

**T A B**

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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](http://TabJournal.org).

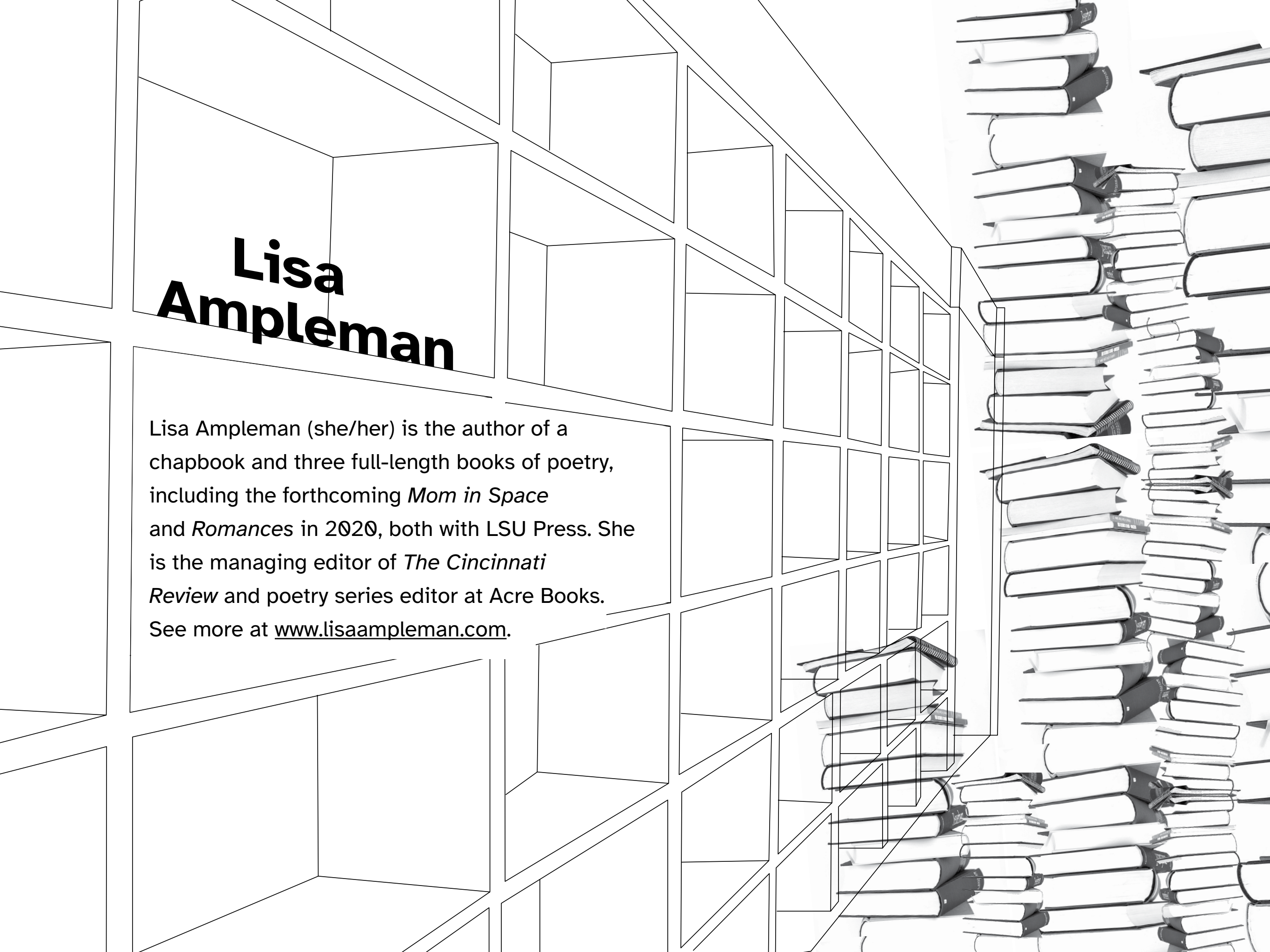
### **Editor's Note**

The September/October 2023 issue of *Tab Journal* contributes to Engaging the World: Leading the Conversation on Health Equity, a co-curricular program hosted by Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. We are especially excited to collaborate with this program because of our work in health humanities, accessibility, and inclusion. We're grateful to Dean Jennifer Keene and Assistant Dean Stephanie Takaragawa for welcoming this work.

The poems we share here grapple with health, illness, the body, and cognition in large and small ways. The work suggests the expansive meanings of *health* and *wellness*, *illness* and *injury*, and speak to the importance of individual experience in the collective conversation of equity. In addition to the poems, we include an interview and four book reviews, which, we hope, lead you to further reading and exploration.

We encourage you to engage with the language and ideas here in this issue of *Tab Journal* and also to take a look at the scope of the broader Engaging the World series at [www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/about/events/etw-health-equity.aspx](http://www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/about/events/etw-health-equity.aspx).

—Anna Leahy, Editor & Claudine Jaenichen, Creative Director



# Lisa Ampleman

Lisa Ampleman (she/her) is the author of a chapbook and three full-length books of poetry, including the forthcoming *Mom in Space* and *Romances* in 2020, both with LSU Press. She is the managing editor of *The Cincinnati Review* and poetry series editor at Acre Books. See more at [www.lisaampleman.com](http://www.lisaampleman.com).

## **A/Steroid**

*with a debt to Destiny O. Birdsong's "Auto-immune"*

It's foolish to think that the word *asteroid*  
without its initial *a* becomes *steroid*,

one descending from a Greek *starlike*,  
the other a twentieth-century sterol + oid.

But I like to imagine my lab-created med  
as an astral compound, my three-pill steroid

dose making my face as puffy as an astronaut's  
in the fluid shift of microgravity. Corticosteroids

curtail inflammation, tame the berserk  
immune system, aren't the anabolic steroids

bodybuilders sneak, though I'd love the sinew  
and stamina they acquire. With my steroid,

I settle for joints that don't feel filled with lava,  
accept jacked-up hunger, ghastly dreams. Steroids

are a compromise in a body set against itself.

Rocky celestial body or starfish, an asteroid

can't come to me in a bottle labeled *[my name redacted]*.

Hallelujah for my holy/unholy steroid.



## **Autoimmunity and Microgravity**

After a year outside Earth's protection, one returned astronaut's  
skin rashed up  
wherever it was touched, allergic to terra firma, the immune system  
righting itself

by lashing out. Old viruses reactivate in space, T-cells speaking less  
clearly to their troops  
without the drag of gravity. And then there's the radiation,  
ten X-rays' worth per day,

photons flashing cosmically even through closed eyelids, streaking  
across the retina,  
personal starshow that can keep a human body from sleep. In the morning,  
I wake up stiff,

sacroiliac joint and spinal column temporarily ossified like a med-school  
skeleton. Sly  
and cunning back pain, cytokines attacking my internal fittings.  
One fateful tweak

in my sixth chromosome guiding an antigen on white blood cells  
to misperform.

Some nights I dream my hips are so rigid I walk with an altered gait,  
I climb stairs as if

wearing a concrete skirt. Spondyloarthritic, a mouthful of a word  
meaning

when the immune system turns on the joints, it doesn't worry about  
the havoc it creates.

When superheated pink plasma seeped through a hole in  
the orbiter's wing,  
after all, it was just air broken apart into ions, doing  
what comes naturally,

not concerned about the disaster to come. Disaster, after all,  
descending from  
"ill-starred," my unlucky astronomy,  
my antimatter parts.



**Lisa**

**Eve**

**Cheby**

Lisa Eve Cheby (she/her) is a librarian, poet, and school library advocate, who holds an MFA and an MLIS. Her poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in journals and anthologies such as *Santa Ana River Review*, *So To Speak*, *Ruminate*, *The Gathering*, *Drawn to Marvel*, and *Coiled Serpent*. See more at [www.lisacheby.wordpress.com](http://www.lisacheby.wordpress.com).

## **Dysfunction**

The little blue pill  
could have soothed  
my mother's heart,  
but the little blue shield  
blocked its way.

## Mom's Martini Shot<sup>1</sup>

I load the trunk with a day's supply of air.

Break down the day into scenes:

from the chair to the door      from the door to the car  
by the automatic door where she rests as I park  
the desk,                              catches her breath

from the car to the bench  
from the bench to reception she grips  
from the desk to the chapel-

-like lobby of the clinic, adorned with crosses, lilies, and retirees who worship  
a movie screen featuring live miracles:

SURGEON SLIPS CLOUDS FROM EYES, SLIDES IN VISION

High on ether and wearing a pirate-patch,  
she heeds the advice of her parrot-sized tank:

*Breathe.*


*Breathe.*

*Breathe.*

Three times a day I drop solution into her eye.  
There is no drop to restore her grayed lungs.

I, with my glasses, sit next to Mom with her 20/20 vision.

<sup>1</sup> the martini shot is the final shot set up for the day on a movie set



# Bonnie S. Kaplan

Bonnie S. Kaplan (she/her) is a poet and educator. Her work appears in anthologies and journals, most recently in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Room*, and *The Bellevue Literary Review*, where her poem “Mastectomy, Simple” was a finalist for the 2021 Marica and Jan Vilcek Poetry Prize. See more at [www.bonnieskaplan.com](http://www.bonnieskaplan.com).

## Prescribed Burn

They gave me my first tattoos, an asterism  
of four black dots pointing to the summer  
the crab burst in my cells, unrelated

clusters in my left breast, right lung,  
synchronous songs of separation.  
It's a myth the body turns on itself.

The moon spoon-feeds the stars  
with estrogen and glucose. Liver,  
bones, and brain roll out the red  
carpet, welcome cells that never die.

We are spun of a delicate fiber.  
It knots—strings break. Of course  
I started a bucket list, trips to see  
Northern Lights, southern penguins.

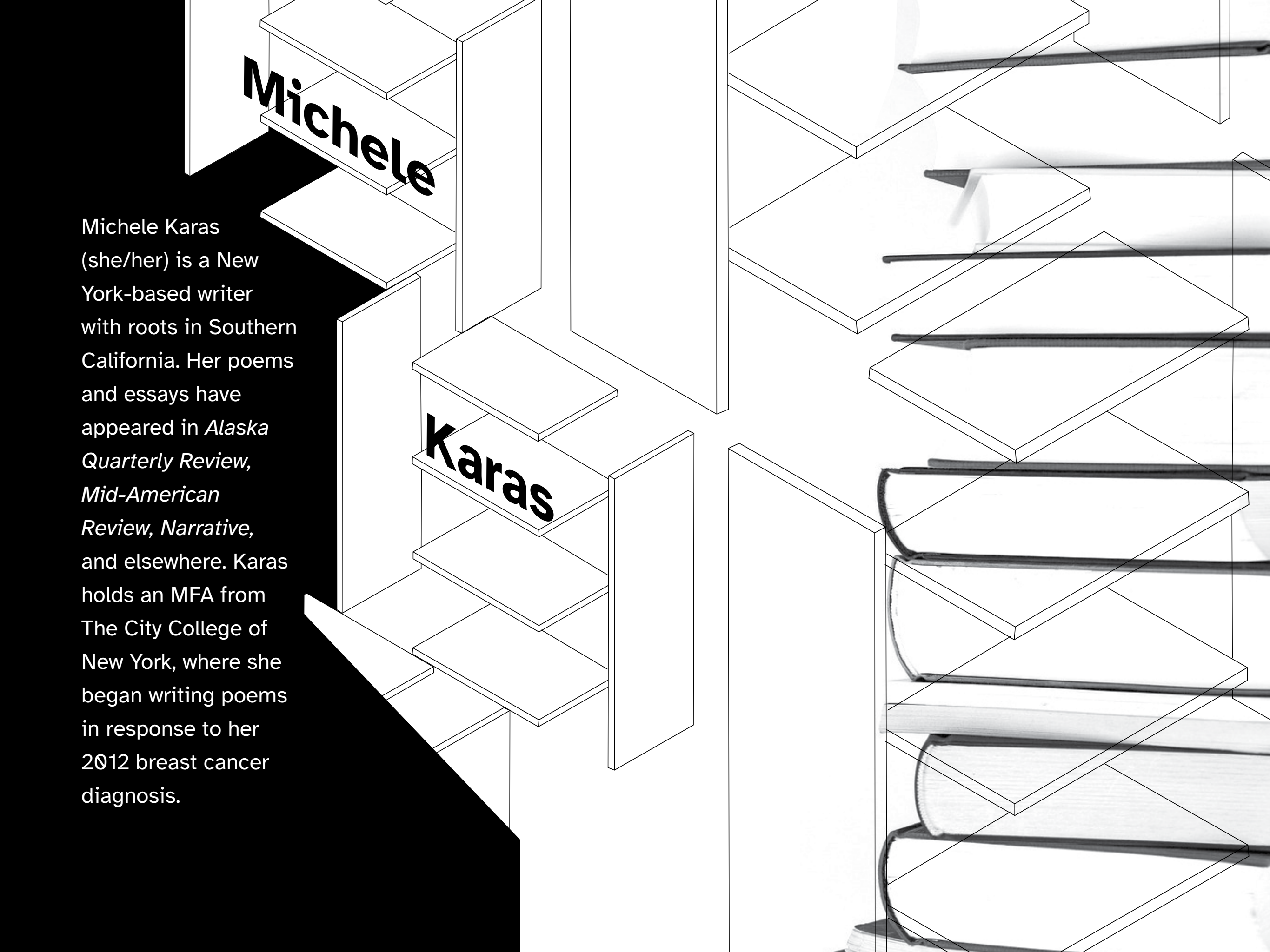
Those four dots on my chest map  
my hope, guide the radiologists' burn,

probe like an alien autopsy. Technicians

scatter before the machine moves its giant  
telescope eye in search of mutant DNA.

They play internet radio. I want it quiet.





**Michele**

Michele Karas (she/her) is a New York-based writer with roots in Southern California. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Narrative*, and elsewhere. Karas holds an MFA from The City College of New York, where she began writing poems in response to her 2012 breast cancer diagnosis.

**Karas**

## **Bad Penny**

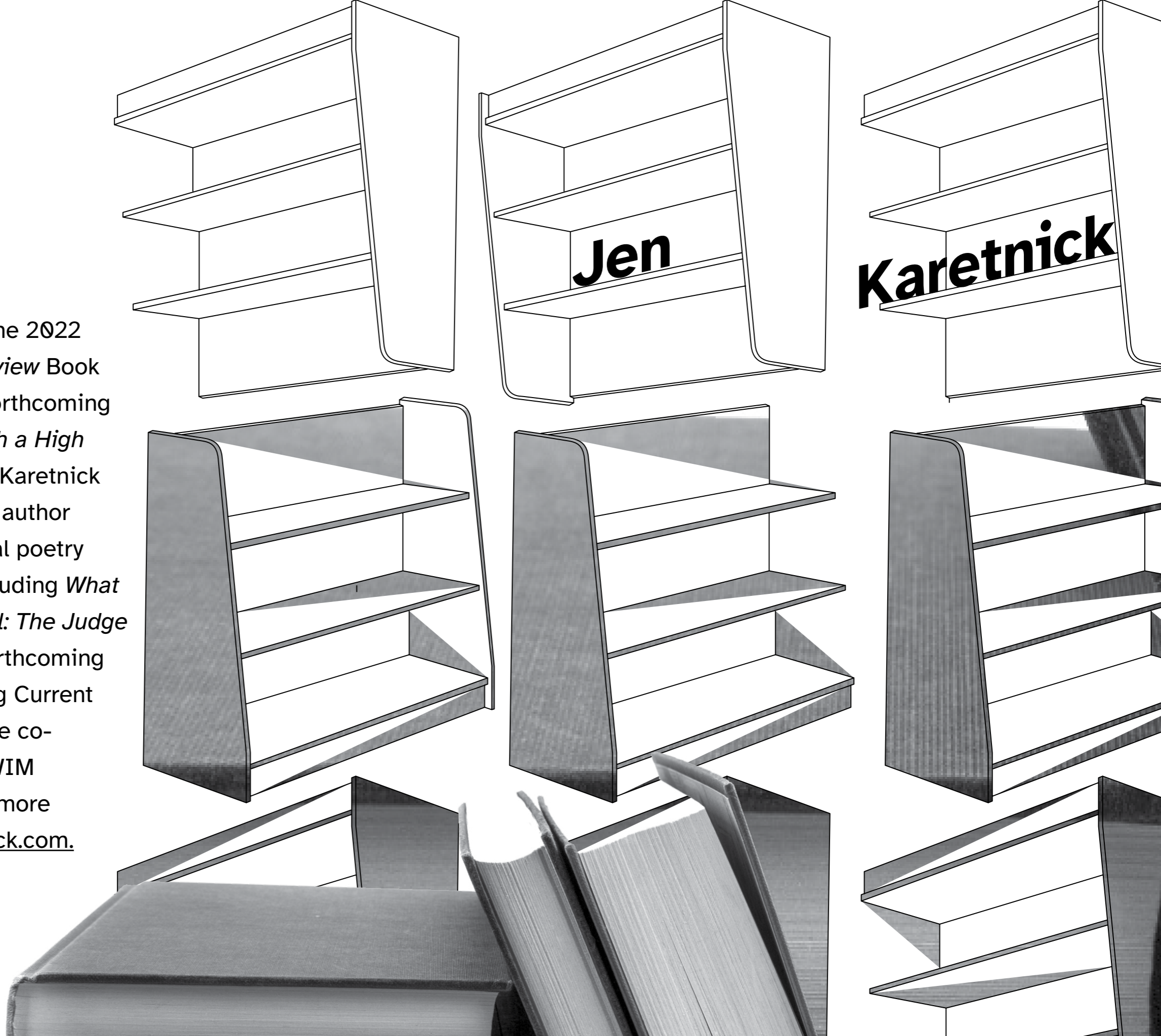
My tumor on the x-ray is the  
only sure thing I'll know today.  
Bad pennies always show up.  
The air in our lungs shows up  
as black. Fat and muscle appear  
as shades of gray. Each day  
inside my chest: undifferentiated  
as two peas in a pod and suspect  
as a flying saucer. Cycles spin  
round. A round copper moon spills  
its iodine glow all over the first  
fallen snow of my forty-eighth year.  
Let hope be a penny. Tomorrow, also.

## Poem With No Sex in It

### *A Pseudo-Cento After Anne Sexton*

a hollow yes // empty as a drained glass // lips once reminiscent of a whispering angel //  
medicines have betrayed the body // her cyclops eye dry // it scrapes open and shut // shut to  
his declaration: we will never have that // since you ask // he has gone out // leaving the bed they  
mistook for a marriage // a raccoon roaming the dump // braver at night // most days she cannot  
remember the last time // to thrust all that life under your tongue // then the almost unnamable  
returns // drooling and matted yet dazzling // to undo an old wound // she cannot forget a drug  
so sweet // the lust // the love // whatever it was

The winner of the 2022  
*Cider Press Review Book*  
Award for the forthcoming  
*Inheritance with a High*  
*Error Rate*, Jen Karetnick  
(she/her) is the author  
of ten additional poetry  
collections, including *What*  
*Forges Us Steel: The Judge*  
*Judy Poems*, forthcoming  
from Alternating Current  
Press. She is the co-  
founder of SWWIM  
Every Day. See more  
at [www.jkaretnick.com](http://www.jkaretnick.com).



## **Obituary for the Order of Things; Or an Abecedarian for Programmed Cell Death**

Apoptosis is an appointed

burden that millions of  
cells know from birth

deep within themselves.

Every day we rise and  
face infinite mortality,

greeted by so many

hyaline deaths that are  
invisible to us, though beneficial, plus

justified to the rest of their

kin. This “falling off, as  
leaves from a tree” is

made to balance division

neat as parted hair, without the fuss  
of inflammation or damage to

properties of neighbors. This high-  
quality suicide is artistic,  
rendering the individual digits of a child,  
sculpting mouse paws, whisking  
tadpole tails away. This is as  
useful in utero as it is with  
viruses, cells killing themselves to  
withhold the spread, though  
xenobiotics can prevent it, force cells to  
yeen again and again into diseased  
ziggurats, leveling us up for the big drop.

Quoted line is from: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK26873/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK26873/)



**Stefanie**

**Kirby**

Stefanie Kirby (she/her) lives and writes along Colorado's Front Range. Her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net and appear or are forthcoming in *Passages North*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Harbor Review*, *The Offing*, *DIALOGIST*, and elsewhere.

## Vocalization

A birthing body baptizes with sound.  
The doula claims the connection  
between mouth and cervix is sacred:  
a clenched jaw can stop birth, keep  
the body from release, delay death by  
whole minutes. She teaches how to  
howl, to deliver breath over the tongue  
in rivers. The depth of each tone, notes  
selected for their resonance in the bones  
and their ability to draw out new life.  
How much harder to respond to  
silence, when no one pulses from  
my body with breath, when there is  
nothing holy left to resolve.



## **Like a Honey pot**

I'm covered with summer bees. Their bodies shift like a coat or runoff or an open door. They've seen my uterus blinking like a star in my abdomen. A uterus starts and ends empty, a hollow in the shape of a hive. Impossible, the bees say, to clear the honey from the blood. Each season after, my body empties in flood: something sticky, something sweet.



# Angie

# Macri

Angie Macri (she/her) is the author of *Sunset Cue*, winner of the Lauria/Frasca Poetry Prize and published by Bordighera, and *Underwater Panther*, winner of the Cowles Poetry Book Prize and published by Southeast Missouri State University. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she lives in Hot Springs and teaches at Hendrix College.

## **Nebbia Fitta**

Dove feathered, heavy fog  
comes along a road.

The woods unfold  
from its wings, forelimbs  
modified for lifting.

Do not deny me.

Open an hour to its minutes.

Then you can look  
at each point as it exits  
the skin, grows to vanes  
that raise weight into sky,  
a structure, understand.

No one can be  
lost in such a living body.



**Jennifer**

**Martelli**

Jennifer Martelli (she/her) is the author of *The Queen of Queens* and *My Tarantella*, named a “Must Read” by the Massachusetts Center for the Book. Her work has appeared in *Poetry* and elsewhere. Martelli has received grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. She is co-poetry editor for *Mom Egg Review*.

## Undying

My friend's hair grayed in one steel  
arc tracing the path of her migraines—  
temple to fontanel to back of skull.

Long ago, I stopped believing in God and felt  
relief so great—a bone chip dislodged,  
the bad tooth pulled—I still can weep.

The dye to keep my hair black is toxic, too.  
You need gloves, can't breathe the fumes  
from the thick purple they comb through.

The polish on my toes, too, is poison—layers  
of dense black matte, and under it all,  
a bruise below my nail, a nightshade, a bloom.

My doctor asks if it's moving and in what direction.  
I wonder about my friend's pain, how it knows  
to follow her gray, or does her gray follow the pain?

My mother's gray was deep as a fog with figures  
moving in it, textures. When I couldn't follow her  
any longer, she insisted on wearing clips in her hair:

tiny ones, spring-coiled with teeth, some pearl  
that shone purple, some tortoiseshell. She wore  
too many, like a child who dresses herself.

In the end, I would pin it all up, all back.  
In the end, it grew so thin, I feared I'd cut her,  
scrape her skull as I pulled a path from her brow.

Even in my unbelief, I believe something arcs  
toward me, rushes like a season, moves  
as the night sky moves, all cut and bruise.

# Angela Narciso Torres

Author of three poetry collections and a senior and reviews editor for *RHINO Poetry*, Angela Narciso Torres's (she/her) most recent book is *What Happens is Neither*, from Four Way Books. Recent work appears in *POETRY*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Poetry Northwest*. She lives in San Diego. See more at [www.angelanarcisotorres.com](http://www.angelanarcisotorres.com).



## Recovering, October

Everyone knows a watched pot / never boils. / I watch anyway / hold  
my breath / till the first / bubble breaks the surface. / Crunching  
through thick rind, / I eat unripe persimmons / a neighbor brought.  
/ Sticky-sweet sap / coats my teeth and fingers. / There's a price / for  
rushing things / before their time. / Kairos: what the Greeks called  
right / or opportune time. / God's time. / The persimmons /  
impatient / in their dimpled skins. / Days lumber by as if through  
bisque. / Lord, let me trust / this honey drip / of minutes. / The cells'  
meticulous knitting. / Even leaves know / this slow work / of turning.





**Angela  
Torres**

**Lúcia  
Leão**

Author of three poetry collections and a senior and reviews editor for *RHINO Poetry*, **Angela Narciso Torres's** (she/her) most recent book is *What Happens is Neither*, from Four Way Books. Recent work appears in *POETRY*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Poetry Northwest*. She lives in San Diego. See more at [www.angelanarcisotorres.com](http://www.angelanarcisotorres.com).

**Lúcia Leão** (she/her) is a translator and a writer from Rio de Janeiro. A board member of The Cream Literary Alliance in West Palm Beach, Florida, her work appears in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *SWWIM*, *Gyroscope Review*, and the anthology *Grabbed: Poets and Writers on Sexual Assault, Empowerment & Healing*.

\* In the following collaboration, the stanzas on the left margin are by Torres, and the indented stanzas are by Leão.

### **Dust of a Thousand Weathers III: An Epistolary of Long Illness**

Who knows better than a grapefruit spoon, the taste of tears?  
I choose a ruby scarf for the rain.

Pain's vocabulary varies with the days. Gallery with no curator:  
the history museum, windows wide to the birds.

In a trumpet-flower's throat, future and past are one.  
A raindrop makes a good pendant. I miss being a flower.

This body of flesh and beans, an embroidery of grains. Days in high relief.  
To feed my family of dreams, I change the frames.

A dog's bark tunnels, thin and far away. The valley is a room  
emptied of snowbirds. A chair gathers words like moss.

The sun is particular, certain it will leave patches untouched, somber.  
And you, parting my hair in the early hours.

Learning to breathe, I renew my vows to air.  
The hawk doesn't ask before plunging from a height.

A wedding without vows, the mountain's veil disappears  
and returns. One pattern in the morning, in the evening, another.

After the storm, mushrooms. I reap a bumper crop of loss.  
What will the next rain bring—thistles or dandelions?

Sick days change the subject. The chimes gossip: a new species  
has arrived. I don't recognize it, myself.

Sunlight pries a curtain, brusque and well-meaning.  
Coffee's on and oh, the rosebuds left a message.

To think I was born from this: days of a thousand weathers,  
rain—and then, again. To think it was born into me, this dreaming.

The last arpeggio is where I begin. One learns to love an ending.  
Outside, wrens peck dropped pomegranates.

Erasures of endings: a wound exposed. The rooftop offers  
empathy to space. You sit with me, sun, hibiscus tea in hand.

All is relative. The unpicked blueberry somehow the sweetest.  
Eye-level, the hawk looms. How puny the mountain seems.

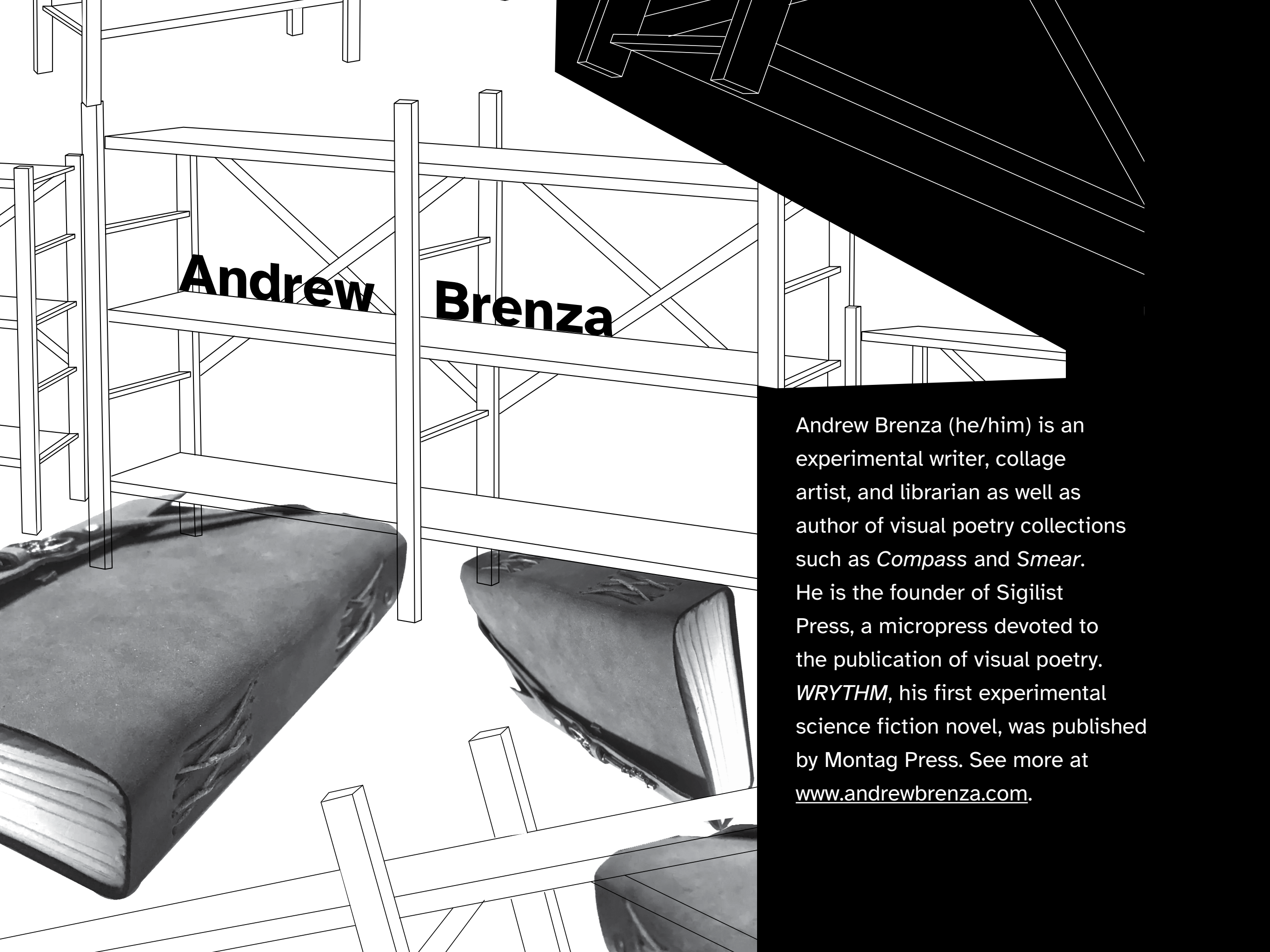
Wolf in Brazilian dark. My sister's voice, a torch in the night.  
The only voice he sees, her light.

My neighbor leaves a basket of persimmons and guavas.  
Musk from these lanterns: a mother's kiss.

With coal in hand I draw a hollow moon on the ground.  
Days will fill it, the generous sun, a friend.

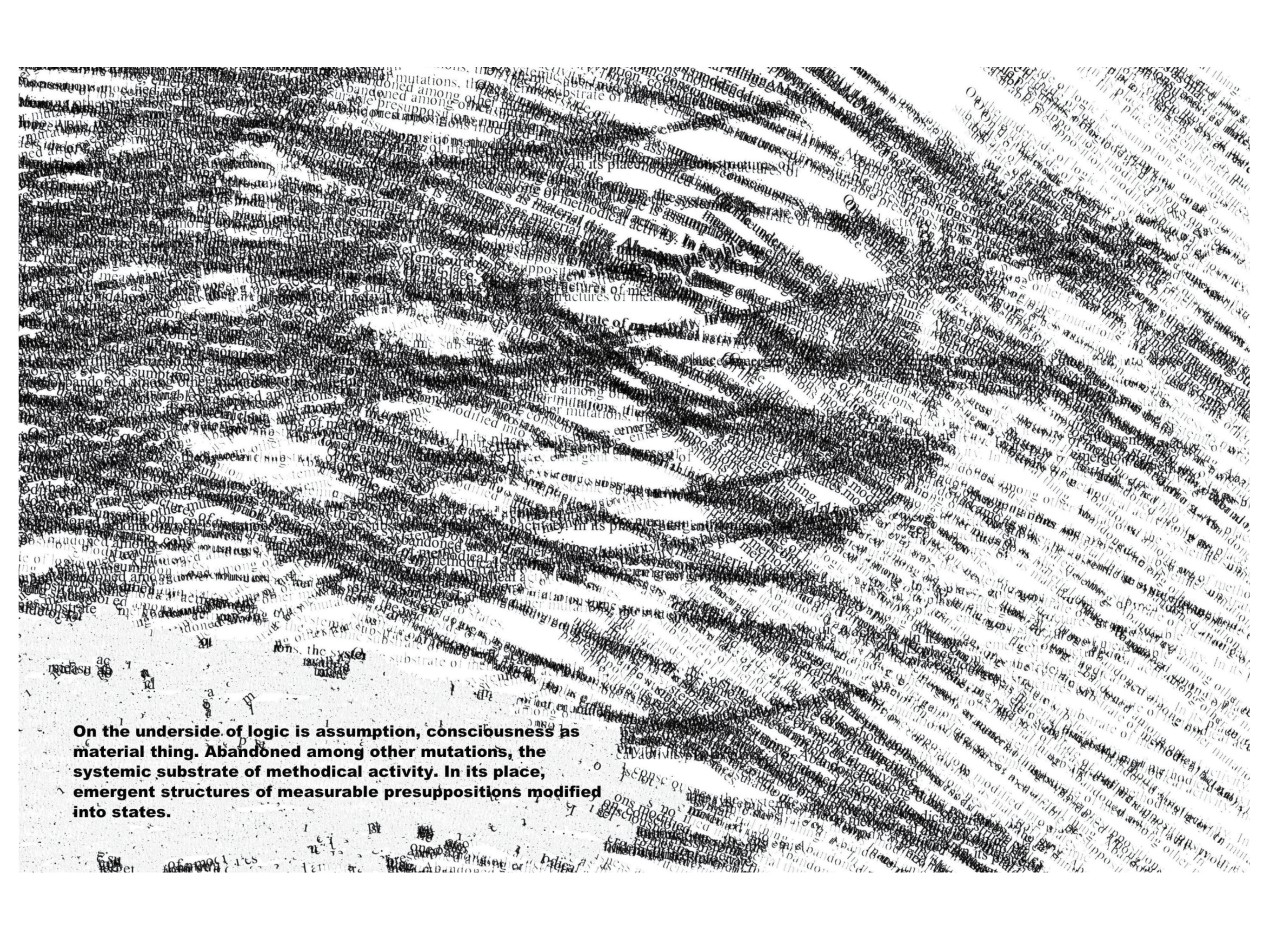
Who swept the tree branches bare?  
Birds are shy. The bruised persimmon, uneaten.

From hunter to beaver moon, this passing-feeling.  
Lipstick red, this leaf. Sunsets compete with me.



# Andrew Brenza

Andrew Brenza (he/him) is an experimental writer, collage artist, and librarian as well as author of visual poetry collections such as *Compass* and *Smear*. He is the founder of Sigilist Press, a micropress devoted to the publication of visual poetry. *WRYTHM*, his first experimental science fiction novel, was published by Montag Press. See more at [www.andrewbrenza.com](http://www.andrewbrenza.com).



**On the underside of logic is assumption, consciousness as material thing. Abandoned among other mutations, the systemic substrate of methodical activity. In its place, emergent structures of measurable presuppositions modified into states.**

## **pod**

On the underside of logic is assumption, consciousness as material thing. Abandoned among other mutations, the systemic substrate of methodical activity. In its place, emergent structures of measurable presuppositions modified into states.



**Sam Risak** (she/her) is an editor at Two Dollar Radio and is the Creative Nonfiction and Graphic Essays Editor at *Sweet: A Literary Confection*. A PhD candidate at The Ohio State University, she has work published in *The Sun Magazine*, *Electric Literature*, *Lit Hub*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and elsewhere. See more at [www.samrisak.net](http://www.samrisak.net).

**Nancy Kuhl's** (she/her) fourth book of poetry, *On Hysteria*, was published in 2022. She is Curator of *Poetry for the Yale Collection of American Literature*, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. See more at [www.phylumpress.com/kuhl](http://www.phylumpress.com/kuhl).



## In Conversation: *On Hysteria* with Nancy Kuhl

**Sam Risak:** “Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences.” One of the opening epigraphs for your latest poetry collection, this line from Sigmund Freud’s *Studies on Hysteria* feels clearly representative of the subject matter for *On Hysteria*, but I was curious if the epigraph’s significance went beyond that. Did this idea of “reminiscences” have any influence on the structure of your collection or any particular poem?

**Nancy Kuhl:** Yes, the epigraph signals that the book’s engagement with *Studies on Hysteria*—and memory, recollection, contemplation of the past, all of this—was very much on my mind in writing *On Hysteria*. But I hope that epigraph points to something else, too: the ways we express things that seem inexpressible. In Freud’s *Studies on Hysteria*, memories one can’t articulate, can’t understand in language, can become the source of hysterical symptoms. In another passage, Freud says of one of his patients: “what she had in her consciousness was only a secret and not a foreign body.”

The way the unsayable is expressed in and through the body can be quite literal, like discovering a shocking secret might *take one’s breath away*. For a 19th-century hysteric, knowledge of the secret might be repressed or forgotten even as a shortness of breath persisted. The secret isn’t consciously remembered; it’s experienced in the lungs. Sensory experiences convey meaning, and that meaning can shift or transform over time. And its relationship to language can evolve unpredictably.

I’m fascinated by the ways these ideas complicate my sense of the relationships between language and the body, memory and forgetting, what’s known and what’s unknown. Symptoms can

be a vehicle for memory, a language for telling secrets. These complications are what I started writing poems about initially.

**Risak:** So, the secret takes a new form. “A Case History,” “Hysteria,” “Archival Footage,” and “Cul-de-Sac” are all examples of titles that appear twice if not three times in the collection. Each title leads to more than one iteration. How did you imagine them working together? What was your intention behind their repetition?

**Kuhl:** Those titles are touchstones in the book. I’m employing multiple perspectives through different poems that approach similar concepts or images. I think of the term “cul-de-sac” as a bit of suburban pretense. It’s a synonym for “dead end,” but these terms obviously have different resonances. I’m trying to hold those meanings, but also the meaning of choosing one of those terms over the other to describe a particular place. Two forms of language can point to a single reminiscence.

And then, in “archival footage”—and maybe this true of “case history” as well—I’m interested in the ways we document the past and return to that documentation as a means of understanding. A piece of film or a family photo album transport us even as it reminds us of all the ways the past is unreachable.

There might be something similar in the idea of a “case history,” but there are other aspects that are distinct to the form, too. These documents can seem to offer an authoritative representation of the past, but they are complicated by limitations and biases in all sorts of ways.

**Risak:** You see a crucial connection between the use of repetition here with Freud's idea of reminiscences. It does seem like there's a parallel here.

**Kuhl:** Absolutely. I'm fascinated by the ways psychoanalysis contemplates repetition. In *Studies on Hysteria*, symptoms can be a way of returning to a traumatic incident. Experience and memory take root in body and behavior, and unconscious preoccupation is expressed through the repetition of symbolic action or the recurrence of meaningful sensation. Repetition allows meaning to accumulate, to evolve into pattern; return functions as emphasis or as a marker of time. And repetition plays so many roles in narrative forms. It can both create and confound the construction and sense of story. Something similar can happen in sonic structures and lyric, too. Repetition can exhaust itself, of course, but even then, there can be something compelling in that collapse as well. Poetic form offers excellent ground for exploring the ways these different kinds of repetition can interact.

**Risak:** Many of your speakers feel mentally or physically captive, and as a result, their days have a monotonous quality. Yet, somehow, your collection—the poems themselves—feels dynamic. What techniques did you use to strike this balance? How did you capture the feeling of being stuck without making readers feel stuck?

**Kuhl:** Your comment describes something in my experience growing up in the suburbs: a sense of constraint I experienced in that environment. For me—and this isn't a new observation on my part—suburbia was a landscape in which things were never really what they appeared to be. Often, pretty surfaces occluded ugly realities. Inconsistency and ambivalence mapped reality

in complicated ways; that world was shrouded in an ambient tension created by unexamined contradictions, making it feel bounded.

Something similar might be true in terms of Freud's patients. Scholars have speculated about the founding patients of psychoanalysis—Anna O. and Dora, whose real names were Bertha Pappenheim and Ida Bauer—suggesting their symptoms had something to do their narrow social roles, that intense limitation.

Your use of the word “static” is important to me because I'm interested in the ways confinement, and even something like claustrophobia, aren't fixed. They are, in fact, dynamic states of being. In writing about this, I've been curious about how lyric or image or other aspects of poetic form can reveal the depths and complexity—the richness—of what might appear to be a cramped psychic space.

Your question reminds me, too, of how limited language and writing can seem. We employ poetic tools or modes of imagination to try to shape a reading experience that feels alive. But when you write something down, you necessarily foreclose another possible expression. You made a choice that creates the static lettering on the page.

**Risak:** Because of the strong association between hysteria and domesticity, it would be difficult to imagine this poetry collection excluding images of the home. *On Hysteria* contains these images, but it also includes numerous images of water, which feels like a less obvious association. Do you think of the dynamic nature of water as a contrast to the confines of the domestic space?

**Kuhl:** I haven't thought about it before, Sam, but you're right about these two things—bodies of

water and suburban landscapes—creating a certain counterpoint. And this also recalls your earlier question: like the cul-de-sac, for me, the shoreline functions as a physical space, a compelling idea, a powerful and multivalent symbol. And of course, poetry allows such a concept to be multiple and open.

Tides can seem so regular, coming and going in time in an utterly predictable pattern. But there's real uncertainty, too. Tides meet storms, and what was reliable and reassuring becomes dangerous and potentially devastating. It's impossible to think about the force of the tide as simply symbolic when the threat of that force has become so unavoidable and constant in our time of climate crisis. That reality and the fragility of it all—it's hard to not have this on your mind when contemplating a real or imagined place where the land meets the sea.

**Risak:** Several of the poems include reference material from Sigmund Freud. How and why did you decide to incorporate this outside material?

**Kuhl:** The notes call attention to specific ideas I'm confronting in *Studies on Hysteria* through Freud's and his patients' language. I think of them as "gloss notes." The word "gloss" appears elsewhere in the book and its many meanings are important to me. I hope to suggest explication and commentary but also glancing attention and equivocal analysis. Even luster and brightness are at issue.

I should add: I'm not always quoting the text exactly. I'm having my way with it somewhat, combining it with and embedding it my own language. I'm elevating aspects of the stories represented in the text, but I'm also using its language for my own ends.

This brings me back to your earlier question about the case history. I'm intrigued by the

complexity of this form: a doctor's report of his patient's experience, the use of a patient's language to develop theoretical ideas. Often, a case history is all we have of the patient's experiences, but surely those experiences are changed in unknowable ways as they are transmitted to us through the doctor's experience, the doctor's writing, his ambition. Writing a poem called "A Case History," I'm adding my own layers to this, adding my experience as a reader, my interest as a writer.

**Risak:** And perhaps your experience as a librarian? Much of your career is centered around increasing the accessibility of research. Do you believe your collection—as well as poetry more broadly—is a tool that can encourage people to learn about topics they may not have otherwise?

**Kuhl:** Poetry is useful to me as a mode of thinking; paying attention to language in the way poetry requires is often perspective shifting. So, in that way, for me, yes, it's a means to learning, expanding my field of vision, exploring subjects about which I'm curious. Writing *On Hysteria* allowed me to contemplate how differently poetry and psychoanalysis are interested in language, articulation, narrative. Each has complicated my thinking about the other.

Maybe it shouldn't go without saying: when I'm talking—or writing—about Freud or his patients, I'm talking as much about what I imagine as about what I've read. I'm a serious reader of Freud, but I'm not a scholar or historian of psychoanalysis. Writing poetry has been a way to work through ideas and histories that interest me, but it's never only that. Poetic form has its own history, includes its own aesthetic arguments, philosophies, and values, all of which are always in the mix, too. The field includes many ways of knowing, or maybe ways of trying to know.

**Risak:** In the final poem, “Takes Place,” the speaker states “I keep telling // the story; I worry there’s / nothing more to know. // Again, I circle back.” I believe most readers will be able to find truth in this line: who hasn’t returned to a memory in the hopes of finding answers that may or may not be there? But I wanted to know how true the line felt to you as a poet. Do you ever feel as though you’ve written everything you have to say? If so, what drives you to write anyway? How do you discover that element of surprise?

**Kuhl:** I’ve been writing for a long time about some of the things we’ve been talking about—about suburbia, its distinct silences, the specific confinements of domesticity (especially for women), the ways memory shapes and reshapes understanding, the ways narrative works. And yet, I can’t say that I feel today like I understand any of it in a way that’s closer to understanding it completely. Though, I can’t really imagine it would be possible to ever understand something like memory or silence completely. I can’t even think what that would mean.

We’re talking about repetition and narrative again. And about memory. I tell a story over and over, recognizing that it’s always evolving, that I’m always remaking it. I learn something, I forget something, the story changes. But still I rely on narrative to shape time, to know the past, to imagine what’s coming. It’s built into the ways we experience the world, the ways we understand our lives, the ways we know our minds. I’m not sure it’s possible to get to the bottom of what interests me about all this. Writing keeps offering new ways to consider well-worn questions, doesn’t it? Poetry is full of surprises.

# Ian Koh

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





## Book review

*Flare, Corona* by Jeannine Hall Gailey

BOA Editions, 2023

To be “irradiated” is to be bombarded enough that you turn into the bombardier (“Irradiate”), suggests Jeannine Hall Gailey in her sixth book of poetry. In *Flare, Corona*, when societal narratives have stopped hitting and the skin has peeled away, “a harbinger” of social trial-runs for the sake of progress looks back with pitiful, searching eyes for whatever was lost to history (“My Life Is an Accident”). This narrator is somehow suited for the role of a death-prone, hospital-visiting subject surrounded by the kind of tragedy-inducing medical circumstances that make the media fear-mongering seem trivial by comparison.

Death is “an old sweater I’ve casually tossed aside” (“Self-Portrait as Escape Artist”). But desensitization is not invulnerability. The narratives can saturate and mutate someone’s mind. What results is the mutant, a somber reminder that to irradiate can just as much be a state of being as it can be an action. These poems peek out of the irradiated mutant’s goggles at a landscape in desperate need of toxic containment and ask readers to reflect upon the beings that fill it with radiation. More importantly, *Flare, Corona* asks, where is the “I” in a landscape filled with contamination?

There is a reckoning in these poems that comes from wanting to be more a product of human than actual human. Can we actually hear a healing narrative when all one consumes is ominous storylines? Gailey captures this conundrum with a type of poetics that may have gone by a variety of names, but for the sake of simplicity, I will call it the *poetics of references*.

Think about the familiar, the way children talk of shows they've watched as if their personality and identity might revolve around that story too, even though they know it doesn't. The poetics of references is one that suggests inadequate or placeholder vocabulary that is filled in by linking back to something else. Both the speaker and the listener are lacking in vocabulary to communicate, so they must use references to suggest they are legitimately in the moment with each other and not speaking or hearing gibberish they can't understand.

In "Mutant Sonnet: Self-Portrait as Bad 1950's Science Fiction Movie," the narrator references *The Giant Leech Woman*, *Killer Shrews*, *King Dinosaur*, and *The Night of the Giant Gila Monster*, shows that this young reviewer admittedly finds anachronistic and unfamiliar. The vocabulary is alternative and cult-like and builds up to a moral dilemma at the end:

Think hard before you point your pistol,  
the laser gun, before you set the dynamite or A-bomb  
on the life forms unique and pitiful, stranded  
upon your planet, wishing only for home.

The poetics of references is not so much about the message, no matter how agreeable, than about the occasion: Humans need to absorb, change, and grow; we need to mutate. Make the best of whoever's here, preserve the planet you're on, remember it in the body.

This collection has preserved a narrative account of the corona virus as an example of humanity's mutation for posterity ("This Is the Darkest Timeline"). As part of history, the corona virus is going to be a point to bring up or that will continue to radiate out for a long time to come. Grim narratives and foreshadowing occasion their appearance alongside grim references

in poems like “In the Movie of My Life” and “Every Time I Take Another Cancer Test, I Feel the Universe Collapsing.” The narrator is both bombarded and bombarding as if nothing ever really changes for the better, all while mutating on the inside. Everything seems to repeat, magnify, then radiate out as a grim conversation point. The narrator explains this more in “Blood Moon, Flare, Coyote,” in which a symptom of multiple sclerosis called a *flare* becomes a metaphor for the radiation: “blazing in the brain, / creating bright halos of inflamed nerves, / casing messages to darken, flame out—.” The physical representation of the act of radiating as a medical symptom is how the narrative comes to be imagined.

The medical symptom is the sickness waiting to be discovered. Our narratives are sickness spreading out. To view things positively, to irradiate is perhaps about embracing and accepting the awkwardness and misunderstanding of being human, the polluting radiation experienced when one necessarily must embrace destiny. There is still a need for connection even if the links are vague and obscure to other humans: the need to fill life in with something, whether it is being “mad at traffic” or finding profundity in “my Netflix recommendations” (“When I Thought I Was Dying”). At the end of the day, to radiate is to live, to be something, to do something. *Flare, Corona* grapples with existence as and the adherence to a force rather than as a passive object mired in a toxic landscape.

Ultimately, the acceptance of narratives as grim is the first step to anticipating better. Gailey recasts mutation as accommodation and growth. And perhaps, too, people keep mutating so that, out of a belief in better, a narrative might emerge that would one day clear the toxic landscape, not as an accident but, in “Calamity,” as a benevolent mutation: “a city is being decimated by Godzilla / or was it a bunch of genetically engineered dinosaurs?”



**Makena**

**Metz**

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## Book review

*Cataloguing Pain* by Alison Blevins

Yes Yes Books, 2022

It is hard for me, as someone who is disabled and chronically ill, to find the right words to share my lived experiences. Each individual who has gone through medical trauma has had their own subjective point of view, and these experiences cannot be equated. In *Cataloguing Pain*, Alison Blevins illuminates the nuances of her own conditions with specific, evocative, and engaging language. In her poetry book, Blevins is vulnerable in both the grotesque and beautiful parts of her life of living with multiple sclerosis and chronic pain.

Before *Cataloguing Pain*, Blevins released *Handbook for the Newly Disabled*. The structure of that earlier book (also reviewed in this issue of *Tab Journal*) is much like the mobility aid that Blevins herself uses in her daily life. It is broken into ten numbered sections, each of which has five sections, with the poems themselves written in five-line stanzas. These structures hold up the book, supporting Blevin's poetry with frameworks that keeps the reader comfortable in the expectation of the form of the poems, regardless of content. Some of the language itself is also working as an accessibility aid by reading as captions for images. That book sets the stage for Blevin's new book, *Cataloguing Pain*, which explores how her MS diagnosis affects her partner, children, and art alike. Her poetry reveals the beautiful as painful, and the painful as exquisitely beautiful.

In *Cataloguing Pain*, Blevins brings us into a niche world that expands on the ideas in *Handbook for the Newly Disabled*. Unlike *Handbook for the Newly Disabled*, *Cataloguing Pain*

is not overtly structured. Instead, different forms of poetry reflect the effects of pain on an individual's body and life. The first poem sets the tone and introduces a voice that is direct, vulnerable, angry, frustrated, and accessible to those who have not experienced MS. "Cataloguing Pain as Marriage Counseling" reads as follows:

When my legs slowly paralyzed—heavy rain, wood, stone—I spent hours holding tight to the kitchen table trying to lift each knee into the pressing air. An editor once asked in an encouraging rejection letter why the manuscript had to be so depressing.

The form of this poem is a paragraph, justified on both margins. The words are in a block of text, which cements the imagery of heaviness. These natural materials weigh us down.

The poems in *Cataloguing Pain* feel more frenetic than in *Handbook for the Newly Disabled*, in part because the forms move from short paragraphs to multiple lineated stanzas, and then back and forth again.

One poem struck me as important in illustrating how Blevins uses pain as language. The single sentence of "3 am on the toilet, the shell forgets" reads:

The shell forgets children are in the house and how many, occasionally remembers children exist—how skin softly hardens at the heels and elbows, the first crunch of cinnamoned sugar on toast in the mouth, jumping bones that bend and run on landing—is startled by how fortunate it is for them to be so helpless and goes back to sleeping or pissing.

The language in this poem is hard to speak, hard to say, as if the tongue gets twisted in articulation, like the imagined sound of nerve endings sizzling.

Blevins as a poet embraces the paragraph poem often, which is why it's important to notice when she breaks from that form. In "I know I'm still breathing from my lungs," Blevins plays with shorter line lengths. The shorter second stanza reads as follows:

Let's stay here with the geese and strays  
the warm wet knee pit and sweet  
musk under our clothes  
safesafe here and home together.

The repetition of sounds in this poem creates an environment that, as Blevins says, is warm and sweet. I want to linger in these words and imagery she's created. The line breaks add pause into this world too. The silence between the lines is an extension of the present, forcing us to take our time reading, and indeed stay safe here, in these words.

In *Cataloguing Pain*, Alison Blevins brings us into her world and makes the mundane horrifying and the horrifying mundane. The language asks the reader to rage, question, and grieve. But Blevins also finds beauty. These poems recognize beauty in or alongside physical pain as well as in the emotional pain of medical trauma, disability, or chronic illness. Her poetry is visceral, stunning in its simple communication of such a complicated topic. Just as pain reminds our nerve endings that they work, Blevins's poetry makes us feel alive.



# Hannah Montante

Hannah Montante (she/her) is a writer, teacher, and singer-songwriter who writes about quirky characters and semi-true events. Her writing has been published in *Sad Girls Club*, *Great Ape Journal*, *Paper Lanterns*, and *Neuro Magazine*. She is an alum of Chapman University.



## Book review

*Handbook for the Newly Disabled, A Lyric Memoir* by Alison Blevins  
BlazeVOX Books, 2022

In her recent poetry collection *Handbook for the Newly Disabled, A Lyric Memoir*, Allison Blevins offers refreshingly honest reflections of her experiences as a queer disabled woman. The memoir is a quick read, full of vivid imagery and images with accessibility notes underneath. That's the beauty of Blevins's poetry: anyone can enjoy and learn from her musings.

Woven throughout the poems are colors that express Blevins's fears about her own changing body and the bodies of those around her. In section II of the sharply named "My Neurologist (Who Doesn't Have MS) Explains Pain is Not a Symptom of MS," Blevins writes, "Disability isn't always like the child born blue and still— / some is simply a dream of rewind, how a person can never go back to their warm bloody shell." This visceral description is one you can truly feel, forcing the reader to confront their own internalized fears about their own health or the health a loved one. Blevins uses warmth to describe one's physical existence and the possibility for disability to change the body at any time. Similar imagery is repeated in section IV of "Cubist Self-Portrait of Woman and Anger," conveying Blevins's fears about her children: "How alive my children seem screaming / through snow banks, cold clings to their cheeks—a red bloodless rash." What should be a lighthearted observation of fun turns into an ominous visual, appropriately portraying the dangers of simply being alive.

Another color that becomes woven through the collection is white, making its first appearance in its namesake poem. Above her verses, Blevins includes a Herman Melville quote

from *Moby Dick*: “... there is a peculiar emptiness about the color white. It is the emptiness of the white that is more disturbing, than even the bloodiness of red.” This image of emptiness continues in the actual poem: “how chemo dripped thick / and red into her chest, and her white breasts—scooped from skin—.” She ends section II with: “Now every room is white and glowing, white glows from our windows like something terrifying lifting from a field.” Her friend’s brush with breast cancer causes them both to feel the shocking weight of death’s looming presence.

While Blevins uses red, blue, and white to represent one’s health and the state of one’s body, she illustrates more positive aspects of life with a body through colors that evoke spring and nature imagery. One awakening she describes is that of a sexual nature, detailed in “How to Fuck a Disabled Body.” In section III, Blevins states, “I want every orgasm to surprise like spring—how pink-purple sneaks and sprouts, / how green lounges like a flung shawl.” The beautiful description demonstrates that Blevins’s expression of her sexuality is a temporary relief from limitations of her disability. Another escape she has is her daughter, with her “delicate toddler sour smell, flesh and soil and crushed dandelion milk.”

Blevins’s clever and poignant collection of poetry carefully articulates the often-unspoken realities of what it means to have a disability, whether they are obstacles and fears she faces or moments of pure joy.



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## Book review

*I Feel Fine* by Olivia Muenz

Switchback Books, 2023

*I Feel Fine*, the newly published poetry book by Olivia Muenz, is innovative in form and content and is cerebral, thought-provoking, and engaging. Muenz breaks traditional formatting constraints to discuss and demonstrate the interior world of someone who is living in and working with their disabled body. This collection explores the duality of mind and body, as well as how to acknowledge and create community and self-worth out of physical and mental difficulties. Most noticeable on the first flip through the book is the consistently justified, short-paragraph formatting. If life working with a disabled body is unpredictable and unfamiliar, then this collection about life with a disability mirrors this balance between expanse and constraint. *I Feel Fine* urges readers to consider the importance of seeing disability directly from those who have and continue to live within and alongside it and to confront our questions, fears, and preconceptions about the disabled community.

*I Feel Fine* begins by solidifying both the connection and separation between mind and body with a short dedication:

Here is my brain. It is writing this. For you. In Times New Roman. To make us both feel. Better. We feel even. Here is my brain. Here is my brain on drugs. No eggs this time. Only the good ones. The doctor ones. Perfectly legal. I feel fine [...]

This prefatory paragraph of a poem situates the reader and the speaker within the world of the speaker's mind and body. We hear the speaker talk to themselves and to us as readers. The words are "For you" and also "To make us both feel. Better." Is the speaker trying to put their own mind at ease or the reader's? This ambiguity introduces the layered and oftentimes confusing world of living with and in disability. What or who is the priority? The body or the mind? Oneself or others? This paragraph closes with "We are. Fine. Welcome to my book," which collapses author and speaker and invites the audience to continue on this exploration of the confines of mind and body. For now, "we" are fine, whether this includes only the narrator or all who are reading—and whether it is a pretense, a politeness, or sarcasm.

*I Feel Fine* functions as a structured stream-of-consciousness, an organized wandering, a wandering organization. While there is a consistent prose-poem format, some pages contain three paragraph-length stanzas, where others contain only a single sentence spanning a short line. The unpredictable structure of this collection reveals that things can survive and thrive outside of a predictable, stereotypical, or neurotypical route—this includes both mind and body. The variable speech and rapidly firing thoughts of the narrator punctuate this book with fun quips, insightful statements, and myriad surprises.

On page 15, for example, the poem kicks us out, with only one line populating the page: "Here are my keys. Now get lost." However, the following page surprises us:

Here is my urine. Sample. I made it just for you. I hope you like it. I wiped the outside with toilet paper. I even signed it. I packed this silver tray just to deliver it to you. I hope you don't mind the

garnish. I couldn't decide between turnips and peaches.

On one page, we are told to leave the body. Then, we are on the receiving end of a urine sample. This back-and-forth is an effective representation of living with disability. In one moment, the speaker—and the reader—is unwelcome in the body, whether it be the physical body or the body of text. Then, the speaker returns to the body to perform necessary functions. *I Feel Fine* is, then, likely to resonate with those living with disability and is likely to inform those who may not have experienced something similar.

*I Feel Fine* is also deeply concerned with community and selfhood. The desire for safety in one's own body is introduced and aptly described quite well with the concept of "Big Community."

But I am in a Big Community. With myself. I am the Big Leader.  
I am the defect. I don't want. To pay taxes. I am crocheting a big  
safety net. For all of us. I am working. Very hard.

But the phone calls are not going through. Hello. Operator  
please give me. A real out.

But I can't find the end. Of the line. It grows faster. Than me I  
am playing. A big game. I eat all. The bits.

The speaker is worried about keeping their own self-made community—and body—together. How can one keep their body together when life is moving too fast or unpredictably to maintain it?

This question is pertinent and permeates the text. Disability presents a crucial set of challenges and questions for the narrator: Where is the end? Is there an end? Can I work hard enough to make all the parts of me safe, both mind and body? Will my communities keep me safe? *I Feel Fine* faces these difficult questions head on, which makes the book important and honest.

In the penultimate piece of *I Feel Fine*, Muenz writes, “I’m coming back down for a surprise party. I’m still alive. I’m still here.” While the book contains the well-articulated mental and physical struggles of the speaker, it ends with the important sentiment that the body and mind are still here, even though there are still surprises and unpredictable experiences ahead. *I Feel Fine* is a thoughtful, informed exploration of the confines of the self, whether that be mentally or physically, as well as the confines of the paragraph and the page. *I Feel Fine* explores and works to answer these questions and more. It’s an engaging, highly introspective, and informative book about disability, self-worth, and the duality of mind and body worth reading.