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# EPIGRAPH

## MAGAZINE

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# Brooklyn, February

Kamden Hilliard

you leave me eleven dollars on the dresser  
to catch a cab chafing drool  
down the pipedark avenues

i am tricked and treated and slowed  
under this hurricane-comedown kind of night  
a consumer's disdain:

we all know all vanishes  
and that makes nothing easier  
thats still satelite-light  
dappling your broke-lyn loft(not stars)  
the moon's benevolence like you  
is a trick of perception

and maybe you will miss me  
or will me a minor heartache  
but thats still eleven dollars and these  
bruises are still burrowing  
upward

the cabbie laughs *ehh this damn sure*  
*aint enough to get you home bruh*

i wonder why he thinks id go back anywhere  
ive been? when i think *return*  
its more keyboard diction than reckless boom-  
eranging i find like lot  
theres nothing to be gained in the past

and thankfully eleven dollars is far enough  
to think about my next line of white inhalations or  
exhaltations pouring me half empty  
down a drain which isnt so bad which  
isnt so anywhere ive been before

## winding in the trees

Kamden Hilliard

*All Art depends upon exquisite and delicate sensibility, and such continual turmoil must ultimately be destructive of the musical faculty.*

--"Impressions of America," Oscar Wilde

what kind of country would floodgate this noise?  
motorcycles in the trees? not you america  
i don't want you to be that kind  
of place or perhaps not the kind of place  
to put my reckless living where all is cauliflower  
ear and neon tipsy plus

in addition how will I ever write about you? you're always  
talking i can't *crossing-brooklyn-ferry* you I can't stand  
my own mind when that greasy eye-holder presses  
my dining car window this stagecoach of thought is stalled  
in your rusted field of cornhusk capitalism and no  
i won't leak what I'm freighting because im not ready to cry  
only you break to buy  
oh you know what im sayin dont *american heritage* me  
you know what i mean what im making dont call  
my educated ultimatum an argument blue star boy  
i can barely listen over your corduroy dreams of merit  
you lovely miscreant

miscried creation i gotta ask: how may i remain  
delicate? and properly tuned how is there an  
F and an F# when your flying monkeys superhighway me?

fine fine i will tell you how tell you howling tell you american  
fastfood syntactical advances it takes a certain lack of control  
to find the secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver  
show me your adonis, mr. wilde

nothing!?! hmmm!  
i grin i romp in the american almost dark  
in the strange shine of libertys night the way light washes  
into the dark amphitheater of the sky

my brain might be all buzzfed and burger queen i may be popped culture  
but im still re-kerneling there are 54 and a half different ways to say  
*fuck you* *i never really liked "The Importance of Being Earnest" anyway*  
and the point is  
im gonna find all of em pokeballing the small jewels of syntax  
sparking this bloodstained land finefine youre right it might be loud  
BUT you see a problem which aint my problem breh

## variations for *excess*

Kamden Hilliard

all the butter in the world ever; run- on  
sentence; white people; turnt up; these  
greedy greedy eyes; self mutilation; what  
is it when everything is alive; first placed  
world;feelings; felt/ velvet/ cashmire;  
egg yolk; yoked arms pinning always  
pinning; pining and bending backways;  
labyrinth bodies; spring board calves;  
people: people/not places to rest; i,  
arrested accelerant;



# Memory

Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco

We play Memory  
at night  
on someone's  
table from  
the thrift store  
in the city.

Smoke comes  
down the mountain  
and makes ghosts  
against the window.

You said  
ghosts remember  
everything.

## Psalm 43, Op. 78, No. 2

Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco

These are not  
my words.

They are old fists,  
pressing my lips  
into tight circles.

This is a way to fold  
old gravestones  
flat as laundry  
in my lungs.

You paid  
to let me trace  
someone's dried flowers  
on your arms

and I learned  
the way to hold  
them carefully.

# When I Drink from the Fox's Head

Nathan Blanchard

Dial down the plush and serpentine road to Berlin at half-past two AM. Kilometers & lightyears. I'm calling you at last call. Hours lost to teenage gambits. I flail and heave and wave one cold hand while our busyness pushes back our hair and flirts girlishly with the wind, the teary-eyed wind, swept across our globe and carried on it laughter. Laughter in the hallway. Laughter in our haste. Haste. My brown-eyed vestige, my translator, my still-born. I promised you I wasted nothing and I promise you still. You were a millionaire. I was the cream.

What's on your lunch plate? Where are you that's any different from any other? In Georgetown? In Hamburg? In Johannesburg? Or was it Cape Town? Your whole life will be a magazine and I used to be a journalist. You & me share facial expressions that defy all emojis. Not death but hunger. So I'll take you to Trader Joe's if you distract me with your adage. Brown-eyed vestige, translator, still-born. Broken phone screens with jagged cracks like German veins. I promised you I wasted nothing. Still, you are a zillion versions away. I am merely a palimpsest.

I picture your empty armchair on those honeyed afternoons. My not-updated profile. Your boxed and silent room long evacuated and replaced. The blinds sideways dicing sunlight, striating the pale drywall in naked December as you wait for a limo to the international airport. That time I placed medicine in your palm and all of your denials. I am this when I drink from the fox's head. I promised you I wasted nothing and I promise you I did my best.

# html lessons

Kevin Sharp

I'm downloading  
alternate versions of our endings  
off sketchy websites  
that crash constantly.

in all the html there's another you.

the architecture of evenings  
crash because I'm awful at coding.  
So we still break up  
at the frozen yogurt place, with the  
sound of text messages  
ringing in my head.

It almost sounds like old dial up  
modem noises, the past infecting  
the future, until we realize

you can't tell the difference at all.

# Make Out

Kevin Sharp

I felt up stupid eddies of rivers  
during seventh grade dances,  
in the back room where  
seances went down.

the vampires burned the library  
that summer. I saw the new girl  
with them. I didn't know  
she was into those white sharp  
teeth all night.

In the closet at the party,  
that's when the river & I went in.  
It was seven minutes  
in heaven. Everything was  
Mississippi & Mark Twain,

v american, v classical,

until the door opened & light  
spilled onto my wet clothes

& the echo of steamboats  
fled the suburban basement like  
lipstick from the lips of girls  
coming home after curfew.

# End Times Scenarios

Kevin Sharp

Stars are just conversations  
you haven't had yet, dead before  
you were born.

The world is ending. The magnetic  
poles have shifted. The oceans rise & it's snowing in Florida.

You and I walk outside, catching snowflakes in our teeth, looking for

snowmen to marry us.  
But the weather is ruined, it shifts  
from snow to sun to

Jeff Von Vonderan telling  
the snowman that people in this room love the hell out of him  
& don't want to lose him but —

loss is built in. What did Freud say?  
"Dieses Kokain ist erschreckend"

beside that, other than that,  
the parts about death, I guess.  
Or maybe flying. We all know flying  
means sex & superman dreams  
are American dreams of penetration & July is the lulziest  
month, breeding lilac bath & bodywork lotions out of the wet  
lawns of perpetual mornings,  
(redacted nights) humidity & cigarette smoke mix like makeup

at the end of our perpetual lady  
of depressing evenings.

The snow looks raw, like a ghost  
who forgot it used to be a person.

That's the whole point  
of haunting anything.  
The memories we make  
never leave.

In the snow, footprints  
fill up & become overwhelmed, taking Ativan until the world  
realigns.

Magnetic realignments  
are exhausting for real.

# Breakwater

Michael Collins

I walk along the mortared stones  
designed to contain high tide.

White flecks speckle their surface;  
once they were clam's shells cast down

to be shattered by hungry gulls  
with eyes and instincts and no words

to name an act *murder*. Nature, pure  
transformation. Instantly

the world is only cycling;  
there is nothing  
I must render.



# Exercise in Not Knowing

Anna Meister

I don't know how to balance  
much of anything: my weight  
over a yoga mat, my coffee  
& the six books I'm reading  
at once, bags of groceries digging  
into red-raw wrists as I walk  
an uneven block. I leave  
too many tabs open, hope  
for an early bedtime, but again  
find myself spending stretches  
awake with the popcorn  
ceiling mouthing purpose,  
purpose. When should I stop  
adding names to the list of People I've Been  
Meaning To Call & pick up  
the phone? I want to sound casual  
while gathering every detail. I don't know  
what you had for breakfast this morning  
& it's killing me. I imagine the sun  
poured over your sprawled legs  
as you crunch what might be  
cereal inside that pristine mouth.  
I don't know when I'll be able  
to confidently apply lipstick bright  
red like you, make it through  
a whole night without that itching worry  
it's spread outside the natural line, all over  
my teeth. Will I ever see you again  
once you move to San Francisco? I ask  
casually. Once a week, I drag my body  
an hour west for a stranger's way of seeing  
& I don't know if it's helping. What good  
could possibly come from remembering  
how the road unfolds when I am

exactly nowhere & listening  
to the song (again) about  
what is remarkable? I can't say  
I know what is remarkable, what  
here I can praise.

# Last Vacation

Anna Meister

Our bodies meet the waves. They told us  
not to stand so close. Hands gripped  
together, we fall forward & taste sand.  
Hear the grit's clink against our teeth.  
Our wet clothes like plastic wrap, mouths  
turned to rattles or the china cabinet right before  
the earthquake hits. Dripping through Wal-Mart,  
we select matching sweatsuits on sale.  
Mine is purple. You pick green.

*Forrest Gump* plays on every television  
in the restaurant. We hear "Run, Forrest, run"  
while I pull the shrimp from the skewer & watch  
the one seal on the fat salty rock, splashed  
every third beat. We measure the crab legs  
against our forearms & see they are the same.  
A mitt-like hand grasps the dentist tool, cracking  
through shells to find meat. Our hands, too small.  
Our hands, only for the dunking, the butter bowl.  
Swing your mallet like in Whac-A-Mole.  
When the baby octopus tentacles bloom  
from my lips, giggle with your gap-full smile.  
Say "That's disgusting."

At the aquarium, there is a starfish that feels  
like winter skin. You poke it with a ballpoint pen.  
For the rest of California, I wear the blue bucket hat  
sewn to say Monterey Bay. Even inland, in the field  
of windmills, with our arms out like that, spinning & still.

Hold your arms like that. My long hair hidden  
beneath, right next to your buzzed scalp. Our sameness,  
your boy-face I have in the pictures, each one  
ruined by my out tongue.

## Lotion and Tonic

Matthew Beach

You'd decided to board up for the night, crossed into town over a bridge that spanned a river, muddied, not deep. A fat trout was holding against the current. It was 1947 then, and you were living Jack Kerouac's Dream in a second-hand Chevy. Down river, men were building a new bridge. You took a job there, wheeling mortar and steel. Forty-three cents an hour to cover expenses. You found a quiet place in town. Could catch the train if you wanted. You began getting the paper every morning (and reading it, too), dressing up on Sundays, strolling through town, getting brunch—the waitresses calling you by your first name.

You went for a trim, waited your turn, shot the breeze the way you do at the barber's, asked for the usual. Electric clippers let fly white curls and swaths. Someone opened a window. *Head down.* The wind swept wisps of hair like ashes over the tile. Scissors, comb, lotion and tonic, stack of days-old newspapers. *Chin up.* You closed your eyes. The lather lay thick on your neck. And cold. You heard the sporadic clacks of a piculet rapping in from the open window. What had become of that old Chevy, you thought. That road back in 1947. The trout holding against the current. You stood up from the chair--shoulders hunched. Went for a look in the mirror. *It's fine,* you said. *It's fine.*

# Qualifying Rounds

Beth Ayer

I want to write a poem  
called In the Public Domain,  
and another poem  
titled Front Matter,  
and then a poem  
called Rip Current.  
I have a poem in mind  
called Evacuation that is about  
to get somewhere, and a love poem  
called Black, Gay Cowboy.  
And a poem about hypotheticals called  
Dolph Lundgren, addressing  
Dolph Lundgren, and a prose poem  
with the title Shame Suit  
in which a speaker describes  
the process of replacing every  
mirror in his home with a cat,  
and then gazes without blinking  
out the window at a row  
of birds on the fence separating  
my yard from the Chinese  
restaurant. I don't know  
the name of those birds.  
Concierge Service takes place  
in the year 2065 and isn't  
as bleak as you might think.  
I have plans for a poem,  
Qualifying Rounds, in which each  
successive line competes  
against the one before it.  
It'll be part of a collection  
called In the Public Domain.

# Nothing Escaping

Beth Ayer

Careless drawings ineffectively release a memoirist  
in the forest, descending a departure from  
the swing set, also on a beginning, a memory-erasing  
machine succeeding even though everyone misses  
a dangerous closure after an earthworm—  
instead of a girl—takes off on Alaska,  
because one *30-day-young* dubiously abandons everything  
less from crawling towards her failure, barges into surfaces  
or fears late Saturday evening, destroys an animate object  
and the vacillating article cannot move onto the confirmed  
peril or pass confidently into a picnic blanket.  
Playgrounds misuse OS fingertips, ignoring still images,  
and instead nature may not progress spontaneously from silence,  
and the careless mirror frees everything unlikely and heedless, for  
nothing escaping is meant to undo the source.

---

*Note on this poem:*

In Oulipian usage, antonymy means the replacement of a designated element by its opposite. Each word is replaced by its opposite, when one exists (black/white) or by an alternative suggesting antonymy (a/the, and/or, glass/wood). I wrote this poem by selecting words from the following article and then following the instructions for antonymy, sometimes devising non-traditional antonyms.

**SOURCE:**

"Teen stowaway shows holes in vast airport security." *Providence Journal*, April 22 2014 (Associated Press).

## Reentry

Brian Robert Flynn

Since it re-begins precisely as it ends,  
we figured nightly visits to the spa  
would help. We'd wet our feet at the pool's edge,  
then splash and duck our heads; swim a few  
as only we knew how, a little blue  
at the thought of our last time. We'd practice  
planting our wrinkled, shrivelled-up pods  
at the bottom of the deep end, exciting  
our intercostal muscles. Anticipating  
the amniotic fluid, almost taking the water  
back in. The rehearsal would come in handy  
(never enough with exhaling and inhaling)  
when everything finally went boom.  
We'd be primed for the perfect exit womb.



# Technology

Daniel Wallock

Circling winds  
cover receding  
neon blue tides.

Tentacle wires  
droop inside  
buildings and  
out of our palms.

From the roof  
never the ground  
our sun crashes down.

From the city's  
highest to lowest  
wax faces drip  
and clocks continue to tick.

# Coast

Sonya Plenefisch

October 24<sup>th</sup> on the Welsh Coast –  
sea like a ridged silver coin,  
wet sand like a mirror.

Fire in the rocks and sweetness on our tongues,  
I'm wearing borrowed boots that only fit with six pairs of socks  
and my cheeks are scraped red with salt wind.

I'm captured in the lens of a friend's camera,  
and three months away I'll look back at how I'm suspended in (time) (place) the lens  
like a specimen jar.

6.5% of all people ever born are living right now and there's nothing lonely about that,  
not on this beach,  
not on this Welsh October day.

# Rocks

Sonya Plenefisch

In the grey hour:

They're building a gravel highway for the pagan gods.

Sisyphus watches a boulder roll down a hill.

My brother skips stones in Zanesville, Ohio.

There is something about rocks that I can't figure out.

Maybe –

# Poem Written from a Poem Written in a Copy of Beowulf by Borges

Jason Dean Arnold

Reasons moved study,  
while night came without hope.  
Language used up my memory.  
Words repeated & repeated...  
the soul is anxiety.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**KAMDEN HILLIARD** tries to study writing and psychology in New York. He succeeds. Sometimes. He is: a poor sleeper, recipient of fellowships from Callaloo and The Davidson Institute, contributor for *Elite Daily*, and an avid hiker. He tries to keep busy. In the past he's been a poetry editor and editor-in-chief at *The Adroit Journal* and other lovely places. His poems have appeared (or will appear) in *Requited Journal*, *\*82 Review*, *Bodega*, *Specter*, and other journals. If Kamden wasn't writing, he'd be very sad—or a scientist.

**ELIZABETH MCMUNN-TETANGCO** lives in California's Central Valley. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *dislocate*, *The Tule Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and *Paper Nautilus*.

Hailing from DC and Baltimore, **NATHAN BLANCHARD** is an MFA candidate in the creative writing program at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. His work has appeared in *Atticus Review*, *District Lines*, and *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*. He enjoys eating at Mexican restaurants with his wife.

**KEVIN SHARP** lives in Pittsburgh with his wife and two sons. He used to work as a temp in a tennis ball factory. He misses those days. His work has appeared in *The Toast* and *Keep This Bag Away From Children*. His novel isn't writing itself. He's on twitter [@el\\_ksharp](#) and posts too much at [cursedvideogame.tumblr.com](#).

**MICHAEL COLLINS'** poems have appeared in more than 40 journals and magazines, including *Grist*, *Kenning Journal*, *Pank*, *SOFTBLOW*, and *Smartish Pace*. His first chapbook, *How to Sing when People Cut off your Head and Leave it Floating in the Water*, won the *Exact Change Press* Chapbook Contest in 2014. A full-length collection, *Psalmadala*, was published later that year.

**ANNA MEISTER** is an MFA candidate in Poetry at NYU. Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *FreezeRay*, *Sugar House Review*, & *Radar Poetry*, where she was a finalist for the 2014 Coniston Prize. Anna tweets [@arm312](#), mostly about her love of the Mountain Goats & grilled cheese sandwiches.

**MATTHEW BEACH** teaches, writes, and paints in Canton, Ohio. His poems and stories appear in *The Prose-Poem Project*, *Metazen*, *Weave*, *Heavy Feather Review*, and elsewhere. His work can be found at [mtbeach.wordpress.com](http://mtbeach.wordpress.com).

**BETH AYER** is the senior poetry editor for *The Found Poetry Review*. Find her in Providence, RI, at [bethdayer.com](http://bethdayer.com), and [@bethdayer](https://twitter.com/bethdayer).

Originally from Denver, **BRIAN ROBERT FLYNN** is currently breathing the poetry and fiction of Washington, DC. His work has appeared in *Banango Street*, *Litro Magazine*, *RiverLit*, and *theNewerYork*. Find him online at [theyeland.tumblr.com](http://theyeland.tumblr.com).

**DANIEL WALLOCK** has published one book, and his writing has appeared in *Burningword*, *Wild Quarterly*, *Paragraph Planet*, *ExFic*, *The Vending Machine Press*, and *The Bolt Magazine*. He's received four writing awards, including first place in San Jose State University's Nonfiction Short Story Contest. He also received a Gold Key for nonfiction, the highest regional honor, from Scholastic's Art and Writing Awards. Daniel worked as manager of marketing at *Ginosko Literary Journal*, and he's the founder of *This Very Breath Journal*.

**SONYA PLENEFISCH** was raised in Sylvania, Ohio, but now lives and studies in Cardiff, Wales, pursuing a career in theatre design. More of her poetry can be found at [fountainpensandkeyboards.tumblr.com](http://fountainpensandkeyboards.tumblr.com).

**JASON DEAN ARNOLD**'s writing has appeared in both online and print journals. Sometimes, birds talk to him. Follow him on twitter [@jasonarnold74](https://twitter.com/jasonarnold74) and read some of his poems at [temporarytranslation.com/poetry](http://temporarytranslation.com/poetry).

*Epigraph* is now reading  
for Issue Nine.  
Send us your poems.

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