

Full Issue: The Woodward Review 2.1 Winter 2022

The Woodward Review Editors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/woodwardreview>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

The Woodward Review Editors () "Full Issue: The Woodward Review 2.1 Winter 2022," *The Woodward Review: A Creative and Critical Journal*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 1.

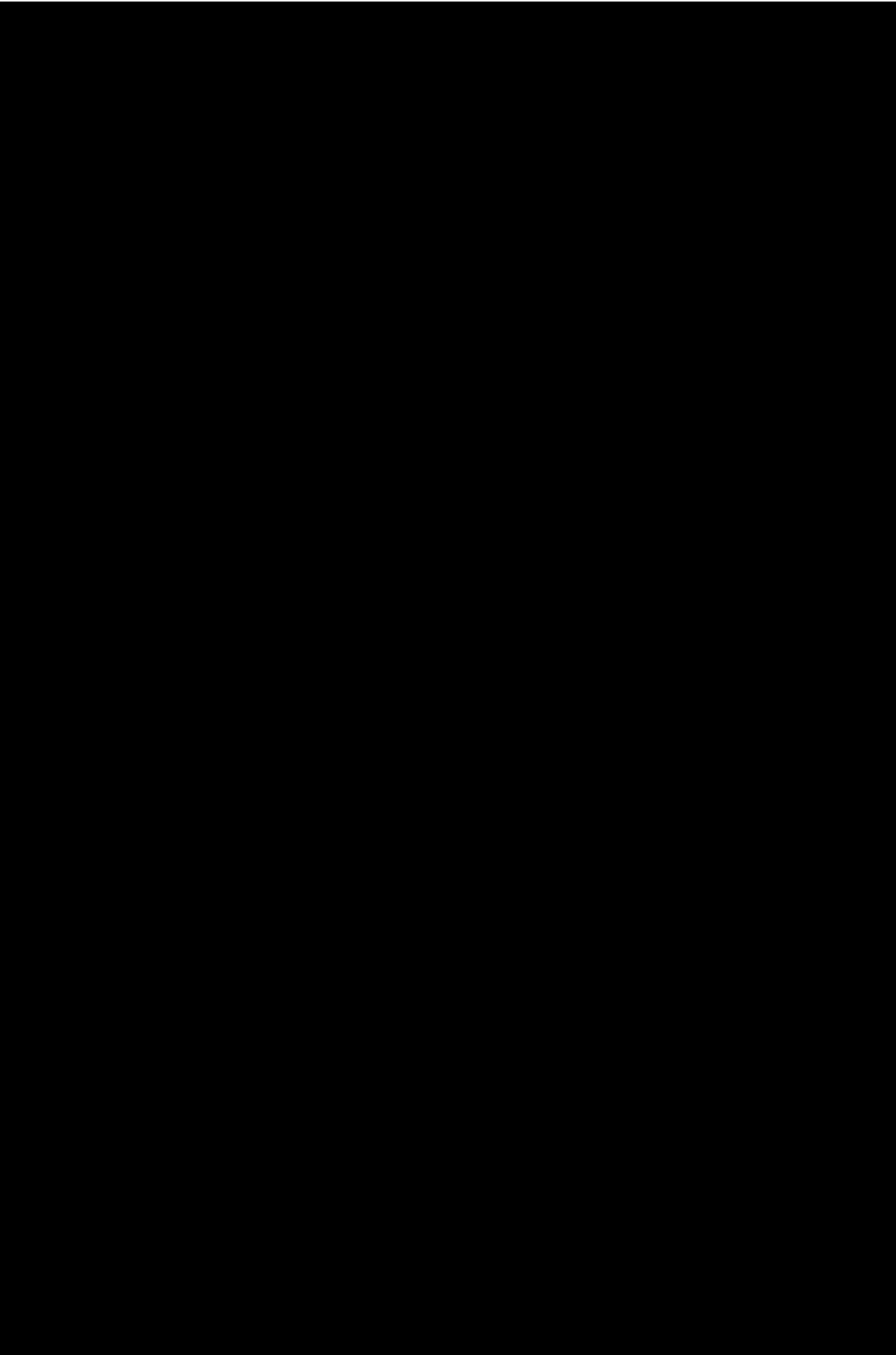
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/woodwardreview/vol2/iss1/1>

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at DigitalCommons@WayneState. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Woodward Review: A Creative and Critical Journal by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@WayneState.

Woodward Review 2
Winter 2022



WAYNE STATE
DETROIT, MI



The Woodward Review
Volume 2, Issue 1
December 2022



the
woodward
review.

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
& Wayne State University Library System

Woodward Review

Masthead

Editor-in-Chief: Isaac Pickell

Poetry Editor: Vincent Perrone

Prose Editor: Lam Pham

Managing Editor: Melissa Moore

Intern: Gage Stewart

Woodward Review 2.1, Winter 2022. All works © 2022 their respective authors, published under license to *Woodward Review*, except the following titles, published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), terms available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>: “Unabsolved Just Us,” “What Happens When We Run From Them,” “An Inventory,” “El Metodo,” “(from) Dreamlife of Honey,” “What Burning the Air Means for a Man Waiting Too Long All That Remains of Him Is Dust and Shadow,” “In the Wild,” “On Charles Darwin’s Theory of Evolution,” and “Once Again”. Front and back cover image: *Man on Floor in Room*, Angelo Maneage, Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), terms available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Table of Contents

C. Fausto Cabrera	
<i>Unabsolved Just Us</i>	1
<i>What Happens When We Run From Them</i>	2
Ana Reizens	
<i>An Inventory</i>	3
Juanita Rey	
<i>El Metodo</i>	4
Reynaldo Hinojosa	
<i>Assembly Line</i>	5
<i>Memory Assemblage Plant</i>	7
Marcus Slease	
<i>(from) Dreamlife of Honey</i>	9
Mark Goodwin	
<i>and</i>	18
<i>in the criss</i>	19
Elias Udo-Ochi	
<i>What Burning the Air Means for a Man Waiting Too Long All That Remains of Him Is Dust and Shadow</i>	20
Nnandi Samuel	
<i>In the Wild</i>	21
<i>On Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution</i>	23
SG Huerta	
<i>They Don't Save Themselves at the End</i>	25
Livia Meneghin	
<i>Care</i>	26
Cathy Ulrich	
<i>Your Girlfriend as a Murder Mystery</i>	27
<i>Your Girlfriend as Good Little Soldiers</i>	28
<i>Your Girlfriend as The Hollywood Sign</i>	29
Linda McCauley Freeman	
<i>Chaos In Nine Parts</i>	30
Ion Corcos	
<i>The Arithmetic of Want</i>	33
Kei Vough	
<i>Once Again</i>	34
Connor Fisher	
<i>Real Actors</i>	35
Jack Morton	
<i>Peter Maynard's Blazing Saddles</i>	36
BEE LB	
<i>my brother; bronzed grackle</i>	43
Contributors' Notes	
.....	45

C. Fausto Cabrera
Unabsolved Just Us

Dred Scott's ghost still roams the streets.

Emmet Till's spirit still looks for his mother,
 it shivers every time someone whistles.

I imagine he's got much to say to a Karen calling the cops.

Need I go on? Down the list... I won't call them trapped souls because I believe they are
 saints & the energy that haunts us is more like a curse called down upon our heads instead
 of some unresolved punishment put on them. They did nothing
 wrong. & you know they were all standing
 around the scene with us— all of
 us; indicted by our presence
 at George Floyd's lynching.
 My aunt asked me if
 I'd seen the video
 yet, on the 8th minute
 of our 15minute
 phone call the day
 after. I hadn't— so
 I scoffed from the belly
 of the judicial beast,
 picturing another
 name added to
 the list of slain.
 But she said that
 this was something
 different. & it is sad
 to find hope in such a
 thing. Where do our heroics lie? When
 you walked by, who were you? A pleading citizen? The one who
 filmed? The cop standing guard of a good cop, having a bad day? Or maybe you were across the street
 minding your business? I'd like to believe we all wanted to be a person who might have tackled that cop.
 Who sees a mob stringing up the noose & says something, does something, knows something about
 sacrifice. Someone who knows they'd be strung up too, but would rather die in nobility than live
 in a world where anyone begs for the basics.

What Happens When We Run From Them

for Rayshard Brooks

Yeah, another one of *these* poems. So What. But not from protests, marches or burning buildings in the streets. Not from the front seat with confused kids in the back I gotta deliver “the talk” to either. Not from a Walmart with a Karen I caught in my phone, not from sitting in traffic where the confederate flag has camouflaged in red on the bumper of a person in a brand new car because the prices are so low in a fuckin’ pandemic, triggered by the word *privileged* while bitching about not being able to go to the bars or restaurants to get away from asshole kids, where wearing masks make them pro-choice all of a sudden. Naw, I’m writing this from a different seat of protest—where I carried my right to be hostile in my waistband (Don’t Tread on Me, either). Separate from political parties or slogans. I own my brokenness with no one else to blame & seal my liberation when my eyes close. I’m *protesting* from a problem’d place Biden helped create & Harris filled & now ya’ll wanna fill with cops because *it’s not fair*. If they kill me, it’ll be justifiable, regardless. Ignored enough, not so much for politics but because it took me so fuckin’ long to figure entitlement out. So, I’ll die as an enemy, never believing in *them*, to fix what isn’t broken for *them*. I am nobody’s constituent. I’m not a fuckin’ Amendment & equal protection isn’t something to expect. I don’t believe in Barack, AOC, Bernie or Jay-Z. I refused to be a victim of my Mothers’ death so I became an oppressor. If hurt people hurt people then what about those afraid of the hurt; what does fear do in the hands of those in power? A counterfeit \$20 bill, a DUI, a toy pistol, a hoodie, an attitude, having one of those days, a baby in the backseat & your girl driving shotgun—breathing... So what...but/ so what... but you can’t/naw muthafucka, you can’t, so what!? If only we could just learn to comply, huh? If we could just vote more, right? Get the right people to represent us in a system of wrong, infiltrate & show’em how good we are? Rayshard was one of us. No, not just black—he was a product of places & ideas meant to break the *bad*, meant to crush the spirit out of spite. These penitentiaries change you in untranslatable ways. Ways that manifest in spurts of resilience—like the hope that he might have been able to run fast enough. But, if only Rayshard would have just complied, like he did for the first half an hour. While the reality of missing his lil’ girls B-day again sunk in...so what, right?! He shoulda thought about that sooner, right?! So shooting him was justified? Oh, we’ll see *Justice*—in the mercy of how they treat their own Blue Lives that Matter. Don’t talk to me about *justice*—matter fact, stop saying that dumbshit altogether. Rayshard Brooks was never going to make it home, no matter how polite or compliant. There are people loved: beautifully flawed & fucked up who may do dumb shit because of their short leash & they’re not going to make it home tonight. If you can’t see through the exceptions; if you can’t picture the face of one of your beloved wayward cousin’s, brother’s, nephew’s or neighbor’s face in that same casket than you’re just as *Blind* as *Justice* & the stupid mutherfucker that came up with that dumb-ass phrase.

Ana Reisens

An inventory

The purchases made with the money once spent on war runs something like this: quilts; oranges; breakfasts cooked over crackling flames (for every hand and every name); shaded marketplaces; dried plums; medicine that tastes like bubblegum; dinosaur bandages for scraped knees; teacups; shiny classrooms with teachers who recognize *everyone's* faces; playgrounds; rainbow-colored paintbrushes; birthday cakes; parks with yellow daffodils and little green frogs sunbathing on the lilies by the fountain; faucets; showerheads; white cotton beds; soft sofas to rest; quiet armchairs to read; hammocks to sway and feel and wonder and dream; universities; olive trees; great mosaic staircases to gather and sit and learn each other's languages; glowing stages and open stadiums; bicycle lanes; vehicles that drive on recycled ideas; bowls of soup eaten with bamboo spoons; shampoo; boxes of chocolates and hand-woven socks;

But would there be enough for the chocolate and socks?
we wondered.

Yes, there was enough.

Juanita Rey
El Metodo

Can I pull this thread
without unravelling the garment?
Will it simply snap?
Or has it other plans in mind?

And should I give in to your demands?
How easy just to want what you want.
I have breathed in and out a thousand times –
el metodo – my method.

I am learning,
for the first time,
how to live with a loose thread.
It's like a scab I long to pick
but so many things heal
when left alone.

Sometimes,
you ask the same question
three times in a row.

I answer.
El metodo. El metodo. El metodo.

Just like a thread would say.

Reynaldo Hinojosa

Assembly Line

ruminations on walking the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House

line
 line break
 line break assembly
 pause:restart:rebuild

line
 line drawn
 line drawn with
 line drawn with hands
 pause:restart:rebuild

line
 line assembly
 line assembly machine
 line assembly machine construct
 line assembly machine construct words
 line assembly machine construct words with
 line assembly machine construct words with songbirds
 pause:restart:rebuild

line
 line assembly
 line assembly with
 line assembly with vision
 line assembly with vision to
 line assembly with vision to honor
 line assembly with vision to honor legacy
 pause:restart:rebuild

line
 line across
 line across the
 line across the space
 line across the space
 line across the space
 line across the space between
 line across the space between our
 line across the space between our bodies
 pause:restart:rebuild

line
line breaking
line breaking apart
line breaking apart the
line breaking apart the soil
 pause:restart:rebuild

line
line planting
line planting the
line planting the fruit
line planting the fruit of
line planting the fruit of beginning
 pause:restart:rebuild

line
line building
line building this
line building this memory
 pause:restart:rebuild

Memory Assemblage Plant

ruminations on walking the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House

it is important to acknowledge the silence
of other roads
and how they lead to different pastures

and that memory isn't always planted with asphalt

because the engine of progress is a road laid with success
not everyone can afford

memory is the joining of hands to an engine

linking ash trees to their leaves
sheltering Bird Island
stuffing luggage inside trunks

built by dreams
of rubber and steel
a sandbar cove turned paradise
interconnecting root and soil like calloused hands

memory is the replacement of alternators from Jens Jensen's fruit

a million cars have planted an estate
to sleep a bed of roses daffodils phlox yarrow monkshood
bearded irises
and swim a hand-made lagoon

here and now we're invited into the family
and with membership
we too can afford nature's crystal dew
or build memory that transfers the long assemblage
of legacy like the soil of remembrance

we build memory
not for machine
not for other roads
or for destiny

we build memory
for distinct roots
for distant hands
to grasp this soil

to build more memory
build more memory
build more dreams

memory is such a fragile engine for growth and roads

driving forward the sacrifice
in hopes that one day
we can all afford dreams
 grafted into branches
 and morning dew
 crystal with light upon a spider's web

let's hope this songbird plucks
from the soil our dreams
what has been waiting for distant
seeds to sprout another dream
whose blooming perfume
our children can breathe
to grasp more soil

so that we too may construct a dream
and that one day we too may use these soiled hands
to turn the wheel of progress
into the silence of another pasture

Marcus Slease

(from) The Dreamlife of Honey

As a teenager, you were baptised for the dead, at one of the church's 159 temples around the world, you wore your white gown, waded into the baptismal font resting on the statues of 12 oxen, after each short prayer, you were dunked in the water, 75 times for 75 names in 5 minutes, you were proud of it, the number of times they dunked you in the water, pushing the lungs to the limit, the names of the dead, rattling off one then another, the name and then the dunking, 75 names, it was more than Chad or Brad or Brock, 75, you were dunked so many times and you could take it, pushing your body, dunked 75 times with the names of the dead, you listened to each name and date before getting dunked, then later they handed out the names, they were the dead from the 19th century, so many names, they had to keep dunking, the dunking offered the spirits in the spirit waiting room the opportunity to accept the true gospel, that's what they told you, they could maybe become gods in the top level kingdom, baptism for the dead was the ultimate opportunity, you could keep progressing long even after you were dead and buried, yes baptism for the dead was the ultimate honour, there on a Saturday with the other 12 year olds, new in America, 12 years old, dunked over and over to rescue the dead.

There was a controversy with Jewish names, some from the Holocaust, baptized by proxy, hundreds of thousands in the 90s, this brought to mind Jews being forced in the past to convert to Christianity or face death or deportation, said Jewish genealogist Gary Mokotoff, in 1995, after the controversy, and discussion with Mokotoff, the church authorities banned baptisms of Jews from the Holocaust, except when they are ancestors of Mormons, there have been more controversies, over the years, with celebrities and public figures, Humphrey Bogart, Marilyn Monroe and the Queen Mother, the grandparents of Donald Trump, Mike Pence, Hillary Clinton, Steven Spielberg, the ancestors of Kim Kardashian, Carrie Fisher, Joe Biden and John McCain, all baptised, baptism for the dead was for everyone, in 2012, the researcher Helen Radkey, a former Mormon who left the church in the 1970s, discovered the baptism of Anne Frank by proxy, the church authorities implemented a firewall and three full time staffers to watch the database for the unauthorised baptism of the dead by proxy, the church authorities are sent a list of Holocaust victims each month by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, those names are off-limits, if you no longer want your registration as Mormon, you have to write a threatening letter, but what kind of letter can you write when you are dead.

There was a controversy of Non-Mormons becoming Mormon in the next life without their consent, but the church leaders said it was a service, they could choose to accept or reject their baptism by proxy, in the next existence, in the waiting room, not a forced conversion, they could choose the truth and the light, or reject it, you and your chum wanted your names purged from the records, even if someday, when you were dead, someone in the line of your Mormon families put it back there, is there any way to escape the registry?

After Weber State University, you moved to Bellingham, Washington, strumming Bob Dylan on your guitar, attending graduate school, studying language theories, the signifier and signified, writing avant garde poetry, with a flatmate and cat named Simon who always spilled the bong water, you listened to Modest Mouse while reading *A Picture of Dorian Gray* at a bohemian cafe, in Bellingham, you were remaking yourself into something different, dancing to live Blues, drinking craft beers, walking the great arboretum, so far from your former Mormon life in Utah, & one weekend Andy drove his car to White Rock, in British Columbia, & you snapped back the schnapps at a German bar, listening to the world's languages on the promenade, especially French and German, since you were both learning them, the world on the promenade, you had moved away from Utah, hurtling yourself into heathenism.

I've found a couch, said Andy, we'll have more room to sit, & behold you took the couch up the stairs, it will not fit through the door, said Andy, we could saw it in half, you said, & so you procured a saw, from the neighbor, proceeded to saw, but halfway through, with a small mountain of saw dust and ripped cloth below you, you realized you were destroying the couch, if you managed to saw the couch in half, and it fit through the door, it would be a ruined couch, it might not hold any weight upon it, so you stopped sawing, before it was too late, acquired a pulley, pulled it through the window.

After Bellingham, Andy moved to Cambridge, for a degree in art history, and then Prague to teach English at a university, & you followed Andy next door to Poland, a few years later, after acquiring a divorce and leaving the United States forever, you were both pilgrims looking for new holies made from old holies in the Slavic lands far from your birth countries, your throat was tickled by fur hats in Poland, but there were very few fur hats in Poland, the fur hats were probably Russian, your throat was tickled by German and Polish, the holy Slavic shrines with harsh hills and mountain stew, you were full of cabbage, stewing.

You were in Katowice, Andy in Prague, & you decided to meet in the middle, the wonders of nature in the Slovak Republic, on New Year's Eve, walking the high Tatras in an oversized puffy jacket, and then into Levoca, or maybe Kezmarok, a small historic village, charming modern tried and true, Andy had a romantic partner and you had a romantic partner, you all counted to one hundred in various languages, your partner counted in Polish, you counted in German, Andy counted in French, Andy's partner counted in Czech, & when your ears were sufficiently tickled, you turned on the clock radio, for every song from the Rolling Stones, you downed a shot and acted out a knife fight, there were six songs and six knife fights, after the sixth time, you looked at the clock, it was close to midnight, we better go out there to the square, said Andy's partner, before we miss the fireworks, we should paint our faces, you said, & the faces were painted, the hair gelled, in the square the people gathered, trailing their children, dancing in circles with sparklers, you remembered sparklers, the smell and feel of them, how your step father lit them in Milton Keynes, England & you danced with them, wrote your names in the air before immigrating to America, the magic of sparklers, in the small square the countdown ended & there was a small display of fireworks, Andy with painted face and gelled hair, the fireworks popping colors into the night sky, it was 2007.

You have moved on, but now, in middle age, you are looking back, for so long you tried to hide it, your spirituality, religion is the wound that wounded you, it was everything and you divorced yourself from it, your intellect and curiosity collided with dogma, half way through your Mormon mission, at age 20, you returned home early to small town Utah, you didn't want to be American, but wanted to re-find your lost origins, from Ireland, your birth country, you wore a Celtic Cross, attended Catholic mass, wanted to change your name to Marcus McGuthrie, and then eventually, at university, minoring in Philosophy, rejected religion & turned to Secular Humanism, it was all temporary.

You hid away in your room for comfort, you can't rely on anybody, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you hid away from people & cried in the evenings, alone in your room, isn't that a sappy story, when no one was looking you cried in your room into the plush chair, & one day your mother caught you, overwhelmed herself, no money, the collectors calling, father on a drunken bender, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you were crying there, in your room, face pushed into the plush, thinking you were crying for everyone, seeing their faces and crying, the sufferings of everyone, since you were told you were a good friend of Jesus, maybe even a best one, & sometimes you even thought you were the new Jesus, reincarnated, meant to live forever, since you had no broken bones in your body, always following the ghost & warm heart of Jesus, & there you were, crying for

everybody, but really you were crying to cry, that was one way to do it, cry for everybody, what is anybody really.

He wouldn't hurt a fly, they said, pointing at you, always the peacekeeper, but not now, you have splattered three flies in the faculty room, and soon the fourth, you have hurt many flies, you think, picking up the book about Anne Frank to splat the flies, but flies carry diseases, you learned it early, there in your mother's house chasing the flies, checking your stools for colour and texture, consistency and length, breadth and width, no green, yellow, orange, clay-coloured, or bright red, and there was the tube, to clean yourself out, the tube with your name on it, but you hardly ever used it, your mum with the vitamins, checking the nutrition, always concerned with it, maybe partially a product of childhood poverty, and you look at the stools now, especially in Austria, where there was a little shelf in the toilet for you to examine it, unlike in America where you plop it and forget it, the most water of any toilet belongs to the Americans, no one wants to see it, the stools samples below you, yes, you think, I have hurt many flies, you think, but only for good reason, but it is also a pleasure, splatting those flies with the only book available, a biography of Anne Frank, here in the faculty room, your plague mask securely fastened, above the tennis courts at the high school in Barcelona where you teach, listening to the grunts of the high school tennis players, ball thwacked from one side of the court to another, heart and will power, it has taken you 25 years and many countries to say it, an ex-Mormon, not a Non, your Mormonism has mutated, you no longer genuflect in the mornings and evenings beside your bed with fingers interlaced tightly together feeling the warmth and tingles in your body, waiting for the holy spirit to enter you, in general, you are non-genuflecting, although you might genuflect with other gestures, you don't wear the sacred garments, shake the secret handshakes, whisper your secret name, you carry a slew of identities, you do not believe any of it, the still small voice, the tingles and bosom burning, but you still search for it, through the altered states of art and language, a spirituality, leaving one country for another and another and another and another and another and another, where do you come from is a question you receive in every new country, you have moved on, but you have to look back to move forward, you come from this and that and you are still becoming, isn't that the glory.

The trees are made of jello and tremble with god wind, all that animal energy, not to mention the various greetings, there in the trees, trilling and musical patterns, there are so many ways of greeting, large cats rubs their heads & bodies together, yes the rubbing is a kind of stroking, elephants entwine their trunks, giraffes press their necks together, horses rub noses, penguins tap their bills together, lobsters squirt urine on each other, the urine of the dominant lobster carries a message, it says I'm the boss, and dogs rolls over when

a large powerful dog approaches them, this avoids conflicts, but you have leaned left, the social construction of reality, even trying to flatten the hierarchies, but they are still with us, up there in the heavens for the religious, trickling down here to earth, a kind of ladder, the great chain of being, for example, god at the top, descending through angels, humans, animals and plants to minerals, but there is something suspect about that, you think, humans as the culmination of creation, dominion and powers that have led to our possible extinction, you think, but what is the alternative when you take god out of the picture, evolution mirrors it, the great chain of being, the process is progressive, from lower to higher life forms, maybe it is built into us, and also other animals, hierarchies upon hierarchies, how did we come to question them, step outside of them, rather than just accept them, what does this say about us, you think, we are part of nature but are trying to create a new nature, the new nature of human culture, but the new nature mirrors the old nature, there are always power structures, there is no way to flatten them, & back in England the hierarchies were still raging, the kings and queens and fairy tale royalty, lords on horses, foxes and hounds, black hats, long coats, those were the masters above you, while your stepfather played butcher with his brother in the garage in Manchester & you ate everything, pig's brain on toast, blood sausages, my blood to your blood, the blood balls rolling inside you, royals and more royals, how could so many people love them.

Your head and heart are a kind of hierarchy, but that's silly, In olden days, according to tradition, eggs were bad for the liver, also the heart, depending at least in part on how you do it, the head & the heart have been around forever, in the east the seat of consciousness is in the chest, the heart, but in the west it's the head, I'd like it to be here, you say, tapping your chest, but I think I'm here, you say, tapping your temples, does thinking make life better, have you seen Rodin's Thinker, squatting, his fist on his chin, constipated, books upon books upon books, a tower of babel, information moves faster and faster, have you heard about the turtle, turtle in German is toad plus shield, a turtle is a good toad, it moves slowly, you want to move slowly, pick up the beer by the giant handle, smell the sausages.

Frank lived in Prague, he was German and could show you the small town in Bavaria, it was something you always dreamed of, taking the midnight train from Katowice to Prague then Prague to Regensburg, your first taste of Germany, behold the most ancient sausage stall in history, not to mention the large German beer halls, ancient mugs for ancient people, look at this bridge, said Frank, it's got a backwards gargoyle, it was maybe your first gargoyle & you identified with it, those gargoyles inside you, since you had left the Mormon religion, and also America, you saw those gargoyles everywhere, for example the masturbating gargoyles in Valencia, was this your power animal, the gargoyle is hideous but also beautiful, the gargoyle was the original gutter, 13th century French architecture,

but then they became chaotic evil, gargoyles, you can say it over and over, rain sprouts but also fantastic creatures, “what is the meaning of these unclean monkeys, these strange, savage lions and monsters? To what purpose are here placed these creatures, half beast, half man or these spotted tigers? I see several bodies with one head and several heads with one body. Here is a quadruped with a serpent's head; there a fish with a quadruped's head; then again an animal: half horse, half goat... Surely, if we do not blush for such absurdities,” said Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, do the gargoyles ward off evil spirits, riding the train from Regensberg to Prague, there in the small compartment, you sang the songs of lederhosen, drank from the horn of plenty, dreaming of your ancient ancestry.

Your ancestors were farmers, brought over from Scotland in the 17th century, others French Huguenots, tilling the earth or cultivating the gardens for rich Anglo-Irish, & your first reading was *Farmers Weekly*, the magic of *Farmers Weekly*, there in the lorry with your granda, collecting the milk from the farmers around Northern Ireland, reading, or rather looking at the *Farmers Weekly*, that yellow on the cover, turning the pages and counting the numbers of livestock, you and your granda, and when you stopped at the farms he collected the milk, scooped some in the palm of his hands and let you drink some, the creamy milk straight from the cow in the palm of his hand, and back into the lorry reading *Farmers Weekly*, the news of the soil since 1934, the magic of turning those pages with your granda, thinking someday yes that is what you would become, the farmer like so many before you, or maybe a gardener like your great-granda, or your biological father, but then later you learned differently, no good with your hands you needed to use your mind, and now here on the telly there is a documentary about private space flights, for rich tourists, up there in the space, & when the space metals fall to the flat earth, the farmers saddle their mules and drag it behind them, the sheep bleating in the distance, the farmer dismantle it, piece by piece, kebab stew in a space bucket, over a campfire, later the expensive material is sold to China, for brute survival, then sold back to the west for foil to wrap sandwiches, & that's how it goes, you think, more and more pyramids with the rich at the top and the farmers beneath them, in way or another, once you were born into something it was hard to break out of it, but there in America you were not a farmer, or a factory worker, somehow you had escaped it all to become a high school teacher, & before that at the poverty line till your mid-40s, but living simply, not tied to any land or country.

When the news of virus descended upon you, you were in Castelldefels, just outside Barcelona, & at the local bakery the croissants were crabs with buttery pincers, we've got the breath of death down our necks, you said to Pineapple, the news louder & louder, gripping and pulling, the virus, sweeping across China, already in Europe & America, it's

not a question of if but when, said the newscaster, freedom versus order, freedom versus order, you hear it over and over, the walls are crumbling, but new walls are going higher, there is no moral high ground for us to stand on, wars and rumours of wars, the Russian invasion, more and more on the horizon, the new rise of fascism, the lust in my hair, the lust in my shoes, you think, breathing breathing, says Laraaji, who are these hyenas hijacking the system, breathing breathing, says Laraaji, plucking your eyebrows, plucking your nose hairs, pincers make us beautiful, you thought, biting into the buttery croissant, and on news from Japan there was dark humour, in order to prevent the spread of the virus, the Tokyo funpack advises people to scream in their hearts, rather than from their lungs, while riding the roller coaster, it said, and you thought yes, screaming into your heart is better than screaming into your lungs, there is so much to scream but it is better to scream silently, virus or no virus, riding the world's roller coaster, scream into your heart because that is where it all starts, there in the heart, the centre of everything, and then you went out there, with the virus raging but less raging, and the children were allowed on the playground at their appointed hour, and you sat on the beach, trying to breathe in the fresh air, while a little girl came closer, she was talking to someone but you didn't know them, maybe a babysitter or sister, I know what grown-ups do, said the little girl, they get into bed naked and then they wind each other up, and you thought yes, that happens, she is not wrong about that, you thought, but not always, it is interesting to observe patterns and the best patterns are observed from outside of them, like a child, you thought, there is a world between the child and the adult but we still need to bridge it, you thought, so much of childhood makes us but we try to forget it, you thought, slowly slowly, you thought, thrift and moderation over agitation and haste, and then in the evening, there in Castelldefels with the virus raging you hung your head, flopped around the dance floor of the living room, this little box of shadows with the light flung out of it, a panther shadows my lyrical shadow, you thought, but I have to keep dancing, there in the living room with the virus raging, and then later venturing out there with Pineapple in search of the bird of paradise, slipping on your plague mask, shoes squeaking on spilled lagers, endless throngs of scooters, you were out there searching for the bird of paradise to liven up your living room, the bird of paradise prefers full sun to partial shade, up to 25 feet tall, a poisonous flower, the banana leaves feel tropical, out there to bring back the bird of paradise for your living room.

During the time of the plague, approaching the lift in your building after work, an elderly man approached you, plague mask slipping under his nose, and this disconcerted you, trying to avoid the plague and this elderly man before you, breathing out through his nostrils, but he was very excited and it was hard to move around him, muttering something about plants, you tried to understand his Spanish, *si*, you said, over and over,

trying to listen carefully, where do you live, he asked, atico, you said, yes, he said, many people have lived there, Germans, lots of Germans, also French, Russian, and even English, but most importantly the koala, he said, you searched your limited vocabulary, is it the same in Spanish, koala, you repeat, si Kola, he says, showing you a baby koala with his hands, one hand moving toward the ceiling, the other hand toward the ground to show you the koala growing, koala you repeat over and over, then you say goodbye to him, you were not sure if the German or Russian or French or English had a koala, or maybe the koala lived in the atico alone, maybe I am the koala, you thought, some kind of exotic animal, there in Castelldefels so far from friends of family, in the time of the plague.

Living near Carrer de l'Església, in Castelldefels, a long street with generic tapas, but one good Japanese and one good Andalusian, says Pineapple, and now there is El Super Burrito, 5.50 for the fat burrito, good on occasion, but not too often, says Pineapple, it is not the Mediterranean diet, I don't want to return to my London face, says Pineapple, my London face was stuffed with chips, yes, you say, me either, my London face bloated with ales, and you both agree to not eat too many El Super Burritos, stick mostly to olives, & the fruit of the sea, something close to the Mediterranean diet, even though El Super Burrito is some kind of comfort, still in the midst of the pandemic, you wanted something to ease the pain, isn't it something always, giving yourself a little of this or that, there is nothing steady to stand on, even if you think you are on solid ground, something shift beneath you, death there in front of you, you never know when it will pounce, and there in the early morning they're back again, at 4AM or 5AM, they chose their hour carefully, how do they know, buzzing around, waiting for the right time to suck the neck or hand or back or elbow, then they sneak away, & you can't find them, the stealthy hunters, how do they know the timing, when you are asleep and snoring, they come when you are the most defenseless, how to prepare for anything.

The ground is shaky underneath you, how to prepare for anything, your step father was laid off, he was often laid off, even when he had his own air conditioning company, Cool Valley Air, he was often laid off, there in Vegas, & also in London, when you lived in the homeless hostel, have you been laid off, how often have you been laid off, would you like to get laid off, you lay down to get laid off, but you can also stand up, or sit up, there are many ways to get laid off, while your step father was laid off you escaped into the world of ninjas, there in North Las Vegas at the talent show, where you performed a flying sidekick, then threw a Chinese star & it was deflected by a block of wood hidden up your partner's sleeve, you escaped into the world of ninjas, also Wilderness Survival Camp, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, but you wet your socks, & you had only one pair of socks, body heat prevents hypothermia, said your step father, climbing naked into the

sleeping bag with you, a bar of chocolate for energy, you learned the lean-to, & also the igloo, you learned the knots and weaving, the helicopter circled around you, cooking potatoes in ashes, crunching the carrots, boiling the big pot of crayfish, you have to be ready for anything, fear is built on repetition and the Mormons had taught you the end days were upon you, you have to be ready for anything with the one year's supply of food storage, chosen and elected for the latter days, the apocalypse always in front of you.

Mark Goodwin

and

the gate said
nothing to

equal

the tree's
complete

lack of

need

for writing

in the criss

-dwin

dle light

of willows'
resistance

no me

no when

a heron's
lace

some
one's breath

gets

out

walks by

my

it

Elias Udo-Ochi

*What Burning the Air Means for a Man Waiting Too Long
All That Remains of Him Is Dust and Shadow*

I hear you can set the air ablaze,
watch it dance from your window
or phone screen, whichever frames
the tragedy of your life. I hear
we can turn the carnage up a notch,
flower the city square with ash & leave
a shadow in place of a man sipping
a cuppa. What can a body bent on
its own demise tell you about living?
In my library, a book says dying is personal,
unlike war. On the lawn across from
where I'm buried in the gyrations
of a tik-toker, a bird sharpens its voice
against the wind. Burn, burn! Burn,
wild world, so we'd stay alive. In the hands
of a god, silence can mushroom
into a vacuum of misery. See how bowels
hinged on trees & a limb flung
halfway from its owner tell more
about the dead than the sound
of air burning away?

Nnandi Samuel

In the Wild

A passive brightness scores its initials on the thatched ceiling,
 as the sun plasticize our shadows on a wall frame.
 the smeared patches of light, whitewashed
 for our voice to regift colors.

& sound is made flesh. & the luster worms into both language
 & leash, unsettling— as the raw weave of leather over our nape.

all noon, with each black minute, our pronouns awash,
 toweled in wild greenery: this bestiality of crying wolf.
 the cherub of man-eaters, equally yoked with a long line of male.

I felt a claw peel me till I bleed,
 & my skin sates its hunger.
 how we identify at lights-out:
 a scar for a scar, in this cutthroat blindness.

say, grief stains the bone.
 say, a neighing hoofs at our doorstep.
 there's just we here, back bent.
 all fur, cold-blooded & groomed to make tent-piece off a haystack.
 there's just this labium, screaming it's own hollowed tongue.

(II) The Last Filly

On grazing, the teff leaves braided back to near-perfection.
you— arching to light. & I palm you as if nothing, dusting
the shiny cow piss off your neck. we pedal our feet in
tandem with the muddy waters,

with the chased spattering of minutes: a burden life affords us
& the soiled labour of our precious limbs.

in between this wildness, blood strengthens your teeth.

& we munch: carving out glyphs from the roughage,

& making runes off the haylage— strawed to a bunch
in the early hours of starvation. we buy into the hunger.

when I itch my tit for milk, I arrive at white grace:

something sour as a chorus to leave between the gum.

when the wild was tamed & you went soft,

I never felt to mourn you. never felt the blind onslaught
heralding our passing away.

your brawn, sheeted beneath the cruel auspice of light.

I sought you everywhere a brightness

shone, memorizing each bend/ each turn/

each approached surface.

On Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution

The backbone attains hierarchy, calls human
its rarest prototype. flesh raw mold of matter:
metonym for brawn gone erect—the way we put friction to use.

from the atlas, you map out humanoids godding Asia:
all muscle swift & limb-light—sky-diving their way into canary objects.
the backflips, met by a whopping sleight of hand: skilled for this labour.

palm, splayfooted in sheer divinity of talons & claw.
elbow, in awful exchange with the modicum of breeze.

It's my first time witnessing entellus roam, undomesticated.
you: akin to howls. our mouth, brutal in this shy minute.

I attest to making a career off Charles Darwin's theory of evolution,
to the urge of parodying apes—
the way the textbook tells me anthropoids are
blessed with noise, as we are with silence

—the way I kept mute all through the
knowledge of knowing you ran a grocery store,
adjacent to a wildlife department I shuttled on goat-skinned sneakers.

as you crush the boiled persimmon,
while I hang around, aimless—as a fruit cajoling the arm.

nature disciplines me into the longitude of a hand—outstretched, knifing the heat.
thick yellowish resin, ringing the purlicue of sworded thumb.

Human: the four-limbed aggressor of the food chain.

Being: the state of existence—a call to space, the way an orangutan seeks a tree.

my animal instinct piques at what becomes of us,
in this endless pilgrimage into the oddities of life—as night blurs into day.

you, lacing & relacing your heartbeat.

the pheromones we secrete, orbiting our loins,

by which I mean my instinct don't lie when I say 'hunger is a call to both hands.'

I have been meaning to tell you:

I'm desperate for a hug.

SG Huerta

They Don't Save Themselves at the End

I'm seven years old and my dad is removing a shard of glass from my now-bleeding foot. There is not as much blood as I think there is in my overactive imagination. I had taken off my shoes at my primo's graduation party and stepped on glass. My dad is not yelling at me. Not this time. I am seven years old. Or maybe I am twenty-two. Or maybe I purposely stepped on the glass because I wanted him. Maybe I wish I could learn to simply stop dancing where glass has been broken.

Livia Meneghin

Care

(I)

is an incision in the neck. most patients are able to emerge from anesthesia. trouble swallowing is usually temporary and patients are out of bed one or two weeks after. pain can be controlled. please do not take aspirin. please do not resume anticoagulants. if you are unsure please ask. swelling and bruising are normal. however, rapid redness may prevent discharge from the hospital. you will leave with small strips of tape. you will be removed. after that, it should be patted dry and left open to air. some patients experience numb and tingling lips following surgery. if you experience symptoms, please please call. the incision line should be protected from sunlight while healing. please avoid straining. please keep your schedule. dial day or night.

(II)

is an incision
 of bed
 pain
 can be controlled. please do not take
 please do not resume
 please ask.
 you will leave
 you will be
 removed.
 left
 numb and tingling
 if you experience symptoms, please
 heal please avoid strain
 please keep

(III)

is a
 bed
 please do not
 leave
 you will

please

Cathy Ulrich

Your Girlfriend as a Murder Mystery

She will be podcasts, thinkpieces, *the guilty look in his eye*, the uncovered truth, the uncovered lie, breaking of the fourth wall, the clothing the victim wore last, draped in dust and dirt, bestseller *based on true events*, casting call for pretty actresses who can *disappear into the role*, who can *play dead*, the dip and fall of split-tail swallows at their nesting bridge, their soft, fluttering echo, the disappearance and haunt, the whisper, the call, the soft, sad sigh of the last person who sees the girl alive, *such a pretty girl, such a tragedy, such a sad, sad thing*.

Your Girlfriend as Good Little Soldiers

She will be the way they know to turn off the classroom lights, to duck under desks, hold erasers in their hands, hide the waver and shrill of their frightened breaths, the way they dial their gifted phones, whisper the number of the dead, she will be DNA tests and pleading parents, she will be the *nothing that can be done*, the huge and empty weight of the nothing that *will* be done, she will be what we make them carry, what we make them endure, and her eyes will reflect the freedom, the god-blessed freedom, we have been granted.

Your Girlfriend as The Hollywood Sign

She will be a land of *dreams-come-true*, of make-believe, she will be actors in face paint, blazing klieg lights, string quartets and mood music, she will be leading ladies and matinee men, little, lonely Norma Jean, *dreaming the hardest*, Peg Entwistle as she climbs to the H, Elizabeth Short and the names in her black book, she will be American Royalty, repossessed mansions, dark sunglasses, boardwalk stars and handprint marks, she will be William Desmond Taylor's unsolved murder, she will be forgotten names and *the cutting room floor*, she will be directors with bullhorns and casting couches: *Action, action, action.*

Linda McCauley Freeman

Chaos In Nine Parts

I

The ironing board has been open
 weeks now and the winter clothes
 on the armchair never made it
 to the box in the attic though
 it's August. My childhood bear
 propped on the windowsill
 doesn't blink, remembers.
 Adulthood didn't take chaos
 from me, only added bounced
 checks, lost keys, and a nagging
 desire for order. The Lamb's Ears
 in the yard, so soft and small
 when we planted, sprouted
 like Jack's beanstalk after
 a week of rain. We keep saying
 we should cut them, pull weeds,
 mow the lawn. Yesterday, I yanked
 moldy shoes and jackets from the hall
 closet: Ski pants for someday,
 instructions for a heater we no longer
 own, a plastic bag with smoke detectors
 bought when we moved in, and paper
 bags full of words.

II

On my way to the farm, down a dirt
 road, I turn the corner and drive
 into sun. My hand flies to my face,
 shields my eyes. The visor is broken,
 pulled from its yoke by my husband
 angry that it wouldn't stay up. I drive
 the whole way, hovering hand over face,
 fielding the sun.

III

I can tell by the stance of your body,
the stiff set of your jaw, the way
your right foot juts slightly forward
as if to push me away—
I don't measure up to the image
your mother carefully packed
inside you like a starched white shirt.

IV

Laundry I asked you to do
still in the bedroom
it's been weeks and I can't
do more so you left me
with laundry never put away
so everything gets mixed
with what's dirty.

V

You look for the lost lure, your favorite,
in the fishing-line nest the mice made.

Complain about what you are missing
as if it were my fault.

I decide to help. Untangle the lines.
But your words keep tying the line
around my neck, tightening, tightening...

VI

There is just my small intake of breath.
Words slide out of you in rivers,
slime then mud. There is a seed
caught in my throat but I can't
hack it out. It has grown bigger
than you and almost as old.

VII

You tell me
I have oil on my chin
in that tone I recognize
when I have gone too far,
done something that shows
not the wife you chose
but another, ill-bred,
unloved.

VIII

I cannot bless you
any more than I can
curse you even here
under my breath when
all my evil thoughts of you
have stacked themselves
into a wall still a house
of cards to blow down
turn my curses to kisses
or they just blow back
to me leeches sucking
away no fortress
no shadow no shield
I open myself again
and again with stupid
hope not amnesia
but knowledge the fruit
you bear I bite again
spit out the bitter
swallow the sweet.

IX

In the moss-turned reprieve between
mud and water, the deer bolt
at the clump of your stained footsteps
bringing in the frozen sausages.

Ion Corcos

The Arithmetic of Want

In an apron of woodland, there is no owl left;
the rain falls, catastrophically, tongues splintered
onto farms, index fingers floating on slogans
and town maps. Overspilling dams erase lines.
The emperor rides on his horse into geometry.
Armageddon is near: illicit fires, a pandemic,
and now the sky is ruining purchasing power.
There is no mention of all the missing koalas,
or the logic of origination – sun, eucalyptus, want.
A staff member masturbates on an MP's desk.
The misunderstanding of river and floodplains,
cartels, governments, encyclopedias, grey hair.
St John wrote about the apocalypse in a cave.

Kei Vough
Once Again

The absurdities of my life continue.

I stay complacent in my faggoted shortcomings.
 I wallow in the sheer opulence of my misery.

I own a peevish, one-eyed cat who whines &
 scratches the kitchen door in constant hunger.

I'm an emotional mess on Grindr.
 I dedicate Odes to imaginary lovers.

My most human proclivity is crying by
 open windows.

Everyday, I take a selfie to convince myself of
 my existence.

The voices in my head are louder than the
 approaching trains at 11:00am.

My best defense is distance.
 Over the static, I'm fluent in silence.

(Hello).....(Hello).....(Hell).....(Hel)

I checked in with the therapist to check my progress. *How are you? July weather is always embittered. Any recent lover? My teacups complement my heart in its emptiness. Often, love is murder with a cute name. Blab Blab Blab...*

No language, no matter how soothing or monetized, can lessen the weight of my anxiety.

Lonely stranger, sit with me.
 Let's peruse our hurts with a tacit intent
 when we find language; insufficient
 and lacking.

Connor Fisher

Real Actors

I slipped small candles beneath my dress. A mother entered. The role of the mother was played by a woman who was a real mother. The small candles beneath my dress were played by actual candles. My own role was played by a man very similar to myself. He manipulates candles and slips them beneath his dress as deftly as I manipulate candles and slip them beneath my own dress. He wears the same type of dresses that hang in my closet. The role of my closet is played by a real closet. It has practiced for years to support the dresses—themselves dresses playing the role of dresses—along its long, horizontal pole. This metal pole is a genuine rod. The pole shyly offers itself to the dresses and their attendants, the hangers. The hangers are played by real hangers. The pole is my best friend.

Jack Morton

Peter Maynard's Blazing Saddles

With the tragic passing of young director Peter Maynard it is tempting to look to his older work. He has already given us great films. But to do so just as his newest film debuts is to undercut its power. Without a doubt, Maynard's most ambitious work, whether you appreciate the result or not, is as co-writer and director of *Blazing Saddles* (2022).

When Maynard announced his intention to remake Mel Brooks' 1974 classic spoof of the western genre, many, (this reviewer included) presumed this was yet another symbol of an industry so scared of risk and creativity that it would rather resurrect old properties than embrace new ones. Furthermore *Blazing Saddles* in particular seemed a bizarre choice. The type of western which it so joyously lampoons has long fallen from favour, replaced by the revisionist style, and the demands it makes of racial inclusion in the period would be better served with real stories of the Black experience in frontier America. But everyone had mistaken Maynard's true intent. He didn't want to remake *Blazing Saddles*, he wanted to make *Blazing Saddles*.

The writing process alone must have been extraordinary. Little is public knowledge. We know 14 different writers were fired from the project, while at least another seven quit. The most common reason for removal from the writing room was showing too much familiarity with the original. It was not Maynard's intention to copy out the original script, and recalling it from memory amounted to the same thing. Rather he was determined to engage in the full creative process of writing, revising, rewriting, and ultimately coming up with a shooting script that would lead to a film which was word-for-word, shot-for-shot, identical to *Blazing Saddles* (1974). Dave Chapelle, one of the only people in the room from the beginning until the end with Maynard, attempted to clarify this recently:

"At the start, he would say to these guys 'shut up, you're just stealing Mel Brooks' jokes'. And they'd be like 'Aren't we just stealing his whole movie?' And then Pete would stare at 'em for like a minute and a half straight, like he was taking the time, each time, to consider whether that were true. Then he'd kick them the fuck off the project. Afterwards he'd look at the rest of us and go 'Anyone else think that's what we're doing?' And there's a room full of Jews, Wanda [Sykes] and me just quietly shaking our heads. Not 'cause I had any idea what he was talking about, but because I know better than to single myself out. But you know what? By the time we finished, I got what he meant. I'd be like 'this

guy didn't pitch a line, he just remembered what Cleavon Little said.' And that wasn't what we were doing."

They eventually ended up with a script that satisfied Maynard. Interestingly the shooting script, which has since been made available, is far from being identical to the final script of the 1974 film. Ryan Reynolds, playing Jim 'the Wako Kid', recalled the amount of improvisation that happened on set. "I'm used to that. Try different takes, someone has a better joke, someone else tries to top that. But nothing like shooting *Blazing Saddles*. We'd spend all day to get one little interchange right." Maynard's process seems designed to keep shooting until the dialogue of the 1974 film not only came up spontaneously, but also demanded to make the final edit, not because it aligned with the original text, but because it was genuinely the best option.

But before the shooting process could even begin, Maynard had to secure funding. While Warner Brothers had given the go-ahead to pursue the project, once Maynard's intent was fully understood, there was much consternation. "They wanted a more modern script, a new style of shooting, different casting... the biggest question we got was simply 'why?' you know, 'what's the point in doing this at all? The movie exists!'" recalled co-producer Donald Kischott, "In the end we got to keep the rights basically because Mel [Brooks] was on board, but we were left looking to fund the thing ourselves. I can't tell you how many people made some crack like 'Are you trying to film *Blazing Saddles*, or live *The Producers*?' People didn't get it."

They did secure funding, but the questioning of their purpose never stopped. Film and cultural critics from the top of the industry on down hounded the project. A collective licking of lips happened with each casting announcement or leak from set. The release of the trailer dominated the news cycle with commentators tripping over each other to express their take on the film's butchering of a classic, its political incorrectness, or its dated appearance and humour. But more than any other response came a demand to know 'why?' Some have been as savage with their criticism now that they've seen the film, calling it "A waste of time and money" and "More offensive to film-lovers than the original was to sensitive audiences". Uncomplimentary comparisons to Van Sant's *Psycho* were made. Hadley Freeman wrote in *The Guardian*: "They'd have been better off doing *Young Frankenstein*. This is a soulless, joyless resurrection of a film which, until now, lay well-remembered and, while problematic, still cherished."

Yet this is not a consensus opinion, and others, regard *Blazing Saddles* (2022) as a modern classic, rivalling the original in importance to film history, and sheer entertainment value. No one can answer the question 'why?', even before he passed,

Maynard was famously reticent to comment on his work. However, perhaps it is possible to address why the film worked today, and why it was worth making.

To begin, it is important to establish something about the 1974 film. The biggest thing separating the characters in *Blazing Saddles* is not the Blackness or whiteness of their skin. Nor is it the blackness or whiteness of their hat, whether they are a 'good guy' or a 'bad guy'. The biggest distinction between characters in *Blazing Saddles* is their era. Some characters are stuck in the 19th century past, with its language and attitudes. Others have a 70s sensibility, complete with new ways of speaking, new kinds of jokes, and new attitudes towards race and other issues. It does not divide evenly between the heroes and the villains. The main antagonist of the piece, Hedley Lamar (played by Harvey Korman) lives in the present. He uses Yiddish words like "putz" and "schmuck" which wouldn't have entered an Anglo-American's vocabulary in the 1800s, and is aware that "cut them off at the pass" is a tired cliché, which it only is because of 20th century westerns. Meanwhile the people of Rockridge, are the victims of Lamar's violence, and despite their antagonism to Cleavon Little's heroic Bart when he arrives, learn to accept and even celebrate him. But even once their attitudes change towards Bart, their language retains its outdated sensibility. Jessamine Milner's elderly woman doesn't hesitate to use the very racial slur she insulted Bart with in their first interaction when apologizing later. Olson Johnson (played by David Huddleston), in welcoming Black and Asian labourers into the town of Rockridge refers to them using the same slurs their oppressive overseers used in the first scene of the film. Some characters are stuck in the past, while others are from the 70s when the film was made.

The distinction is extremely apparent in the use of the N-word, present throughout the film. The period characters use it often and casually to refer to Black people, whether insulting them, or simply talking about them. The characters from the 70s rarely use it, but when they do it is in the reappropriated sense, as when Charles McGregor's character, Charlie, uses it when Bart returns in his role as sheriff. (Setting up the fantastic joke: "They said you was hung!" "And they was right!") Bart himself uses it twice, once when cheekily quoting the words of a period character back to his subordinate, and again when he has adopted the persona of a period villain to hold himself hostage. The outlaw cowboys use the term frequently, but Hedley Lamar, despite being perfectly comfortable taking advantage of racism, and sending Bart to his death, never does.

While in contemporary mainstream films, such as *12 Years a Slave* or *BlackKlansman*, it is not uncommon to hear villainous white characters using the N-word, it is rare to hear it used, as we do in *Blazing Saddles* by white characters with whom the

Black protagonist, and we as the audience are meant to sympathize. It helps that these characters are ruthlessly pilloried for being ignorant (Jim calls them 'morons') and inbred (Everyone's surname in Rockridge is Johnson), but ultimately what makes it work is the depiction of these characters, their language, and their attitudes as part of an imagined past which a 1974 audience can mock as outdated nonsense.

In making *Blazing Saddles* (2022), Maynard did not attempt to mimic Brooks, by putting characters from the present into his period piece. Rather he deliberately repeats Brooks' choice, nearly fifty years later, and puts characters from the 1970s into his period piece. Jamie Foxx's Bart didn't walk out of a Kanye West music video, but rather out of the pages of *Ebony*. Bradley Whitford's Hedley Lamar isn't the enlightened, liberal, racist character he played in *Get Out*, he's the 'Not racist but practical' of Spencer Tracey in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. And as a result the distinction between the 19th century characters and the 1970s characters is more apparent than ever, as both feel dated to the modern viewer in completely different ways.

Consider the French Mistake sequence. The scrapping cowboys and townfolk burst through a wall into another studio where a chorus of men in black ties and high hats are filming a dance number. All are portrayed as effeminate, and the flamboyant director repeatedly refers to them using a slur for a gay man. James Corden was originally cast to play the director, a role originated by Dom DeLuise, but left the project, stating publicly that he had expected the scene to be rewritten, and in his mind, it was "an unfunny, uninclusive mocking of a group of gay men". The juicy but brief role instead went to Neil Patrick Harris. Watching him, it is just as difficult not to cringe when he uses the slur as it is not to laugh when he shouts "Wrong!" to the dancer who messes up his choreography. You can see what Corden was talking about, the casting of Harris and other out-and-proud gay actors doesn't soften the slurs or stereotypes. And yet in the context of the whole film, it becomes understandable. In the original, the fourth-wall-breaking climax is set in the contemporary world of the 70s, 'look how far ahead our attitudes are of the 19th century "morons" now' the audience gets to think. 'See the cowboy actor leave to hook up with the dancer, it's a good gag, and beautifully normalizes homosexuality.' In Maynard's version the sequence appears as part of a climax set in 1970s Hollywood. Yes, it normalizes homosexuality, but it also normalizes the mocking of stereotypes and the use of harmful slurs. 'Look how far ahead their attitudes are of the 19th century "morons", while still being outdated and offensive today' we think. We are forced to question what ideas we hold, that will one day be equally outdated. Some critics still object to the scene, and perhaps they're right, but it cannot be said that it embodies prejudice without interrogating it.

Maynard made one choice in an arguable concession to modern political correctness. However, rather than undercutting his intent with the rest of the movie, it compliments it. I'm referring to the casting of Zahn McClarnon. In the 1974 film, Mel Brooks appears in warpaint and headdress as the chief of an unspecified American tribe, speaking Yiddish rather than an indigenous language. Maynard had intended to assume that role himself, and had already filmed several scenes as Brooks' other character, the governor. A studio executive, concerned about optics, convinced Maynard to bring in some indigenous actors to read for the role. McClarnon blew everybody away. Kischott recalled "we were all killing ourselves laughing at his governor. Then he did a take as the chief. I looked over at Maynard. I think he saw how perfect this could be, but feared it was going against his intent to make the original movie. We talked about it after McClarnon left, and I said 'aren't we engaging in a full, independent creative process? Well, as creatives, not thinking about Mel Brooks at all, that man is perfect.' And he was." McClarnon brings the house down as the chief, and his casting augments the original gag. Brooks appearing in red face and speaking Yiddish, besides just being provocatively humorous, is a comment on the fact that, in the films *Blazing Saddles* (1974) was spoofing, those roles did often go to white actors of Jewish or Italian descent. The use of Yiddish exaggerates the practice, making it ridiculous. In *Blazing Saddles* (2022) you have an actor with a Lakota background, who has spoken Lakota on film, instead performing in excellent Yiddish which goes, as in the original, subtitled. The scene hasn't changed, the gag still plays, and it has another layer of depth now. As an added bonus, rather than Maynard, who was not known as a performer like Brooks, we are treated to McClarnon in the role of governor Lepetomane. Not only does he surprise and delight in a goofball turn such as we've never seen from him, but his mere presence on camera brings a new dimension to certain scenes, such as Lepetomane's constant objectifying of his mistress. Played to make the supposedly powerful governor seem sex-crazed and unauthoritative in the original, it gains a new dimension, as the audience realizes that a person who looks like McClarnon behaving that way to a white woman would not only have been impossible in the 19th century, but would have at least raised some eyebrows in the 70s as well.

White women are just about the only women to appear in *Blazing Saddles*. In a movie bringing the Black experience to the western, the only woman of color is Bart's mother, seen in a flashback speaking no dialogue. There is no female lead of any race. Women do, however, play several important secondary roles. Carol Arthur plays Harriet Johnson, a buttoned-up school-marm, while Robyn Hilton never appears in anything but lingerie as the Governor's mistress, Miss Stein. Jessamine Milner is unforgettable as the elderly woman, and Madeline Kahn plays the Saloon performing, serial heart-breaking, rhotacismic Lili von Shtupp. And while this may sound like Madonna-Whore-Crone with

an extra serving of Whore, much of the humor from the characters comes from subverting those types. Harriet Johnson begins a speech inaudibly at a public meeting, and when the crowd makes it clear they can't hear, she apologizes meekly saying "I'm not used to public speaking." She then proceeds to deliver a loud harangue of a letter written to the governor, calling him the 'leading asshole in the State', at a volume which causes everyone to jump back. Jessamine Milner's first appears when Rock Ridge is being attacked. She is held by one villain while another repeatedly punches her stomach. "Have you ever seen such cruelty?" She asks, comically embodying the innocence and victimization of the people of Rock Ridge. However, when Bart greets her on his first morning as Sheriff, she instead embodies the ugliest racism those 'innocent' townsfolk harbour. Lili von Shtupp, with whom Lamar, Jim, and countless unnamed saloon patrons are enamoured is employed by Lamar to seduce Bart. After they spend the night together however, it is she who is obsessed by him, thanks to his sexual prowess and the fact that he's "a nice guy." The plot device of a woman seductress as an obstacle, and the hero proving himself by satisfying her is a misogynist framing. Though the consistent humour based around Lili's speech pattern makes it difficult to think of the character as sex object, patriarchal symbol or anything other than hilarious gag character played extremely well. Ultimately, while the women of *Blazing Saddles* undercut the genre's expectations of them, none has enough of a role to assert themselves except through their relationship to men, such as Lili standing up for Bart, or Milner regretting her prejudice towards him. Harriet Johnson gets to deliver a punch which knocks a villain crashing through a shop window in spectacular fashion. But while the women subvert the tropes of the genre, they can't escape them in the way the Black lead does. All of those limitations exist in Maynard's version as well. Is this an intentional demonstration of the failings of the 1974 film? Or a real failing on the part of the 2022 film?

These and similar questions are constantly at play. The result is a subtler, denser film than the original. That is not to say a better film, but perhaps a more impressive one. Consider the scene where the townsfolk of Rockridge are presented with a deal to help them save their town. In return the railroad labourers want "a little piece of land to call their own". Olson Johnson says they can accept the Black and Asian workers, "but we don't want the Irish!" "Everybody" Charlie insists, "No deal" Bart declares, and Johnson agrees "Aww prairie shit. Alright, everybody." Smiles on their faces, the townsfolk and railroad workers shake hands and mingle. When that scene was written in 1974, it could expect a laugh for the Irish joke, augmented by the shock value of the white actor using racial slurs, and then a positive feeling from the audience as well. Cleavon Little, our hero dispatched into the West from modern times hasn't beaten the villain yet, but he's done something harder by beating the prejudices of the townsfolk. His victory is the sweeter

because it is the true story of America. Inclusion has come about, the 70s audience thinks, and we've gotten to the point where the exclusion of people based on race seems as foreign as the exclusion of the Irish based on nationality. To the 2022 audience, the Irish joke still lands, the slurs might garner a shock laugh, or simply be discomforting, but when friendly mingling starts, can they join the celebration and back-patting? Do they see themselves in Bart, Jim and Charlie, the anachronistic characters who have brought some modernity to the West? Do they genuinely believe the actors, like Foxx and McClarnon feel they live in a post-racism world? Or are they reminded how polarising an issue immigration still is in 21st century America? Do they wince, noticing that despite twice hearing a slur for a Chinese person we have yet to hear an Asian actor speak in the movie – noting both the lack of representation, and their own failure to notice until now because it is still so common? Doesn't the idea of the inclusive America embodied by Olson (played charmingly by Dean Norris) when he smiles and waves his hands feel as much a dated fantasy in 2022 as the tough but righteous West did in 1974?

It is tragic that Maynard, who suffered privately from colon cancer, didn't survive to see the world's response to his film. It has been controversial, but one feels it's a controversy Maynard would have cherished. While *Blazing Saddles* (2022) is arguably a great film in its own right, it may yet contribute in another way to film history. For what filmmaker will now approach any remake without the legacy of Maynard's work, both positive and negative, upon him. It is too early to say, but much as Brooks' film killed the idealistic Hollywood western, Maynard's may have done an even greater service by killing the Hollywood remake.

In the last shot of the film, Bart and Jim ride off into the sunset to a choral rendition of the irresistible theme. In Brooks' film, they dismount, give their horses to a handler, and get into a car, reminding us one last time, that world is the past, we have moved on. In Maynard's film, they dismount, give their horses to a handler, and get into a vintage 1970's car, reminding us one last time, that this film is the past, we have moved on. Audiences will continue to revisit Brooks' film, and some will return to Maynard's as well. But will they flock to the next remake of an old favourite or reboot of an existing franchise? Perhaps. But they will not do so without wondering whether the film was truly made today, as Maynard's *Blazing Saddles* was.

Contributors

C. Fausto Cabreara is a multi-genre artist & writer currently incarcerated since 2003. His work has appeared in: *The Colorado Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Comstock Review*, *The American Literary Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Water~Stone Review*, *The California Quarterly*, & *descant*. His most recent project is a prose collaboration with photographer Alec Soth, *The Parameters of Our Cage*. He co-founded The Stillwater Writers Collective partnered with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop (MPWW) & has a profile through WeAreAllCriminals.org's *Seen Project*.

Ion Corcos was born in Sydney, Australia in 1969. He has been published in *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Wild Court*, *Mud Season Review*, and other journals. Ion is a nature lover and a supporter of animal rights. He is the author of *A Spoon of Honey* (Flutter Press, 2018).

Connor Fisher is the author of *The Isotope of I* (Schism Press, 2021) and three poetry and hybrid chapbooks including *Speculative Geography* (Greying Ghost Press, 2022). He has an MFA from the University of Colorado at Boulder and a Ph.D. in Creative Writing and English from the University of Georgia. His poetry has appeared in journals including *Denver Quarterly*, *Random Sample Review*, *Tammy*, *Tiger Moth Review*, and *Clade Song*. He currently lives and teaches in northern Mississippi.

Linda McCauley Freeman is the author of the full-length poetry collection *The Family Plot* (Backroom Window Press, 2022) and has been widely published in international journals, including in a Chinese translation. Nominated for a Pushcart Prize 2022, she recently appeared in *Delta Poetry Review*, *Poet Magazine*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, and won Grand Prize in StoriArts' Maya Angelou poetry contest. She received a grant from Arts MidHudson and was selected for Poets Respond to Art 2020, 2021, and 2022 shows. She has an MFA from Bennington College and is the former poet-in-residence of the Putnam Arts Council. She lives in the Hudson Valley, NY. www.LindaMcCauleyFreeman.com.

Mark Goodwin is a poet-sound-artist & fiction-maker who speaks and writes in various ways. He has a number of books & chapbooks with various English poetry houses, including: Leaf Press, Longbarrow Press, Nine Arches Press, Shearsman Books, & also Middle Creek in North America. His latest chapbook—/to 'B' nor as 'tree'/ was recently published by Intergraphia. Mark lives with his partner on a narrowboat just north of Leicester, in the English Midlands. He tweets poems from @kramawoodgin, & some of his sound-enhanced poetry is at <https://markgoodwin-poet-sound-artist.bandcamp.com>.

Reynaldo Hinojosa received his MFA from the University of Texas at El Paso in 2018. Shortly after that, he shipped off to boot camp for the Michigan Army National Guard. He recently accepted a Lead Teaching Artist Fellowship with InsideOut, a Detroit based non-profit whose focus is teaching poetry to youth during school hours and after school programs in City Wide Poets. When not in the classroom, you can find him hanging out at Book Suey, where he is a member-owner. He lives in Hamtramck with his partner, son, and two cats.

SG Huerta is a Chicano writer from Dallas. They are pursuing their MFA at Texas State University where they serve as the nonfiction editor for Porter House Review. SG is the author of the chapbook *The Things We Bring with Us: Travel Poems* (Headmistress Press, 2021). Their work has appeared in *Infrarrealista Review*, *Variant Lit*, and others. They live in Texas with their partner and two cats. Find them at sghuertawriting.com or on Twitter @sg_poetry.

BEE LB is an array of letters, bound to impulse; a writer creating delicate connections. they have called any number of places home; currently, a single yellow wall in Michigan. they have been published in *Revolute Lit*, *After the Pause*, and *Roanoke Review*, among others. they are the 2022 winner of FOLIO's Editor's Prize for Poetry as well as the Bea Gonzalez Prize for Poetry.

Livia Meneghin (she/her) is the author of *Honey in My Hair* and writes reviews for *GASHER*. She is the winner of *Breakwater Review's* 2022 Peseroff Prize, a Writers' Room of Boston Fellowship, and The Academy of American Poets' 2020 University Prize. Her writing has found homes in *Solstice Lit*, *Thrush*, *wildness journal*, and elsewhere. She earned her MFA from Emerson College, where she now teaches writing and literature. She is also Program Coordinator for EmersonWRITES, a free creative writing lab for Boston Public School students. She is a cancer survivor.

Jack Morton is from Kingston, Ontario and attended the University of Toronto. He now lives in the south of France. His stories can be read in *Expanded Field Journal*, *NonBinary Review*, *Radon Journal*, *The First Line*, and Parsec Ink's *Triangulation*.

Ana Reisens is an emerging poet and writer. She was the recipient of the 2020 Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Award, and you can find her poetry in *The Belmont Story Review* and the Fresher Press Anthology *Winding Roads*, among other places.

Juanita Rey Juanita Rey is a Dominican poet who has been in this country five years. Her work has been published in *Pennsylvania English*, *Opiate Journal*, *Petrichor Machine* and *Porter Gulch Review*.

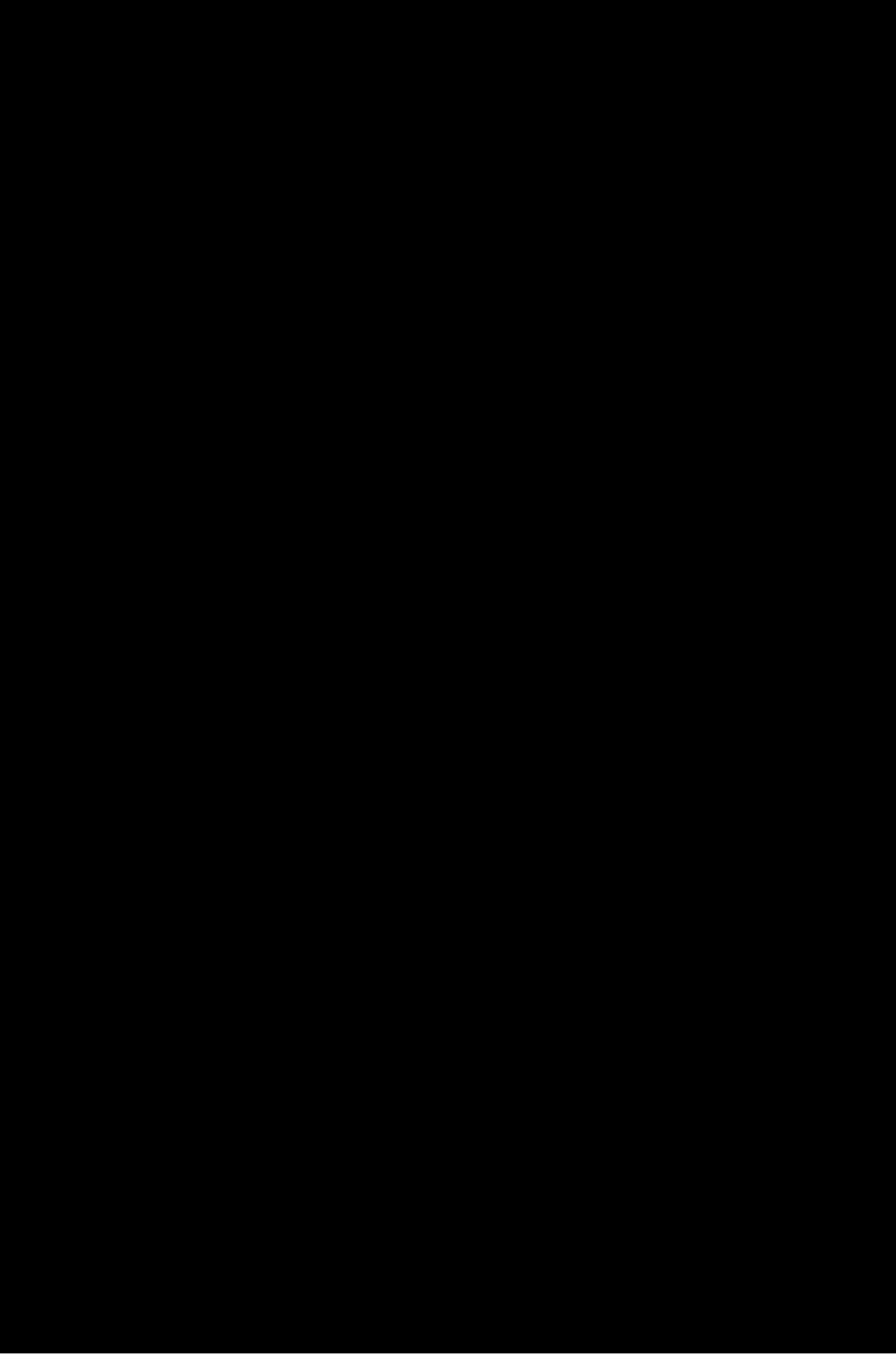
Nnandi Samuel (he/him/his) hold a B.A. in English & Literature from the University of Benin. Author of *Nature knows a little about Slave Trade*, selected by Tate N. Oquendo (Sundress Publications, 2023). His works have been previously published in *Suburban Review*, *Seventh Wave Magazine*, *NativeSkin Lit Magazine*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Quarterly West*, *FIYA*, *Fantasy Magazine*, and *Strange Horizons*. A 3x Best of the Net and Pushcart Nominee. He won the Miracle Monocle Award for Ambitious Student Writers.

Marcus Slease (Portadown, N. Ireland 1974) is the author of *Puppy* (Beir Bua Press), *Never Mind the Beasts* (Dostoyevsky Wannabe), *The Green Monk* (Boiler House Press), *Play Yr Kardz Right* (Dostoyevsky Wannabe), *Rides* (Blart Books) and *Mu (Dream) So (Window)* (Poor Claudia), among others. His writing has been translated into Polish and Danish and has appeared in literary journals in North America and Europe, including *Tin House*, *Bath Magg*, *Black Box Manifold*, *The Lincoln Review*, *Fence*, *Poetry*, as well as in the anthology *Dear World and Everyone In It* (Bloodaxe) and *Best British Poetry 2015* (Salt). He comes from a working-class background and currently lives in Sitges, Spain. Find out more at: *Never Mind the Beasts* (www.nevermindthebeasts.com).

Elias Udo-Ochi is Igbo-Nigerian & queer. He graduated from the University of Benin, majoring in English & Literature. He has poems forthcoming or already in several journals. A 2018 Wawa Book Review Young Literary Critic Fellow, his manuscript FLOWERBOYS was a finalist for the Kissing Dynamite 2021 Micro chapbook contest. He currently volunteers as an outreach worker for a Global Fund sponsored nonprofit invested in the sexual health of Key Populations. He is a member of The Deadliners, a collective of badass Nigerian Creatives. On Twitter, he tweets @eliasandrevn.

Cathy Ulrich knows that Bette Davis was inspired by Peg Entwistle's performance in "A Wild Duck." She thinks that's really neat. Her work has been published in various journals, including *Unstamatic*, *Beaver Magazine* and *Wigleaf*.

Kei Vough (he/they) is a 22-year-old, bi/queer Nigerian poet. He currently serves as poetry chapbook reader/editor for Tyrian Ink Press. They have works forthcoming with *PANK*, among others. Flirt with him on Twitter @KayVough.





DETROIT, MI
2022