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# The Journal of Poetry & Poetics

**Volume 8, 2020**  
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THE CENTER FOR POETRY AT CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

T A B U L A  
*p o e t i c a*



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## **Design Statement**

The print issues of *Tab: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics* are special editions, each published at the beginning of the calendar year. These issues reflect the mission of Tabula Poetica: The Center for Poetry at Chapman University to create an environment that celebrates poetry in various forms and venues. The annual print issue engages the reader with poetry as a material object and asks that the reader negotiate between image and text. The design of the print issues does not assume a traditional role of quietly framing content; instead, design actively shapes the reading experience. The special print editions of *Tab Journal* continue to experiment and explore the intersections between form and content, object and space, and reader and reading.

This year's print issue is driven by inclusive design and low-vision principles. We aim to produce an equitable and engaging experience with diverse sight abilities. In 1840, William Moon developed an embossed reading system for the blind that was less complex than learning Braille. It was centered in Britain and later shared by missionaries in India, China, Egypt, Australia, and West Africa. The Moon system was particularly useful for people who had lost their sight later in life because the Roman alphabet had already been deeply rooted in their cognitive recognition and recall and, therefore, proved easier to learn than the abstract system of Braille. Moon's system could be taught and learned in only a few days. It now appears in *Tab Journal's* 2020 print issue.

Both the color blocking of the print issue and of the the title pages of the online issues echo the approach that Oliver Byrne applied to *The Elements of Euclid* in

1847. Byrne translated all seven books of the *Elements* into a visually dominating presentation of diagrams and color to help categorize and highlight information. Byrne published mathematical and engineering works in the more text-based tradition, but with *The Elements of Euclid*, he made it clear by his subtitle, "...in which coloured diagrams and symbols are used instead of letters for the greater ease of learners," that he intended the publication to be more accessible.

Electronic issues are published on [www.tabjournal.org](http://www.tabjournal.org) and follow the theme of the annual print issue. Using these differing formats—print and online—allows experimentation with design and materiality in a time when print and electronic dissemination coexist. *Tab Journal* does not force either format to adapt to the other. The reading experience in virtual spaces is different than that of a printed journal. While the electronic files can be printed, electronic issues are formatted for reading on the screen and for assistive technology. Decisions about page size, typography, and composition are driven by the online reading experience, accessibility, and low-vision standards. *Tab Journal* also makes use of the audio possibilities of digital distribution.

To order copies of the current or previous print issues, please send a check for \$10 made out to Chapman University to *Tab: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics*, Department of English, Chapman University, One University Drive, Orange, California 92866. *Tab Journal* is available at the AWP Conference and Bookfair each year.

## Matthew J. Andrews

Matthew J. Andrews is a private investigator based in Modesto, CA, and a writer whose poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sojourners*, *Red Rock Review*, *Willows Wept Review*, *The Dewdrop*, and *Deep Wild Journal*, among others.

## **Awake**

Under the fiery glow of a just-risen sun,  
the details of the scene begin to expose themselves.

Tables and chairs upended haphazardly.  
Broken glass carpeting the bare wood floor.

The pianoman's head at rest on the keys so decidedly  
you could hear the echo of its discordant thump.

Blood-smear hieroglyphics. Bullet-hole constellations.  
Bodies written in dead languages.

A woman upstairs crying. There is always a woman  
and she is always crying too much to speak.

You take out the pen to write down notes  
but you are sketching again: square house

with no windows, smoke from the chimney,  
thick tree with bulging leaves, tiny balls

of fruit, stick figure man, colorless orb.  
You duck under the tape and step outside.

The sun's flames lick your skin slick  
and you close your eyes to take in the warmth.

## **Tule Fog**

The old man is a chainsmoker,  
and when the days darken with winter

he sits by the luminous hum of fire  
and thinks for a good long while as

he puffs, his voluminous breath tumbling  
down the mountainside and into

the valley, where it settles like  
sediment in a bottle of wine,

erasing our shapes until we all  
fade into a colorless hue

of mist, thick as eternity.

## Jake Bailey

Jake Bailey's work is published or forthcoming in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Palette Poetry*, *PANK Magazine*, *Storm Cellar*, and elsewhere. Jake earned his MFA

from Antioch University in Los Angeles and lives in Illinois. See more on Twitter @SaintJakeowitz and [saintjakeowitz.wordpress.com](http://saintjakeowitz.wordpress.com).

## **Portrait of a Mouth**

A single mouth unfolding can taste  
the outline of a shape in the dimmest light.

In the dimmest light, a mouth  
can word itself across lilies and vines.

Across lilies and vines, a mouth  
breathes its rasp like a ghost might  
speak itself into being.

A ghost might speak itself into being  
if we are always haunted  
by mouths shutting softly.

Shutting softly, a mouth grinds  
its teeth, ashamed of the way  
its tongue moves.

The way its tongue moves is given  
as a serpent's mouth meaning no harm.

A serpent's mouth meaning no harm  
will lick the air to see how you're doing  
with a stitched shut mouth.

A stitched shut mouth can say as much  
as one whose lips don't know each other.

Know each other:  
a mouth belongs to the ghosts we are.

The ghosts we are can make another  
mouth move to say *I love you*  
or *Stay with me. Please,*

stay with me. My mouth  
still sings your name.

## Tatiana Dolgushina

Tatiana Dolgushina was born in Soviet Russia and grew up in South America. Her poetry has been published in *Hobart*, *CALYX*, *The Write Launch*, *The*

*Lindenwood Review*, and *Red Booth Review*. She holds graduate degrees in both biology and poetry and lives in rural Alaska.

## **Russian tenderness**

I could talk about tenderness. the Russian way.  
how my mother only has it selectively, only  
with animals and only on moments she breaks  
away from the fight, to take a look back  
at the scene of crimes that living commits.  
or only in the morning in the kitchen  
when she thinks she's alone and she asks  
the dog what he's thinking, whether the dog  
knows her true state of being. for a moment  
she doesn't fight, so that she can listen  
if the dog answers her.

her teaspoon hits  
the sound of the glass, with the metal ring  
around the cup to absorb heat so as  
not to explode, in the clash of hot tea  
in cold climates. my mother is the contrast  
of living tender in harsh climates. the fear  
of the vulnerable cracks us all, like glass.

the dog in the kitchen senses the emotions through the sound in her voice. the cat's in the vicinity of the house, where the food is kept outside as a cooling mechanism. outside, where the disorder of a communist city keeps order.

the echoes into which my mother grew, believing in some kind of truth fed to her by the Soviets. the kind of empty truth that seeps into one during childhood. the future of 'promise' that keeps one warm during the Siberian winter.

the warmth of running down the city street and the ice of winter taking one into its ruins. the warmth of running away and fighting the gangs that show up on the street corner and then approach your door, to take something from you. the truth of the frozen ground water after

a particularly black frost.

the freedom  
of taking something for oneself, even if  
it means taking the whole corner down  
in one's uprising. the truth of  
wanting to not collapse under  
the storms that are waiting for you  
around the corner. so you're

waiting to take something  
of yours, and not for yourself  
but for some kind of world that  
keeps one out. and now you live with it,  
the cold meats freezing on the outside,  
you live with the inescapable knowledge  
of it all being taken.  
and eventually  
it all being gone.

## **an index of place**

*woman*—when Addy paints a sculpture of a female body to put on her wall, then accidentally hangs it upside down. she repaints it right side up instead of flipping it. that is literally crazy, I tell Addy.

*wind*—the natural elements within Russian folklore are explanations of life for the tundra and taiga of Siberian plains, once dominated by Mongolian powers. hundreds of years had passed until the white Russian could overtake a vast land, and by then many of its people were marked with black hair and brown eyes that resembled the northern people. it was a heritage accidental, the people still speaking Russian. and later, communism tried to erase the history. in order to erase it, the regime had to go back to the middle ages, when the white Russians invented traditional costumes and danced in circles to the god of the wind.

*white*—in me runs the blood of Siberian natives, the story of my great grandfather is that he was seven feet tall and lived out in the snow country, in the pictures his face looks like a brick, in face of a land of white snow that never exposed the brown soil. the snow covering feces and dead branches under its layers, capturing the moisture and making a soft bed out of abandoned ant hills, composing fake trails of runaway rabbits, killing the ungulates in its tracks by trapping them in soggy layers. then eating them alive, from the bottom up.

*women*—a woman that comes from other mothers is the only source to truth telling. like a mother that becomes a full woman, I am made of women, I wait for my mother to dream a dream to tell me about reality. I imagine she has lost the truth of her mother, but I have lost the truth of her dreams. she dreams the dreams that foresee the future, then she calls me on the phone to tell me about them afterwards, or to ask me if they've yet come true.

*wandering*—how we had to cross nations and kilometers of borders that don't longer exist on the maps, just to get where people could be safe. nobody knew where that could be, except it wasn't here and now. one had to risk everything to find freedom. one had to lose everything. one had to sever the blood that ties us to the roots beneath the earth, and walk step by step, breaking a root each time walking.

*wailing*—a deep guttural grief that makes a mother ashamed of her daughter. the kind of weeping that is hidden from view, because the daughter is afraid of the mother, to show the mother that she cannot handle life, when all the mother wants is for the daughter to be stronger than she was, and even the mother never wails, not between these walls.

*walls*—into which the family has settled on the urban outskirts of the city. in apartment walls which separate multiple people on the living room couch without legal papers. which separate foreign American neighbors from watching the girl from

the balcony being strangled by a man. which the girl cannot sleep afterwards in between the same walls, and wakes up in startled agony, wailing.

## **Dia Roth**

Dia Roth is a queer poet based in Seattle, WA. Their work appears in *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *The Selkie*, and *Sky Island Journal*.

## Signals

Or try to believe in  
the smoke from the  
sidewalk. It pleads:

*see me in thick plumes,  
close with longing alone.*

Go inside and stay  
there, but look  
for my smoke.

One milky pillar:

send  
help,  
stay  
away

crush  
candies  
between  
your

unbrushed  
molars and  
spit them  
across the city

I'll catch the broken morsels on my tongue: flies  
snatched on their way to the next trash heap. Small brown frogs  
croak a nighttime chorus. Save me a Jolly Rancher

to suck on, a sliver in your bed. Give me a sign  
I'll see you again when it's all over.

Every night, my neighbor smokes a cigarette  
on the street corner, sucks its glow  
in the shorts and longs of morse code longings.

## Kelly R. Samuels

Kelly R. Samuels is a Best of the Net and two-time Pushcart Prize nominee. She is the author of two chapbooks: *Words Some of Us Rarely Use* from

*Unsolicited* and *Zeena / Zenobia Speaks* from Finishing Line Press. Her poems have appeared in *Salt Hill*, *DMQ Review*, and *The Pinch*.

## **Note from Fantine to Her Daughter, Cosette: (2)**

Have you still that one chemise with the ribbons, the one you were wearing when I left? It brought out the roses. So often skin as cream, but with you, true. Such a cherub, such a sweet thing you were, toddling about. Listen now: mind the sharp edges of tables and where the money goes. Keep it, keep it for those long nights in need of a bundle of wood or an orange or the lentil, that practical pulse. All the finery I wore—azure stitch, bit of lace—lovely, yes, but worth more sold. Wash your face in cool water frequently. Pocket the coin always.

### **Note from Fantine to Her Daughter, Cosette: (3)**

An easy hobby: to pinch the cheeks of, gloss the lip. To smile as if someone were watching. The mirror was a lens those days—the tilt just so, the candle lit like. Glass as friend, glass foggy with my breath and then shined with sleeve. Then tossed out the window with the bathwater, with piss in the chamber pot. All that careful study wasted time, now troubling. Now: pain. And, too, the book balanced on head and, too, the dip and curtsy. Silly. I'm sorry to share this, but you should know. The bottom of a copper pan will do as well, briefly.

## Laila Shikaki

Laila Shikaki is a poet from Palestine. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Chapman University and is pursuing a PhD in English at St. John's University in New York. Her poems have appeared

in *Sequoya*, *Nazzar Look*, *Pomona Valley Review*, and *We Chose Everything*, a bilingual poetry anthology of the work of more than fifty Arab poets.

## Book review

*How The Water Holds Me* by Tariq Luthun  
Bull City Press, 2020

The first thing I noticed as I read Tariq Luthun's poetry collection *How The Water Holds Me* is its musicality. The words are smooth, and if read out loud are melodic, even if the topics chosen by the Palestinian American poet are not easy or happy. In fact, Luthun discusses tough issues spanning from the loss of his country Palestine to his inability to communicate with his father, bullying at his school, and religion. These poems are both personal and collective, making this a deeply felt book for the reader.

In the first few pages of this collection, Luthun ends the poem "Fruit" with lines that set the scene for his entire collection and that immediately create connections with other migrant Muslim families. Of a Ramadan night, he writes:

another generation passes  
into the wake, and mama prays in the moonlight  
before the fast. this is where i come  
to learn why a mother gives  
her kin a name that lingers, a name  
that only we can pronounce.

This idea of a "we" that can pronounce Luthun's name may appear to be speaking to his nuclear family, his Palestinian community, or even his Arab heritage. Yet the

poems create connections with anyone who has faced a calamity.

These lines are preceded by a setting that is familiar to migrants, where a mother, here a Palestinian, insists her son “eat, eat. Go on. take, take.” These words in English are a literal translation that Luthun adds himself to the Arabic lines in an Arabic font. While many Arab poets who write in English, or Arab American poets, myself included, include Arabic words in their English poetry, these poems contain the original Arabic. This authenticity and respect for the original language establishes another connection with migrant families who value their first language.

Tariq Luthun writes especially beautifully about the loss of Palestine. While discussing his father’s journey to the United States in “After Spending an Evening in November Trying to Convince My Mother That We’ll Be Fine,” he uses a collective pronoun:

...all  
my peoples and I still ask  
if it’s possible for a man,  
immigrant as my father—  
without having moved  
an inch—to one day  
awaken from the dream  
and enter—upon leaving  
a country that cannot have him—  
a country that does not want him.

*How The Water Holds Me* is a collection that sounds beautiful, with its many

alliterations, its assonance and consonance, and is also philosophical and complicated, at times even disorienting, as some poems flow seamlessly into others, while others appear seemingly unbidden, and end as abruptly. Sometimes Luthun's demons are mentioned: alcohol, a love relationship, a friendship. At other times, such subject matter is implied, as in his poem "Sermon (For Those Who Survive)," where the poet writes about feeling trapped:

Every day, I crawl out of this cage,  
elbows crimsoned & so fine; so aged with the sky's  
knees in my back. My cries flutter & my throat loosens  
to make space like a prison emptying its cells  
into the earth below the earth.

As a Palestinian poet myself, having lived the last several years in the United States as I pursued my PhD, I have a special connection to Luthun's poetry, but I am confident that those less familiar with Palestinian history and culture will appreciate the rich sounds, the figures of speech, the varied images of water and that a studious reader will enjoy deciphering what is in between the lines. This is a book that is both political and personal, it is also poetic and engaging. In April, upon the book's publication, Luthun announced that all proceeds of *How The Water Holds Me* will support a Palestinian charity, furthering its personal and political reach. This book is to be enjoyed over and over, out loud, and with a cup of mint tea!

## Tryphena Yeboah

Tryphena Yeboah earned a BA in Journalism and an MA in Communication Studies from the Ghana Institute of Journalism. She is currently a Fellow in Chapman University's MFA in Creative Writing program. Her fiction appears

in *Narrative Magazine*, and her poetry chapbook is part of the New-Generation African Poets series from Akashic Books. Yeboah blogs at [tryphenayeboah.wordpress.com](http://tryphenayeboah.wordpress.com).

## **Book review**

*1919* by Eve Ewing  
Haymarket Books, 2019

*A Cruelty Special to Our Species* by Emily Jungmin Yoon  
Ecco, 2018

*Midden* by Julia Bouwsma  
Fordham University Press, 2018

In the summer of 1919, the drowning of an African American teenager, Eugene Williams, precipitated a race riot in Chicago. He was among a group of black boys who crossed white swimming territory. In Korea, between 1932 and 1945, girls were dragged into vehicles of uniformed men and sent to a “comfort station” to service Japanese troops. And when an inter-racial community was forcibly evicted from Malaga Island in 1912 by the state of Maine, which threatened to burn down their homes, some were arrested and confined to an institution for the feeble-minded, while many left with hardly any trace, save for their school and cemetery. In the future, the Malaga school will be moved, and the graves dug up to rebury the remains. Each of these incidences has not only sparked contentions and exposed deep-rooted structures of injustice but also, in present times, have triggered traumas lacing such experiences, the historical inaccuracies, and the silence and

grief that circles the unknown. Three recent poetry collections, each built on the spine of immense research and dedicated effort to start a discourse, propel readers through poems toward a necessary consciousness: Eve L. Ewing's *1919*, Emily Jungmin Yoon's *A Cruelty Special to our Species*, and Julia Bouwsma's *Midden*.

In *1919*, Ewing introduces readers to a historical moment between slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. Amid the tragic impact of the riot of that year, her poetry works like memory, visually moving between spaces, and ambitiously reveals the events of the period as anything but transitory. The book is divided into three sections: Before, What Happened, and After. Each begins with a biblical text of Exodus, modified to address the beginning and spread of migration, the rumors which circulated, and provoked many clashes. The poems are in conversation with a 1922 report by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, titled *The Negro in Chicago*. In the book's last section, the poems explore schemes disguised as hope and the dismissal of what the report described as "Chicago's greatest problem." The work is testament that neither Ewing nor the history she brings to readers can be dismissed. Her writing captures and seeks for itself meanings beyond what one is made to believe.

In "True Stories About the Great Fire," the speaker asserts, "Everything they tell you is wrong." The revelation is marked by a passionate inquiry and a firmness in what the speaker has come to believe as truth: "you said hope for the Negro dying / hope through the dying." The speaker shifts distinctively, taking up the voice of a mother, a child, a teacher, an observer. In the poem "sightseers," the narrator laments over the spectators of mob violence, some who joined in vicious crimes with

no apparent reason but the sight of a growing crowd:  
we live in a time of sightseers  
standing on the bridge of history  
watching the water go by  
and there are bodies in the water[.]

The dying is individual and multiple and witnessed.

With the turn of each page, death and ways of mourning are met with tension. Over a period of five days, 739 people lost their lives in the 1995 Chicago heatwave; they were mostly poor residents of the city who kept their windows shut for fear of crime and couldn't afford air conditioning. In remembrance of them, the speaker recalls in "July, July!":

one summer in Chicago the people baked to death in brick  
mouths open for water or to say my lord  
or to say I love you mama or to sing  
or their eyes closed and they died in their sleep[.]

Ewing's devotion to delving into the much larger issue of structural racism is evident in her critical interrogation and her imaginative work as she models what it looks like to resist the tendency to settle for the present just because. She questions the fabric of a city built on the foundations of inequality and pushes for a discourse on how to proceed in a country predicated on racial hierarchy.

Telling the history of marginalized people is an intimate task that Yoon too takes on in her debut poetry collection, *A Cruelty Special to Our Species*. Central to her work are testimonies of Korean women forced into sexual slavery for the

Japanese Empire during World War II. Yoon's poetry is infused with dark secrets of a generation of women captured and subjugated in brothels. Her imagery is unexpected, sharp, and moving. Like Ewing's, these poems are grounded in research and calls for a historical consciousness that manifests itself in radical transformation and reconciliation.

There are four sections: *The Charge*, *The Testimonies*, *The Confessions*, and *the After*. *The Testimonies* present a precise and intently felt account of seven comfort women enslaved when they were girls. Jin Kyung-paeng was picking cotton with her mother when she was captured and put aboard a ship. Kang Duk-kyung was asked by her school teacher if she wanted "to go to Japan / do something good for the Emperor" and found herself working in a factory where "food was so scarce we pulled grass, roots anything we could eat / girls died of hunger some went crazy." The reader is drawn into a sense of the ordinary life and yet the most unexpected and horrifying scenes jump out.

Several poems in the collection are titled "Ordinary Misfortune." These poems expand on the everyday moments and offer evocative meanings, all the while never losing sight of the big cultural issues and assumptions regarding the tensions between Korea and Japan. The speaker grapples with this conflict when a Canadian friend inquires, "Why don't you guys just get along?" The speaker proceeds to break down the question, revealing how it is riddled with belittlement of wartime transgressions and the symbolism of comfort women as everything but the incriminating act that it was. In another *Ordinary Misfortune* poem, a brand of condoms is number one in Korea, which it seems like a harmless observation until

the reader is made to understand the context: it is a popular condom since the war. Beyond its marketing as the “thinnest” and the “pinnacle of condom technology,” its ranking is parallel to “Charge number, assault number one, attack number one.” Just as the experience is advertised as “skinless skin,” a deep un-layering pervades “the erasure of evidence and cries” and the license to “blast more holes into their bodies” with nothing to hold them accountable.

I was gripped with rage and compassion because I recognize none of this is ordinary, and yet it was painfully rendered so. In the face of such mounting brutality, one would hope for relief, but Yoon is unrelenting in her agency to command change as she explores the aftermath, the longstanding hold of such agonizing experience: “Every door is closed. 70 years and no one knows. No one knows my past is alive.” Hwang Keum-ju testifies, “It was December 2nd. I lost my uterus. I am now 73 years old.” The speaker is unforgettable and pleads that a glimpse of suffering be witnessed, not with an overly nationalistic interpretation but with deep human emotions. Yoon makes it clear her poetry’s role is to “amplify and speak these women’s stories” and not speak for them, and this is exactly what she achieves.

While both books by Ewing and Yoon attempt to explore the untold stories and break a cycle of silence, Julia Bouwsma’s *Midden* is most remarkable and rigorous in this pursuit. In her own words, “Eventually you have to break the silence. Even if doing so means disrupting the peace, risking anger or sorrow.” In *Midden*, the investigation of Malaga Islanders does not come easy, as with little scraps of evidence, the writer attempts to uncover truth about a nearly erased history of more than forty people forced to leave behind their homes, an act motivated by opposition

to miscegenation, racism, and political corruption. The speaker is well invested in this process of discovering and while seeking answers, emotions of discontentment and sorrow are expressed with a vulnerability only such an account can bear. I was moved between spaces of dark memories that had me feeling unbound from my body and laboring with the speaker. In "Dear Ghosts, I pick the List," there is a vivid description of disinterring marked by lyric intensity: "I take up scissors, razor blades, the rusted / garden loppers, pinking shears. I scissor you/ to islands, rearrange until my fingerprints peel / your faces gray."

The sudden changes the islanders undergo are suggested in the poem "Interview with the Dead," in which the narrator questions long-dead victims about who they became in the tragic chain of events, how they remember the island, how they left, and where they went. In their response to what they left behind, the dead reveal "Our arms spread out around it all / until our hands could not / meet our hands." This is the closest the writer comes to quantifying their loss. Possibilities of intrigue is as much strengthened by Bouwsma's imagination as her impulse to retell the experience in the most visceral way. Her work mirrors the emotional disorientation and longing not only in the islanders at finding a home but also in the speaker who grieves ancestors. Like Ewing's determination to set things straight, Bouwsma's writing carries the same pulse of insisting on truth in "Dear Ghosts, how can we stop the sunlight from spinning the story": "The boards were pried off one by one, but the threat of fire / will linger under anyone's tongue. Who doesn't carry their own erasures / silently in their spines, limbs horizoned to the past?"

From all indication, the central theme of oppression and marginalization, and the

mystery of its vicious aftermath, is successfully carried out in these three collections, and each writer delivers an enthralling account on the subject. Drawing on a diverse body of historical sources, these poetry collections shape the bond between memory and history by tracing back to moments, many of which are uncomfortable to revisit but necessary. The act of retelling is a sacred one. The writers do not hide their conflicting notions. Ewing describes her work as “a small offering, an entry point into a conversation about a part of history that I think is worth talking about more than we do.” In her note to readers, Yoon admits, “My poetry does not exist to answer, but rather to continue asking.” And Bouwsma digs into the burden of unburdening when she says in her Afterword, “I felt beyond compelled to write but I couldn’t write it without opening silences and wounds [...] without taking the risk that I might be stepping upon the dead even as I tried to honor them.” These collections offer us more than we can take. Yet, each insists that we know the truths about histories of marginalized peoples, that we’re made uncomfortable by the brutalities, and even more, that our capacity to be human and compassionate is challenged and revived.