

EXPOSITION REVIEW

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February 2018: “Greed”

On The Theme:

“Greed is the beginning of so many great narratives. Whether our hero is thrown into a hellish situation by another’s avarice, or if our narrator herself is delightfully (or horrifically) selfish, there are so many ways in which we can be greedy. Show me all of them, and don’t be shy.”

On The Winners:

“I’ll begin by emphasizing how blown away I was by this many unique and original takes on the topic of Greed. While I had my own interpretation in mind, all the pieces—and especially the winners and Honorable Mentions—engaged me in all different ways, revealing endless different sides of the same delightfully greedy coin like a room full of funhouse mirrors.”

— *Rebecca Luxton*
MANAGING EDITOR

Nixon in Heaven

EVAN McMURRY

1ST PLACE

FICTION

Her mother claimed she had once run into Richard Nixon at a white-tablecloth restaurant in San Clemente. Mimed a rocks glass to her mouth. “Sloppered!” A word she and her poker friends had invented. “Awful for Pat.” Whisper-level: “Not her real name, you know. It’s Thelma.”

In college he was a villain. Her boyfriend ran down their dorm hall carrying a rolled-up rug an exchange student had brought with him from Ankara. “This is the carpet Nixon used to carpet bomb Cambodia!”

In grad school, a shift. “Only Richard Milhous Nixon could have gone to China,” one of her professors said, “is the hoary cliché. Like most clichés, it admits this aggravating kernel of truth—”

By the time she landed at a think tank he was royalty. Her mother by then was dying. She flew home to central California to find her mother’s frail body pinned by a soft blanket. “Oh, the son of a bitch,” she cried, eyes aimed upward. “Sloppered when I saw him. Don’t blame him, after all he did. I feel for Pat—not her real name!”

“It’s Thelma,” she said.

“Imagine that? First lady of the United States and nobody ever even knew your name. Can’t wait to go to heaven and tell that man what for.”

She had no idea her mother believed in heaven. Did Nixon? Did the people he bombed? Those napalmed children?

“I. Don’t. Know.” Her fiancé struck the steering wheel on the drive home to Bethesda from another ruined dinner party as she tried not to puke in the passenger seat. “Why, why, why, why do you always bring this up—”

He didn’t work out. Awkward texts to her friends, excuses to remaining family members when she arrived alone to the funeral. Her mother’s headstone: WIFE AND MOTHER. *Bullshit*. She was up in heaven, sober Nixon collared against a white wall, her mother seizing the silk fabric he’d fled Whittier for. “Listen here, you, you—”

In the old photos with his family you could see that whooped-dog terror in his eyes that life is so unfair not even death will end it.

Tanka (he holds the record)

TRACY DAVIDSON

2ND PLACE

POETRY

he holds the record
for eating Musketeers bars
four hundred and five...
his greed brings him a trophy
two days locked in the bathroom

Killer Dessert

GUY BIEDERMAN

HONORABLE MENTION

POETRY

The cheesecake looked sublime as it made its way across the kitchen floor on the backs of two ant columns. The cat watched it pass. The dog noticed too and made his move wiping out the ants and one black spider, but not before the spider bit the dog who fell dead across the cat, causing a heart attack to the pensioner who'd held off dying knowing her greedy nephew was already measuring for furniture, himself 82, that old buzzard

Broken

KRISTEN OLSEN

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

He looked forward every two weeks to this moment, when she entered the room and settled her young body in the cushioned chair. He'd come in early to prepare the space for her, bringing fresh irises, dimming the lights, straightening the photograph of red rock canyons he'd explored many years before. They began by breathing together, long and slow. He read a poem by Rumi and held her hand, so much softer than his own. The session was supposed to last ninety minutes, but he planned to stretch it to fill the entire afternoon. He prodded her with questions. She talked of the life that didn't fit any more, of looking for herself, and listening for God.

"It's time for the table," he finally said.

She climbed up and lay on her back, eyes closed, for the bodywork. He stood and looked down at her face with smooth skin. Dark hair that fell unruly. Raindrops tapped on the window. If he focused on his exhale, time stopped. He moved around her, touched her shoulders, the length of her arms to her hands. She seemed tight today.

He charged for his services, but it wasn't her money he coveted. He was old now, unable to climb red rocks. She had an aliveness he was still searching for inside himself, raw and beautiful in her suffering. Sometimes he dropped pieces of his own pain into conversation. He was trying online dating, but women his age with spiritual insight were hard to find. He hadn't been held enough when he was a child. Revealing himself relieved the pressure, for a moment, of his forbidden greed for her.

Afterward, in the hallway, they embraced stiffly.

"Is something wrong?" He felt compelled to ask.

She paused. "Next time, I want to stick to talking and skip the table." Her face flushed, but she didn't look away.

"As you wish." He found her rain jacket in the closet and held it open.

She took it from him and walked down the stairs.

He returned to the room alone and sat in the cushioned chair she'd occupied, breathing in the remains of her light musky perfume. He applauded her growth each session, encouraging her to trust her body, follow its wisdom. He considered himself a

healer, but he saw now that part of him wanted her to remain broken. Broken, she needed him. Her brokenness made him feel his want.

Street Sweeper

MARTIN JON PORTER

HONORABLE MENTION

POETRY

the street sweeper knows
that some parts
of town
are easier to clean
than others

April 2018: “Magnetism”

On The Theme:

“ *A physical phenomenon produced by the motion of electric charge, resulting in attractive and repulsive forces between objects.*”

In an age where many things attract and repulse us (technology, food, sexuality, and politics, to name a few), it is a curious thing to explore and reflect on what our position is in relation to these elements that make up so much of our immediate world. Everything we navigate now seems incredibly polarized, albeit with mostly good reason, the idea of being magnetized by known and unknown forces leaves an entire field for the many versions of ourselves to live in.

In essence, magnetism defines the way most of us sort of passively define our universe in both tangible and intangible ways. Push and pull, give and take, karma and serendipity; the act of catch and release. How do you place yourself, an object moving through the current of a largely uncontrollable, and charged pulse?”

On The Winners:

“ *F*irst, I’d like to say how honored I was to be invited into this Flash 405 contest as a judge. It was an absolute pleasure reading this caliber of writing on the theme of “Magnetism.” I also enjoyed feeling the difference in how each genre approached the prompt. For the last year or so, I have been obsessed with the concept of magnetism—particularly as it pertains to how we interact with each other socially as opposed to scientifically. (Perhaps that is actually an interchangeable idea as well: that the science is entirely social no matter how we turn it, who knows?)

I find an intrigue in exploring the invisible tension of things, whether that be between ideas, places, or most notably, bodies. The two winners I chose carried that unspoken thread between entities very well. There was both grace and ache in their pieces that is familiar, yet usually kept secret in our world of so much human interaction. The first place piece, *Potential Energy*, captured this quite well with lines like, “*Claire makes a fist over the sun; a fruit threatening to burst. It would be so easy—to reach out, take her hand. Let the light halo our fingertips.*” A truly stunning image for me. It’s difficult to pinpoint an attraction that produces electricity, but when you feel it, it cannot be denied.”

— *Edwin Bodney*
POET, GUEST JUDGE

Potential Energy

KATE BOVE

1ST PLACE

FICTION

Claire noticed a trend in film: wide shots of birds on wires, teetering. She tells me about it while we share a joint by the Charles. Across Storrow Drive, crows collect on the telephone wires, which slice the sun in two. An orange, bleeding—until the color drains from the sky and into the river.

She says, *In a time before electricity, birds sat on chimneys, on roofs, on trees.*

I say, *Maybe they like wires because they're free of foliage. Power lines, sight lines.*

We listen to the static that leaks from the wires above us. Claire holds up her hand, examines the orange running through her skin. I imagine a crow seeing its first telephone pole, decades ago. It knew it needed to land there.

Do you think the crow was scared, Becca? Claire asks. *That first one.*

Sure.

A magnetic sort of fear; repelled and drawn in all at once.

Claire makes a fist over the sun; a fruit, threatening to burst. It would be so easy—to reach out, take her hand. Let the light halo our fingertips. Had the first crow sensed the marvelous danger, all those electrons circling the metal in a current, before it clawed the line? Before it closed the loop.

She asks me to pass the joint. It withers in my hand, the way the telephone wire withers under the crow's feet, all that blue energy rippling just beneath the surface. Calling out, but unseen.

Happy Land, Isolated

ROXANNE GETI

2ND PLACE

NONFICTION

I arrive at your roadside studio apartment, heart so loud I don't have to knock. You strong-arm the door and waft me inside.

"Hey," you shout as if I'm thirty feet away, not three. "How ya doin, kid," you ask as if I'm fourteen, not forty.

I'm doing perfect. I'm far away from chores and bills, mosquitos that suck on me at night, and a husband who doesn't.

You and me, we're gonna drink cheap beer and curse. We'll watch the playoffs and go silent and stare into each other's eyes. We'll arm wrestle and you'll say something sexist. I'll slap you and you'll press your face to mine.

We'll talk about your ex-wife and how she's back on the pills. We won't talk about my husband.

I'll get us another beer but we won't finish them. We'll smear ourselves with each other and fuck into another dimension. Your white hair will glow in the dark and my tits are amazing, you'll say. I'll smash my lips into your back and muffle I love you.

Noise: we love our noise. We'll whimper and whine like starving dogs. The neighbors hate us.

After, we'll deflate, spent, and press our butts together. You'll tease me that mine's cold.

Soon, the sun will force its way in. You'll jump out of bed too quickly and shower. You'll reemerge and our connection will have faded like a hand stamp, along with my musk that you'd huffed like glue. Our conversation will shrivel like plastic toys in the oven.

Eventually, the guilt will make me end us. I'll try to remain friends, text you about draft picks and tease you about your wimpy forearms. But I've ripped the hook from your mouth, and you won't take my bait. I'll stop casting and walk home hungry.

I'll miss you like a removed kidney—surviving, but the party's over. I'll spend months writing nauseating essays about you, inserting myself into your apartment like a Colorform on a paperboard backdrop. This is where I'm young, beautiful, brash, and sexy as all fuck. I'll fight back tears in public and at home, because I'm a criminal, maybe even

to you now, and there's no sympathy for the devil. I'll dream of running away and renting a dingy studio apartment where I can drink cheap beer and swear at the refs, where I can keep an ear out for your heartbeat, just outside my door.

Lunar Bodies

MARYANN AITA

HONORABLE MENTION

EXPERIMENTAL NONFICTION

We were in a bad noir: two former lovers tilted toward one another in a dark speakeasy.

*(a month earlier, on the cusp of
the new year, I'd been startled
half-awake by two
brusque
buzzes.)*

I hadn't heard from him in three months, but I'd spent weeks churning mental drafts of how I could believably shroud an "I miss you" in a "Happy Holidays."

*(my heart pumped in pace with the vibrations
flooding me with uninvited self-awareness.
I knew without looking that
bright blip of green
was his name—
a little light in the dark.)*

But on New Year's Eve, I woke to *his* "Happy Holidays."

He hoped I was well.

All I read was, "I miss you."

A few weeks later, we sat in a tin-roofed bar drinking throat-stinging cocktails and saying everything other than what we wanted from each other.

I didn't ask if he still had a girlfriend. I didn't care. I felt entitled, however misguided that may have been. I wanted to tilt the universe in my favor, to disrupt the earth in some tiny way. He still didn't want to keep me—just to have me—but we were magnets. It was up to gravity, to iron, to ions, to the moon. It was up to anything we could blame it on.

He asked me when I thought toilet paper was invented. He complained about *Playboy's* lackluster redesign and the reduced quality of its paper stock.

It was up to gravity. To the moon.

I woke up the next morning dripping in victory.

*(truths often
reveal themselves
in the dark.)*

I didn't regret it. Or the months of clandestine sex that followed. I didn't regret when he left his girlfriend, or that I wasn't his new one. I didn't regret it when, another year later, he started seeing another someone else.

We only understand the moon as it relates to us. It pulls Earth's tides, as does the sun.

We became friends then, laid a layer between our magnets. I needed that more than the moon. I needed a human to remind me how human I am. Flawed and full of emotion. Rough, like the pages of *Playboy*.

*(I've been
known to look at the ground and think
about the stars,*

Three celestial objects in tension.

Sometimes Earth is in the center. Sometimes, the moon.

*sometimes,
forgetting my feet
are my only way to fly)*

I can't control the moon.

In the Wood

CAROL ANN MARTIN

HONORABLE MENTION

EXPERIMENTAL FICTION

My mother said
I never should
play with the gypsies
in the wood.

good, good, good.
good girl, so good.
be good.
because I say so
love, love, love
because I love you.

come, come, come away
wild, wild, wildwood
run wild
greenwood, greenglade, greenshade
sun scatter, moon shadow
star shine, dew grass, barefoot

If I do,
She's sure to say,
"Naughty girl to disobey"

your daddy and I
because we care
care so much
love and care about you.
angels guard you while you sleep.
darling, darling, darling
we only want
what is best

midsummer night
violins, soul-pierce, heart pierce
eyes, dark eyes, dark wood.
owl hoot, raven, moss and fern
oak, beech, aspen,
leaf bed, love bed, hotbed
tanglewood, tanglehair
fire crackle, flame leap, spark fly

what is right
you are our sunshine,
you will thank us
sacrifices we have made

hot! hot! hot!
snowfall, snowdrift, snowdrop
snow white horses
lichen, mosses, ferns, frost

what time will you be home?
it doesn't grow on trees
sweetheart, dearest,
better safe than

ancient roots, pathways, loves
playing in the wood
yes! yes! yes!
sorry, sorry sorry, but

I'm off with the raggle taggle gypsies, O

The Cherry Harvest

CAMERON SNYDER

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

We stand in the backroom of our grandparent's house and my older brother turns up Too \$hort on the Magnavox stereo and bobs his head to the beat while I listen to the lyrics and grow more confused by the minute. He, Too \$hort, speaks in the cryptic tongue of Parental Guidance: Explicit Lyrics, the kind that my grandpa would beat our backsides raw about if he knew we were absorbing them right here, right now, in his house. Too \$hort says something about pretty ladies and cherries and images flutter in my mind and I nod my head like I know and my brother catches my false sense of understanding and he's sure to point it out like he always does to prove he's older. He motions toward the stereo and says, "You know what he's talking about?" I can tell it's rhetorical because he knows I don't know, but I go ahead and say, "Maybe, yeah," anyway. He just shakes his head and pulls out something shiny from his cargo pocket. It's a buffalo nickel. "Allow me to give you a demonstration," he says. He makes the symbol for A-OK with his thumb and forefinger and places the nickel in, buffalo side out. "OK," he says, "this is the cherry"—he means the nickel—"and this is the wiener"—he means his other forefinger that's sticking out straight like a hard wiener. He sticks his finger into the nickel, at the buffalo, and it pops out and lands on the carpet and goes rolling under the bed. My brother waits for a look of acknowledgement, waits for me to give a sign that says his wisdom has been duly imparted on his dipshit of a little brother, so I ask, "That's sex?" He laughs. "That's the cherry harvest. It only happens once. To virgin girls. You know what a virgin is, right?" I look at him and nod. Then we both don't say anything for a minute as Too \$hort's voice fills up the room with all that esoteric sexual smoothness. My brother kneels down, and I kneel down beside him, and we tilt our heads and reach our arms beneath the bed and pat our hands around as my grandpa walks up and stands behind us in the doorway and listens to the lyrics while he stares angrily at my brother and me—two virgins searching for the cherry.

June 2018: “Nature”

On The Theme:

“Nature is inherent to us. We say ‘it’s in our nature,’ speaking of that thing that shapes us. Yet in nature versus nurture we argue whether we were born the way Mother Nature—and generations of ancestors’ genes—made us or if external experiences in our lives dominate our decisions.

We can immerse ourselves in nature, get lost in the sensations and awesomeness of the wilderness here on Mother Earth as well as in the vast expanses and intricate patterns of the infinite universe(s): the macro of the cosmos and the micro of molecules; the seen, unseen, and parallel.

And though the laws of nature are immutable—permanent explanations of behavior—that doesn’t mean we can’t disprove hypotheses and even amend the occasional theory.

By way of an art-y digression, in Italian, *natura morta* (literally ‘dead nature’) is the term for the still life genre of painting—a fun fact I know because it’s also part of the title of one of my favorite Tom Robbins books (*Still Life with Woodpecker/Natura Morta con Picchio*) and because I’m interested in all things art (hint, hint).

But I don’t want any ‘dead natures,’ unless they are a spin on the literal, Italian kind (or you get creative enough to prove to me that I do). So send me vibrant pieces that dissect all the meanings of nature.”

On The Winners:

“It was an incredible honor and pleasure to read the record-breaking number (!!!) of pieces across all genres (experimental included), yet the caliber of the submissions also made it a challenging feat to limit my selections to only five pieces to share, let alone one to win.

Some of these pieces seemed to peer into my soul and pull out something I’ve felt or didn’t even realize I wanted to feel. From an enduring itch of love clocked on the Aztec calendar, to still life in the most heartbreaking sense, to shudder-inducing realities seen through hallucinations, to the multiple meanings of nature swirled into one, to Jay DeFeo as inspiration, these pieces brought nature to life in every way. I hope you enjoy the work of these writers as much as I do.”

— Brianna J.L. Smyk
MANAGING EDITOR

Whiskey Horoscope

SARINA BOSCO

1ST PLACE

NONFICTION

Once this was a poem and it was about someone else, but now it is about you because you have fallen in love and so have I, accidentally, second-hand. It rises off of my skin and out into the night melting the fallen snow, softening the pine needles, making me read Neruda alone with bare thighs. Hair down like it was when you were caught here at my mouth.

And still I am caught, waiting, raw under the moonlight. The poetry books sleep on the shelves.

Let me be clear: I knew.

You went west looking for answers and found vast landscapes instead. I went to college, wedged myself between the mountains, read and read and read until the boys all fell in love with me because I never looked at them.

I want to tell you about the Aztecs. Their fifty-two cyclical years and the repetition of events.

I want to tell you that that's us—that we'll come back around, even when we don't know we're nearing one another. Like the nights almost two years ago that you spent at my bare ankles, laughing in the dark, drunk on whiskey.

When you were gone and I grew restless I went west, too. And all that I found was wild animals in rut—stags rubbing the new soft parts of themselves on the cedars, confused. The living bone itching under the flesh. Their hides quivering with desire.

I think of you when I see them bellowing, scared and belligerent. Wandering through the pines lowing, flesh hanging in tatters from their racks. I wonder if she's worth it.

The man that I'm in love with tells me that sometimes I murmur in my sleep. *We will come back around.*

I took an astronomy class, too. I never told you that. I never told you a lot of things and I wonder if spilling them out at night would have stopped your hand on the doorknob. I learned about the planets and how if they dance too close to each other one must sacrifice itself. Gravitational pulls, when imbalanced, are destructive.

We'll come back around. But for now you'll keep sleeping with that girl with the small, small teeth. Your soul going out under all of the constellations. Waiting to see if

there's a message for you coming years and year from now; waiting to see if we've destroyed each other yet.

Dead

JACKIE DESFORGES

2ND PLACE

FICTION

“Not dead,” she decides. “Still.”

We move our faces closer to the glass. Our noses are pressed against the window; it’s fogging beneath our breath.

“Still,” I say, and another little cloud forms on the glass.

The coyote doesn’t move. We can see the Millers across the street, huddled against their front window, staring as the animal lies motionless in the road. It’s the third coyote we’ve seen in the neighborhood this month, the fifth that’s been spotted in Los Angeles this year. Our father no longer lets us outside unaccompanied.

Three days later, I find our cat on the side of the house. She lies motionless next to the recycling bin, eyes open, bleeding from the neck. My breath stops. “Dead,” I hear my sister whisper.

It’s a game we used to play in the hospital. Two years of sneaking out of our mother’s room and down the hall, scaring the new patients as we took turns popping up next to them with our identical faces and different shirts—we could always see that flash in their eyes for a split second: *same person? a ghost?* We were like the twins out of *The Shining*, a movie we’d watched with our fingers over our eyes. We’d stare at the patients who were sleeping; we were too young to understand a coma but old enough to know that it was different than simply being alive, some unnatural state caught in between.

“Dead or still?” one of us would ask, and the other would have to make a split-second guess, and the prize was a chocolate bar from the vending machine.

“Dead or still?” I’d asked my sister at the funeral, looking beyond the coffin to a small vase of roses left at a grave.

“Dead or still?” she’d asked me three weeks later, looking over my shoulder as I painted the roses clumsily onto the canvas, trying to mimic the way our mother had done it.

“Dead or still,” our mother had taught us, flipping through a book of her favorite still life paintings. “A ‘still life,’” she had said, “is different than something being dead. It’s alive, just still.”

Now we choose one of our favorite photos of our mother and bury it in the shoebox with our cat. We pick a rose from the backyard and place it on top of the grave. Two days later it will be dead did.

Waves

KAYLA MONSANTO

HONORABLE MENTION

SCREENPLAY

FADE IN:

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

CHRISSY, early twenties, a fragile girl with a nervous disposition, sits at a table with THOMAS, early twenties, a by-all-accounts "normal" person.

Thomas unwraps his sandwich and sauce packets. He digs in. Chrissy pulls the sleeves of her sweater up around her hands. She scans the restaurant behind him.

THOMAS

Aren't you going to eat?

Chrissy snaps her eyes back to him. She gives a weak smile.

CHRISSY

Duh. I'm starving.

She sighs heavily as she unwraps her sandwich. She rips off a piece and dunks it in her sauce packet.

Behind her, a slew of people walk in and out of the door. Her eyes wander, trying to make it past her shoulder. She fights to keep them straight.

THOMAS

So, how have you been?

CHRISSY

Oh, you know. Busy as always.

Thomas nods.

THOMAS

Busy with what?

Chrissy's brows furrow for a split second.

CHRISSY

Uh, school and stuff. The usual.

THOMAS

I feel you. I'm taking this arts and humanities of the 19th century class and I can not, for the life of me, remember one god damn person's name besides Leonardo Da Vinci.

CHRISSY

Uh, Da Vinci died in the 1500's.

THOMAS

And he's the only guy I can remember from the 19th century.

CHRISSY

Right...

An employee behind Chrissy slams a cabinet door shut. Chrissy jumps. Her eyes go blank. She shuts them.

A MAN walks in. He carries a duffel bag. He pauses. Scanning the busy dining room, he pulls a semi-automatic rifle from the duffel.

Chrissy SCREAMS at Thomas to get down. The man starts SHOOTING.

Her eyes snap open.

THOMAS

Are you ok?

He reaches across the table to comfort her. She pulls away. She scans the room.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

It was just that girl. She shut the cabinet door too hard.

Chrissy nods but is still visibly confused.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You scare so easily.

He laughs. He has finished his sandwich and moved on to his fries. Chrissy's sandwich remains half-eaten. She looks to her food and tries to take a bite.

CHRISSY

I thought it was--like a... I don't know.

THOMAS

Like I said, you just scare too easily.

He looks to her food.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

And you eat like a bird.

Chrissy forces a bite down.

CHRISSY

No I don't.

THOMAS

Oh wow, two bites? You showed me.

She rolls her eyes. She picks at her sandwich and continues to scan the room.

Across the restaurant, a WOMAN sits and fidgets with her hands. Her eyes are large and fearful.

Chrissy's eyes widen at the sight of the woman. Her eyes slowly track over to her right shoulder, then dart back to the woman.

The woman is still staring to the same spot. Chrissy allows her eyes to track back over her shoulder. Just as her eyes reach the point to where she has to turn to look over her shoulder, Chrissy closes her eyes.

The man swings his rifle as he shoots. He hits a waitress square in the chest. He smiles.

Chrissy looks back to Thomas. He stares past her in shock. The man takes a step closer to their table. He continues to swing the rifle back and forth. His face is twisted into a demented smile.

Chrissy jumps off her stool and grabs Thomas by the shirt. She pulls him down under the table. Chrissy looks Thomas in the eye and motions for him to be quiet.

She turns back to see where the man is. He is staring Chrissy in the face. He raises his rifle.

Her eyes snap open.

She swings around in her stool.

The parking lot is busy. People walk to and from their cars. There is a line of people waiting patiently to order.

A MAN walks in carrying a baby. He walks up to the woman across the restaurant. She grabs the baby and smothers it.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Chrissy? Chrissy, hello!

She looks back to Thomas.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Where did you go?

CHRISSY
I'm sitting right here...

He shakes his head. He reaches over and taps her on the temple.

THOMAS
Where did you go?

Chrissy looks back to her sandwich. She pushes it away.

CHRISSY
Can I ask you a weird question?

THOMAS
Sure, shoot.

CHRISSY
I--Do you feel safe?

He watches her a moment. She pulls her sweater back up over her hands.

THOMAS
What do you mean?

Chrissy leans in a little closer.

CHRISSY

Like, here. Do you feel safe here?

THOMAS

In Little Palm?

CHRISSY

No! My god, I mean like here,
here! In this restaurant, here!

Thomas leans back and lets his head dip to the side.

THOMAS

I mean, sure? I don't see why not.

CHRISSY

I just feel like someone could
come in right now and just--

THOMAS

--You can't think that way.

Chrissy nods.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

I guess anything could happen but
that's just the way things are
nowadays.

Beat.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You gonna finish your fries?

FADE OUT.

Parts

BRIE RADKE

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

I am one part storm and one part sea. Except when I'm not. Sometimes I am all storm or all sea.

My sea part sloshes with gin and wide emptiness. It's the part that says no to anything anyone ever offers me. It's the part of me that has been there the longest.

My storm part isn't as old. It grew from the waves. It is mean and quiet or mean and loud, depending on its mood. Quiet mean is when the storm screams terrible things at the sea, its echoes rising all the way up to the space between my ears. The sea is used to this. It listens and nods, drawing in its tides like holding breath. It gets purple and still and smaller, smaller, smaller until we all fall asleep for the day.

The sea is only angry when the storm is loud mean. When it tells my mouth to throw its wind and lightning at people or things outside of us. The waves of the sea get big and slam against my insides in protest. I lose my legs, and even my lunch sometimes, when the sea is so upset and the storm is so wild. It's a broken loop. The storm blows into the world, the trapped sea blows into me. They never learn.

Once in a while, they are both calm. The storm is not blowing, it is quiet quiet. Just like a small fire with embers that remind me of my nature.

When the sea is calm, it sparkles blue gold and feels big full instead of big empty. In those moments, I am one part sea and one part sky.

Sometimes—very, very sometimes—I will be two parts sky, its edge moving up, up, up until there is almost no edge at all. Big full blue gold sea and sky with no edge is my favorite. But sea and storm will not stay calm forever. I will forget sky was ever a part of me when we are purple again.

3,200 Pound Rose

MIA KIRSI STAGEBERG

HONORABLE MENTION

EXPERIMENTAL FICTION

on Jay DeFeo's painting *The Rose*

Bulging rocks, radiating transcen-dental center. Sloughing, fervor, imprisoned trees, monument to recalcitrant ghosts, mudface, stone cicatrix, unfurling embattled innards, quest for the holy grey. O rose thou art pan-demonium when it's asleep. Bulge out, bulldoze in, breathe, breathe, the ugly truth will set you free. Once this was excrement, once these petals were boulders. Swallow a mouthful of feathers, take out your eyes, try them on.

Weatherbeaten, shock-addled, inexorable, upsurging, another day another year. This lifetime past, what's left is your heavy body lying on mine as day breaks. Let me believe, let go, let be. Let's be more, let's try again, let down your golden snare. Copulation, forgiveness, and where are you putting the colors of my life?

O rose thou givest and thou takest away, tears squeezed from pollen. Colors spew faster. Dawn, shooting stars, fire smolders. Adduce, decide, attack, contain, recall, seize. Midnight blue, royal yellow, crimson, green, all unseen.

Open your hands now, face a battle's end with honor. Have this moment, take, eat, body which is given for you, says the rose. Take my body with your eyes, touch it to your mouth.

Quick, quicksilver, knotted moons, unshored ships. Ah, down, down, heavier, spreading core, smooth, washed clean.

New skin, perforated leaf.

Fresh cry.... Next rose.

August 2018: “Mystery”

On The Theme:

“**R**ight after my girlfriend and I moved to Los Angeles, a location scout for the reboot of a 1980s detective show wanted to use the arid-yet-mangrove-like tangle of succulents in our front yard as the backdrop for, as I recall, the scene where they find a gardener’s body.

There was money in it, so sure, why not.

It didn’t happen (rewrites? budget? the angle of light?) but while she was taking photos, she asked, “is that your kitten?”

It was hard to see what she meant, but then, in the shadows, it was clear: there was a tuxedoed little kitten in the safari orange agave and the barrel cacti. Suspicious but also curious about us. Maybe four or five months old. We’d lived there for a while and had never seen him. How long had he been there? How had he avoided the coyotes? What was he eating?

When we took him to the vet to check him out, it turned out he was chipped, with a name, address, and two phone numbers. The name was of someone who does not exist, according to the internet. The address was twenty miles away. The first phone number belonged to a woman seventy five miles away who convincingly said she’d never had a cat, and the second number, according to Verizon, belonged a block of numbers belonging to SWIFT, the banking system that governs the routing numbers on your checks. There the trail went cold, which was fine with us.

We kept him. In a way, his origin doesn’t matter because he’s just a fact, but also he’s a mystery, and every day he refuses to tell us anything further.

Mystery is your prompt.

There is an elegance in solving a mystery and a whole different kind of elegance in not solving one. Either way, have at it. Give us a mystery that’s upcoming in the headlights or one that’s already passed by, rear-view.”

On The Winners:

“**M**y first novel is 170,000 words and my second 240,000. For my memoir I wanted to write something shorter, so it’s...175,000 words. Once, a Famous Novelist said to me, “There’s a short story contest I think you should enter,” and I said, “really?” and she said, “No, everyone knows you can’t clear your throat in 5,000 words.”

This was said from pure benevolent good humor, a goad to get me to value the precise and the quick. I love how well all these entries took care of business so efficiently

and yet without feeling cramped or rushed. I was fond also of the stories that managed to fit in all of the plot in such a short time.”

— *Glen David Gold*
AUTHOR, GUEST JUDGE

Blood and Oxygen

JOHNSON CHEU

1ST PLACE

POETRY

Blessed be the time to fritter away an afternoon on Oxygen network's docu-murder mysteries.
Blessed be the victims: Five unsolved murders in a sleepy Kentucky hamlet;
Lisa, killed by her jealous ex.; Renya Marroquín and her unborn son mummified
Thirty years in a 55-year-old gallon drum in Jericho, New York.
Blessed be our continual, unencumbered breathing.

Bottom

JON MOZES

2ND PLACE

FICTION

The flood lights switch off and we're left in the dark, up in our neighbor's treehouse, which he built himself. He's a joiner, a real tinkerer. Before the lights might flood us again, activated by a squirrel or our neighbor's rabbit wife, who's collecting trash at the base of the tree, we look at our neighbor—our host—sitting across from us, and his middlebrow head becomes lowbrow, capped by a haircut that's gone wrong, as if it had been done at an asylum or the edge of an executioner's pit. Our neighbor's been braying about cocks all summer long, this father of five, fingering and fondling cocks in his brain, right between the long ears, the fantasies spilling out of his mouth—but not saying now that they're jokes. Just before the lights went off he asked us if it's done like *this*, blowing a watermelon rind, hands dripping, more rinds below, wife dropping them into a Target bag. He wants something in his mouth, it's not clear what—it might be cocks, it might not. If we didn't know him better, if we weren't his close puckish fairy friends, we'd tell him to hold the rind with both hands—really grab it—a move that would spare him a mess if his ears actually found themselves between a bear's legs. But his haircut, the one we know his wife gave him—it's so hapless and tonsured, he'd be mauled by a bear no doubt, no exit, pursued through a ramble—keeps us from opening our mouths. This is tricky since what we love to see and do are tricks in the dark. But why make our host feel worse simply because magic compels us to? *Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier...* We hold our tongues and let his flow, our small smiles still working on his head—we can't help that!—and are flooded with light once more. Our host shuts up, blinking wildly, seeds on his strands, haircut no longer in negative space. He wipes his hands on his thighs, sighs and burps and reaches for another I.P.A. as something scuttles down the trunk. And his wife is calling up now all high and thin, saying that she's going in, that she's done with the garbage, she's done.

Translated from the Original

GUY BIEDERMAN

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

Anytime you translate, a little part of you goes into someone else's creation. That's the way it is. It's like seeing faces in a plank of wood. Your eye catches the eyes, the set of a mouth, the shape of a head in a knotty 2×6 laid by an erstwhile carpenter. Sometimes you wish you didn't see faces. You can't help it.

It's part of your shape,
the way you look at the world,
and the way the world looks at you.

You find the *Original Portable Tungesa Dictionary* in Darko's Antiques on Main, the place that's never open, but is today, and though you don't speak Tungesa, and even your spellcheck wants to auto-correct it into something that trades more in its orbit, you have to have this book. You are the only one inside the store. A basket near the register sports a note: *please leave a contribution, we're trying out the honor system today.*

And you think, it'll be my honor.

You only have a twenty and the book costs ten. Briefly you consider leaving nothing, or a note expressing your thanks, knowing there was a time when you would have walked out with the dictionary, and whatever else you could carry, whether you needed it or not; especially if you needed it not. Because need wasn't part of it. Well, maybe a small part. But need had little to do with the object you stole. Need ran deeper then, though then you didn't budget for such thoughts.

Then was a long time ago. You were a person you barely remember—a forgotten echo that began way back when and comes booming back around at last, bouncing off deep canyon walls in a voice you don't understand.

But the ageless face is there, sealed in memory, 4×6. So you leave the twenty in the basket and walk out with the *Original Portable Tungesa Dictionary* under your arm.

You return home, and discover a poem of markings on parchment tucked between yellowed pages, and you search the dictionary for the meaning of each stroke.

It's a poem written by a hunter who has given up the hunt, given up all weapons, given up even the desire to hunt, apparently, but not the desire to discover...

And at the bottom of the page in script faintly familiar, you recognize two letters.

Initials.

And they
are yours.

Hide and Seek

DOUG VAN GUNDY

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

She didn't know that she was lost, she only thought that she was winning the game that she'd neglected to tell the rest of us that she was playing, and so we did as she wanted without even knowing it: we *sought* her—in the toy chest at the foot of her small bed, in the wicker clothes hamper in the upstairs hall, beneath the guest bed in the extra room. After exhausting the familiar places, panic drove us to the backyards of neighbors, to the alleyways bisecting the blocks around the house; to the backseats of parked cars and the berry-choked hedge of *Pyracantha* along the side of the Presbyterian church. We yelled ourselves hoarse, saying her name over and over again until it sounded nothing like a name, until our voices were night birds emerging from the high branches of the Norway Spruce. Not one of us thought to look in the crawlspace under the eaves, the place that always frightened her as if it were haunted, or inhabited by something more terrifying and famished than any monster in her frequent nightmares, but there she was – curled up with a picture book and a flashlight; a bottle of water and a sleeve of saltine crackers. She'd looked behind the low door in the baseboard and found it cozy—not the expected danger, just boxed coats and Christmas lights and the comforting smell of hot dust and trapped air. She'd shut the door behind her and waited to be found, our shouting voices scarcely audible through asphalt shingles and fiberglass insulation. For the first time since she could remember, she wasn't afraid—not even a little.

Contributors

Judges

Edwin Bodney • Edwin Bodney is an LA native and co-host of one of the largest poetry venues in the nation, Da Poetry Lounge. A nationally recognized poet, he has performed his work for an array of organizations like: USC, UCLA, Lexus, TV1, All Def Digital, and Button Poetry. In 2016, he officially published his first book titled, *A Study of Hands*, with Not A Cult Press. Through his work, both on stage and in classrooms facilitating workshops, he hopes to transform his community in such a way that no one forgets their joy in the midst of all their healing.

Glen David Gold • Glen David Gold is the author of the bestselling novels *Sunnyside* and *Carter Beats the Devil*, which has been translated into fourteen languages. His essays, memoir, journalism, and short fiction have appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Playboy*, *Tin House*, *Wired*, *Zyzzzyva*, *the New York Times Sunday Magazine*, *the Guardian UK* and *London Independent*. He has written *The Spirit* for DC comics and *The Escapist* for Dark Horse. His essays on the artist Jack Kirby accompanied the landmark *Masters of American Comics* and *Comic Book Apocalypse* museum shows. Recently he has co-written episodes of *The Thrilling Adventure House* and *Welcome to Nightvale*. His three-part memoir *I Will Be Complete* was released June 26, 2018.

Rebecca Luxton • Rebecca Luxton is the Fiction Editor of *Exposition Review* and worked on the Southern California Review while completing her Master of Professional Writing at USC. Now she's a marketing professional with a love for all things fiction. Favorite authors: a rotating cast who currently include Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mary Gaitskill, Stephen King and the late Joe Frank for his exceptional radio storytelling work. Follow her on Instagram @therebeccamarielle.

Brianna J.L. Smyk • Brianna J.L. Smyk is the Art and Experimental Narratives Editor of *Exposition Review* as well as a multi-genre writer, a communication consultant, an art historian, and a yogi. She holds master's degrees in art history from SDSU and in professional writing from USC. Her short fiction and nonfiction has been published or is forthcoming in *The Human Touch Journal*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *FORTH*, and *Burnt Pine Magazine*. Find out more about Brianna on Twitter: @briannasmyk.

February 2018: "Greed"

Guy Biederman • Guy Biederman is a SoCal expat who lives afloat on a houseboat in the San Francisco Bay where he teaches Floating Groove and Writing On The Dock of The Bay workshops. He and his wife Phyllis host Anonymous Pie Salons every New Year's Day.

Tracy Davidson • Tracy Davidson lives in Warwickshire, England, and enjoys writing poetry and flash fiction. Her work has appeared in various publications and anthologies, including: *Poet's Market*, *Msllexia*, *Atlas Poetica*, *Writing Magazine*, *Modern Haiku*, *The Binnacle*, *A Hundred Gourds*, *Shooter*, *Journey to Crone*, *The Great Gatsby Anthology*, *WAR*, and *In Protest: 150 Poems for Human Rights*.

Evan McMurry • Evan McMurry's fiction has appeared in more than one-dozen journals, including *Post Road*, *Euphony*, *Arcturus*, *Oddville Press*, *Palaver*, *Mulberry Fork Review*, and more. His story "Nothing Kinky" won the New Millennium Fiction Prize, and his story "The Fall of Rabbi Gold" was selected as a finalist for the Al-Simāk Award for Fiction from the *Chicago Review of Books*. He is a graduate of Reed College and received his MFA from Texas State University-San Marcos.

Kirsten Olsen • Kristen Olsen studied creative writing at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis and Madeline Island School of the Arts. She lives in Minneapolis, where she practiced law for 17 years. Her work has been published on the website *fiftness.com* and by the online literary magazine *Panoply* (www.panoplyzine.com). She tweets at @kolsenjd.

Martin Jon Porter • Martin Jon Porter is a teacher who lives in Melbourne. His most recent poetry has featured in *ArtAscent*, *Medusa's Laugh*, and *Wanderlust Journal*. His debut chapbook, *Traits*, was published by Ginninderra Press in 2016.

April 2018: "Magnetism"

Maryann Aita • Maryann Aita is a Brooklyn-based writer and performer. Her work has appeared in *Exposition Review*, *The Collapsar*, *Big Muddy*, *Breadcrumbs Magazine*, and others. Her teleplay, "The Matchbreaker" won the 2016 Broad Humor Film Festival Best Original Comedy Pilot. She was a featured storyteller in The PIT's 2017 StoryFest and has participated in the Brooklyn Sisters Reading Series. Maryann has an MFA in writing from Sarah Lawrence College and a BA in psychology from NYU.

Kate Bove • Kate Bove is a graduate of the University of San Francisco's MFA in Writing program. Her work has appeared in *Emerson Review*, *Concrete Literary*, and *plain china*, among others.

Roxanne Geti • Roxanne Geti is a resurrected writer trying to make sense of the nonsensical while hopefully bringing you comfort and familiarity.

Carol Ann Martin • Carol Ann Martin is a freelance author living in a small, but very creative and vibrant, town in rural Tasmania. Although she writes mainly for children, Carol Ann does relish an occasional sortie into adult and experimental fiction.

Cameron Snyder • Cameron Snyder grew up splitting his time between a factory town in Kansas and Corpus Christi, TX. He now lives in Denver, where he resells clothing and other household oddities on the Internet. He is a staunch supporter of autodidacticism and he is a believer in the power of libraries. His writing has appeared in *BULL: Men's Fiction*, and is forthcoming in *The Normal School*. He is currently at work on a collection of essays.

June 2018: "Nature"

Sarina Bosco • Sarina Bosco is a chronic New Englander. She collects myths, often wakes up around 2:00 am, and can't get the words out quick enough.

Jackie DesForges • Jackie DesForges is a writer from Los Angeles who is currently based in Paris. She's also the co-founder of the TalesOnRail Artist in Residence program at Rail Europe. Find her on Twitter @jackie_travels.

Kayla Monsanto • Kayla Monsanto is a soon-to-be graduate of the University of Central Florida. Upon graduation, she will receive a Bachelor of Fine Arts in English-Creative Writing with a minor in Cinema Studies. When not in school, she lives in sunny South Florida with her two dogs, Sammy and Brady.

Brie Radke • Originally from Washington State, Brie Radke now lives and works in Pasadena, California. By day she is a director of marketing for an education company, by night she is an aspiring short form writer. Her work has appeared in *Chaleur Magazine*.

Mia Kirsi Stageberg • Mia Kirsi Stageberg's earliest fiction was published in the *New Directions* annuals. The mother of six children, she's also worked as a nonprofit fundraiser, researcher, art writer, editor, oral historian, and singer in a few bands. Her writing has been widely published in

journals, most recently prose poems in *sPARKLE & bLINK (Quiet Lightning)* and an essay, “A Few Things You Might Not Know About Trolls” (*Sloow Tapes*) in Brussels. She has a novel from Beatlick Press, *Candles* (2014), as well as fourteen other books, chapbooks, and Ebooks. Stageberg lives in Japantown, San Francisco.

August 2018: “Mystery”

Johnson Cheu • Johnson Cheu started writing poetry in June Jordan’s Poetry for the People From there, his poetry’s appeared widely in anthologies such as *Staring Back: The Disability Experience from the Inside Out*; *Screaming Monkeys: Critiques of Asian American Images*; and journals from *North American Review* to most recently *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Foliate Oak*. Other stuff out in the world include edited film books, and scholarly articles in Popular Culture Studies and Disability Studies.

Doug Van Gundy • Doug Van Gundy teaches in both the BA and MFA writing programs at West Virginia poems, essays and reviews have appeared in many journals, including *The Oxford American*, *Ecotone*, *Appalachian Heritage*, and *Poetry Salzburg Review*. His first collection of poems, *A Life Above Water*, is published by Red Hen Press. He is co-editor of the anthology, “*Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods: Contemporary Writing from West Virginia.*”

Jon Mozes • Jon Mozes’s publication credits include stories in the *Bellevue Literary Review* (2016 Pushcart Prize Nomination) and *LUMINA* online; and nonfiction in *Under the Sun*. He has also performed some of his work at The Monti, North Carolina’s premier live storytelling organization, winning a Hippo Award for Best Overall Story. Jon has been awarded writing fellowships at the Vermont Studio Center and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and he has worked as an actor, director and playwright, with memberships in both Actors’ Equity and the Screen Actors Guild.