

£ X i S T O T H E R W I S E



Issue 17, January 2026

Beth Anne MacDonald

Bella Melardi

Caio Major

Mark Blickley

yucheng tao

Blue Sunshine

Bryce Baron-Sips

Carolina Gutfreund

Andrew London

EA Kane

Anne Whitehouse

Fendy S. Tulodo

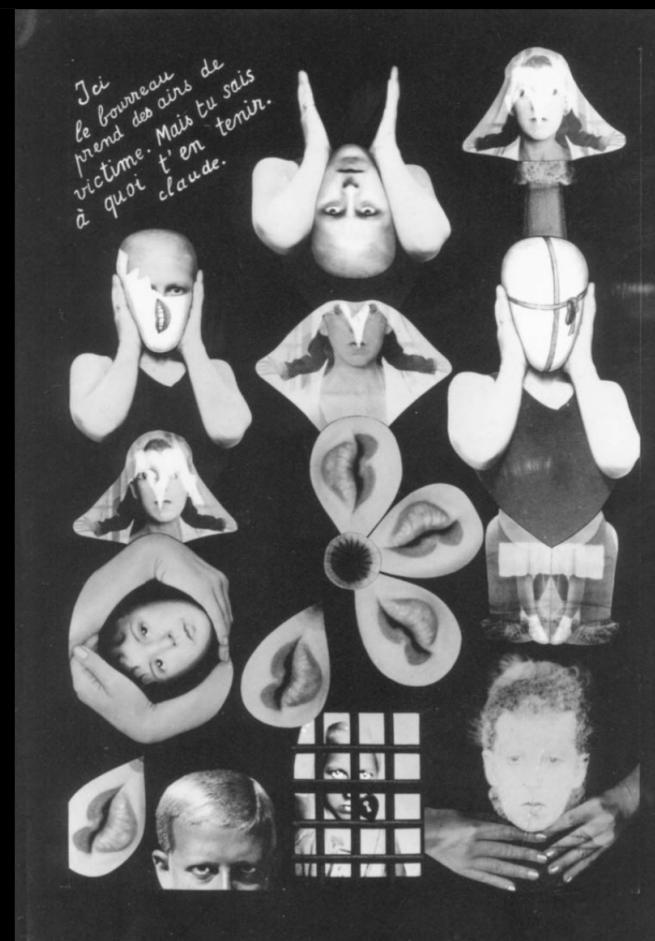
Mel Connelly

Cleomé Morra

mk zariel

Theodora Bonis

this is what
RESISTANCE
looks like



Holy Rollers and Tech Bros sit side-by-side.
Heads together. Legs apart.
Comparing parchment scrolls and source code.
Blending old-time religion with optimization models
because

Man: I wanna live forever.

One argues the only way is through His Magic.
Watch closely as wine becomes a dead son's blood and bread becomes his body.
A miraculous sleight of hand.
The other swears the only way is through His Science.
Watch closely as a young son's blood revives his aging father's body.
A miraculous multigenerational plasma exchange.

Bio-hacks are the new hair shirts.
One more gadget designed to monitor piety and/or performance.
Never mind, same thing.
If no one knows about it, does your penance even count?
Sanctity just another game when only suffering makes you worthy.

What the pious really seek is transfiguration.
Man's Divine Glory.
The perfect alpha male.
Made in His image or His appetite?
Never mind, same thing.
So, which is better, old god or new? Trick question.
It makes no difference when eternal life is promised only through the son.



Ever since she was a young girl and heard the preacher blame women who wear pants for America's downfall, **Beth Anne** has wanted to ask questions about gender performance and blame. As an adult, she uses her lifelong obsession with religion to explore how the ancient beliefs of patriarchal religions shape modern women's lives with devastating consequences for everyone.

A grant writer by day, her work appears in *Querencia Press*, *The Saranac Review*, *Exist Otherwise*, *Marrow Magazine*, *The Anti-Misogyny Club* and more. You can find her at [Instagram](#) or her [Website](#).

Meanwhile,

TikTok prophets package purity where wellness vibes will keep us safe.

Tradwives insist it really is all about freedom of choice.

They sell us clean eating with a straight face

through clenched teeth.

Kneading bread behind a gleaming countertop. Pregnant.

With a pedicure.

Proving little girls still like to play dress-up when
white women in prairie dresses slip on ballerina slippers
to become foot soldiers for the patriarchy.

Phyllis Schlafly greets them at the Pearly Gates.

Welcome to eternity, says the spider to the fly.

The rest of us, well, we're just Jezebels and welfare queens.

Refusing the command to contort and conform to a white man's conventions,
while they plant their flag or plant their seed.

Never mind. Same thing.

Post-Roe isn't pro-natal when motherhood is the main means of subjugation.

Lot said it best. Save the men, fuck my daughters.

We're all just baby mamas for the children of Mars

One prays for the apocalypse,
the other makes it so.

Watch them come together, side by side, as they step in line. Murmuring. Marching.

Right,

right,

right.

God: It's always been about control.

Moon Water

Bella Melardi

When I was little, I used to stare at the moon from my bedroom window and wonder if it ever resented the Earth's admiration of the sun. Did it envy that brightness? Did it ever feel like a substitute, glowing only because of borrowed light? My father used to visit every other weekend. Routinely asking about school like he was clocking in for a shift. Covering my mom's shift. I think he felt like the moon. That when the sun set, we were left with disappointment.

But my father had a power over me that my mother never could. His greatest influence was his absence. When he left, the space he left behind grew large enough to raise me. I became an ocean without a moon—wild, rising, uncontrollable. I learned to rise and crash without warning. His absence pulled at my tides, leaving a lump in my throat that only grew. Later, doctors called it a thyroid nodule. I just thought of it as the physical proof that I was always on the brink of tears. I called it the body's way of storing an unanswered question.

Water rose in the back of my retina, causing it to swell. A slow flooding that blurred the edges of everything. When I lost an eye, I lost the ability to see the grey in reality. Depth and nuance became a rumour. My black and white thinking, an act of survival.

I feel guilty about the way men have power over me. It led me to fear masculinity. Especially in myself. I performed femininity. A fluoride forced across my teeth. A purifier. But I couldn't stick to the routine. Tight shirts. Short skirts. Makeup. Full face. Eventually, my entrails had to exhale. I had to think about what the world meant to me. And not what service I could provide to it. This is what resilience. This is what resistance looks like.



Bella Melardi (she) is a poet and author. She writes about the political and personal. She attends OCADU.

Wingspan

Growing up you see freedom as
a flock of birds, taking flight together
from telephone wires, black shapes against the dawn sky,
the flock calls to each other, a dog barks, Mary Oliver-core,
politically neutral imagery unless some eco-anarchist killjoy
shows up to read into it.

As an adult clinging to this side of 40
you know freedom is the viral video you just watched:

Chicago, La Migra spots one delivery worker and swarms.
The man's reflexes are faster than yours have ever been
as he runs with his bike, the wheels swerve, he dodges them,
still running he hops on the bike, legs pumping faster than an Olympian's on those pedals,
and he's off, the thugs shouting in a lumbering run behind him,
but the man on the bike is too fast, pedals blurring,
he's around the corner and down the street,
his body becoming a dot in the distance as the fascists stumble and stop,
he's too fast for the fascists, one of whom is wearing a white cowboy hat for fuck's sake,
too fast for the Supreme Court and its recent verdict stating that
his brown skin is the only reason they need to grab him off the street in the first place.

Faster than I was when I did not apply for the gender on my passport
to be changed from 'F' to 'M' before the president's executive order.
Now if we want/need to move to my wife's home country,
we can't do it as a married couple, I'll have to find some other way
to emigrate, her country will not recognize the marriage of two 'F's
despite my beard, testosterone, masculine name.

Caio Major



Caio Major (he/him) is a Latino trans man and a graduate student in the MFA-Fiction program at Syracuse University. He has published fiction in *Coffin Bell Journal* and nonfiction in *So To Speak* intersectional feminist journal and *Plentitudes* literary journal. He lives in Syracuse with his wife and their dog, Bagel. You can read more of his writing at his blog, [Second Adolescence](#).

cont'd

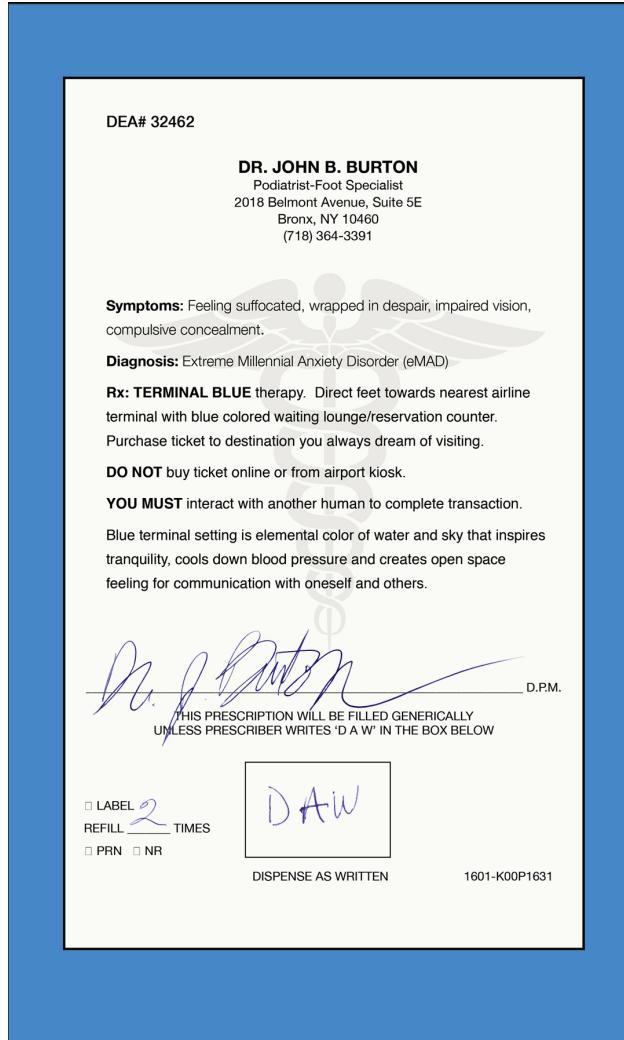
www.existotherwise.com

You hope that this man in Chicago, caught on video by a stranger,
now become a hero, known online only as Chicago Bike Guy <3,
when the adrenaline faded from his body and left him shaking,
perhaps thinking of the fate narrowly avoided,
the concentration camps and slavery,
that which according to your childhood education,
Uncle Sam existed to save people from,
but so yes you
hope that his shakes subsided and he was able to eat his fill,
that grateful loving arms squeezed his torso until he became breathless again,
that he was told he was a hero, a movie star, a magical flying man,
Latin America's magical realist literary movement in motion,
less a metaphor than the embodiment,

All of Steven Spielberg's white children and
All the wingspans of all the birds in the world
Have nothing
On him.

Terminal Blue

Mark Blickley



Mark Blickley (he/him) grew up within walking distance of New York's Bronx Zoo. He is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild, PEN American Center, and Veterans For Responsible Leadership. His latest book is the flash fiction collection *'Hunger Pains'* (Buttonhook Press).

The Side of Death

Yucheng Tao

A black bird emerges in my dream.

A black bird emerges over the city.

It circles the ruins.

Could it be a black crow? Or an unknown species?

They long for meals, for the cruel, but for them, it's a beautiful corpse. And my Lord especially likes to feed them.

What is death to war? I ask myself.

It is the inevitable result, the shadow that follows. Those who survive may suffer even more, facing every day and night the flashing images that rise from dreams like ghosts.

I am one of the few who survived the battle of the Mountain City.

This city has a long night. Even during the day, blatant evil is like a ghost in the night, exposed here.

In my hands I still hold my paintings. They are records of hell, and they contain everything I have witnessed.

The lord of the Mountain City, cruel and violent, took pleasure in destruction. He set fires day and night, watching the flames fill the sky and the people run screaming from the blaze. During the day, he filled the fields with blades and threw the innocent into them. From a perverse sense of beauty, he was drunk on this evil and saw himself as the supreme ruler who had restored Sodom. Everything against the Bible was, in his eyes, beautiful.

I was only a painter and could not change anything.



Yucheng Tao is a Chinese poet based in Los Angeles, currently pursuing a B.A. in Songwriting at the Musicians Institute. His work has appeared in over 30 journals internationally, including *Wild Court* (King's College London), *NonBinary Review*, *Apocalypse Confidential*, *The Arcanist*, *Red Ogre Review*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *SHINE: International Poetry*, *In Parentheses*, and more. He was a semifinalist for the Winds of Asia Award. His debut chapbook, titled April *No Longer Comes*, was published by Alien Buddha Press in August 2025

I mixed my blood into the paint, my tears into the strokes, recording the map of hell. Soon the people rose up, and another city-state attacked. I was trapped in the mud of war. At that time, I felt that no matter what war was, it would at least destroy the cruel paradise of the lord. For the first time, I came close to death. Compared with watching so many tortured without reason, that kind of death seemed almost merciful.

Now half of my face has been burned into the shape of a hill under fire.

I still hold the map of hell. On the side of death—amid the ruins where I survived — I think: if I turn from the side to the front, that is death itself. Sudden fear, absolute nothingness.

The side, trembling in memory, becomes the image of hell.

Everyone is being pierced by the lord.

From the side, only the blood-stained thorn was visible; the face turned away into the dim moonlight, dissolving its sin in death, leaving only an image behind.

And the concrete manifestation of death is those nameless deceased, being devoured bit by bit.

The Lord eventually became the aesthetic enjoyment of the black bird.

I meet myself in
metallic swirls of blood and
clumps of tissue
down the drain, water pinkish,
warm—

and I meet myself
in the sound of laughter
bouncing off tile
when I realize
what I have done, and I—

meet myself in
one-way-mirror nights
spent on my knees,
reverberating pain drawing from me
words I do not mean,
begging God for atonement I
do not deserve, and I meet—

myself in touching a body that's
my something borrowed,
his something blue,
and I meet myself—



Blue Sunshine (any pronouns) is a queer poet from a small town in Georgia, Blue Sunshine (any pronouns) is the author of *Is It Bad If My Gums Bleed When I Floss?* (Curious Corvid Publishing, 2024). Their poetry and short fiction has previously been published by Free the Verse and Laughing Man House Publishing. [Instagram](#)

Hyde (cont'd)

Blue Sunshine

in the weight of canvas
draped on skin, heavy,
red-painted tally marks six weeks in,
no one can see it, and
I meet myself in—

legacy,
mishandled and
miscarried and
unmissed.

On Being Violetta When All Medicine Has Failed You

You can tell

if a singer is good at singing *Addio del passato*

if a pill bottle has rhythm

if Violetta sounds better the sicker she's getting.

based on how many days it's been since your pharmacy called out your insurance.

There's been a problem. It's problematic, the problem.

Take heart, this is a hooker with a heart of gold story,

We're on half-rations now, one-third, tell CVS that, tell Walgreens,

but let your hair and your awareness stand at attention, at the back of your neck,

tell them not to tell me that I should watch my tone,

because we have a mystic compulsion to rise above it.

The mouth goes down as the voice goes up: raising a mismanaged manicure of a hand-on-bottle,
higher, higher—

transitioning, Violetta is like an angel's soreness, pressing down to relieve us upwards,
inflammation, muscles and vocal cords swelling as earthly things thin.

without the base of a bottle to raise I rise above it (TELL THEM THAT MANIA DOES
NOT WATCH ITS TONE), beatific. *I am more than my body*, a voice that is not my own tells
me. *We are love, forsaken by all we love, because we are already dead.*

Bryce Baron-Sips

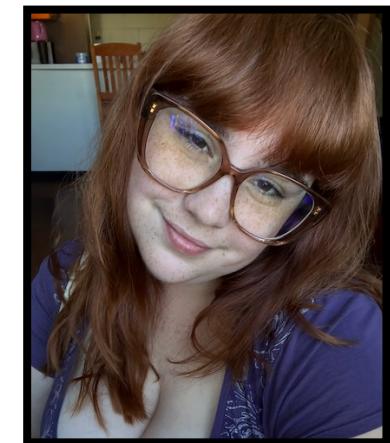
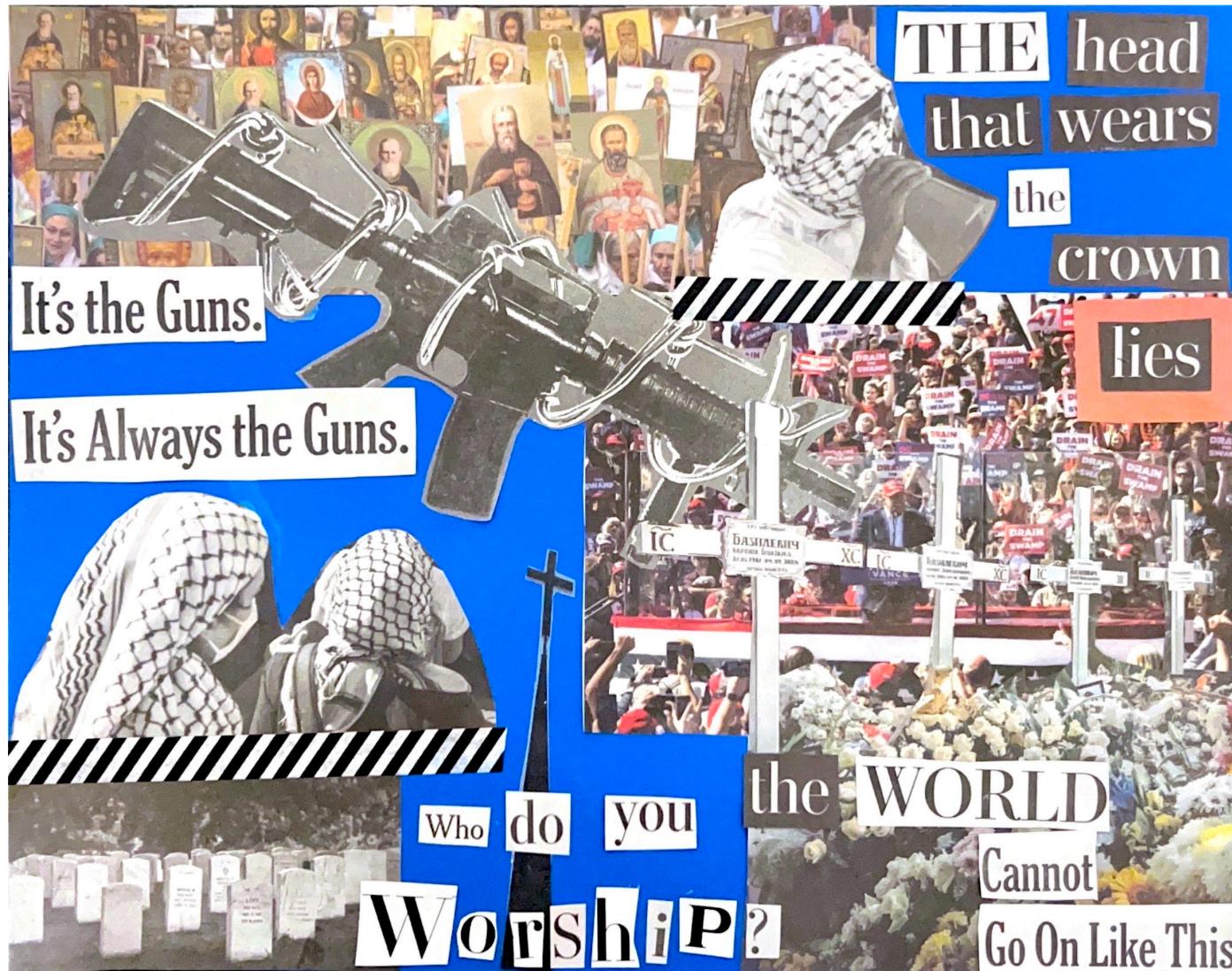


Bryce Baron-Sips (he/him) is a speculative writer and poet who has work published or forthcoming in *Nightshades*, *ALOCASIA*, *Strange Horizons*, *Wrongdoing Magazine*, and elsewhere.

The mouth goes down as the voice goes up. *Tutto, tutto*
my lithium salt of the earth.
one who has wandered from the path of health: *La Traviata*.

Who Do You Worship

Carolina Gutfreund



Carolina Gutfreund (she/her) is a senior double majoring in creative writing and environmental sciences. She has been published by *Evanescing Lit*, *Thread Magazine*, *Muse Zine*, and more. She is currently the editor in chief of USF's literary magazine, Thread and a Senior Editor at USF women's magazine HerCampus. You can read her work on Instagram [@Ro_Writing](https://www.instagram.com/@Ro_Writing).

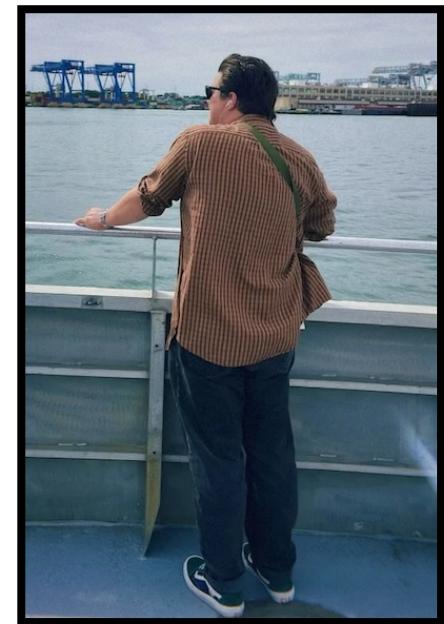
The Politics of No Longer Starving

Andrew London

John Darnielle is married with two sons. Laura Jane Grace sits comfortably in her Chicago apartment. Patrick Schneeweis's father still plays the trumpet. I am at work, staring at a screen. There are still three hours left in the day. Last weekend, I churned in the mosh pit at the Rent Strike concert. I can still feel the bruise.

I always wanted to die young. But I'm still here. The fire is reduced to a smolder, but the ashes don't blow away. We're all still here, those of us who still are. "Most of my old friends are dead or sober," Pat remarks in a recent interview. He is surrounded by boxes of aid headed for Gaza. There is an echo that reverberates through that room, or so I would guess. It's hard to be uncompromising forever. For all the fights, for all the songs, all we said.

I'm happy that John no longer writes about the stick pins and the cottons. That Pat released the bunny. I hope Laura dreams about Bob Dylan tonight. I will play Erik Peterson for my son one day. And maybe it will light a flame inside him. Maybe he will accomplish what the rest of us could not do between two chords and a lie.



Andrew London (he/him) is a Colorado-based writer focusing on fiction and poetry. He worked as a photographer and writer for Music in Press, and his contributions as writer, editor, and designer were published by Colorado Parks and Wildlife in 2024. When he's not writing, he's making zines, playing music, or going on long hikes with his wife and dog. [Website](#)

Seventh Period

EA Kane

The sound of a lockdown is much like a firetruck. A firetruck with a focused, robotic voice crunching through the loudspeaker after each deafening siren. Are there earthquake sirens, in California, which we were watching fall into the ocean in DVD-quality? My teacher was struggling to turn off the movie projected onto the whiteboard. My teacher was struggling, and looking at me, who had set up the projector for her. Me, huddling like an earthquake beneath the counter beneath the windows with a pair of scissors in my hands and my classmates pressed around me. She was small and round and her daughter was in the next classroom over painting a paper mâché oyster all glamorous and wet with varnish and I gave my scissors to my best friend and went to help her. She locked the door and covered the windows and I stood on her desk to turn the projector off at the source. Reaching up, aware of the fact of my classmates staring at me, aware of the screeching siren, of the playground across the street, of height and the light off the snow coming between the blinds and my blue scissors and my best friend who I lie to more than anyone.

There were two bomb threats at the school where my brother was student teaching. They are funny stories but they arrest my mind after I hear them, tell them. They are stupid stories, sick—misspelled dry-erase death-wishes on mirrors in bathrooms I always imagine look like the bathroom near the cafeteria in my elementary school, always one stall off-limits and I never knew why. After them, I sit in the empty kitchen like a jar of fresh bacon grease, slowly congealing in the false-memory hijacking of a life without my brother.

I step down from the desk and I am responsible for her, when there is a gunshot and when something crashes against our classroom door. She has long yellow nails and her skin is so much clearer than mine and she smiles with teeth when she is angry. (And I know she thinks I'm ugly and gross because of the way she talks about people like me and the way she doesn't thank me when I do anything nice for her anymore, but I will still eat twelve cold lobsters at her graduation party and her boyfriend will still abuse her, so I try to think of her as small pleasures, as a loud voice calling me weird names down the hallways, as plucking my fingers through her knotted blonde hair during homeroom.)

And when the boy in camo and shooting glasses breaks through the classroom door, I take a bullet for her and die. It might be a love confession. But I still die. Over and over, taking the scissors from her hands and tucking into the disquiet beneath that long chipboard countertop, waiting for a memory of a death that may or may not come, that has and will come.



EA Kane (they/them) is a multidisciplinary artist living in rural New England. Their work has been published in the *Black Warrior Review*, *the Sandy River Review*, and *A Possible Practice*, among others. In prose, verse, and visuals, monsters rule their heart. [Website](#)

Stumble Stone

Anne Whitehouse

A cento, for Jon Grabelle Hermann

“The ceremony is a respectful event
that commemorates Holocaust victims
by placing a small brass plaque
outside their last freely chosen residence
or place of work.

Created with a powerful idea
that people are only forgotten
when their names are forgotten,
each stone is small, just 10 by 10 cm,
but it carries the full weight of life,
of a family broken, a future stolen,
and a community shattered.

These stones invite passers-by
to pause, remember, and reflect.
We do not stumble
over them with our feet,
but with our hearts.”

In the moment of silence,
on a street in Greimerath,
a motorcycle sped by.

Anne Whitehouse (she/her) is the author of poetry collections: *The Surveyor’s Hand, Blessings and Curses, The Refrain, Meteor Shower, Outside from the Inside, and Steady*, as well as the art chapbooks, *Surrealist Muse* (about Leonora Carrington), *Escaping Lee Miller, Frida, Being Ruth Asawa*, and the forthcoming *Adrienne Fidelin Restored*. She is the author of a novel, *Fall Love*. Her poem, “Lady Bird,” won the Nathan Perry DAR 2023 “Honoring American History” poetry contest. She has lectured about Longfellow and Poe at the Wadsworth Longfellow House in Portland, Maine, and Longfellow House Washington Headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

How to Be a Room

Fendy S. Tulodo

When I was little, I thought my ribs could swing wide, like a gate opening slow. That if I tried hard enough, I could let someone live inside. It didn't happen, not until Mira moved in. She came with a suitcase full of tiny speakers, said she liked the sound of empty apartments.

She played recordings of breathing, laughter, quiet typing. I didn't ask whose. The noises filled the rooms faster than air.

Sometimes, she'd stand still and ask me, "Where do you keep your fear?" I'd point to the hallway, always the hallway. She'd walk there, nod like she could see it, then return and lie down on the floor.

The tiles were cold. Her hair stuck to her cheeks. I watched her chest rise, slow, deliberate. It looked like prayer or surrender.

When she left, she didn't take the speakers. The sounds stayed. Every night, I hear them clicking on, a low hum followed by faint laughter. The air moves differently now, like someone's still passing through it.

I started talking back. I tell the air what groceries I bought, what I remembered about my father, how the mirror in the bathroom doesn't show my shoulders anymore.

It answers sometimes, in its own way. The curtains move without wind. The faucet drips faster when I start crying.

I think I've become the place she wanted. A body that listens close, a space that keeps breathing after everyone leaves.

If she returns, I'll leave the door open just a crack.

She might come back inside, or I might step in fully and let the apartment take me for good.

Either way, these walls remember.



Fendy S. Tulodo (he/him) stays in Malang, Indonesia. He makes art from words and sound, looking at how time moves slow for some, fast for others, and why certain bonds don't break even when they should. By day he sells bikes. At night he writes songs, records them as Nep Kid. His work sits in the silent gap between what's spoken and what's really meant. [Linktree](#)

Handmaidens (or, “What’s the Point of Loving Me in Fascist America?”)

I.

They followed through with it,
a number taken a time ago at the butcher's counter
that's called after my foot's already tired of tapping.

Get on with it. Allyship--too good to be true.
We waited together for the verdict, staring at our feet,
holding our own hands in public, but not the other's.
No, no longer. Never.

We looked every way crossing the street when we went home
after dark, some time granted, afterwards disappointed,
the next move decided, worried our ending could be more
abrupt, scared to walk alone, to look behind us.

As if everyone was suddenly against us.
As if they always were.

Tomorrow, my stuff goes to the curb
and I must grab a car before it passes.

Forcibly separated, evicted by the government,
I will tell my wife goodbye and move
into my state-sanctioned studio apartment.

To fight will result in certain death,
social or otherwise.

Mel Connelly

Mel Connelly (she/her) is a lesbian feminist poet, archivist, and art and book historian whose writing has appeared in *Screen Door Review*, *Poetry South*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and more. She lives in France, but her work is often inspired by her upbringing in the rural South, where there is also plenty of butter.

Handmaidens (or, “What’s the Point of Loving Me in Fascist America?”) (cont’d)

Mel Connelly

We thought this was speculative,
that it wouldn't happen in our lifetime.

It's the near-future. Needless to say, they let us down,
a past decade revived and tradition monumentalized.

We are re-entering an age gone by,
new foundations overturned for the former.
You said it's like living in another country.

Where?, a word that designates time.
Where we shared hair ties and date nights.
Where I ordered a ring online.

What if it ends here?, you asked,
grabbing my forearm in the courthouse.
My head could only meet your chest.
But I couldn't. One of us had to seem
as if she was keeping it together,
as if she was the breadwinner.

Court-ordered, marriage revoked, the brush
of your hand against mine's been made illegal.

The sight of it nearly gave the judge a stroke
and that's when he banged his gavel.

cont'd

www.existotherwise.com

Handmaidens (or, “What’s the Point of Loving Me in Fascist America?”) (cont’d)

Mel Connelly

II.

Indeed, before long the other will dissolve
into a non-factor. *Who goes there?*
Someone lost. *Who goes there?* I certainly don't.
Later when we pass each other in the supermarket
you pretend we never fucked.

Don't let me fall through,
I think. Let the absent subject herself,
let her make it so with a secret look.

Effervescent, the rising feeling of love,
the rush bringing you to your toes.
What bubbles up, explodes.
No doubt I missed it happening.
No doubt it was microscopic at first.
But here beneath the fluorescents
you have to keep your distance.

How fast our world ruptured.
I should have stocked a bunker,
no place for us to go. None, no last resort.
No resistance. No enticing cliff to jump from
or spiced chamomile to put us to sleep
or stash of downers you got in France.
No friends, no numbers behind us,
no line of defense. No one to save us.

Handmaidens (or, “What’s the Point of Loving Me in Fascist America?”) (cont’d)

Mel Connelly

III.

I have gathered all my items,
noticing that the produce is misshapen.
Waste is forbidden. Store policy:
Don't get rid of what's still ripe.
We are familiar with this line of thought.
You rub your stomach as a sign
and I pretend to be shocked.

There's finality in a check-out line. You're behind me
and I pass you the plastic divider. You don't say thank you.
I brought my own tote, procedural and expected.
The checkout girl must know. I tip the bag boy.
If this is my life now I shouldn't have to carry groceries.

Pause fairly. Cool it with the paranoia.

I took notes, a mental list of your glances.
I should have asked for cash back, bought time.
Usually the cashier has words on end but she was silent.
My strongman had your same manners
and I gave him more than enough.
The things I notice after the fact.

IV.

How do you get along now that you are not allowed to work with kids
but you're being forced to have them? How's that useless degree?
Has your retirement been compromised? What's for dinner?
Is your husband hungry? Do you still believe in surrogacy?

cont'd

www.existotherwise.com

Handmaidens (or, “What’s the Point of Loving Me in Fascist America?”) (cont’d)

Mel Connelly

Our landlord was always a dick. Did he kick you out yet?
Are you my new neighbor? Who do you live with?
I have endless questions, most of which need no answer.

V.

Sensations of learning to be alone, involuntarily a nun:
eating the last piece of pizza, cold, showering in magma,
the whole bed being mine, brewing a single pot.

Instructions on how to live a holy life:
ask God if solitary confinement was what He had in mind.
Ask if the extra room on my mattress has purpose.
No more clink of mugs in the morning! Or arguments
over the morality of microwaving a leftover slice.

Stunted dilations, now a wider perception,
but the details are blurry.

Unexpected confrontations might seem uncanny,
but we were *married*, so you know that I go out on Wednesdays.



some days i can't figure out if i'm upset that i'm trans
or just mystified that some people aren't. footsteps
echo on pavement like the drumbeat of a thousand
definitions that i mostly did not ask for—the discourse flooding
with split-second theories cast off on the wind—
some days i ask for people's opinions when
they were never my problem and technically still are not

and maybe it's the morbid fascination of it all, keeping one eye
fixed on the doomsroll toward a
softer apocalypse, one made on hundreds of televised papercuts
and my friend says that fascism is a tall building made of thin material
easy to knock down so long as you try

not to get too freaked out, but that's
long been a foregone conclusion, seeing as
getting too freaked out is my personality.
and some days my gender is the smallest stronghold of all time
unintimidating but at least still
somewhat impervious.

mk zariel (it/its) is a trans-masculine neuro-queer poet, theater artist, movement journalist, and insurrectionary anarchist. it is fueled by folk-punk, Emma Goldman, and existential dread. it can be found online at mkzariel.carrd.co, creating conflictual queer-anarchic spaces, writing columns for Asymptote and the Anarchist Review of Books, and being mildly feral in the great lakes region. it is kinda gay ngl.

On Giving Your Word

Theodora Bonis

From above it must have looked almost nice, the three of us talking like that, though it was the sweat in the palm of my hands that gave it away while the lawyer combed through my memories, and the matching lines on our foreheads were dark as grooves in wet pavement.

I don't even know if you're getting these messages.

If there was anything left from the time before, it was certainly gone now. My tongue was littered with disfigured phrases: willful or threatened acts, polyvagal EMDR, wanton disregard for the physical wellbeing

I was getting discouraged when I got no response, but I decided to double down and keep reaching out to you.

of a child, alienation. Abuse. There is no easy way to say this. I was all mouth then, words a river's current, body a shuttered home, heart bruise-black and beating.



Theodora Bonis (she/her) is a writer and art educator based in Burlington, VT. She is the author of *Shadowing*, a poetry collection, and her work has been featured in *Eunoia Review*. [Sweetgrass Root](#)

cont'd

www.existotherwise.com

You may want to reconsider that last statement. It will have lasting implications for you.

A light goes off. Another comes on.

In the corner of a bedroom, the softened figure
of a candle keels over in its heat, and I spoke,

I give you my word — it won't be a painful process.

all the while thinking of a limp limbed girl
napping in her father's arms and knowing
a river is just a body

You'll always be my daughter.

running.

Twilight

Theodora Bonis

When the jeans shrink in the wash.

If the seatbelt is too snug. What

it looks like from the outside.

How the tracks warm before the train.

When he's holding you like that. Why
you're supposed to dry flowers upside down.

How a certain light slants a certain
way. Or a branch writhes away

from itself. Why the ink stain won't come
out. How the armchair takes you in.

Why you look in every mirror you pass.
If you stand a loaded gun. If you know it.

When you're being ugly. How you choose
to play the game. If you're lucky.

How it feels in your skin. When you want it
bad. If you think you'll forget.



Theodora Bonis (she/her) is a writer and art educator based in Burlington, VT. She is the author of *Shadowing*, a poetry collection, and her work has been featured in *Eunoia Review*. *Sweetgrass Root*

