



ISSUE 5

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Deryck N. Robertson

I Like Old Fences

I like old fences
Split rail cedar
Triangular and soft
From lifetimes of
Early winter snows
And late spring rains
Soft to the touch
And covered with
Velvet green mosses
Pieces found one
Or two at a time
Still bound
With rusting bailing wire
Tied by hardscrabble farmers
With calloused hands
Once these fences marked
Pastures and fields
Dreams and seasonal hopes
Now they only mark

The passage of time

Putting in Time

Grey skies hover, depressing While
black-flecked ice-snow Holds out,
refusing to admit
That its time is finally over

Neither April rains nor the
First warm days of this so-called
Spring have fully completed their
Task, leaving me to wonder

If they're fully committed or
Only putting in time, like the
rest of us, hoping that the job
Will get done, if only we wish

Deryck N. Robertson lives and creates in Peterborough, Ontario, where he is an elementary teacher. His work has appeared with Bird, Buried Press, Underwood Press, Melbourne Culture Corner, Burnt Breakfast Mag, TunaFish Journal, Northern Otter 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 while his upcoming one is awaits printing.

Aminu Salihu

THE MESSENGER OF DOOM

Anytime I see my uncle, Adamu, in our house, I know that God has yet again picked off another sheep from Grandfather's flock of twenty-two. Uncle Adamu was one of my favorite uncles, and I am sure he was most of my siblings' favorite too. He is nice and kind to all. Anytime we go to visit him in his house, he always welcomes us warmly and entertains us with plenty of foods and drinks. He would say that the refreshment he gives us was our souvenir for the long trek to his house. His house was approximately five kilometres away from ours, and so we always appeared tired and famished on reaching there. However, knowing that our hunger and tiredness will be appropriately placated, we never want to miss any opportunity to either be sent on errand or pay a visit to his house.

My uncle Adamu was the first sheep in Grandfather's flock. I was told he was either fifty-seven or fifty-eight at the time I was born. I am now thirteen, and so, Uncle Adamu should be either seventy or seventy-one, although I prefer him to be the former. I have noticed that aged people die more often than their counterparts. Not that a seventy-years-old man wasn't aged anyway, but just that I thought if he was seventy-one, he would soon die, and Uncle Adamu's death wasn't an event I was ready to witness soon. So, whatever the case, to me, uncle Adamu is seventy, and that's it; true or not.

My father was the second sheep in Grandfather's flock. Compared to uncle Adamu, my father was still young – he was just forty-four. I do sometimes wonder how Grandfather was able to keep his peace with his wives for twenty-seven years. Or maybe my father was a product of an unplanned struggle on Grandmother's matrimonial bed. Whichever it was, my father came nearly three decades after uncle Adamu. But then surprisingly, after he came, Grandfather's breeding spree started. In the space of twenty years, he was miraculously able to produce twenty more sheep – thanks to his two new wives who produced three pairs of twins successively. Grandfather must have had a tank full of extremely viable seeds. Grandmother's sheep came to a total of five, while her other co-wives combinedly produced seventeen.

Out of these twenty-two flock, only seven still chew their curds today. God has somehow mysteriously, decided to lead fifteen of them to the slaughterhouse. I say mysteriously because their deaths always follow a similar but mysterious pattern. How else can one explain the deaths of fifteen siblings, within seven years, and all to undetectable illnesses? It is worthy to note that even the community hospital in our locale had recommended a prayer session for the family because as they said, they could find no other explanation for the death of all the deceased except through the mystic ways. And because our society was one rooted in the belief in mysticism, everybody nodded to that.

It is also worthy to note that whenever these deaths occur, the one person that always brought the news to my father was uncle Adamu – an always unpleasant news for us to bear, I must say. And that is why even though my siblings and I love to go to his house, we are never too excited to see him coming to ours. This because we knew that whenever he came in, walking hastily and wearing a smile that I now know was supposed to mask his emotion, there had been another loss. That is why when I saw him rushing into our house that day with his fake smile, my heart skipped a beat. I knew grandfather's wealth – as I was told he called his sheep, had once again dropped.

As usual, I was not in the least delighted or excited to see him, and as usual, also, I only offered him a brisk greeting. It still surprises me how I was able to act hostile to him whenever he comes dashing into our house and be thrilled whenever I was to go to his. I guess thirteen-years-old children can also have mood swings? Or is it behavioural swings that I should call it? Whichever it was, I think uncle Adamu himself understood that his visits weren't the best of occurrences and that the brisk greeting was to be expected, and so, he never got angry or reprimanded me for the nonchalant behaviour.

Uncle Adamu went into our living room as usual and asked me to beckon on my mother. My father had travelled two days back. We were expecting him back that very day. And so, it was natural for uncle Adamu to ask to see my mother. Maybe it wasn't another death news, after all, I thought. I rushed into the kitchen to call Mother. When I told her uncle Adamu was in the living room, the glass cup in her hands fell and shattered on the floor. Mother had, from the beginning, not been a big fan of uncle Adamu's visits. She had once said that anyone who always bore bad news was bound to be disliked by many. I understood then why the Angel of Death was nobody's favorite angel. Mother dashed out of the kitchen into the living room. I followed her at the same pace. When we entered the living room, the fake smile on my uncle's face had vanished. It was now replaced by grief. Since I had never felt inclined to sit with Father and uncle Adamu whenever the latter visited, I reckoned that the aggrieved facial expression was the one uncle Adamu generally puts on to break his death news.

I was wrong though. I would later find out that my uncle never put on a pained expression except if the sibling that had died was one he was very close to. I think mother knew that very well, for even before he said anything, her eyes were already teary. I knew she admired some of her husband's siblings very well. Maybe she was about to cry in fear that one of them had gone. When I saw my uncle stammering to say his words, I confirmed my speculations that a very dear sibling had died. If Father was around, I was sure he would also cry and stammer. For he and uncle Adamu was very close to almost the same set of people.

I was eager and yet scared to hear the name of my supposed dead uncle's name – it might be one of the young ones I liked. Was it Audu, Jagaba, or Madu? I didn't want it to be them. After sobbing and stammering for a few more minutes, uncle Adamu finally announced the name of his dead sibling. The very moment he mentioned the name, I collapsed. The dead sibling was not in any way who I expected. Uncle Adamu's new dead sibling was none other than Musa. Musa – the only sheep in Grandfather's flock who owned a block of flats, the only sheep that had a well-paying white-collar job, the only sheep that was loved by all others. It was Musa, my father, that uncle Adamu announced his death to us.

Uncle Adamu was my favorite uncle. He was kind to my siblings and me. We all loved him as we did our father. But right to the day, he came to our house to announce that our father died in an auto crash on his way back home from the journey he had earlier promised to bring us back many presents, we became alienated to him. We were still alienated to him even when he laid on his deathbed. But anyway, even his children and wives became alienated to him after our father's death. In the space of two years, the entire locale had a shocking revelation about the seventy-three-years-old man. I cannot say that I wasn't surprised at the revelation. But my surprise was not on the fact that my uncle was found to have meddled with the deaths of all his dead siblings. It was because I couldn't fathom why, even as close to our father as he was, he still brought about his doom. But then again, I am just fifteen-years-old, and what does a teenager know about things like that? What my teenage brain understood very well, however, was that my uncle, Adamu, was not only a messenger but also a perpetrator of doom.

Aminu Salihu is a 25-years-old graduate of Microbiology from Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. He hails from Niger State, Nigeria. He loves telling stories having African perspectives. He has been published on The KalahariReview, Praxis Magazine, and Artmosterrific. He tweets @As_tukunji

Somsubhra Banerjee

The Sense Of Smell

Oh, the sweet pang of pain. Tatvik's drugged brain failed to feel the intensity of the operating pieces of equipment entering him, but a soft feeling engulfed him completely, his bubbling mind, imagining things, yesteryear memories caressing him by, all his senses, as if exploding and bursting, creating an orchestra of the cacophonous circus of thoughts, and he seemed to get sucked into that realm, slowly, slowly.

A tap on the shoulder, and he figured, he's still in the space-time conundrum of his dream, and as he tried hard, very hard, to remember his last fleeting thought, his mind relayed to him some snapshots of his career, his career as a chef, but a very weird chef.

Tatvik saw himself, cooking up a storm, in his restaurant, mixing ingredients, aplenty, his eyes strained, with dollops of sweat forming around it, trying hard not to miss a minute detail. After finishing a dish, he walks on, to the nearest chef, looking at his dish and then tasting it, nodding in approval and moving to the next. Finally, he takes a look at the new orders and starts his preparations.

The next image that pops up in his dream was himself, in his already closed restaurant, eerily silent, with only a neon bulb flickering above him as he stood there, breathing deeply, trying again, to try to smell even the faintest smell from any of the hundreds of items lying before him, raw vegetables, fish, meat and whatnot. Even the smell of fresh rain, which had already started, didn't reach his sensory nerves. He wondered how he had survived all these years without his sense of smell. They say, a chef must have a strong sense of smell and taste, and he has none. Well, technically, because of the sense of smell being absent, his sense of taste is diminishing at an alarming rate. Nowadays, the only way he recognizes the quality of cooked food is by color, texture. And that has worked well, until now, no complaints. But for how long?

None of his cooks knew, albeit the sous-chef, about this condition. So, this operation, which aimed at improving his sense of smell, and that is where he is currently, and that is where his tingling senses played with his mind as the procedure remains in motion.

Tatvik sat on his wooden chair, thinking. That sepia light kept flickering over his head. His eyes fixated on the open fridge, he could now smell each and everything that the moment offered. The icy cold winds crashed on his face, and he closed the door. It has been more than a month since the operation, and now he could smell every food that is being prepared in his restaurant's kitchen. He could minutely measure the number of ingredients more efficiently than before, but then, why did he feel his customers seemed a bit dissatisfied. More so, why is he dissatisfied? This new sense of smell has left him irritated like never before. He finds faults in his work and others too, which takes a toll on his mind. His confidence, which was there, on top, irrespective of his shortcomings, seemed to have gone, dwindling slowly, slowly. His mind, ever so active, kept spinning into circles and circles, fabricating thoughts that had never occurred to him, before

Some philosophers say we are our body. But as we grow older, we get wrinkles and grey hair. We develop health problems and modify our diet. We change our look, our clothes, our hairstyle, and more. And then there's the death and replacement of most of our cells. So our body isn't a permanent fixture. Others say our mind is what gives us our identity. Yet, our outlook on life changes over time. We may become an addict or get sober, find religion or lose it, just as we maybe become jaded... or embrace an unbridled optimism.

Deeper, his thoughts meandered, deeper it penetrated into the unexplored dungeons of his mind, as he walked towards a small sitting area, near a flowing rivulet.

This sense of smell, which was a defect in my body, for a long, and now fixed by introducing or mending something, does that make my body new? Did my body reject this new change? Or is this my old body itself, sewed together again, because it needed repair? And what if I want back my old self, the old sense of not having a sense? Would then, my body be termed as old, because now that old part is put back again, in some way or the other?

So with all of these changes, am I really the same person throughout? If not, which version is the real me? Is there one?

Tatvik grew more and more restless, sitting by that rivulet, as a myriad of smells juxtaposed together and ignited his senses like never before. He breathed in a lung full of air, trying to inhale every bit of smell that every organism near him, emanated, that very moment

.Then he dialled his doctor's number.

Somsubhra is an IT engineer, working in Germany, and finding time, rather trying to find time to scribble something every day. He loves the smell of fresh rain and staring into the sky and old buildings. He has a WordPress blog and a literary magazine which takes up most of his leisure time.

Find him here: <https://linktr.ee/shombnrje>

Lisa Mary Armstrong

The Body Police

If your body
was my body
To have
To hold
To control
To mould
To exploit
Would you build a resistance?

Would you stop traffic
dead in its tracks?
Hold your flare high?
Would you paint the sky red
with your rage and fury?

The revolutionary dream
Disrupt the masses
Grab your placard
Demand
Doctors without conscience

Here they come
To police our bodies
To strip us bare
We are the resistance
This is our calling
This is our plight
Watch us soar
Let our bodies take flight

The Girl with No Coat

The elements
no match for this Amazonian girl
Strong in her temperament
she braces herself against the cold
Dances towards the tempest
mischief in her eyes
Fearless in her pursuit
of life
Destroying the in-destructible
chains of patriarchy
Raising a fist
in salute
Objecting to objectification
in vindication of Mary
The girl with no coat

Lisa Mary Armstrong is a Scottish poet and law tutor researching women and children's experiences of the criminal justice system. In her spare time, she likes to write poetry and fiction, drink tea and play the piano. Her poetry can be found in @poeticallymag @fahmidanjournal @aurorajournal and forthcoming in @dwellinglit @royalrosemag @TheIndianFemRev

Zahirra Dayal

The Swing

You are ten years old, and your hair is being fixed. Sundays smell like burnt hair and rotting eggs from the Dark and Lovely straightener. Your mother pastes onto your head with a paintbrush; the smelly concoction makes your scalp itch.

“You have to keep it in for 20 minutes, so don’t fidget,” she says. Twenty minutes is an eternity, and you perch on the uncomfortable wooden stool, your eyes chasing the hands of the clock on the wall. Now your head is bent over the bathroom sink, and she is washing out the mud. Specks of black splash against the white wall and you screw your eyes up trying to identify the amorphous forms.

After your mother roughly towel dries and combs your hair to untangle the knots, she starts to blow dry it with an angry face. You make her angry most of the time because you are guilty of so many inexcusable things. You sit with your legs open. Your hair is wild and untameable. You play in the sun, which makes your skin an unacceptable shade of brown.

“Keep your head still!” she barks, the smoke from the blow drier mixes with the smoke from the cigarette that sits between her lips. You watch the smoke rise, sashay and disappear. Your head is yanked from side to side as she pulls and aims the blow drier like a gun at close range to each small section of hair. You sit frozen to the stool blinking back tears. Because of the precarious state of blow-dried hair, when she’s finished, she divides your hair into two and rolls each side into a ball, pinning it down tightly with triangular hairpins. Any kind of moisture, even the slightest hint of rain could attack and make it curly again, so you’re not allowed to unpin the two tight balls on your head.

At the sound of the car hooter, your mother finally releases your imprisoned mane, and it falls to your shoulders in silky waves.

“That’s better, now your hair is presentable,” she says, her eyes gleaming with self-satisfaction as she surveys her work. Your mother has bought a chocolate cake which she’ll tell the guests she baked, and she’s spent all morning dusting corners, shining spoons and polishing the floors to make everything look perfect. You go outside with your mother to greet the visitors who are parking their car in the back yard

“Ahh, look at how beautiful she is, come here my Ameera,” says your mother with lit eyes and sugary words as your cousin Ameera gets out of the car with her frilly purple dress, and purple shoes. You watch, half-hiding in the doorway as your mother holds your cousin close to her chest. Ameera means princess in Arabic. Your cousin has emeralds for eyes, straight, shiny black hair and fair skin; everything your mother wishes you had. You are invisible because your aunt, uncle and cousin file passed you in the doorway without noticing you and settle on the sofas in the adjoining living room.

‘Ahhh how is your new school Ameera?’ asks your mother with envy laced tones. “She’s doing so well,” beams your mother’s sister, “she’s the top of the class, and it’s a private school you know.” “Beautiful and brainy hey,” replies your mother, squeezing Ameera’s soft cheeks with her fingers.” “Don’t do that Beena, her skin is very fair and delicate,” chides your aunt, pulling her daughter possessively towards her. Your mother’s fawning makes your aunt uncomfortable.

“Layla, come and take Ameera outside to play on the swing. But don’t push her too high, be careful with her, she’s not used to rough play,” says your aunt, her eyes piercing right through you. You obediently guide your young cousin out of the living room into the garden. You choose the long muddy route to the swing in the backyard and watch your cousin’s shiny purple shoes turn dirty brown. You like the way the mud caresses the soles and climbs up her shoes. You feel her warm, soft hand in yours and see the trust dripping from her green eyes. She can’t reach the swing, so you gently lift her up onto the wooden seat. Your nose is so close to her skin; you smell the Johnsons Baby Powder. Her little hands clutch the two ropes, and you go behind her to push the swing. The seat glides forward, and her purple frills lift slightly.

“Higher Layla, higher” your cousin shouts excitedly. You use more force now, and her whole dress flies open, revealing purple tights that you didn’t see before. “Higher Layla.” And you obey.

You keep pushing and watch her flying through the air. Then you hear a small voice say,

“Stop Layla. It’s too high now, please stop,” but you keep pushing hard on the edge of the seat, with both hands now. You want to see it touch the sky. The louder the screams get, the more distant they feel for you. You are terrified and excited.

Then you see your mother, aunt and uncle run towards you, you see six panic soaked eyes. They struggle to bring the flying swing to a halt but eventually manage to bring your terrified cousin down from the sky.

“What were you thinking, Layla?” asks your aunt through angry teeth.

“She didn’t mean it, Bee. Ameera’s fine. No harm done. Let’s go in and have the chocolate cake I baked,” says your mother too quickly.

Zahirra is a writer and language teacher living in London. She has also lived in Zimbabwe, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates and draws from these diverse experiences in her writing.

Her short stories have been published in the Fahmidan Journal, Ayaskala Literary Magazine, Small Leaf Press and in the forthcoming issue of Opia Literary Magazine. She can be found on Twitter @ZahirraD.

Millicent Borges Accardi

Holy Waters Heal the Border Scar

From "Border Bullets" by Norma Cantu

Two babies sorted and taken from skin
like property. Stitched back into
the olden days
harshly across water from hip to hip,
in uneven edges, a scar torn open again
and again and made new
each time
the edges were torn, open ripped
and away, like land lost
or a life taken.
Falling down the banks, her children
disappeared when she was
laid out on her back,
spaced between on passages of the
sweat sheets for longer
than necessary.
It was economical and virtually complete
her journey from woman to possible
and then made equal
all was wide and lost into everything
all knowledge that was clear
and frank-necessary.
As if she were, for now, both
boundless and brief,
like bullets.

With a Whip for a Tail

From "Tracing the Horse" by Diana Marie Delgado

The horse is not a party game this is some real
skin and shit and animal. I meet him on the trail,
taller than me, and feel his ribs moving under
my legs and I am found. For the rest of the Wyoming
summer, I am out in the hay and comparable
ranch weeds, tied to the rough rope with the others
on a trail, bumping through chores, sorting
out and bending over under tree limbs
and assorted rocks. I even try to make friends
with the girls on the next cabin from Oregon,
who wear braids with blue bows that their mom puts in,
every morning. I am found and philosophical,
and then I repeat my words from a high saddle
above where the ground used to be.
I cannot hear the trailblazer or the cowhands
cause this land is family, and I am down for the
count, to face the fires at night. We cook meat
over red coals in the ground, and there are above
stars, where I can see inside the outside of the dark
moon, and we know we want it all.
We want to take things on and ride them
along, into the ground, unfettered and bitter,
all of our troubles becoming a complete transformation
beyond the city we knew, Ha, it is absolute, my confidence
and with my moss boots that I bought with pennies, I earned
babysitting. I know how it is. How to cook a fried egg
in sizzling butter, until it browns and makes a crust.
I know how to feed the fire in pit with cotton wool.
The rest of the things I see are repulsive and dangerous.
Distant to me now, cause I am on a sweet ride to anywhere,
carrying the never-ending, hard-won secret of searching
for who I am.

Millicent Borges Accardi, a Portuguese-American writer, is the author of two poetry books, most recently *Only More So* (Salmon Poetry). Her awards include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Fulbright, CantoMundo, Creative Capacity, the California Arts Council, The Corporation of Yaddo, Fundação Luso-Americana, and Barbara Deming Foundation, "Money for Women." She's led poetry workshops at Keystone College, Nimrod Writers Conference, The Muse in Norfolk, Virginia, and University of Texas, Austin. Her non-fiction can be found in *The Writers Chronicle*, *Poets Quarterly*, and the *Portuguese American Journal*. Recent readings at Brown University, Rutgers, UMass Dartmouth, Rhode Island College and the Carr Reading Series at the University of Illinois. Recent poems in *New American Writing*, *The Journal* and *Another Chicago Magazine*.

Joe Gowthaman

The beauty and the beast?

How am I supposed to glorify you? My sweetheart,
When I love you more than any of my poem can, For,
you are that drop of water, amidst the draught, Yes, for, I
will forever adore you and towards you, I span. It might
seem flattering, but hey, love flatters,
For, you are the faith that exists, inside this atheist, When
you stand there, smiling, I melt, it's all that matters, For,
you are the soul, behind those lines, of fellow lyricist.

With no words spoken, as you love me be me,
I happen to be the, me, that you love the most, automatically,
We love each other, creating our own brand, the we, For, have
become one soul, in two bodies, almost. Poetically. You will be
the unrealistic reality, in this sceptic's life, Forever, will I
surrender to you, your love and ours, completely. As I will keep
striving, to be your reality, paying any price, I am here, the
upgraded myself, yours, unapologetically.

What would I have been, hadn't I met you?
Can't even imagine the pain, anger and loneliness,
But why should I even imagine that? A forgotten
hue,
For, you know me perfect, no more, no less. I
surrender my soul to you, now on my knees, For,
your touch can soften the monster in me, Somehow,
the beauty and the beast never made sense, For we
are the beasts, beautifully in love, then hence.

Joe Gowthaman is from the southern part of the Indian Subcontinent who belongs to the world of poetry. A vivid reader and an angry poet whose verses are cold and warm. A firm believer that words can change the world in a way guns and bullets can't. His first compilation, "My Darwin beard and all" has been published in southern India. Twitter handle: @GowthamanJoe Instagram handle: @joe_gowthaman

S. T. Brant

Time Enough to Understand

There are things you must believe,
Things you must forgive Time of,
Love...

The night eats me up.
Down among the wall where the Prince eats
I am guts on his plate.

Paradise is a crook of the heart, Dear.
A crown of decadence in your hair,
The jewels tangled...
How, Sir, does the crown appear?
O, Guinevere...

The secret recipe of Love I've found-
What you call Love is Publication.
Hypostatic artificiality.
The hypostasis of the mind that procures
Sweet ineluctability... of an ordered heart.

Brilliance glows indisputably, fiercely;
It is the nature of the glow that's argued:
If it is Brilliant that Brilliant glows
Or some cheaper tint only Time knows.

No, it is the hypostasis of the heart,
For all the ineluctability of mind, that-
Time is Past, Dear.
Look at the sun in the sea,
The moon, see, is the horizon;
This hemisphere is- and we
Are angels in its jars- Purgatory.

I WAS I AM (A god in the Pantheon)

The webbed crown... that the spiders of my mind
Create to incorporate
You, a hive of flies...

And I did pour forth Darkness into darkness;
Darkness as a hard
That's clinched a star and inmost glows, shelled
Fully by Abyss,
As though the will of eyes saw blurry through
The void
To distinguish Dark from Naught-

My blood was lava and was wax,

All the particles of essence that I was bled,
The pain of it!...
The muted radiance that burst from me
to compass me,
Make from my Hollowing the Cardinal point of Life,
the sun of night,
depleted me of..

Splashed by the drink of god, I loathed the cup...
Drank the tidal transformation down...

S. T. Brant is a teacher from Las Vegas. Pubs in/coming from EcoTheo, Door is a Jar, Santa Clara Review, Rain Taxi, New South, Green Mountains Review, Another Chicago Magazine, Ekstasis, 8 Poems, a few others. You can find him on Twitter @terriblebinth or Instagram @shanelemagne.

Dawn Watts

Tell Me

Tell me why you've chosen me
as your lover.
The answer, a slow-dying need
within me;
while wild plums decay
on barren branches, some scattered
upon the frozen ground.

I remember when the taste
left my palate
for love and fidelity.

When the moon is full do you
see my face
alive and lit
with the sun's backward glare?
At night the hum of cicadas
hide my footsteps leading to
other lovers.

"Someone has to
take care of you
"unfettered and unknowingly, he says.

My body sinks into
the sound of invisibility,
never wanting him to see
my need for more.

Dawn Watts is a writer of poetry and prose. She has been published in Serotonin, Stone of Madness Press, Tealightpress, and PocketFire Press. She lives in Chester Pennsylvania and can be found on Twitter @wattswritten

John Bartlett

CETACEAN STRANDING

nobody knows why you do it
this full-throttled intent
to beach, this premature step
in evolution from sea to land

did your leaders lure you here
with silky promises of
squid and cod, then
leave you floundering in
the shallows of their deceit?

or did you hear the cries
a child might make at night
to draw you here, despite
low tides and radar warning?

or did sonar static,
like onset dementia confuse,
'til kamikaze-like & shore-blown
by anonymous wind divine
you flatlined,
adrift on terra firma?

Your bulk and burden
too heavy for our hearts
to bear

John Bartlett is the author of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. In 2019 his first Chapbook *The Arms of Men* was published and *Songs of the Godforsaken* in June 2020. His full collection *Awake at 3 am* has just been released by Ginninderra Press. He was the winner of the 2020 Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize He reviews and podcasts at beyondtheestuary.com

Ololade Edun

YOU WON'T FIND GOD HERE

they said my body missed the way home again —
that I am now an Ọgbànjẹ. a wormhole for spirited beings & oddities.
a requiem for lost ones — oke, jimoh, chijioke & 99 others.
& of what use are scars? when I wear mine every time I come back.
like I did the last time.
& the time before the last.

báámì said my soul is on transit with no destination —
that here, we do not measure our grief with tears.
silence is a bittersweet remedy.
& bàbà àgbá said the groins that produced me will birth others.
the ones that will stay. those that will come after I'm gone.
potentials this country won't see to kill before dawn.

& if they ask máámì what it means to be alive —
she'd definitely say it is to have a son who is not me.
a child whose voice does not tear eardrums when he speaks.
boys whose existence is not a struggle for acceptance in a broken country.
the one whose soul will make home of this body.
my body. the one I cut daily.

i am in your room going through boxes of your stuffs —
i wear your clothes.
strap your heels because they look so perfect on my legs.
here you are just a name. a memento for the lost ones
.a photograph in our famous family frames.
because we do not measure our grief with tears.
silence is a bittersweet remedy.
no one wants to remember you.
you, like me, are pathetic losers. unfit, unloved, & weird.

poetry is how I say "it fucking hurts" —
to be a troubled soul. burnt boys who many never turn men.
wanderlust in a sea of withered sunflowers.
shades of red. orange. yellow. green. blue. indigo. & violet.
so I cupped my fears & stroke their chin again & again & again.
because letting go is termed acceptance.
& they said my body already missed the way home again.
so let me ask one more time —
"where do we go when we finally die?"

Ololade Edun is a contemporary creative, a microbiologist, and a medical student. He writes experimental things with interests in medicine, literature, sciences, and leadership. His works have appeared, or are forthcoming in Kalahari Review, Parousia, The Shallow Tales Review, Pawniers Papers, The Scribe Post, Voice Lux Journal, & elsewhere. Ololade is a poetry reader for ARKore Blog, lead contributor for Tribesmen Community, and a creative podcaster for The GhostPen Project. When he is not writing, Ololade is either in the laboratory culturing microbes or drowning in Indian/Pakistani playback songs. He tweets beautiful things @OloladeWrites.

Al Jacobs

Sing's Hong Kong Noodles

Mainlanders gnaw ribbons of chilli noodles, as, at the register, Sing indulges Andy's plan to go into business, in America.

Andy plotted how they'd open an upmarket noodle shop near Andy's house in Southern California.

How they'd call it Sing's Hong Kong Noodles. How the new noodle shop's motto would be "We keep it casual."

How the actual restaurant space layout, with the counter up close to the door, would coax people into forming a line.

How the short line winding out the door would compel people to believe that Sing's Hong Kong Noodles was worth waiting for. An American superstition, Andy insisted.

And Sing's Hong Kong Noodles would craft its noodles in house, with fine rice flour, reviving an archaic noodle recipe rooted in royalty. No one, Andy assured Sing, would need to know that that was bullshit.

And when the guests ate through each day's set noodle supply, Sing's Hong Kong Noodles would close until tomorrow.

And if the noodle shop sold out every day, Sing would earn enough to work five-day weeks. In a place where topless women skate and everyone owns a car.

Al Jacobs is a writer and designer from Toledo. He lived for a time in Collingwood but now lives in New York. Find his work on the internet.

A.R.Salandy

A World

A world where the utter chaos
Of pandemonium ensues
So effortlessly beyond borders
Or rather imagined communities

Is where media builds fear
And acts as a barrier-
To the contraction
Of continuous change so characteristic

Of modernity where new ideas flourish
And cycles strange and rapturous ensue
As far-off shots can now be heard
In search of deep war ideological,

But worldly changes give new meaning
To earthly shackles
That challenge, any semblance of calm
and dissipate notions of mundanity

Until all contracts are broken
And all are forced to give way
To a world, information grows
To create an artificial heaven-

Suspended between seeded clouds
Far above metropolises gaudy
And spiritual entities
That hope for a new beginning

For which all may rise and no one might
return.

Imagination

Cubed are minds restless
In the computation of processes
Whose provenance only grows,

Warped are the steps of the living
Who take no peace in certain end
Or final adjournment from commodification,

Pedantic are the noises
That emanate from rooftops gawdy
And painted in substance quelling,

Duller are the skies
That must watch ever-changing life,
Now cyclical, bureaucratic,

But gold are the dreams
Of all those that cling to hope,
For even the meek seek imagination

To give glad tidings as silent wars are raged.

Anthony is a mixed-race poet & writer whose work tends to focus on social inequality throughout late-modern society. Anthony travels frequently and has spent most of his life in Kuwait jostling between the UK & America. Anthony's work has been published 120 times. Anthony has 1 published chapbook titled 'The Great Northern Journey'.

Twitter/Instagram: @anthony64120 <https://arsalandywriter.com/>

Note From the Editor

Once again we thank all our lovely contributors for their support and submissions and to everyone taking the time to read all the amazing poems and stories we receive!

This issue has been a special one, using a new format has had its ups and downs but we are happy to say it's working well. Hopefully, we can get back into the swing of normalness now and get the ball rolling on 2021!

As always we would like to acknowledge the original custodians of the land we live and work upon, and pay our respect to all indigenous peoples past and present.

