collision literary magazine
collision staff

Editor in Chief
Kim Rooney

Assistant Editor
Hannah Woodruff

Nonfiction Editor
Maggie Koontz

Fiction Editor
Victoria Pfefferle-Gillot

Poetry Editor
Maria Pane

Arts Editor
Hannah Heisler

Design & Layout Team
Gracie Eden
Taylor Caroline Hauskins
Isabelle Ouyang

Secretarial Manager
John Starr

Social Media and Public Relations
Peri Walker

Editorial Staff
Ali Aijaz
Brianna Austin
Jake Dihel
Sandy Fairclough
Michael Gambone
Joseph Jang
Madelyn McAndrew
Alyce Palko
Ananya Venbakkam
from the editor

Dear readers,

As my third and final year as editor in chief of Collision nears its end, I find it difficult to believe all that has changed. Our commitment to experimental forms and styles remains strong, and I’m proud to watch our dedication to students and to marginalized and less commonly heard voices continue to grow.

This year, we partnered with Community and Students for Academic Workers and turned the attention of our zine towards the writing and art of student workers. We also continued our burgeoning newsstand tradition, working with student artist Jess Fitzpatrick to decorate two newsstands and place them around campus for the magazine release.

Thanks are also in order to each staff member, new and old, for the time and care they’ve contributed to the magazine. Additionally, a special thanks go to our graduating seniors: Maggie Koontz, Maria Pane, Peri Walker, Tori Pfefferle-Gillot, and Taylor C. Hauskins. Thank you for letting me lead Collision for the past three years and for giving me the room and support to grow.

I’ve spent the past four years learning how to be an editor, developing an ear for poetry and prose, and understanding the platform that Collision provides, and I am glad to have done it with you. I will miss you all dearly, and while I will miss Collision, I am confident and excited to see what awaits.

Last but not least, I want to give my warmest thanks to the writers and artists who inhabit these pages, as well as our readers. Your interest in and support of our publication make publishing this maga-
zine possible, and I hope you enjoy this small collection. Beyond this note, you’ll find environmental disaster, a reimagined paradise, and bodies in bloom. Each piece of writing and art is a welcome addition to *Collision*, and we are honored to offer these pieces a home.

Thank you all for your continued support. I hope you enjoy!

Yours,
Kim Rooney
collisions

Collision Literary Magazine owes many thanks to

The University of Pittsburgh Honors College, for their continued support and their promotion of the arts.

Karen Billingsley, for her patient guidance in financial matters and administrative processes.

Chris Chirdon, for his technical skills, encouragement and support, and aid in planning and executing our public art display.

Jennifer Lee, for her extensive knowledge and endless enthusiasm for our experimental endeavors, and for keeping us weird.

Scot Cantalupo and the staff of The Sheridan Group, for printing this magazine.
Cover Art

State of Non-Acceptance

Maria Paula Camacho
University of Central Florida
table of contents

1st Prize
11 Rue du Chameau, fiction
Katie Brownfiel

2nd Prize
16 “Armageddon slides in before suppertime”, poetry
Dorothy Nguyen

3rd Prize
17 save the trees.//the kardashians created bantu knots., poetry
Zuri Arman

Honorable Mention
19 twenty four hour, poetry
Laura Billheimer

Additional Works
21 Carry-on Baggage, poetry
Laura Billheimer
23 Bottom Feeder, poetry
Sofia Lautt
24 Blue, art
Keeley Smith
25 “did we change the meaning of literally?”
–merriam-webster, poetry
Zuri Arman
27 Mother Earth at Night, poetry
Jacob Richards
30 Trans Eden, art
Keeley Smith
31 Putting things into the jelly of me, poetry
Emily Wolfe
32 Flood, art
Margaret Ward
33 The Lip Poem, poetry
Payal Nagpal
34 okgreat, art
Abbey Wroten
35  Scarred, fiction
43  State of Non-Acceptance, art
44  Response to your inquiries on existence dated Sept. 30, poetry
45  Heavy Vehicle for Consciousness, art
46  Robot Performs Slam Poetry, poetry
49  Disrupted Cannon, art
50  Hitching A Ride To Vogafoss Café, poetry
51  Don’t Let Go, art
52  Friendly, art
53  Faces, art
54  Two Halves of a Whole, art
55  Tourist, poetry
56  Blooming 3, art
57  Peppermint Tea, poetry
58  In Mother’s Arms, art
59  Alice, art
60  The Spider, poetry
62  Beehive Twins, art
63  Elegy of Absence, poetry
64  The Individualist, art
65  Something Less Political, art
66  Rapid ‘Ōhi’a Death, poetry

**table of contents**

Riley Steiner
Maria Paula Camacho
Emily Wolfe
Maria Paula Camacho
David Schwartz
Colleen Simmons
Alexis Wolfe
Sunny Buddai
Simone Skerritt
Simone Skerritt
Sunny Buddai
Melissa Newcity
Michelle Magallon
Sarah Kalthoff
Maria Paula Camacho
Amanda Moldovan
Kaley Hensley
Brendon Stout
Ryan Varadi
Julia Morrison
Julia Morrison
Kira Santana
“Don’t slouch, Gazelle, you look like an alley cat.”

Sister’s chidings are lost on me now as I sit on our steps. Her steps. My steps now. I am alone. When did Sister become Bride become Mother? When did I, Gazelle, the smallest of the children, become Bride-Waiting? I do not understand this passage of time. I do not understand this appeal of waiting on display, like the fruits in the market, like the flowers in the stands, like a tapestry on display, for a man to come by and take me as his own. His prize. His choice. His wife.

I do not have Sister’s supple and straight spine. I do not have Sister’s easy smile or eyes as soft as dewy grass or curves as fine as a sculptor’s craft. I am like a potter’s training work. The Maker was not experienced in his craft when he made me.

I spend my days draped in Sister’s old white. It was made gray from days of dusty streets, but Mother just sighs with tight lips and a tighter smile. She washes my hair with perfumes and tries in vain to ease the knots from my mane. It is hidden all the day in
my scarf, but it never stays contained. It remembers too well the
days in the alley when I used to run free and wild with my brothers. They are not boys anymore. They are men with beards and swords and women they call on each morn and noon and night. They smile as wide as their stride in the marketplace and speak in booming voices. When did they grow to be so? Why am I always left behind?

My arms are dusted in sandalwood powder today. The smell reminds me too much of Sister. When we were small, Mother said we couldn’t adorn ourselves so until we were Brides-Waiting. Sister did not listen. We were at a festival and she was dancing. She was wearing red, and her hair was not yet tucked away. Her feet were bare and her laugh was music and her words were a song. She was beautiful. She is beautiful. I miss her so.

My brothers’ friends visit some days. They are handsome now. They were not before. Their limbs were too thin, their voices too high, their faces too bare. They were rough and incomplete sketches of manhood. Now they are looking for wives.

“Nadia Lah,” they greet me and extend their hands. I am no boy, but I will still shake. They sit a while. They used to call me Gazelle. I used to run with them. When did they begin to call me by my given name? When did I become a woman in address?

Others pass by the steps each day. We are not far from the market, so the merchants and their boys trundle their carts along
the cobbles and the dust. The boys smile at me, and I raise my eyes to meet theirs. They cannot stop to greet me, but I want them to. I am lonely these days. They are too young to be of any consequence.

A merchantman stops at our step one day. No, not a man. Not a boy either. He is something else. He is handsome. His eyes are not like mine. They are lighter, and they are made lighter still by his smile. They are the color of almonds and shaped so. His cart is full of oranges. When Sister and I were small, we would share an orange in the hot summer days. I devoured more than her, but she was kind and paid no mind to my selfishness. Her babe likes oranges, too. Her cries are silenced with the fruit. Sister’s husband is a merchant, and he spoils her. That is what Sister says in her new dress. No more graying white for Sister. She is clad only in fine silk. The merchant extends his hand, and there is an orange in it. I should not accept such a gift, though it is small.

“Nothing is free, Nadia,” my father scolded when my fingers would feel the grapes and plums piled high on wobbling tables in the marketplace. Sister knew the price of things well. She knows it better now. Her husband taught her the prices of figs and pistachios and incense and myrrh and wool. She runs his shop when he is away. He travels to the widest regions of our world. He is disappointed to have a daughter.

I shake my head with a scowl and do not accept the
proffered gift from his extended hand. He leaves it beside me and departs. I rise, and when I know that no one can see, I take the orange into my hand. I will visit Sister today.

Her home is not so far away, but she is often busy. She has servants now and a babe and a husband and a store and a home of her own to oversee. She has much to occupy her days. I stop in front of her door. Do I knock or enter? Do I act as a stranger now? I knock. One of Sister’s maids opens the door. She smiles at me.

“Madam Kateb,” she calls. Little Gazala totters out of her chamber. She has grown so tall. She will be beautiful like her mother. I lift her onto my hip and offer her the orange. Sister says that she was named for me. She emerges from the kitchen, her face flushed from the heat. Her belly has grown heavy.

“You’re expecting, Safia?”

“For five moons. You haven’t come in so long.” She places her hand on her stomach. “The midwife says he’s a boy. He kicks like a warrior.” Her laugh is weak but proud. I wonder what that is — to have a child inside of you. I wonder what it is to have a man to love you. I wonder if I will sit on the steps alone all my days. I wanted that. I want that. I want to be free, but I don’t want to be alone.
I hand Gazala to the waiting maid. Sister extends her hand to me, and I take it. She places our hands together on her stomach, and I feel the kicks of the little soldier. Sister moves her hand to my face. She takes me into her eyes. I am afraid for her as she is for me. She is happy. She asks me if I am, too. I cannot answer her.

The moon has become thin again by the time the merchant passes. His cart is full of olives now. When his gaze meets mine, I offer him what I can: a smile.

“Beautiful girl, what is your name?”

“Gazelle.”
“Armageddon slides in before suppertime”

Dorothy Nguyen
Indiana University Bloomington

and after, a skeleton fist bumps a ghost, but no, those proximal phalanges are passing through transience like traipsing through the door with no pants on; it’s all breeze down there, cold where it touches the soiled spots on your knickers, and the kids are ogling, and saliva is oozing from gapped teeth. It does(n’t) matter. They turn to admire the harvest moon, a ripe mac-n’-cheese orange cranium grinning down at the world in blazes. ‘How to Scare The Bejeezus Out of Others and More’ passes from skeleton to ghost, but of course the tea(r)-stained, dog-eared, thirteen-paged manual flops to the ground and becomes ash in a matter of seconds. It doesn’t matter anyway. You’re clumsier than that guy, the skeleton says, pointing at the walking deadman, who tilts in their direction just as his rotten leg collapses into three neat pieces, a trinity of misaligned physicality offered like the rest. Groovy, Greg the Ghastly Ghost groans. The skeleton finds his companion hardly tolerable, but the other ghosts were always too busy jiving, and anyway, the other skeletons were too dry for his taste. Groovy, the skeleton says back. He watches the flesh bake and congeal like white cheddar curds in the oven. Heat pulses in his phalanges and metatarsals. It was loud at first, but now all he hears is the way the fires snap to a soft, staccato tune all their own. It doesn’t matter any(more). Just groovy, he says, and leaves without Greg, just rattles and clicks and gathers his bones and
Third Prize

save the trees.//the kardashians created bantu knots.

Zuri Arman
University of Pittsburgh

tight coils entice hands not deserving of their grace.
eyes stalk every strand glistening in the sun.
sweet, warming kisses
against the cold glare behind them, but
mirroring the hot tongue offering
obscenities before them.
pale, slim hands visibly engorged with crooked rivers of blue passion
lunge for the root.
without regard
yank.
   pull.
   snatch.
before raising a fist full of earth to the boisterous crowd behind
them.
shears soar through canopy,
effortlessly gliding through kinks and curls
ignoring the utters and cries for help.
knots of tangled matter fall to the ground and
turn the color of tar before being auctioned off.
devoid of soul, but commodified, nonetheless.
valued more in death than life.

pale, slim hands, visibly engorged with rivers of blue passion
grab at this earth.
enticed by a sensuality but unable to locate its existence,
glue matter to their own scalp,
adjusting in the mirror before snapping a selfie.
Honorable Mention

twenty four hour

Laura Billheimer
Indiana University Bloomington

bruises healing well (stop)
flowers arrived safe (stop)
peaches for breakfast (stop)
lovely birds outside (stop)
nurse says done next week (stop)
scans start tomorrow (stop)
get answers soon love (full stop)
Additional Works
Carry-on Baggage

Laura Billheimer
Indiana University Bloomington

Laptop, toothpaste, water,
a chunk of blue glass
“for luck” from my family.
I carry a poet’s brief thoughts
on urban flora in LA,
the words of a man
who made his father a tree
and left me with crabapples,
my home
tucked under my nails.
Landing in New York,
I’m distracted by the notes
of a man from Brooklyn
from the Philippines,
reborn in a field of rose-colored
stones and horses
to flush my head
of the centuries of bodies
paving our flight path.
My phone dies again
and I’m left with Dickinson’s
letters to help forget
about my treading air
over a miles-deep grave.
How long would I float—
with the lights dying,
cabin flooding—
until I fell away,
back into flecks of bone and glass,
to spend an afterlife
with the fish, haunting
corners of the ocean floor.
Bottom Feeder

Sofia Lautt
University of Puget Sound

The little sea star folds her arms like noodles
Around a stone half-buried in the sand
Possessing little she must be firm and frugal
To prosper in poverty—the tiny queen of the hinterland

The others glide like sunlight over stones
And smile inside their splendid silver scales
How quaint, how dull, says the little cabezon
And so agrees the mocking yellowtail

From blue-green forests descending closely flocked
The gentry of the distant shallows observe
And flash their shining tails on her rock
And sympathize in her troubles undeserved

But the little sea star smiles and waves them on
And burrows more warmly in the sandy floor
It’s true! This is a far cry from Babylon—
But I want not for anything more
Blue

Keeley Smith
Towson University
“did we change the meaning of literally?”
–merriam-webster

Zuri Arman
University of Pittsburgh

my skin is not literally Black.
not literally cool ash, nor a smooth
onyx or obsidian (smoldering beneath my feet).
my skin is literally colored the deep shades of carolina clay:
tans, caramels, mochas. the color of mud, but not for
child’s play. this is the literal mud of sculpting the finest
displays of the human hand.

i literally have hair like
wool with coils and curls, z’s and c’s.
strands intertwined and tangled
emanating from my follicles,
hugging and, if without supervision,
knotting and locing,
solidifying their bond as i have to them.
literally growing towards the sun,
towards god. readjusting their angle to
maximize our communication, improve my prayers.
my kitchen is so thick it rivals the molasses my
nan literally slathers on her biscuits made in her
literal kitchen with her
literal hands to tame my
literal mane, braiding my
literal hair into rows of
literal corn.
i may not get the job but
god can feast on this harvest.
Mother Earth at Night

Jacob Richards
University of Pittsburgh

silently down delaware backroads,

i’m moving through something strong—
the air turning to salt around me.

i need more,
pull myself through the crank-down window
and collect myself
among the sand—

begin to place myself into italics

one bone at a time.

i’m on a different platform now,
the wings of a new bird clenched
in my teeth,
night dropping down like spiced cologne.

the universe extends left (fullstop), right (fullstop) forever.

an elk stands against the moon, silhouette-black,

lays down—opens her mouth—
tide rolls in, and soon
she shines once, dissolves into the ocean.

the sky breaks like eggshell, and now
absolute star,

fresh jade,

permission.

i thank the world as it presses into me from all sides.
offer my yes my no,
become something else,

i pamper Mother Earth.
braid her body hair.
moisturize her knuckles.
cup her breasts,
taking the weight from her back.

she stretches herself out
before me,
back cracking spine popping—
i reverb

—kiss her fingertips i am leaving. turn
to go. find myself
in,
below the horizon,
where this year comes crashing to an end.
i gasp for air,
releasing my teeth:
the bird in my mouth was you.
the bird in the sky is you
my world becomes birds
and you were once all of them.
    i search for shiny things
to place in a nest.

a grain of sand enters my left pupil. my right.
    i blink and cry pearls.
Trans Eden

Keeley Smith
Towson University
Putting things into the jelly of me

Emily Wolfe
University of Pittsburgh

First when he was creating
he put fish things into me
and then field things, meat things.
It was too much too quickly

and I said so, in fact for a while
when he was gone I ate only salmon
because I wanted to return to my fish body
and live underwater like my ancestors.

Only you can’t reverse the surgery
any more than you can go back
and eat from a different tree
or skip ahead to when we all have wings,

so if you can’t learn to like the evolution
this millennium has to offer you
you’re “about shit out of luck,” he said.
“But you can always try eating chicken.”
The Lip Poem

Payal Nagpal
Ashoka University, India

you are chewing.
your mouth is open; there is sludgy pasta smashed against your teeth, sauce masticating to the color of my mayonnaise. in this moment, i think i despise you.
okgreat

Abbey Wroten
University of Maryland
I remember that summer being filled with thunderheads, and the day Jason almost died looked no different. Fourteen years old, I woke up to see blue-tinged clouds gathering above the giant oak tree in our backyard, darkening the ground with the shade that comes before a rainfall.

My mother was already up, cooking breakfast. “What are you doing today?” she asked as she slid three greasy bacon slices onto my plate.

My nose tickled with the smell of slightly scorched pork. “Jason and I were going to go to the falls. He leaves tomorrow.”

“Oh, that’s right.” She plopped a rounded heap of scrambled eggs next to the bacon and set the plate down on the kitchen table in front of me. “Well, you might want to come up with a plan B. It’s supposed to rain.”

As I looked out the window, my heart sank. Water was starting to patter the road in big droplets that left dark, misshapen circles on the concrete.

I chewed my eggs despondently as the rain picked up, sounding like a freight train on the shingles of our roof. Then, as quickly as it had come, the rain stopped.
I paused with my last piece of bacon halfway to my mouth. As if on cue, the phone rang.

Jason’s voice came through from the other end. “I don’t think it’s going to rain anymore. You still want to go exploring today?”

“It’s not really exploring, Jason. We’ve been there, like, a million times.”

“Stop being stupid.” And he hung up without waiting for me to answer. He didn’t need to. He knew what I’d say.

Fifteen minutes later, he was on my front porch. My mom’s voice drifted out the door after us as I stepped outside. “Be careful, you two!” I closed the door behind me.

Hazy mist rose from the street as we crossed to the other side. The squall hadn’t done much for the heat; it was already stuffy and humid. The newly arrived sun blazed down onto the pavement, giving off the faintly acrid smell of sodden asphalt.

Jason led the way downhill, towards the trail that entered the woods where the creek ran. We’d always been the same height, but this summer he’d grown a couple inches, and now he stood slightly taller. Lording this fact over me had recently become one of his favorite hobbies. I tried to play it cool, but I secretly resented it, even though I knew I was getting too old to be bothered by that kind of kid stuff.

We reached the trail and followed it into the woods, the
shade of the trees overhead cooling the air a little. The hissing of car tires on the road behind us faded as we walked farther. The trail ran along an earthen ledge, surrounded by bushes and green scrub. I could hear the creek burbling off to our left, swollen with the recent rain, where the ledge dropped off twenty feet to the water below.

After a few minutes, we got to the old utility bridge. It was an ugly metal structure that stretched over the creek from one side to the other, a skinny steel walkway hemmed in by chain-link sides that had rusted into red. When Jason and I had first found it three years ago, it had been blocked off with yellow tape, but Jason had immediately pawed that aside and clambered across.

Now, he scrambled up onto the bridge without hesitation. “Come on, Haley!”

I eyed the flimsy steps that led up to the walkway. The bridge wobbled too much for my liking on good days, and today its surface was slick with collected rainwater. I suppressed a shudder as I looked down at the creek, with its hard rocks lurking just below the surface, and tried not to think about what it would be like to fall from this height. “Maybe we shouldn’t.”

Jason smirked. “Wimp,” he said. “That’s why I’m going to Anderson Prep and you’re not.”

I scowled. “What does that have to do with anything? You’re just showing off.” But he was already halfway across the bridge, his sneakers clanging on the thin metal.
Anderson Prep. The name stuck in my mind as I gingerly followed him across. That was the boarding school that Jason was leaving for tomorrow. His parents were the ones who had pushed for him to go, but deep down, I knew his jab had some truth to it. I could never pick up and live away from my family at school. I had my school here, my family, and my friends, and that was the way I liked it.

But Jason couldn’t wait to go. To him, it was all a new adventure. I knew this, and the thought squirmed in my stomach like a fly I couldn’t shoo away.

I let out the breath I’d been holding across the length of the bridge as I stepped onto the solid ground of the other bank. We headed back in the direction we came, on the opposite side of the creek this time, towards the place we knew sloped down to where the water tumbled over a small cliff and formed a pool below.

There were puddles in the trail here, soaking our shoes brown. The rocks around us were slick with leftover rain.

“You don’t have to go, you know,” I said as I hopped onto the next stone. It was a game for us, jumping from rock to rock. “You could just stay here and start ninth grade with the rest of us.”

“I do have to go,” he called back over his shoulder. “My mom would freak out if I didn’t. Plus, I want to.”

As I landed on the next rock, my ankle slipped to the right. The solid surface beneath my shoes was there one moment and
gone the next, and I felt a tiny twinge of pain. “What about your friends?” Wincing slightly, I hopped off the rock onto a patch of ground that wasn’t too muddy.

“I’ll make new ones,” he said, a hint of frustration in his voice. “And I’ve already met Noah and Danny and Aiden and the rest of—”

The pain in my ankle was jabbing at my nerves, faint but persistent, like set of tiny teeth. “Yeah, yeah,” I said, rolling my eyes. “It’s not like I haven’t heard about how amazing they are for the entire summer. Well, they really don’t sound all that great.”

“Don’t be like that. It’s not my fault their old center forward broke his arm. What was I gonna say, no?”

“Well, you sure didn’t have to come home every single day and make me relive Danny’s winning goal from last season four hundred times. I really didn’t care.”

We’d reached the end of the rock trail and were walking along the ledge path again. The water was growing louder down here, smashing into itself off to our left, aggressive enough so that we had to raise our voices to be heard.

“What’s your problem?” Jason said. “Just because you don’t want to be friends with them doesn’t mean they aren’t cool.”

“Maybe you should be thinking about your real friends.”

“Oh, yeah? Like who?”
I stopped and glared at him. I didn’t know why I was being so irritable on his last day here. I just knew that I could feel the pressure of the hours ticking away, one after the other until he would leave, like those threatening storm clouds pressing down upon my head.

“What do you mean, like who?” I said, my voice rising even more. “Like me! Don’t you even care that you won’t see me anymore?” My voice was a pathetic whine, and I knew it. “Maybe I don’t want to even be your friend anymore, if you’re just gonna replace me with someone else!”

He was angry now. “Well, at least at Anderson I won’t have you following me around everywhere I go!”

At that, I felt hot rage creeping up the base of my throat. Rage at the fact that he didn’t care, rage that he’d just admitted what I’d always feared, what all the other kids had snickered about in middle school, what they’d jeered at me and he’d always denied, always shouted back in their faces that it wasn’t true: that I was just like his little pet that followed him wherever he went, that I couldn’t do anything by myself. That I was afraid. A coward.

I felt my arms lift and shove his shoulder, hard. He stumbled backward, and his right foot slipped on the wet leaves. As his body leaned back, arms flailing, I realized with a jolt that all that was past the foliage behind him, where the ledge dropped off, was empty air.

I lunged forward and grabbed his arm, yanking him to-
wards me with everything I had. He flew past me, and the force of my pull threw me to the ground.

When I got up and turned around, he was sprawled against a log on the other side of the trail, holding a hand to the left side of his face. He slowly stumbled to his feet, and I saw a cut running along his cheekbone where he’d struck a sharp, dead limb that stuck out from the log. A line of blood swelled in beads along the gash.

We both stood there, staring at each other in shock. Jason’s chest was heaving, but the sound of his gasps was whisked away in the water crashing against the rocks below us. My own breath came in jagged rhythm, like I was trying to suck air past something lodged in my throat. The panic that had knifed through me at the sight of Jason about to fall dulled to a leaden stone in my stomach as my galloping heartbeat began to slow.

“What did you just do?” Jason asked. His eyes were boarded up, steel.

“I…” I looked down at my shaking hands as if they held an answer. I knew his gaze was boring holes in my forehead, but my chin felt too heavy for me to lift.

He stared at me for a moment longer, then swiveled and headed down the path. I trailed behind as he walked away from me, my eyes fixed on the angry hunch of his shoulders, until we reached the place past the waterfall where the trees reopened to the low roar of the road.

In unspoken agreement, we went back home, both of our
clothes streaked with mud. He told his mom he’d fallen, but said nothing more about it. She put some Neosporin and a Band-Aid on the cut, but I knew it would leave a scar. I hovered nervously in his front doorway in the moments before I went home, but I couldn’t think of anything to say.

*     *     *

I still can’t, not that it makes any difference. I’m twenty-two and I’m at the grocery store on Bridge Street over my winter break, weighing the Gala apples in my hand, and suddenly he’s there, walking towards me from the leaf lettuce. “Haley?” he says. “Wow, it’s been a long time.”

“Yeah, a really long time. How are you?”

What else is there to say? It’s been eight years since he left for Anderson and I continued my life here, without him. We didn’t talk much after that day at the falls. I could have tried to keep in touch, but I never reached out, and he didn’t either, and the silence widened until the gap was too large, too awkward, to bridge.

He says something generic about his classes at Penn State. I try not to let my eyes drift to the thin line on his left cheek.

Our conversation dwindles after that, and I make up some excuse about needing to go find baking soda for my mom. I see him again in the check-out line, one spot ahead of me, and I let an old woman go between us so he won’t know I’m standing right behind him. I duck to look at the Mentos, and when I lift my head again, he’s leaving with a cart full of beige plastic bags, his face still faintly marred by the scar I’d given him, his back retreating into the snow.
State of Non-Acceptance

Maria Paula Camacho
University of Central Florida
Response to your inquiries on existence dated Sept. 30

Emily Wolfe
University of Pittsburgh

We have found that there is no way to prove that you are not less than flesh less than light or ink but only part of the mass of inconsequential thought that clouds around the head of God in the morning sometimes when he lifts a mug of tea to his lips;

however, we have also seen no evidence to oppose the claim that you are unknowingly controlling everything and that the universe takes its cues from your breaths which could explain why sometimes after you run up a tall staircase the earth spins faster under you.
Heavy Vehicle for Consciousness

María Paula Camacho
University of Central Florida
Robot Performs Slam Poetry

David Schwartz
Marshall University

He enters robust,
at home among coffee beans.
Espresso maker. <!-- a man who makes energy instead of taking it is not
a man. Maybe it’s a woman encased in steel. Maybe not. & so I
made him out of robot... -->

Beret on his head,
he’s more than cloth or metal,
both art and artist.

This café transforms,
a proving grounds, and Robot
has climbed above all

so he may address
the crowd of peers so eager
& at last be loved.

He’s center stage.
The time, finally, has come.
Robot sings his ode-

“Beep boop beep boop beep
beep beep beep boop beep boop
beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
eeeeecccccccccccccccccc boop boop beep beep” <!-- It wasn’t always this electronic. He had a human voice & said “there are no doors.” It was supposed to be a pun for Microsoft Windows. But he also said it because he could only see them, never get there. My Joke didn’t stick. All that was left was noise. He speaks in languages I no longer understand.-->

The poets applaud,
true beauty in creation!
But Robot’s nervous,

his muse eludes him.
So tense he’s started sweating.
Bad engineering.

& one of them knows
why Robot sweats. “It’s Shakespeare,
you dolt. You stole it.” <!--I want to tell you what the poets look like, what Robot sees, but it’s hard. They are faceless, not like masses but truly skin without eyes or nose or most of what makes a face a face; it makes them difficult to read. But how do they speak? How do they breathe and applaud and shout all the ways I make them do? A mouth requires no face. & this is all they are: A mouth.-->

Robot reminds them
Shakespeare wrote sonnets. Haikus are bis chosen form.
It’s derivative,
yes, but it’s found poetry,
Very Dadaist.

Says it all in beeps
& boops. Alas! No one will
ever understand.

It’s too high concept,
he laments, sweat pooling on
the café hardwood.

“You’re all just jealous!”
he beeps, sparking from all the
electricity.

Robot and water
combine. Fries the audience.
How embarrassing!

Poets’ ghosts haunt him
at once “Boooooo-” he flees the scene.
Back to the workshop. <!-- It was supposed to be funny, so I couldn’t tell you
how Robot gripped the limp bodies of the people he could never
touch. How he kept them with him when he fled. He took them
home to keep them close.
Back to the workshop where he’d make himself human
& master the art of wearing skin-->
Disrupted Cannon

Colleen Simmons
Towson University
Hitching A Ride To Vogafoss Café

Alexis Wolfe
University of Pittsburgh

The sheep, off-white like parchment, saunter the grassy field littered with soot-smudged stones. I sit among two girls I hardly know and enjoy breakfast: dill-cured arctic char on volcano bread—rye loaves baked under ground, heated by the Earth’s fury, grown in the geyser’s steam—paired with a lone cup of yellow milk, squeezed from the utters of sheepish, standing cows. We do not speak, the girls and I, we watch the sun-soaked sheep, draw Mývatn’s aging mountains, and tweak the words we wrote, perhaps before anyone knew of this island without trees, before we knew just what it meant to want.
Don’t Let Go

Sunny Buddai
University of Pittsburgh
Friendly

Simone Skerritt
University of Maryland
Faces

Simone Skerritt
University of Maryland
Two Halves of a Whole

Sunny Buddai
University of Pittsburgh
You started as a tourist, visiting the highlights of my cheek bones, and holding late-night conversations between my legs until the backs of my knees knew you by name.

Eventually, you moved in behind my ears, working part-time at the corner where my neck meets my shoulders. On weekends, you sat alongside my temple, reciting haikus, first in my throat, then in my lungs.

Let’s get married in the spaces between my fingers, raise a family on the curve of my brow. Our children can engrave their names on the magnolia tree you plant inside my breast, its branches reaching all the way up to the tips of my lashes, to hang above my laugh lines.

On warmer days, when the flowers bloom behind your back, you can rest underneath its shadowy breath to recollect the Sunday afternoon you first felt the peculiar sureness, tugging at your chest, when you spotted me at a coffee shop, visiting as a tourist.
Blooming 3

Michelle Magallon
Florida State University
Peppermint Tea
Sarah Kalthoff
Hope College

Steep cactus petals in peppermint tea
let steam curl up under chapped lips
like drying forest fern bends, no longer sun-bound,
like groggy babe turns in to mother’s breast.
Push pale pink pill from its foil daily,
wash it down with honeyed eucalyptus and baby oil
and a wandering wondering—what will it be like
tending to gardens, tender and teeming with life?
And what if embryos grow as quickly as cuticles,
and little blonde curls as unruly as zucchini vines?
Let the cactus needles set nimbly on taste buds
sting with anticipation, throb with gestation.

When the wedding bouquet dries, steep it in hot water.
It will bud like this covenant of life-keeping.
In Mother’s Arms

Maria Paula Camacho
University of Central Florida
The Spider

Kaley Hensley
West Virginia University

A girlish give of ankles
  gripped by gallant hands,
blonde feathered arrows spill
  from the mouth of a quiver.
Freshly squeezed fish kisses mix
  with hot golden strands,
I hold my breath when my Father
dips me in the red river.

Black feathered arrows run
  from the mouth of a quiver,
my peppered legs poke
  holes in fabric, spin stolen thread.
I do not like it when the Father
dips me in his red river.
Raindrops gather in my web—
  this is where I lay my head.

My peppered eyes poke
  holes in sky, spin stolen thread.
I am a master, I am the maker
  of a terrestrial tennis racket,
another gathers in my web—
  this is where he lays his head.
Until the belch of spring,
  we live on a pink sugar packet.
He is the maker
    of a small-bodied racket.
The shape in my shapelessness
    singing to me in shadows
when the belch of spring
    swallows my pink sugar packet.
A piece of you has died
    in me, oh collector of widows.

Shall I dangle from your fingers,
    join the song of shadows?
I wobble on weak ankles
    drunk on the weather’s cider.
The piece of you has died in me,
    am I one of your widows?
A father stands by the red river,
    he is calling for a spider.
Beehive Twins

Brendon Stout
West Virginia Wesleyan College
Elegy of Absence

Ryan Varadi
Northwestern University

I am hunted by a void dog,
a shadow hound, a being
of absolute absence that
charges lethargically behind me,
on through a hallway of tessellated
wallpaper from your little studio apartment
in the heart of Budapest. And there are drops
of viscous nothing reaching up
to lick my calves as I go by,
engulfing them until I am straining
to even move an inch. All the while
I can hear the sounds of a panting tongue
behind me. The beast erases it all
and it will not let me go
outside to stand on the soft line
where the mulch meets the grass,
to hide you in the liminal creases
of the earth.
The Individualist

Julia Morrison
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Something Less Political

Julia Morrison
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Amongst the enchanting mist in the mountains high up at Kōke’e,
lining the barren lava channels on the flanks of Kīlauea,
Stands a twisted tree, rough to touch,
branches spinning out from its core,
adorned in scarlet flowers,
a lei placed upon its shoulders
‘Ōhi’a Lehua, two lovers entwined in a tender embrace

The strong warrior ‘Ōhi’a, brought to his knees by the graceful hula
of Lehua
Two fools seeking true love in one another,
Living in serenity on the outer corners of the woods,
until a stream of fiery jealous lava flowed down through the trees,
consuming every last source of life in its path,
Pele, goddess of volcanoes, came to a halt before ‘Ōhi’a,
molten rocks crumbling beneath her feet,
eyes burning at the sight of this man she could not have,
‘Ōhi’a, captivated only by his beloved Lehua, turned Pele away and
cleaned the ash from his hands,
unknowingly sealing his own fate among the streaks of black
As Pele recedes into the cool heights, she transforms the warrior into
a twisted tree,
So aridly hideous that no one would ever give it more than a passing
glance,
Leaving fragile Lehua holding on to its spindly trunk,
The sounds of twigs breaking apart in the wood
Rooted in place, pleading for ‘Ōhi’a to become himself again,
Swallowing stitches, coughing up blood
Hot tears pouring down her face,
The Gods pitied Lehua who no longer could release her fingertips
    from the insides of palms,
fists digging into roots, searching for the firm hands that had once
    held her,
Pele’s curse fueled by anger, scalding tears, water rising as steam;
the irreversibleness of arson
once the smoke clears there is nothing left to return to,
Roots stretching upward as limbs come together, the Gods reunite
    the two lovers
as Lehua joins her ‘Ōhi’a as a beautiful red blossom growing between
    leaves of green
Trees like supple reeds, dancing in red lace
‘Ōhi’a branches cradling Lehua
And if one were to pluck a flower from the tree,
The clouds would cut open and bleed onto the ground,
    rain falling,
the sky crying with Lehua for she cannot bear to be separated from
    ‘Ōhi’a once more

These days there is a wickedness spreading rapidly
Through the forests and creeping up the trees
Dancers in red ripped from the trees
Where does the darkness come from,
does it spring up out of the brittle branches, between the leaves,
or deep within the roots, reaching its palms wide out in the earth,
    wrapping around delicate blossoms,
Strangling its petals, crimson drops of blood falling,
poisonous daggers seeping back into the dirt,
    killing each other softly
Somewhere along the way losing sight of each other,
Two lovers mourning at twilight.
space for you