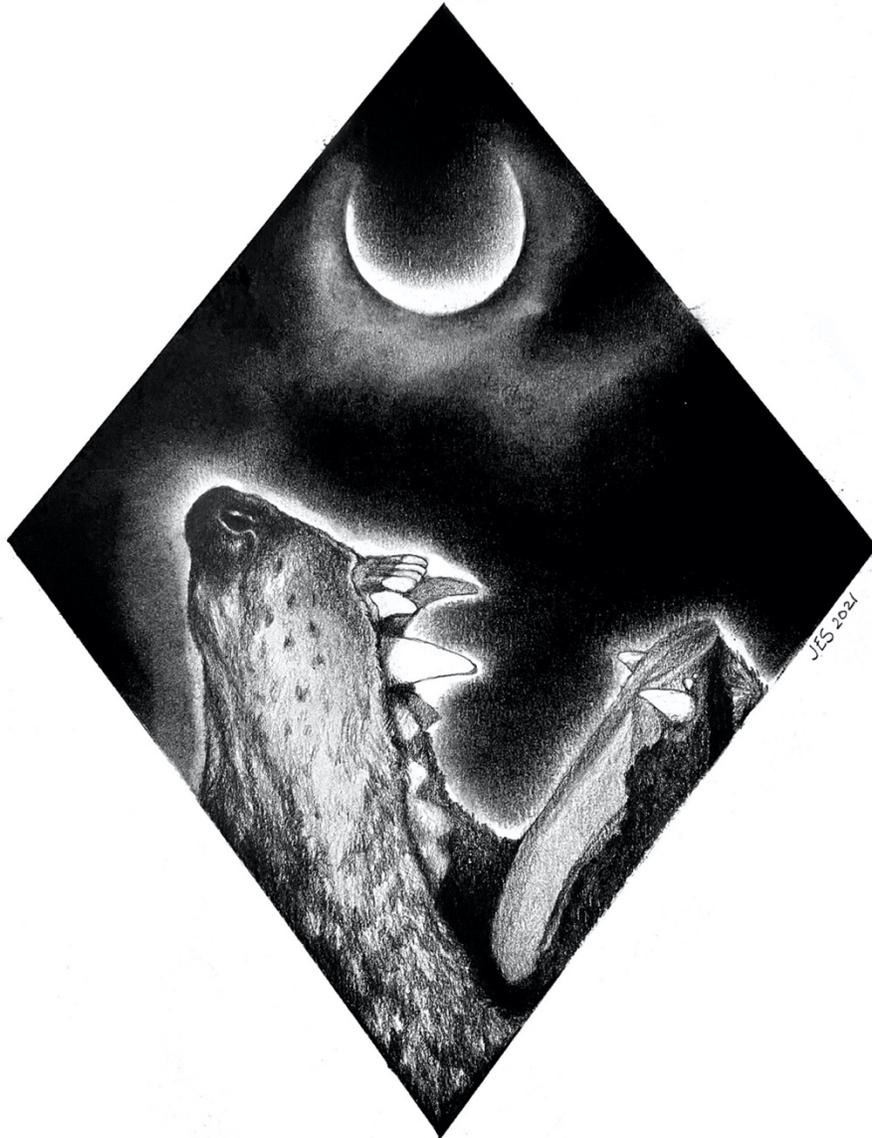


Rejected Lit Magazine
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E. Indian River

Anthony Negrón

I remember the face of my youth;
Its castoff eyes and dry brows,
Clumsy ears
Intent on finding nuance
Within scenes of obfuscate duality
And disorder, blood-
Soaked streets and carports,
Buicks and beat-down Fords
With unnatural holes where
Natural light shone through,
Suggesting miracles like plate-
Glass windows filled with obsolete
Evidence of white deities and
Prophets
Who never saw Black Death coming?
In a ghetto
Or honeysuckles in spring,
Their sweet centers giving
Me a sense of Aprils in a better world;
Odorous hope like pollen
To my nostrils
Spent brass clinking and
Ringing in the alleyway at my feet
As I clamored ignorantly for more-
The ground seemed like such
A cruel place.
Scattered grass grown beside needle-
Lined cracks in paved sidewalks
Like veins;
Poisonous blood leading
To the field where I played
As I had my first taste
Of malt, a half-empty Double Deuce I
Chugged and felt warm
Less alone, vomited
On my shoes, found
Kinship in consequence
When I thought that it was love;
The face of my youth all
Red with bloody error, skin soaked
Boiled and fermented,
Habit a process-

I learned how to die on East Indian River
Where all my firsts
Took root in my blood.

Don't you raise your rifle

Anthony Negrón

Don't you raise your rifle, boy,
It will change the way you see.
Don't take aim, he's just a child
And this desert belongs to him.
Don't you raise your rifle, boy,
the future is at stake. Yours and his
Are intertwined, so leave your arms
At your side.
Don't you raise your rifle, boy;
His friends want to live as well.
The sand has drunk it's fill
Of blood, it does not need theirs too.
Don't you raise your rifle, boy,
Let their laugh-song carry on.
They do not wish to take your life;
Your instinct led you astray. Your heat-dreams
Have changed even children into horrors;
The price is too high and
rising still.
Don't you raise your rifle, boy;
He's a child like you were once.
If you can both grow to be good men
This war may end one day.
Don't you raise your rifle, boy,
You'll forever view him through iron sights.
The fear and violence in your heart
Will become a feast for consuming regret;
Making every dark corner remember
Your intent, and take
Aim back at you.
Don't you raise your rifle, boy,
you can become human again.
The hate that the desert taught you has
Not reached permanence.
Don't you raise your rifle, boy;
There is no bomb on his chest. It is filled
With joy and wonder that you must
Let go on.
Oh, boy, you raised your rifle;
committed to the sin. The sun has risen
on your fear and set
On the child's hope.

Now that you've raised your rifle, boy,
The memory will haunt you as a man.
Tear your dreams to bloody death
and drown you in shaming sweat.
You raised your rifle and so are doomed
To dread and ruminate; to lie and rot, and wander
Lost while forever taking aim.
You raised your rifle, boy,
And, though you both survived-
The price was too high and
The cost is rising still.

Anthony Negrón is a Black and Puerto Rican-American poet and disabled Iraq war veteran. He resides in Hampton, Virginia. His poetry is centered around his relationships and processing traumas. He has a BA in English and is currently working on his first poetry collection, *Letters To Us*. He can be found @shattered sentimentsva on Instagram.

oh, but what difference does it make —

Trishala Vardhan

they could have given me metal mandibles

and i still would have managed

to make music

of your name.

Trishala Vardhan is a 24-year old Dalit Indian who has lived in the lap of language for as long as she can remember. A practicing (not yet publishing) poet, she believes both in the promise of peace, and the penance of its absence. She has currently just completed her masters in English Literature, and is working at the National Institute of Smart Governance in her hometown. Grappling with the grief of the current world order, Trishala is doing her best to be kind to her own disillusionment in a country where both death and dreams are disregarded in equal measure. Poetry is her skein of light in this survival.

Movement

Aicha Yassin

A friend once told me about this ritual in Argentina,
Where people get in their cars and travel as far north as they can get.
they stop by small villages on the way, and explore the pristine land,
Some would end up in Venezuela, and in Colombia, the others.
He told me this story as we sat in a small bar in Ramallah.
And I thought to myself, if I were to take a car and do the same
A checkpoint will stop me,
And if I pass the checkpoint,
A border will stop me,
And if I pass the border (miraculously),
I will be stopped by war.

Aicha bint Yusif is a 26-year-old Palestinian living in Haifa. She holds an English literature degree and is currently studying Medicine. She is passionate about poetry, and her works appeared in *World Literature Today* (NYC) and *Rusted Radishes* (American University of Beirut). She also likes yoga, working in the land, and making crafts.

Telling Our Son His Dog Died

Jennifer Cox

We tell our son
The dog died
That she was sick and
Couldn't get better
We tell him
She isn't coming back

Our son is confused
He doesn't know death
Only smushed a few bugs sometimes
He asks
"She is . . . Somewhere?"

I do not tell him
That she is in the vet's freezer
I do not tell him that soon
She will be cremated

I do not tell him
we will spread her ashes
Over the lake she loved
and her remnants will settle
On the lily pads and
mint lining the shore
And will stick, undetected
To the bottoms of our feet
As we come out of the shallows
I do not tell him
That then our feet will carry her
Wherever we go

So I do not tell him that soon
She will be everywhere

Jennifer Cox (she/her) is a poet, lawyer, and mother. Her poetry primarily revolves about motherhood, birth, and the impending climate crisis. She enjoys reading, spending time outdoors, and playing with her children. Her work has previously appeared in the League of Canadian Poets' Poetry Pause and Bywords.ca. She resides in Ottawa with her children and husband.

On being a coyote

Laura Anne Whitley

Pros: no one will ever keep you as a pet
Cons: no one will ever keep you as a pet

On being a haunted house

Pros: nobody will make a home inside of you
Cons: nobody will make a home inside of you

Laura Anne Whitley is a comedian who accidentally became a poet, and is delighted to report they both use the same muscle. Her mission in life is to create mythology, and her favorite form of intimacy is through confession. She finds inspiration in chaos, nostalgia and *The Invisible*. She hopes that when people connect with her work, they're not connecting to her, but to a part of themselves. Her work can be found on Instagram @laurabreadkitten.

Noble House of Salazar

Oswaldo Vargas

He gets me a beer

halfway through it,
I unravel.

mistake mistake
ohgodmistake

The waitress asks if I'm ok

how do i say that I hope he knows my weight
before the night is done?

He can sell my bones when he's done with me
and I'd still ask which one fetched more money

He drops me off
but i still pretend my steps lead up
to his family home

A spot in the hallway,
reserved for the portrait of his bride

mount me on a wall

call me a success.

To the Tiger (for Aaron)

Oswaldo Vargas

I got far in the pilgrimage
toward the equator
that browned you.

The next one will finish it
and pose for pictures.

He too will count the keloids
on your back, big and small,
like blessings.

Oswaldo Vargas is a former farmworker, a graduate from the University of California, Davis and a 2021 Undocupoets Fellow. Anthology features include *Nepantla: An Anthology Dedicated to Queer Poets of Color* and *Puro Chicanx Writers of the 21st Century*. His work can also be seen in *The Louisville Review*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Huizache*, *West Trade Review*, *Narrative* (upcoming) and the *Green Mountains Review* tribute issue to former U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera (among others). He lives and dreams in Sacramento, California.

MISSOULA

Yetta Rose Stein

It is spring
with the lilac stench
reaching for me.
I barter with the gods
for rain.
I missed you and am wondering:
were you in town last weekend
for the wedding on Saturday
and the funeral on Sunday?
The father of the bride
stood in front of everyone,
begged the gods for a moment of silence.
Our Alberton wind blew in a fierce gentleness
knocking down the altar,
like a sign of
something alive.

It is spring with
everybody dying
in the summer.
I missed you and the way
you hate good things
like rain and weddings.
Do you still visit that park?
The one where we thought
we might be in love?
Like a sign of something alive?

It is spring and there are
yard sales on every other block.
Everybody is dying and everything is for sale.

Where do you go to pray,
in this town with as many churches as bars.

It's raining now,
starting to rain,
I see god in the old buildings
that still stand.
The lilac stench wilting,
leaving me behind.

I see god,
her lightswitch between
matrimony and martyrdom,
flipping, easily.
I pray these hills are green
come August.

Yetta Rose Stein is a graduate of Hellgate High School. She lives in Livingston, Montana. She spends her free time trying to embrace the wind. You can follow her first drafts at [@yettaworldpeace](#) on Instagram.

My Body is Made of Wömen

Kitty Chu

I

I am sick with nausea

but
I hunger for meals
to fill my mouth with guilt
because I do not know
how to metabolize gratitude
served as white rice
in porcelain palms
I bring to my tongue.

I am foreigner
half-familiar with tongues
home to
Mom + Dad
who were born
in Taishan but came to the
United States to *pull* money and
Mom pulled thread

into fabric and fabric was pulled

onto bodies; she made clothes
and waited for Dad to come home
while Dad waited tables— a busy
busboy
until 11
pm, way past 6 when we ate,
everyone but

Dad.

Mom cooked and
home smelled like labor

wafting through the rooms,
the scent of steamed and stir-fried money:
beef and corn
with salt beads:
Dad's crystallized sweat
to remind us at 6
we were eating his labor
while he lost
family time
shifts until 11

but we were asleep
our stomachs full and uneasy

II

I am sick with a fever
living between Mom & me
after her words slashed
my fresh flesh I cleanse
with saline
tonight when
 big sister Sally
played big brother and
 tattletale telephone.

Bottles of Ensure
sat in the vast vacancy
of the kitchen and
tonight I needed
an () bottle
 emptied
into the sink.
I poured \$\$\$ down
the drain instead of
downing it
for no reason
but to have an
empty bottle.

Mom moves →
 past the hallway
 past the restroom
 past the closed closet door
 where she picks up a metal rod
 moves →
 past the bedroom door
and finds my body folded
in thirds with my head praying
to my knees.

She swings an X
and my back raises its skin
to yell but I *shush*
bow my tongue
saying \$orry.

III

it's been cold here
since spring of 2005
when a baby bloomed
in the belly of our mom

who birthed and named
my sister/ chicken/ baobuoy/ a treasure
with her skin so golden
it harvests youth from the sun
kept in her eyes that
slant up towards the sky
to smile as the new favorite.
I am a child
five years older
forgotten five years later
after the arrival of the sun
that keeps me cold.

IV

Coughs in my body

store generations of souls
mapped out by my nose lips
Taishanese *loy koy*:
I ask them to come be with me,
with Mom and Dad
whose mother tongues
speak the land of their first home
in Taishan where I am foreigner because
I dress in cotton t-shirts from H&M
and qipaos only on holidays
when I eat the same food
celebrate the same harvesting of rice and wheat
under the same moon that heavenly ages
to a crescent shining
on half my face.
In same sky of *sim sim* stars,
my ancestors hum softly in my blood
thicker than red twine knotted and burnt
around our necks to honor the zodiacs
we fall under
as I wonder where my body first began.

Kitty Chu is an Asian American writer living in the valley of Southern California. She is graduating from the University of California, Riverside with a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing. Her works have been featured in Entropy Magazine and Matchbox Magazine, and she has received the William Willis Poetry Prize and the UC Riverside Chancellor's Award. Outside of writing, Kitty enjoys birdwatching (especially ducks and pelicans!), going on sunset walks, and making caffeine-kicking coffee! You can keep up with her on her Instagram page, @kittyychuu.

Ghost Exchange

Ann Tweedy

because i can offer you nothing
i aspire to ask nothing of you
is it a bargain we are stuck in
or its absence
the language thick on us

now we are mimes or those live statues
in San Francisco, grey grease paint,
tiny robotic movements--
no--child stars, trapped
in performance

Ann Tweedy's first full-length book, *The Body's Alphabet*, was published by Headmistress Press in 2016. It earned a Bisexual Book Award in Poetry and was also a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award and for a Golden Crown Literary Society Award. Ann also has published three chapbooks, the first of which was reissued by Seven Kitchens Press in April 2020. Her latest chapbook, *A Registry of Survival*, was published by Last Word Press in December 2020. Her poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Literary Mama*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, and elsewhere, and she has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and two Best of the Net Awards. A law professor by day, Ann has devoted her career to serving Native Tribes. In 2020, she moved from Washington State to South Dakota to join the faculty at University of South Dakota School of Law. Read more about her at www.anntweedy.com.

HISTORY AS AN OBSOLETE GLOBE

Joseph Meads

For instance:
a pack
of 10,000
wild dogs
(that's 40,000
canine teeth)
surrounds us –
& you bow
your head
forward,
toward
my right ear –
to whisper,
like a ghost
or the ghost
of a just felled tree:
I too am colorblind... *träume ich noch en Deutsch.*

Joseph Lee Meads is a diagnosed schizophrenic and currently an MA student in the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has previously been published in Columbia Poetry Review, Chicago Literati, Lover's Eye Press and elsewhere. He posts images of his muted television onto Instagram: @joseph.lee.m

Pornographer

Ami Xherro

Am I alone here?
Am I the only
masturbator
on this page?
Did you
or did you not
jerk to
your white
fleeting
gods
earlier today,
reading
the newspaper?
You're sorry,
I know what
you do
when you're
all alone.
You know
what I would do
to find a warm thing
to be caught in.

Anyway
I wanted to know
if I was alone here.
I wanted a Really
Big Romance.

To clear the image
from my eye,
It will take a deep breath
It will take a China
It will take a Valium
It will take a truck
It will take the endurance of a family's bickering
It will take the language of love
for desire to exit
for something to take its place.

Ami Xherro's first chapbook, *The Unfinished Flame*, was published by Swimmers Group in 2017. Her work has appeared in the Hart House Review, Shrapnel, University College Review, Long con, Autodidact, the Poetry Institute of Canada's annual anthology. She also makes sound poetry with the Toronto Experimental Translation Collective. We seek to renegotiate relationships within and across languages and media using homophonics and public transcription practices.

FIRST GENERATION

Ángel García

1

Born two-eyed, one-nosed, fat-tongued, belly
protruded, extraordinarily average, still they'll
praise you, your parents, as un bebe perfecto.

How quickly you gorge yourself on everything

you are given. And still, you wallow and whine
for more privilege. It's not your nature to savor
your blessings. A healthy appetite, they'll claim.

He's a growing boy, they'll excuse, when before

everyone else has been served, you demand having
seconds. What you taste deep down in the back
of your throat, bile-like, is not your heart burning
—but guilt. Sour from what you feel you deserve.

Your love is conditional, admit it. It always has been. It's ripe with your expectations: the cheap currency of tit for tat; vice-versa; bubble gum, bubble gum in a dish. More than your love for your immigrant parents, you're consumed with how you must change them, to make from their poor, unfortunate lives a better inheritance. You make them suffer through your Sunday sermons, preaching about decolonization, the enlightened path they must follow to be saved from their self-inflicted misery, all while speaking a language they don't understand. Homesick for a home-cooked meal, you order ahead, and stay only long enough to pick up your meal and riffle through cupboards for the expired canned goods they hoard to feed themselves, but not you because you deserve better.

During your graduation party, you strut through
the backyard, bragging to everyone about the size
of your citizenship, wagging your degrees in their
dark faces. Finally, when you introduce your parents
to acquaintances and colleagues, you snicker behind
their backs when they mispronounce a word in English.
When they divulge where they come from, or how they
came here, you smack your teeth and talk over their past.

Ever since you could walk, you've believed you could
manifest your own destiny with no help from no one.
You needed to believe that to make something of your
-self. But no one here recognizes you, Chicano prince.

LA BESTIA

Ángel García

he clears the jungle for track

In Tuxtla

she washes clothes on river rock

the low growl of the tractor

trembling

near the river's edge she sweats

fever spreads through his body

heart tense

from her fear of the tree lines

he cuts the motor and stumbles

back home

she tells her child to stay close

everything green grows into dark

shadows

begin to stalk their young prey

what slowly feeds on his wrought body

will kill

a child momentarily unattended

dragging his body through a trail

his cries

echoed by a mother who mourns

for home, he wants to go back home

to live

she knows they must leave here

to get away from the train, the beast

la bestia

that will consume her family whole

HERENCIA

Ángel García

You never mentioned the switches or stones, the unhung crucifijo
tearing into your back, your father running you out, *no eres mi hijo*.

Late-night, TV aglow, you never said the name of who hurt you.
Instead, my head cradled in your lap, you'd tell me, *I love you mi'jo*.

What bones we may break, may we break the bones of our pasts,
skeletons dragged over scarred lifetimes, *en nombre del padre, el hijo...*

the ghosts of our wounds, dark-winged words we've never shared,
are what keep us bound, rooted for generations, *de tal palo tal astilla*.

You've never been your father, just as I've won't be you. Still, how
could I be a better angel, Papi, when I've never been a good son.

Ángel García, a proud son of Mexican immigrants, is the author of *Teeth Never Sleep* (University of Arkansas Press), winner of a CantoMundo Poetry Prize, winner of an American Book Award, and finalist for the PEN America Open Book Award and Kate Tufts Discovery Award. He currently lives in Champaign, IL.

About the cover:

Jacqueline (Jackie) Evans-Shaw, known artistically as thesleepingstag, is a Creole artist born and raised in Bozeman, MT. Using traditional and digital mediums, she creates dreamscapes of soft horror and liminal spaces that draw from mythology, mysticism, and the wild mystique of the Rocky Mountains. Her inspirations include director David Lynch, post-rock band Black Hill/Silent Island, and the uncanny feeling of being watched in the woods at night. Her work can be viewed on Instagram @thesleepingstag.