



**13**



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**COBALT**

(poetry)

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# JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

## PILGRIMAGE

We're late.

Night has already parceled the wall into disconnected bricks.  
Someone's collected the prayers slipped between  
and burned them in effigy. In silence the sky responds.  
The mothers crumbled to all fours scratching at the wall  
have returned home to a different kind of wailing.  
The soldiers have already said goodbye to their limbs.  
Men with skin darker than the absence around stars  
have retired their chessboards and stories and ancestors.

There is nothing left to lose and ask for again.

I've carried a notebook bearing what I cannot release of you  
down past the river, through the sands, to this myth.  
I am wanting to be rid of your bricks and light: my religion.

But the ears of the wall have closed for the night.  
At night the river runs backwards, toward memory and truth.  
Tonight I'll sleep like someone who has never known truth  
and be the first to relieve this burden of hope  
by smashing my head into the wall of the gods  
until love has left me so love can return.

# ENGRAM WILKINSON

## WE CANNOT PUSH AWAY

Night comes walking at us like  
an orderly: blue uniform, hand  
outstretched, balancing on his palm  
our small, paper cup. An offering,  
the two pills, things to help. If  
what survives of us is love it's  
got to be digested first, each star  
trapped in the oblong peach-shape  
released through the blood. Maybe  
this has made me heavy, each  
star a small dumbbell coursing  
through the body. Maybe this  
has made me dumb, my left side  
leaden with missed appointments.  
Help me. I do not want to be remembered  
as a hulking giant, dumbstruck under  
the cosmology of drugs I will swallow  
tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow.  
I do not want to be remembered  
with the weight I've gained recently,  
addicted to the aftertaste of  
panic. There is more blood in me  
than I'm supposed to have. You had  
this blood, this same blood, heavy,  
infected, let it gather in your shoes  
as we walked to buy cigarettes, shed it  
one night while skinny-dipping in  
the lake. What do I do? I grab  
the evening's long arm as I would  
shake your hand, and accept

# ENGRAM WILKINSON

each offering as if it came from  
God. I accept. I do not want  
to be remembered. The road,  
barely lit under the cloudy sky,  
is long, but the dog doesn't seem  
to care much about that. She runs,  
fleeing the quiet from which  
we cannot push away.



# DAVID NIELSEN

## NECKTIES

In a couple of hundred years  
people will see them in history books

and historical dramas,  
the way we see powdered wigs today,

not sure, exactly, of their significance—  
a position in parliament?

A frippery of the upper class?  
The art of tying one has become a lost art.

Once my arthritic grandfather  
begged me to conjure him a knot:

eyes closed, head back—  
like that statue for Saint John of the Cross—

he stood waiting for a miracle.

# CARA CHAMBERLAIN

## KNITTING

*No distinction was made between the gestures of language  
and the gestures of life.*

—Nicole Krauss, *The History of Love*

It goes beyond the familiar casting on,  
binding off, knitting and purling,  
to include the slip-slip-knit,  
the pass-slip-stitch-over,  
the right-slant-increase,  
the left-decrease—  
all rendered in code such as  
K2tog pssso yo and Ssk,  
leading to the inevitable conclusion that  
our foremothers did not simply make  
the stockinette stitch, the trinity stitch,  
the seed stitch, as their fingers whipped  
through cotton, up to four needles turning  
one linear chant into a polyphonic  
weave often symbolic. They were tying  
their own serene insurrection.

# PEYCHO KANEY

## THE SONG OF MY COMPUTER

The best way to write is not to try:  
let it flow like sadness dripping  
down from the summer leaves,  
and my computer screams: “Let me  
sing my song!” (but computers cannot  
scream), (doesn’t matter, this is cybernetic  
dream),  
and the mirror shows me the fear  
of the deer or the bravery of the crow,  
My dear, I say in my sleep, sorrow  
comes to us when the night falls  
over the city,  
dark, grey, irrelevant,  
it comes, slowly, slowly,  
embracing us in its gentle arms—  
warm and fuzzy we feel and let us  
scream.

# M.J. DUGGAN

## I ALWAYS SEEM TO WATCH YOU FROM AFAR

On evening where sheets of rooks whirl  
like cyclones of flapping ash,  
through the dark afternoon window  
where I see the shell of a blue star.

I watch you from afar  
time beating like an impatient monster in motion,  
our day became fitted hours of paid banality,  
yet I always seem to watch you leave but never  
arrive.

When I heard the wind carry its voice  
from cordial gutter to napkin fields of snow,  
where horses ran in triangles of untouched lavender  
did I see an image of you walking away.

If I could stop time and its deathly ruin  
and pause just an hour in your arms  
I would see the true wonderment in love  
its necessities and beauty in flourishing threads of time.

Yet I always seem to watch you from afar  
either leaving or sleeping beside me deep in dream,  
passing me in the hallway at night  
like a familiar stranger on a returning train.

# BRETT FOSTER

## PASTORAL WITH BREATH VISIBLE

*adapted from* The Greek Anthology

It's cold as hell out here, that's clear enough, and yet  
as I lead this group of international, high-school students  
through Wrigleyville (just to see that place, though closed shut now),  
I forget the stinging wind and long, wound-up gusts  
when I see up ahead lanky Therimacos now motionless,  
young Greek standing underneath an oak  
pub sign on Addison, struck still, so still, by a lone  
streaking star, which he follows as it flames out across the heavens.  
I'm struck dumb with him, everything lost, until the white fire happens—  
flurries beginning to fall and reaching us as if they were a thousand  
thousand fragments of that one finished light.

# DANIEL BOURNE

## FREQUENT CLASSROOM PROBLEMS

Often there are simple solutions to challenges  
Of classroom technology, the problems that arise  
When you are conducting a lesson.  
The oboes are flat, or Jacob's mother has died,  
Her sad face peering through the window. These distractions  
Should not take away class time, so here are  
Some remedies to apply. For example,

There should be a blue light in the center of the amp,  
But there isn't. This might be construed  
As a mere existential error, but for you to be sure  
You must consult the proper manual, the one  
Buried in the cornerstone of the building  
At the beginning of the last century. And as you  
Scratch your head, turning knobs and praying, the students

Start to fiddle with their own intricate contraptions, their thumbs  
So miraculously evolved. Soon you hear a loud moan.  
Jacob's mother flits about the room, just one more  
ghost in the machine, sadly, paying even now  
Full tuition for her son, who sleeps through every class,  
His head down on the book  
Meant to open up his eyes.

# DANIELLE WEEKS

## TIGER BONE WINE

At Guilin Park, the beasts are bred for bones  
the wealthy pour into their porcelain cups  
with every rising sun. The medicine  
that lurks in tiger skin, they say, revives  
the weakest man and makes a happy wife.

The Park knows better than to kill a tiger  
outright. Instead: the starving down to stripes  
and feigned concern, the maddening of the beasts  
until they crush their brothers' throats, who learn  
the brutal mercy of beings already dead.

Their fur is stripped like sheets from a death bed.  
The fifty-five pounds of skeleton  
are steeped in thirty-eight percent wine—  
a heavy set of numbers, wed to bills  
that curl from pockets of tailored, imported suits.

The tigers end in Pepsi bottles, hidden  
in the bags of auction-winners flying home.  
They gurgle down the throats of men who dream  
of bone-fed youth, of taking in a life  
to mask the certain fade of flesh.

At dawn in Guilin Park, the walking wine  
is pawing at the walls and going blind.  
Its stripes embrace the latticed shadows of the cage,  
a blur of ribs and slowing blood that bows  
to ending in the place where it began.

# ALYSE RICHMOND

## WEIGHTLESSNESS

purple watery beads stain white  
ridges of a plastic cup. Bitter, I am  
drinking a blend of vinegary reds

and playing back my favorite sex  
dream—a voice in my ear, stubble  
scraping thin skin, goose bumps

spreading like pox in the deep  
blue of nights we should never  
have spent together. Because now

I want your palms pressing down  
on my wrists, creating a fullness  
in once-empty veins—a heft

where there used to be weight-  
lessness



# KIM SUTTELL

## DECORUM

There was a man whose smell was all  
I ever wanted. Eating wouldn't  
matter—I would abandon life  
following his scent. Even  
so he made me hungry, so  
our legs wrapped and clinging were  
smashing sandwich wrappers. Time  
and trash heap, with pressure eke  
limned sediments. And then  
indifference piles up like  
rabbits and pheasants in a still  
life, with fur warm enough  
to care for, it would look nice  
over the sideboard. By  
the mantel clock I know he lies  
still, accreted treasure tucked  
in the strata, centuries under.

# VANESSA COUTO JOHNSON

## FITZGERALD PARK

There are decisions such as whether or not to leave the jacket on in hot with rain. Ducks create small disasters in the fountain. Young, female on a breaded surface, they peck first at each other before eating. Beakless-faced, we juxtapose our noses on a bench. In a soft place, I tell you, The nose is an essential part of the face. You note the wing variations of fowl, how, yet, they fly. But they also rest. When five, I held up dead doves I would later eat. I wanted to show I understood the realities. You know how to hold quail in a petting zoo, then anticipate a flight that does not happen. Something either stays or goes, but the go is limited. The exit is noted in signs, but impossible, as I walk on a sphere.

# AARON DELEE

## SELFIE: CUPPING SCAR TISSUE

This plum pain in my shoulder, buried  
    beneath blade, behind polished, ax-shaped  
bone and embedded in blood vessels  
    has risen. At first it dripped in boyish  
red whine droplets, staining eardrums.

I've tried callousness, thickening my skin  
    to sink it again, but leather never made things  
better. The pain pooled, flooded, poured  
    forth. A cabinet's worth collection  
of mason jars pulled it to preserve—the kind  
    my mother kept a garden of cherry tomatoes  
in; but the ache could not be contained  
    under such heated pressure. It rivered

and I filled batches of balloons with its expanse,  
    hoping to toss them over my head and watch  
them drift off. Yet all would fall back down,  
    burst. Swelling into a great cacophony, a black

and blue magnitude the size of Lake Michigan;  
    fresh as the day my maker made it,  
sunk it deep into me. With the pull and rip  
    currents, undertows, its hypothermic  
chill, I have had to learn not to resist  
    its grip, lest seaweed strangle my kicking  
feet, flailing limbs. Instead I accept its tug  
    on my wrist and swim parallel to the shore.

# KATIE MANNING

## THE BOOK OF MOOT

*all that remains of Second Timothy*

who will judge  
the dead  
God  
in view of his  
living?

the Lord  
loved this world  
but  
he has deserted me  
like a drink

a great number of  
itching ears want to hear  
myths  
from the lion's mouth  
but  
they  
turn their ears away  
from every  
sound

come to me quickly  
Lord

best to get here before winter

# JOSEPH RIOS

## BALDEMAR'S JALE

Some loud morning, you wake:  
a hammer sledge meets a black crow—  
bar and makes it sing a vibrating,  
humming, knuckle swelling crash  
of drum-drum on asphalt black—  
note the simple, repeating dashes  
painted a cold as fuck yellow,  
keeping time under Baldemar's wind-  
catching hand, swirling every which way  
from the passenger side. See Baldemar  
shaking rocks in a paper cup,  
sitting there on a plastic milk crate  
behind the U-Haul store. He will do whatever  
you want for a square ten an hour.  
His back, his hands, his limited English,  
his supplication, and his silver capped teeth  
are yours. When its over, Baldemar only asks  
that you return him to where he was found.

# SIMON PERCHIK

So much dirt yet you cram  
as if these seeds would slip  
crush everything to bloom

the way you pick out a loose stone  
hoping for an avalanche  
and the yard covers with flowers

once your hands come together  
so the ground can't move  
or light up your eyes

because it's easier than sorting  
—you don't cheat anyone :one seed  
next to another and another and another

lowered so everyone  
is put back piece by piece  
and next Spring will climb out

to look for you  
—you use colors! come dressed  
waving your fingers

sifting the Earth whose light  
is wasted in the daytime  
counting, counting, counting.

# JUAN MORALES

## FOR THE UNDERDOGS

Like anyone, I've spent the last few years smelling failure  
wafting off the politicians and blotting  
onto newspapers that smudge my fingers.  
The poems won't come tonight. I'm thinking instead  
of this hiss of anti-war, shock and awe, hard-headed Saddam statue yanked  
to crack the tiles below. I shake my head for battles  
fought for no resolve, and I have to ask if the occupation  
turning out insurgents is anything like a failed revolt  
tamped down and suddenly labeled terrorism.  
I close my eyes in prayer for the underdogs, who  
line up on both sides, who  
also lament the civilian sisters and brothers,  
traumatized by quiet nights and wishing  
for uneventful trips to the market. I write  
so something like hope emerges even when fears  
emanate as burning tires and car alarm screams,  
desensitized in the broadcast of our daily quagmires.

# DERRICK AUSTIN

## THE BAIT

Fishermen in motorboats poised  
on anxious waves talk in bursts,  
breakers against wooden weirs.  
One yanks up a sallow cod. I imagine myself  
as that fish with the rictus of a mouth  
like a puppet, expressing innocence  
and stupidity, lunging for the bait (worm twisting  
into hook), drawn into the fiery clarity  
of oxygen (my dying must be like a mosaic),  
chilled and sold (the pans of a scale; words like gulls  
above me), gutted, exposing all  
the simple gem-like gears of my erotic life (your kindness,  
drawing me out of myself, is not a knife  
entirely). Before your lips, I passed through many hands.



# TENNAE MAKI

## **REVOLVER. SOMEWHERE ELSE, IT REMAINS AWAKE.**

There was a thin line that ran the circumference of the room. She was the only one that could see it.

Free of imperfections, a circle is perpetually, habitually flawless.

The morning glory had been clipped from its vine days ago.

It remained open, whilst the other buds had returned to their dormant state.

It faded earlier than late.

Dawn.

# MACEO WHITAKER

## MUD HUTS

Jug bands jam for Tonka truckers.  
Damn, life's a peach pit in scraped,  
upstate river towns. Basement life:

here's your bed, there's your sink.  
Dribble 'til your fingertips rust.  
If you can reach the rim, heave

shots like Reggie at MSG. Shoot  
'til you no longer miss. Too late?  
Large fries and fat nuggets suffice.

Swing a bat. Keep swingin'. Swing  
'til your little palms grow pitiless.  
Be ready. Bad things will go down.

Wax museums crumble to mud huts.  
We grow up and learn the difference  
between Emmet Otter and Emmett Till.

# KRIS O'HARE

## AMYL AWAKE

On a slow night, you swing in a sling reading Genet, copiously greased,  
waiting tangle-tied in strap and bind. Eventually, they arrive, naked except  
for shoes. One gets behind you, he uncaps a vile, places it under your nostril.

You inhale. A benign shot—a neon-zippered flicker. In a blind eye squint,  
you watch the scurry of men, a flash of white flesh, skin loose and limp like  
plucked chickens. The sound of clenched leather, a lisp. His breath: A  
blue-muted penance, an unheard chaplet. You lose consciousness, then wake  
to another man, an insidious ginger beard, skin so pale, it is almost  
translucent.

A lick of wet above his lip, dirt in his teeth. It all plays out like a Fassbinder  
film in bulged strobe and bar light. A crooked nail like the number seven.

An odorous cluster of torpid grubs. A veined rage, then a gasp tells us it is all over.

Slack in stirrups. A receptive warmth. A cumulus smear on black linoleum.  
Gestation period unclear. You open your mouth wide and close your eyes: the  
glory disappears. You open your eyes and shut your mouth: the glory reappears.

A lonely douche hose hangs in a vending machine like a noose.

# JAKOB VANLAMMEREN

## AT NOON ON TUESDAY

*with Nathan Thomas*

I will listen  
to the Beach Boys  
& everything will  
turn out  
yellow-beige  
after the bruises heal,  
rawhide is returned  
to the hook behind the closet door...

This animal: it's been building inside of me  
[for I don't know how long].  
I practice restraint against the day.  
Wash with soap & water.  
Appreciate the clumsy fumbling  
after dark,  
then morning  
where the marks come alive  
when he says  
don't worry baby.

# MICHAEL DOWDY

## THE DEAD SEND REGRETS

*Day of the Dead Parade  
Bywater, New Orleans*

Dear Youth,  
We dig the grills you swab  
in pallid hues, the fuchsia glow  
of mambos pleading time and chance.  
We adore the wobbly come-ons,  
the sneakers skimming asphalt waves  
like goose feet or fathoming rods,  
the bonfires leaping blowtorch hot,  
the tanks and hoses for the bends,  
our passports shined with spit and beer.

Next year avoid the fierce and clenched,  
inspect the sails and stock the decks.  
Procure pallets of gumbo, vials  
of Mississippi silt, rings laid  
with tourmaline, some working stiffs  
who haven't been chiseled to bone,  
the subsurface rights to gas, oil.  
Veiled in mist, marigold, and lime  
we'll float ashore, alert as bees.

Next autumn leave tools. Nail guns, booms,  
hammers, two-ton drills, pumps that purr.  
We've got blueprints and chalk for miles.  
Deliver goods that groan and crunch.  
Backhoes, cranes, Skilsaws. Quid pro quo,  
we'll build boulevards to the throne.  
Boss man says payment's due up front  
for your shining kingdoms to come.

# DANE HAMANN

## LIGHT SPLASHING SO DELIBERATELY

I'm through the door and into a ravine  
of storefronts. Lonely delivery vans

lumber out of sight, their fat tires  
screeching around corners. Pans clatter

behind a screen door, bakery aroma  
drifting into the early morning dust.

A taste of the lake on the breeze.  
Lavender light softens spasms of neon

from the sidewalks. The brightest  
remnants from last night are stained

leaflets fluttering against telephone poles.  
Every ten minutes, a train clatters empty

down the Blue Line. Masses of vine-like  
wires crackle now and then overhead.

The very bricks of the buildings course  
with invisible electrons. I'm magnetized.

The Coyote Building looms like an art deco  
mountain and pulls me to its shadow.

There, where the sun hasn't yet reached  
and the air is still cool, hollow newspaper

# DANE HAMANN

machines colonize a star-shaped intersection.  
Sunrise begins to pool along the windows

of the chalk-white Flatiron. And yet,  
this seems the extent of the world:

blocks of humming, bolt-locked buildings,  
light splashing so deliberately below

my feet. My only choice being to alleyway  
into the gentle, graffitied fuzz of the day.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Derrick Austin's** poetry has appeared in *storySouth*; *Relief: A Christian Literary Expression*, receiving an Editor's Choice for Poetry; *The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle*; *Ganymede Unfinished*; and *Poets for Living Waters*.

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**Vanessa Couto Johnson** is listed as a Highly Commended Poet for the 2014 Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Blackbird*, *Toad Suck Review*, and elsewhere.



**Psycho Kanev** is the author of four poetry collections and two chapbooks. His poems have appeared in more than 900 literary magazines, including *Poetry Quarterly*, *Evergreen Review*, among others.

**Tennae Maki's** work has been published in numerous print and digital journals, including; *491*, *Spillway*, *Eunoia Review*, *The Bicycle Review*, among others.

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**Juan Morales** is the author of *Friday and the Year That Followed*. He is the Editor of *Pilgrimage Magazine*, a CantoMundo Fellow, and the Director of Creative Writing at Colorado State University-Pueblo, where he curates the SoCo Reading Series.

**Kristian O'Hare** earned a PhD in English with an emphasis in playwriting at Western Michigan University an MA in English from Boston University. He teaches English at Christian Brothers University in Memphis.

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**Alyse Richmond** is currently pursuing an MFA at Chatham University.

**Joseph Rios** was born and raised in Fresno County. His chapbook *Shadowboxing* is forthcoming from Achiote Press. He studied literature at UC Berkeley. He works as a handyman and lives in Oakland, CA.

**Kim Suttell** is currently the poet-in-residence in apartment 3B, an honorary position, to be sure.

**Jakob VanLammeren** is the Archivist/Collections Librarian at the Leather Archives & Museum. Jakob holds an MFA in Poetry from Bennington College, and work has appeared in *Gigantic Sequins*, *Hanging Loose*, and elsewhere.

**Danielle Weeks** was the nonfiction editor for *The Evansville Review* and an editing intern for *Measure: A Review of Formal Poetry*. In 2013, her poem “Cardinal Heaven” received an AWP Introduction Award.

**Maceo Whitaker** is a Creative Writing teacher living in Beacon, NY. His poems are in the current issue of *The Common and Rattle*, and forthcoming in *POETRY*, [*PANK*], *The Pinch*, and *The Florida Review*.

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