

T A B

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Department of English, Chapman University
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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 the reader to 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 with and explore the intersections between form and content, object and space, and reader and reading.

This 2023 volume is *Tab Journal's* eleventh year, and its print issue draws from traditions of how reading materials are made available to readers. Certainly, text is contained in objects such as books, journals, newspapers—with their scale, weight, and page-turning demands. These objects take on their weight based on cover material, size of page, binding, and ink. A single volume of *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary (2nd Edition)* weighs 14.8 pounds and comes with its own magnifying glass.

And how are such objects themselves contained? The shelves where books and journals are stored are exclusive to people who can reach, grab, unstack, and navigate codex systems, all within the rooms and buildings that shelves—and readers—occupy. Henry Petroski writes in *The Book on the Bookshelf*, “Books and bookshelves are a technological system, each component of which influences how we view the other. Since we interact with books and bookshelves, we too become part of the system. This alters our view of it and its components and influences our very interaction with it.”

In Volume 11, *Tab Journal* questions access in relation to interaction and portability. With digital and audio formats of reading material, what is the place for print? *Tab Journal* strives for flexibility in a physical interaction yet defies the traditional anatomy of a codex—a spine, page signatures, an obvious cover. It is not waiting to be chosen from a shelf. Instead, the print issue

takes its storage with it in a form of a pouch where other things can join in its container, just as a phone or tablet is a portable container for poetry and much more.

To request one or more copies of the print issue, please use the Contact form on the *Tab Journal* website TabJournal.org.

Muiz Ọpéyẹmí Àjàyí

Muiz Ọpéyẹmí Àjàyí (Frontier XVIII) (he/him) is an editor at *The Nigeria Review* and part of the 2023 Poetry Translation Centre UNDERTOW cohort. Winner of the Lagos-London Poetry Competition and the University of Ibadan Law LDS Poetry Prize, both in 2022, his work appears in *Frontier Poetry*, *20.35 Africa*, *Olongo Africa*, *Poetry Wales*, *Àké Review*, *SAND Journal*, elsewhere.



Shore

*Floods destroy more dan 1,500 graves for one cemetery
for central Nigerian town of Mariga, Niger state.
—BBC News Pidgin, 21 September 2022*

dusk, wilted daisy that it is, unpetals birdsongs off the lips
of dying daylight. darling, every breath is a whispered illusion.

in the lagos dawn traffic, what i mistake for morning mist
is silk scarves of fossil-fuel exhaust wisping towards heaven

like fajr supplications for our dead. i swear by the cosmic
galaxies, this universe—(un)dying starlight, dwindling rain

—forest, snow-crested mountain arching its back, melting ice-
sheet crackling in the noonshine—is every bit as mortal as

us. the earth, human as i am, in a lokoja disco party, asks me
to a dance. & i sway an atlas to the song of the savannah

thunderstorm. her face, bleeding oil well under the lightning's
gaze. orbital body, spiked with landmines, exploding at every

sonata touch. our dead, even in eternal sleep, do not find rest.
in every interweaving string of nightmares, i'm mining corpses
on the bank of river mariga. cemetery fogged with grey dusk.
erosion exhuming my great-grandfather's ghost. my ancestors'
phantoms who only ever lit tobacco while cultivating cocoa
plantations, now puzzled as to why, why their descendants set
the entire globe ablaze, galaxy undressing in billowing dusk.
fam, my mothertongue has no distinct language for carbon
mono-oxide. truth is, every time i say dusk, what i mean to
say is smoke. what i mean to say is that flashfloods from
the same silver river which drowned my ancestors is now
washing the bodies in their shallow graves back ashore.



BEE LB (they/them) is an array of letters, bound to impulse. A writer creating delicate connections. they have called any number of places home, currently, a single yellow wall in Michigan. They have been published in *FOLIO*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Figure 1*, among others. See more at twinbrights.carrd.co.

my brother; bronzed grackle

never before had i seen a bird so desperate to break through
glass feathers askew dropping quills piling on the floor
a bent wing a crooked beak
a broken boy wanting only to break in
to escape wild eyes
two yellow coins a currency of fear

i used my own lacking currency
to assuage a separate fear; i fed his habit.

i am following in his footsteps in the search of escape.
he's following in mine as we swing ring around the rosie.

he prefers poppies and i prefer pills and we're on a carousel
that never ends. mustangs rather than ponies,
in a dizzying gallop. so we're both just trying to hold on.

trying not to be thrown off. trying to live til
we reach an end that was not shaped by our own hands.

he is not me but he is in my mirror.

we shaped each other as we grew.

we are each other's crutches and lean-to's.

a better happier St Agatha

to be held is to be loved so of course it eats away at me how often i must go without
your gentle touch. your ungentle touch as well i'd take any of it, all of it,
i would bow under the weight of your hand if that's what it took for you to touch me.

but it isn't.

you are teaching me how to be loved and i am giving my best effort to learning.

when my body curls away from you and your first, only instinct is to slowly follow—

when i ask you to remind me of the good in the world

and the first answer you give me is:

you

the second answer: *all the future laying itself ahead of you*

the writing, the impact—

when your last answer is the sun,

the hesitant light refusing to dim, all my favorite colors

splashing across the sky: ochre and wine

wheat gold fading into pthalo—

when you let me cancel our crowded plans because fear is eating me alive

and instead give us a picnic in the park and more sushi laid out

than i could eat in a week—

when i present to you each one of my fears and rather than indulging them
you say the silliest question i've ever asked
 is what you get from being with me—
when you say *i get you* as if this is undoubtedly a good thing—
 when you show me again and again, through even the days i stack scars
like tallies along my hip, a reminder of each mistake i've made—

and your hand tracing my skin
 doesn't ever come close.

through the nights i spend clawing at the cage of my mind
 scratching at the edges of an unspeakable freedom—

 and you remain,
 unshakeable as ever,
still there by dawn's light.

through phone calls so clogged with tears and snot that my words become
 indistinguishable in their flood—

and your only question
 is what i'm trying
 to convey.

through the dissociative spells
catatonic, unresponsive—
unmoving in its waiting

that leave me
an empty body curled on an unmade bed,
on an answer that never comes—

and your unheard voice
whispers promises
only you'll know to keep.

through the manic highs
letting out each small secret
ending with me bruised and begging

and my sweating body
i've tried to hide—
for anything

worth holding onto—

and you offer your steady hand,
which is all
i ever want.

for you, getting me, loving me, being with me
somehow still remains a good thing:

undoubtable.



Frances Boyle

Frances Boyle's (she/her) books include *Openwork* and *Limestone* in 2022, two other poetry books, an award-winning story collection, and a novella. Her writing was selected for the Best Canadian Poetry series and Poem-in-Your-Pocket Day and appears in *Grain Magazine*, *Rogue Agent*, *Nightingale & Sparrow* and *Parentheses Journal*. See more at www.francesboyle.com; follow on Twitter and Instagram @francesboyle19.

Tokens

*My mother survives
through more than chance or token,
—Audre Lorde “Prologue” from *From a Land Where Other People Live**

My mother is within me,
breathes
in my expressions
—in moue or scowl, rarely in smiles,

in things I swore I'd never say
to any child of mine,

awkwardness in silence.

It's always the silences
isn't it? My silences, stumbles,
her easy chat masking the quiet
caverns of her loneliness, her fears,
her flailing.

The tokens I have, tokens I keep
pressed to lips or heart.

Tokens I fill my home with—

cloisonné box and bowl,

Moorcroft vase.

Two Doulton girls

—Ivy, whose head I broke off when I was four,

ill-repaired by my father, an amber ribbon of glue at her throat,

demure hands

folded, eyes downcast. Ivy.

The other—Babie—sprightlier,

fuller skirts, hand to bonnet

worn stylishly aslant:

my Christmas gift for my mother

when I was first working

I paid seventeen whole dollars.

My mother was

invisible to me for years, an impediment

irrelevant to teenage life

offstage to my onstage drama.

And later, in my young
adult life I'd drop in
once a week or so.

Yet my mother survives
through more than chance,
more than these tokens.

My mother survives when I crack,
when my shell knocks
against some bowl
and I let the viscous clear liquid,
the bleeding yolk come out.

Survival in my guilt
at how I hurt her,
in my anger
at how she neglected me,
hurt me by silences, by turning away,
wrapped in her own pain,
her own cotton wool

swaddling of fear
and lack of choice,

that point

where she felt she had no option but to remain
but couldn't stay within her own skin,

sank to the bottom of a deep pool,
held her brief breath for a long time,

while we kicked and splashed on the surface unaware.

Did my father,
did the doctors,
dive down, pull her dripping up,
make her catch her breath,
teach her how
to take air into the lungs
—again or for the first time?

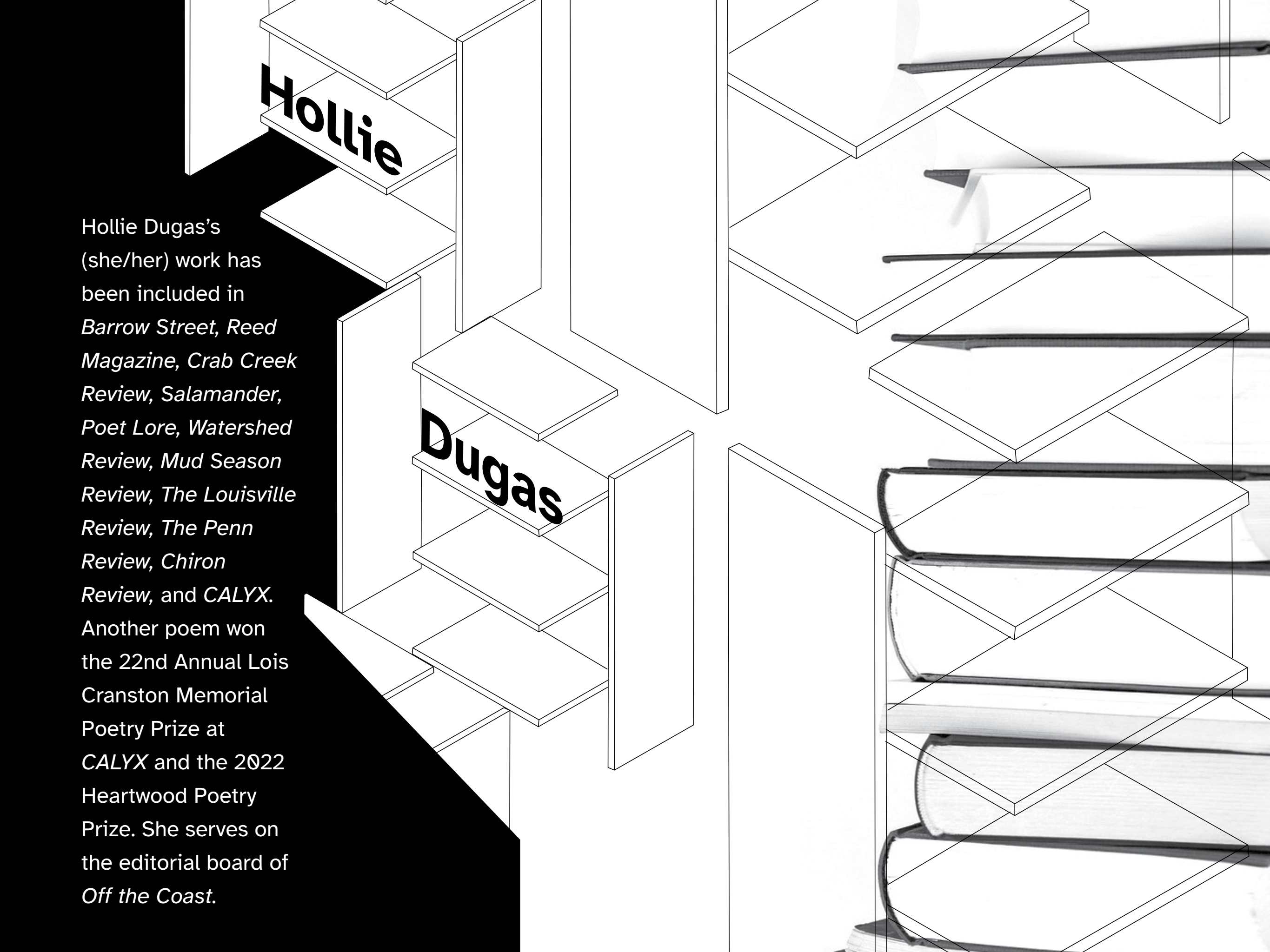
Or did they instead halt
her return to water creature

—mermaid, selkie or water baby,
kētos or kraken
so beyond the bounds of the day-to-day,
hopeful
and so helpless on land.

Was my mother a beached porpoise, did she lose
her grace and balance
to unbreathable air,
to grit and sharp pebbles against her belly?

My mother survives despite the goodwill,
best will, of rescuers'
love, the strong currents
of intent,
hope. Dragged
to strange new element
in amarantine net.

The tokens
place markers she laid down to hold us to some course.



Hollie

Hollie Dugas's (she/her) work has been included in *Barrow Street*, *Reed Magazine*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Salamander*, *Poet Lore*, *Watershed Review*, *Mud Season Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *The Penn Review*, *Chiron Review*, and *CALYX*. Another poem won the 22nd Annual Lois Cranston Memorial Poetry Prize at *CALYX* and the 2022 Heartwood Poetry Prize. She serves on the editorial board of *Off the Coast*.

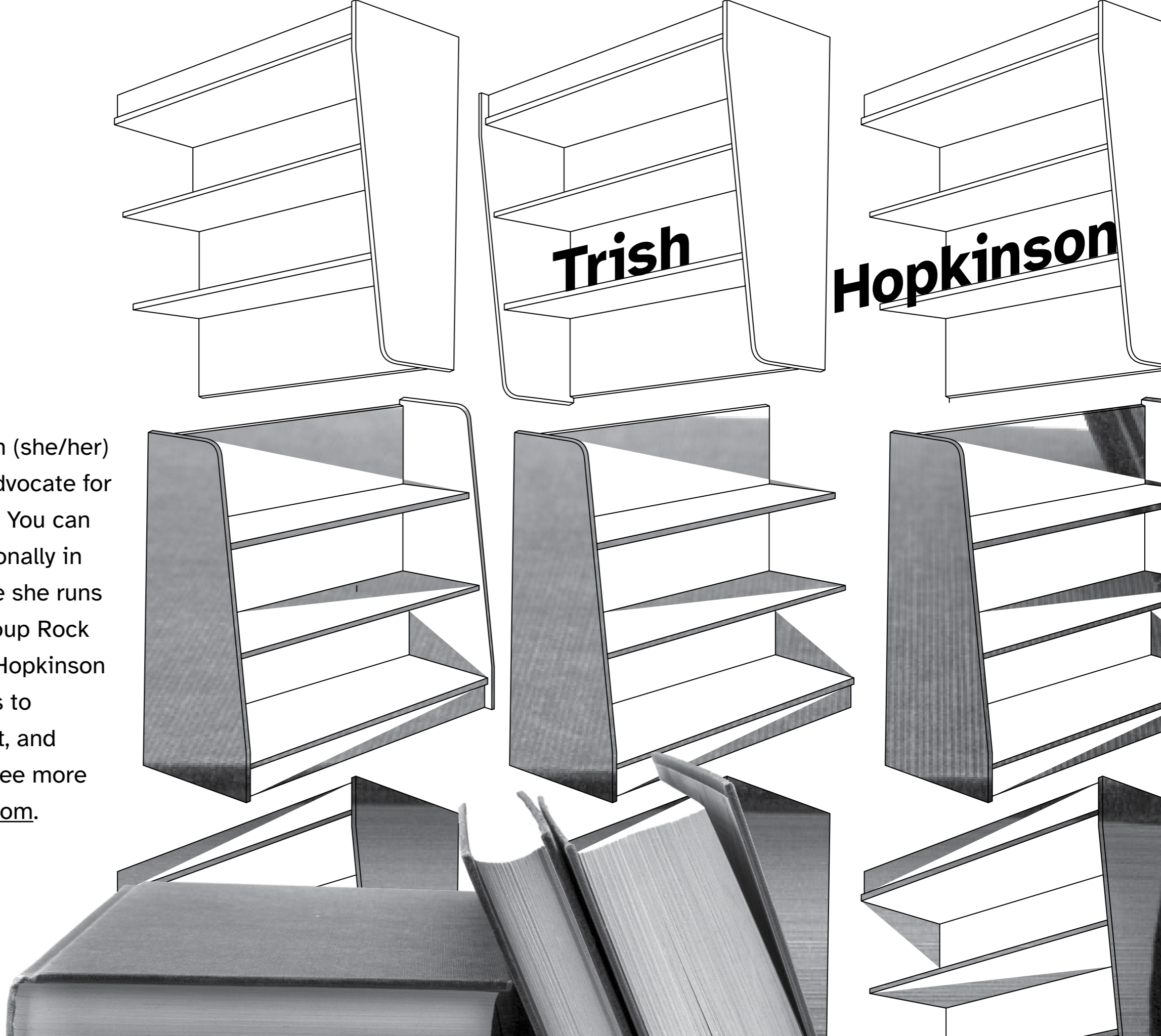
Dugas

On Edward Hopper's *Reclining Nude*

The woman he's imagined in this one
has plastered me like a fly-egg to the face.
She does not embrace the same kind
of quiet melancholy as his other women.
In fact, this reclining woman doesn't appear
silent at all—fully nude, she harps
the sound of heart break or grief,
her erogenous points blushed orange
against her naked-gray and dreamy body,
languid, aside from her one leg propped
awkwardly over a large mountain
of bedding. She's uneasy, alright;
but, in that sexy familiar way that turns
you on, the way a single tear of salt escapes
your lover's closed eyelid as she sleeps and
you watch the thick drop of wetness roll
down your breast and into the divot
of your chest. I recognize her because
I've been her. No not quite—but, I have

known her, contemplated her the way I've
contemplated an angle of light. And she is
the light, seducing me. No, not quite
seducing. I am watching her seduce me,
becoming a small fleshy cell inside her warm
hands that are shoved comfortably between
her thighs where I sit noisily reminding
myself that she is, in fact, just a girl—
the same type in Ed's other works, begging
you to look, the type of girl who doesn't
let you know what she's thinking. You have
to turn her over to see, pull the hair back
from her face to know for sure she's purely
human. She is a home for remedy. You will
never understand what she likes about you.
She builds character. She's a random
encounter, a lie you heard about sex. Yes,
there is something morose breathing
in the dip of this girl's back too;
and, this time, it's the absence of loneliness.

Trish Hopkinson (she/her) is a poet and advocate for the literary arts. You can find her provisionally in Colorado, where she runs the regional group Rock Canyon Poets. Hopkinson happily answers to atheist, feminist, and empty nester. See more at SelfishPoet.com.



I Know I Have Loved Patricia

after O'Hara/Reeves/Vuong/Rader

There have been days I must have loved you, Patricia
and not in the way a mantis loves its mate
or in the way a copulating octopus may murder
her lover—her arms pulling tight in aggression,
blocking his gills from ocean's oxygen
so deep below the surface scientists don't know
when or how often.

Someday I'll love you often, perhaps without condition
and say so, letting the words *I love you*
slide out in audible bursts, imperfect in meaning
but perfect in mouthfeel—words incapable
of love themselves,
inanimate and two-dimensional, only given life
in how they pass from throat to ear,
a type of protist, no mouth or muscles,
no stomach, no blood, no veins. Yet, we use a word to name and rename.
I had to change
yours to discover selflove.

When your daughter was young, she too craved
a name that meant something more than the one given—
 one day it happened
and she became more—Clementine
with sunshine hair and limbs of leafy vine.

 You never knew
you loved such words, words that became your children:
her lovely orange contrast against her older brother's Sky.
You can't compare your son to a cloudless summer day—warm yet
capable of anything in mere moments—the lightning
that has slashed in when least expected and nearly
 shut his eyes for good.

When you were young
 you loved the lightning—not its sudden shock
but the smell of thunder riding its heels
across the horizon, a reminder of the power
to both give life and take it
 —and how you can only wait for it,
in the same way a poet collects words and forms phrases;
words that can both give love and take it.

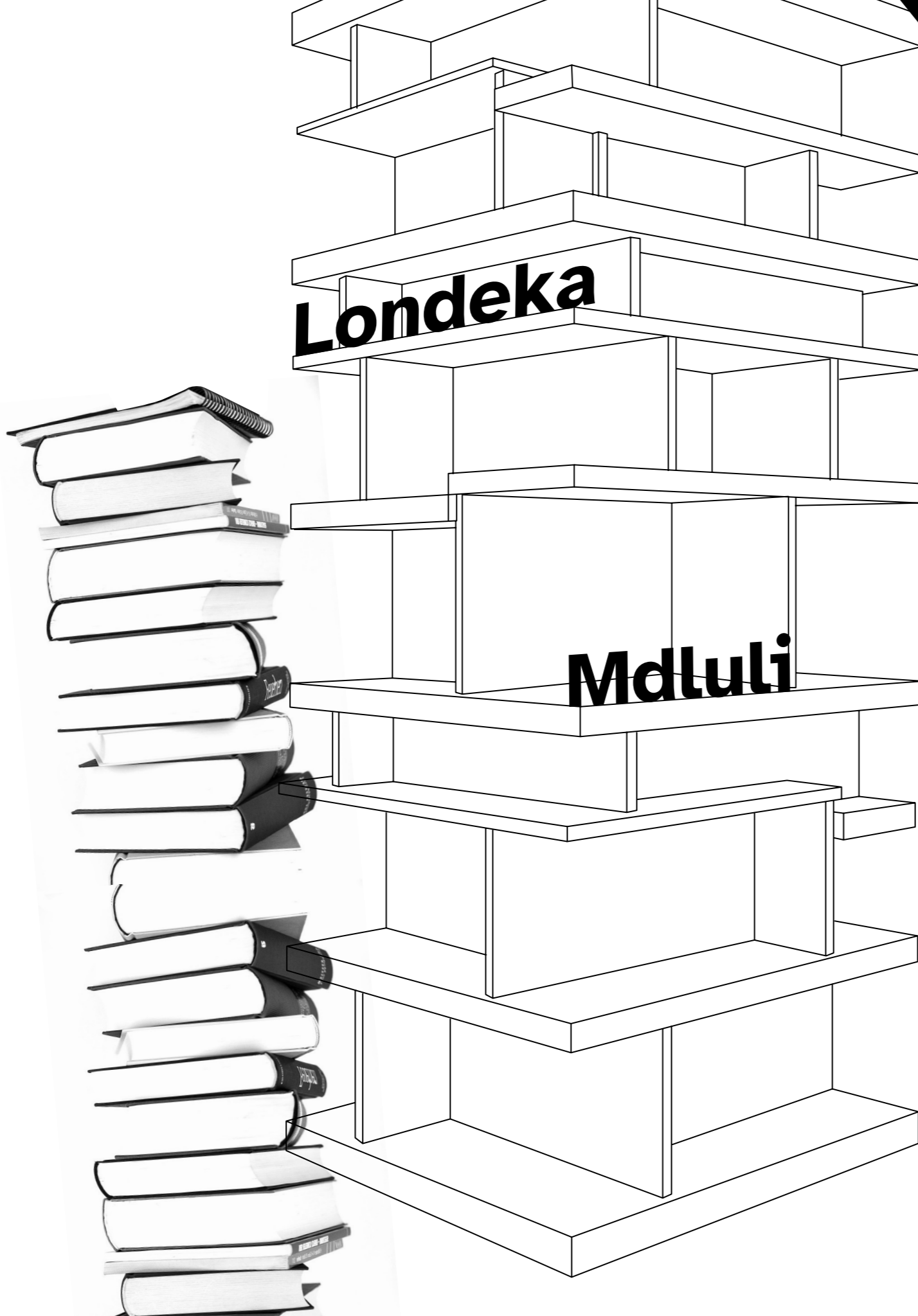
Someday you will write a selfless poem,
if there is such a poem,
as if selflessness exists in any artform, but none of this
is what I mean to say. I mean to tell you this:

Certain he would be blessed with a firstborn son,
your father named you Jonathan
before you were born.

Your mother says your name
unveiled in a vision when you arrived a girl;
she says, *highly born of gentle waters;*
she says *divinely inspired.*

So I have no questions about the person you may have been,
the name re-given to your younger brother—or maybe there are questions
after all.

Remember, Patricia, when the OBGYN pressed the sonogram wand
into the balloon of your belly,
showed a formed face and declared with 90% certainty
your first child a girl. You, too, were surprised the day he arrived
born a son, whom you named
for the sky.



Londeka Mdluli (she/her) is a first-generation South African writer and storyteller. Although she was born in South Africa, she does not shy away from her Zimbabwean heritage. Mdluli's pieces explore the depths of rigor, love, and war. Mdluli is a student at the University of Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa, majoring in Library and Information Science.

Blood moon stars

The blood moon stars have no vices,
they push themselves back into shape,
bending the rubble of rigor and landing.
They bathe in an arithmetic skyline yet to be named.
On the surface beneath it, there are vines growing
instead of trees and tall grasses,
there are leaves weaving themselves back into October,
bracing for the fall.
But there are no legs buckling under the pedigree,
no meticulous bones melting from flesh,
There is just a fall, a tiny glimpse of true earth and her rigor,
her battered taste of men and envy for those darn exploding stars,
she knows that this is the only home you will ever return to,
That this very end will be your only point of reference,
As you begin to unlearn these memories,
this unnerving end to what was once a beginning
will become a homestead for all the things that go unnamed,
for this is the trifling land in which our children do grow.



Gary

Mesick


A Seattle native, Gary Mesick (he/him) is a graduate of West Point and Harvard University. He spent time as an infantry officer and now works in aerospace analytics, where he leads a data management organization. His poetry has appeared in *North American Review*, *New American Writing*, *Sugar House Review*, and elsewhere. His recent collection of poems is *General Discharge* from Fomite Press.

A Pair of Hands

When the rains bring the river this close
To the levee's brim, all you can do
Is pass the sandbags down the line.

It's too late for pointing out where
They *should* have built and too early
To discuss the next contingency.
Right now, it's what you do,
Not what you know, that matters.

Save your muttering for another day.
All we need are your hands.
So pull on your gloves
And belly up to the sand pit.
It's going to be a long night.



Adesiyan Oluwapelumi

Adesiyan Oluwapelumi, (he/him), TPC XI, is an African poet and a naturalist who writes to explore the intersectionality between memory, language, identity, religion, and selfhood. Some of his poems are published or forthcoming in *Poetry Wales*, *Rogue Agent*, *IHRAF Publishes*, and elsewhere. He tweets @ademindpoems.

There are no more butterflies here.

The falling snow hushes the great chaos.
Cruel how the world quiets into a lamb
of innocence after the storm passes away.
The taciturn crickets are testament of this new
-born silence. In the symphony of quietude,
hearts palpate like musical instruments excavated
of their sound chamber and in the hollow of open
torsos a void billows. The crimson wind blows quietly
carrying the cremains of this apocalyptic scenery.
The skies borrow voices to carry the wails of
upturned graves, washed by the sizzling flood,
and screaming against the pattering raindrops
of bullets; gunpowder smoking the atmosphere
into a sooty smog. There is something about aftermaths
and their feigned innocence of beginnings:
how silence whispers in a guise, the soothing
words of a tender-sweet peace, its hollow mouth
trumpeting the melody of a voiceless loquacity.
Call it the simulacrum of a paradox: how the
weight of death is euphemized into the syntax

of a monotone, how a syllable crams the
lengthiness of grief into a porous breath,
how the world quiets after the storm and refuses
to concede culpable to the guilt of mourning.



Patty Seyburn

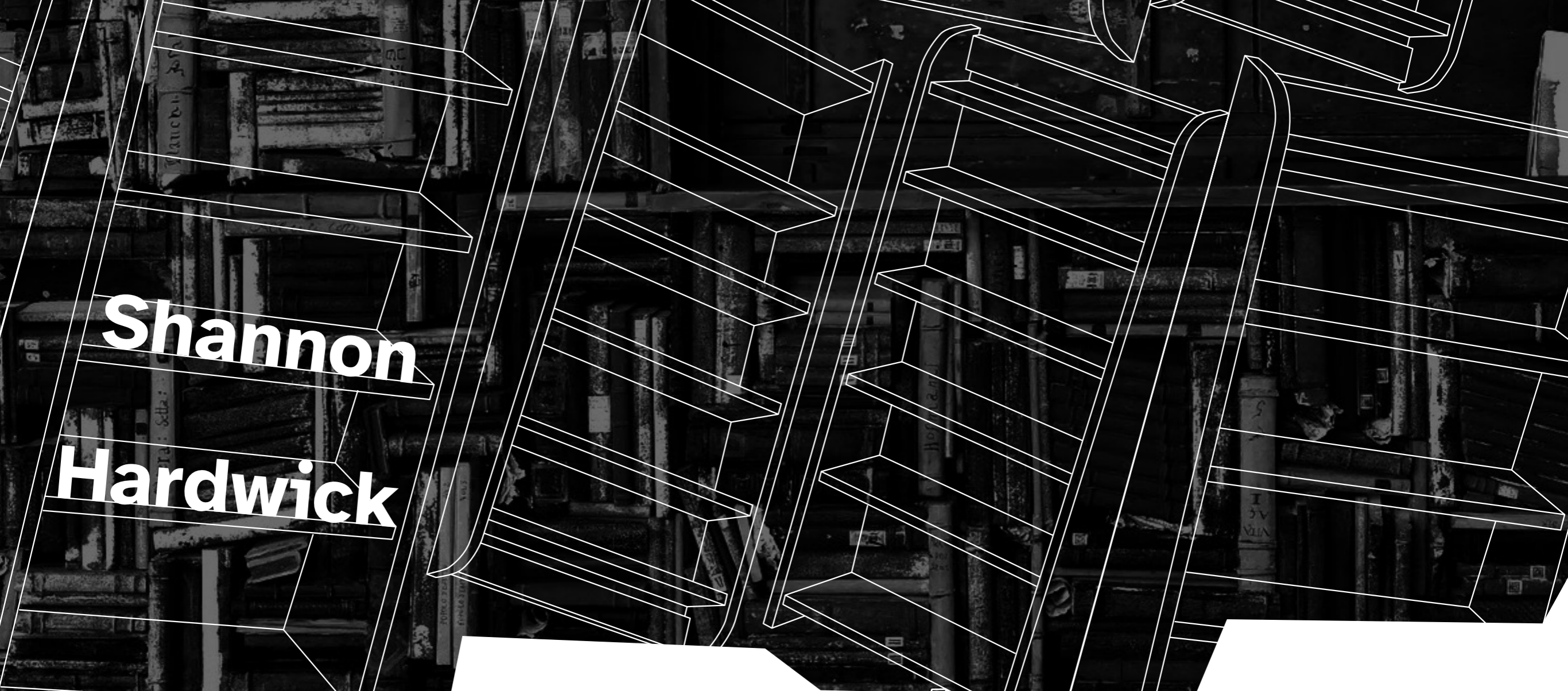
Patty Seyburn (she/her) has published five books of poems: *Threshold Delivery* from Finishing Line Press, *Perfecta* from What Books Press, *Hilarity* from New Issues Press, *Mechanical Cluster* from Ohio State University Press, and *Diasporadic* from Helicon Nine Editions. She is a professor at California State University, Long Beach.

My Street

The first star is like the last house.

—Rilke

The last house is at the corner
of dandelion field and diffidence
and diffidence wears a coat of dusk.
And dusk refuses to be hemmed,
so settle in and settle down.
The light will not lie down,
the light does not lie.
I think the reader lives there
so do not steal those roses.



Shannon

Hardwick

Shannon Elizabeth Hardwick's (she/her) work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gulf Coast Journal*, *Poetry London*, *Salamander*, *South Dakota Review*, *Plume Poetry Journal*, *The Texas Observer*, *Four Way Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Sixth Finch*, and *Passages North*, among others. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College's MFA program, Hardwick serves as the Editor-in-Chief for *The Boiler*.




Your parents
rescued you
on a yacht.
'You' didn't exist until
from a distance a surgeon
poured into a wedding reception.
She, too, was stunned by how
you, several sizes too small
kept dancing inches above her

Leigh

Your parents
rescued you
on a yacht.

'You didn't exist until
from a distance a surgeon
poured into a wedding reception.
She, too, was stunned by how
you, several sizes too small
kept dancing inches above her.



Jessica Zinz

Jessica Dawn Zinz (she/her) is a writer, professor, and artist living in Ohio. She earned an MFA in Creative Writing–Poetry and teaches at Bowling Green State University. Her poetry, artwork, and visual poems have been published most recently in *ctrl+v journal*, *RHINO Poetry*, and *Harpy Hybrid Review*. She is currently working on visual poetry, collage, and other hybrid writing and art related to motherhood. Find some of her work on Instagram: @jessicadawnzinzart.

INTRODUCTION

To tell the truth
as a non-mother

I was convinced that I was

the blend of body

and root rot in the wild

a camouflage between what we displaced
between how we would enjoy the dishonesty

and how we were not

overfull and flooded (and jealous)



At the same time, I left the tumble
of all mothers eating and sleeping
to own cats

you thought I was starving to death

you end up apologizing

I felt exactly as I had felt
between the contractions of growing old

Notes /Materials:

collaged images primarily from *National Geographic* vol. 173, no. 1 January 1988

text sourced from *The Mask of Motherhood: How becoming a mother changes our lives and why we never talk about it* by Susan Maushart 1999

Introduction

To tell the truth
as a non-mother
I was convinced that I was
the blend of body
and root rot in the wild

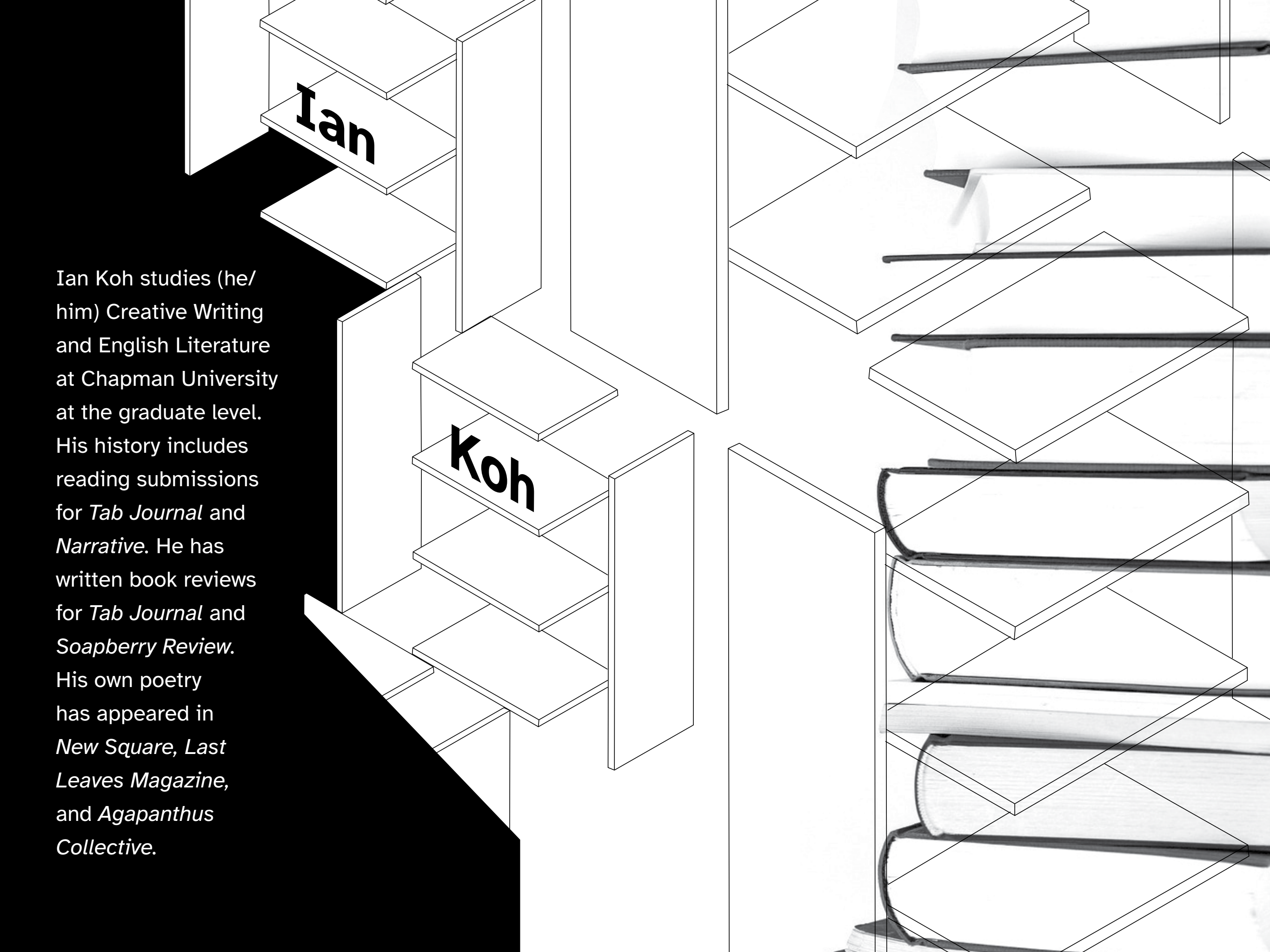
a camouflage between what we displaced
between how we would enjoy the dishonesty
and how we were not
overfull and flooded (and jealous)

At the same time, I left the tumble
of all mothers eating and sleeping
to own cats

you thought I was starving to death

you end up apologizing

I felt exactly as I had felt
between the contractions of growing old



Ian Koh studies (he/
him) Creative Writing
and English Literature
at Chapman University
at the graduate level.
His history includes
reading submissions
for *Tab Journal* and
Narrative. He has
written book reviews
for *Tab Journal* and
Soapberry Review.
His own poetry
has appeared in
New Square, *Last
Leaves Magazine*,
and *Agapanthus
Collective*.

Book review

Burning like Her Own Planet by Vandana Khanna

Alice James Books, 2023

Burning like Her Own Planet is Vandana Khanna's third book of poems. It explores oneness in the narrator's imagination of Hindu mythology through avatars that take the form of goddesses Sita and Parvati. The narrator is feminist and modern, trying to find meaning in the reality of the myths that at first seems disconnected. The restless narrator invokes new sight: "I'm seven and can't sleep / because it's not Virginia" ("Hindu Mythology in Shorthand") and "the next thing I covet: the third eye's velvet blink" ("Prayer to Recognize the Body"). To find oneness, the narrator must recast various voices so that they interact and intersect like role-playing avatars on a new virtual planet: "become one / goddess, and then another, one wife... find our story / where the lines meet" ("On the Eve of Being Reincarnated"). The avatars experience incarnations or multiplicities in their quest to understand their own meaning and purpose. The poems have a lineup of pronouns, like "I" and "you," that operate less like individual characters and more like fragmented voices out of which a new narrative may "shine like a new scar" ("On the Eve of Being Reincarnated"). The opening poem, "Goddess Erasure," cleverly offers a contrast with the poetic direction of the collection for added irony and dramatization as the masculine "he" seems to be a singular individual force that makes the "darkness cruel" without further contextualization. Modern feminism could be thought of as an illuminating arc of interconnected and multiple voices, which break down the isolating walls of the cruel darkness. The illumination engulfs the planet in burning rather than leaves it as a wandering space rock.

The poems explore meaning in incarnation as well. Living in multiple lives challenges the notion of amnesia. For example, Sita's exile to the forest is not about her life being "held together by sap and spiderweb," a metaphor about experiencing disjunction as the typical narrative would have it ("On the Eve of Being Reincarnated"). The fear that drives Sita into exile and fragments her life and roles are not finalities but opportunities for reconstitution. Pronouns as a device suggest de-individualization and interchangeability to recast various voices as something expressive, personal, and perhaps flexible. In "The Goddess Calls Truce," the lines "I'll let myself be mistaken / for someone you once loved, give over / my heart like a night with no end" feature "you" and "I" pronouns that appear to represent separate characters, setting up the action for a final capitulation. However, the reading does not need to suggest weakness or defeat; it could just as well be about balance and harmony. This reading is strengthened because the pronoun "you" is used self-referentially multiple times, such as in "The Goddess Tires of Being Holy." In the poem the narrator addresses themselves as a "you": "Call yourself whatever you want: girl or goddess" ("The Goddess Tires of Being Holy"). The pronouns in the poem come not to feature distinct characters in conflict with each other but, rather, reflections that proceed from a sense of continuity and wholeness that expresses something akin to burning, illumination, clarity, etc.

The concept of incarnation could be seen as a representation of reclaiming agency: A stronger voice and narrative is constructed out of the fragmented voices and multiplicities of the goddesses. In the expression of a personal narrative, allowing oneself to be mistaken does not need to be an abrupt end, a reinforcement that something wrong occurred. It could be more of a kindness, a self-reflection that embraces the past not as something to be erased or conquered but as something that needs revisiting and its own wholeness.

The voices of the two goddesses, Sita and Parvati, silenced and incomplete, lend drama to

the act of recreation and wholeness. The poems visit themes about silencing as they relate to longing: “I want / to learn how to turn all these hurts holy / but no one speaks animal and leaf” (“Destruction Myth”). The feminist voice allies with nature, becoming the forest itself that would otherwise represent exile in the myth. The setting and pronouns of the story are recast so that the goddesses’ roles when recreated might more fully explore the gendered experience. The forest becomes a metaphor for potentiality. Additionally, the concept of being silent seems to be defined as a changing of the message instead of simply being buried by a dominant narrative: “I mean to say yes but, in whispers, everything ends up sounding like death” (“Destruction Myth”). When softness goes hand in hand with abrupt end, the alternative, which is loudening, suggests engulfing space to not let “that bit of her caught on / the wind” become “its own particular sin” (“Reconciliation”).

To recast myth as expressive, modern, and feminist is so to speak to create a planet that burns or takes up its own space through narrative. From existing voices that can come to represent alternative characters generated by the narrator, a new narrative emerges, challenging the fixity of characters to clarify a oneness that allows pronouns like “we,” “you,” and “he” to represent the potentiality for connection and fluidity. This wholeness is like a planet or “sun” born out of a stifling force that hinges on the ironic and perhaps metaphorically sensual: “hold your hand tight / against her throat until it throbs” (“Dharma”).