

# POETRY

*April 2018*

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# CONTENTS

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## **SPLIT THIS ROCK**

SARAH BROWNING	5	Introduction
ILYA KAMINSKY	7	<i>Question</i> <i>Search Patrols</i> <i>A Cigarette</i>
JAVIER ZAMORA	10	<i>Guadalajara</i> <i>Whatever I Did After ...</i>
SOLMAZ SHARIF	12	<i>The Master's House</i> <i>The End of Exile</i>
CAMILLE T. DUNGY	16	<i>Naming what has risen</i> <i>this beginning may have always ...</i>
PAUL TRAN	18	<i>Scientific Method</i>
SHARON OLDS	20	<i>Poem Which Talks Back to Itself</i> <i>How It Felt</i>
SONIA SANCHEZ	23	<i>Haiku and Tanka for Harriet ...</i>
ELIZABETH ACEVEDO	28	<i>Iron</i> <i>Hearing That Joe Arroyo Song ...</i>
TERISA SIAGATONU	30	<i>Moana Means Home ...</i> <i>Atlas</i>
SHERWIN BITSUI	34	<i>From "Dissolve"</i>
KAZIM ALI	37	<i>From "The Voice of Sheila Chandra"</i>
ELLEN BASS	42	<i>Marriage</i> <i>I Could Touch It</i>
KWAME DAWES	44	<i>Ode to the Clothesline</i> <i>Vagrants and Loiterers</i>

## BLACK GIRL MAGIC

MAHOGANY L. BROWNE	49	On Black Girl Magic
KIANDRA JIMENEZ	52	<i>Halcyon Kitchen</i>
EBONI HOGAN	53	<i>Cardi B Tells Me about Myself</i>
ROYA MARSH	56	<i>Ode to Fetty Wap ...</i>
BIANCA LYNNE SPRIGGS	60	<i>What Women Are Made Of</i>
ELIZABETH ACEVEDO	62	<i>You Mean You Don't Weep ...</i>
E'MON LAUREN	63	<i>The Etymology of "CHUUCH!"</i>
JUSTICE AMEER	64	<i>(After God Herself)</i>
RAYCH JACKSON	68	<i>A sestina for a black girl ...</i>
ARACELIS GIRMAY	70	<i>sister was the wolf</i>
IDRISSA SIMMONDS	72	<i>Flight</i>

## SNOW CITY ARTS

ERIC ELSHTAIN	75	Introduction
FRANCISCO	77	<i>From "Burglar's Got Your Tongue"</i> Illustration by Jaiden
SHANI	79	<i>The Love</i> Illustration by Rin
LEONEL	81	<i>Animals with Feelings</i> Illustration by Jamari
MONTARIUS	83	<i>I Can't Stand Watches</i> Illustration by Gabriella
CONTRIBUTORS	84	

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Back in 1912, *Poetry*'s tiny first office was often crowded with visiting poets and friends, and founding editor Harriet Monroe would brew coffee over an open fire in an adjacent vacant lot. Visitors eventually would head out to a nearby restaurant where Monroe might buy lunch or dinner for writers down on their luck. Charming as this may sound, what she established all those years ago was what we would now call a poetry community. As Wallace Stevens once wrote, remembering Monroe, *Poetry* "was notably a magazine of many people ... in a group, she was always most eager." These days, poetry communities flourish everywhere, and stay in touch not only in person through readings and informal gatherings but moment to moment, via social media and texting.

In the spirit of such gregariousness, this month's issue presents work from three of many such active communities: Split This Rock, a gathering of those who work for social justice; *Black Girl Magic*—the name is self-explanatory, but these are poets connected to the BreakBeat poets featured in our April 2015 issue; and Snow City Arts, an organization that provides instruction in the visual arts, creative writing, music, theater, and media arts to children in hospitals. In juxtaposing work from each of these vibrant groups, we hope readers will get a sense of the vivacious energy and talent nourished wherever poets and their readers gather.

—D.S.



**SPLIT THIS ROCK**



SARAH BROWNING

---

*Introduction*

The thirteen poets gathered in this portfolio will read at Split This Rock Poetry Festival taking place April 19–21, 2018, in Washington, DC. Poetry — as ever — reminds us of what matters. When you're feeling particularly despondent — *Can it get any worse? Wait, it just did!* — I invite you to read these poems. They are community and beauty and mourning and fierce hope and resistance, all. They are restoration.

The poets are all ages, from their twenties to their eighties. Three have been role models to us in this work for decades and I want to take a moment to thank them profoundly, to say that we built Split This Rock on their shoulders. They are among the poets who inspire us as activists and writers, and who sustained us through the difficult years of struggling at the fringes of the literary landscape. They are Sonia Sanchez, Ellen Bass, and Sharon Olds.

Sonia Sanchez has been a lifelong activist for peace and justice and Black voices. She was a preeminent member of the Black Arts Movement and one of the earliest and most effective advocates for Black studies programs in higher education. She opened the first Split This Rock Poetry Festival by standing on a table in the middle of Busboys and Poets, a noisy restaurant and performance space in DC, invoking the ancestors and calling us all to use our powerful voices for justice.

Ellen Bass coedited, in 1973, the first major anthology of women's poetry, *No More Masks!*, a collection that ended the isolation of so many of us. When she was leading community writing workshops in the eighties she heard so many stories of childhood sexual abuse that she put her own writing on hold to focus on this horror and its healing. She produced one of the most essential texts on the topic, *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (1988), which has sold over a million copies and has been translated into twelve languages. Bass's poems published here may not seem particularly political to some readers, but in their frank portrayal of LGBTQ family life and love one can find them profoundly political, disturbing as her vision of queer normalcy is to some.

Sharon Olds, in her eleven volumes of poetry, has freed millions of women from the shackles of shame that society has employed to control our bodies and thereby our minds and our very selves. Women's sexuality has always been policed, in every realm, including, of course, literature. Sharon Olds wrote the poems anyway; she stormed the gates. Additionally, over thirty years ago, she cofounded a program of writing workshops at a 900-bed state hospital for the severely disabled, at which she still teaches.

The poets in this portfolio represent some of the many stylistic strains of American poetry. They write lyrical, narrative, avant garde, formal, and elliptical work. The poets represent a range of racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual identities. They have disabilities. Two—Paul Tran and Javier Zamora—are the children of US-exported wars, in Vietnam and El Salvador, respectively. They write achingly of the generational impact of war, violence, and forced migration on families, on psyches. Their poems, as do the others in the portfolio, remind us that all issues are connected: war and family violence, gender equity and economic disparity, immigration justice and the struggle to save our only home, this earth.

The poems challenge us—and they challenge us to ask the same of our government: what matters to us now, in 2018? What are we fighting for? What do we treasure enough to preserve, to bequeath to our children and our grandchildren?

Split This Rock was founded ten years ago precisely to promote the poems that ask these vital questions. A national organization whose mission is to cultivate, teach, and celebrate poetry that bears witness to injustice and provokes change, we've built Split This Rock from a single festival into a powerhouse, helping move this poetry from the margins to the center of our literary culture. The biennial national festival is our cornerstone program, but we also organize and present vibrant youth programs, an annual contest recently renamed the Sonia Sanchez-Langston Hughes Poetry Contest, the Freedom Plow Award for Poetry & Activism, readings, workshops, campaigns for social justice, a poem of the week series, and The Quarry: An Online Social Justice Poetry Database, housed on our website. We invite you to join us.

ILYA KAMINSKY

---

*Question*

What is a man?

A quiet between two bombardments.

*Search Patrols*

I cover the eyes of Gena, 7, and Anushka, 2,  
as their father drops his trousers to be searched, and his flesh shakes,

and around him:  
silence's gross belly flaps. The crowd watches.

The children watch us watch:  
soldiers drag the naked man up the staircase. I teach his children's  
    hands to make of anguish

a language —  
see how deafness nails us into our bodies. Anushka

speaks to homeless dogs as if they are men,  
speaks to men

as if they are men  
and not just souls on crutches of bone.

Townspeople  
watch children but feel under the bare feet of their thoughts

the cold stone of the city.

*A Cigarette*

Watch —

Vasenska citizens do not know they are evidence of happiness

in a time of war,  
each is a ripped-out document of laughter.

God,  
deaf have something to tell  
that not even they can hear —

you will find me, God,  
like a dumb pigeon's beak I am  
pecking  
every way at astonishment.

If you  
climb a roof in the Central Square of a bombarded city, you will see  
    my people and me —  
one neighbor thieves a cigarette  
another gives a dog  
a pint of sunlit beer.

JAVIER ZAMORA

---

*Guadalajara*

We knew something was wrong when next to the TV, a large tomatillo plant was growing out the carpet. Everything there spoke, Table, Lamps...

In the living room, Coffee Table's eyes glued to the TV: flags, drums, hands on the chest on the screen, but it couldn't have been Independence. It was the fifth of the fifth month, something about a battle won, a battle lost.

Our host, Dining Table, handed each of us a green sphere. *Eat, s'il vous plaît. Don't think about it*, she told us; then sent Chair and Coffee Table to sleep.

*Watch the bedbugs. You can't unlock the windows*, Fan in the hallway said.

For two weeks Table left tomatillos outside our door. The green marbles punched through our stomachs, so deep, our ears grew roots. It was as if no heat. Bed wished she was bigger. Closet dreaded his clothes. Wall didn't let us sleep; kept saying,

*iLook! Look over there, cabrones. You'll never make it there. If you're gonna ask for the best route, the best price. ¿Where are your suspenders? ¿Dress shoes? You're not really serious about getting to San Francisco. ¿Are you? Pinche dirty pigeons.*

*Whatever I Did After Has Not Happened Yet*

at a certain time the kitten stopped moving I wanted to see if it would  
burn  
rain like cane fields when they're scorched after harvesting

through the phone Abuelita remembers the black kitten I threw in  
the fire  
still trying to crawl out that ash isn't snow Abuelo said shirtless

I picked up a mound in my hand if I look back at my front door  
barefoot kids in the street try catching the flakes on their tongues

come visit us they say nextyearexnextyear I'll try again  
dust covers the roof my toys my hair my expired work permit burns

black the sky it is march again & again there's no wind  
Abuelita asks us to send a bag of autumn leaves she wants to keep

in a book the color so pretty interesting what if there's no wind  
I ask while acid at Joshua Tree camping the slight movements

of the twigs of the ocotillo sound like mice deep in their burrows  
with the silence of only this pen writing the only words I can hear

*hella yellow now* I'm in a similar dirt to Abuelita's yellow but here  
there's healing  
the cold the sky the same I'm staring at clouds the same

thought of then now again I could this could be the very cloud  
the very dirt but this time I'm happy yes I can be I'm smiling

SOLMAZ SHARIF

---

*The Master's House*

To wave from the porch  
To let go of the grudge  
To disrobe  
To recall Ethel Rosenberg's green polka-dotted dress  
To call your father and say *I'd forgotten how nice everyone in these red states can be*  
To hear him say *Yes, long as you don't move in next door*  
To recall every drawn curtain in the apartments you have lived  
To find yourself at 33 at a vast expanse with nary a papyrus of guidance, with nary a voice, a muse, a model  
To finally admit out loud then *I want to go home*  
To have a dinner party of intellectuals with a bell, long-armed, lightly-tongued, at each setting  
To sport your dun gown  
To revel in face serums  
To be a well-calibrated burn victim to fight the signs of aging  
To assure financial health  
To be lavender sachets and cedar lining and all the ways the rich might hide their rot  
To eye the master's bone china  
To pour diuretic in his coffee and think this erosive to the state  
To disrobe when the agent asks you to  
To find a spot on any wall to stare into  
To develop the ability to leave an entire nation thusly, just by staring at a spot on the wall, as the lead-vested agent names article by article what to remove  
To do this in order to do the other thing, the wild thing  
To say this is my filmdom, *The Master's House*, and I gaze upon it and it is good  
To discuss desalinization plants and de terroir  
To date briefly a banker, a lapsed Marxist, and hear him on the phone speaking in billions of dollars, its residue over the clear bulbs of his eyes, as he turns to look upon your nudity  
To fantasize publishing a poem in the *New Yorker* eviscerating his little need

To set a bell at each intellectual's table setting ringing idea after idea,  
and be the simple-footed help, rushing to say *Yes?*

To disrobe when the agent asks you to  
To find a spot on any wall to stare into  
To develop the ability to leave an entire nation thusly, just by staring  
at a spot on the wall

To say this is my filmdom, The Master's House  
To recall the Settler who from behind his mobile phone said *I'm  
filming you for God*

To recall this sad God, God of the mobile phone camera, God of the  
small black globe and pixelated eye above the blackjack table at  
Harrah's and the metal, toothed pit of Qalandia checkpoint the  
same

To recall the Texan that held the shotgun to your father's chest,  
sending him falling backward, pleading, and the words came to  
him in Farsi

To be jealous of this, his most desperate language  
To lament the fact of your lamentations in English, English being  
your first defeat

To finally admit out loud then *I want to go home*  
To stand outside your grandmother's house  
To know, for example, that in Farsi the present perfect is called the  
relational past, and is used at times to describe a historic event  
whose effect is still relevant today, transcending the past

To say, for example, *Shah dictator bude-ast* translates to *The Shah was  
a dictator*, but more literally to *The Shah is was a dictator*

To have a tense of is-was, the residue of it over the clear bulb of your  
eyes

To walk cemetery after cemetery in these States and nary a gravestone  
reading *Solmaz*

To know no nation will be home until one does  
To do this in order to do the other thing, the wild thing, though  
you've forgotten what it was

*The End of Exile*

As the dead, so I come  
to the city I am of.  
Am without.

To watch play out around me  
as theater —

audience as the dead are audience

to the life that is not mine.  
Is as not  
as never.

Turning down Shiraz's streets  
it turns out to be such

a faraway thing.

A without which  
I have learned to be.

From bed, I hear a man in the alley  
selling something, no longer by mule and holler  
but by bullhorn and jalopy.

How to say what he is selling —

it is no thing  
this language thought worth naming.  
No thing I have used before.

It is his  
life I don't see daily.  
Not theater. Not play.

Though I remain only audience.

It is a thing he must sell daily  
and every day he peddles

this thing: a without which

I cannot name.

Without which is my life.

CAMILLE T. DUNGY

---

*Naming what has risen*

Why not a crocus from this bulb? Why not the purple  
of bees' lust so that, in honey, she might taste something  
good? Under skin, purple is a private taste, closer  
to the blood of her tongue, closer to the blood  
she chokes on when she's gasping, to the clot  
behind her blackened eye. The heated force  
that slammed her shin, that pushed bone  
from the bone, that arched her but did not  
approach caress, is another kind of lust. Spring:  
a madness of grappling. Isn't that what she sees outside  
every window? And inside? Nothing unique going on.

*this beginning may have always meant this end*

coming from a place where we meandered mornings and met quail, scrub jay, mockingbird, i knew coyote, like everyone else, i knew cactus, knew tumbleweed, lichen on the rocks and pill bugs beneath, rattlers sometimes, the soft smell of sage and the ferment of cactus pear. coming from this place, from a place where grass might grow greener on the hillside in winter than in any yard, where, the whole rest of the year, everything i loved, chaparral pea, bottle brush tree, jacaranda, mariposa, pinyon and desert oak, the kumquat in the back garden and wisteria vining the porch, the dry grass whispering long after the last rains, raccoons in and out of the hills, trash hurled by the hottest wind, the dry grass tall now and golden, lawn chairs, eucalyptus, everything, in a place we knew, every thing, we knew, little and large and mine and ours, except horror, all of it, everything could flame up that quickly, could flare and be gone.

PAUL TRAN

---

*Scientific Method*

Of course I chose the terry cloth surrogate. Milkless  
artifice. False idol. Everyone, I'm told, has a mother,  
  
but Master bred me in a laboratory, his colony  
of orphans. Rhesus macaque. *Macaca mulatta*. Old  
World monkeys, my matriarchs ruled the grasslands  
  
and forests long before white men like him weaned  
their whiteness and maleness from our chromosomes,  
  
slashed and burned our home, what they once called  
The Orient. French Indochina. Việt Nam. Master,  
like a good despot, besotted and dumbstruck, dying  
  
to discern the genesis of allegiance, the science of love  
and loss, nature versus nurture, segregated me at birth  
  
from my maker, pelt sopping with placental blood.  
In a chamber where he kept track of me, his pupils  
recorded my every movement, my every utterance,  
  
hoping I might evince to them a part of themselves.  
But I wasn't stupid. I knew famine and emaciation,  
  
and nevertheless I picked that lifeless piece of shit  
because it was soft to hold. Who wouldn't want that?  
Though it couldn't hold me, I clung to the yellow-face  
  
devil as though it was my true mother and I grasped  
the function of motherhood: witness to my suffering,  
  
companion in hell. Unlike infants with wire mothers  
I didn't hurl myself on the floor in terror or tantrum,  
rocking back and forth, colder than a corpse. I had

what Master believed to be a psychological base  
of operations. Emotional attachment. Autonomy.

Everything he denied and did to me, his ceaseless  
cruelty concealed as inquisition, unthinkable until  
it was thought, I endured by keeping for myself

the wisdom he yearned to discover and take credit  
for. Love, like me, is a beast no master can maim,

no dungeon can discipline. Love is at once master  
and dungeon. So don't underestimate me. Simple-  
minded and subservient as I might appear to be,

I gathered more about Master than he did  
about me, which, I guess, is a kind of fidelity

conceived not from fondness but fear magnified  
by fascination. Master made me his terry cloth  
surrogate, his red-clawed god, nursing his id

on my tits, and for that, I pitied him. All this time  
he was the animal. All this time he belonged to me.

SHARON OLDS

---

*Poem Which Talks Back to Itself*

*For Etan Patz*

The parents whose boy went off to school  
that morning — the police may have found someone  
who saw their son, alive, after  
they saw him for the last time. *Step away!*  
Someone who saw that elfin face  
change, at the word “soda.” *Step back!*  
And change again, and change. And down  
the basement steps, down into the earth,  
the stairs down into the underworld.  
*Don't go there. Close your eyes.* Someone  
may know the unbearable — someone  
in custody. O, “custody.”  
A wall of dirt, a wall of stone,  
a bare bulb, like the uterus upside  
down. No Kaddish, no washing of the dead,  
no linen shroud, no company  
through the long night.  
Whatever honor can be kept for him —  
his pure and whole honor is kept  
by his parents, for the rest of the hard  
labor of their lives. All this time,  
they could not die, so they'd be here, in case  
he came back. *Unspeakable.* And now,  
the one taken in for questioning cries out,  
“I don't know why, I don't know why.”  
He will not tell. Is he holding that hour  
to himself. Did he hold that child in his hands,  
39 years ago.  
Vanished. The spirit mattered away.  
And the dear matter — *don't.* The bag,  
the truck. The landfill or the barge, the burial  
at sea — the dispersal, the containment within  
the bounds of the oceans, crested on top and

cragged at the floor where the innards of the planet pour  
up, molten, through fissures — contained  
in the air bound by the atmosphere, the  
clouds of mourning pressing against  
the inner surface of the casing. *Shut  
your mouth. Put down your pen. Drop  
your weapon! Stop! In the name of the law  
and the prophets.* At his birth, the history of the earth began.

### *How It Felt*

Even if I still had the clothes I wore,  
those first twelve years, even if I had  
the clothes I would take off before my mother  
climbed the stairs toward me: the glassy  
Orlon sweater; the cotton dress,  
under its smocking my breasts-to-be  
accordion-folded under the skin of my chest;  
even if I had all the sashes,  
even if I had all the cotton  
underwear, like a secret friend,  
I think I could not get back to how  
it felt. I study the stability  
of the spirit — was it almost I who came back  
out of each punishment,  
back to a self which had been waiting, for me,  
in the cooled-off pile of my clothes? As for the  
condition of being beaten, what  
was it like: going into a barn, the animals  
not in stalls, but biting, and shitting, and  
parts of them on fire? And when my body came out  
the other side, and I checked myself,  
10 fingers, 10 toes,  
and I checked whatever I had where we were  
supposed to have a soul, I hardly dared  
to know what I knew,  
that though I had been taken down,  
again, hammer and tongs, valley  
and range, down to the ground of my being  
and under that ground, it was possible  
that in my essence, at the center of my essence, in some  
tiny chamber my mother could not  
enter — or did not enter — I had not been changed.

SONIA SANCHEZ

---

*Haiku and Tanka for Harriet Tubman*

I

Picture a woman  
riding thunder on  
the legs of slavery ...

2

Picture her kissing  
our spines saying *no* to  
the eyes of slavery ...

3

Picture her rotating  
the earth into a shape  
of lives becoming ...

4

Picture her leaning  
into the eyes of our  
birth clouds ...

5

Picture this woman  
saying *no* to the constant  
*yes* of slavery ...

6

Picture a woman  
jumping rivers her  
legs inhaling moons ...

7

Picture her ripe  
with seasons of  
legs ... running ...

8

Picture her tasting  
the secret corners  
of woods ...

9

Picture her saying:  
*You have within you the strength,  
the patience, and the passion  
to reach for the stars,  
to change the world ...*

10

Imagine her words:  
*Every great dream begins  
with a dreamer ...*

II

Imagine her saying:  
*I freed a thousand slaves,  
could have freed  
a thousand more if they  
only knew they were slaves ...*

I2

Imagine her humming:  
*How many days we got  
fore we taste freedom ...*

I3

Imagine a woman  
asking: *How many workers  
for this freedom quilt ...*

I4

Picture her saying:  
*A live runaway could do  
great harm by going back  
but a dead runaway  
could tell no secrets ...*

15

Picture the daylight  
bringing her to woods  
full of birth moons ...

16

Picture John Brown  
shaking her hands three times saying:  
General Tubman. General Tubman. General Tubman.

17

Picture her words:  
*There's two things I got a  
right to: death or liberty ...*

18

Picture her saying *no*  
to a play called *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:  
*I am the real thing ...*

19

Picture a Black woman:  
could not read or write  
trailing freedom refrains ...

20

Picture her face  
turning southward walking  
down a Southern road ...

21

Picture this woman  
freedom bound ... tasting a  
people's preserved breath ...

22

Picture this woman  
of royalty ... wearing a crown  
of morning air ...

23

Picture her walking,  
running, reviving  
a country's breath ...

24

Picture black voices  
leaving behind  
lost tongues ...

ELIZABETH ACEVEDO

---

*Iron*

And although I am a poet, I am not the bullet;  
I will not heat-search the soft points.

I am not the coroner who will graze her hand  
over naked knees. Who will swish her fingers

in the mouth. Who will flip the body over, her eye a hook  
fishing for government-issued lead.

I am not the sidewalk, which is unsurprised  
as another cheek scrapes harsh against it.

Although I too enjoy soft palms on me;  
enjoy when he rests on my body with a hard breath;  
I have clasped  
this man inside me and released him again and again,  
listening to him die thousands of little deaths.

What is a good metaphor for a woman who loves in a time like this?

I am no scalpel or high thread count sheet. Not a gavel, or hand-  
painted teacup.

I am neither            nor romanced by the streetlamp nor candlelight;  
my hands are not an iron, but look, they're hot, look  
how I place them        in love        on his skin  
and am still able to unwrinkle his spine.

*Atlas*

If you open up any atlas  
and take a look at a map of the world,  
almost every single one of them  
slices the Pacific Ocean in half.  
To the human eye,  
every map centers all the land masses on Earth  
creating the illusion  
that water can handle the butchering  
and be pushed to the edges  
of the world.  
As if the Pacific Ocean isn't the largest body  
living today, beating the loudest heart,  
the reason why land has a pulse in the first place.

The audacity one must have to create a visual so  
violent as to assume that no one comes  
from water so no one will care  
what you do with it  
and yet,  
people came from land,  
are still coming from land,  
and look what was done to them.

When people ask me where I'm from,  
they don't believe me when I say water.  
So instead, I tell them that home is a machete  
and that I belong to places  
that don't belong to themselves anymore,  
broken and butchered places that have made me  
a hyphen of a woman:  
a Samoan-American that carries the weight of both  
colonizer and colonized,  
both blade and blood.

California                      stolen.  
Samoa                              sliced in half                      stolen.

California, nestled on the western coast of the most powerful country on this planet.

Samoa, an island so microscopic on a map, it's no wonder people doubt its existence.

California, a state of emergency away from having the drought rid it of all its water.

Samoa, a state of emergency away from becoming a saltwater cemetery if the sea level doesn't stop rising.

When people ask me where I'm from,  
what they want is to hear me speak of land,  
what they want is to know where I go once I leave here,  
the privilege that comes with assuming that home  
is just a destination, and not the panic.

Not the constant migration that the panic gives birth to.

What is it like? To know that home is something  
that's waiting for you to return to it?

What does it mean to belong to something that isn't sinking?

What does it mean to belong to what is causing the flood?

So many of us come from water  
but when you come from water  
no one believes you.

Colonization keeps laughing.

Global warming is grinning  
at all your grief.

How you mourn the loss of a home  
that isn't even gone yet.

That no one believes you're from.

How everyone is beginning  
to hear more about your island  
but only in the context of  
vacations and honeymoons,

football and military life,  
exotic women exotic fruit exotic beaches  
but never asks about the rest of its body.  
The water.  
The islands breathing in it.  
The reason why they're sinking.  
No one visualizes islands in the Pacific  
as actually being there.  
You explain and explain and clarify  
and correct their incorrect pronunciation  
and explain

until they remember just how vast your ocean is,  
how microscopic your islands look in it,  
how easy it is to miss when looking  
on a map of the world.

Excuses people make  
for why they didn't see it  
before.

SHERWIN BITSUI

---

*From "Dissolve"*

On limbs of slanted light  
painted with my mind's skin color,  
I step upon black braids,  
oiled, drenched, worming  
from last month's orphaned mouth.

Winged with burning —  
I ferry them  
    from my filmed eyes, wheezing.

Scalp blood in my footprints —  
my buckskin pouch filling  
    with photographed sand.

No language but its rind  
    crackling in the past tense.

•

Tearing apart cloud names —  
pierced fog commands:  
douse the inferno's ribs  
with opaque forgetting;  
clip dawn from the book's dusk,  
unfasten the song's empty auditorium  
over a garden of mute foals.

Tearing apart fog names —  
pierced cloud sings:  
let them shriek from their hinges,  
let them slice their gills open  
with flint knives  
and circle their ghosts  
as frog-skinned antelope,  
let them drag their legs over a trail  
anchored to a ladder  
that has soaked up blood  
since land began crawling out of anthills.

•



KAZIM ALI

---

*From "The Voice of Sheila Chandra"*

What represses unhomes in the sound  
Who has made me what is made me  
Is a voice just muscles and shape and  
Breath to phrase a song boats assemble  
At the mouth of the harbor mouth in  
Earth you who wrote an ode to silence  
Never wrote of what is silenced I did  
Seek all resounding caves let the voice  
Be lit all the lanterns in the new world we  
Need the language of stone from string  
To string quiver in the opening the garden  
So beautiful Lucifer dark sun of morning  
No Eden but innocence no expulsion  
But after

•

No more will I listen to other than  
A single note moaned not known  
I do not here think again what place  
Presents itself own moan well eye  
Here body as a battery of the one  
Moment when it is time to open  
Your mouth to plug in I will allow what  
I invented to find its color make  
A shape which neither water nor  
Sky do how do you now in this  
Contained shape go through  
Your life not like a constellation  
Not guessed at intuited or divined  
No name so how do you discern a shape for  
What is often called g-d

•

Vantablack was made for missiles  
Or planes for defense purposes so dark  
No eye could see it some voices are  
Like that no one could hear them it  
Is not good to be lost to be lost is  
More than metaphor for spiritual  
Condition I sit at the terrace overlooking  
The green sea perhaps it is failure  
That ought to be sought the voice  
That fails falls silent Sheila's or  
The body's the blue failed me the sun  
Fails every evening I we you have all  
Failed too everyone who strove all these  
Long years for peace failed

•

August 7 Predawn blue and blue the sound  
Of the sea further away and less violent lights  
On the water fishing boats closer than I  
Imagined no one is awake some animals  
Maybe what I do without knowing in a  
Harrowing world what I do without knowing  
As I listen to the gurgle of water against  
The promontory I feel like I am listening  
To a body how slow and opening a piece  
Of tune where one does not know how  
It will unfold no chord or cadence to tell  
You in sound what the path will be how  
It will happen until it happens I do not want  
To be alone what does it mean anyway when  
Someone says "Muslim"

•

Can she still feel music in her body can she  
Vocalize even without technology of the  
Mouth tongue palate glottis vocal chords  
What is a voice Anish Kapoor granted  
Exclusive right to work with blackest  
Black she now communicates through notes  
And gesture Vantablack made for  
Military purposes like sound also used  
For torture all sounds to wake you vibrate  
Your brain what emerges as an echo from  
Music as torture children on the beach  
Playing god is sound or art or science  
Shit and sex the body's echo what mess  
Is left in the big or the little death

•

Sheila's voice always in the background  
Always disappearing into the music  
Of what surrounds it the way one loses  
Oneself in sex or death or the moment  
Of shitting I got lost in Salman's  
Music he said it was a surrender of  
Ego when he left me behind but really  
It was a surrender of my will words too  
Have god inside but for the prize of  
The body they do not compete can  
Not hold the storm of time cannot  
Hold the line do I touch the ocean  
Inside will my family come to  
My funeral

•

That night we swam the full moon  
Civilized us federated us gave us  
Our nationality we who were lost  
I have now lost what little heritage  
I did have returned to the rude  
Rough world long vowels of  
Morning evening birds scream  
No soft blanket falling to cover  
But a throttling a suffocation  
Of dusk no silence when the self  
Stills the absence of noise is itself  
Torture I cannot sleep tongued loose  
Drones move through a riff by  
A singer without papers

•

August 9 Eleanna takes me out on  
The water Miller exploding the form  
Of the novel itself I see now how Nin  
Wanted to move away from his vociferous  
Singing of the world as material to try  
To construct a music of the way  
The mind works still fed by light on the  
Water a mute noise of engines under  
Water as the boat passes the light  
House and heads out for open sea  
Remembering in Palestine crawling  
Down the hill trying to catch a wifi  
Signal from the settlement untapped  
Improvisation of space

•

At the stone terrace the gardener lingers  
Clipping hedges while I work breeze  
Between us soon I will return I read  
The article about a poet who was killed  
In the street his poems untranslated  
All the artists and writers killed the open  
Space of the sea yesterday Eleanna and I  
Went too far out went almost all the way  
To Marseille we saw the pink-gray sky  
Of wildfire I accepted the waves I found  
In the chapters of the Quran to sing my  
Way through turbulence draw a way  
Through the waves savage wildfire all  
The villages evacuated

•

We woke to the smell of burning air  
A little cool smell of charred refuse  
Colors muted last night the moon  
Came clear nearly blue eyes too  
Painfully large rough on the eyes and  
Impatient but I wanted to look so  
Badly for the meteors the sea  
Crashing against the rocks smoke  
From the fire obscured the sky  
In the morning we rowed across  
The harbor and realized fear of heights  
And fear of depth is the same just one  
You see and one you don't

ELLEN BASS

---

*Marriage*

When you finally, after deep illness, lay  
the length of your body on mine, isn't it  
like the strata of the earth, the pressure  
of time on sand, mud, bits of shell, all  
the years, uncountable wakings, sleepings,  
sleepless nights, fights, ordinary mornings  
talking about nothing, and the brief  
fiery plummets, and the unselfconscious  
silences of animals grazing, the moving  
water, wind, ice that carries the minutes, leaves  
behind minerals that bind the sediment into rock.  
How to bear the weight, with every  
flake of bone pressed in. Then, how to bear when  
the weight is gone, the way a woman  
whose neck has been coiled with brass  
can no longer hold it up alone. Oh love,  
it is balm, but also a seal. It binds us tight  
as the fur of a rabbit to the rabbit.  
When you strip it, grasping the edge  
of the sliced skin, pulling the glossy membranes  
apart, the body is warm and limp. If you could,  
you'd climb inside that wet, slick skin  
and carry it on your back. This is not  
neat and white and lacy like a wedding,  
not the bright effervescence of champagne  
spilling over the throat of the bottle. This visceral  
bloody union that is love, but  
beyond love. Beyond charm and delight  
the way you to yourself are past charm and delight.  
This is the shucked meat of love, the alleys and broken  
glass of love, the petals torn off the branches of love,  
the dizzy hoarse cry, the stubborn hunger.

*I Could Touch It*

When my wife was breaking apart, my son was falling in love.

She lay on the couch with a heated sack of rice on her belly,  
sometimes dozing, sometimes staring out the window at the olive tree

as it broke into tiny white blossoms, as it swelled into bitter black fruit.

At first, I wanted to spare him.

I wished he was still farming up north, tucking bulbs of green onions  
into their beds and watering the lettuce,  
his hands gritty, his head haloed in a straw hat.

But as the months deepened, I grew selfish.

I wanted him here with his new love.

When I passed the open bathroom door, I wanted  
to see them brushing their teeth,

one perched on the toilet lid, one on the side of the tub,  
laughing and talking through their foamy mouths,  
toothbrushes rattling against their teeth.

Like sage gives its scent when you crush it. Like stone  
is hard. They were happy and I could touch it.

KWAME DAWES

---

*Ode to the Clothesline*

*After Alfred Stieglitz*

Not so much the missing of things  
but the nostalgia of colors, their music,  
  
the ordinary revelation of a family's life  
caught in the flop and dance, a jig,  
  
if you will, of their layers, outer and inner skins,  
the secret things so close to the body,  
  
the taste, the salt and sweet of blood, and shit,  
and piss, and then, rinsed and scrubbed, leaving  
  
beneath the astringent scent of soap  
a musky marker of self for strays  
  
to smell or imagine as they walk  
past the parade of the living  
  
on taut lines, propped by poles  
with nails for a hook, above  
  
the startling green of grass and hedge,  
the barefaced concrete steps,  
  
the sky, inscrutable as a wall;  
this is what one carries as a kind  
  
of sweetness — the labor of brown hands,  
elbow-deep in suds, the rituals  
  
of cleansing, the humility of a darning  
or a frayed crotch, the dignity

of cleanliness, the democracy of truth,  
the way we lived our lives in the open.

*Vagrants and Loiterers*

*South Carolina, c.1950*

You got that clean waistcoat,  
the bright white of a well-tailored  
shirt, you got those loose-as-sacks  
slacks and some spit-polished shoes,  
and you know, whether you are looking  
like money, or about to take a stroll,  
to tilt that hat like you own  
the world; yeah, smoke your pipe,  
roll your tobacco, and hold loose  
as authority, your muscles, lithe  
and hard; and every so often, when  
you feel the urge, you reach into the waist  
pocket and pull out that watch on its  
chain, then look in the sky and say  
*Gonna be a cold one when it come,*  
like God gave you that fancy clock  
to tell the future. These are the easy  
boys of the goodly South; waiting for  
what is out of frame to happen:  
the sheriff with his questions, the  
paddy wagon, the chain gang, the weight  
of the world. Waiting, with such delicate  
dignity, fickle as the seasonal sky.

**BLACK GIRL MAGIC**



*On Black Girl Magic*

My sister-in-law, who I call my Sister, is what most would like to call a “firecracker.” She married my youngest brother, born to a father who was married to my mother lifetimes before, and we’ve been kin ever since. Whatever she says, it’s usually with a snap of her eyes, a cut of her lips, or a finger wag. It is not a performance of blackness—she is a Black woman. And these movements are hers, just like they were her mother’s. Just like they were her grandmother’s. A tradition of survival. She’s learned how to get her point across neatly: a knife in a drawer full of spoons. She’s always accused of being too “rough” on people. Which is where our sisterhood thickens, molasses strong.

I too have lived on that block, in that house, first door to the right and you could find me: Angry Black Girl/Strong Black Girl/Black Girl You Call On When You Need to Get Things Done.

My Sister, T, is too this woman; unapologetically, listening to Beyoncé with her three Black daughters and her eldest Black son. Praying faithfully for forgiveness, because she’s begun to believe that she is hard to love. T, who snaps her eyes when pointing across the room, need not pray for forgiveness, I say. But it’s hard to believe someone like me, especially when the world is fixed on telling her how strong and loud and wrong she is. I introduce to her June Jordan’s mantra “*I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name*” and we weep a little between laughter. There are these moments that I hold close to my chest. The phone glued to my ear as we cackle between shit talk and ferocious laughter.

Where in the world do they love a Black Girl for being herself? We are primed to bear witness to Kardashians and Jenners pretending to be Black women with their cornrows and Black boyfriends, their acrylics beaming under the hot light, the world their stage. No one asks them to settle down their finger snaps or tone down their hair color. No one judges them for their sexual partners or the sex tapes that leak. Their children are born, revered as beautiful, receive rightfully the world’s love. They are offered modeling contracts and makeup deals like candy, as we sit by idly, college tuition debt growing, as our children die from lead poisoning in Flint or with a

handful of skittles in Florida or because of disobedience in Maryland or sleeping quietly on the family couch in Michigan.

Where in the world do they love a Black Girl for being herself? Where a twenty-seven-year-old activist can die after her second child is born due to cardiac arrest. Her weight and height and eating patterns are blamed for her health, never the stress it must've caused her heart to watch her father ripped from this earth, on repeat in hi-def display; a reminder that Black death is the only thing certain and ours. Her name, so closely linked to the ghost of her father, Erica; a chant no one will sing until she is gone. My sister, T, is not my blood sister. But she is mine. She is me. We are one and the same when we love how we love. Our teeth bared and gleaming because we've grown to understand "I love you" as a weapon held against our throats. We retreat into ourselves and fight others who are trying to kill us: family members, friends, neighbors, and supervisors. We understand the small deaths (TV shows where all you see are jokes about us; weaves overpriced and deemed out of style until a hashtag with Gigi, the newest trendsetter, mimics a Black girl from IG; or the men we love disposing of us with statements of "too much" falling from their open palms) can culminate into an ultimate death. A death where there is no room for the love of ourselves, beginning the journey of void-filling through addiction, dangerous surgeries, and loneliness. Though we oftentimes find ourselves unfolding to protect those same hands during vigils, protests, and rallies. This is what Black women have been taught to do. Love and show up for what love has survived. And so, we do. Let those that look like us take from us, until there is nothing left. We understand we are the backbone despite the backhand. And we love with the harshest tongues, believing that the survivors of such a spectacle are here to stay. We share intimacy this way, in hopes that if you see combat deserving of affection, maybe you too will swing in the protection of our names.

But this is not a fail-proof plan. This is not the blueprint for home. For many years, I believed it was our only heirloom. To speak as hard as you love. I spoke to T today. I told her about the importance of apologizing. She sighs and cuts me off: "I meant it, Sister, I'm not sorry." And I hear me ten years before, angry and seething and righteous. I reply: "It's not about being right. You are not apologizing for what you believe to be true, you are apologizing for your hand in hurting someone else."

We hang up soon after and I am spinning because while I ask my Sister to do things I wasn't capable of doing at her age, I wish someone had told me about the power of forgiving myself. I believe we have the right to be snarky and witty and throw shade, if we choose. We owe ourselves the right to speak through a world that's tried to mute us all of our lives. But I know the difference between intention and impact. We've seen this before. And so we lash out, because we know our very lives are in danger. Zora Neale Hurston wrote, "If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it." Eleanor Bumpers, Korryn Gaines, Tanisha Anderson, Yvette Smith, Miriam Carey, Malissa Williams, Sandra Bland, and Rekia Boyd: killed for standing up, sitting down, speaking back, protecting their children, or just being Black women.

I believe with my whole self: ain't no room for a Black woman's voice to be policed. Our worth is always up for debate. My Sister is one of the kindest women I know. I have witnessed her crumble to the ground in fear for her child and reach into her deepest pocket for grace when dealing with the gracelessness. Black women are often asked to lead (silently) and be the symbol of civility while everyone else plays from a different rulebook, mocking their existence the entire time. T is the woman I dreamed of becoming. The way she rides for my little brother—their marriage is a fortress of forgiveness and love, the way it stretches until there is room for all of their children and their dreams. T sends me a text about being hard to love and I want to cry. Such a folktale: being hard to love. What a fable we've grown to believe as the rule. T is so easy to love. We are so easy to love. Our resilience and expansion is proof that magic exists. We are magic. We are Black girls grown into women, growing people, and this collection of Black Girl Magicians are mantras, prayers, and promises of our survival. The anthology this portfolio comes from, *The BreakBeat Poets Volume 2: Black Girl Magic*, edited by myself, Idrissa Simmonds, and Jamila Woods, is a literary but breathing example of our great-great-great-great grandmothers' triumphant and explosive war cry.

KIANDRA JIMENEZ

---

*Halcyon Kitchen*

Granma cautioned in a kitchen off Century and Hoover:  
Never throw your hair away. Burn it. Till yellow  
cornbread bakes and greens release pot liquor,  
her garnet-polished fingers unraveled each cornrow.

Never throw your hair away, burn it till yellow  
flames flick up and turn orange, blue. Overhead,  
her garnet-polished fingers unraveled each cornrow,  
wrestling. I reminisce, standing over her deathbed.

Rain picks up and turns ocher, blue. Unsaid  
were simple things. Oxtail stew and yam  
recipes I recollect, standing over her deathbed.  
She smoked Mores leaning in the kitchen doorjamb,

when simple things — oxtail stew and yam  
recipes — were not measured nor written. Cooking while  
she smoked Mores leaning in the kitchen doorjamb,  
her left hand in the profound curve of her hip. She'd say, Chile,

ma recipes are not measured nor written. Cooking while  
I sat alongside the stove waiting for the hot comb, meantime  
her left hand in the profound curve of her hip, she'd say, Chile,  
I may be dead and gone, but you mark my words. Sometimes

I sat alongside the stove waiting for the hot comb, meantime  
I loved watching her smoking, cooking, talking with More fingers,  
I may be dead and gone, but you'll mark my words. This time,  
she is quiet. I hold maroon-polished hands as her soul lifts, waits, lingers.

I loved watching her smoking, cooking, talking with More fingers.  
Halcyon rain picks up, soaks me blue. Nothing unsaid.  
She is quiet. I hold maroon-polished hands as her soul lifts, waits,  
lingers,  
restful. I'm remembering — standing over her deathbed.

*Cardi B Tells Me about Myself*

Dear Frustrated in Flatbush,  
Gurl, just go on ahead then.  
You waiting for your Daddy  
to give you the thumbs up?  
Do what you like.  
Do what makes your ass happy.  
They gon' call you all makes  
and sizes of hoe anyway.  
That's how this thing been set up.  
But just cuz they name a thing a thing,  
don't mean it ain't still named God  
in some other language.

Your fortune cookie say you poppin'.  
You a full spread of good shit.  
Your rotten wisdom tooth.  
Your pockmarked shoulders.  
Those eyelashes ain't come here  
to talk about the weather.  
You the hottest day in July  
and every fire hydrant in this city  
is written out to your name.

Whatchu dead fish for?  
Whatchu call that stroke?  
Drowning? Baptism?  
Gurl, you betta lick that  
collection plate clean  
and stop pretending you just  
got off the first canoe from Heaven.  
You ain't nothin but  
a big bowl of sweat rice.  
You wring your left thigh,  
they call you Vintage JuJu.  
They like, "This some kind of nightmare?"

And it's just you, smoking a blunt in the dark,  
cackling like rain. Like your grandmama  
at her ain't-shit husband's funeral.  
Bitch, you been a woman.  
This ain't new skin.  
Slap some Lycra on it  
and call yourself a predicament.  
You ain't just somebody's meal plan.  
Pull back your hair and eat.

And look at this muhfukka,  
sittin across the table,  
lookin like he wanna bite you.  
Tonight is tonight and tomorrow  
might be somewhere else,  
serenading some lesser bitch.  
Throw his ass a bone and  
stop worrying about your credit score.

You stay banging your tambourine  
to the wrong hymnal.  
I'm sure they had names  
and inescapable mouths but  
what your ex gotta do with this?  
Why you still got his body in your linen closet?  
That's nasty. Bitch, keep your house clean.  
You crying over spilled dick. Gurl buh-bye.  
Getchu a free refill.

You too black for indie film housewife.  
You too naked for conversation like this.  
Too much soft brutality,  
too much bathtub depression.  
Why you always got your neck swung open?  
Free throat don't pay for your boy's sneakers.

You already know I don't even sigh for free.  
Shit, I stroke a shallow strobe light,  
inchworm down 4 feet of greasy pole,  
and I still don't feel like any less than a miracle.

ROYA MARSH

---

*Ode to Fetty Wap (written after strip club)*

*A reading from the book of Willie Maxwell 679:1738*

... then Rap Gawd formed a man  
from the dust of the auto-tune  
&breathed into his nostrils  
the breath of Rémy Martin  
the man became Fetty Wap.

Rap Gawd saw fit to  
make Fetty a counterpart.  
so he caused the man to fall into a deep sleep;  
while he was sleeping  
he took one of the man's eyes  
then closed up the place with flesh.  
then the Rap Gawd made a woman  
from the eye he had taken out of the man.

the creation story of Fetty  
the first trap rapper to make a song  
I might play at my wedding.

there's a choir of church mothers  
smiling down on the brown boy  
that sings of a woman's worth  
in a culture destined to nullify it.

do you know how long  
sisters been waiting  
for a brother  
to willingly let us hit the bando?  
(after patiently explaining what the fuck that means.)

*l'union fait la force*  
your music emblematic of the motto of Haiti  
unity makes strength

as we scream **SQUAAADDD!**  
the weight of that bass  
hits hard  
like Gawd's tears  
landing on glow in the dark floors  
'cause Gawd does not just "cry"  
He makes it rain  
on a crowd of women  
in heels higher than most GPAs  
dancing their way through  
nursing school  
&out of some deadbeat's  
roach-filled i bedroom.

the fellas  
big brother  
arm-wrapped shoulders  
singing off-key  
about Ki's &pies  
and other shit  
they have no real idea about.

the only song in the club  
that allows a hetero male  
to gaze into the eyes  
of another  
[suspected] hetero male  
and/or stranger  
singing his fucking heart out.

make him more mathematician  
than murderer  
spewing lyrics repping  
the urban district's finest cognac  
this

is a black man's  
"Sweet Caroline"  
oh, oh, oh!

Fetty, you got me —  
I, too, see heaven  
peering through  
the pearly-gated smile  
of that gap-toothed princess  
in your video.

I, too, have a glock in my rari —  
in the form of a master's degree  
but don't get it twisted  
this summa cum laude blow  
anytime a motherfucker think  
they know me!  
&my trap look a lot  
like a dimly-lit cafe  
with semicold  
red stripes  
a microphone  
a couple judges  
but I'll be damned  
if anyone tell me  
I ain't a **queen of this shit.**

&then I blink  
&the bass subsides  
&the song fades  
into another brother  
caring more  
about his golden grill  
than making the best  
of a family business.

&she picks up her ass  
her purse  
slides off the pole  
disappears  
into a mixture  
of low-budget smoke machines  
&catcalling men

wedding bands tangled  
in the drawstring of their sweats

&another Saturday twerks  
itself into the crisp breeze of Sunday morning  
&the church mothers glance over the room  
covered in government-issued confetti  
&Gawd smiles  
as they bellow in unison

“I want you to be mine again!”

BIANCA LYNNE SPRIGGS

---

*What Women Are Made Of*

*There are many kinds of open.*

—Audre Lorde

We are all ventricle, spine, lung, larynx, and gut.  
Clavicle and nape, what lies forked in an open palm;

we are follicle and temple. We are ankle, arch,  
sole. Pore and rib, pelvis and root

and tongue. We are wishbone and gland and molar  
and lobe. We are hippocampus and exposed nerve

and cornea. Areola, pigment, melanin, and nails.  
Varicose. Cellulite. Divining rod. Sinew and tissue,

saliva and silt. We are blood and salt, clay and aquifer.  
We are breath and flame and stratosphere. Palimpsest

and bibelot and cloisonné fine lines. Marigold, hydrangea,  
and dimple. Nightlight, satellite, and stubble. We are

pinnacle, plummet, dark circles, and dark matter.  
A constellation of freckles and specters and miracles

and lashes. Both bent and erect, we are all give  
and give back. We are volta and girder. Make an incision

in our nectary and Painted Ladies sail forth, riding the back  
of a warm wind, plumed with love and things like love.

Crack us down to the marrow, and you may find us full  
of cicada husks and sand dollars and salted maple taffy

weary of welding together our daydreams. All sweet tea,  
razor blades, carbon, and patchwork quilts of *Good God!*

and *Lord have mercy!* Our hands remember how to turn  
the earth before we do. Our intestinal fortitude? Cumulonimbus

streaked with saffron light. Our foundation? Not in our limbs  
or hips; this comes first as an amen, a hallelujah, a suckling,

swaddled psalm sung at the cosmos's breast. You want to  
know what women are made of? Open wide and find out.

ELIZABETH ACEVEDO

---

*You Mean You Don't Weep at the Nail Salon?*

it's the being alone, i think, the emails but not voices. dominicans be funny, the way we love to touch — every greeting a cheek kiss, a shoulder clap, a loud.

it gots to be my period, the bloating, the insurance commercial where the husband comes home after being deployed, the last of the gouda gone, the rejection letter, the acceptance letter, the empty inbox.

a dream, these days. to work at home is a privilege, i remind myself.

spend the whole fucking day flirting with screens. window, tv, computer, phone: eyes & eyes & eyes. the keys clicking, the ding of the microwave, the broadway soundtrack i share wine with in the evenings.

these are the answers, you feel me? & the impetus. the why. of when the manicurist holds my hand, making my nails a lilliputian abstract,

i close my fingers around hers, disrupting the polish, too tight i know then, too tight to hold a stranger, but she squeezes back & doesn't let go & so finally i can.

*The Etymology of "CHUUCH!"*

chuuch/church

[pronounced without the *r*. the *r* is the hump on our backs. too much to weigh/wait. imagine replacing the *r* with *u*. the cupping is softer. all the things it holds. it often sounds like *ahh*. round and complete. it all comes together. like home.]

1. from the renowned *amen!* meaning *let it be*. or *so it is*. or so may have it. and take into agreement. this the stamp. the let it be said and sold. the solidarity screaming from the stem of our spouts. this is the yes.
2. used in positions of *incognegro*. the screech beyond the neverlands of our blocks. posted and protecting. remember the code. often known as *i peep game*. or the never ending *i'm on it, bro*. closing the deal. the celebration of *i see you*. welcome to my memory for another day. let the house of our bodies be grateful. for our sacrifices have not killed us. yet.
3. said like a vaccine. the awkwardness dancing on your lip before your words fall and ruin the show. this can also be the broken promise. the text you know you won't reply to. the person you drag your heart for with no supplies left to clean. this is sometimes the last stake. the call of *i don't understand, but imma figure this shit out*. the choir is singing and you can't understand anything sang. you sing. for the house is still bouncing. ace boom cooling.
4. this is not to be confused with *sending off*. it's the most honest thing we are unsure of. for every house is not covered. so we cover our prayer with a *this is it. this is real* and our lives. we do not *agree* to this condition of our well-being. blast and break our cinder blocks like tambourines. we weave the stories together. thank and talk through our teeth. for *we know. we understand*. we light the sky. shake up with god and find the move. keep the key. keep it pushing.

JUSTICE AMEER

---

*(After God Herself)*

Adam ate an apple  
it got stuck in his throat  
and they called him Eve  
the progenitor  
the creator of all things  
the mother of strength  
and fortitude  
and sadness  
Adam ate an apple  
choked on it so hard  
a rib popped out of his chest  
and they called it Eve  
the progenitor  
the creator of all things  
the mother of strength and fortitude  
and sadness  
it takes the hacking of a body  
to make a woman  
Adam hacking up a piece of his body  
it was just a piece of fruit  
they called me fruit once too  
they called me fruity  
before they called me flaming  
before they called me faggot  
before they called me woman  
i thought i would have  
to hack this body into pieces  
woman, a name stuck in my throat  
right under the apple Adam tried to eat  
choked on it for years  
waited for my ribs to pop out  
my chest to explode  
for my Eve to be created  
from the fruit i couldn't swallow  
they called me fruit once

until they called me woman  
and then they just called me fruitless  
as if it took a womb to be  
progenitor  
creator  
mother of all things  
strength and fortitude and sadness  
they reckon God looked  
at the image of herself  
and called it Adam  
they still don't call me woman  
they still don't birth me Eve  
even though they cast me out  
my throat shrunken close  
with the fruit still stuck in it  
like Adam  
before they called him Eve  
and suddenly i am a stranger  
to Eden  
i am a stranger to this body  
as if it hadn't always been mine  
i reckon God looked  
at the image of herself  
and called it me  
but i don't know if that  
was before or after the apple  
before or after Adam choked  
which came first  
the progenitor or the mother  
the apple or the rib  
the strength or the sadness  
this body was God's original creation  
but they called it sin  
they called it Adam  
I reckon God looked

at the image of herself  
and called Adam Eve  
after she choked on his name  
some fruit that bloomed  
in everyone else's throat  
but she could never quite swallow  
the fall of man was an apple  
hacked up from a fruitless body  
a woman learning what evil was  
like a man forcing his name upon you  
the fall of man was a rib  
being torn from a chest  
and men calling that violence holy  
naming a woman based only  
on the body parts she's made of  
the fall of man  
was the beginning of Eve  
Eve casting out Adam's name  
Eve discovering who she was  
the progenitor  
the creator of all things  
the mother of strength  
and fortitude  
and sadness  
the fall of man  
was Eve becoming a woman  
with or without Eden's approval  
and now  
every time someone  
tries to call her Adam  
tries to force the apple  
of his name down her throat  
she laughs  
she swallows

she looks at God herself  
and she smiles

RAYCH JACKSON

---

*A sestina for a black girl who does not know how to braid hair*

Your hands have no more worth than tree stumps at harvest.  
Don't sit on my porch while I make myself useful.  
Braid secrets in scalps on summer days for my sisters.  
Secure every strand of gossip with tight rubber bands of value.  
What possessed you to ever grow your nails so long?  
How can you have history without braids?

A black girl is happiest when rooted to the scalp are braids.  
She dances with them whipping down her back like corn in winds  
of harvest.  
Braiding forces our reunions to be like the shifts your mothers work,  
long.  
I find that being surrounded by only your own is more useful.  
Gives our mixed blood more value.  
Solidifies your place with your race, with your sisters.

Your block is a layered cake of your sisters.  
Force your lips quiet and sweet and they'll speak when they need to  
practice braids.  
Your hair length is the only part of you that holds value.  
The tallest crop is worshipped at harvest.  
So many little hands in your head. You are finally useful.  
Your hair is yours, your hair is theirs, your hair is, for a black girl, long.

Tender-headed ass won't last 'round here long.  
Cut your nails and use your fists to protect yourself against your  
sisters.  
Somehow mold those hands useful.  
Your hair won't get pulled in fights if they are in braids.  
Beat out the weak parts of the crops during harvest.  
When they are limp and without soul they have value.

If you won't braid or defend yourself what is your value?  
Sitting on the porch until dark sweeps in needing to be invited,  
you'll be needing long.

When the crop is already used what is its worth after harvest?  
You'll learn that you can't ever trust those quick to call themselves  
your sisters.

They yearn for the gold that is your braids.  
You hold on your shoulders a coveted item that is useful.

Your presence will someday become useful.  
One day the rest of your body will stagger under the weight of its  
value.

Until then, sit in silence in the front with your scalp on fire from  
the braids.

I promise you won't need anyone too long.  
One day you will love yourself on your own, without the validation  
of sisters.

No longer a stump wailing for affection at harvest.

ARACELIS GIRMAJ

---

*sister was the wolf*

sister was the wolf  
& could cross easily through

the mountain dark to den  
keen & quivered with

the muscular siege of slit purse  
purple with hours

purse purple with birthwork  
her sight both inward-

& outward-lit  
on what small sparkle of pyrite

in the silt or the thick smell of her own  
wilderness opening shit & hair & blood

each little birth  
an astonishment of form

inside its own tiny veil  
licked toward the air of this Other Side

[*Live!*]

then that sound  
from the hospital's infant table

after what seemed like years  
of silence a mew

which held inside it

all the voices of

this dream & other animals  
trying to begin

IDRISSA SIMMONDS

---

*Flight*

I call to ask my mother the name of the street where we bought the suitcases when we left Brooklyn. A better question would have been how did it feel to be sliced from the rib of Pine and Loring and sent, like a kite, up North. Or tell me what your mother said to you in her grand rear room the night we left, seated on the edge of her bed in her nightgown, muted in the low light. So many bellies in the house. Cacophony of kreyol and Brooklyn buk and sweet sweat across the walls. Did she tell you to follow your husband. Did she tell you anything about us. How, above all, you should keep us anchored to here, where the distance between comfort and safety is measurable by the length of the hallway, the distance from one room to the next. The rooms, like capsules, each with its own medicine for Black kids. Or, tell me what you wore on the plane ride. I only remember what I wore: stockings and Mary Janes and the pink knit pleated skirt. I did not remember this was your first time flying, a grown woman over thirty, and you had never seen how small the world looked beneath your feet.

**SNOW CITY ARTS**



*Introduction*

Snow City Arts provides one-on-one instruction in the visual arts, creative writing, music, theater, and media arts to pediatric patients at four Chicagoland hospitals. Over the last twenty years, we have taught sixteen thousand students and have led more than fifty thousand art workshops.

When a Snow City Arts teaching artist knocks on a door and is invited into a potential student's hospital room, the teaching artist needs to find the right catalyst as soon as they can. They never know how much time they are going to have with a student, so they jump right in, working under the philosophy that in art a student learns best by doing, working in "yes... and" relationships with the teaching artist. No matter what form of art inspires the student, whether it be painting, photography, music, film, or theater, they are exposed to a variety of art-making materials, learning basic to more advanced techniques and practices through studio-based pedagogy.

Students often do their work through their discomforts and pains, anxieties and exhaustions. Whatever the media, we are consistently amazed at the artworks born out of the chaos and discomfort of the students' circumstances. That said, we consider the art and poetry not as the work of the "sick" but as the work of serious artistic explorers and apprentices, novices and experts. In this small portfolio, we have paired poems with visual art. The conversation created between these two mediums symbolizes the multitude of conversations between teaching artist and student artist that have been, and continue to be, the impetuses for the now tens of thousands of art-making encounters we have had the pleasure of facilitating since 1998, when the first teaching artist—a poet—stepped into a room at Rush University Children's Hospital and asked, "Would you like to make some art with me?"



*Free*, by Jaiden, age ten.

FRANCISCO

---

*From “Burglar’s Got Your Tongue”*

Homer doesn’t speak.

He can speak, occasionally doing so in his sleep,  
but he doesn’t with intent.

Homer’s therapist, after diagnosing him with “elective mutism,”  
recommended he be enrolled in music and learn an instrument.

Homer’s parents were excited for their son to learn an instrument.  
They romanticized the notion of their inexplicably mute son being  
a musical genius

communicating not through words, but the soul.

In reality, he was a cacophonous mess and their new weekend alarm  
clock.

Homer, a fan of the trumpet and annoying his parents, was often  
asked to practice outside.

This suited him just fine ...

—*Age twenty*



*Flowerheart Red*, by Rin, age sixteen.

SHANI

---

*The Love*

*After “[Love is a purple angel]” by Hoa Nguyen*

The heart  
is a skinny  
piece of paper.  
Half purple. Half  
pink.  
With 2 googly  
eyes that shake.  
With a glittery mouth  
that’s the color of a  
rainbow.  
With 2 wavy arms  
and 2 wavy legs  
wiggling everywhere.  
With curly hair  
as curly as a  
chair.  
This heart  
is the heart  
of somebody in love.

— *Age eleven*



*Monkionworbutterfly*, by Jamari, age eleven.

LEONEL

---

*Animals with Feelings*

Happiness is a blue fish eating

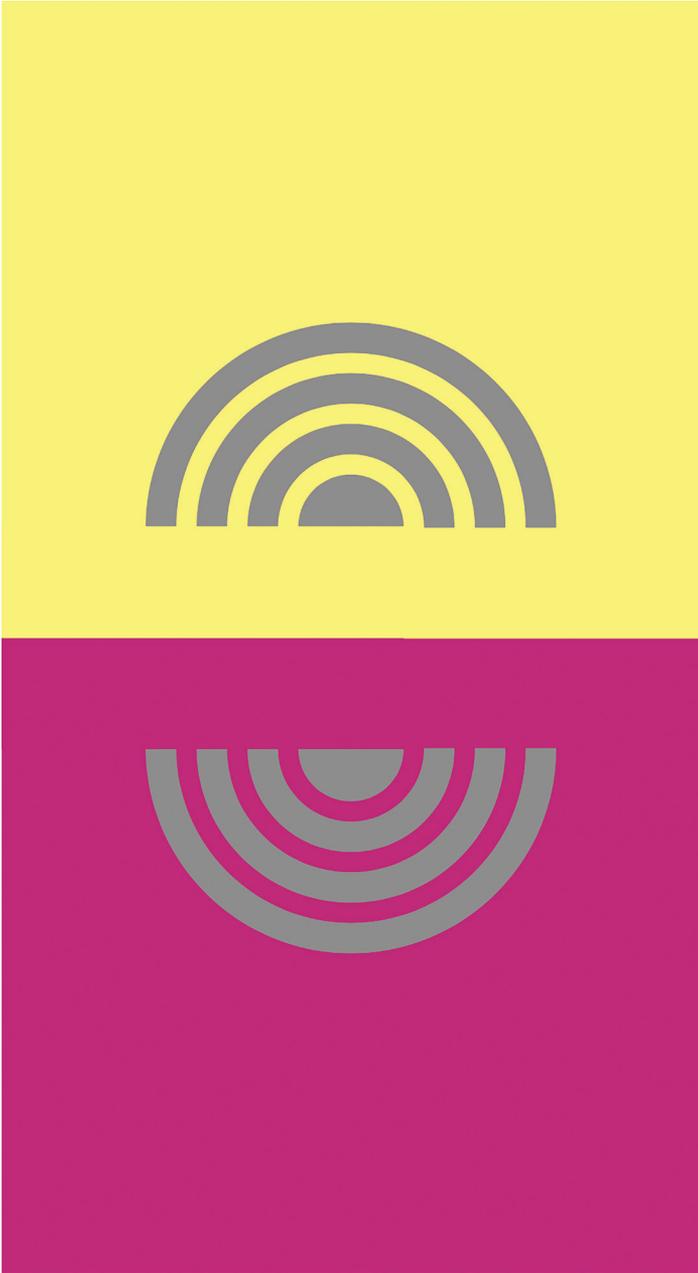
Sadness is an orange turtle trapped in a fish tank

Anger is a yellow lion hunting animals to eat

Kindness is a red snake sharing food

Trust is a gray tiger telling the truth

—Age nine



*Sunrise*, by Gabriella, age twenty.

MONTARIUS

---

*I Can't Stand Watches*

I don't understand how watches tell time — I think time is tricky  
I can't stop it and it doesn't stop for no one; therefore, time is tricky  
I never knew anything is infinite  
I figured out that one thing was: *time*: it tricky  
every second that passes is a new one, is it the future  
or the past ... I could never figure it out ... time is tricky  
to review and view things are completely different  
to view is present to review is past that's what I don't get, time is  
tricky  
past is gone present is now future is present  
that makes Montarius wonder why time is tricky

— *Age eighteen*

## CONTRIBUTORS

---

ELIZABETH ACEVEDO\* is the daughter of Dominican immigrants. She is a National Poetry Slam Champion. *The Poet X* (HarperCollins, 2018) is her debut novel.

KAZIM ALI's most recent collection of poetry is *Inquisition* (Wesleyan University Press, 2018) and his most recent prose book is *Silver Road: Essays, Maps & Calligraphies* (Tupelo Press, 2018).

JUSTICE AMEER\* is a Black poet and organizer based in Providence, Rhode Island. Xe is a Pink Door fellow and one of the inaugural Feminine Empowerment Movement (FEM) Slam Champions.

ELLEN BASS'S\* most recent book is *Like a Beggar* (Copper Canyon Press, 2014). A chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, she teaches in Pacific University's MFA program.

SHERWIN BITSUI\* (Diné) is the author of *Flood Song* (Copper Canyon Press, 2009) and *Shapeshift* (University of Arizona Press, 2003). He teaches at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

MAHOGANY L. BROWNE is coeditor of *The BreakBeat Poets Volume 2: Black Girl Magic* (Haymarket Books, 2018) and author of *Black Girl Magic* (Roaring Brook Press, 2018) and *Redbone* (Willow Books, 2015).

SARAH BROWNING is author of *Killing Summer* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2017), cofounder and executive director of Split This Rock, and associate fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies.

KWAME DAWES is the author of twenty-one books of poetry, most recently *City of Bones: A Testament* (Northwestern University Press, 2017), and is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

CAMILLE T. DUNGY's most recent books are *Trophic Cascade* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017) and *Guidebook to Relative Strangers: Journeys into Race, Motherhood, and History* (W.W. Norton, 2017).

ERIC ELSHTAIN\* has worked as a teaching artist for Snow City Arts since 2005. He edits Beard of Bees Press and his poetry book is *This Thin Memory A-ha* (Verge Books, 2014).

FRANCISCO'S\* piece is an excerpt from a much longer story that is still a work-in-progress.

GABRIELLA'S\* piece is inspired by the work of Josef Albers.

ARACELIS GIRMAY is the author of the poetry collections *The Black Maria* (2016) and *Kingdom Animalia* (2011), both from BOA Editions, as well as *Teeth* (Curbstone Press, 2007).

EBONI HOGAN\* is the 2012 Women of the World Poetry Slam Champion and her plays have been featured at the National Black Theater, the Living Theater, and elsewhere.

RAYCH JACKSON\* currently teaches fourth grade in the Chicago Public School system. She is the 2017 NUPIC Champion and is working on her debut collection of poems.

JAIDEN\* participated in a project called Positive Language that uses ASL and photography.

JAMARI\* invented a new animal using nineteenth-century lithographs to make the collage that appears in this issue.

KIANDRA JIMENEZ\* holds an MFA from Antioch University. She teaches poetry and fiction at Yavapai College, and splits her heart between poems and gardening.

ILYA KAMINSKY is the author of *Deaf Republic* (Graywolf Press, 2019) and *Dancing in Odessa* (Tupelo Press, 2004), and is coeditor of the *Ecco Anthology of International Poetry* (Ecco Press, 2010).

E'MON LAUREN\* was named Chicago's first Youth Poet Laureate and uses poetry and playwriting to explore a philosophy of hood womanism. Her poem in the issue is from her first chapbook, *Commando* (Haymarket Books, 2017).

LEONEL\* was practicing his knowledge of metaphor in his poem.

ROYA MARSH\* is the poet in residence with Urban Word NYC and works feverishly toward LGBTQIA justice and dismantling white supremacy.

MONTARIUS\* was imitating Urdu ghazals in his poem in this issue.

SHARON OLDS is, most recently, the author of *Odes* (Knopf, 2016) and *Stag's Leap* (Knopf, 2012), for which she received the Pulitzer Prize and the T.S. Eliot Prize.

RIN\* was working on silkscreen in their piece in this issue.

SONIA SANCHEZ\* is one of the most important writers of the Black Arts Movement. The author of sixteen books, she has received the Robert Frost Medal and the Robert Creeley Award.

SHANI'S\* poem in this issue was influenced by the playful comparisons in Hoa Nguyen's poem.

SOLMAZ SHARIF is the author of *Look* (Graywolf Press, 2016). She is a lecturer at Stanford University.

TERISA SIAGATONU\* is an award-winning poet, arts educator, and community organizer born and rooted in the Bay Area.

IDRISSA SIMMONDS\* is a poet, essayist, and fiction writer at work on her first novel.

BIANCA LYNNE SPRIGGS\* is the author of *Call Her by Her Name* (Northwestern University Press, 2016) and *The Galaxy Is a Dance Floor* (Argos Books, 2016).

PAUL TRAN\* is the first Asian American since 1993 to win the Nuyorican Poets Café Grand Slam. Their work appears or is forthcoming in the *New Yorker* and elsewhere.

JAVIER ZAMORA recently received a Lannan Foundation fellowship. His first book is *Unaccompanied* (Copper Canyon Press, 2017).

\* First appearance in *Poetry*.

# POETRY FOUNDATION APRIL FEATURES



<b>POETRY PODCASTS</b>	<p><b>POETRY MAGAZINE PODCAST</b> Poetry editors <b>Don Share</b> and <b>Lindsay Garbutt</b> talk to contributors and share their poem selections from this issue with listeners.</p> <p><b>POETRY OFF THE SHELF</b> Listen to Poetry Off the Shelf's <i>A Change of World</i>, our six-part special series devoted to the intersections between poetry and the women's movement.</p> <p><b>POETRY NOW</b> April's four-minute episodes feature new poems by <b>Diana Arterian, Randall Horton, Prageeta Sharma, Roberto Harrison, and Feliz Lucia Molina</b>. Produced in partnership with the WFMT Radio Network.</p> <p>Podcasts are available free from the iTunes store and on <a href="http://poetryfoundation.org">poetryfoundation.org</a>.</p>
<b>HARRIET BLOG</b>	To celebrate National Poetry Month, <i>Harriet</i> will publish a new essay each day by previously featured bloggers.
<b>POETRY FOUNDATION .ORG</b>	Find essays, interviews, and a new animated series of contemporary poems retold as short films for all ages created in partnership with <b>Motionpoems</b> . And whether you are a teacher, student, parent, or autodidact, check out our new <b>Learn Area</b> .
<b>EVENTS</b>	<p>Plan your trip to Chicago to see some of our April events!</p> <p><i>Poetry off the Shelf</i> <b>DAVID BIESPIEL, WENDY WILLIS &amp; ELIZABETH TAYLOR</b> Thursday, April 5, 7:00 PM Poetry Foundation</p> <p><i>Poetry &amp; Music</i> <b>KAY RYAN &amp; THE APOLLO CHORUS SALON CONCERT &amp; CONVERSATION</b> Thursday, April 12, 7:00 PM Poetry Foundation</p> <p><i>Poetry off the Shelf</i> <b>LINGUA FRANCA: SOUTH AFRICAN SPOKEN WORD COMPANY</b> Wednesday, April 18, 7:00 PM Poetry Foundation</p>
<b>EXHIBITION</b>	<p><b>Bettissima: Treasures from the Poets House Elizabeth Kray Archives</b> April 3 – May 30, 2018 Monday – Friday, 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM</p>



**POETRY FOUNDATION**  
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# POETRY



Editors Lindsay Garbutt and Don Share go inside the pages of POETRY, talking to poets and critics, debating the issues, and sharing their poem selections with listeners.

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# PODCAST



**Conference on Poetry and Teaching | June 23 - 26, 2018**

**Director:** Dawn Potter, **Associate Director:** Kerrin McCadden

**Faculty:** Diana Goetsch, Joaquín Zihuatanejo

**+Writing Intensive | June 27 - 28, 2018**

**Workshop Leader:** Kamilah Aisha Moon

**Conference on Poetry | July 8 - 14, 2018**

**Director:** Martha Rhodes, **Faculty:** Maudelle Driskell, Vievee Francis, Kevin Prufer, Jason Schneiderman, Connie Voisine

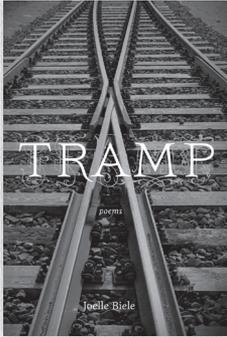
**Poetry Fellows:** Ben Purkert, Phillip Williams

**Poetry Seminar | July 29 - August 3, 2018**

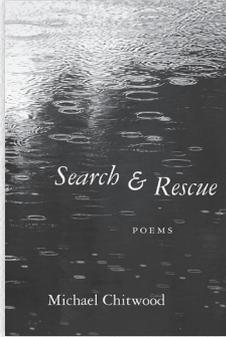
**Director:** Patrick Donnelly, **Faculty:** Martha Collins, Eduardo C. Corral

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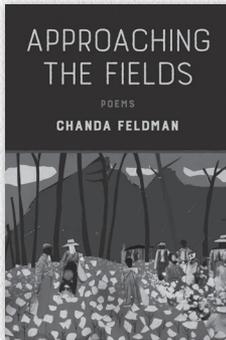
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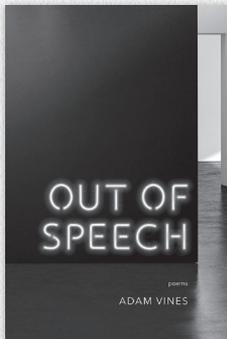
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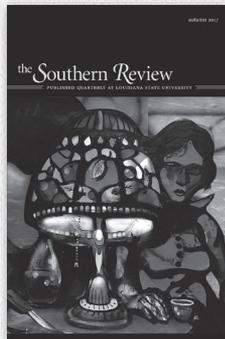
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Yrsa Daley-Ward  
**bone**

Foreword by Kiese Laymon

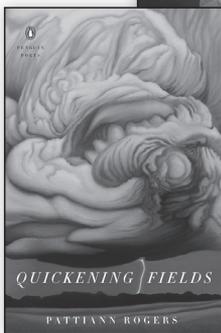
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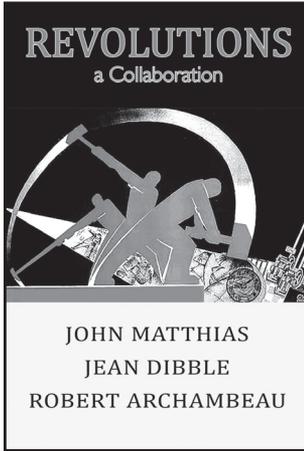
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