies and iced tea I served, examining every bite and sip. Her sense of smell was especially acute. When I mentioned

that I had heard her sing by moonlight, she blushed. But she willingly sang for me again, and this time the song was comprehensible. Its theme was the phases of the moon and the light it shone upon a solitary hunter in winter. It drew from my bitter depths tears that I had suppressed since my wife had packed up her things and loaded them all into a big yellow taxi idling at the curb. Her name, she said, was Tralanis, and after she licked the tears from my cheeks, she left without a sound. I sat stunned. Then let loose.

I wept for an hour, and then I slept the sleep of the dead. When I awoke the heat spell had finally broken, and I relished the breeze that moved among the trees and the tall grass. I could smell a fresh kill up there somewhere. Perhaps you know the feeling of life pulsing through the arteries once again, of senses enlivened after sickness or dull slumber? Into the cool breeze I whispered, Tralanis. Tralanis, I whispered.

\*       \*       \*

The weather continued to cool as autumn approached. I could sense Tralanis up there roaming, keeping watch beneath the strange moonlight. Three nights passed without a sighting. Just knowing she was there lifted my spirits. Then I began to wonder if she was just a dream or a delusional fantasy. The grief books spoke of these things. During certain stages of deep mourning, it was possible to enter into a false reality if reality itself were too much to cope with. I didn't care. I had begun to feel better after the cathartic meeting when she drew out my sorrow. I started cooking actual meals instead of opening packages of pre-prepared food and picking at them. I had begun to walk more, strolling morning and evening again in the streets of my neighborhood as our family once had done. Two of the neighbors had even come out on their porches to wave and to greet me by name.

Then one evening I heard her howl. I wrapped myself in a blanket on the back patio and waited for her beneath the full moon. I drifted off and dreamed of storm clouds overhead, thunder in the distance, and a gentle rain that grew to a downpour. Suddenly I awoke to perfect silence, moonglow upon the lawn. Tralanis stood over me, watching me sleep. The sound she then emitted was a low kind of growl. Fear struck me, beginning with a sour feeling in my gut. A strange but sweet warmth spread through my torso and into my throat, which opened as I lifted my face and let out a howl of my own, a long, low cry that I had never heard from any human. My senses hummed with electricity—I could hear rustling in the grass, smell owls in the trees and burrowing voles beneath the bushes. My skin bristled with sensitivity. I rose from my chair and embraced her.

I awoke next morning in the woods, naked, covered with sweat and mud, blood and brambles, semen and tufts of fur. In my mind was a blur of images and impressions: the moon's pull upon my heart like that of a strong tide, a shuffle of animal claws and teeth and growls, pungent odors that I could not identify, the rich and woody flavors of earth and sky upon my tongue, and a violent, passionate wrangling into the ecstatic depths of night and underworld and death's brink.

Overhead sunlight shone through the branches. Crows rattled and cawed at me. Squirrels chipped and scratched around the trunks of the big trees. Down below, the mourning doves cooed from my patio.

3

After I showered and tended to my wounds, I stood again in the window looking out at the sky, which even at midday had begun to darken in the west. Clouds roiled in. Distant thunder and the occasional storm clap. Big drops on the patio. The burnt odor of ozone. I went out and put a tarp over my patio furniture, just as the rain swept through.

It only lasted an hour. And then again the sun broke through. In yet another hour the sky was clear and blue and filled with birdsong. A host of white-crowned sparrows came in to pick at the lawn. I cooked and ate a pot of hearty stew with some fresh sourdough and butter.

That night I slept as deeply as ever. My son appeared in a dream. He was walking past our house with a group of other children. School chums with their backpacks. He showed no recognition of our house. They were simply walking together, those kids, absorbed in conversation. Walking to school.

\* \* \*

I began walking in the woods and in the neighborhood. I belonged somehow to both. In the woods I learned to breathe and to observe in silence; in the neighborhood I helped the elders with yard work and the children with homework.

Once I was a history teacher. And then history repeated itself. I was offered a job at the middle school, which reopened after Labor Day. I walked the halls again. I peeked into my presumptive classroom with its bare walls, shiny floors, and rows of desks. Its promise. I would soon pick up the key. I would soon mark it as my territory.

My brother and his wife brought my niece and nephew over to play Rummikub on the back patio. We shared iced tea and cookies. We remembered together the family that used to live here. We toasted the renewed health of its lone survivor.

\* \* \*

I have no more fear and no more yearning. There lingers a sadness and of course the pain of a broken heart. The melody of the coyote's song I recall each afternoon as dusk settles in the tall grass and the moon appears in the trees. I've forgotten who said we are part animal, part spirit. And are we not at once both wild and tame?

It's October now; yesterday morning as I was preparing for school, Tralanis returned to the tall grass beyond my fence, trailing a litter of cubs. She was teaching them



to stalk a small rodent that she had let drop from her jaws. They leapt and growled and jostled for position. When one of the cubs brought the prey to its mother, she barked her approval and sat with her brood in the grass to watch them feed.

## Heritage

Catherine Audrey Hess

in another life  
I walked these plains  
on another woman's legs

I saw the great beasts  
rear their heads proudly  
commanding their kingdom

colossal, shaggy  
things they were  
so full of vigor

the tall flaxen grasses  
danced at their behest  
moving in wild rhythm

those were my  
ancestor's times  
times before ships

an age before vessels  
rolled in from the ocean  
and shed flesh here

an era before men  
chased the beasts madly  
and drove them to dust

hardly anyone left  
to remember the names  
of those who came before

the woman I once was  
tells me of the fields  
and their beauty

she inhabits me  
as I inhabit her  
we are one and the same

connected through  
generations  
by our heritage

as one soul  
we  
remember

## **Two poems** by Christien Gholson

### **Resurrection Ferns: Spells**

They grow from moss on the oak's bark, dangle  
twenty feet above the earth. Fronds like seawrack;  
like sea-spells, drawing a ghost-ocean closer, closer,  
for 70 million years, beneath this highway bridge.

I was a drop of rain, once; slipped down the length  
of this oak's trunk for sixty years; years pilgrimed  
inside phosphorescent labyrinths of moss, drawn up  
steep xylem trails, tranced inside a sporangia patch.

I was part of this sea-spell, a drop; part of this sea-  
spell, a spore; part of this sea-spell, a frond's memory  
of a previous life as rain, a drop, that contained a sea  
turtle turning around the oak's crown.

What is born again? I press my forehead against bark  
and exhale. Transpiration draws salt water up through  
the vascular trails of my body, from an ancient ocean,  
a future ocean...

## What's not there calls to me

Christien Gholson

What's not there calls to me. Can you hear it? Wind over an empty bottle half-buried in sand, edge of the high-tide line.

Spray lifts off foam, becomes a seagull, becomes a grey veil. I sometimes make lists of things that have replaced what's no

longer there: *microplastics, iphones, 3d printers, blockchains, ghost nets*... words that developed too quickly to have roots.

They hover just above me, their cameras send images of this poem back to a bunker full of server racks, in a secret location

beneath the earth, where green and red lights illuminate specks of dust. What's not there keeps calling out to me. Do I mistake

it for the odd distant voices produced by tinnitus? Is that all it really is? I want to know that the calls from what's not there are

separate from my own small wounds. A gull lands nearby, eyes me, searching for something I don't have. I ask the gull if it hears

what's no longer there, too. *Sometimes*, it says, *inside an empty crab shell*. I laugh – good joke – then open my wings, flap twice,

lift off sand, and sail into the fog blowing in off the water.

## ***Plein Air / Remote Sensing***

Myles Dunigan

*Plein Air / Remote Sensing* is an ongoing series of paintings based upon smartphone-based 3D scans of nature. Through the process of photogrammetry, a method of 3D imaging based on taking photographs from multiple angles, I am able to capture these vignettes from the natural landscapes of S.E. Wisconsin and North Florida. These scans are imperfect records of my experience of nature, filtered through a smartphone, and reconstituted into a digital model. I meticulously recreate these 3D models as 2D watercolor paintings as a play on the 'Plein Air' artistic tradition, which entails artists painting directly from nature as a spiritual, or meditative practice. In an era where our experiences are constantly mediated by our devices and technology, I see this series as a meditation on how we experience nature, the uncanniness of augmented reality, and a contemporary satire of the Romantic trope of the lone artist amidst the landscape.



*Plein Air / Remote Sensing 1*

Watercolor on paper, 14" x 11", 2018 – 2021

© Myles Dunigan



*Plein Air / Remote Sensing 2*

Watercolor on paper, 14" x 11", 2018 – 2021

© Myles Dunigan





*Plein Air / Remote Sensing 3*

Watercolor on paper, 14" x 11", 2018 – 2021

© Myles Dunigan



*Plein Air / Remote Sensing 4*  
Watercolor on paper, 14" x 11", 2018 – 2021  
© Myles Dunigan





*Plein Air / Remote Sensing 5*

Watercolor on paper, 14" x 11", 2018 – 2021

© Myles Dunigan



***Plein Air / Remote Sensing 10***

Watercolor on paper, 14" x 11", 2018 – 2021

© Myles Dunigan

## Fire and Drought

Claire Matturro

From the porch, we smell  
pine and beargrass smoke as  
the national forest burns  
east of us. Hot air cracks,  
settling ash on our tongues  
and crusting our eyes.

The creek, gone  
from flow to mud  
then sand, smells of dead  
fish. With something  
like faith we had planted  
an acre of peas.

When the well churns  
up silt, dark  
and undrinkable, I regret  
the long hot showers  
and careless irrigation,  
all our arrogant waste.

As fire burns closer,  
deep-rooted Magnolias  
drop leaves curled  
like brown fists. Cardinals  
pluck the planted peas  
from disked rows of dust.

## 无主之树

Zhang Zhihao

如何判断一棵树  
是病死的还是老死的  
在人际罕至的原始森林  
我常常陷入盲从  
病死也罢老死也好  
总归死得其所  
但在我的家乡有这样一棵梨树  
孤零零地长在门前  
百米开外的田埂旁  
树干粗大，树枝旁逸斜出  
春天开过多少花  
夏天就结多少果  
而到了秋天路过的人  
蹿上枝梢随意采摘  
一年又一年  
我们都以为它会一直这样活  
尤其是在我远离家乡几十年后  
还好几次在梦中见过它

## Nobody's Tree

Translated by Yuemin He

To diagnose if a tree  
died of disease or naturally  
in the untrodden primeval forest  
I often follow blindly  
Either way  
it's a fair death  
But in my hometown, there was such a pear tree  
standing alone in front of a gate  
around a hundred meters away from the fields  
its trunk massive and branches sticking out in all directions  
The amount of flowering it had in spring  
meant equal amount of fruiting in summer  
In autumn passersby would  
climb onto it to harvest at will  
Year after year  
we all thought it would live like this forever  
Even after leaving my hometown for decades  
I still saw it several times in my dreams

但事实上它已经死去多年

没有人告诉过我

它因何而死就像没人知道

它为什么而活，孤零零的

像花圈之于填满灰烬的坟墓

Yet the truth is, it died years ago

Nobody told me

why it died just like nobody told me

why it had lived; lonely

it existed like a funeral wreath to a tomb of ashes

**Poet's Authorization:** The poet has granted me written permission (in Chinese) to translate and publish these poems along with my translations.

## **Poached**

Julie A. Dickson

An elephant calf stood whining by the still body,  
de-tusked, maimed face unrecognizable,  
distant hum of the chainsaw would not deter  
her perseverance, hope un-dissuaded, trunk  
caressing, trying to rouse sleeping mother;  
pushing against her empty breasts, as much for  
comfort as to quiet her aching belly.



## Two poems by Kired Quidangen

### Shakespeare for my grief

what's past is prologue where every  
inch that shines is dug out of internment, out  
of perennial burial to bring forth even more  
things that shine; here where all that matters  
is what glistens and what can adorn and what  
can explode and implode and terrorise and disjoint;  
here where life is only the afterthought of livelihood;  
here where the bodies rotted and decayed and festered  
where the hymns used to ring with glinting jade  
here the past is hallow: in the craggy callouses  
of burial after burial after burial                      here traced  
for all the futures                      here recomposed  
and recomposed                      against the wound  
                    against memory                      against the blood  
clotting the throat,                      lining the teeth  
for ~~their~~ meager ~~mercy~~ recompense

## **Monsoon child**

Kired Quidangen

none of the carabaos will wake to see  
the end of the storm, the house's grief  
shall tend to the muck and the sludge  
and the sun's grief shall tend to the tears  
shed over the years and years of drought  
you are barefoot in the flood with the trees  
dancing amid the howling winds, the soil  
is wet at last and the seeds are finally free  
to grow: for every drought there is thirst,  
and drowning, and surfacing like how your  
own heartbeat leaps over the swelling rivers

## Evolution

Jocelyn Li

They say the worst kind of death is drowning  
and I remember. Once our shoulders were bare  
skinned, kissed by the sun the summer  
I turned sixteen, all pink cheeks and football fields  
still unfiltered by terror then. I'd chase the edge  
of your uniform skirt, pretending I'd learnt to swim by  
refusing to fall for someone like you. I remember when  
to sink meant to let our hair down  
at recess. Hold a girl's hand.

Signs of global warming:  
our city is  
- breathing thunder  
- soaked, choking on expired tear gas  
- a crowd holding hands  
- sweating through black shirt after black shirt  
in a summer that had stretched on for far too long

The first night it rained bullets a schoolgirl lifted  
her hands into the sky and tried to stop  
the leaking with her fingertips.

when fists turned into batons and bloodless bodies  
dove off the edge of buildings  
then drizzled out

the sea level rose and rose and washed them home  
unidentified, *NO SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES*  
stamped across taped lips, cuffed wrists

I remember how we brought out umbrellas  
we'd stashed in dark corners for five years,  
floating boards, taught ourselves to breathe  
through the fuchsia gills of our new respirators.

I remember the day some of us grew fins.

## Birds of the North

By Rammel Chan

#

The last man dreams in his burrow.

He is dreaming of birds. Black and white birds. Clumsy like rotund chickens. The birds are his daughters and they stand on an island in the north where the air is so cold it is static on their feathers. It is winter on this arid rock and he is the sun and the birds that are his daughters watch as he rises and falls like an old man waving goodbye over the horizon. And now night is all there is.

The last man startles awake in his burrow and then succumbs again to sleep.

He is now dreaming of his father, though he doesn't recognize him. His father is a skeleton of tall gigantic and yellowing bones reaching down to him with gaunt rope-like fingers that dig into the ground like tree roots. In the dream, the last man is young, a boy, a teenager, a baby, and he is asking his father a question. Of what? As he speaks he forgets. His father's papery lids peel back as if waking and reveal the hollow blackness of the inside of his skull and his teeth chatter to speak and it is his father's voice and the answer is too much, it is too terrible. Out of his father, another larger skeleton grows, a ribcage from a ribcage, a femur from a femur, a skull from a skull, and the new skeleton is hunched over the skeleton of his father and it is his father's father. And from his father's father another skeleton grows and it is his father's father's father, larger still. And from him another and then another until the sky is a canopy of bones and the skulls of his ancient ancestors looking down on him and he asks each of them the same question and they answer and it is too horrible, too much. The last man feels the shivers of grief in his skin, tears like snakes on his cheeks. And he wakes with a start. And he reaches to his wife in the cold and sweaty tangle of their bed. And hearing her breath calms him but the sting and cold of his tears cling him to wakefulness and so he moves through the tunnels of the burrow into the light of the main room and he makes a tea of nettles and lemongrass. He tries to forget what he learned in his dream: that he is the last man.

The last man and his small family live in the shadow of two mountains, at the bottom of the valley. His wife and the two girls, they do not wake. It is still cool enough to step outside, to breathe the air, to remember. He decides that opening his eyes to his valley will steady his heart.

He exits the burrow into a world that has remained as it was all his life. To his front, he can see the berry bushes on the east side of Sunset Mountain where he once played and where his daughters now play. To his left, to the south, he can see the hill where the shadow of the Sunrise Mountain never reaches, where once his father grew, and now his wife grows, hardy robust plants that could take root in any soil.

To the north, he hears the distant bubbling river stream that separates the valley from the plain and provides them with fish, though like his father and his father's father and his father's father's father before him, the last man only fishes once a week. On Fridays.

About his feet scratch the three hens and the rooster that haunt the outside of their burrow, gaunt strange things that peck the ground at nothing.

Behind him is the outside of the burrow, like a glass igloo. The main room is thatched with ancient hexagonal glass panels. Made by men who knew more than he did, made by men to last thousands of years. They are hard as bricks but clear as stream water, letting in the steel-gray light of the valley morning. Between noon and two when the sun is at its zenith, sunlight washes the shadow of the mountain off their burrow and the glass panels absorb the light and stores the energy so that at night the burrow has enough power to heat their food, purify their water and light their tunnels with pin pricks of electricity.

At the back of the main room, the burrow becomes a cave-like series of tunnels, held up and floored by arches of wood and stone. The tunnels lead into a series of rooms. First, there is the master bedroom, a large mattress where his wife still sleeps, a ferociously intelligent woman with a face like the moon, beautiful and unavoidable. Here in this room his daughters were born. Further down, a bedroom, where now sleeps Aya, his first child, a strong, muscular child of twelve, a steady-minded, fiercely disciplined learner. Further down, another bedroom, Hua's room, his second child, a child of eight: imaginative, sharp-tongued and born salty. Further down, seven other bedrooms, saved for sons or daughters that the last man and his wife never had. One room is now storage for the weaver. The other is for the clothes. Another is to store tools for building. Another, tools for gardening. Their inanimate family. There is a room of food. Inside, tiny smoked fish hang on lines, a basket of eggs, potatoes, aged, salted animal flesh that the last man had captured in a pit trap twenty days ago, and an endless wall of jars: jars full of berries and jars of cucumbers and melons and roots.

And if you venture further down the tunnel finally you will find the coolest parts of the burrow, where the family sits to talk during the mid-day rest, where they tell stories, where they play games and where they keep their room of books.

His wife has risen. She watches him from the door of their burrow and he turns to meet her gaze. A face like the moon, bright and unavoidable.

The steam from his tea eases the clamoring of his heart. It is a beautiful day and he talks to himself as he walks the half mile to the stream. He finds a spot where he likes to fish and sits with his tea and he thinks for a time about this dream, about his ancestors' answer to the question he forgot.

When was the last time he had seen others? Others that were not his family. Ahh yes, the old woman. He remembers her vividly, her gaunt oxen that pulled her cart through the valley, her sweat soaked cloak hiding her loose skin on her bones. Aya was nine then, yes, and Hua was five. Sharing with her their food and their burrow for a week, in return she gave them an old replacement solar brick that was laid like refuse in her cart and an ancient book written in a Far-Eastern language that his wife only somewhat knew. The

trader-woman's news from the east was only ramblings of her own family. With bags of stream water tied tightly and jars of cucumber and berries, she left to the North and did not pass through the valley again.

He tries to remember, when was the last time he had even seen markings of other men? Had he ever seen them? When he ventures south, where his pit traps for the grazers are laid, he always fears being surprised by them, the other men. Years ago, his father had taught him to find their markings, warned him of the dangers of other peoples: slavers, eaters of manflesh, the takers of things. Yet after the lesson, his father admitted it had been years since he had seen footprints or hoof prints, or heard the sound of a transport engine, or seen the smoke of a distant campfire. He considered himself lucky in this. His father admitted too that his own father had only ever seen strange men once, at a distance and they perhaps were as scared of him as he was of them.

The last man tries to remember, when was the last time he had seen another man? And he thinks, as far back as fifteen years. When his father was just starting to become lame in his leg. They ventured for a year past the Sunset Mountain to the arid steppes of the West. As they walked his father would touch him on the shoulder, and at first he did not look back because he thought the old man simply needed support but then as they walked deeper into the steppes, he found his father would touch him on his arm and on his neck and the top of his head and when finally the last man would look back he would find his father smiling, great lines across face. He was a good old man, funny and witty, forgetful but hardworking. The last man thought himself so lucky to even be alive at the same time as a father like him.

At night the old man told the boy stories and by day they marched and saw nothing. No one. Not a soul.

Until one morning his father walked them into the joint of two rivers and there they encountered their first people in three months. Amongst three yurts between the two rivers his old father embraced an even older, more ancient man, hair sparse and silver and his eyes gray with blindness. In a slow, tottering, meek way, like a shy, excited child, the ancient man opened a door to a yurt and revealed a woman, his granddaughter, a girl with a face like the moon, beautiful, shining, and unavoidable.

And there amongst the three yurts between the two rivers, the last man and his wife were married. There were only four of them to witness and sing the song at this last wedding: his father, her mother, her grandfather, her aunt. They did the ritual and ate a modest meal and at dusk the family, eagerly, pushed them into a room to consummate. On their first night together they talked, because that was all he knew how to do. He listened to her and he marveled at the way she spoke, like running water, clear and fast. She talked of black and white birds that lived in the north that disappeared from the world long ago, when the world was cool and people were everywhere. She seemed to know so much and was so willing to offer it to him. All he could do was make her laugh.

He kissed her on the mouth, wanting to take in all her knowledge, wanting to take in everything that was her. He thought himself so lucky to even be alive at the same time with a woman such as her.

And he remembers now how her grandfather looked the day they left, haloed in sunlight, wisps of silver hair in the wind, grieving eyes peeking over a smile, small and crouched as if sinking into himself. He remembers how he smelled as they embraced, like the last crackle of fire-coals, the last heavy drops of water from a rain. How he shrank away as they walked, how he waved and kept on waving until they could no longer see him. He realized now that this was how he always imagined him, waving there still. Even when they returned to their burrow in the valley, where the garden was overgrown and the food was dried up and rotten, but the books smelled the same from when they had left. He forever imagines her grandfather just to the horizon, waving goodbye. Was he the last man he had seen?

No, the last man he saw was his father. He had died just a few weeks after Aya was born. The night before he had held the baby in his hands and kissed her head and made a joke to her and she smiled and he laughed like the last man had never seen his father laugh before. In the morning he found him sitting in his room. His hands open on his lap and his head hung down toward them as if he were studying the lines in his palms. The man did not move from the doorway but watched, hoping that his presence would wake his father with a start and they would laugh at how silly he was to have fallen asleep that way. He stood for a long time until his wife found him.

They buried him in the south hill garden, as he would have wished.

And then today, years later, he came to him in the dream. With his horrid answer. Though his heart has eased, he cannot shake the thought that lingers: “Am I the only man left?”

How could he have known? The last man’s only way of knowing the world was through his senses and all he could sense was his valley. He can only see as high as heaven, only smell as low as the dirt on his feet. He can only hear as far as his wife can read and he can only love as long as the length of his daughter’s hair. He could not know all things. He is *a man*. There are things that *men* might know. Many men together, many people, could know many things: of the lifelessness of oceans, of the disappearance of ice, of the heaving tyranny of deserts, of the extinction of animals, of the decay of diversity, of the emptiness of soils, of the eccentricity of orbits, of the persistence of feedback loops, of the toxicity of air, of the centuries old gradual depletion of his race, and in knowing these things *they* might have known sooner what now he discovers in dreams, and perhaps found a new way to live. They together. Many men, many people might do this. But a man, a person, alone, does not know. How could he? He wakes with the sun, feeds his belly and the bellies of his children and labors to ensure their bellies remain full. He lives just as his father lived and his father’s father and his father’s father’s father and occupies his time harvesting berries, pickling squashes and cucumbers, fishing, hunting and teaching the symbols and words and skills to his children.

And Aya and Hua, would they have children? For years, he had taken for granted the thought that someday another man, a trader, or a sojourner might come and embrace him too as his father did to his wife's grandfather and someday offer up his sons to his daughters. Those sons would be lucky to have them. Aya and Hua are like their mother, strong, witty, quick to learn, precise in their judgment. Unavoidable women, like the moon. In some ways they are like him too: they are steady and sometimes they are also funny. And the way they laugh in the bushes reminds him of his father. And the way they cry when they are hurt, reminds him of his wife's grandfather. In them is the great combination of those he has loved before. Will their children be like them? Will there *be* children to be like them?

No. He rejects it. How could this dream be true? In other dreams before he had found answers, yes, but in many dreams he had also found delusions, fictions, feelings that felt true but were really of his own imagining.

He decides the dream must be one of these. There must be others.

But that dream was sent to him for a reason and he decides that the reason was to compel him to action. To see for himself. He decides he should go out into the West, across the steppes and search for them there first. It would be dangerous to leave his family behind but what danger could it mean if he finds no one? What would it mean to him if he would die and not smell and kiss the wispy hairs of his own grandchild? No, he must plan a journey to find them, to find someone.

When he meets them it will start with trade. He could offer pickles, the hexagonal bricks, some dried fish, and then as time moves on the partnership would grow into a friendship, yes, and maybe a contract of marriage for his daughters as his father had done years before he was born with the old man to the west and eventually their children will meet and he and his wife and their relatives will witness and sing the song and his left eye twitches and a bird calls and they can come stay in the valley or at least nearby and he feels a tenseness in his neck and in his arm, a numbness and they will have a child and he scrunches his face but parts of his face feel heavy as if loaded with sand and perhaps the child will be a boy and a blood vessel is bursting and in this way the dream won't come true and needles of light appear before him and chase after him wherever he looks and his sons-in-law will be good men too and there is a leaking in his thinking and the mug of tea tilts and trickles to his feet and the grandchildren will be strong and many and he opens his mouth and he tries to call his wife's name and he begins to stand from his favorite fishing spot but his knees buckle and he forgets how to stand and the lights appear more fervently and his breathing is labored and his face is suddenly on the earth now, on the valley he has loved for his whole life and his arms are spread out, his palms down, his numb left hand clings to the grass and if you tilted your head to see just right it would look like the last man were embracing the whole world as though saying goodbye and saying goodbye not just for himself but for all those men who came before, who carried hope like fire on fragile wicks of muscle and skin and bone and his voice comes out and it startles him that it sounds like a laugh, his father's laugh, his daughters' laugh and something else happens and



something else and something else and he can't count or conceive of things happening to him anymore but he can feel something stopping and ending and he can feel the idea of him leaving and he clings hard to it, like a man would, like man has, like man never will again, defiant, "No," and before the clockwork in him cranks down to a halt and the leaking in his mind ruins the engines of his body and the cells that carry his Y chromosome pale and disappear from the world forever, the last man thinks about his daughters.

#

Their mother found him. She followed the dusty footprints he had made in the path to the river stream and found him there, beside his favorite fishing spot. She did not scream as she thought she might. She watched him from far away for a long time. She hoped that maybe he was just resting.

After a time, she scooped him up over her shoulders and brought his body the half-mile home. She left the mug.

They wept. Their mother knelt beside them so her face was near theirs and she let their tears soak into her hair. They wept so long and so hard and they screamed his name. And they asked him to wake up. They begged him.

They buried him in the garden as he would have wished.

In the years to come, at the behest of their mother, Aya and Hua would journey into the world armed with their knowledge and their skill and their wit and in years and years and years find no person like their father. Nor would they find many people like them. Just their leavings. An empty cave of scattered tools and hides. Abandoned detritus of tents on a plain. Some old women in huts by a river, waiting to die.

And they reached an ocean, and watched a flimsy layer of debris float and dance atop the waves. And they reached a land of hard rubble, words written and faded in the stones, now covered in ivy, moss and grass. And they found themselves in deserts of endless sun and over mountains of tinny air and in breathless forests of oily, strange trees. They hunted megafauna, the likes of which have not been seen for hundreds of thousands of years. And they fought and bested gargantuan beasts that they had never read of in any books. They healed themselves and rested in familiar solar burrows along hillsides built and forsaken by people like them. They picked berries from bushes in their wanderings, laughing at stories of their youth in the valley and remembered their mother and of course, remembered their father.

And eventually they found their way back to the valley, hair silver, skin brown, muscles taut. The garden was overgrown and the food was dried up and rotten, but the ancient books gathering dust in the burrow smelled the same from when they were young. They found the bones of their mother in the bedroom where they were born and they buried her in the south hill garden as she would have wanted.

In these later years, the dream of the last man seeped into the minds of his daughters, though it came not as one night terror of bones and answers, but as drips of

water torturing from the kitchen, as the ticking of a clock counting on the wall, as the clattering harsh breath of old age in a sister's throat. It came in the passing of the hours, days, decades without family arising around them, without friend or even stranger waving from the horizon, without the magical appearance of the wispy hairs and sweet smells of children.

They had witnessed the lonely earth and they were married to Finality and knew him well.

And the summers grew too hot, and the legs grew lame and the sisters grew too old and to rest was all they could do.

Hua, who was a better storyteller than her sister, would talk in the coolness of the back room. Stories she made up. Stories from books. Stories of the things she could not have known on her own but a great many people had once known together.

She had read an article many years ago, or was it a story her mother told her before she died. No, Aya remembers, it was part of a book by one Elizabeth Kolbert, a fairy story of flightless, black and white birds that once lived in the northern islands. Ahh, yes, Great Auks, they were called. Aya nods, interested, listening, toying with the remnants of her meal, craning her neck to the ceiling of the burrow, listening deeply. These birds, Hua says, were docile, fat and clumsy, more like chickens in penguin dress. They first encountered man in the greedy sailors, pirates in search of fortune and gold and land to tame. The birds' bodies were sacrificed to these men. Great young men, a different kind of man than our father, she says, but men still the same. They plucked the birds from the ground as easily as if they were ripe turnips, they butchered them for their feasting, these stupid, flightless animals. And then when the men failed in finding their gold, they decided to make their fortune off their backs. They peeled off their skin, tore off the feathers from their bodies and shipped them into bags to be stuffed into ladies pillows on the continent.

In a short time, swaths of the land that were once the birds' nesting ground, once covered in busy black and white bodies, were now empty. Eggs cracked open on the limestone, the bones of their mothers and fathers picked clean. The story ends, Hua says, very sadly. The last remaining birds, the very last birds, were found on a treacherous, icy island in the north. It seems they had chosen to nest there because it was the furthest away they could get from humans. Just two of them, male and female, tending one lone egg. The birds had become such a rarity, that to the men their flesh was a delicacy, their feathers a rare commodity. The men who went looking for them, had seen their black and white bodies from their ship and knew they could make money out of them. In their greed, the men clambered onto the island, almost dying themselves. At the sight of the men, the birds tried to run, but were easily bested, just as they had been bested a hundred years before. Short legs, stubby flightless wings against the men who came, fiercely and unrelentingly, with their height and their strength and their brutality. Without remorse, the men strangled the last of the Great Auks. As they dragged the bodies to the ship, the men noticed that in the scuffle the last egg had cracked and was useless to them. So they abandoned it, on a cold island in the north, to freeze, or worse yet, to be born into the world, the last of its

kind, and to die quickly, no parents, no grandparents, no others, not a living relative in the world to grieve for it.

Hua stops. A silence falls on the back room of their burrow. The burrow of the last man, now the burrow of the last two women, waiting to die. They sit silent so long that the light of the sun from the main room fades and the electricity kicks on with a hum. And now night is all there is.

Aya, finally, mercifully, rubs her eyes and says, "How lucky I am."

"What do you mean?" Hua asks quietly.

"I have you."

And they thought themselves so lucky to be alive.

## Kaua'i 'ō'ō

Rachel Rix

Life isn't always

for the willing.

A honey-eater's flute-like call

the last song sung

for a female that would never come.

Favoring *Lobelia* nectar,

but forced to higher ground.

In 1987, David Boyton was the last

to hear its query—*is anyone out there?*

It's possible the 'ō'ō never went extinct.

Twice rediscovered.

But his survival's unlikely;

his call is loud and distinct.

## **The Impenetrable**

George Freek

*After Mei-Yao Ch'en*

The sun shines on this  
mountain hideaway,  
it dies with the night.  
An eerie breeze hardly  
ruffles the river's water.  
I stand in my doorway,  
and hear the melancholy cry  
of an unseen bird,  
like a weary penitent, seeking  
forgiveness for his sins,  
but to whom can he be speaking?  
The stars look bright,  
but they shed a false light.  
A crow circles in the sky.  
He's frustrated, searching  
for carrion along the shore.  
He lands in a distant tree.  
His cry, harsh and insistent,  
continues to mock me.

## **And A Great Sign Appeared**

Robert Zhao Renhui

Non-human species have always co-existed with human beings, even in highly urbanised areas. During the Covid-19 health crisis, when travel was limited, I started to look more closely at my everyday surroundings and became more sensitive to the proximity of non-human neighbours in the middle of built-up Singapore. This exhibition captures the dramatic and mundane encounters I had with the natural world during this time, and reflects the myriad connections between people, regions and wildlife across time and space.

Even as Covid-19 dominates news coverage, the climate crisis continues inexorably. Climate-driven range shifts for species have become a reality, and in Singapore, there was a dramatic example of this on 22 December, 2019, when thousands of Asian openbill storks suddenly appeared in Singapore. Hailing from the northern parts of Southeast Asia, probably Thailand, they flew around Singapore for a week looking for a space to stay, but were unsuccessful and left. Thailand had been in the grip of an unseasonable drought, and the birds were looking for a more hospitable environment in which to live. Their appearance in Singapore reminds us that our region is connected ecologically, and that climate change has a transnational impact.

Another visitation happened on 5 June, 2020—World Environment day, ironically—when a large colony of 100 flying foxes was seen flying over Singapore’s central catchment area. They stayed for about a week. The large bats could have flown to Singapore due to a disturbance from deforestation to their habitats in neighbouring countries, probably Indonesia or Malaysia. This was a significant ecological event because flying foxes are extinct in Singapore, and the last time they were spotted here was in 2016.

Not all visitors were welcome, however. Around November 2020, barn swallows migrating through Singapore took up residence in a HDB block in Pasir Ris, occupying the ledges, corridors and rooftops. As the birds numbered in the thousands, some residents were distressed during this time. The birds stayed until March 2021 and left.

Other than these visitors from abroad, I was also interested in a sense of everyday neighbourliness we have with non-human species. At 7 p.m. sharp every evening, a single tree in a Choa Chu Kang HDB estate becomes alive with hundreds of long-tailed parakeets returning to their roost after a whole day of foraging. Nobody knows exactly why they are attracted to this tree and congregate there in such large numbers. The birds fly in big groups and chitter at a high volume, but the spectacle is over in less than 10 minutes as the parakeets settle in for the night. It is so subtle that most people would not notice the birds’ daily flight out if they were not paying attention—but if there was one luxury that the Covid-19 pandemic gave me, it was the time to do this.



*Flying Foxes, Singapore, 2021*

© Robert Zhao Renhui



*And A Great Sign Appeared (Things from the Heat), 2021*

© Robert Zhao Renhui





*Flying Foxes (A short history of decline), 2021*

© Robert Zhao Renhui



*And A Great Sign Appeared (Thailand-Singapore), 2021*

© Robert Zhao Renhui

**Two poems** by Craig Santos Perez

**Wet Sonnet During the Pandemic**

*November 2020*

sunday morning rain  
our daughter peed the bed  
i give her a bath  
throw sheets & dirty clothes  
in the washing machine  
*the strongest typhoon of the year*  
*is approaching the philippines*  
her toes & fingers wrinkle  
the spin cycle begins  
lord     please  
don't let us drown  
in the second wave  
of the virus  
inundating our shores

**Ars Apocalypse**  
*December 2020*  
Craig Santos Perez

every night

i write

a poem

about the end

of the world

yet

every morning

the world

revises

the end

of the poem

## **Leave A Trail**

Maria Editha Garma-Respicio

Rainbow's glistening at the horizon  
Pulsating the prophetic vision  
As it breathes the undying covenant  
Oh, so enchanting, so poignant!

Luna's silhouetting the dark sky  
Melodious night breeze rises up high  
Gives rhythm to this melancholy mood  
Beseeching this life won't get screwed!

As the tide rises and falls  
Kisses the pristine sand and crawl  
May this life's journey make an impact  
Fulfil its purpose without distraction.

May the virgin tropical forests,  
the sanctuary of wild animals go back  
to its former glory. May humans awaken,  
stop quarrying the mountains.

At the bottom of the divine sea  
Aquatic creatures are begging to thee  
Suffocated by litter everywhere  
Bring back the crystal water, show care!

At dawn, appears the elusive bluebird  
Reminding us that we are stewards  
Rebuking insolences buried in the soul  
Beckoning us toward that one goal.

Conserve and preserve the environment  
Do your role, be a living testament  
Make this world greener than before  
Create a trail for your kin to explore.

## Two poems by Cynthia Good

### The Visitor

Not sure I've ever seen her, but the dog food bowl  
is empty this morning and her fresh dark prints  
paint the white wall out back. She jumps down

at night. I may have seen her once on the hill,  
a wild cat, tail thick as a squirrel's, color of  
the mountain. I think of her on Tuesdays at 2pm

as the women play dominos near the pickleball court,  
their faces reflected in pickleball-blue, laughing  
and chatting. Alone on my balcony, I imagine her

perched over the roofline staring down at me,  
eavesdropping on Tchaikovsky, Piano Trio  
in A Minor. I think about her clawing her way

in her refuge of rocks above the Pacific, slipping  
into my kitchen for leftovers, wandering  
ledge to ledge in total darkness or torrential

rain or brazen daylight, chasing mice  
over jagged edges, the sun darting orange  
light into her eyes. No one will know

whether she survives the season, until enough  
time passes that someone like me looking up  
at the mountain will notice she's no longer there

sprinting from rattlesnake to scorpion, deft,  
on her own to find water in the desert, the low  
amber moon's heavy crescent on her back.

## Whale Watching, La Laguna San Ignacio, Mexico

Cynthia Good

The walking paths are crushed white shells  
Rattling like chains under your step  
As wind wheezes through haggard palms

On this cold March morning. You're wearing  
All your clothes, two t-shirts, three sweaters,  
A windbreaker. At the Ignacio Springs B&B

They serve sweet lips fish for dinner, rosé  
And Costco lemon pie. On the lagoon  
Today a grey whale steered her 40-ton body

To place her face in your hand, an inch  
Below her left eye, and you felt chosen.  
Just 100 whales stay for now as the others go

To Alaska for the summer. A dozen came  
To the panga, swimming around, beside  
And beneath us, their babies, gliding

And rolling, mothers rubbing their barnacles  
On the bottom of the boat as you trailed  
Your toes in the water idling, chosen.

And shells on the packed sand spiraled  
Into chandeliers, and on the long tope  
Filled dirt road back, you sailed, exhausted

From three days of travel, back to the owls,  
Roosters and stray dogs barking, the usual  
Out of town evening water sounds. You sleep

In a yurt, under a circus ceiling, beneath  
Blue and white flowered sheets listening  
To the bed springs through your pillow.

And through the window you, chosen, watch  
The moon cellophane the river as the last  
Of the green-winged teal splashes into night.

**Two poems** by Joe Bisicchia

**People Finder**

Trees line like a library,  
and clouds remold into fog  
dissipating like books lost,  
long overdue, yet in the midst.

Mortality comes and goes  
like mist.

But love is not thin as paper.

Nor narrow as a trap,  
nor wide as a net.

It is more than the passing mist.  
Such haze goes thick, but  
cuts apart through the trees.

You and I find each other  
in all of this,  
in the intertwined glitter  
falling like diamonds.

See us  
upon the glassy leaves.  
You smile at me.  
I smile at you.

Sun upon the forest,  
the prism within us.



## **Remains**

Joe Bisicchia

See at earth's surface,  
cheetah, once so fast,  
now motionless, breathless.

But nothing stays still.

Dirt is now the cheetah.  
One and the same.

And, so am I.  
Ages upon ages have melted away.  
Death by stone, by arrow, by gun,  
by time, and an array of ways.

And still,  
sun has not stopped yet, its run.

Earth is not heaven.  
As this parched place is wont to do,  
it steels its own skin callous  
and in doing so, hardens its heart  
to the furnace fire, and even to the rain.

But time persuades and blurs the way.  
Fate will wait, but not forever.  
Heaven is forever.

Dirt is the cheetah.  
It will now once again race  
with the present sun,  
swift as the fast, present worm.

Alive, and so am I.

## Growing up in the Garden/City

Faith Ho

*A narrative account of childhood interactions and nature in Singapore. A response inspired by Esther Vincent Xueming's personal essay "[The Field](#)".*

There is no field in my childhood.

I remember things in blocks: concrete, jungle, garden. I play at the playground downstairs; soft rubber flooring, hard metal poles. The swing is painted cobalt blue, the slide fire-engine red, the tunnel cyber yellow. To the right of the playground is a small maze, well-trimmed hedges drawing clear-cut lines to dead ends, or to the end. Looking at it now, it seems miniscule, but I remember the days when it seemed just about my height; I could peer over the leaves if I tiptoed. Sometimes I would play with my friends, laughing as they chased me through the hedge, ducking down to avoid being detected. The stray branches of the neatly kept hedge would brush against my legs, my arms, but I wouldn't mind—it was part of it.

Instead of fields, there were manicured trees and paths. I remember things not in stills but in movement, glimpsed through the blur of the car window: buildings, buildings, trees, trees, buildings, trees. Sometimes my family and I would pile into a car and take a ride to the other side of the country, that impossibly faraway place called “the West”. (For the longest time, I thought that anything far away was “the West”. I had little idea of space as a child, only the sense of endless time spent fidgeting in the car.) There I would see the familiar HDB blocks and malls and MRT stations interspersed with green shrubs give way to the unfamiliar sight of endless rows of trees, contained at the sides of the roads but bursting like forests of their own, on top of green slopes or just next to the road.

That was not to say that there were no experiences of nature. There is a reservoir near my home; I would sometimes walk there with my family, treading the pebbled path and staring out into the large expanse of water. The catchment in this reservoir is entirely man-made, a huge water body that was painstakingly carved out of the earth. I heard it used to be a sand quarry, but then the waves rose up and swallowed up the sand, and then lapsed into peace, patiently waiting. That's how I imagine it. Or it could be that it was merely a gaping hole, and the sky decided to fill it with water; clouds piled upon each other, unleashing tears to seal up the cracks in the earth.

Now it's just a flat body of water, ringed with trees, a slope on one side. I would go for picnics with my family there sometimes, lying on the grass and staring up at the night sky. There would be no stars; I could never see any.

It was only a thin ring of path and trees; when I walked there I could see buses and cars zooming past, through the gaps in the trees. Sometimes a loud truck would go by, and I could hear the screeching of its tires, the exhaustion of its exhaust. It was strange, that sudden dissonance of city-sound meeting man-made nature.

Sometimes we would venture further into the island. Only on weekends. After my father would spend a week in his air-conditioned office in the CBD area, he would loosen his tie and announce that it was time to “go for some exercise”. In the early morning or in the evening, we would pile back into the car (sometimes with bicycles, sometimes without), past the blurred landscape, and reach a park: usually Botanic Gardens, or else East Coast Park, or even Bukit Timah Hill. We would spray mosquito repellent, apply copious amounts of sunblock and argue over who would carry the water bottles. The walk would be long; I’d spend most of the time talking to my brother, inventing games and stories to distract from the tedium of the walk and the soreness of our legs. We would get our monthly dose of nature; sweaty and gross, we’d grab dinner at a shop nearby, and go back into the car, and back to the concrete blocks that contained our home.

My father liked to go to different places. When Gardens by the Bay opened, we made a trip there. We took my grandmother to see the Flower Dome, where she could marvel at the sheer number of flowers, many times the size of the small paradise she cultivated on her balcony. We would visit different spaces for the fun of it: Hort Park; Kranji; once, the boardwalk in Pulau Ubin.

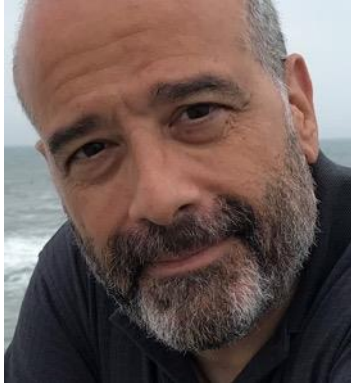
I think of trees like Impressionist paintings: the individual leaves make no imprint in my mind, and neither do I picture disparate brushstrokes; rather, it’s an effect of random abundance, unclear boundaries. I cannot picture how the sky is framed against the individual leaf, but I can picture the tree, distinct from its surroundings and one in itself.

It is quite unlike my impression of nature: the distinction between the weekday concrete and manicured greenery of school, home, shops, and the occasional weekend park visit. I can see the reservoir from my window, but it remains there, behind this panel of glass, ringed in by a fence of trees.

It exists, it is there, but it is no more a part of me than I am part of it. There is no field, no memory of a field, just fragmented memories of various shades of green. I only keep with me blurred impressions of trees, grass, crickets, sandy paths, waves, sunlight filtered through leaves.

Some mornings, the birds wake me up outside my window. I cannot see them, only hear the sound of their incessant chirping. They do not know I exist, or that I know of their existence. Unknowing, they continue to sing.

## Contributors



**Joe Bisicchia** writes of our shared dynamic. An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, he has written nearly two hundred individual works that have been published in nearly ninety publications. Commonality of humankind is a constant theme as he highlights the extraordinary power of faith in ordinary, everyday life. The collection *widewide.world to unwind* has been published by Cyberwit.

His website is [www.widewide.world](http://www.widewide.world).



**Rammel Chan** is an actor and writer based in Chicago. He is a Kundiman Fiction Fellow and his short plays have premiered at the Gift Theater as part of TEN and his fiction has appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction* and *Riksha*. He has performed with the Timeline Theater, Lookingglass Theater Company, the Goodman Theater, Victory Gardens Theater and with the Steppenwolf Theater Company, among others.

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**David Denny's** fiction has recently appeared in *Narrative*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Catamaran*. His books include *Sometimes Only the Sad Songs Will Do*, *The Gill Man in Purgatory*, and *Some Divine Commotion*. He lives in the coyote-haunted foothills of Cupertino, California.

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**Julie A. Dickson** is a poet, lover of books, feral cats and advocate for captive elephants. Her books, *A World without Ivory*, *Bullied into Silence* and others are on Amazon. Dickson's poems appear in *Ekphrastic Review*, *Misfit*, *Sledgehammer*, etc. A Pushcart nominee, coordinator of 100 Thousand Poets for Change, she has also served on two poetry boards.



**Myles Dunigan** is an American artist and educator born in Massachusetts. His work addresses ecological anxieties and the role of technology in imaging the natural world through the apocalyptic and the uncanny. Dunigan was trained as a printmaker at the Rhode Island School of Design and holds an M.F.A. from the University of Kansas. His recent exhibitions include the International Printmaking Center of New York, the Boston Public Library, the Far Eastern Museum of Fine Art in Khabarovsk, Russia, and Modern Eden Gallery in San Francisco. Dunigan currently works at the University of Florida and Santa Fe College, and resides in Gainesville, Florida, where he is closely monitoring a bird's nest constructed in a discarded cardboard box.



**Francisco Palemón Arcos** is a teacher, writer, and promoter of the Nahuatl language whose poems have been featured in *Círculo de poesía*, *Revista SinFin*, and *Ojarasca*, the literary section of the prestigious Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*. He holds a Master's degree in Indo-American Linguistics from the Center for Advanced Studies of Social Anthropology in Mexico City and a Doctorate in Education. He is a professor at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN) in Chilapa, Mexico.

**George Freek** is a poet/playwright living in Illinois. His plays are published by *Playscripts*; *Blue Moon Plays* and *Off The Wall Plays*. His poems appear in numerous journals and reviews. His poem "Written At Blue Lake" was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize.



**Maria Editha Garma-Respicio** is from the hottest city of the Philippines, Tuguegarao City, Cagayan Valley. She is married with two children, and is a migrant worker who has been in Hong Kong for 18 years. She started her journey with writing during her primary years. Her short story was published in *Linyayway Magazine* at 14. Since then, her passion in writing flourished, both locally and internationally. She's a member of different literary platforms, and has co-authored several anthologies worldwide. She believes that writing is the best form of art and the best therapy ever.



**Tyler Gebauer** is submitting the English translation of “The Feelings of Water in My Community” with the author’s permission. Tyler is a freelance literary translator who has worked for organizations and writers based out of Chicago, Mexico City, Madrid, Bolivia, and El Salvador. His literary translation has been published in *Modern Literature* and *Packintown Review* (forthcoming).

You can find him online at [www.linkedin.com/in/tyler-gebauer-1992n](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tyler-gebauer-1992n)



**Christien Gholson** is the author of several books of poetry, including *The No One Poems* (Thirty West Publishing), *On the Side of the Crow* (Hanging Loose Press), *All the Beautiful Dead* (Bitter Oleander Press), and a novel: *A Fish Trapped Inside the Wind* (Parthian Books). A long eco-catastrophe-ceremony poem, “Tidal Flats”, can be found at *Mudlark*, along with its sequel, “Solutions for the End of the World”, at *The American Journal of Poetry*.

He lives in Eugene, Oregon. Visit him at <http://christiengholson.blogspot.com/>.





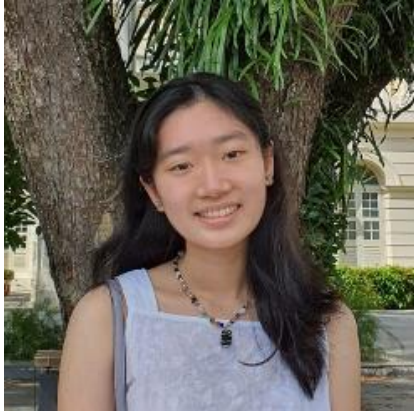
**Cynthia Good**, an award-winning poet, author, journalist and former TV news anchor, has written six books including *Vaccinating Your Child*, which won the Georgia Author of the Year award. She has launched two magazines, *Atlanta Woman* and the nationally distributed *PINK* magazine for working women. Her poems have appeared in journals including *Awakenings*, *Free State Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Main Street Rag*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Pedestal Magazine* among others. Cynthia's new chapbook, *What We Do with Our Hands*, from Finishing Line Press will be published this summer.



**Yuemin He** is the author of numerous articles on composition pedagogy, Buddhist American literature, and East Asian literature and visual art. Her poetry translations appear in anthologies and magazines, such as *Oxford Anthology of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*, *Metamorphoses*, *Ezra*, *The Northern Virginia Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Exchanges*, *91<sup>st</sup> Meridian*, *Rattle*, *Chinese Literature Today* and *Renditions*. Currently she is an English professor at Northern Virginia Community College at Annandale, Virginia.



**Catherine Audrey Hess** is a Native American poet and student whose work has appeared in *Dual Coast Magazine*, *Peeking Cat Poetry*, *Wales Haiku Journal*, and elsewhere. Her work celebrates the natural world and the divine feminine, and is colored by her heritage and her role as a mother. She calls the Ozark Mountains home.



**Faith Ho** is a JC student in Singapore. She has a lot of fun discovering words and reading others' works. When her fingers aren't completely dead from writing school essays, she attempts to translate her thoughts into coherence and do a bit of creative writing herself.



**Jessica Bryant Klagmann** grew up in New Hampshire, then received her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. Her writing appears in *Whitefish Review*, *Terrain.org*, *Stonecoast Review*, *echoverse*, and elsewhere. She's been a writer for environmental programs in northern New Mexico, a college writing instructor, and an adult education program director. Fascinated by landscapes, she's usually running on mountain trails with her dog, hiking in canyons with her family, or restoring a hundred-acre forest in Maine.

More can be found at [www.thehillsdranktheriver.com](http://www.thehillsdranktheriver.com).



**Daryl Li** is a writer based in Singapore. He was longlisted for the Australian Book Review Calibre Essay Prize and Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Prize. He has also won a Golden Point Award for his fiction. His work has been published in *NANG*, *Gastronomica*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *OF ZOOS*, and *so-far*. He was a writer-in-residence at the Singapore Botanic Gardens under a programme by the National Arts Council, Singapore, and took part in the Singapore International Film Festival Youth Jury and Critics Programme.





**Jocelyn Li** writes about identity, womanhood, local culture and her nation. Her poetry is forthcoming in *Diagram*, and has appeared in *Cicada*, *Glass*, *Oxford Poetry*, *PEN Hong Kong* and *Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine* among others. She was born and based in Hong Kong, where she lives with her lizard and frog.

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**Grace Massey** has a BA from Smith College and an MA in English from Boston University. Her poetry combines careful observation with lyricism and often focuses on the themes of nature and family. She has been recently published in *Thimble*, *Amethyst Review*, *Front Porch Review*, and *Vita Brevis*. Grace is a retired editor who spends her time writing, taking ballet classes, and socializing shelter cats.



**Claire Matturro** was a lawyer until she moved to the woods and turned to teaching at a state university law school and to creative writing. An author of eight novels, including a series published by HarperCollins, she now lives in Florida. Claire remains active in writers' and environmental groups and is an associate editor at *Southern Literary Review*.



Pushcart Prize nominee **Sophia Naz** has published in numerous literary journals and anthologies. Her work includes the poetry collections *Peripheries*, *Pointillism*, *Date Palms* and *Shehnaz*, a biography. *Open Zero*, her fourth poetry collection, was published by Yoda Press in September 2021.

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**Meenakshi Palaniappan** is a Literature educator and a quiet observer of the world around her. She writes to think and enjoys playing with words to paint pictures of life as she sees it. She is especially drawn to nature. Her poems have been published in *Shot Glass Journal*, *The Tiger Moth Review*, *Mothers Always Write* and in The Poet's summer issue of *Friends & Friendship Vol 2*.



**Craig Santos Perez** is an indigenous Chamoru writer from the Pacific Island of Guam. He is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Habitat Threshold* (2020).



**Kired Quidangen** is an Itneg-Ilocano writer from the hinterlands of the Ilocos Country. They work in poetry, translation, and visual art drawing from their ancestry of historical placelessness and their coming to age with the parental supervision of the internet in the time of intensifying environmental disasters. Their ongoing projects include navigations of the intersections of poetry and visual art as collaborative and collocate mediums, and the intricacies of mother tongue translations.



**Rachel Rix** earned an MFA from Sierra Nevada University and has forthcoming work in *War, Literature & the Arts*. She has recently published work in *Verdad* and *Right Hand Pointing*, and was shortlisted for the Billy Collins *Fish Anthology* 2020 poetry contest. Rachel lives in Sacramento, where she is a CMT. She lives with her husband, Adam, and their two cats, Floppy and Leo.



**Audrey Tan** is working on short stories about the complexities of interpersonal relationships. Her fiction has been published locally and overseas. She is a fiction editor of the *Journal of Practice, Research and Tangential Activities (PRE&TA)*, and teaches creative writing and language courses.



**Zhang Zhihao [张执浩]** is the author of ten poetry collections. He has won many prestigious poetry awards in China, including the Luxun Literary Prize. Currently, he is editor-in-chief of *Chinese Poetry*, a quarterly poetry magazine in Wuhan.



**Robert Zhao Renhui** (b. 1983, Singapore) is a multi-disciplinary artist. Strongly informed by his observations and ongoing research into the natural world, Zhao adopts a practice that investigates and unravels the intertwining relationship between humans and their habitats. His work has been exhibited at numerous solo and group presentations in Singapore, London, Shanghai and more, including the 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (Brisbane, 2018) and JiWA: Jakarta Biennale 2017. Zhao was a finalist for the Hugo Boss Asia Art Award 2017. He lives and works in Singapore.