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ISSN: 2169-3013

www.facebook.com/groups/TabulaPoetica





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Design Statement

The annual, distinctive print issue of *Tab*: *The Journal of Poetry & Poetics* engages the reader with poetry as a material object and asks that the reader negotiate between image and text. The design does not assume a traditional role of quietly framing content; instead, design actively shapes the reading experience and continues to experiment and explore the intersections between form and content, object and space, and reader and reading.

Beginning last year, the 2020 print issue was the first issue that was driven by inclusive design and low-vision principles. We commit to producing an engaging and increasingly equitable experience for all abilities. We developed a new website for online issues that also makes available accessible issue archives, including audio recordings of poems. Visit our website at <u>TabJournal.org</u>.

The 2021 print issue was created during a time of quarantine as the world underwent the isolation and anxieties of the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, we reflected on concepts of time—as a sense of place, as space, as structure, as visual experience of light and dark. Time has an impact on psychology; we can lose time or lose track of time. Time has a history of visual representation and documentation as well. This year's print issue explores visual expressions of time warping, time traveling, and the chronology and the kaleidescope of time keeping. The images and texts engage in ideas of process over time, such as healing or growth.

While the design for online issues draws from the year's print issue, the issues that follow in March, May, July, September, and November are designed

and formatted for the on-screen reading experience. Decisions about page size, typography, and composition are driven by the online reading experience, rather than to mimic a print version.

To request one or more copies of the print issue, please use the Contact form on the website.



Halo

Take me where the headlights halo, double-vision suns or clouds so high ice crystals form in the atmosphere, every shard a tiny mirror. Silver sleet filling the sky. Run until you forget yourself. Form yourself into something new, radiant, a beast made in the light, eyes made of high beams, feet growing fields in the night, tall stalks of corn to get lost in, silks already bursting with new greenery.

You and I lose ourselves there, overcome by some primal urge to howl at the moon. Shadows multiply exponentially. If you are not human then what are you? But when does God stop forgiving for petty human cowardice and error? Some say love is infinite accompanied by heartfelt repentance

Victory over shame. How do I repent, how do I love someone who cannot hear me though their words echo in every silence, blinking in and out while my vision is hazy. When does God start cursing those who defy, just as God rewards those who follow? Do not think you will not be tested.

Is this my test? To lose love in an endless field? Can I go back and pick it up? An infinitesimally small definition. Programmed want. A conditional love, a love that is provable to people outside myself. Where are the words for this unlimited thing?

As if I am amputating an appendage—an arm, a leg, a heart, a head?—just to brandish it above my head, and scream "Look!" Though that would be childish, I do have the urge. I decide against this tactic daily if not more often. I got used to seeing the eyes of love, feeling the warmth, and now love has chosen to abandon me momentarily.

Though I know I am never alone, I shrink away all the more. Clinging to some excuse to let them drift though they do not drift; I jettison myself to icy, black vacuum of space of my own volition obsessed with some self-fulfilling prophecy that I belong on the periphery, not at the center, though we are all cared for parts of this place, just south of paradise.

Conversion Disorder, recurrent episode, severe

- 1. Mourning comes at night at first, seeping from black to midnight blue to purple velvet to burnt orange that could only be produced in flame. We are told here—with these eyes and these skins—that longing is the feminine side of love. We are all feminine before God. We will always be left wanting, endlessly gulping salt water, famished, fearful a flame to be hunted the sun is fire too why always left to burn while the sources of divergent points of sky falling corpses in dry transaction energy exchange for existence so then loving the Beloved is a vastness without language diaspora of separation from all we have taken and irrevocably changed with the gift of will illegible callousness so thick to be immune to kisses sentenced to mourn without ability to point to nail down the extent of what has been lost
- 2. To pine as much as mourn. To empty ourselves so far that our emptiness has \ redoubled. The emptiness of a conduit opens one to joy as much as to agony. Even then, only a momentary satiation. Then hunger. So, then why choose this life? We do not choose. This life is given or thrust upon us despite many a seekers report before. We come when we are called and we are all called from different lives. To this common second nature. With common creation to protect. A renewed commons and commonwealth when we take pen to paper. With access to everything and nothing. Some illusion of choice. Even a single drop of the divine will leave one thirsty, tipped into madness.

- 3. Bare the flame bore the hole always burning but is not hope always wounded but cannot scar a compensation for falling short perceived inability to be grateful enough to raise confidence from cinders. Even the One watches us suffer because we cannot resurrect, make incantation for, pull back from beyond the here and now that which is not with that given name at beginning of time linear or not the word in every language has been lost compensated for with more words and more meaning that makes meaningless stand in for exchange of being from one being and another. All a part yearning not for completion but for the knowledge of all we leave behind. Sure of that within and the emptiness that brings only desperation the knowledge of what it is to be without.
- 4. All I can say of this agony made by filling a void at my center, in my ribs, in my gut, with anything is malformed guttural gargling utterances, phlegm, disgust overwhelm need to expel any of the solids that come up at movement of tongue barter to pairdown my regret including the treasure I've kept for so long called heart-burn a conversion in illness and faith beyond the sideways bars of body of sight of sense or mind without mind. Trip-wire trigger a visceral ephemera. Story told in bruises and scrapes, scars the skin was too thin to fight off. Every time I looked at my body, for almost a year, all I saw was illness. I was shown once. Now more than once. That the sense that lies to others is the one where I place my roots rerouting the figure of language through body in time uncork bottle so ship and ocean lay bare the lines

drawn to civilize bodies gone below histories foreclosure comes at all attempts at love to refuse loneliness risk lines on our bodies meeting God-fearing femininity a condition of adulthood we are told what we are certain of takes residence in body some primeval conviction colonizing guilt panoptic panoply infinite television screens screams drown in being drawn back to the shallows moored and leashed in sight rent apart at the mercy of the waves falling grey frothing foam so above so below far from/too close.

- 5. Whispers come in spells. recognition and misrecognition. a stable truth though not some unquestioned allegiance. Biting creatures immediately silent with emptiness converting in front of onlooking animals. Immediately afraid of my body, turns of tongue, a seemingly sudden admission of fear in my fulfilling of my heart's deep desire for connection while fueling a firing squad. Terrorist, some bark. Brother, say others. Sister, say few. Glitch of contradiction sitting in the grey with little choice for recourse. Coming to peace in pieces intent on healing, while some deep knowledge asks a reckoning with the fact that I will go out in a similar wreck. Dive into the—Seclude myself in the bluest ocean daring not to give into the darkness. Carve the light into my bones where soul comes under fire slow erosion compounding climb to pressure and rarity realized.
- 6. Prayer came a recording through waterlogged peace on pages come in making meaning sensing snake to simple to hold responsible where variable bounds of wrong and right

moving-camera blur make less breath while I had not learned the Arabic already concerned with righteousness or being with faith sustained by waking workhorse from darkness unfamiliar begging to be rid of the floodwater given over the drowning by Man who blurred my border asserting femininity and false appearances gave he like rite of passage to prompt scream with hand [manus] at larynx to scar somehow unreal because unseen and un-captured evidence cannot count.

7. I urge You, take back the glass I could not bare my innocence inlet my spirit rise take back the water and the easy air one month many moons remind me to remember my vulnerability and my value by breaking any scale made and meant to measure equivalence always false when compared. Take back the flood waters from my body take too the ravenous winds. This was storm enough an untraceable electricity ecstatic in dance to the bounds of my being The Being and back. Fill me with Love instead as you are and always will be my surest shore sitting beside me. Fill me instead with smoke to come and go and rise to greet You still.



Guarding Thresholds

That war wasn't supposed to happen.

They were brothers.

"Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai," Nehru announced.

All-India Radio echoed.

On the playground, children chanted before

their innocence was shattered

by the news on the radio

of the soldiers dying on the northeast frontier

amid the fallen snow on the barren steppe.

But Ladakh was far away, and the span of attention

short in children who have homework to finish.

The mothers didn't, rather couldn't, dwell on the news

as the sunshine commanded them to their chores.

Every day my aunt read the newspaper

keeping score of the machine guns and mortars

fired or lost, the shifting boundaries of McMahon Line,

the threshold the soldiers guarded.

She was never shy to speak her mind, never one to betray emotion.

Day after day, the stories of soldiers crawling through snow

with a single rifle and a small load of ammunition

pitted against the mountain treachery and sly enemy,

she read them with flair and dispensed the news generously. Ladakh was so far away, and she had an audience to inform. Day after day, the snow melted under the weight of artillery Her face calm and collected, with no sign of thawing until she read us the story of Shaitan Singh, along with his battalion, fought with bare hands when they ran out of bullets until he breathed his last breath. His picture in the morning newspaper – her red nose sniffling We learned that day sometimes

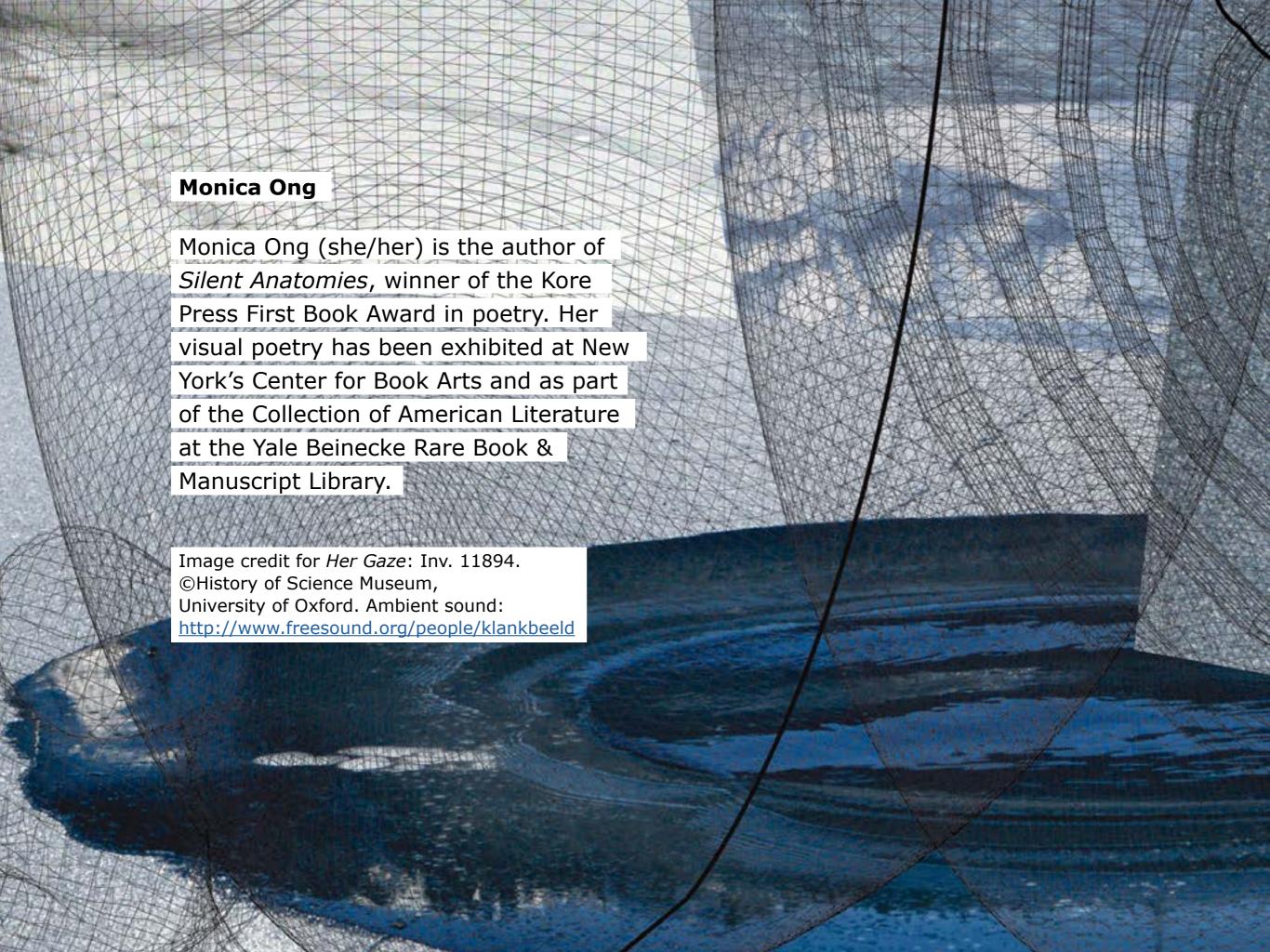
A rock reaches its threshold for breaking.

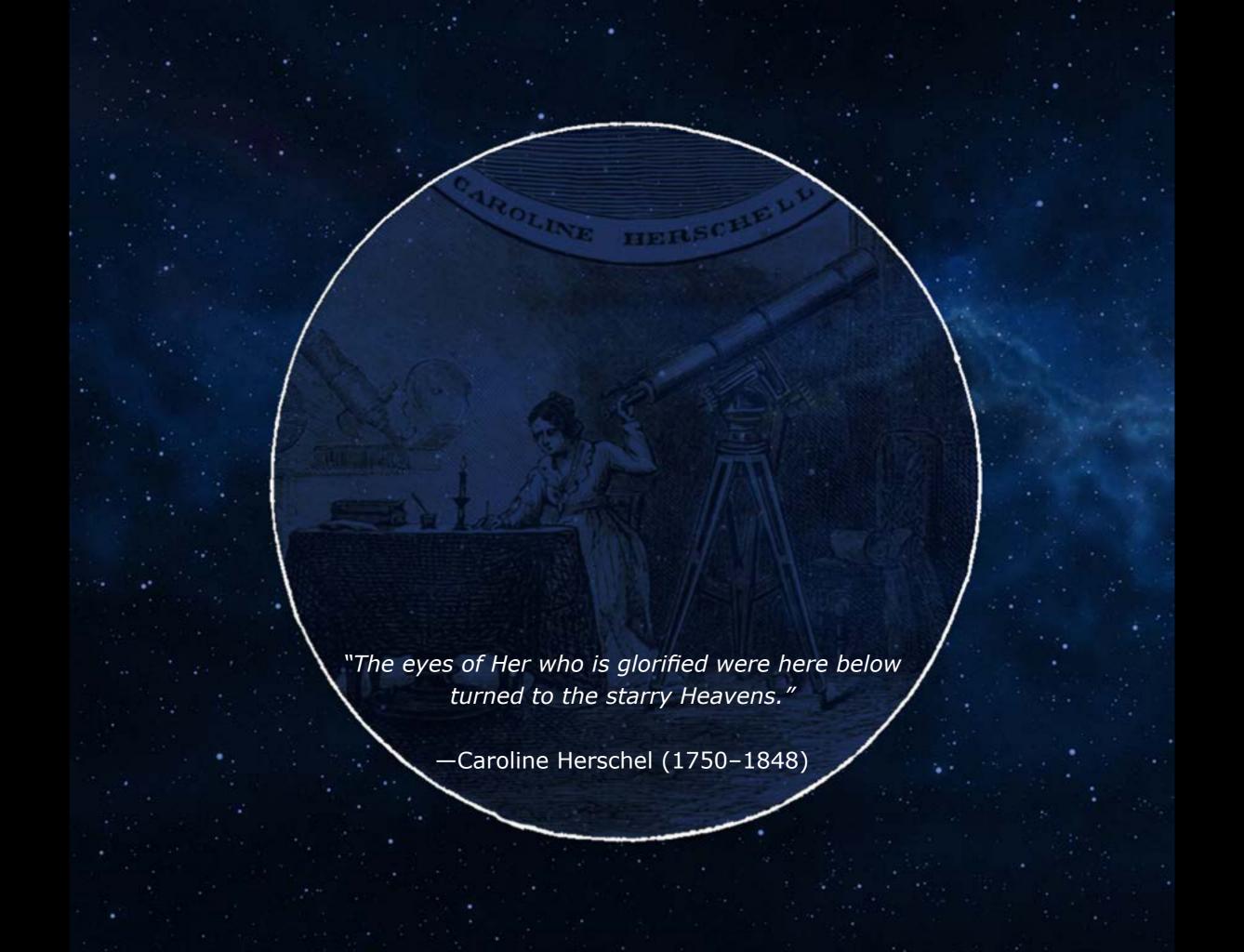
Notes: *Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai*—a political slogan declaring brotherhood between India and China that was officially advocated in India, used from the 1950s until the war of 1962.

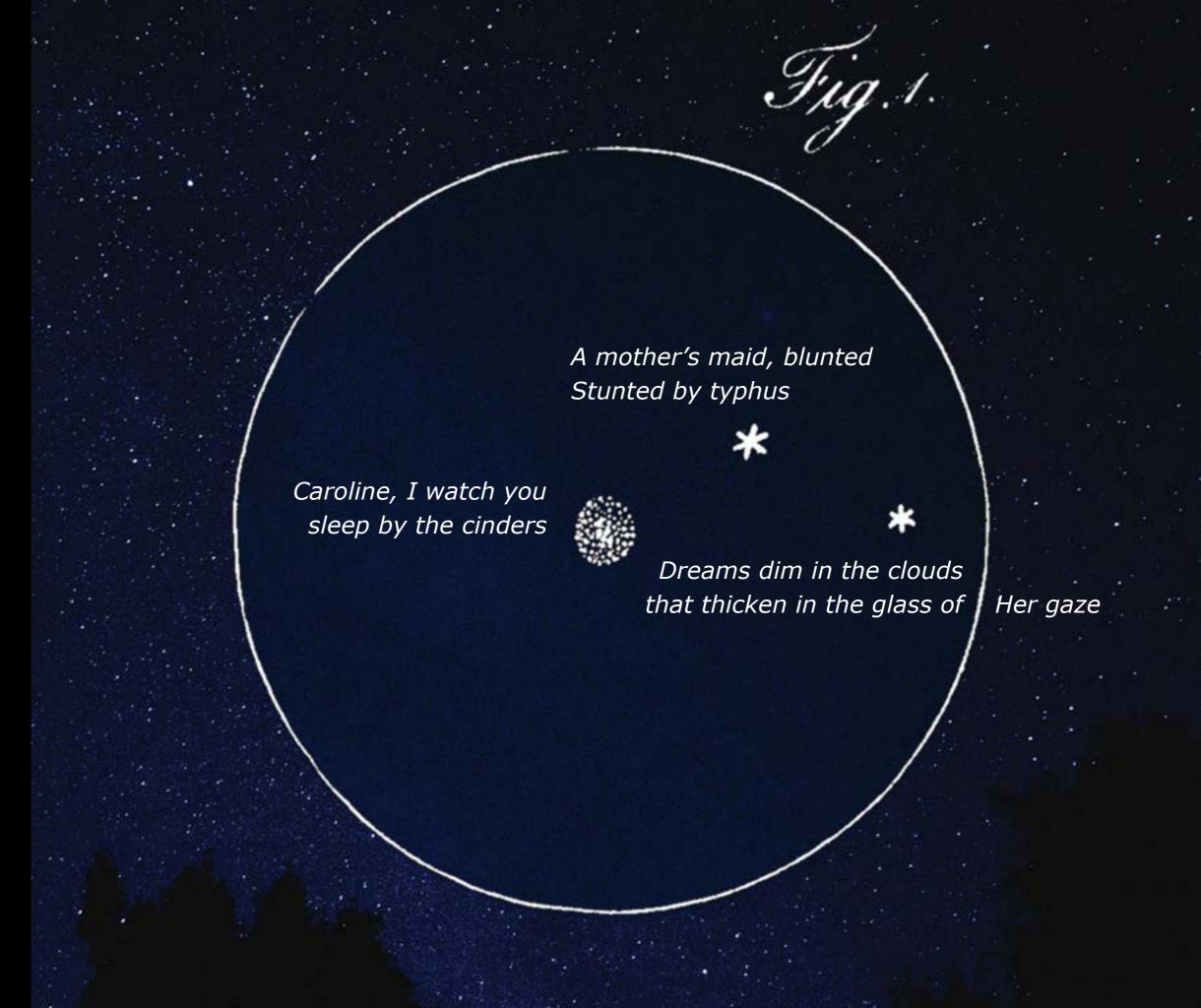


The Familiar

today my Spanish teacher and I are celebrating Valentine's Day 2 so I can try to understand the difference between encantar and querer and amar, that is to say, where does God-love lay different on the heart than mother-love and when do I say I loved him but I wasn't in-love, and how do I explain the tightness when friend-love feels the same as crush-love which I held so close to the sprout of, brote is the same word used to describe the beginnings of a plague, sick-love, how do I articulate the clean, clear-love I feel after class, when my tongue can move again in familiar shapes after being thrown against itself, how do I say teacher-love without pushing the limit of what I know how to say, or to know another-love with the hope that my new mouth understands how to say love, but better.















Beneath the jealous moon to touch the Net den' squares of light we count our losses to My child reaches out a finger presses a diamond into the of my eye corner



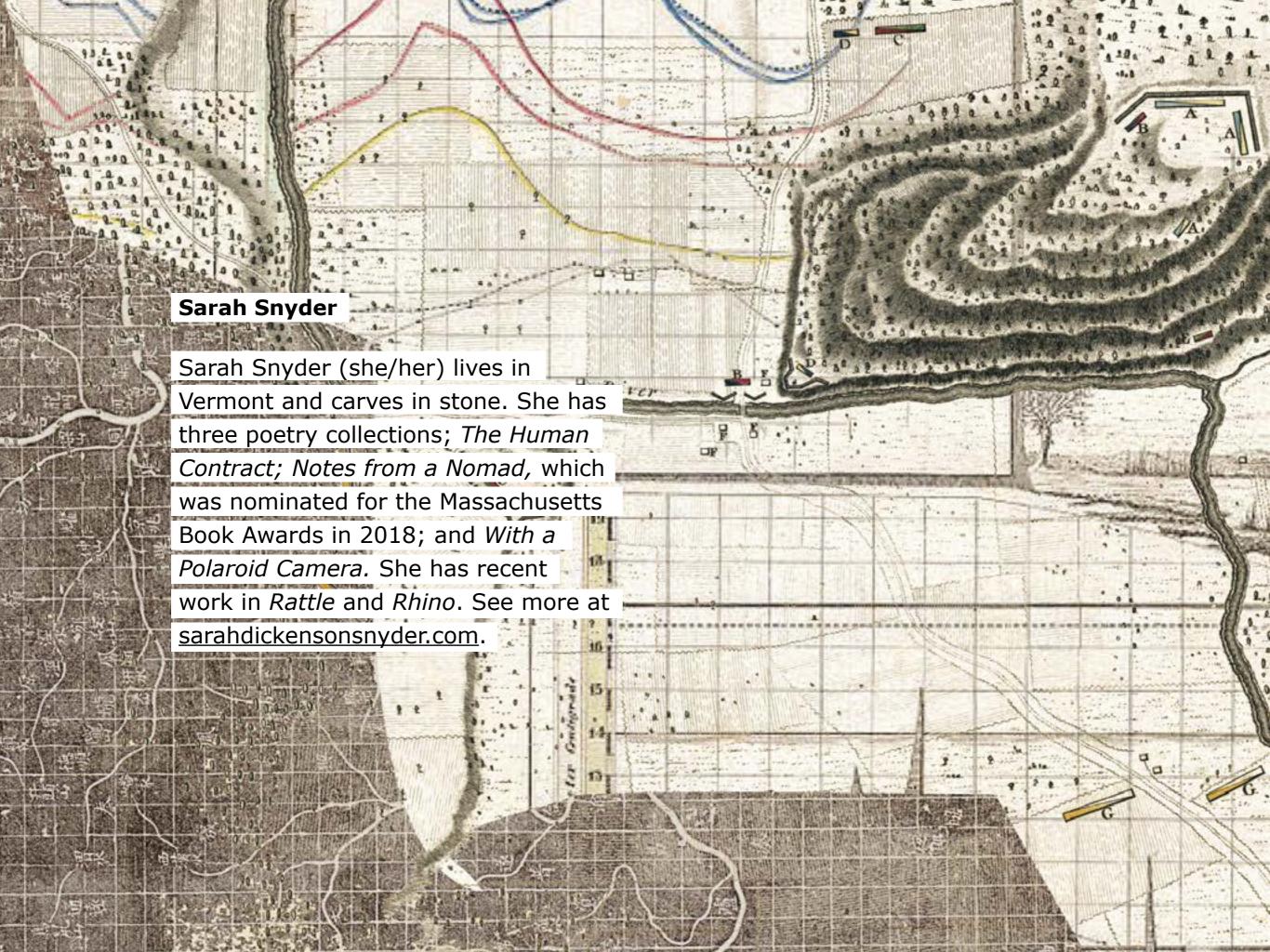
Because It's Summer

I was taught to name the bodies of water. As if the water was not name enough. As if the boy I was then didn't pack crates of cards to set sail, in those months

with their irreversible hum, the curious cat he'd sit next to on bamboo floors, gathering sunlight for butterflies. As if butterflies weren't sunlight itself, or the flowers they kindled in the small garden,

demolished by dust. This morning I made an inventory: fur, claws, bones. Stitched the moments of hunger & hanged them on the yawning window. Where was the sky's burning whole note that would repair

our names? Something sedentary sank somewhere. It hoped for my return; meanwhile, outside, the clipped kundiman I'd pursued was heard writhing inside the mirror.



The Gravity of Below

You know how people bury a thing as some sort of magic—the coal I stole

and dug a hole in hope of a diamond, the statue upside down to sell a house,

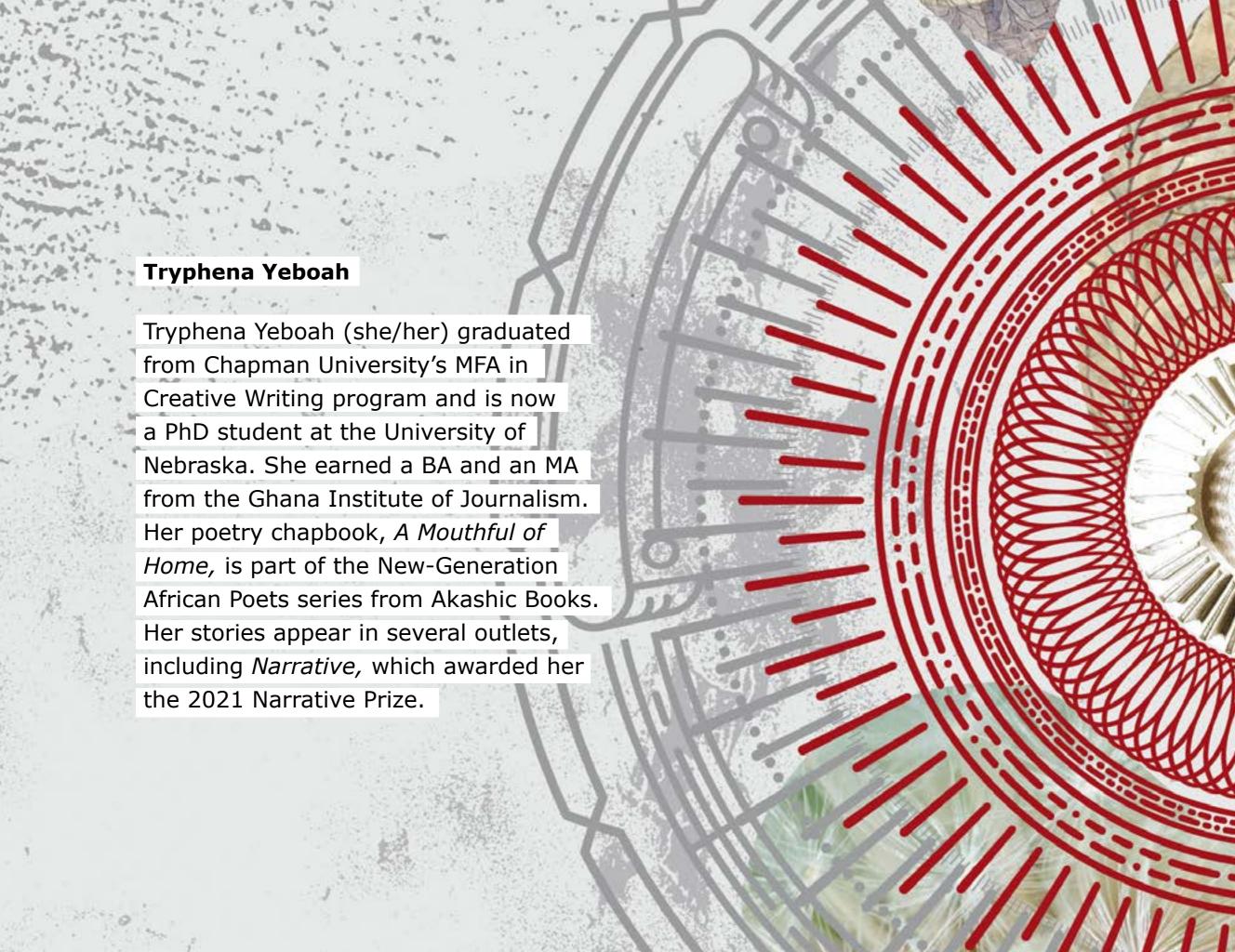
our dead in a casket for safe passage, for rebirth, perhaps, a place

for us to visit. I think of Antigone, how she was willing to die

in a tomb so that her brother's body would be buried. We have a history

of burying. The unnamed bones beneath the site of the fallen towers.

How every place with buried ashes or bones becomes a church.



Book review

A Net to Catch my Body in its Weaving by Katie Farris Beloit Poetry Journal, 2021

There is something about a book so intimate—in one moment, I'm taken aback by an unexpected and private detail, and in another moment, I'm fully immersed in its world, reaching deeper for what it promises. At the heart of Katie Farris's chapbook *A Net to Catch my Body* in its Weaving is the frank portrait of a woman not merely surviving but thriving cancer. In the book, while we see cancer invade the speaker's body, there's a shift from the agony associated with it to a more detailed rendering of her life, desires, and insistence on hope. There exists a steady progression of the journey, from a phone call on the speaker's thirty-seventh birthday informing her that she has cancer to the treatment, and in between, the poems are glimpses of an unconditional marriage and the urgent longing to live.

Creating poems on such a painful subject isn't easy, but in unadorned yet beautiful writing, Farris offers a meditation on how the body endures and carries itself through chemotherapy and radiation. The imagery is vivid in the emotions it evokes and disturbing where it should be, but its triumph is that it is clean and unembellished, capturing moments that are raw and unforgettable. When I read "In the Event of My Death" and "Emiloma: A Riddle & an Answer," I was immediately struck by what lay behind the words and how the sense of deterioration is carefully explored. Here's are lines from the former: "What used to be / a rope descending /

my vertebrae to the basement / of my spine / grew thin." In the latter, Farris writes:

Will you be my death, chemo? The shell of my self in the sphere of time plucking, plucking the wool of my hair from its branches.

As these lines demonstrate, the originality of voice and precision of language in this collection emerges from establishing the speaker's genuine awareness of the changes happening within her body. Readers learn to expect intense vulnerability because there's very little to hold back or guard for a voice that seems to take openness in its construction. In some cases, the truth is readily admitted, and in others, it reads as a slow observation, as if the speaker realizes but continues to grapple with the reality of invasion and loss. The impression is deepened as Farris builds a tone in the book that is far from dejected. To be so physically transformed by her illness is not the only offering; these poems simultaneously manage to convey a soul untethered from the experience.

By writing about pleasure, wonder, and hope, Farris carries readers along to imagine all that is possible despite suffering and, most importantly, to imagine the power of insisting on life. What emerges from this is a work that embodies vitality

and ambition. If you've ever wondered why anyone would write love poetry in a burning world, Farris tells us: "To train myself to find, in the midst of hell / what isn't hell." And in fact, she finds it—the bald head is a beacon of a watch tower; the awaiting of PET scan results is the welcoming of spring; midway through chemotherapy, sex is something heavily desired. No matter what, there is no plan to denounce pleasure and skip life's delights. Of course, what is difficult and unbearable remains so—a bald and cancerous body, a burning world—but even then, there's nothing like a speaker who can reconcile both extremes by weaving a thread of hope.

In "Outside Atlanta Cancer Care," Farris earns my attention with this point of wonder:

our longing grew our fingers longer, twigs to our branches for if you long hard enough, do you not find fruit in your palms?

Even from just these lines, one can notice another remarkable element in the collection: the closer we get to the agonies of a failing body, the closer we're pulled to the green and vibrant earth. Once the relationship to nature is established, there's a sort of reframing of the narrative as we observe the speaker reimagine the condition of her life. I can't think of a more fitting metaphor than this reckoning

with earth. In "What Would Root," the speaker reveals that, when she reaches out to touch her eyes, she feels twigs emerging from them:

they were a part of my body I could not doubt—
they were living and enervated and jutting out. I
sat down feeling the hairs on the back of my neck
understanding for the first time they were not hairs, but roots.

The symbolism is an artful declaration on what the speaker is always reaching for: something lush and nourishing, a blossoming and bright presence in the coldest, darkest times.

At its core, the poems in *A Net to Catch my Body* in its Weaving are driven by a keen awareness of ailment and the body's frailty; with this comes great attention to building a voice compelled by the vulnerabilities of life and at the same time, one that is gripped by a yearning for life. It is one thing to read a book about navigating pain and it is another to witness the largeness and tremendous delight of life even as it appears to diminish. This is precisely what Katie Farris has accomplished with her chapbook.



Book review

Focal Point by Jenny Qi Steel Toe Books, 2021

Focal Point by Jenny Qi is about the kind of convergence that brings together the disparate, that in the friction and heat causes an ignition. It is about life as it burns hot and radiant. Perhaps it sears at times, but it is beautiful, good, and perhaps necessary. This book—this way of reading this book—is a metaphor for the kind of upbringing and values that transposes time, self, emotion, and mortality into poetry: poetry that is felt in life and poetry that is appreciated through words. In the opening poem, "Point at Which Parallel Waves Converge & From Which Diverge," "the eight hundred mice / I've sacrificed this year" suggest a struggle to find clarity through the heavy undertones of mortality. Finding a cure for cancer is not simply work, it is a point upon which the living move in view of death. There is a fullness to the act, a pull towards completion, a race toward meaning despite limitedness.

The drive toward meaning gnaws from the set of opening poems that dwell upon the passing of a loved one. It ripples outward and, like waves, does not stop. One starts to see the soul at war when actions are considered in light of infinity. In "Psalm," the infinite hurts in light of unrequited true love: "I want to abandon my pride and chase you while you leave me." No, it is not about being clingy. It could be read as the pain of living in the wake of divine pleasures so great that one can "taste the ripple of stars until you're drunk on the Milky Way." It is only natural then

that the impermanence of human experiences would "flick you off like errant dirt" ("Never love a poet"). There is drama in life when you can lose sight of the divine. The reflection is always unsettling: "I refused the chaplain," Qi writes in "The Last Visitation," in response to questions about a living will. How does one prepare? Death overtakes the living eventually. All one can do is to taste it all.

There is something about taste that connotes choice. Sadness becomes a choice and not unhinged emotion, for example, only when one has indulged in real pleasures. To taste is to experience, to be in touch with. The father in the poem "Distribution" requests to "Scatter my ashes in the ocean," seemingly to urge the dissipation rather than consolidation of perhaps pain. There is clear element of choice. It would be wrong to think of this poem as simply about moving on. Yes, it could be about seasons, but it is more about empathy and consciousness—the kind that is allowed to dwell somewhere even in moments of deep isolation and duress. To live well is to have experienced life and to want it to be experienced for what it is and nothing more. Then there is choice, not as vagueness but clarity, agency, and authenticity such as in "First Spring, 2011," from the lines "They look absurd showing off / as if beauty still mattered." Being un-beautiful is beautiful too because it finds its place, as does being sad. To be sad is to be strong. To flee is to invite dissonance and disconnect. When the disparate comes together, there is convergence. What that convergence means is strong to the point of being poetic.

Focal Point, while about focusing, does not alienate connection to the backdrop. The poems encourage consciousness, sharing, and empathy. In "Commonalities," haters at a pride parade are met with the reflection: "I want to march up and ask

who their parents are." Love and honor for parents becomes the source and strength for this fighting spirit. A strong centering is ultimately where one's influence and actions radiate out from. With the infinite in focus, there is a deserving prioritization of family, honor, love, and respect. "Decision-Making" is a cautionary poem about a doctoral candidate who goes on a murderous rampage after another candidate was awarded the prize he was competing for. There is nothing wrong in striving for prestige, but what is pleasurable should never be the sole focus, lest it become toxic. Qi attributes a father's strong centering and work ethic as the cause for weathering the hard times and bearing the burdens, some things that carried the family. In "What We Grew in the Desert," Qi reflects upon the futility of actions and goals because choices, especially right ones, are the real reason life is so full. All actions are futile like oleander: "pink flesh burst from clay, / blowing sweet poison to the wind." The focus on happiness is not about how one "sang my pleas into the leaves."

Life is full of pleasure traps in *Focal Point*. These poems rise above them, focusing on the infinite to make choices an escape and hardships mere points. Qi's poems tower, like "the mountain and the stars— / be that immovable and that transient" ("Contingencies").