Dear Reader,

It has long been a part of my mission as a writer of color to expand the literary canon and find ways to make room at this historically closed-off table. And, I don’t just mean the larger literary canon, I also desire to expand what we might call “Southern” writing. Southern doesn’t just mean stories about country roads and Dixie tradition. It is, instead, about the varied ways in which Southernness can be expressed—it is the urban south, the Black south, the racist south, the progressive south. It’s a poem about the lesbian experience, a poem about a Miami highway, a poem about an immigrant story, a poem about a Birmingham billboard, or even a poem partially written in Lakota.

This issue attempts to show all sides of what it means, what it can mean to be a Southern woman. There are some writers here who were born, raised, and who currently live in the South. Some were born here but have since moved away. Some writers in this issue were not born in the South at all, but they now find their life and work here. Even their Southern perspective should be considered. In this issue, you’ll find a heterogenous South, a South which can be a mirror to many and a window to all. I hope you enjoy what I’ve curated here—welcome to the new South!

~Ashley M. Jones, Guest Editor
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COVER IMAGE by Anne Markham Bailey

Image from Poverty Point Mounds, a Louisiana State Park Historic Site.
Southern Pastoral

by Kwoya Fagin Maples

little black children
march baskets of big-house
linens to the wash woman’s
shadow in the field

a blonde baby whimpers
from the green grass floor
the wash woman sways over the pot of lye,
her movements careful to not disturb the fresh wounds in her back
she slowly works in soiled
linens with a soaked wooden stick

the silver-faced surface
winks at her in the sunlight

a wind starts up and lifts tufts
of the baby’s hair
the baby’s cotton
cheeks flush red

he begins to cry
and crawl towards the wash woman, who leans
the wet stick against the pot’s belly

the baby reaches her hem, salt
tears on his face, salt
on her back

she lifts him into the air

for seconds he is framed by the blue sky
the rush of her smell clouds through his nostrils

then quietly, as if told to
hush, the hungry lye opens
and closes its mouth
I’ve Got Life

by Kwoya Fagin Maples

What I’ve got
is calves and heels to carry me
and this heart that only God can stop.

I’ve got these fingers
to snap in time.

I’ve got this behind for sitting,
so I don’t sit on my spine.

I’ve got these shoulders only I can shrug,
breasts that letdown when I get the feeling,
and a bird neck that carries my head and all my blood—

These lips only move if I tell them to, if I want them to.
There is so much my body can still do.
Plus, I’ve got these eyes for watching you.
The Doctor Asks If I Want To Go Home The Way I Came

Mt. Meigs, Alabama
June 1845

by Kwoya Fagin Maples

The first day is the worst. He rolls his sleeves up slow, cuffs white and crisp as gardenias. He says to lift my skirts up higher—roll them up around your waist, he says. He drapes a white sheet over the table. I climb up and crouch on my knees and hands, like Delia showed me, kneeling deeper when his naked fingers press the middle of my back. His cold hand makes my spine shiver and he tells me you’re gonna have to learn to keep still. My behind is high up in the air. Naked as the day I was born, like when that overseer turned my skirts up over my head to give me lashes. I just sit up there on that table and cry. Next thing you know, I’m sittin’ there snifflin’ and in walks a pack of white men. I sure cried that first time, I tell you.
Suburbia

by Emily Krawczyk

Bruises bloom purple and wilt gold.
The colors of royalty.

Our mother’s hands are dripping.
Diamonds are pieces of the ice that we fell through.

Our father is the ruler
and the be-header.

We live in the kingdom he has built.
He can throw us out—but he doesn’t.

We dream of switching places with the paupers
who are always peering through the glass.

Velvet is suffocating
Leather leaves welts.

Kiss the hand that feeds you.
Chew off your own leg.
A Feared Language

by Kimberly Casey

When the doctor tells me
“less likely”
she means “you are too young
to have the test to learn of never.”
When I respond with my lack
of want, she will say outright
“you are too young to know yourself in such a way.”
I’m called stable.
Maybe able to bring one weary animal warmth
yet still I shed everything out.
A birth happening here would be
deemed miracle. Barren is a feared language
perhaps too antiquated for my age.
Call me barn instead, all open doors
unable to keep anything in,
covered in red and dying straw.
Alarm

by Kimberly Casey

Somewhere inside me an alarm is ringing. How can I keep these hands steady through all this noise? My therapist says she’s glad I’m doing better. I am always figuring out new ways to lie. When my therapist says high-functioning depression and anxiety, does she mean me that I am high functioning, or my illness? How many calendars can I fill before I finally say no? Will no ever stop feeling like failure? I know all the right ways to have a panic attack in public without making anyone else uncomfortable. What if my obligations are keeping me alive? What if this next poem reveals the ways I could have saved him? What is a brain capable of when pushed to experience a sleepless week? What if this next poem revives a ghost? What sort of elegance can I conjure from using? I want to break my heart free from its body. I want to pull out my pulse and give it to you. My endless shudder. If I clean the cobwebs from the ceiling fan at 1:30am, will I remember the last thing James said to me? If I paint the bedroom closet on a Tuesday in July will my mother not be disappointed? If I run 3 miles every morning will I step on the right way to ask my father why? I broke apart the alarm clock and everything was a mirror. The ringing is my phone. The ringing is my boss. The ringing is my dog, my mailman, my insurance bills. The ringing is that I have not learned to knit yet, and my body isn’t as small as it could be. The ringing is the stain on the carpet that just needs one more good scrubbing, just one more.
Reckoning for a Body

*after Ada Limón*

by Ashley Roach-Freiman

What is it to love my soft and mottled body?
Each time I clothe myself, I shout ecstatic love, the better
to squeeze fear out. I cry over the sheets, the dishes, the bathmat
how much older I am, this far into my 30s. (All the new skin.)

I wear lingerie that cost money. So strange
to have money, and to slowly lose beauty,
and to be late on wanting a child.

Before I got a job, before I fell in love, before I knew anyone at all,
I trusted the concrete foundation of my own attraction
in the way I thought about men.
In my way, in my brain, another woman always lived:

in the bedroom, perfumed, with a book of poems
memorized. Peach light.
(Where I cleaned my knife.)

I woke with a cramped neck and extra weight. That sexy perfume lady
had been dragging around some rape; what’s life?
I made my body so clean it shook.

I could no longer look at men or hear them talk;
all the emptiness of weather talk with no possibility of sex.
Happiest alone with pinto beans, clean sheets, a sink full of dishes.

I kept thinking about a Sharon Olds poem, about how honest
the pressure of her still feels—always a woman loud loud loud.
I think about a man looking out a window at a woman with a notebook—
that’s power (whose, depends).

Sometimes when I squeeze the springy hill of flesh under my breasts,
I’ll imagine a body, a woman, me,
the twenty-one or twenty, in her boho halter, slim, easy,
at the most shallow riptide of understanding and sex.
Though I am her and I am her,
I am with excess more quietly,

clouds not current, the sun-bright lace
across the floorboards
(where I do the walking) of my body.
Undone Light

by Ashley Roach-Freiman

When I was nineteen,  
I would let anyone  
breach my body  
if they acted  
like they didn't much care.  
Were you this way too,  
requiring touch,  
unrequited?  
After the bar,  
in my dark room,  
(or, be honest,  
still in the bar's bathroom),  
I would kick my hips  
against slippery grip, watch  
the ceiling shift  
with streetlight—  
trying to believe  
my own movement.  
The first time  
your boyfriend and I  
kissed, I swirled  
his tongue  
ring in my mouth,  
swallowing  
the thick  
bulleted muscle.  
Moved,  
he went further.  
He bucked,  
beer-blacked out,  
(bad habit I would grow  
accustomed to)  
and me, under his belly,  
eyes half-closed,  
paying attention.
Detour

by Denise Duhamel

Any feminist who has ever taken the high road will tell you the high road gets backed up and sometimes we need to take a detour straight through the belly of uncensored rage. —Andrea Gibson

Don’t get me started on abortions, even the Bible had them—those “bitter waters” were meant to induce. There are animals that can abort a fetus themselves (cryptic female choice)

if the mate is unfit. I guess most people don’t think of rape in the animal kingdom—we say it’s just nature and “kingdom,” not queendom, after all. Hurray for the pill, but what about all of the natural teas which bring on a period or miscarriage?

Oh, that’s right, you can’t get them here in the US. They might be “too dangerous”—let’s give you this pharmaceutical instead

with its mood swings and bloating and cramping.

Oh, and it might cause cancer.

Have you heard this joke?

A Republican senator walks into the office of Democrat and asks, “Hey, what should I do about this abortion bill?” The Democratic senator says, “I think you’d better pay it.”

Ha ha ha. This detour is bumpy with rocks and potholes. Unfunded by any township, I drive at my own risk. Maybe I’ll abort just by speeding up.
Love Poem #6

by Denise Duhamel

Is it cliché to say, when we met, bluebirds flew out of my chest?
Or that I was ready to reach in and pull out my coward heart,
throw it in a fry pan with onions? I would have rather been
rid of it, not feel anything as I knew what would follow:
honeymoon, then betrayal or boredom.
Is it cliché to say wheels popped out of my heels
so that I could roll to you faster than I could walk
and roll away just as fast if I got scared?
Is it cliché to say I was giddy like a kid?
It is cliché to say all good stories end in some kind of death,
even if it’s just the nerve endings that can’t quite reach our hands
that tingle then drop the forks we grasp?
Ping of metal on kitchen tile, heart stew splattering.
And I’m glad I feel nothing cleaning up the mess.
I Wonder If My Ex Will Read This
(for M.S, who gave me the idea)

by Denise Duhamel

I wonder if he’s thinking of me when I’m thinking of him. Of course, I never think of him!
Not his cats or his Clash albums, the way we would rate movies on a scale of one star to five, then debate each actor’s performance and the soundtrack. We had so much time, it seemed, back then to talk for hours on the phone, to stretch out our arguments into weeks, to gossip through the night then sleep until noon.
I wonder if, when he tastes cornbread, he envisions me. I made a lot of it because it was cheap and we were college students. Now I am remembering those blue Jiffy boxes (four for a dollar) and my oven with the wonky pilot light. I remember washing dishes (no dishwasher) and breaking a Goodwill wine glass he loved. He thought I’d done it on purpose which I swore I hadn’t. But what would a shrink say?
I missed lots of the obvious back then. I remember winning tickets on the radio to see Octopussy— how we both loved movies, even bad James Bond. How you had to go to a theater back then to see one. At the time, I had no idea of pussy’s slang meaning. I didn’t understand how my genitalia were anything like a cat. As he explained it to me I was pretty sure he was lying.
I had no shrink back then, no self-help books. We had no Google to settle disputes. I never blamed myself or wrote an inventory or let things go. I was on my own with my resentments and fears. He was on his own trying to figure things out. We both wrote in notebooks and even sent each other letters. We either listened to music or didn’t. We had to agree. We had no headphones to escape into sound. Max Picard writes, “Nothing has changed the nature of man so much as the loss of silence.” I am talking pre-cell phone, pre-Facebook, pre-devices of any kind. I remember answering the landline (no caller ID) hoping it was him but it was my roommate’s mother. I remember busy signals, my huffing and puffing for her to get off the phone.
in case he was trying to call me. I remember hanging up in a fit of tears and unsophisticated bickering. I remember dropping off film to get pictures of us developed, then days later picking them up in an envelope with a smiling family on the front. I remember wondering why things couldn’t be that perfect for us. I remember thinking if I thought about him hard enough he would show up at my door. I remember threatening to end it all if he didn’t come to see me.

I meant my life, but I couldn’t have been serious, could I? We acted like children because we were still children. We thought we could change who we essentially were. Or maybe that was just my take—maybe he knew who he was all along. It’s not like I ever think about him or where he is now. If you are another ex expecting that that this poem would be about you, forgive me and/or consider yourself lucky. It’s not as though I live in the past with my remorse. That would make me nostalgic, or pathetic, which I am not. I don’t miss much about 1983. I don’t miss Roger Moore or think he was better than Daniel Craig. I don’t even remember missing Sean Connery. And I don’t understand, frankly, how sexist James Bond movies keep getting made. That is something we would talk about if we still talked. He would say Shouldn’t there at least be a few ironic winks? I would say And what about a more age-appropriate heroine?

I remember my ex wasn’t crazy about poetry. So why would he read this? It was hard back then to accept it was over, but, as you can see, I’ve thoroughly, most thoroughly, moved on.
Still life with my father

by Donna Aza Weir-Soley

Two weeks full sun, my skin—the color of milk-less cocoa
Your face, the deep dark of over-roasted coffee beans.

The contrast of my natural black curls parted in the center
Nestled next to your full head of hair—white and fluffy as cotton balls.

Same almond-shaped eyes—mine, deep-brown and dancing
Yours—rheumy, made colorless with unshed tears.

My head leans in close to your left shoulder
My right hand is a fist in the middle of your chest

Our intimacy, our distance
the clogged septic longing, the yearning

Must be what “friends” see, the reason for the likes
the comments, hearts and sweet emojis .

What they don’t see are the sins—forgiven
committed before I was born—stories not
of charm or the kindness I have come to know
crimes against mother—unspeakable

For which I must hold you accountable     except
I cannot digest refried anger—reheated.

Like dew, my outrage evaporates in your sun-hot love
“How many years?” you ask. “Only five” I say—“don’t cry.”
Sea Stories: bellywoman bangarang.

by Donna Aza Weir-Soley

1
The sea shells stories in spurts and stutters
He was the first man for me, your father.

He was a wild one, sea said, all dem women
He was good looking then, bway, people change.

I went to work in Kingston/ your brother’s father was a sargeant
He killed a man, right in front of me—a thief.

Shook me up so bad—my mind/heart/stomach
changed—Mummah came to take me home.

He wanted me to give your brother his name
But no, that was not right, though he was my first.

I wanted nothing to do with that feral seagull
But he forced himself, next thing I know—you.

2
What do you mean to tell me, sea? What manner of story is this—rape?

Just that a woman gets tired of fighting
Next thing I knew, I was carrying you.
Odes to Winnie

by Zoe Vaziri

I.

I have never seen
anyone
love anything
as much as you love the peanut butter
on the end of this spoon.

II.

Legs stretched,
rump round and
rearing madly to compensate for your
missing tail, the
guttural greetings grumbled
from your unsocialized mouth.

Everyone always thought
you were yelling when you did this.
But I knew
that was just how you had learned to say
hello.

III.

I never forgave you for the time
you ate the inseam from my
favorite designer jeans.

I scoured the internet for
four
long
months,
finally found
the perfect replacement,
and then...
you ate those, too.
IV.

You always insisted
on being the littlest spoon,
wedged between us like a
warm lumpy beanbag,
tongue flopped across part of my pillow.

It’s okay.
You can keep it.

The stains will remind me
how much I miss your morning kisses.
Boston Marriage

by Julie Marie Wade

for Angie

Even if we had met in Boston instead of Bellingham; even if you had not been wearing your green sweater with the wool sash askew, or driving your Mercury Tracer with Tennessee plates, David Gray blasting from the Discman you had rigged to your radio—I know I would have loved you: then as now, there as anywhere.

Even if I had not been wearing my high-water pants with red sneakers and dark woven belt (what a catch I was!), or that Rhoda Morgenstern throw-back scarf in my still-permed hair; even if we had not been twenty-two and twenty-three, respectively, you brand-new to the West Coast and me never having left it once before—I know I would have loved you: then as now, there as anywhere.

Even if we were two women older and otherwise occupied, enlightened enough to recognize a sudden flutter in the gut is not admissible as empirical evidence, I can picture it: my son at the pre-pre-school program for exceptional suburban achievers, my daughter at the Tchaikovsky and Tots summer music camp; me, other side of town, following my GPS to the closest Whole Foods because I didn’t have time to bake the gluten-free birthday cake I promised. (My husband’s colleague’s wife has Celiac’s, poor dear, and I’m in charge of preparations for her party!)

Perhaps you’re late for a meeting. Perhaps you just popped in for a hummus wrap with sprouts and a nice strong coffee. Perhaps I dent your Volvo hatchback in the parking lot with my monstrous minivan, the one we’re planning to upgrade to a Mercedes station wagon. It’s no secret, I’ve
been distracted since the move, and I’m hoping
if I wait right here beside your sporty two-door and
apologize profusely and write you a check that you’ll
consider not reporting me to my unforgiving insurance
company. (The fact is, there have been a few other
incidents, and I don’t want our rates to spike again
just because “Babylon” came on, and I was singing
along with the sun in my eyes...)

And this I can see clearly: you walking toward me
through a checkerboard of silver Audis and black
Saabs; the late-thirties librarian version of you,
which is much like the early-twenties graduate student
version, just more resplendent; still with your long stride
and your tousled hair and that furtive look you have
been known to wear, appraising me first with well-
earned suspicion—Who is this soccer mom loitering beside
your car? Is she actually leaning against your door?—but
soon something between us will shift. We’ll have to
exchange phone numbers so I can get the damage fixed.
And then we’ll be waiting outside the body shop, which is
already charged with metaphor, and we’ll decide to get
some lunch at the corner café, where one thing will lead,
tenuously at first, then undeniably toward another.

“Not if you hit my car!” Real You insists in the dim
glow of our real-life living room. Real You thinks I’m
a hopeless romantic, can’t be trusted with such a wild
subjunctive, since I have a weakness for movies like
Serendipity (“Absolute shit!” you say, which is true—
I won’t dispute), but also Sliding Doors, which even you
admit was charming. See how they end up together
anyway, sooner or later, the two who are meant to be?

“They’re not even gay,” Real You grumbles. It’s true,
we need more queerly beloveds, don’t we? Oh, the puns
I am capable of! I place my real hand in your real hand,
tell you again how I would have loved you: then as now,
there as anywhere. And the real gift is that you believe me.
Mary Cheney, You Know What They Say About Women Like Us

by Julie Marie Wade

That we’re dykes because we have daddy issues.

That we’re queer because we aligned ourselves with the wrong parent early on, then grew a fondness for wide pant legs and flat-heeled shoes.

That we’re bitter because nobody asked us to Prom.

Listen, this isn’t me talking. I’m just trying to keep up with the pseudo-science.

We might be lesbians because our mothers withheld their approval all our lives, or perhaps because they never showed us how to mold the meatballs right.

Your mother told Cokie Roberts on national TV, “Mary has never declared such a thing!” At the time, you had been out and living with your partner for eight years.

Maybe we watched too few episodes of Father Knows Best and/or didn’t identify enough with Jane Wyatt. Mother Knows Less? Mother Keeps Quiet? Mother Makes Him Think It Was All His Idea?

In 2000, your father said, “I think we ought to do everything we can to tolerate and accommodate whatever kind of relationships people want to enter into.”

Gee, Dick, thanks for that rousing endorsement. I’m glad you can tolerate and accommodate the generous stick up your ass, all while still supporting the Federal Marriage Amendment.

Forgive me, Mary. He’s your dad. If it helps, my father called him “a real swell guy.” And besides, my dad never said anything about tolerance or accommodation. Instead:

“This whole homosexuality business started in the 1960s. Your mother and I got married, then watched the world around us fall to the fornicators and the bigamists and the sodomites.”

Note how he doesn’t see a correlation here—that maybe their marriage tipped the iceberg toward some more promising alternatives.

In 2004, you said you came “very close” to quitting your job on the Bush-Cheney re-election campaign. People were wearing buttons at the RNC that read, One man. One woman. As God intended. Chanting it, too. Forget about quitting your job; I don’t see how you didn’t quit your party.
Or maybe it’s me who’s lacking patience, compassion, the long-sightedness to see things through. Maybe I should stand in awe of such restraint, the fact you never seem to find the last straw in the haystack of shit they heap upon you.

The pay-off? You and Heather are still invited to spend Christmas in Jackson Hole. Meanwhile, I couldn’t find my parents’ second home on a map, and they have never once uttered my partner’s name.

In your autobiography, you quote yourself as saying: “Personally, I’d rather not be known as the vice-president’s lesbian daughter.” Why not? Is it too reductive, too making-an-issue-out-of-a-person? See, I thought Republicans always liked that.

I’m not fond of epithets or bald-face denials, but I’d really get my back up if anyone presumed such a thing about me—Republican? Because my parents are? This apple fell so far from that blazing red tree she has rolled into another garden.

Lesbians love turquoise, I hear. Sapphire is my birthstone. Cerulean the color of my aura, a psychic once said. Lavender menace? That’s fine in theory, but Mary Cheney, come with me. Wouldn’t you like to menace in blue?
Stellar

by Epiphany

I met God in the flesh he had brown eyes, nappy hair, and a broke heart
He spoke of self-preservation and discovery of who him be
He searched for meaning in places he didn't belong
Longing for understanding
He forgot who he was
He knew not the king I spoke of as I described him to himself
His reflection was all types of unfamiliar
Star, shine new
Star, boy you must not have ever been told your truth
You messiah
Negus on new days
Maybe you think because you runnin’ low on melanin
You ain’t nubian enough
Don’t be new slave
Please avoid that wave
You bright in the night
I met God in the flesh and when he jokingly calls himself “King”
he’s oblivious to the fact that that’s really what I see
Or maybe love has tainted me
Maybe I crown him prematurely in hopes that he grows like an oak tree
Sturdy over time
Premeditated in rhymes
That you black man... know you God of some sort... God of some kind
In breathing flesh, granite, or wood pine box
You legend and whatever the timeline of conversation
No hesitation
Dark as the deepest seas
Power run infinitely
You black man
Strong
Black man
Real
Black man with duality
Black man still
You more than gold
Karats are accessories to your shine
Puzzle to mind
Quest to find
You melanin
In your darkness
At your worst
Lowest of lows
Black man you...
Black Magic
craigslist in birmingham

by Alina Stefanescu

The sign of the cross doesn’t work in America
    all signs point to Jesus

Zombies are ghosts
gone atheist
unlike reverence for garlic
found in Romanian graveyards
no ghosts survive
evangelicalism’s angels

A gesture is helpless
without living
ghosts
to receive it

Sign of the cross:
Shunnarah at the crossroads
Minty, Moses
listed as "other names" in the Wikipedia entry for Harriet Tubman

by Melissa Range

The Quaker paced the swamp's edge at the appointed time.
He threaded through the cattails and couldn't call her name.

My wagon stands in the barn-yard of the next farm across the way.
The horse is in the stable; the harness hangs on a nail.

Facedown in the marshes, Araminta Ross felt the Quaker's steady tread swishing through cordgrass.

Facedown in the swamp slush, Minty never moved; hidden behind nineteen trees, her nineteen fugitives (except for the two babies, drugged with opium) moved on pain of death. Minty felt the hum of currents thawing swamp ice, the epileptic hum of God inside her cranium (a vision or a dream or a master's two-pound weight, blunt trauma to the head). She felt her prayer skimming and she felt it when God said:
My wagon stands in the barn-yard
of the next farm across the way.
The horse is in the stable;
the harness hangs on a nail.

The Quaker paced the swamp road.
He’d heard Moses would come
though he didn’t know who Moses was.
But he heard the hum

of cattails rattling as he walked,
loblollies whishing air,
a great blue heron croaking.
He knew Moses was there.

She always comes in winter,
when the nights are dark
and folks with homes stay in them.
That had been the talk.

No one would speak her given name,
no one would write it down,
and no one would swear they’d seen her
until the war was done.

And then they all said, Moses.
They all said, Harriet.
I saw her with a revolver.
I saw her lead them out.

I saw her. Yes, I knew her,
though she was always in disguise.
I helped her with ten dollars.
I helped her with new shoes.

They called her the General.
They called her a man.
They called her woolly, dusky,
darky, sable heroine.
Praying, she was Minty, 
brain pressed to the sky, 
the name her mother gave her 
and the name God called her by

and the way he opened humming 
past what she would become 
(hyperlinks and children’s books, 
an answer on exams).

*My wagon stands in the barn-yard of the next farm across the way.* 
*The horse is in the stable; the harness hangs on a nail.*
Black Bench

by Melissa Range

Sarah Mapps Douglass at the Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia, 1833

Sarah’s mother does not quake, week after week,
in the back pew, does not quake, week after week,

when white Friends who come to sit with them
are then forbid to sit with them—

this bench is for the people of color,
a whisper silking like the color

white silks through everything, even prayer,
yet thinks that it’s not there. Is it prayer

she hears, like white ribbons silking through the bonnets
that her mother makes, white bonnets

without sprigs or beads, for Quaker women
like the women who pass to the front, women

who do not believe in slavery?
In the front pews, silent, they pray against slavery.

Praying, silent, her mother does not quake.
Sarah quakes. She has wished this meeting-house would quake,

God arching an unwhite wing over this place,
sweeping everything white in this place

beneath the black bench, under the staircase,
where her mother sits—under the staircase

where Sarah will no more sit with God
unless He makes this house to fall. God

is the still, small voice that our hearts speak,
and this is what he speaks

to her, which she will bear: week after week,
gathered in prayer, week after week,

her mother unquaking on their
black bench, alone because she’s left her there.
Frances Ellen Watkins Lodges Two Weeks with Mary Brown, Philadelphia, November 1859

by Melissa Range

Weird John Brown he had a wife, and who remembers her? She bore him thirteen children, and she was left with four.

Frances Watkins worked the circuit (and who remembers her?) making speeches against bondage. She knew she could do more.

She went to stay with Mary Brown before Mary headed south to see her husband in his cell, to kiss his sulfur mouth.

They stayed at William Still’s house. It wasn’t radical, though two were black and one was white and their cause was criminal,

or at least the man was to be hanged—Mary’s darling, the Old Man. Frances sat with Mary. Frances held her hand.

Frances helped her answer letters. Frances made her sleep and eat. Frances got a note to weird John Brown ferried through the grate:

I thank you, that you have been brave enough to reach your hands to the crushed and blighted of my race. And although the hands of Slavery throw a wall between you, friend, and me, Virginia has no bolts or bars to bar my sympathy.
John Brown, the wolvish shepherd,
the star that cracked in two,
who broke his children’s bodies
to let the war come through—

could he read it in his fervor?
Could his brain follow a word?
Or were his eyes bedazzled
by the lynch rope of the Lord?

Mary sat within Still’s parlor.
Soon she’d get on a train
with an armed escort, headed south,
to visit weird John Brown.

Frances went back on the circuit—
Ohio, then Vermont.
She asked for prayers for Mary
everywhere she went.

Frances sent six dollars to Mary,
winter clothes to John Brown’s men
waiting on their gallows days—
Stevens, Copeland, Green.

She didn’t ask for help.
She paid all the expense.
In a 600-page book on John Brown
she isn’t mentioned once.

Mary had thirteen children;
nine died off one by one—
from dysentery, from consumption,
from the dreams of old John Brown.

Frances wasn’t married.
She didn’t have a child.
She had no parents to support.
She had no one in this world

and nothing but a heart
that would not know its place,
but would be a sister everywhere
though she was sisterless.
Anywhere, Away

by Debra Kaufman

His hands on my throat,
I feel the familiar animal
fear that means flee—
only this time
  there’s a click
like a key in a lock
just before I pass out.
When he leaves I gather
the documents I’ve kept hidden,
pack two suitcases, pick
my daughter up from school.
She asks where to in a voice
that wishes something new
is truly beginning.
  We’ve driven off
like this before. She’s eight
and already damaged
by my cowardice.
  Whenever he says
he will never leave us,
my breath stops, stutter-starts.
Terrifying to know
  it is all up to you,
you in your wobbly
willingness to forgive,
even as he compresses
the air around you.
  Rat poison
has crossed my mind.
My daughter, though.
Prison.
  Better: there’s a friend
of a friend in a northern state.
October wind pushes us forward,
the dashes on the highway
some new code I have
miles, days, to decipher.
Driving on I-95 at 3am

by Cathleen Chambless

Only car on the road,
skyscrapers built
off cocaine lines
collage the horizon,
the highway lamps
crouch over me,
magnify my loneliness
with their light beams,
the bulbs glow,
maybe they are UFOs,
suck me up & abduct me, please
let the yellow dashes on the street
be stitches sealing off my existence –
an expunged file.
My father’s absence stretches with
the highway & bends with the night
on the pavement,
a languid jaguar yawn,
it’s tongue a curling crescendo of a wave,
it cradles me & I slide down
the pitcher plant’s throat
then dissolve until I am just another particle
in this never ending supply of empty.
A Personification of Capitalism

by Cathleen Chambless

Pearl drop eggs in delicate sacks hatch & bloom.
How do you do? My name is Doom.

Shake hands with the red ribboned
fork of my serpentine tongue

I’ll bind each arm &c swallow you,
soothed by the digestion of flesh.

Donald dreams of the world
exploding as he masturbates feverishly,

jizzing into a Jacuzzi
of oil. He rolls in his concoction

& slathers it on his skin.
Here piggy, piggy. I swoon.

A sacrificial oath–
Skull & Bones,

six white skeletons, manic plastic
cackling mannequins,

lounging around the war table
in Klan cloaks,

their jagged fingers linger along
the latitude & longitude of suffering,

roll the die.
You’ll never make it out alive,

too busy in the factory
losing finger tips &

snippets of your future,
snippets of your wife.
Yours, yourself no more.
Human beings or

a nine digit corporation
made of flesh?

We need you to spawn
fetuses into the dawn

shriveled umbilical
confetti streamers!

We need more fingers,
more toes, don’t forget to

sever the tongue & eyes,
No Child Left Behind.

Now, legislate this excrement
I came all over & sign:

For I am Christ.
The Book of a Civilized Home

by Hannah Star Rogers

A seashell bouquet
is not of course

that hard to make,
provided there

is a sea. A man is
not hard to love

given he is far away.
Coffee for twenty

is only coffee for two
times ten. Forsythia

can be loosened at
the neck when

the leaves drop,
unleashing in the frost

two great branches
of canary lemon.

The ovoid planet can
be undone from its poles

since a model is only
imagining. The shade

of a darkened lamp can
become a mask to light

and a droplet follows
the diagram of landscape.

A lily is only a poison
if you are a cat.
The Three Hour Siege on the Caddo Parish Jail  
Shreveport, Louisiana, May 12, 1914

by JC Reilly

A thousand men had battered steel doors with railroad irons, and then hacksawed their way through the bars, to drag Hamilton from his cell, and tighten a fresh, hemp rope around his dark, thin neck, his screams lost to the mob’s cheers and seething purpose, his tears erased by May’s mid-morning rain.

The Guard never came, though Sheriff Flournoy telegraphed the Governor for troops—or so the Times would report the following day, beside the photograph of the man the crowds strung up on a telephone pole across from the Courthouse, caught mid-swing, Hamilton’s head lolling but not snapped, a trace of foam at his mouth. The hilt of a knife protruded from his chest like a key to the door of Hell.

The sisters, not yet ten—the age of the girl supposedly despoiled—would not have walked downtown to Dixon’s Dry by themselves, but that Mama’s cold was getting worse, and she needed liniment and a sack of horehound drops.

They barely made it past the press of bodies—and the brawls that spun like eddies in the rush of angry men on Milam Street—to arrive at the store, where Mr. Dixon hurried them inside, locked the door behind them, let them shelter with the other ladies there. He led the group in a prayer, that they wouldn’t be burned out, that the streets would clear, be safe again. Maybe some of them prayed for the soul of that Black man—and maybe not.

Years later, of this day, the sisters would not speak. But more than once, it might be said, that prayer can’t loose the knot that binds a chiliad of hearts in evil deeds—and magick has other things to do than try.
that damn lawyer who shares my name

by Mandy Shunnarah

“The caravan road itself had to be well protected by fortresses, between different stations and at exposed points. Such strongholds were situated in Tell Shunnarah between Rubebeh and el-‘Odhah, on the Naqb ed-Dableh. The new inhabitants of the desert had besides the Bedouin another enemy, perhaps more dangerous than the first: the desert itself with its lack of water, its sandstorms, poor soil and hot climate. But their unbreakable will, combined with indefatigable industry, overcame these difficulties.” — The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society

it’s a half hour longer
and the curves
make me carsick
but anything’s better
than billboards and faces
dotting i-65
not just faces
his faces—
from alabama
through florida
i AM your attorney
i only hear a pre-taped
maury show on repeat
is HE your father?
he is not the father

does that damn lawyer
who shares my name again
staring through my windshield
at seventy miles per hour
t.j. eckleberg multiplied

is that guy on the billboards your dad?

my dad’s an addict
a dead one
overdosed on oxy
bought it
with his daddy’s money
i bet she’s really rich
ger her dad is on billboards

if i’m rich i don’t know it
tell it to my thrift store clothes
tell my dead father
he doesn’t have to pay
child support never sent

i don’t look like him
i’m not like him
everything i learned
about being palestinian
i learned on wikipedia

shunnarah is a misnomer
i’d rather claim alabama
it explains this thick drawl
my southern accent
can’t form arabic syllables

tired of questions
i moved to ohio
where shunnarah billboards
don’t reach
Battle Cry Blues after “Global Warming Blues’ by Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie

by Scarlett Connolly

Their horses shook the earth
as they came for our land.
I said their horses shook the war-torn earth
as they came for our land
Jackson kicked us to the side
and tied our hands

There’s no talking to those animals
full of hate and Christ
no, there’s no reasoning with those animals
so full of hate and Christ
I’m an Indian pleading for my life
not a monster to be sacrificed

I said hóȟ, yuŋȟáŋ yaečháŋkiŋ waktA čhaŋčháŋ
yaŋ lila wičákȟe
I said lé hékha mitháwa makháiyutȟe na
yaŋ lila wičákȟe
Animals say God let us come
this is where we belong

Now my home is a third world country
and I have tear-gas in my eyes
my home is a third world country
and they’re contaminating our water supply
Seems like for White Man’s livin
we natives gotta die

Seems like for White Man’s livin
we natives gotta die
Their horses shook the earth
as they came for our land.
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Jackson kicked us to the side
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There’s no talking to those animals
full of hate and Christ
no, there’s no reasoning with those animals
so full of hate and Christ
I’m an Indian pleading for my life
not a monster to be sacrificed

I said No, if you think I will cower
you are very wrong
I said This is my land and
you are very wrong
Animals say God let us come
this is where we belong

Now my home is a third world country
and I have tear-gas in my eyes
my home is a third world country
and they’re contaminating our water supply
Seems like for White Man’s livin
we natives gotta die

Seems like for White Man’s livin
we natives gotta die
Dawn Witness

by Laura Secord

The Nelson Woman and her boy are taken from the county jail by unknown parties and swung from bridge... The woman was very small of stature, very black, about thirty-five years old and vicious... The boy was about fourteen years old, slender and tall, yellow and ignorant... The ghastly spectacle was discovered this morning by a Negro boy taking his cow to water. --The Okemah Ledger, May 25, 1911

Muddy river before dawn.
Sky streaked white like chicken feathers. His sack filled with greens and wild onions. Foraging.

His spotty cow with him, wandering the bank.

Near the bridge rounding the bend, he thinks he sees Aunt Laura, cousin Lawrence walking on air?
Seems they’re flying against the skies flashing streaks in rosy color.

Glowing,

Sounds. He hears Lawrence moaning, Miss Laura mouthing off,

bold as ever.

Sunlight shooting rainbows out her hand. In this flash there’s recognition—

Hanging. They are hanging, strung from hemp off Schoolton Bridge,

Aunt Laura, muddy blue calico swinging

Lawrence bared, his drawers pulled down.
Shamed.

Eyes clouding with tears, throat choking, he hears the cries again. A baby, no longer ghostly.

Hunting the brush, under the Osage he finds Laura’s newborn daughter tossed,

left to starve amid thorns, the lynching party’s picnic scraps and chicken bones.
Because you asked for a happy poem

*by Jane Ellen Glasser*

I have scrubbed the rug using biodegradable enzymes, swept up

the sharp stars that scattered a man’s features from the hallway mirror,

buried the blade, once used to chop vegetables for soup, beneath the porch,

bleached the kitchen tiles where a weight was dragged out, erased prints

from knobs, crazy-glued the heirloom china tea caddy and cups, returned laps

to the uprighted dining room chairs, sucked tears from the heavy curtains

that kept the windows blind, took down wedding photographs that for years

marched up the stairs, watched the fire eat a torn, bespattered shirt,

and flushed a gold ring down the toilet before you even entered this poem.
ANNE MARKHAM BAILEY is founder of Markham Bailey Image & Print. Markham Bailey Image & Print was born in 2011 at the Innovation Depot in Birmingham, Alabama. We participated in the Entrepreneur Accelerator program as part of the Birmingham Venture Club’s commitment to business growth. Markham Bailey Image & Print is a certified WBENC woman-owned business. Visit them at www.markhambailey.com.

KIMBERLY CASEY is a Massachusetts native who received her Bachelors of Fine Arts in Writing, Literature and Publishing from Emerson College in Boston, MA. She has since moved to Huntsville, Alabama where she founded Out Loud HSV - a spoken word and literary arts collective dedicated to inspiring community outreach and activism through spoken word. Her work has appeared in Red Fez, Hypertrophic Literary and The Corvus Review, among others, and is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at Pacific University.

CATHLEEN CHAMBLESS is a proud Queer Latinx from Miami, Florida. She graduated with her MFA in poetry from FIU. She runs a semi-annual queer poetry reading series through the Stonewall Museum. Her work has appeared in The Electronic Encyclopedia of Experimental Literature, Fjords Review, Grief Diaries, Jai-Alai, Storm Cycle 2014 & 2015, and Wussy Mag. Nec(Romantic), a finalist for the bisexual book awards, is her debut collection of poetry (The Gorilla Press 2016).

DENISE DUHAMEL has published numerous collections of poetry, including Kinky (1997), Queen for a Day: Selected and New Poems (2001), Ka-Ching! (2009), Blowout (2013), and Scald (2017). A Distinguished University Professor at Florida International University, she lives in Hollywood, FL.

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ASHLEY M. JONES, GUEST EDITOR Her debut poetry collection, Magic City Gospel, was published by Hub City Press in January 2017, and it on the silver medal in poetry in the 2017 Independent Publishers Book Awards. Her second book, dark // thing, won the 2018 Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize for Poetry from Pleiades Press. She currently lives in Birmingham, Alabama, where she is founding director of the Magic City Poetry Festival, 2nd Vice President and Membership Chair of the AWC, co-ordinator of the Nitty Gritty Magic City Reading Series, and a faculty member in the Creative Writing Department of the Alabama School of Fine Arts. her on the web at: https://ashleymichellejones.wordpress.com/.

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EMILY KRAWCZYK is the founder of the online publication The Laughing Lesbian, a platform for the LGBTQ community. She is the nonfiction editor of UAB’s NELLE (previously Poem Memoir Story) and assistant editor for the Birmingham Poetry Review. She was a cast member of Listen To Your Mother Birmingham 2016, where her personal work in nonfiction was turned into spoken word. She is currently finishing her degree at UAB and works as a freelance editor and writer.
KWOYA FAGIN MAPLES is a writer from Charleston, S.C. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Alabama and is a Cave Canem Fellow and a current Alabama State Council on the Arts Literary Fellow. She is the author of Mend (University Press of Kentucky, 2018), which was named a 2019 Finalist for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for Poetry. Mend was also finalist for AWP’s Donald Hall Prize for Poetry. In addition to a chapbook publication by Finishing Line Press entitled Something of Yours (2010) her work is published in several journals and anthologies including Blackbird Literary Journal, Obsidian, Berkeley Poetry Review, The African-American Review, Pluck!, Tin House Review Online and Cave Canem Anthology XIII. Her most recent poetry collection, Mend, received a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation and was finalist for AWP’s Donald Hall Prize for Poetry. Mend tells the story of the birth of obstetrics and gynecology in America and the role black enslaved women played in that process. Maples teaches Creative Writing at the Alabama School of Fine Arts and directs a three-dimensional poetry exhibit which features poetry and visual art including original paintings, photography, installations and film.

MELISSA RANGE is the author of Scriptorium, a winner of the 2015 National Poetry Series (Beacon Press, 2016), and Horse and Rider (Texas Tech University Press, 2010). Recent poems have been published in 32 Poems, Blackbird, Image, and Poetry. Range is the recipient of awards and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rona Jaffe Foundation, the American Antiquarian Society, the Sewanee Writers’ Conference, and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Originally from East Tennessee, she teaches creative writing and American literature at Lawrence University in Wisconsin.

JC REILLY writes poetry, fiction, CNF, and drama. Her full-length poetry collection about witchcraft, herbalism, twin sisters, and murder, What Magick May Not Alter, will be out this spring from Madville Publishing. Follow her @aishatou or read her blog at jcreilly.com.


HANNAH STAR ROGERS Hannah Star Rogers’ poems and reviews have appeared in The Kenyon Review, The Los Angeles Review of Books, Tupelo Quarterly, The Carolina Quarterly, and TSR. Her flash fiction has been honored by Nat. Brut and Glimmer Train. She received her MFA at Columbia University and her PhD at Cornell University. She has received the Akademie Schloss Solitude Fellowship in Stuttgart, Germany, Djerassi Artist Residency in Woodside, CA, the international artist residencies at ArtHub in Kingman, AZ, the Arctic Circle in Finland, and with National Park Service in Acadia, Maine and the Everglades, FL.

LAURA SECORD received her MFA from Sierra Nevada College, after over twenty-years as a spoken word artist and producer of community performance events, including 100,000 Poets for Change and Voices of Resistance. She has a lifelong commitment to women and the under-represented. For thirty years, she combined the life of a writer and performer with a career as a Nurse Practitioner in HIV care. A Pushcart nominee, her poems have appeared in the Birmingham Weekly, Arts and Understanding, The Southern Women’s Review, PoemMemoirStory,Passager, Indolent Books, Snapdragon and Burning House Press. She is the co-founder of Birmingham’s Sister City Spoken Word Collective, and an editor of their anthology,Voices of Resistance.

MANDY SHUNNARAH is an Alabama-born writer who now calls Columbus, Ohio, home. Her essays, poetry, and short stories have been published in Electric Literature, The Rumpus, Entropy Magazine, and many more. She’s currently working on a book about her half-Southern redneck, half-Palestinian family. She runs the book blog Off the Beaten Shelf. You can learn more about all her writing endeavors at mandyshunnarah.com.
ALINA STEFANESCU was born in Romania and lives in Alabama with her partner and four small mammals. A Pushcart nominee, she is the author of ‘Objects In Vases’ (Anchor & Plume, March 2016), ‘Letters to Arthur’ (Beard of Bees, August 2016), and ‘Ipokimen’ (Anchor and Plume, November 2016). Her first fiction collection, ‘Every Mask I Tried On’, won the 2016 Brighthorse Books Prize. She can’t wait for you to read it. More online at www.alinastefanescu.com.

JULIE MARIE WADE Born and raised in Seattle, Washington, Julie Marie Wade completed a Master of Arts in English at Western Washington University in 2003, a Master of Fine Arts in Poetry at the University of Pittsburgh in 2006, and a PhD in Interdisciplinary Humanities at the University of Louisville in 2012. Her poems and essays have been widely published in anthologies and journals nationwide. Wade teaches in the creative writing program at Florida International University and reviews regularly for The Rumpus and Lambda Literary Review. She is married to Angie Griffin and lives in the Sunshine State.

DONNA AZA WEIR-SOLEY Born in St. Catherine, Jamaica, Donna Aza Weir-Soley came to the United States at 17. She is presently an Associate Professor of English, African & African Diaspora Studies and Women’s Studies at Florida International University. She is co-editor (with Opal Palmer Adisa) of the anthology Caribbean Erotic (Peepal Tree Press), and single author of two books of poetry: First Rain (Peepal Tree Press) and The Woman Who Knew (Finishing Line Press).

ZOE VAZIRI is a poet, singer, and lyricist performing under the artist name ZIIRI. Her debut EP “Weird Energy” was released in 2019 and is available on all major platforms. When she’s not working or plucking dog hair off every bit of clothing she owns, she can sometimes be spotted on Tumblr and Instagram under @heysirplayziiri (but truthfully, the dog hair keeps her pretty busy these days).
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