



# THE OFFERING

UNIVERSITY OF  
MASSACHUSETTS  
LOWELL

2023



# THE OFFERING

A PUBLICATION OF THE UMASS LOWELL LITERARY SOCIETY

2023

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## **About the Literary Society**

The UMass Lowell Literary Society publishes the annual campus literary magazine, *The Offering*, which features poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and visual art submitted by UMass Lowell students, alumni, staff, and faculty. Each fall, undergraduate student members may apply for editorial positions on the magazine, a process coordinated by club advisors in cooperation with active club officers.

Anyone in the UMass Lowell community may submit work for consideration for publication in the magazine, with submissions open generally from early November to mid-February, and the magazine appearing in print and online in April. The club organizes an annual public reading event to launch the magazine each spring.

To stay informed about literary activities on campus, visit *The Offering* website or the UMass Literary Society Facebook or Instagram pages. For more information, or to request submission guidelines, write to [offering@uml.edu](mailto:offering@uml.edu) or contact the club advisors, Professors Maggie Dietz [[maggie\\_dietz@uml.edu](mailto:maggie_dietz@uml.edu)] and Maureen Stanton [[maureen\\_stanton@uml.edu](mailto:maureen_stanton@uml.edu)].

See also:

<https://umasslowellclubs.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/literary-society>

<http://sites.uml.edu/the-offering/>

<https://www.facebook.com/UMLLiterarySociety/>

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## About the Name

This journal's name pays tribute to *The Lowell Offering*, a pamphlet published monthly between 1840 and 1845 whose content—including essays, stories, poems and ballads, letters, editorials and humorous pieces—was written exclusively by female workers in Lowell's textile mills.

Founded by Abel Charles Thomas during his three-year pastorate at the Second Universalist Church in Lowell, the magazine was subtitled “A Repository of Original Articles on Various Subjects, Written by Factory Operatives.” In an editorial printed in the first issue, Thomas explains the aims of the publication: “to encourage the cultivation of talent; to preserve such articles as are deemed most worthy of publication; and to correct an erroneous idea which generally prevails in relation to the intelligence of persons employed in the Mills.”

In 1842, Harriet Farley and Harriot Curtis, both mill workers, became co-editors, and produced the magazine until its final publication in 1845. Charles Dickens, who during an 1842 visit to America, famously visited and extolled the city of Lowell, also admired the enterprise of the women who wrote and “duly printed, published, and sold” *The Lowell Offering*. He writes, in *American Notes*: “Of the merits of the Lowell Offering as a literary production I will only observe, putting entirely out of sight the fact of the articles having been written by these girls after the arduous labours of the day, that it will compare advantageously with a great many English Annuals.”

The Editors find it fitting that the name of the University of Massachusetts Lowell's literary magazine reflects the city's rich cultural and literary heritage, and hope that work among these pages honors and contributes to that legacy.

## **FOREWORD BY Allison Tervo**

It has been such a joy to watch this magazine evolve into its final form. Really, I feel like I've been watching the evolution of this body of work ever since I transferred here: the seeds of this fantastic collection were planted long ago; at the beginning of these authors' academic journeys. And, as their peer, I've had the unique and wonderful opportunity to learn and grow alongside them.

I remember sitting in Poetry I with Professor Dietz (among folks I had yet to realize would become some of my dearest friends), listening to my peers engage with poetry in this thoughtful, remarkable way. I was mesmerized by the art form instantly, but even more so with the way my peers were able to bend language in new ways; always trying new things; rendering feelings I didn't know could be named. I remember sitting in my first Creative Writing course here at UML with Professor Dubus, listening to my peers read their short stories and class exercises aloud. I cried in that class once while reading a piece I had written (I guess I'm memorializing this forever now). I was so embarrassed . . . but the Zoom chat lit up instantly with encouragement. Not short, snippy encouragement, either—genuine, thoughtful sentiments that I remember and cherish to this day. Nearly every student in the class took time to type something kind for me in a moment where I truly needed it.

Aside from our authors' ability to remain uncommonly kind in the academic setting is their ability to grow: each author in this magazine has tried and tried to curate this skill; refine it; and amaze with their writing. I've watched them study, revise, re-revise, support our English Department (and vice versa!). This is the culmination of that dedication: a stunning body of work that, I think, speaks to the vibrant community of writers that

UML curates. It amazes me. I am inexpressibly grateful to have grown as a writer alongside you.

Thank you to Professor Stanton and Professor Dietz for their tireless work both as teachers of this craft and advisors/advocates for the magazine. Thank you to Ash Rivera for being an incredible leader and Co-Managing Editor (it comes so naturally to you!). And thank you, dear authors: you make this community the wonderful place that it is. You are the heart that beats in this collection. Thank you for your beautiful, beautiful work.

## **FOREWORD BY Ashley Rose Rivera**

My favorite publication that I've taken part in during my time at UMass Lowell has been *The Offering*. It is not exempt from trials and tribulations, but through it all I've developed a deeper love of this craft. The arts are so incredibly important and are a method of expression that will always be steeped in revolution and change. I believe in the power that it holds and think its importance can never be overstated. Writing, reading, painting and photography have always been my ways of rebelling against the world. When tragedy strikes and paints the world in its melancholy hue, art in all its forms is a weapon with which to strike back. I have had the incredible privilege and honor of helping people bring their art to the world and do not take that lightly. It has been incredibly rewarding to amplify people's stories and hold a megaphone to their voices.

If there is one piece of advice I could tell people that hope to tell their stories to the world, it is to not fear the negative. More often than not I see people lean towards a happy ending, a silver lining, a glass half full type of approach. To those, I would say let your cup be empty. Let that ending rip you apart, let that silver lining tarnish, shatter the glass that nourishes you. Stories deserve to be told earnestly, honestly and without pretense. Whether you tell your own story or that which is conceived by your wonderful imagination, your tragedies deserve justice. To do that you have to let them live as they are. Flannery O'Connor once wrote, "Accepting oneself does not preclude an attempt to become better." Welcome your story and never stop exploring your truth, no matter how gritty it may be. Doing so will not negate positivity or a life worth living. It may, in fact, help you strive for it.

Toni Morrison once said, "If you find a book you really want to read but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." Never stop submitting

your work. Even if you didn't get in this year, or don't get in the next year, or don't get in the eons after that, there is always a time and a place that will catch up to you. If there's one thing I've taken from these last four years, it's to never stop trying. It'll help you improve and aid you in the long run. Don't stop trying.



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NICOLE BAGLEY

## Lunar Pareidolia

If you and I  
started over on the moon  
you would palm feed me  
water from a crater. I'd  
bore you with talk of the  
stars and your eyes, our  
skin soil for fresh life we  
never would've had. You  
might fixate on the blue  
green hues of that little  
smudge of life. How  
silly they'd seem buying  
bread and doing taxes  
while we stirred oceans  
in syncopation. All the  
hemispheres would cry  
out if you left me. I think  
we'd write our best poems  
up there.

NICOLE BAGLEY

## Spring

Don't leave. The last of the  
equinox is stuck in your teeth  
from when you took a bite of  
my night. I'm breaking your day,  
like spring does for lovers with  
time to chase. We lost lucid thoughts  
in a meadow, your hands hold a rose  
colored oath. Mine are lilac stained,  
I'm purpling my prose. It's cool, it's  
pouring but God this life is pretty.  
Don't be scared of the shadow we  
cast, spring came early. Can't you  
see the sun is rising like Earth took  
her first breaths? The wind is feeding  
us saffron while it sings us to death.  
This moment is vernal and we'll be  
in mourning after morning. So  
don't leave. It feels like the eve  
of something.

JASON BOURRET

## Newton's Theory of love

I've never seen the force of the wind.  
I've always felt the tickle on my skin,  
heard the intimacy of the leaves, but I've never  
seen the branches sway, evicting their occupants.

I can see a fruit, rotting atop the dispossessed  
leaves—it smells like an apple. There's a  
single bite taken out of it—  
marked territory.

I see a cloud, lingering above me, unmoving.  
I feel tempted to scratch my fingers through it  
and watch the vapors dissolve between  
my fingers; if only I could reach it.

I'm told the cloud looks like a rose.  
Nothing beautiful lasts, but there's a chance  
this foggy flower will; preserved in  
the amber of my mind—I hope.

I can't help but wonder, though, what will become of  
that discarded apple when I can no longer  
see it. Will it simply stay there  
decomposing, swallowed up by the earth?

SAMUEL CLAFLIN

## Entombment's Mirror

Her scarlet body wrapped in the cotton's embrace  
graces the gurney with joyful ambition.  
Melancholic white walls prohibit my affection;  
the wall's lone mirror reveals my velvet tendrils.

I wish repeatedly for hours ago.  
The sundial's persistence grows weary:  
a once-emboldened sun  
makes way for a haughty moon.  
This grayscale shroud  
was the only witness to my inaction.

While I kindle flames of altruism,  
her flesh is drawn. My reflection  
whispers to me, a measly dishrag  
soaked with permanent entrapment.  
*Where were you?*

Her wounds are dressed lavishly  
and so are mine. The same universe  
that attempted to condemn us  
cowers before our moonlit smiles.

DOUGLAS CONNOLLY

## In Search of the Perfect Croissant

It's the late 2000s through the early 2010s and the Connolly family has been staying for two nights already in the Hoyt Family vacation house in the George's Mills village of New London, New Hampshire. For now, the family is a block away from the fallow-colored, three-floor house built into the hillside. The three children are walking slowly around the inside of a quaint and homey country building, the George's Mills General store. The store is the size of a modest apartment and is colored in its natural wooden brown on the outside and the inside. Twelve-year-old Douglas is staring at the brown "free samples" basket, which is displaying a set of darkly-colored slices of bread protruding from a white table cloth. He takes time to appreciate the joy that the "free samples" basket brings him. Its past gift of chocolate-dipped pretzels has not gone unappreciated. Eventually, Douglas' ten-year-old brother Gavin stumbles over to the basket to join him in sizing up their prey.

"Looks good, huh?" Gavin sighs, without taking his eyes off the prize.

"You bet. I've seen those kinds of chocolate-infused bread all the time at Blue Moon Bagel in Medfield. They're called croissants, and boy are they tasty!"

"You think it's worth taking a bite?"

"I don't just think it, I know it. I'm gonna get my hands on some of this chocolatey goodness."

Snatching a napkin in his right hand, Douglas leans over the wide, thin basket, taking a few blissful seconds selecting his choice of treat.

Finally, a short, thick piece of chocolate-covered bread beacons to him from the top of the pile, coaxing his napkin-covered fingers directly to its edges. The boy picks up the short, thick slice of bread, bringing the cut of grains up to his head until it is level to his mouth. With a longing smile and an eager set of teeth, the twelve-year-old boy proceeds to take a bite.

At once, Douglas encounters a brief millisecond of surprise, followed by disgust. The lips of his smile fold inward producing a pucker frown. His neck muscles flip into overdrive, keeping the trash in his mouth and preventing him from swallowing even the smallest portion of the brown filth. An entire childhood of foul tastes and smells flash before his eyes, from the sandpaper-dry pork chops at age five to the artificial smell of rancid hot dogs at the Metacomet baseball diamond. None of the tortures can compare to the present seconds of agony ticking slowly by. Being in his first year of middle school, the child knows that a less mature, kindergarten or first-grade version of himself would spit the revulsion onto the floor of the store immediately.

With his calf muscles kicking into gear, Douglas throws himself out the two front doors of the convenience store. Lumbering down the front steps, he finds a spot at the parking lot far away from the gas station pumps and spits the revulsion out his front lips. The relief is significant, but not unconditional. The taste of thick wheat and gross brown dust still curses the inside of his mouth. Flipping his head from shoulder to shoulder, he fails to detect any nearby snow banks that could wash the haunting ghost of the evil bread away.

Kicking up a running start, the child sprints towards the white line by the roadside scanning for cars as he goes. Finding an absence of traffic, he continues his rocket-paced jog across the street and back to the house. With his shoulders alternating as his legs thrust forward, Douglas carries himself past pine trees, frozen maple leaves, and an entire yacht club filled with canoes. With his mouth open, he powers

his stride using the back of his throat. He hopes he won't touch his tongue to the roof of his mouth, which is still polluted with the devilish concoction.

At last, he draws closer to the family manor, charging towards a tall yellow house on the left side of the road and a snowbank as high as a mailbox on the right. Slowing down, he allows himself to crash knees first into the soft part of the bank, which absorbs his fall like a comfy beanbag chair. Without stopping to catch his breath, Douglas begins to dig with his hands, stuffing his mouth with fistful after fistful of snow. Thankfully, the remedy is enough to clean his mouth of the last grains of the filthy bread. The tired boy turns one-eighty and flops down on his back, staring up into the blue raspberry-colored sky with its lumpy clouds shaped like mashed potatoes. Breathing as much with his stomach as his lungs, Douglas's belly rises and falls like the tide with each crisp breath of relief.

With the putrid concoction no longer staining his mouth, a smile returns to the little boy's face. His freckled cheeks grow pink as they are whipped by the gusts of winter air that caress his head. Placing his hands onto his belly button he chooses to stay put for five minutes. The neutral taste returning to his mouth feels akin to a joyous rebirth. The entirety of the experience has left him thankful and grateful for the taste of nothing at all.

Soon afterward, the little boy's grandmother walks across the road. Her pink scarf shines brightly against the green of her coat. The young child strains his neck and looks into her hazel eyes and black hair. It's a beautiful face, which has been present in an endless number of childhood memories. The woman notices his eye contact and takes it for a sign that he'd like to speak with her.

"So, I take it you didn't care for the Pumpernickel that they were giving out at the general store."

"Pumpernickel." The boy mutters, as he faces the old woman  
"What's pumpernickel?"

GABRIELLE CRUZ

# Driving

Deep breaths. Hands on the wheel at ten and two. Blink back the tears. No, scratch that. Embrace the tears. Let them fall. It's the only way you know you can feel.

Okay, so now you're crying harder. That's fine. Crying is fine. Crying is normal. Let's just sit in this moment for a little while. Let the feeling wash over you as though it were a wave and you the shore. Like you're letting the tears wash your face. They leak from your eyes and swim their way down your cheeks, gathering in a pool that drips off the bottom of your chin.

Deep breaths. Foot steady on the gas. Choke back the sobs. Actually, don't. If choking on your sobs is anything like stifling your words, they'll get caught in your throat and leave you unable to breathe. So let them come. Feel them resonate throughout your entire body. Let them shake you to your core. Let them leave you aching.

Deep breaths. Deep. Breaths. Take in your surroundings. Soak in the warm rays of light coming in through the sunroof, the budding leaves of the oaks and the maples, the laughter coming from students on their lazy Sunday afternoon. Don't think about what once was. Or do. You really shouldn't.

Don't think about the time he picked you up in a car that wasn't his and could barely keep his eyes on the road because they were too busy being on you. Don't think about the time he led you to the dance floor as butterflies fluttered around in your empty stomach and you couldn't tell the difference between your hunger for his touch and your hunger for a meal. Don't think about the time you made it out just for you to come back craving more. Don't. Think.

But it's too late. You can see the library and you're listening to that one song and your mind is racing and you can barely keep up with it and the tears keep pouring and pouring and the sobs keep getting louder and louder and now your judgment is as clouded as your eyes are and you're still driving so you have one of two options. You can either pull yourself over or pull yourself together and the latter seems like the best option but, god, is it the hardest. Everything keeps flooding back in tsunamis and raining down in monsoons and now you're dripping in memories and lost causes. You know that they've been lost for a reason but you can't seem to figure out why and nothing seems to make sense except for when you're there in that little college town . . . but when you're there all you see are ghosts and all you hear are their whispers and all you want is for it to *stop stop stop* but they keep pulling you *back back back*.

And in your head you aren't driving home anymore. You're back at the bar and you act like you aren't looking for him but you see him in every single face and you're scouring the room for the pair of eyes that are his and the music is blaring through the speakers and they're playing that one song and the liquor is hitting you and your friends are asking if you're okay. You say you're ready to face him but you know that's a lie because the minute you do you'll be nineteen again and it will all rush back and it will all spill out and you'll be the reason it all goes wrong for the second time.

This is what it always comes to. The boy with the celestial eyes and the worried heart that you held in your hand and crushed just because you knew you could.

Hands on the wheel at ten and two. Change the song. It does you no good to dwell on the past. What's done is done.

Foot steady on the gas. Leave it all behind you. Burn it and scatter the ashes out the window.

Deep breaths. Remember who you are. Deep breaths. That isn't you anymore. Deep breaths. You did what you had to do.

Deep breaths. Deep breaths. Deep. Breaths. And drive on.



JESSIE DANILIUK / *Buzz Buzz*

# Pygmalion

Slip is a watery clay mixture often used in slip and score techniques in sculpting, acting as a bonding agent between two softened pieces of clay. A slip is also a thin, simple dress, stitched like a tube of varying lengths and spaghetti straps, usually meant to be worn under another dress for modesty. Items may slip, like an object off a table, shattering to pieces on the floor. Or something not tangible at all, something untouchable, like a word, a thought, an idea, a secret, slipping through lips.

There's a dim light coming through the doorway, oozing over cold tile, warming it in shades of gold—no raw umber or cadmium yellow. Rather, the flickering of a dusty old incandescent bulb, heating up the stuffy little studio and bleeding its light out like that of a weeping wound.

An old metal bench creaks within the room. The room is small, made smaller still by the array and assortment of, simply put, things. There was an easel in the back left corner, furthest from the door, and upon it was a half-finished painting. The streaks of oil paint were sloppy and uneven, fleshing out forms that were not quite there. It was a figure, back to his viewer, with a swell of muscle bounding over the vaguely smooth flesh of his back. His hands were in position to hug himself, though his fingers had not yet been painted, merely blocked out with awkward shapes and shadows of color, where they may come to life and squeeze into his painted flesh.

Sketches in charcoal, pencils, drafts in pen and collages of paper littered the walls, pinned and taped onto the otherwise barren gray walls, left to collect dust. A desk was the only other piece of large furniture in

the studio, pressed flush against the rear wall. There was a sketchbook laid open, upon its pages were sketched out drawings of a figure, hunched in different poses. Strewn about were odd pieces of paper, swatches of paint and wheels of color, a mason jar filled with old, paint-choked brushes. Another jar sat filled with murky purple solvents, the sour smell strong enough to burn away nose hairs, while paint sediment clung to the bottom of the glass.

Everything in the room is stagnant besides the young artist within it. She sits upon a creaky old stool, her hair tied loosely back with an elastic she had found on the floor of the hallway. She twisted her lip to blow a piece of hair out of her face, letting the dark curl rest lightly on the wire rim of her glasses.

Jane nibbles on her lower lip, her teeth pressing into the soft flesh while her tongue flicks over the chapped bit of skin. She regards her work with a set of dark, narrow eyes. She frowns slightly, slipping her hands into a bowl of warm water.

Before her was a large clay sculpture of a person—of a man—carefully seated upon a wooden podium. His shape was still imperfect, slabs of gray clay in messy blobs to make up the curves and arches of his limbs and torso. His face was blank, and too small, like those expressionless mannequins with their thin arms and long necks, alien reflections of the human ideal—out of reach with the naturalness of the body into something premolded and uniform.

With dampened hands she worked over the clay, smoothing it into softer shapes. The fluidity that came with the human form was something the clay could capture, if she could just try to wield it just a bit better . . .

For hours she worked at the clay, adding more here and there, carving away where it began to bulge just too much. With wet hands she would smooth out the roughness of the shapes, wearing away the marks of her fingertips, of her touch. The clay slowly turned from mineral to

flesh with each wipe.

But every time she looked, pulling back to look over her creation, there was something wrong. There was nothing calling to her, nothing that pleased her. Art didn't have to be pleasing. But there was a part of her that needed it to be more than just clay, a man of clay, a man made of clay. There had to be something more.

Frustration wrote itself into the wrinkles between her brows, pinched together. She rested her hands on her waist as she sat a little straighter. The wet clay on her hands bled into the fabric of her loose t-shirt. Goosebumps traveled up her forearms at the chill, a strange grounding feeling bringing her back to her little studio.

The clock read well past midnight. The quiet *tick-tock-tick-tock* heartbeat sounded louder than it had just hours before.

It was raining. The droplets clung to the windows of the train, streaking across the dirty glass like little shooting stars. She sits there, wondering why the rainstorms never seem to wash the grime away.

There was a woman seated across from her, wearing sheer black tights that clung to the fleshy parts of her calves, with a little plaid skirt and a smart white turtleneck. Even though every inch of her was covered, it was hard not to notice the curve of her waist, or the softness of her upper arms down to her dainty wrist. Upon them, even daintier bracelets. She had let out a soft sigh, relaxing the tension in her belly into the waistband of her skirt. It dug in slightly as she shifted in her seat, wordlessly looking through her phone.

There was something about the stranger that called to her, but she never looked up further than her waist—only at her legs, and then her crossed-over knees, and then the spot where the band of her pantyhose was exposed by the riding up of her skirt.

Without thinking—probably better that she wasn't—she opened her sketchbook and began to draw.

She had to keep the studio warm and humid so the clay wouldn't dry out as she worked. She gently peeled the wet paper towel off her seated man, still trying to understand what was wrong. Was it her? Was it him? It couldn't be him. She had measured out his proportions a hundred times now. It had to be her. She just wasn't finished.

She hesitated after a moment, forcing herself away from the sculpture. She could overwork the piece--make him worse than he was. Break him before he could be broken. Upon the cluttered desk, her sketchbook laid open, notes and diagrams of her ideal man, her created man. Her fingers traced the charcoal, smudging it just slightly. Her lips pressed together in a thin line, trying not to be annoyed with herself, too frustrated or upset. This was all just a part of the process. With creation came frustration, something a professor could have said to her, if she had taken the time to listen.

The smudge was on his thigh, soft and shaded. There was something about it that seemed off, even in the drawing. Her thumb ran over the lines of his thigh, gently rubbing it away. The gray smudge left behind was a guide--she took a piece of charcoal, then carefully started to outline his thigh once again. She added fat where muscle once was, making the shape swell smoothly under her stroke.

She rubbed away more of the charcoal, focusing on his calves. He needed to be softer. He needed to be more.

Pulling herself away from the sketchbook, she returned to the sculpture. With careful motion, she pulled a small tool from her belt, and began scarring the flesh of his thigh. Shallow cuts, one after another, hatching across to score the previously smoothed skin.

She sank her hands into her warm bowl of water, then cut away a piece of clay from the block. She worked it between her hands, kneading it smooth, forcing the air from the mixture. She rolled it into a flatter piece, then scored the back as she had done the thigh. Once again, she returned to her slip, using it as glue to bind the two pieces together.

Wet hands returned to the false flesh, working extra clay into the leg. She would make him softer, then. Adding more to *make* him more. More of a man, more of a human, more of . . .

She didn't quite know what she wanted. It wasn't her decision to make, really. The art would bring itself to life, it always had. She had to trust that it would this time, too. Even as his frame seemed stiff, the extra softness she slowly added to his legs brought more life to him than there had been in weeks. Weeks of taking and carving and sculpting, just for her to nearly want to start over.

But *adding* was the trick. He needed life. He needed something other than sharp stone. Something natural. Dreamlike. She wanted to see his skin dip under her fingertips, bouncy in some places, and firm in others. Would there be muscle hidden under the thin layer of fat?

She closed her eyes, running her fingers down the inside of his calf, and pictured scratching pantyhose underneath her nails.

It wasn't raining the next time she rode the train. And she was there too, with her pretty legs and delicate ankles. She wore pantyhose again, and little black heels. Again, it was hard to look anywhere past her waist.

But her arms laid against her sides, her fingertips drumming the edge of the seats beside her. Jane watched her curiously, her gaze tracing up her arms. Soft, like her legs. No toned muscles. Maybe there was muscle beneath. Briefly, she glanced up at her head, at the roundness of her face. She had headphones atop her head, and her eyes were closed.

She didn't draw this time, but committed it to memory. She wondered what she was listening to, too.

Jane was frantic. Clay dried up to her elbows, her hands dipping fervently into bowls of cooling water. They had been hot at one point, but the studio grew cold quickly this time of year. It snowed outside, quiet and plush, collecting in the grass like ephemeral little blankets. They

wouldn't be there by the time she'd leave the studio that morning.

She slapped clay onto her creation haphazardly, but there was purpose in her knuckles that bled into the clay. Slowly she worked the blobs into flesh, carving out shape and roundness and life out of something so still, so cold. She wondered what the shapes would feel like if the flesh had been real, if the sculpture took a breath, if it spoke and told her what it wanted to become.

The curve of its chest became soft and round. She cupped the breasts gently, a caress that did little to add to the shape of the clay. Indulgent, maybe. She was too focused to think about it.

The sculpture's features were soft, gentle. She let her hands roam the clay, her fingertips dampened slightly with water. Once again, she wanted to press her fingers into the softness, feel it squish under the heel of her palm, and feel warmth brimming from within it.

There was something insatiable about her touch. She couldn't think straight, her hands roaming the shape of the body beneath her. The sculpture didn't even have a head, but she imagined it speaking to her, letting out soft breaths with each ghost of her fingertips. She pictured gooseflesh rising on gray arms, and a flex of a clay fingertip reaching towards her.

She wanted it. She wanted *her*. Jane needed her. Needed this. Needed something. She pressed herself against the sculpture, wrapping her arms around it. With a shaky sigh, her hands roaming the curves of its back, she imagined the skin below her was warm.

She wasn't on the train the next time Jane rode it. She pretended the empty seat across from her didn't matter, and that the shame that warmed her cheeks wasn't shame at all.

Under her nails, clay cracked and dried.

A piece that large would never fit in the kiln. She gripped her wire, staring upon her creation with cold calmness. It was clay. It had only ever been clay.

And she dragged the wire through, limb by limb, then the torso in planned chunks. And then her creation once again, was just clay. Only clay.

JOSEPH KEANE

## SHELIKEDIRT

She knelt on the carpet in her new living room, a big cardboard box in front of her, unwrapping ornaments.

She normally would have loved this. When her family moved to Oregon when she was in the first grade, she loved setting up her new room. Moving in was weeks of organization, imagination, and experimentation.

Now, moving in is the arthritis in her dried-out fingers, straining to rip tape and sort small, delicate glass. It's the rash on her neck that's back with an itch, and how hard it is not to let it distract her. It's her knees with no cartilage, grinding on the hardwood, through the area rug that isn't making this hurt any less.

She used to love Arbor Day. That's why there's thirteen coffin-sized cardboard and wood containers in her new house full of Arbor Day ornaments. But the movers weren't careful enough and most of them have been weathered by the move. She picks up a palm sized bronze globe, built to hold real moss inside each indented shape of the continents.

But now the moss, meant to resemble vibrant, lush and varied ecosystems across the planet, is dead-brown and frayed.

"Too real." She says to herself.

Her cat, Linus, watches from the counter. Linus is enormous, with water balloon sized cheeks that always look like there's something hidden inside.

And now, there is: a little rubber leaf with an inscription that reads "Earth Day 1993."

ERIN KERR

## Oh My I Wish You Were A Fry

The white, pure crystals float downwards.  
Alone – they are tiny and unimportant –  
together, they are a force.  
A salt storm rains down on my unexpecting potato.  
My effort to infuse flavor  
into this abomination of starch –  
that potential to be a french fry –  
disappointed us all by being a baked potato.  
Good God, I wish it were a french fry.  
If it were a french fry, I would not have to assault it  
with salt, pepper, cheese, or sour cream  
just to coerce into my mouth.  
If it were a french fry,  
I would not have to strategically move it around my plate  
just to make my mother believe I actually ate  
her bland, crushed potential potato of disappointment  
and crushed potential.  
So, I pretend it is a french fry.  
I grit my teeth  
and take another salty bite.



ERIN KERR / *Untitled*

CAITLIN LEACH

## If I were a sunflower

I'd choose to stare at the sun.  
I'd bask in her trilled laughter  
as it spilled through the cicadas' hum,  
arch my tender neck and flash my petaled  
teeth. My seeded tongue  
would dribble with feeble  
curses for the clouds shadows.

And at dusk, I'd shrivel  
at the moon's approach and shiver  
at her crisp stare, provoked by the sour  
gloom to guide my shrunken face east.

In time, the nights would ease  
as I gave witness to the sun's gift  
to her partner—her smile; to broaden  
and wane, only to broaden again,  
each reflection sweeter for its inimitability.

CAITLIN LEACH

## Payment In Kind

I hate the way my panned hand poises to sap  
moments of their beauty—how quickly I try  
to crystallize a near-amber moment into maple  
candies, into little grainy sweets that taste  
nothing like the trees the syrup bleeds from. But,

what if I could? Trap the sharp bite of winter's  
breath onto birch bark paper, all the better to burn?  
Or siphon the flying goldfinch's bright  
yellow swells into strokes of black? I'd boil  
soft wintergreen and bitter pine into a perfumed  
sludge, just to fill my pen with what fills my lungs.

The photographer and I each have our camera  
that raises a wall of glass—magnified, stained, mirrored—  
between us and the world: but I hate the glare.  
In every print the shadow of my face frames the shot,  
and the hollows of my eyes glow as they stare.

KIMBERLY MAI

# I Thought You Stopped Loving Me When I Did These Things

- throwing up Cheerios and milk during gym class
- getting lunch detention for being mean to the other kids
- missing the dismissal bus because I was reading a Charlie and Lola book
- falling asleep during mass
- turning in an assignment about falling asleep during mass
- playing the recorder at home because each note echoed through the vents while you were sleeping after a long work shift
- getting a C in music after I stopped practicing my recorder, and tainting my clean elementary school record
- not saying something in Vietnamese correctly, so you resorted to yelling at me until I got it right (you were just as angry when I got a C in music)
- pretending to sleep when I was actually staying up at night to play on my DS
- not playing with my toys a month after you bought them
- lying about brushing my teeth
- bleeding through my pants for the first time
- outgrowing my shirts, my pants, and my underwear
- told you how sad I was after taking medication
- told you how I hated the way you compared me to the women in the advertisements
- stopped eating the cucumbers you'd buy me every week
- stopped eating with you at the dinner table
- signing up for show choir

- asking you for a ride home from practice
- asking you for money to help fund the show choir program
- getting a B in high school geometry, thus ruining my streak of A's that started in middle school
- not wanting to go to Kumon
- getting a C in AP Calc
- scratching the car on three occasions that you know of
- pursuing an English degree
- pulling away from your hugs because you commented on my body while patting me down for inspection
- crying in front of you because you raised your voice at me
- muffling my sobbing with my fists in my room because I was afraid to cry in front of you
- staying in my room all day
- not knowing what I wanted to eat for the week whenever you went for a Market Basket run
- never splurging in restaurants despite you doing the same thing
- forgetting to speak Vietnamese at home
- always saying *con được rồi* to you because I gave up defending my life choices (I hope you're proud that I no longer say "I'm okay" in English)
- not talking as much because I'm terrible at speaking in Vietnamese
- forgetting to turn on the car engine 15 minutes before driving the car

MAYA MARIA

# Tithe

When Mother Time comes to collect, you won't  
notice her presence. She will warp

your gaze to the mountains, distract  
you with misty, pink cliffs

and the untamable sea that crashes  
on the ageless rock. She will cry thunder

for your sandy footprints, hum ballads  
to the earth between your toes

before she claims you to become  
the mountain and the sea yourself.

MAYA MARIA

## We Were Raised To Respect The Trees

to hide among bark and bone  
when danger knocks, to cradle  
them when survival's rope is taut  
at our throats, to disappear  
beneath a wingspan of leaves  
and unleash our secrets  
to the wilds that carry  
those whispers through rain and rot.

We were raised with the forest  
as our temple grounds, to kiss  
a christened bed of roots, to tithe  
thoughts not coins, and wear  
rosaries of twig and winterberry.  
Go to the pine for bristly truths,  
to the sycamore for solace,  
to the willow to inherit the dialect  
of the timber and the terrain.

Take Eucharist of sap and soil  
and kneel before an earthly altar.  
Bury us in healing moss, absorb  
our rickety trauma, our poison,  
the invasive metals that corrode  
our skin. Our souls breathe  
with the tree rings. Our toe prints  
are still inscribed in the holy mud  
between the birches. Worship waits  
in the deep corridors of the grove.

MAYA MARIA

## At The Bridge's Edge

I return to the bridge's edge after seven years to sit with the moss. A journal watches me from its propped position on the guardrail. The things it would say if it could, if I wasn't in charge of what is written and what never makes it inside. My unlaced combat boots drape over the side of the concrete bridge—scuffed, faux leather daring to drop. Some things don't change, although I now wear a different pair.

The water below is more creek than brook, now. The summers are drier every year and I can see the passage of time in the soggy stones poking their heads out of the water for their first breath in decades. Nothing is as green as I remember. Even the moss is parched, dry and yellowing, lining the banks of the creek and climbing up tree roots, trees that seem to wilt in despair.

Thomas Wolfe said, *You can't go home*, but I return to sit with younger versions of myself; the fiery girl who ran to the bridge to hide, to escape to her small pocket of the world. It offered her a roof, no matter how damp, where she could converse with herself and the cement walls could echo back to her—several times if she spoke loud enough. Everything has changed including myself, now two or three versions beyond that girl. Have I dried up and faded in vibrancy, too? Or did I suck the life from these old, screaming grounds and invent a woman, unafraid, and ruthless in her search for more?

I came stocked with provisions: clementines, bruised apples, and water; spare pens and extra matches; a knife hidden in my boot. I traveled by forest back then, finding my way with landmarks and learning to turn left at the white birches, to follow divots in the earth, listening for the brook's trill so that we may walk together. I knew the

faces of trees better than the strangers in my own house.

This bridge is where I became a writer, where I and countless characters were born and reborn again, where I learned to love this inherited language in my mouth and discovered its power. I'd sit here in this very spot with my journals and escape into a place of words—of black and white—that only exists in my mind. I'd walk down to the banks and listen to the chatty water, to hear her stories. Maybe I stole one or two and made them my own.

The graveled asphalt is cold and hard on my ass. How did I once sit here for hours, testing the dark? I don't remember noticing the cars as much as the creek, or the buzz of the telephone wires over the murmur of the trees. It's funny what we endure because we must.

COURTNEY MORIN

## Anatomy of Origin

willowed vertebrae  
    honey tongue  
fists like frost or sea  
    water.  
mother told me not to panic  
    in salt-waves  
cusp a body like a cranium  
    cut bilaterally.  
my carcass made to float  
    a sponge or leaf  
until it rots.  
lily of the valley fills my mouth  
    my chest cavity.  
it is always salt-mother.  
    foliage unbecomes  
each axis tilt from juniper  
    sprigs to hickory  
husks. I disgorge all moons  
    that have come before  
today. tell the ocean to still. i-  
    bird boned. i-  
contusion to the temporal lobe.  
    i never learned  
how to swim. mother.  
    an unraveling.  
what caps surge like bullets  
    or callused vines  
clutching my larynx. i-  
    dissecting the origin.

how to love a world and  
    still wish to depart?  
mother's hands like craters  
    hold salt overflowing  
hold flesh flowering  
    into a daughter of dissonance.  
i—an omen becoming.  
    i—an evaporation. a cleansing  
i—an exit wound. open.

COURTNEY MORIN

# The Nature of Being

i.

Here you are.  
Where oceans expire,  
and where stone is exercised  
by salt and storm;  
where flames crest  
in ashen skies,  
and evenings sign—

ii.

Here you are.  
at the junction of light  
and matter; at the edge  
of slanting shadow  
where gods slumber;  
where Time factures  
and beckons—

iii.

I am here.  
where you have voyaged—  
from the wilderness of womb;  
to the radiance of rot;  
home—where being exits  
into canyons of memory,  
and exists only in fragments—

SARAH OMAR

## Abu-Ali

My mother held my hand tightly as we walked through Souq Al-Hamidiyya, each buyer waving and shouting to get the attention of potential customers. The souq went on for about 600 meters, and it was impossible to leave empty-handed. A man wearing a tarboosh with a large teapot on his back stopped us and began pouring us tea into small teacups, high up in the air. A few meters away from him, an old man who was selling sweets stole my attention. I cry to my mother, begging her to take me. We entered his small shop, and he had the most perfect white mustache that took up nearly his whole face. The man looked down at me with honey-filled eyes and cracked a smile exposing some of his teeth. My eyes widened at the sight of hundreds of candies and pastries all laid out in front of me. There was baklava, maamoul, and Turkish delights all piled up atop each other forming a dessert tower. The man known as Abu-Ali (the father of Ali) was familiar with my shock. He had seen hundreds of children every day like me come into his store looking up with innocent eyes. Charmed by my excitement, he packed us a box filled with sweets at no cost. I walked out of the store holding the box close to my heart, never forgetting the kind man with the magnificent mustache.

Summers went by and I returned to Damascus, I was older and knew my way around the city. Everything had changed, the once-sweet smell of jasmine had turned poisonous, and the souqs were not as lively as they once were. Walking the cobblestone alleys did not feel safe anymore, families were torn apart, and the morning adhan did not sound like a call to prayer, but more so a cry for help. If the arches of Damascus spoke, I would close my ears to not hear.

One night my cousins and I decided to go out. We argued a little, then agreed on a nearby restaurant, as it was the safest option. We ran through the tight alleys, just like we used to, and sang old folk songs in the dark. We finally arrived, and as soon as I entered, I was taken aback by the atmosphere inside. In the middle of the restaurant, there was a fountain with petals in the water. There was no ceiling, but instead bright lights and grape vines strung across the arches. My favorite was the orangeless orange tree growing in the corner. Men and women were sitting happily, eating large plates of food, singing, and dancing. As the waitress seated us, the lights dimmed and a belly dancer came out. Her thick gold bracelets flirtatiously clacked together as she traveled across the room, and her body moved with the beat of the drum. I grew tired and decided to sit outside at a table and wait there until my cousins wanted to leave. In a nearby apartment, someone was burning bakhoor, and playing the saddest and softest note on a ney. Tears fell as I thought to myself how this was the city of the soulless ney.

I realized I was not alone, an old man was sitting a few tables away from me. When he was not taking a drag off his cigar, he was twiddling with his mustache, and then I realized who it was. I walked over and said hello, and Abu-Ali recognized me right away and told me how much I had grown up. He smelt of cardamom and cigars, and his once honey-pot eyes were now empty. We made small talk as the music from inside the restaurant and ney collided together. I learned that he lost his bakery due to the war, and his family was scattered across the world. The only hope for him was waiting to get a visa to Europe so he could see his last surviving son get married. He took one more drag of his cigar, crushed it with his heel, and got up. Before leaving, he wished me luck and gave me a small piece of candy from his pocket. And that was the last he ever gave me, and the last I ever saw or heard from Abu-Ali. A few years later I learned what had become of him. A stray missile had killed him in his apartment only a few days later after our encounter.



MARLEY O'NEIL / *Untitled*



MARLEY O'NEIL / *Stairway to Somewhere*

TRAVIS PARADISE

## Dad Says

I can't smoke inside so I cope  
out back, beneath breath-seeking stars.  
Huddled against the tractor's garage  
I'm enduring the whipping of brisk November  
stabbing through the sheepish holes of my Baja jacket.  
My fingers quiver as I unearth the crisp metal  
grinder from underneath decaying foliage.  
I pack my pipe, ignite it against deep ocean lips.  
The blaze tingles my chest before pooling  
out my icicle nose; outside so long  
I lose feeling in both earlobes,  
but I can still hear the stomp of his steel  
toes as he creaks down the porch to say –

*Come back inside or you'll freeze*

NOLAN RICHARDSON

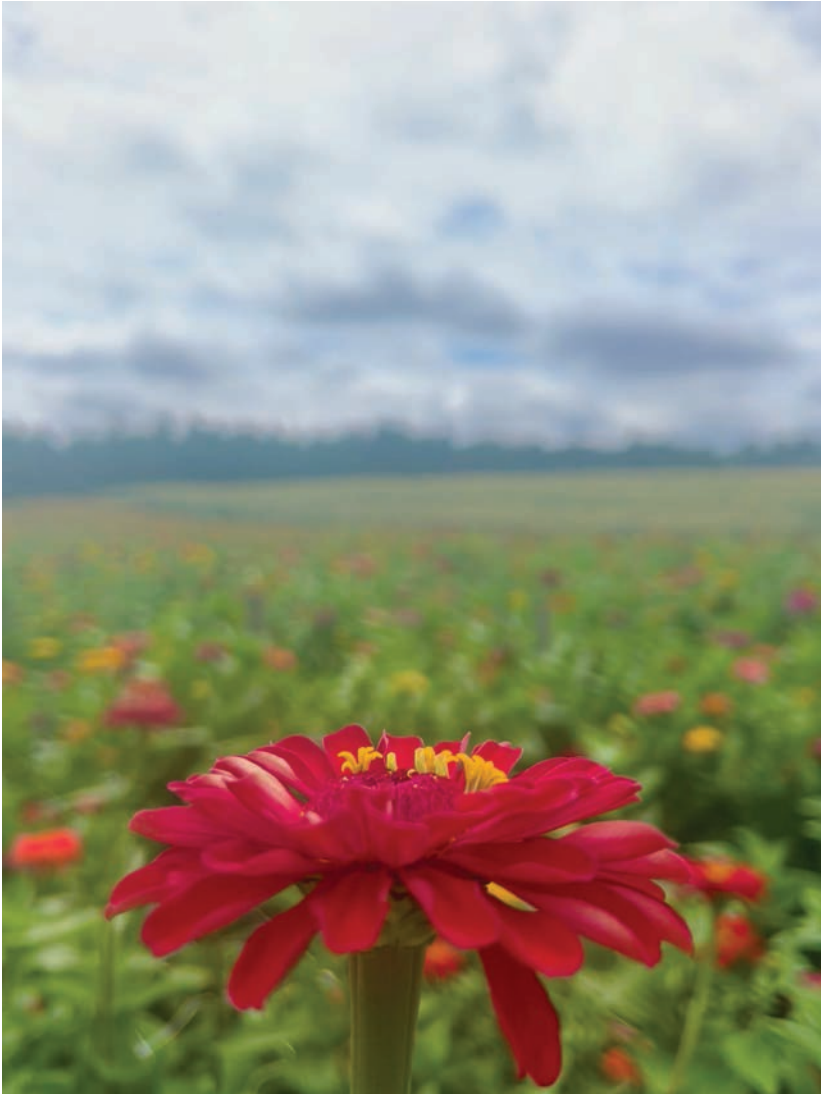
## Stillness

It's days like today when the sundries  
scattered across my desk are more attractive than usual.  
That oxidized penny looks comfortable  
in the shaded corner of my desk,  
and the empty water bottle has never  
seemed more content in its place.  
They could both be placid for the next decade  
and no one would notice, no one would come around  
and see them; they won't give a damn.  
I envy that lonely penny. And the reverent water  
bottle who has nothing left to give,  
but still stands.

ASHLEY ROSE RIVERA

# Petrichor

You hit the windshield clear and hard,  
congesting my view. The oncoming lights  
haze maroon, mustard and evergreen.  
I turn on the wipers and let their power  
whisk you and flick you onto the hood  
where you cascade down. You cloud the side window.  
Your dots compose an achromatic metallic portrait,  
even the wind paints silver strokes of you.  
The clouds overhead become an amalgamation  
of mingling navy-pearl sky.  
A calmness suffocates me; sound invokes a steady melody.  
I feel my heartbeat mimic your rhythm,  
calm when it's with you.



ASHLEY ROSE RIVERA / Focus

ANGELA SABO

## Springfield, VT

I am up early enough  
to catch the sun rise over the green mountains  
in the green mountain state.

A ladder rests against my neighbor's roof,  
A toy bucket rolls in circles on the sidewalk.  
I, along with all else, am a relic.

My first morning sober—  
The window once the screen  
has fallen out: a safety hazard,  
an open wound,  
the bugs fly in.

TABITHA SOPER

## Getaway Green

My glass ocean waves reached for your grassy fingers,  
soaked with the weeds that swayed with me.  
I hope we touch most in the summers, when  
my waves are coolest, your blades warmed  
by the blaring sun. Grace the water's edge  
with your verdancy, lay beside me, hold onto  
droplets of my salt in your roots.

You were rolling hills and flickering grass  
in the wind. Tall trees grow from the mounds,  
and I find you in the leaves that blossom from their branches.  
They spread their palms for my sky, traipse  
their careful symmetry towards the clouds  
that bathe with me, and ache for the warmth I  
bring with my day. When the hours shorten and  
my expanse undepens, those sleepy  
yellows overtake my leaves  
and I no longer see you in them.

But I see you in how the brush blurs on the highway,  
how the rain soaks the fields.

LYRA TAURUS

## Cutting it Off

“You have the most beautiful hair,” my mom would say while helping me get ready for my dance recitals as a kid. “It’s so long and thick... You’re so lucky.”

I look up at the mirror, my eyes gleaming. My face was caked with a foundation that was a shade too dark, a bright pink blush, vibrant blue eyeshadow, and a deep red lipstick. I looked so much like a girl.

At the time, “looking like a girl” was the goal, the highest compliment. I wasn’t stereotypically beautiful. In the second grade, girls would laugh at my arm hair saying that it “made me look like a boy.” Then there was also the mole above my lip that my mom reassured was a beauty mark, while the other kids at recess branded it as a “witch’s mark”; but I always had my hair. I believed that my hair could’ve been on the covers of magazines or could’ve belonged to a Disney Princess – it made me feel beautiful. My hair was everything.

But as time went on and the strands of my hair grew longer, the image of myself shifted: the smile that had shined brightly against my childhood mirror began to droop and eyes that had once gleamed turned dull. People say that hair is just dead DNA, but now for me, it is a reminder of a version of myself that has long since passed. I wanted to hide behind my long hair, but instead it felt like a beacon, a bright light that got attention while I was in my most vulnerable state. I no longer liked that girl I saw in the mirror. I didn’t want to look like a girl anymore.

Looking into the mirror at my work now, my eyes are puffy as I try to fake a classic customer service smile. I notice the tear stains that have fallen onto my green apron, near my pin that clearly reads: “they/them.”

There were some days that I could handle being misgendered more than others; it is unfortunately something I have grown accustomed to, but I reached my breaking point today. I can't be the pink or blue the world wants me to be. Why can't I be the purple in between, like a sweet lilac or a ripe plum. Hell, maybe even yellow – the bright burning yellow of a sunflower, or the mellow and soft yellow of the sunset. Just because I looked pink, doesn't mean that I wasn't yellow on the inside. I shouldn't owe anyone pink.

At the end of my shift, I sprint out the door to the Supercuts in the same plaza. I sink down into the chair and the hairdresser is quick to run her fingers through my long hair, saying “You have such beautiful hair!” She was shocked, almost horrified, when I told her to cut it all off. She wonders what has led me to this decision, so I look at her through the mirror with a smirk.

“I just need a change.”

When the first strand fell, a weight lifts off of my shoulders. I feel lighter with every snip, almost as if the bars of a cage are being broken down, one-by-one, all of them falling over.

There is a brief silence before she tells me to put my glasses back on and see what I thought. When I got my first glance, it is like seeing an old friend again. A smile that hadn't been there in so long spreads onto my face and stars reenter my eyes. This person is me. I have been cut free.

ALLISON TERVO

## I Mark Myself The Poisoned

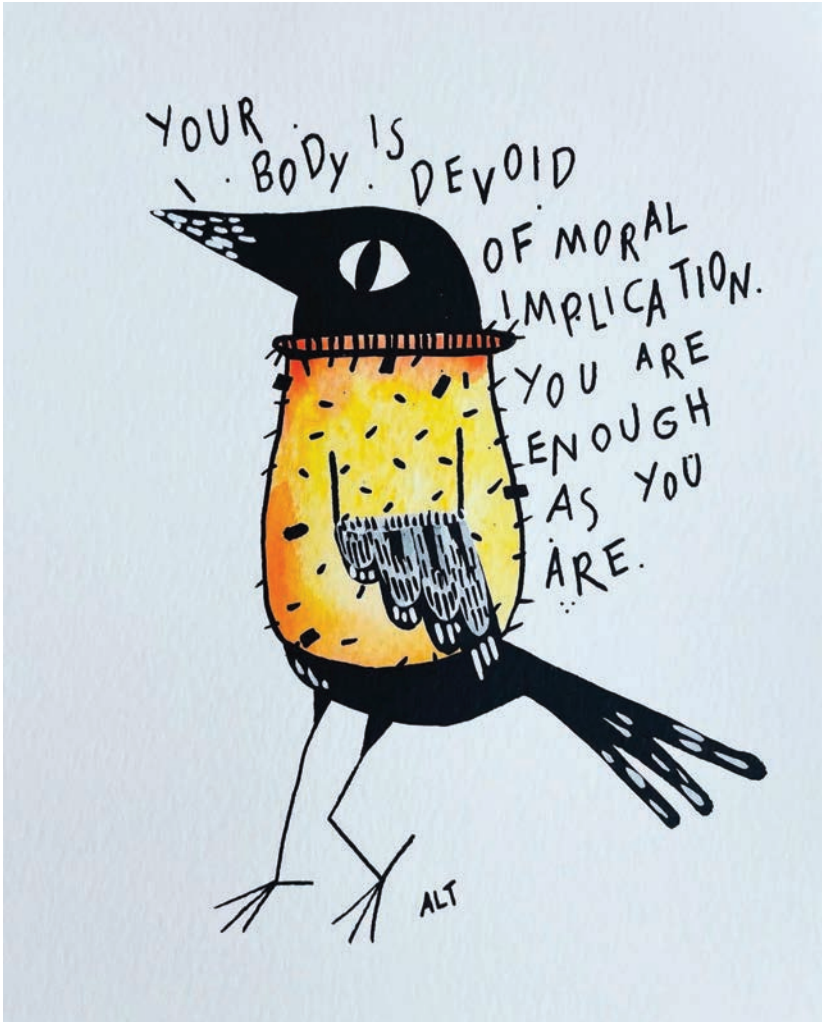
link, even the bullfrogs are sounding  
my name (they agree I am the weak one).  
A mighty cloud shakes its aspergillum;  
my dress goes limp with punishment.

The grass sees all, nods, and kneels  
hellward under my feet. I know ground.  
I know to trample like I know to dream  
recurrent dreams. Isn't it safer to travel  
our known pathways?

The wind snaps at my neck and tugs  
my hair on purpose. I think of warm  
pets and homes with families tucked inside.  
I think of quiet mugs of coffee.  
I'll let myself go tectonically separate;

this mind has divine inclinations!  
I'll warp the woods myself. I'll fistfight  
every frigid trill of wind. I'll fashion  
a chunk of land where I am the sole  
antagonist: what is love if not violence?

The trees huddle around me to withhold  
their pathways. They gossip  
about all of my horrors.  
Across the forest, a doubtful log  
tries and tries to convince them otherwise.



ALLISON TERVO / *As You Are*

CHRISTOPHER TYMULA

## Excerpt from *The Dreaming Mind*

Isolation. It is a strange thing, yet all too common. As people locked themselves away from others, even their own family, loneliness spread with ease. A new age had begun, and we were all stuck in it.

I remember the first day. I sat in a hard plastic chair, slightly too small for my body, during algebra class of my senior year of high school. I wore black sweatpants, a colorful, short-sleeved shirt with a sweater, with vibrant cloth showing only at the neck. I was, like most days, very tired. It was last period, and the minutes turned to eons while the clock ticked away. The teacher was fearsome though, so I never dared to rest. Weakly, I tapped my heel against the streaked tile floor, as did a few other students.

This was life. For the past eight years of my meager existence on this floating rock in space, this was my life.

In front of me to the left sat two of my friends, both of whom were named Alice. They were juniors and we had met the year before. With their company, luckily for me, I wouldn't be alone every day during Mrs. H's algebra class. Together, we shared the torment of time.

I remember the waiting. For weeks, we had heard whispers of a virus in a faraway land. They called it COVID-19, a name I regarded with the distant fear one would feel for a foreign war. It was outside of my control and I was looking on with anxiety. For a time, it seemed like just another opportunity for school to be put on pause. I remember working at a farm supply store down the road from my house and talking with a coworker.

“Y’know, it seems like every week I see you, things only get worse,” he said.

Little did I know, that was the last thing I’d hear from him.

The classroom’s loudspeaker crackled, interrupting the lesson. I wondered, my first coherent thought in the last hour, if it was finally time. The principal would announce a two-week break, as a safety measure in response to the growing number of virus cases in the United States. The class cheered, as did I, much to the teacher’s dismay. We finally could take some time off, and we believed it was well earned. When the day ended, Alice 1 and 2 and I talked about what we would do with this new free time. We made grand plans, some as jokes, some as genuine goals. I wanted to see my ancestral homeland, Greece, while the pair of Alices desired to never come back to this wretched place. When I boarded the rusty, dilapidated bus to return home, my hopes were high for the future.

The two weeks became three, then four, then five. As I sat on the office chair in my bedroom, watching the clouds drift by, folding my hands into different positions out of chronic indecision, the weight of the silence finally set in. The old ways were gone and this was it. We never had a senior year, and the remainder of the semester was orchestrated almost entirely online. So many faces, people, teachers, I would never see again. The classmates I sat side by side with vanished into memory. I could remember their voices, their smiles and their laughs, but it was all hollow now.

To claim my experience was unique is foolish. I knew everyone else suffered the same as me, and others even more so, but that didn’t make the pain any less real. As the hours blended together, moments I had once thought mundane became deeply desired. All I wanted was to wander a mall with a friend, catching up as if we hadn’t spoken in years. I would’ve done anything to hug them again, even for just a second.

Then came graduation. The couch in the living room became my bleacher seat, and the television became my stadium. My mother and father, dressed lazily, as was I, became my audience. After a speech from the principal and a display of my graduating class, the Chelmsford High School Class of 2020, commenced. There I sat back, not bothering to lean in to better see the faces, and watched as each senior photo flittered by in a slideshow. I waited until my own face appeared. I looked so joyful, so full of optimism, excited for what the future held. When I looked into my eyes in the photo, I couldn't take it anymore. I sat up, left the room, the TV still playing, and retreated to my bedroom with sluggish footsteps. I fell back onto my chair, feeling the soft foam cradle my body, and fell into slumber.

Normally, I don't remember many of my dreams in great detail. But, over the course of this new era in our lives, the dreams I witnessed became more vivid, intricate, and alive. I still remember the first one.

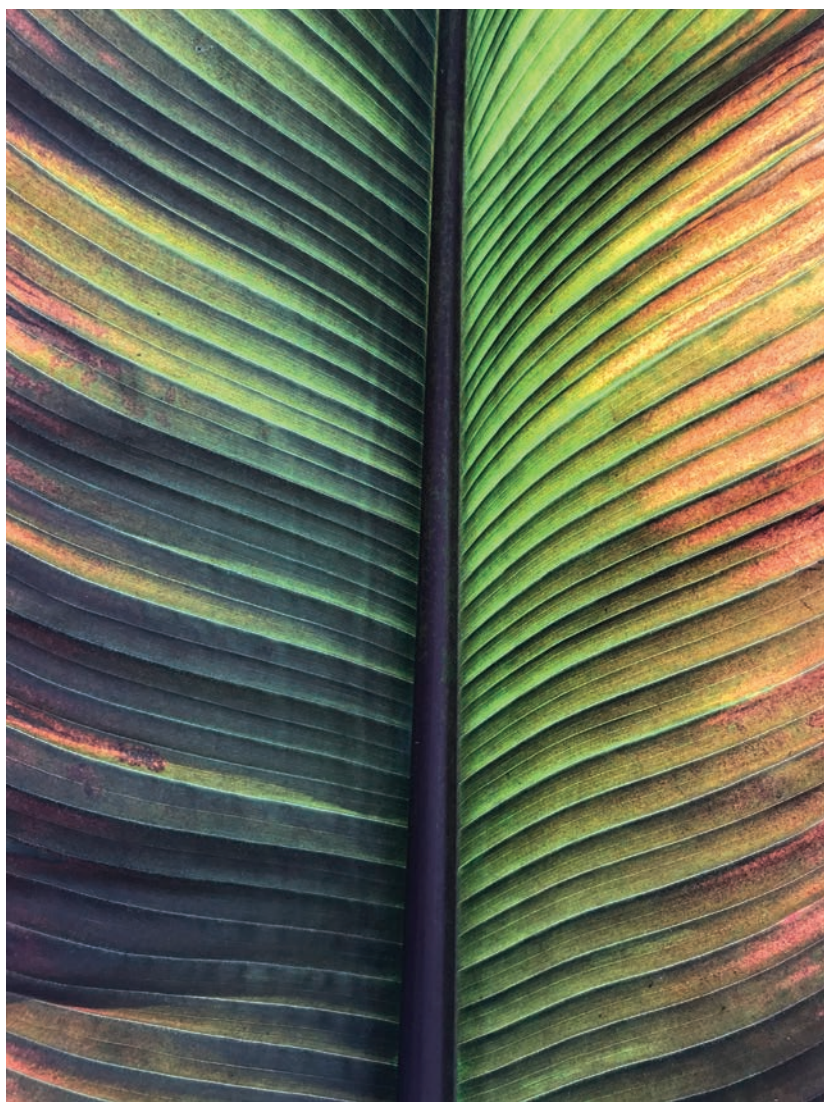
I watched myself as I drifted in the void of space. An eternal black, pure nothingness surrounded me. The stars were distant, flickering speckles in the endless dark. My eyes were open, and I took in the emptiness. I was tiny, minuscule, incalculably small against the infinite maw of the final frontier. How insignificant I felt in that moment. Soon, I reached out with an extended arm. I don't know why I was tempted to, but I pointed at the brightest light I could find. Slowly, from my extended finger, my body became covered in radiant, gleaming gold, and my eyes began to glow. I was confounded, but wonderfully pleased. Gargantuan feathered wings, glassy in appearance, sprouted from my back, and, in an instant, I flew. The void filled with color, and as I soared through the cosmos, an iridescent, kaleidoscopic swirl of light enveloped me. I passed through nebulae, felt the rush of the vibrant gasses against my skin, and took in the view with awe. As my journey continued, music played softly behind the glass-like clink of glittering suns. The symphony was distant, muted, but the lyrics pierced the veil of sound.

*Little memories, marching on. Your little feet, working the machine.*

I stopped, without deceleration, and beheld a world. With my left hand, I felt over the surface. The mountains were but small ridges against my palm, and the seas dampened my glowing fingertips. I turned toward the star of this unknown system, the burning rays reflecting off my body, and watched as loops of fire struck out into space. With both hands, I reached out. I cradled the star in my grasp, soaking in the warmth, and held it close to my chest. Curling into a fetal position, I wrapped my wings around me, and never had I felt so warm.

*My little dream, working the machine.*

The barking of my dog stirred me awake. I sat up with a jolt, the visuals burning into my brain, and wiped the drool from my chin and desk. It had been a few hours, perhaps. The clouds had long since carried on, and the violet of the night had staked its claim. The trees outside my window were but shadows against the sky, swaying gently in the breeze. I heard my name being called, the voice of my mother, and returned to reality, as much as I desired to dream once more . . .



CHRISTOPHER TYMULA / *Radiance*

ANNE MARIE VAUDO

## *Figures from the Attic*

In the timeline in his head, he imagined just a week ago his mother making the pilgrimage through the hatch in the ceiling to the attic. Slowly, she would lug the large plastic boxes, faded and cracked with age, down the three flights of stairs. He imagined her carefully unswaddling Santa figurines that once belonged to her sisters from their bubble-wrapped slumber and rehoming them in windowsills. Scotch-taped to the walls of the dining room were the drawings he did when he was very small, the reindeer scribbles and misspelled Christmas lists, almost dull in color in the way public school construction paper dims in the sun. The angel, scoliosisly hunched on her emerald throne, sat fabulously congested under the ceiling.

For the months leading up to that December visit he daydreamed of coming home to his mother. It was the single week he'd return to the quiet of the coastal air where as a kid he developed winter sunburns from the unpaved snow. In the absence of the heat that drew people seaside, the winter solstice brought with it a cold, quiet wind that picked up orphaned sand and gyrated it across the sidewalks, making it the sole presence of the beach town. Growing up, he hated how lonely it got, wanting nothing more than to take the two hour train ride into the city. He found company in the concrete during day trips, and fled there for good when he grew older.

But the city frost this time of year was just as menacing as the hollow cold of his hometown. He felt it most on his commute back from work, from the gallery he answered phones for. The final trek from the station to his apartment met him with wind tunnels from concrete buildings that threatened him indoors. But the inside greeted him with

an aggravating solitude. He heated his dinner, hearing his neighbors beyond drywall committing the same nightly ritual as him, an endless reverb of microwave and late-night shows. Staleness croaked through his radiator. Not knowing what else to do, he fell asleep watching reruns of anything, the once hot plastic sitting, solidifying in his lap. He suspended just above sleep, hazily nestled above complete subconsciousness. He imagined retreating seaside, where there were no industrial landscapes to usher into. He felt suffocated by his single-roomed dwelling where the only view the window offered him was of bricks and bird shit. The fabricated chatter of the TV nocturnally replaced the daily dialogue of art directors that didn't bother to remember his name. Though he once despised the sickly salt air, he found himself nostalgic for it, as if it would bring him a release from the rigid, mechanical grit he became accustomed to.

That night he dreamt about greeting his mother after so long. He could feel the sand on his feet through the subliminal mist as he opened the door to his childhood home and flailed into her arms, disintegrating. He cried, the folds in his face waxing and waning against tears until his teeth ached, confessing everything that went wrong since he moved to the city as he would coming home from elementary school. *Going home*, he thought as he woke up, just the sound of the words sounded so sweet. *Going home*, as December came. *Going home*, as he packed a duffel bag. *Going home*, as he dressed in his winter coat and left the apartment.

As he walked to the train station, he realized it was the longest he had been out in the street in a while. A tall, lanky boy with stick legs wrapped in ripped jeans passed by him, his puffer jacket blossoming above his waist like a treetop, as if his plush torso could make him topple over at any minute. A man with stagnant thighs that stuck out perpendicular to his wheelchair sat by a Macy's department store window. The man stared at the nubs at his knees as families in long parkas passed him silently. As a kid, he was part of these families,

visiting the city with his mother in wintertime to window shop. Back then, he never seemed to notice the smells of the city, but now he noticed that even through the thin cold, the pavement baked with the smell of roasted peanuts and piss. The lampposts that lit the streets of downtown wore wreaths and holiday lights strung between them. Men leaned over and vomited in street corners of concrete dwellings as suburban shoppers foreignly gripped their children's hands, and people on phone calls marched on.

The train station was a shiny industrial haven from brick storefronts and sidewalks and all that those streets seemed to foster. Its metallic boughs escorted him inside, offered to take him two hours East, back to the sea, for \$20 round trip. He swiftly guided himself past the turnstiles and onto the commuter rail. He sat backwards, he realized after the train started to move, and he watched the city get smaller and smaller until it faded away to a fog. Finally, the city looked quiet, as if lullabied to a muted grey, and he drifted off with it.

The beach town met him exactly how he remembered it. Below freezing, he walked through snow-covered sidewalks, each footstep making a silhouette. The snow on the ground reflected sunlight onto the parts of his face revealed by his scarf, warming him. White lawns extended long past the houses they belonged to, so heavily decorated and blinding him with stringed lights. The glow from the lights along with the ending of sunset cast a royal blue smug in his vision, as if he was navigating with cellophane over his eyes. Still, he continued, passing by the church in younger days he and his mother would attend Sunday mass. A nativity scene stood on the lawn of the church. The spotlights that lit the scene revealed desaturation in the paint of the plastic family. He stopped to look closer. Vandalized, Mother Mary was missing. As he stood still, he realized his feet were beginning to feel damp, the snow salting his soles limp, and carried on.

The croaking of his shoes started to settle as they met the familiar curves of his childhood walkway, and he slowed his pace to observe the house. The white paint was cracking in places, the black shutters were beginning to turn grey. The Santa figures smiled at him through ceramic rosy cheeks as they sat in the windowsills. He kept on the path until he reached the front door. Frozen with ice, the white screen jammed open with a tug, and carefully he lifted the steel doorknocker, now green with age, just enough to knock it back against the door three times. From the slivered window in the door, he could see the school projects taped on the walls, the Christmas tree in the corner and almost make out the tiny angel on top. Slowly, the old woman descended the stairs and came to the door, the unlocking noise emulating the sound of cracked knuckles, next replaced by the slow whine of moving hinges. He met his mother's eyes, smiling slightly. She smiled back, her cheeks folding. The blue of her irises were more worn than he remembered, faded with age and maybe something else.

He wanted to say something, but couldn't. Silently, he entered the house and looked around. So many times in the city had he imagined coming home, setting down his heavy heart finally, placing it in the palms of his mother. He thought differently as he found himself observing the house, her collection of preservations. He thought about how she held onto him through Crayola-soaked papers that kept him small forever, how she swaddled and un-swaddled the last memory of her sisters every year, their final goodbyes in department store figurines. He could not set his heavy heart onto his mother's own. Surely, hers would fall if it took on the weight of both.



JULIAN VIVIESCAS MEJIA / *Riomaggiore*



A. DAVID WUNSCH / *Self Portrait Soldier Field*



## Contributors

**Nicole Bagley** is a sophomore majoring in English Creative Writing with a minor in History. She is thankful for the love and support of her friends and family.

**Jason Bourret** is a recent graduate of UMass Lowell with a degree in English and a minor in Spanish. He hopes to one day complete a novel as well as a collection of poetry. His work has been featured in two previous issues of *The Offering*. He would like to thank his boyfriend for always being his muse, as well as his loved ones for their unconditional support.

**Samuel Clafin** is a senior majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Mathematics. He plans to pursue a career in software engineering and eventually teach computer science at the college level.

**Douglas Connolly** is a senior majoring in English and minoring in Political Science.

**Gabrielle Cruz** is a senior English major concentrating in Literature and the Art Editor for this year's *The Offering*. She would like to thank her family and friends for encouraging and supporting her in sharing her writing and is honored to be featured in this year's edition alongside such talented individuals. Gabrielle hopes to further her writing in graduate school and looks forward to sharing more of her work in the future.

**Jessie Daniliuk** is a junior Creative Writing major. She is one of the Fiction Editors for *The Offering* and the Vice President of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society. She thanks her friends and family for their endless support.

**Amanda Gambale** is a senior majoring in Creative Writing, and minoring in Biology and minoring in Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Between classes, she works on her first novel, yet to be titled, and hopes to be finished by this year.

**Joseph Keane** is a recent graduate from UMass Lowell. He is currently working with fellow alumni to form a Lowell-based writing workshop and artist's collective.

**Erin Kerr** is a senior majoring in Graphic Design and minoring in Marketing. She enjoys writing poetry and taking photographs in addition to visual design.

**Caitlin Leach** is a senior majoring in Creative Writing and is the 2023 Poetry Editor for *The Offering*. She is currently working on a symphonic music composition, drafting a poetry manuscript, and writing a novel.

**Kimberly Mai** is a Creative Writing major, minoring in Psychology and Education. She hopes to continue improving her skills in writing and editing.

**Maya Maria** is a Creative Writing major and a senior at UMass Lowell. Writing has always been one of her greatest passions. With a deep love for language, she draws much of her inspiration from life and nature. Maya currently teaches piano and violin but is excited to begin working as a full-time writer.

**Courtney Morin** is a non-traditional student at UML currently majoring in Biomedical Engineering. She was a runner-up for the 2019 Kurt Brown Prize in creative nonfiction. Her work is often melancholic in its examination of the human condition and most recently seeks to marry STEM and creative writing as a vehicle of discussion and discovery.

**Sarah Omar** is a sophomore majoring in Creative Writing. She is a proud Palestinian-American writer who is inspired by her homeland and seeks to portray the beauty her region has to offer through her writing.

**Marley O'Neil** is a staff member in Francis College of Engineering serving as the Department Operations Coordinator. She started her own landscape photography print business in 2017. She has been featured in several shows. She hopes to continue to have the opportunity to share her perspective with new audiences.

**Travis Paradise** is a senior majoring in English with a focus in Creative Writing. He is one of the founders of the Creative Writing Club at UML and acts as one of its Presidents. While he hopes to write story for video games and screenplay, he's a poet at heart, who dreams to someday have his own poetry collections published.

**Nolan Richardson** is a senior majoring in Creative Writing. He typically writes fiction and hopes to get a novel published after graduating.

**Ashley Rose Rivera** is a senior English major with a Creative Writing concentration. She has been involved in *The Offering* for four years and has been Managing Editor for the past three years. Ashley was involved with UMass Lowell's student run newspaper, *The Connector*, serving as editor in chief in 2022. She was the lead mentor for UMass Lowell's financial literacy program, the Money Management Mentors in 2022. She was an undergraduate research assistant for an archival revamp project for the English department in 2022. She is currently a bookseller and an intern for the literary agency, the Strothman Agency. She hopes to pursue a career in publishing. She thanks her loved ones for supporting her and is grateful for the privilege to have been taught under the English department faculty.

**Angela Sabo** is a recent graduate from Colorado State University's M.F.A. program in Creative Nonfiction. She attended UML from 2015-2019, where she obtained her B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She was also the Managing Editor of *The Offering* in 2019. She enjoys poetry, coffee, and self-help books.

**Tabitha Soper** is a senior majoring in Creative Writing. She intends to one day publish fantasy novels and collections of horror stories.

**Lyra Taurus** is an English/Creative Writing major at UMass Lowell.

**Allison Tervo** is a senior majoring in English/Creative Writing with a minor in Psychology. She is the current President of UMass Lowell's chapter of the National English Honors Society (Sigma Tau Delta), the Vice President of Service and Advocacy for UMass Lowell's chapter of the National Honors Society (Omicron Delta Kappa), Managing Editor for this year's edition of *The Offering*, and an Honors College prospective graduate. She hopes to publish a collection of poetry someday (and maybe even some fiction!). She'd like to thank her parents for always encouraging her to pursue her dreams, her professors for teaching her how to reach for them, and her English Major friends for their constant encouragement.

**Christopher Tymula** is a junior majoring in Creative Writing. He is a Master-level tutor of the UMass Lowell Writing Center. He plans to finish a science fiction novel within the next few years.

**Anne Marie Vaudo** is a sophomore Sociology major and a reader for *The Offering* 2023 literary magazine.

**Julian Viviescas Mejia** is a junior majoring in English with a concentration in Journalism and Professional Writing and minoring in Italian Studies. He studied at the University of Modena in Italy during the spring of 2022. He hopes to become a photojournalist after graduating.

**A. David Wunsch** is a Professor Emeritus in the ECE Department at UMass Lowell. All of his serious photography is in black and white. In 1966 he took a workshop with the photographic educator Minor White.

## In This Issue

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Cover photo:  
Julian Viviescas Mejia / *Venice*