

# SOUTHERN WOMEN'S REVIEW



SPECIAL POETRY ISSUE /1999-2020

POEMS

FICTION

NONFICTION





# SOUTHERN WOMEN'S REVIEW

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GUEST EDITOR

**Ashley M. Jones**

EDITORS-AT-LARGE

**Alicia K. Clavell**

**Helen Silverstein**

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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 heterogeneous 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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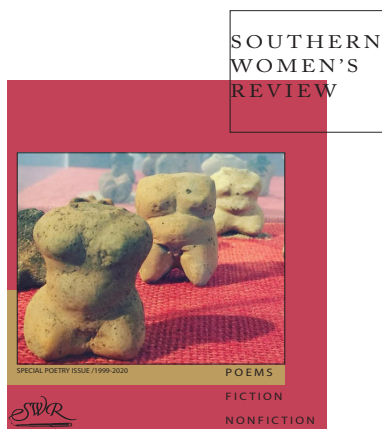
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**COVER IMAGE** by Anne Markham Bailey

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  
*bush*, 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 jerk up, clawing at the sheet on the table and pulling down my skirts. The doctor's eyes meet mine, and then he points from my hem to my waist, tells me *this is purely scientific*. A few men place their handkerchiefs over their noses. *Excuse the odor*, gentlemen, he says. Seems like tears were coming up out of a well. One man holds my shins while the doctor puts his tool in. Another stretches me apart. 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,  
at 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-blackened 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 man  
ner 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 wolvisk 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 Chambliss*

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,  
its 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 Chambliss*

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 & 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 Ruhebeh and el-'Odjah, 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

there's 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  
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 *hóh, yuṅkháṅš yaečhánkin waktA čhaṅčhán*  
*yaúṅ lila wičákhe*  
I said *lé héčha mitháwa makháoiyuthe na*  
*yaúṅ lila wičákhe*  
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.

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 *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](http://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.

**EPIPHANY** is a poet hailing from Broward County, FL. She's been writing since she was a child and is now in charge of offering poetry programming to thousands of students in the state of Florida via the vein of nonprofit work.

**JANE ELLEN GLASSER** Jane Ellen Glasser's poetry has appeared in numerous national journals, such as Hudson Review, Southern Review, Virginia Quarterly Review, and Georgia Review. In the past she reviewed poetry books for the Virginian-Pilot, edited poetry for the Ghent Quarterly and Lady Jane's Miscellany, and co-founded the nonprofit arts organization and journal New Virginia Review. She won the Tampa Review Prize for Poetry 2005 for her collection Light Persists, and The Long Life won the Poetica Publishing Company Chapbook Contest in 2011. Her 5 poetry books and two chapbooks have received high praise. Her most recent collection, Jane Ellen Glasser: Selected Poems (2019), was published by FutureCycle Press. To preview her work and access her books, visit the website: [www.janeellenglasser.com](http://www.janeellenglasser.com).

**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-coordinator 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/>.

**DEBRA KAUFMAN** is the author of Delicate Thefts and The Next Moment (both by Jacar Press) and A Certain Light (Emrys) as well as three chapbooks. her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Poetry East, Spillway, Tar River Poetry, and North Carolina Literary Review. She is also a playwright, an editor for the online journal One, and a member of the board of trustees of the Paul Green Foundation. A Midwest native, she has lived in North Carolina for thirty years.

**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 @aishatonu or read her blog at jcreilly.com.

**ASHLEY ROACH-FREIMAN** is a librarian and poet with work appearing or forthcoming in *Bone Bouquet*, *THRUSH Poetry Journal*, *The Literary Review*, *Ghost Proposal*, and *Superstition Review*. A chapbook, *Bright Along the Body*, is available from Dancing Girl Press. Find out more at ashleyroachfreiman.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](http://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).

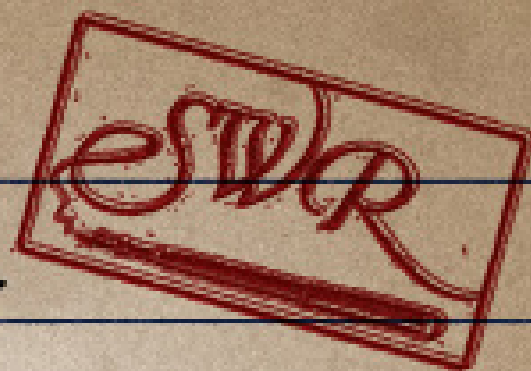
**ZOE VAZIRI** is a poet, singer, and lyricist performing under the artist name ZIIRI. Her debut EP "Weird Energy" was released in 2019 and is available on all major platforms. When she's not working or plucking dog hair off every bit of clothing she owns, she can sometimes be spotted on Tumblr and Instagram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



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## SOUTHERN WOMEN'S REVIEW

## Poems, Fiction, Nonfiction

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