

CULTURE

ESTD

# MELBOURNE

2020

CORNER

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# Frank G. Karioris

## *December nights*

*Havana, Cuba*

Sweet grass  
    for horses,  
road by sun.

Fill my mouth, cavernous  
    desire you demand nothing  
yet I receive all as incense  
    makes the air sticky & sweet;  
Fill me entirely, my hands become  
    your bow to play melody  
lines I have known before, & now  
    they are in me as blood.

This rain pours  
    down running  
under the door,

Nights filled with moments,  
    as mornings with tar coffee,  
we find seconds coming away  
    from the wallpaper as hands  
on thighs beaded with sweat  
    these palms with breeze alit  
make with cock crow, one person  
    should not be allowed this much  
joy.

In Cuba,  
even horses dance.

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## *Roots & Branches* *to Cavafy*

Do not be afraid of this trial,  
it is meant only to distinguish  
who amongst us all is worth  
the joys, sweat, time, and pain  
their community has invested  
in your hands, back, and self.

Each ache you feel, each scar  
is echoed on each our skin,  
as you will too feel other's joys  
their smile, laugh, & love,  
they shall be ours together.

It is not to dissuade you in this,  
but to provide you remit to  
enter the fray as fully together,  
no illusion of a singular self,  
but entwined as roots and branches,  
reaching skyward and earthbound.

*Lover in the North Sky*

Last night  
we slept  
    with the windows  
    open, those

winds touching our

skin,  
    letting it push us

towards untold  
    skies

    that dare to open  
as fingers  
move

entwined with their  
    other, clouds;

as the small  
    of your back

comes closer to me.

**Frank G. Karioris (he/they/him/them) is a writer and educator based in Pittsburgh whose writing addresses issues of friendship, masculinity, and gender. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Pittsburgh Poetry Journal*, *Collective Unrest*, *Maudlin House*, *Sooth Swarm Journal*, and *Crêpe & Penn* amongst others. They are a regular contributor to *Headline Poetry & Press*.**

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## J. Archer Avary

### TOO MUCH BREAD MAKES TOO MUCH

#### SOPHIE

The digital scale was accurate to one-tenth of a pound. Standing on it was part of Sophie's morning ritual, before her first cup of tea and after her morning poo, a consistent moment of stress in a life already burdened by deadlines and responsibility. It was cold and clinical, like a glacier underneath her footpads. She hesitated momentarily before opening her eyes to its neon-blue display.

173.2 pounds. Almost 40 pounds more than her ideal weight.

Sophie bought the new scale when she started on Keto. It seemed a good idea at first, but the unflinching digital accuracy was consistently demoralising. She missed her wonky analog scale, the one with her footprints permanently stamped into the white plastic. All she had to do to skew the results was look at the display from a different angle, and suddenly 173 would become 169.

Her mother made food an issue when she was a little girl. Sophie reached for a second slice of garlic bread during a family dinner at a fancy Italian restaurant. *Too much bread makes too much Sophie,*

scolded her mother, smacking her on the back of the hand.

Thus began Sophie's lifelong battle with weight and self-image. She measured her food intake religiously, recording every morsel in a food diary and completing thrice-weekly cardio workouts. High metabolism kept her svelte through her teenage years but slowed in her twenties. She gained 22 pounds during her first year working at Gilchrist & Stoat and hyper-awareness gave way to obsession.

She tried fad diets and personal trainers but never achieved the dramatic weight loss results she was dreaming of. She counted calories, sat on an exercise ball at her desk instead of a comfortable chair, and trained for half-marathons. Despite all the effort she continued to gain weight as her 30th birthday loomed.

Her best friend Heather made reservations at Caniglia's steakhouse to celebrate the occasion. Sophie examined the little black dress purchased especially for the occasion and shuddered. Size 18. She snipped off the tag, slipped into the dress, and twirled before the full length mirror. The dress diverted attention from her imperfections, which pleased her greatly. Even among her closest friends, she was self-conscious about her body and its

perceived flaws. She finished applying her makeup just as the Uber arrived.

The dinner was well attended and Sophie felt so much love in the room. The guest list was impeccably curated, including all her favourite people, who happened to be brilliant conversationalists. The waiter uncorked a bottle of Merlot and the women raised their glasses.

“Sophie, you’ve been my rock since our freshman year, and now it’s your dirty thirty,” Heather began. “You were there for me after those terrible frat parties, holding my hair out of the way when I prayed to the porcelain god. More importantly, you helped me find the courage to leave an abusive relationship.”

Sophie blushed, staring into her wine as Heather choked back tears. She was not accustomed to being the centre of attention.

“You deserve to find fulfilment in your life, and all of us here want your wildest dreams to come true.”

Sophie pondered the meaning of fulfilment as the toast was consummated by the clinking of glasses. She was a success by any economic or professional measure, but she couldn’t allow herself to enjoy it. There was an emptiness inside, a nagging voice that said she was overweight and unworthy of

love and respect, somehow less than human.

Echoes of her mother’s fat-shaming rang in her head, *too much steak makes too much Sophie.*

Was it too much to ask to be comfortable in her own skin, the way she was before her mother foisted this burden on her?

Sophie ordered the ribeye. There was something primal about a rare cut of meat, how the red centre looked almost alive, juices oozing from the grain of the meat. She would not deprive herself on this very important birthday. Her mother created a perpetual engine of self-loathing and low self-esteem, and she was sick of kowtowing to it.

Sophie looked around the table at her girlfriends, her support system, smiling, laughing, and trading stories. These were strong women, but vulnerable in their individual ways. She was there for them through their hardships, but couldn’t allow herself to drop her facade of cool hardness when dealing with her own.

Surrounded by the warmth of friendship, Sophie closed her eyes.

*Universe, if you’re listening, I need your help. Life would be so much easier if I could be carefree in my own skin again. Please make me effortlessly thin. I would never wish for material things, I’m only asking because it would improve my*

*mental health. Please, even though it sounds stupid, it would mean everything to me.*

She felt silly for indulging in such irrational behaviour, but along with the low-key fat-shaming, her mother filled her head with fairy tales and Disney princesses. Part of her still believed that wishes occasionally did come true, especially if uttered in the twinkling candlelight on a milestone birthday.

Waitstaff descended on the table, delivering entrees and topping up wine glasses. Sophie's ribeye was well-marbled, charred in parallel lines. The steak felt cloud-soft under her fork and knife. She chewed slowly, savouring its flavour and texture.

Sophie dabbed the corner of her mouth. Her lips, normally full and pillow soft, felt flimsy and thin. She raised another forkful and could barely fit it through the opening. She chewed and swallowed quickly, feeling her heartbeat accelerate as she realised something was not quite right.

Sophie pushed back her chair and stood up, covering her face with her napkin. Her girlfriends dropped their utensils.

"Sophie, are you OK?"

She shook her head and bolted towards the restrooms, desperate to escape before the tears came. She threw open the bathroom door and came face to face with her reflection in the mirror. Where her

mouth used to be, there was only bare skin.

No lips, no smile, no way to express herself. Her mouth had vanished.

The door opened behind her. It was Heather. She put her hands on Sophie's shoulders and turned her away from the mirror.

"What happened to your face?"

Sophie's eyes welled with tears. She tried to say something, to tell her best friend about her stupid wish, about her mother's fat-shaming and her lifelong body-image problems. There was so much to say, so much to share and express, but all Sophie could do was mumble nonsensically.

Heather wrapped her arms around Sophie and pulled her close. She felt the rise and fall of her best friend's breathing, and for the first time in her adult life, she felt safe.

**J. Archer Avary (he/him) is a former journalist who now writes short fiction. His work has appeared/is forthcoming in Bright Flash Literary Review, Stay Journal, and the Remnant Archive. He left the USA in 2014 and now lives on a tiny island in the English Channel.**

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# Jemelia Moseley

## DYING TO BLOOM

Limp... I no longer glow  
My brightness, now slightly brown  
Broken, I no longer grow  
Water alone cannot save me  
Pure hydration and a solid foundation  
Surrounded by care, love and positivity may get me  
to the other side  
Where my life in the form of my leafs may regain its  
colour  
And I bloom  
Tall, producing oxygen and hope into the world  
The plant that did not grow.....grew.

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## THE VISIONS OF POSSIBILITIES

The vision of possibility surrounds me  
like the echo of sound

Sometimes ever so silent but loud

I aim high and I dance like raining clouds  
When they open wide, like empowering mouths

Freedom in my movement.....  
Like a protest, like march, like my chant  
Always try, never give up....that I'll shan't  
Freedom in my movement and the possibilities that  
surround me  
I am the movement, within me, lay all possibilities

## BLACK

Black is beautiful  
Yet they say we're ugly and cruel  
Black is bold  
Yet they say we're aggressive  
No help or handouts  
Came on the wind rush  
But they don't want to hear our pain  
Say it's depressive  
But they keep us in chains  
No inbetween  
We don't all look or act the same  
Yet these constant comparisons are mean  
Can't keep us in chains  
We must be heard we must be seen

**Jemelia is a primary school Teacher, Poet and Spoken Word Artist.**

**She loves all things poetry and spoken word and would love to see her work all over the world in print/word and onstage/TV.**

**Jemelias poem "United" will be published in "The Fly On The Wall" in September 2020, Her other poems; "Grandma and Grandad" and "The Protest" will also be published in September in a Scotland. "The Daily Drunk Mag" has recently published her work**

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# Laszlo Aranyi

## (Frater Azmon)

### Moon

#### (Tarot, Major Arcane XVIII.)

... search, search, Plague buddy! The intoxication of  
 creativity is ecstatic,  
 he was waiting for the Dionysian desire.  
 But later he shrunk to the size of a worm  
 and sunk paralyzed  
 among shattering-moldering caricatures  
 deep in the tyrannical water.  
 Our vision is the legend of blindness.  
 Dead mimics life. What is perceptible  
 is a mere plastic delusion.

The moon is stumbling rootlessness.  
 The moon becomes a homogeneous, chewed root.  
 Hole before me, hole after  
 me,  
 Plague buddy, search,  
 search...

The tiny light source steps out of its staggering  
 circle,  
 lingers on a smooth, waxy  
 mortal remain, stretches the chilled, fatty thighs,  
 eagerly looking for the gates of fertility.  
 And then he unexpectedly swallows  
 which has already started to rot,  
 our life thus becomes one with death.

The tunnel leading to the deliquescent womb comes  
 to life again  
 from the squirting hot lava.

He who was born by tyranny is infected. Sooner or  
 later  
 he turns from persecuted to persecutor.  
 Just as Hypatia was lynched by the enraged  
 Christ-believing mob of Alexandria.

Hole before me, hole after me,  
 Plague buddy, search, search... Search!

Vlad, the Impaler marched towards Braşov,  
 you wouldn't be any different, would  
 you,

"a new genius" from the Carpathians?  
 The burning disgrace of every revolution is  
 "Wille zur Macht":  
 who chases away the president, der führer, the  
 usurers of banks,  
 to take their place  
 who kills oppressors  
 while preserving the structures of tyranny,  
 is not a freedom fighter, but a wretched  
 criminal...

Translated by Gabor Gyukics



## **Magic breaking into still images**

Beings of fire, air, water and earth gather around  
me!

Drink from the stirred, foamy blood,  
be the substance of my flesh and blood!

Several baskets of nutshell bend, try to crack  
from the seemingly empty body bag.  
Snarling heads of prophets on Salome's platter  
covered with fierce green plaque of full  
moons.

The continents are the livor mortis of the oceans.  
I became one with my brothers; Fire, Air, Water and  
Earth,

I don't have to say what I wish for.  
And our Master: a guffawing sugar-daddy buttoning  
his flies  
in the crooked night that is capable of  
shrinking.

**Laszlo Aranyi (Frater Azmon) Poet, Anarchist,  
Occultist from Hungary. Earlier Books:  
(szellem)valaszok, A Nap es Holderok egyensulya.  
New Kiterített rokabor. English Poems Published  
in Quail Bell Magazine, Lumin Journal,  
Moonchild Magazine, Scum Gentry Magazine,  
Pussy Magic, The Zen Space, Crepe and Penn,  
Briars Lit. Acclamation Point, Truly U, Sage  
Cigarettes, Lots of Light Literary Foundation,  
Honey Mag, Threta Wave, Re-side, Cape  
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Know Spiritualist mediums, art and explores the  
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## Jon Bishop

**Jon Bishop's work has appeared in a variety of outlets, including Laurel Magazine, Burning House Press, Culture Cargo Cult, Fourth & Sycamore, Boston Literary Magazine, The Arts Fuse and Write City Magazine. His first collection of poetry; Scratching Lottery Tickets on a Street Corner, was published in 2018 by Finishing Line Press. He is a founding co-editor of Portrait of New England, a literary journal, and co-founder of the JT Lit Review, a blog. His work has also appeared in Voices of the Valley and Mountains and Meditations, two Quabbin Quills-produced anthologies.**

### Jellyfish Sprite

Sky dark, light gone, black  
    like pitch,  
    like starless midnight,  
    but then,  
red,  
    the sky cut open,  
bleeding like a knee  
    scraped along pavement  
after a fall during a walk  
in midsummer,  
    and arms,  
dozens of them,  
    grasping at the grass,  
    hungry,  
        electrified,  
    zapping,  
and there it is, in full view,  
    head like a planet,  
        imposing, shouting silently  
that I am here,  
        that your eyes are mine now,  
these seconds burned into your head  
    like how I have cracked the clouds,  
        cracked even the unbreakable sky.

# William Falo

## The Mousetrap

I wanted to drop the box and leave, but the many warnings we received about stolen packages made me think twice. Nobody answered the door, but a dog barked from the backyard and I walked around the house.

“Hey delivery girl. I wouldn’t go back there.” Someone called out.

A man was standing on the sidewalk holding empty boxes.

“Why not?”

“It can be dangerous.” He put the boxes down. “What’s with the purple streaks in your hair?”

“I like purple.”

“Is there a delivery for me?”

“What’s your name?”

“Jacob. I live down the street.” He pointed at a house. “Not for long though.”

“I’m Madison. I’ll check.”

A dog yelped. I stopped and headed for the fence. I pulled myself up and looked into the backyard then gasped.

“What do you see?” Jacob asked.

“A small dog running in circles. Also, crates holding larger dogs.”

“I hear them all the time.”

“Who lives here?” I pointed at the house.

“I don’t know.”

I pointed at the boxes. “I hope you’re not the one stealing the packages around here.”

“No, these are empty. Since I got furloughed, I’m moving out of this dump.”

I got back in the truck.

He was probably a porch pirate. A loser. Alone. I stopped the truck. Was I so different? I was stuck in neutral. Broken.

That night, the little dog haunted me so I called the police. They mentioned trespassing so I hung up. I submitted an online form for animal control, but it didn’t give a date when they would investigate it.

The next day, I brought an empty box to the house. Inside the box was a step stool. I used it to climb into the backyard.

The small dog paced back and forth while the larger ones slept. I tripped over a chain.

The dogs went crazy. The little dog panicked and ran back and forth.

I caught it and saw the name Mouse written on the collar. I paused. In high school, they called me Mouse. A loud bark snapped me to the present and I

picked up Mouse then heard one crate door open. A large dog stepped out.

I reached for my phone, but couldn't get it out of my back pocket.

There was no escape.

"Madison." A voice called out. Jacob kicked the gate open.

The big dog charged. I turned, but before I took a step the dog tackled me. Mouse flew out of my arms. I landed on my hand and pain seared through me. The small dog darted out of the open gate. The large dog bit my pants and dragged me backward. The door opened and a man came out.

"What are you doing?" He held something in his hand.

Jacob threw his coat over the dog then we both ran toward the open gate.

"Stop." He yelled.

We kept going and slammed the gate shut.

"Let's get out here. He's got a gun."

"Where's Mouse?"

He looked down the street. "I don't know."

"Oh no." I sobbed. "They used to call me Mouse in high school."

"Why?"

"I was small and a loner. Some popular girls once tricked me into the woods and poured

paint on me. Purple paint."

"That's the reason for the purple streaks in the hair?"

I nodded. "I never want to forget how much bullying can hurt people inside and out."

He nodded.

"But I can't stand porch pirates, animal abusers, and people who don't wear masks."

"I'm glad I'm not one," he touched his mask and we walked down the street. "This was like a Mousetrap."

It made me smile for a minute.

He drove me to the nearest urgent care.

He waited until I walked out with a brace on my hand.

"Thank you for saving me."

"You saved the dog."

"I hope so."

The next day, I went to the dogfighting house before the sun rose. I dressed in black. I used the step stool to look into the back yard. It was empty. All the dogs were gone. They would just start again somewhere else. I knocked on Jacob's door, but nobody answered. Did he move without saying goodbye? It seemed like it was all for nothing.

I volunteered at the local shelter, so whenever someone brought in a dog, I would be the

first to see if it was Mouse. I did laundry and cleaned cages with one hand. The delivery company suspended me for missing packages and my off the job injury. They may fire me.

On my second day at the animal shelter, I turned around and saw Jacob.

“What are you doing here?”

“I came to see you.”

I looked down. “Aren’t you moving?”

“No, staying.” He smiled.

“I thought you hated this town.”

“Now it seems more exciting.”

“How come?” I folded blankets with one hand.

“Because a delivery girl named Mouse became a hero.”

“I don’t feel like one.”

“You’re a superhero.” He paused. “I mean that.”

I smiled, but I couldn’t speak because I was afraid that my voice would tremble.

“Do you want to look for Mouse and any other animal cruelty going on in the neighbourhood tonight?” Jacob said.

“Yes.” I smiled.

The door opened and a dog barked. It sounded like a small

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“Mouse,” Jacob said. “I got something for you.”

“What is it?”

“Animal Crossing. It’s a little safer than rescuing dogs. It might help with stress.”

“Do you have one?”

“Sure do.” He held up his game.

“Cool. Thank you.” I hugged him.

“No problem, Mouse.” I didn’t mind the name Mouse because I knew it wasn’t a trap. I picked up little Mouse. The dog version of me without the purple streaks. Together, we were moving forward one step at a time. We planned to drive around to search for other dogfighting operations. It was a long shot, even futile, but what if they are there. Who is looking for them hidden in plain sight? Maybe we can catch a monster, maybe we can save some dogs. I found a great friend and maybe more just by delivering a package during a pandemic.

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**William Falo studied environmental science at Stockton University. He lives with his family in the USA. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in Litro Magazine, Fragmented Voices, Train River’s first fiction anthology, and other literary journals.**

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## R. W. Haynes

### **The Hero Resists Fading**

Why say that I capitulated to  
The forces of avarice and of that envy  
Time let accumulate against me?  
Was there something more heroic to do  
Then ignore any advantages proposed  
As well as the blustery intimidation?  
The hot theatre of self-identification  
Cooled long ago, as fantasies, exposed  
To the withering light of the noonday sun,  
Surrendered to sanity; the vessel ran ashore,  
Plunder exhausted, the magic sword I bore,  
The last glowing force of desperation.  
To organize for the last contention,  
Is the last and best stupidity prevention.

### **A Sonnet for ENGL 2322**

Though our modern dragon is a giant blow-fly,  
He relished the thought of a last dragon-fight,  
Summing it all up, a ferocious good-bye,  
Braced to do deep damage and say good night.  
Human insects swarm at us and thrive,  
Preventing virtue, biting philosophy,  
Spoiling what's delicious, lovely, or free,  
Laying nasty eggs and staying alive.  
No wonder the Vikings were devoted to the sword,  
And, though they dwelled in great savagery,  
Their courage prevailed in their wild liberty,  
Warriors sustaining strong faith in their lord.  
That's heroic hygiene, lads and lasses,  
And life is more than just protecting your asses.

## **Ballad of the Bullies**

### ***For John Prine***

“With my crossbow  
I shot the albatross...”

The colors will get you  
If you do not hide  
The doubts and betrayals  
Huddled inside.

Direction rescrambled  
Guides your ascent  
While all your cartoons  
Ask where you went.

He’s on television  
With his pasted-on Brillo,  
His brain all atremble  
With strawberry Jello,

He’s screaming to tell us  
To murder each other,  
Cain against Abel,  
Child against mother.

Now I’ll play a break  
And make a few faces,  
Till all of the Muses  
Send me off to the races.

Gravity invites us  
To spin from the ground,  
And flames roar sideways  
And burn everything down.

My friend, blessed Argus,  
Has two hundred eyes,  
But says he has never  
Heard so many lies.

He left all his shades  
In a coffin somewhere  
To hide them from bullies  
From the party of fear.

He has special magic  
And time in his mind  
To comfort the helpless  
And light up the blind.

But bullies will rally  
And bulge out their eyes,  
Convinced they can bully  
Their way to the prize.

Gravity likes to circle back  
And yodel how it draws  
Chaos back from hurricanes,  
Justice back from laws.

**R. W. Haynes is Professor of English at Texas A&M International University, where he teaches early British literature and Shakespeare. His recent publications include studies of playwright/screenwriter Horton Foote. In 2016, Haynes received the SCMLA Poetry prize at the Dallas conference of the South Central Modern Language Association. Two books of his poems (*Laredo Light* and *Let the Whales Escape*) appeared in the summer of 2019.**

# Nathanael O'Reilly

## Scission

two pairs of scissors  
tattooed on the underside  
of the hairdresser's  
wrist, blades crossed like swords ready  
for battle with customers

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## Lake Effects

The lights on the shoreline  
surround Willow Lake, cast  
soft light across water.

Nineteen beams point towards  
my window, silver and gold  
bobbing on the surface

as wind creates ripples  
from southwest to northeast.  
The fountain in the lake's

centre spurts jets fifteen  
feet skyward, the water  
arcing, falling over

a six-foot-high three-hundred-  
and-sixty-degree spray  
like an inverted liquid

umbrella, the display  
illuminated from below  
by floodlights aimed at stars.

The jets rise and fall,  
pulse in perfect rhythm  
like a pumping organ,

their spray blown northeast. Twelve  
mallards and eight white swans  
settle down for the night,

heads tucked under wings,  
while houses on the farther  
shore darken as midnight falls.

## Lego Building

*For Celeste*

dump the bucket's contents  
out on the bedroom carpet

turn your doll's bed upside down  
to create a flat building surface

consult with your co-creator  
about today's custom build

divide tasks evenly and fairly  
lay down the baseplates

create separate piles of pieces  
organized by colour, rake

and sift through the big pile  
looking for green, brown, tan

grey, blue and white pieces  
set all mini figures aside

combine Friends, Harry Potter  
and Star Wars sets together

into new creations, organized  
according to new principles

throw away the instruction  
manuals, listen to inspiration

create your own new world  
built upon your own dreams

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## Year Twelve

silver Commodore  
station wagon parked on two  
strips of cracked concrete  
divided by freshly mown  
grass, splattered with eggs and flour



Nathanael O'Reilly is an Irish-Australian residing in Texas. His books include *(Un)belonging* (Recent Work Press, 2020); *Preparations for Departure* (UWAP, 2017), named one of the Books of the Year in *Australian Book Review*; *Cult* (Ginninderra Press, 2016); *Distance* (Ginninderra Press, 2015); *Suburban Exile* (Picaro Press, 2011); and *Symptoms of Homesickness* (Picaro Press, 2010). More than 200 of his poems have appeared in journals and anthologies published in twelve countries, including *Antipodes*, *Anthropocene*, *Australian Love Poems*, *Cordite*, *fourW*, *FourXFour*, *Headstuff*, *Marathon*, *Mascara*, *Postcolonial Text*, *Skylight 47*, *Snorkel*, *Transnational Literature* and *The Newcastle Poetry Prize Anthology 2017*.

## Walker James

### **Mourning the Person I Never Was**

As I mourn the version of myself – that timeline where my mother did not re-marry, that timeline where we were the famous duo, marching in protests as a mother-son tag-team - she would let me stencil Black Lives Matter on her signs, 30 of them by noon, to hand out to anyone with empty, restless hands.

I miss the timeline where we wore matching scarves and aviators, speeding down Canal Street with the top-down, pretending to be on the run from the cops and the mobsters – or maybe, really, fathers.

I mourn the timeline where I got to come out to her – it seems like every memoir I read the gay son’s mother is single, just the two of them ice skating, just the two of them applying for students loans, just the two of them and a dog in the living room with a straw-woven mat and lamps shaped like vases and ashtrays depicting Norwegian harbors painted in blue.

I miss the timeline where my energies were not so focused on men - her man wielding hammers and steering wheels, bloodying his teeth on curse words, fits of laughter, little Viking of Highway 100, each dollar of our education torn from asphalt, each coin smelted in a diesel engine.

**Walker James is a Queer poet living in St. Paul, Minnesota in the United State of America with a cat. They have been published in Tealight, Haute Dish, Stone of Madness, Versification, Rag Mag Revival, random sample review, and the Daily Drunk**

I mourn the timeline where I email my mother a PDF of *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, and she emails back “Yes.”

I mourn the timeline where we live in Seattle, then Madison, spend some time in Dallas, a summer in Houston, a week in Brooklyn, then six months in a caravan, homeschooled, reading Wittig at age 15, Foucault at 14, and drag shows each weekend.

I mourn the summer we never spent in the Alaskan wilderness – for the first few weeks, it’s about the bears and the creeks, but she brought with ten books by Inuit authors - so we dedicate the last two and a half months to cleaning up litter on the trails and reading at the edges of lakes.

This is the timeline that never was, hellish city of daydreams – instead, I built cities inside of windowless places full of coat hangers, my abortive windchimes, how they muttered metallic every-time heavy footsteps paused at the door.

How small my hands felt inside my step-father’s steel-toed boots.

How perfectly my feet fit inside my mother’s heels.

# Margarita Khusainova

## In Defence of Potatoes

Chasing a language  
 Not mine  
 Moulding into a shape it can never be  
 Extracting a borsch out of a black pudding  
 A vareniki out of a bratwurst.  
 To think the potatoes could suffice –  
 The universal, the beloved, the sacred.  
 The simple.  
 But no.  
 My tongue seems to crave oysters now.

\*\*\*

There is a border  
 a line between us  
 between me  
 disorder in the world  
 horizon is lost  
 I'm floating  
 fleeing  
 the scene  
 the people  
 the I  
 the self  
 what do you want  
 what do I want  
 does it matter who wants x  
 if the y doesn't care  
 the play has been critically acclaimed.  
 24.  
 twenty-four years  
 a credible  
 award-winning performance  
 I'm normal  
 look at me going places  
 wait  
 where am I  
 who am I  
 a nap is in order  
 a drink should follow  
 tomorrow I'll joke about it with a friend  
 hey friend  
 I'm broken lol  
 I hate myself lol  
 I'm sad and need help lol  
 self-deprecation is sexy  
 I'm adorably depressed

have been since I can remember  
 how fun  
 countries years apart  
 I'm facing the repressed  
 the forgotten  
 something hidden in the library lost and found  
 abandoned construction sights  
 school musical contests  
 aunts with their own agreeable issues  
 and the choices  
 all the regrettable  
 throw-backable  
 embarrassing choices  
 here I am.  
 alive  
 odds be damned.  
 bordering on improvement  
 personal development  
 hides more than hope  
 but forgiveness

\*\*\*

My first friend  
 was very contextual.  
 it is hard not to be close,  
 when you take your first steps on a duvet  
 especially laid for that.  
 I'd like to believe we were good friends  
 despite our unoriginal nature  
 and me asking her to scratch my back  
 at sleepovers.  
 Friends after that lacked substance  
 and I ended up  
 in heartbreak with my back stabbed instead.  
 As an adult-in-making  
 starting from scratch  
 I notice a pattern  
 as well as the importance of being touched  
 on the back.  
 Please!  
 I know your arm must be tired,  
 but please,  
 let us be friends.  
 Again?

Breasts  
Breasts.  
Something,  
And, please DO  
Judge me, I would  
Really love to  
have. We  
can

dig into  
social  
pressure,  
sexist industries AND  
objects for women  
or we can just accept  
the fact that I want  
bigger

# BOOBS.

**Margarita Khusainova is a poet from the depth of Siberia, writing in English and Russian. The main themes of her poetry are migration, sexuality, biography and mental health. Moving to Berlin in 2016 has allowed her to explore the boundaries and freedom of multilinguistic experience as well as discover previously abandoned roots. Despite often dealing with traumatic subjects, her poetry remains fundamentally hopeful.**

# Jen Schneider

## Care Packages (from) Home

### Question 1.

Storefronts in a nearby neighbourhood are decorated with signs that read “We ship to prison”.

Do the signs refer to the residents of the neighbourhood or the items on the stores’ shelves?

### Question 2.

Walk outside. Take whatever transportation is available to the nearest city (population greater than \_\_\_\_ - insert any number more than 1,000).

Count the number of human beings found ‘sitting/sleeping/living’ on the ‘streets’.

Repeat.

Define Living.

### Question 3.

Detention centers in the U.S. currently “house” millions.

Define house.

This number is more than the number of votes required to swing the upcoming election. The last election, too.

Define swing.

### Question 4.

Define incarceration.

Walk outside. Take whatever transportation is available to the nearest “detention facility”.

Count the number of human beings found ‘sitting/sleeping/living’ inside.\*

Define Living.

\*Note: Like most of our nation’s standardized tests, you will not be allowed in.

### Question 5.

Are detention facilities designed to keep people out or in?

### Question 6.

Are standardized tests designed to keep people out or in?

### Question 7.

Which of the following words doesn’t belong?

Street Sale  
Street Chalk  
Street Banter  
Street Patrol

### Question 8.

Which of the following words is least like the others?

Right  
Left  
Silent  
Speak

### Question 9.

What does the following list of words describe?

Crayons  
Individuals  
Systems  
Sustenance

### **Consume. Digest. Don't Digress.**

Quiet now, grub is served. Clock chimes six, all heads down. Numbers eat numbers. Careful, consume - don't digress. Rows of mouths open: close, chew, and swallow. Say Grace, digest. Careful - don't Digress. Damn, alert - pod on lockdown

---

Deryck N. Robertson

*scounter@accel.net*

#### **Lilly E. Brown**

I wandered into Blue Streak Records  
Looking for some new-old brass CDs

Puttered around, head sideways  
Reading faded titles through hazy  
and scratched jewel cases

Picking out dusty recordings and  
Squeezing them back into their  
non-alphabetised slots

On a rickety, pressboard, build-it-yourself  
White and brown Walmart bookshelf  
By the door, were CDs for a buck

Well, then...

I squatted down and began my  
Browsing with renewed curiosity

Madonna, Sinatra, country, rock  
An eclectic collection of classics

On each, your name:  
Lilly E. Brown

I only had a five-spot, so I  
Carried four up to the counter  
And bought a little piece of your life

**Jen Schneider is an educator, attorney and writer. She lives, writes and works in small spaces throughout Philadelphia. Recent work appears in The Popular Culture Studies Journal, Toho Journal, The New Verse News, Zingara Poetry Review, Streetlight Magazine, Chaleur Magazine, LSE Review of Books and other literary and scholarly journals.**

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Wondering, who you are, and why  
Your CDs were here, today

I felt strange, a bit voyeuristic,  
Carrying what you used to own  
Back to my truck

Did you move?

Did you switch to digital?

Are these stolen?

Sold at a garage sale  
from a cardboard box on  
a folding card table,  
beside 8-tracks, cassettes and  
Vinyl 33s?

Relics of your parent's  
and aunt's and uncle's generations

Did you die?

You can tell a lot about someone  
from their music collection

I think if we met, we  
Could have been friends

**Deryck N. Robertson lives and creates in Peterborough, Ontario, where he is an elementary teacher. His work has appeared online with Bird, Buried Press, Underwood Press, and in Wunderlit Magazine. He can usually be found in Algonquin Park with his family of paddlers. His two self-published zines can be found in recycling bins and lining upscale bird cages near you.**

# Anonymous

**2020BR** (before revolution)

Gnawed knuckles stinging along decorated names,  
The razer of the streets soaking through red and  
yellow mist, afternoons laughter consequence one  
AM screams, toughened youth to light the fire, the  
futures first streetlight, can the world save you?  
Don't walk away, my friend, heavens, a far greater  
challenge. We won't cry for broken bones when  
breath is the answer. Slicing through skin, a few short  
words boarded, barricaded and beaten. Angels fall to  
the child's side, the tears of god float down. Only the  
rich look over us now, don't bend, my son, these  
roads built wide for us to walk. The march of beasts,  
chest reads cop, wasped in black armour, no creature  
of gods will, no path is written, just names on homes  
and hospitals beds.

This morning rises a warmer air. ash and privilege  
drink, amend the right to breathe again, allow the free  
to sing, in sorrow and loss and faith and love. This  
course constricted thought we will strike, the streets  
are ours.

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