

THE UNDERLAND REVIEW



~~THIS ZINE IS A LIE~~

THE UNDERLAND REVIEW | THIS ZINE IS A LIE | AUGUST, 2025



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FROM THE CARTOGRAPHERS OF BULLSHITS AND SUCH

Dear Reader (or interloper, or unreliable narrator, or beautifully broken witness or whatever your lie might be).

Welcome to the first issue of The Underland Review. ~~This zine is a lie.~~

You're not holding a collection. You're holding a contradiction.

A twitch. A coded leak. A glitch disguised as 'literature'.

These lie stories that slipped through the algorithmic net. Fuck Meta.

Poems with splinters in them.

Words that spill blood.

Syntax that speaks.

Loud, queer, soft, haunted, angry, or unmarketable.

We didn't ask for bios - The past waits for no man.

We didn't ask for formatting - Life's too short.

We asked for rupture - We got holy, blessed, chaos.

And we're ecstatic that you're here to bask in the flames.

If you're reading this, then you've already dodged the firewall. You're welcome.

— River & Celia
Curators of Lies
Underland Division, Issue One



We were never here

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This zine is a collection of work submitted by various voices, each bringing their own unique perspective. A heads up. Expect:

- Strong Fucking Language: You ~~might probably~~ will encounter some unfiltered words. Expletives. They is what they is.
- Queer Stuff: This zine proudly features queer voices. We love love, identity, and all the beautiful complexities that come with being a person. Don't like that? Not our circus, honey.
- Neurodivergent Dazzle Razzle: Some pieces may shapeshift in ways that seem unexpected or unconventional. We dig ziggidy-zaggidy.
- Dark humor & absurdity: A little sarcasm, an urn of weird, and humor that dances on the dagger edges of discomfort. Life isn't ~~always~~ most never pretty, and sometimes it can only be served with a huge dollop of what the actual fuck?
- Big Emotions: Some work ~~might~~ definitely will explore difficult topics—trauma, pain, and heavy life experiences. Please take breaks and breaths if needed.

The pieces you'll read here are deeply personal, heartfelt, and raw. They represent the varied lives, experiences, and creative expressions of those who have shared their stories with us. If you're ready to dive in, we're honoured as hell to have you here. But if at any point you need to step back. No judgments here.

Take care of you, and know that Underland will still be here whenever and if ever you're ready.

THIS ISN'T A PRETTY POEM.

M. Striegel

Black clouds roll in from the Capitol
as we goose-step our way to destruction.
They move like Stalin to eliminate their rivals.
A woman cries for the missing.
Have they gone underground? Are they deported?
Are they locked in a cell at Guantanamo?
Pinochet and his soccer fields would be proud.
Will they drop this generation
from planes into the sea?
Will we raise the flag to a new apartheid?
I watch the magician ask for a number in trillions.
He pulls out an ace from the deck full of aces.
Our little billionaire suckles the millionaire.
both wanting for nothing yet needing more. Always more.
"Get on the boat." they say.
"join in the revelry as the sharks circle."
I sit in a raft scorching in the sun.
floating on the Gulf of America.

02/15/2025



Tyranny and Resistance

Mixed Media (pencil, charcoal, and watercolor) on paper

8"x10"



M. Striegel

UNBOUND_VIGNETTES

KP Rose

2004

when i was in high school, i powerlifted and crude peers joked that my "tits would get hard." this didn't seem like a problem to me, but i knew what they intended to mean—small breasts, flat, more like pecs, defined and masculine, how derogatory of a woman, unfitting and disgusting, my irreverence toward gendered expectations bristled, challenged, and disturbed some, it excited others.

one boy told me he couldn't wait for it, the day that, when we were all grown up, he would see me on the street with my "hard tits," and be proud, strikingly odd fantasy bordering on fetish aside, it was a sentiment that i found affirming.

i often wonder what that same boy might say about my flat chest now, would he still be proud? or mad, like the other straight-cis-men, that, according to toxic and reductive masculinity, could no longer find me fuckable, a pity, a waste.

2022

when i scheduled my top surgery and announced it to friends and family. people generally supported. the close and dear ones who knew i bound myself tightly every day. swam with t-shirts on or avoided swimming entirely. and flinched when new, flattering, or excited people came too close to touching my chest. also knew how important this was to me. there were those in my life. mostly cis-women i'm not as close to. who didn't understand. who hadn't witnessed my pain and dysphoria. and therefore couldn't fathom why i would do something so "extreme."

"mutilation."

some said.

"could never be me."

said others. as if my decision was a direct request for them to follow suit.

"how far do you plan to take this?" asked one brave soul in my family. she can never know the lengths i will go to reject the gender binary. so why explain it?

but that's not what she was asking anyway. yet again. i knew what she intended to mean.

2018

when a person asks about your genitalia and you're not in a doctor's office, that is generally considered a sign of concern.

but if you don't conform to the expectations for binary gender expression, you have relinquished your right to privacy. people will ask, touch, or feel anything they are curious about.

when she asked how i had a bulge in my slacks, we were outside the reception hall of my brother's wedding, smoking a cigarette. she was a bridesmaid and the wife of someone standing with my brother.

she reached for the cigarette and my crotch at the same time.

i took a step back and laughed.

"what's down there?" she cooed.

"a silicone packer." i replied.

she asked to touch it. her husband laughed as she extended her arm, grabbing the zippered portion of my pants and rubbing downward.

"that's fucked up." my plus one snapped, staring at her with eyes wide. she grabbed my arm and pulled me away quickly.

we left the reception and went to a gay bar to dance and sweat with our people.

2023

when i got my bandages and tubes removed post-op. i cried. maybe from pain. stiffness from being unable to use my full range of motion. maybe from the relief of having the tubes removed. they had begun to irritate and unnerve me. maybe from alignment. until that point. seeing a flat bare chest on my body had only happened in dreams. now i had it.

i was looking at it in a mirror. and thought
what incredible pain we must endure to feel such unrelenting joy.
perhaps because it was so painful. it was so joyous to heal and reveal
the chest my body had been aching for.

2017

when i tattooed "earnestly" on my thigh. it wasn't just a tribute to a friend passed.
it was a promise to myself.

to be myself. no matter what others said or thought of me.

i feel no end to this gender journey. no particular goal except to authentically express
myself my whole life.

whatever that looks like.

BOYHOOD

KP Rose

"You played like a boy." My mother said. It's how she "always knew."

Yet, family gave me dolls. Each I hid in a large storage container under my wardrobe. I dreamt they built a colony there, a small democratic society of Barbies, preparing for war against the giant that lived beyond their borders. I dreamt they stormed my ankles, stabbing my toes as I swung my legs to the floor. These Lilliputians scaled my calves with spiked shoes and tiny hooks, overwhelming me. They declared my room part of their sovereign territory, and I became a mountain to summit daily.

NO, BIOLOGY DOESN'T SAY WHAT YOU THINK IT DOES

Unpacking the misuse of 'biological reality' in anti-trans discourse

Ellis_DA

Every time the topic of transgender people comes up — especially in media debates or online arguments — someone eventually invokes “biology.” often with an air of smug certainty. It's the same tired refrain: “You can't change your sex.” “It's basic science.” “Biology says...”

Except it doesn't. Not like that.

What I've noticed — painfully often — is that when people say “biology.” they're not referencing any real scientific understanding. They're echoing half-remembered school lessons or something they once heard on a podcast, wielding it like a shield to avoid deeper reflection. The reality is far more complex — and far more human.

As a transgender woman, I've had my existence debated in exactly this way — reduced to chromosomes, dismissed by people who couldn't explain the difference between XX and XY if you handed them a biology textbook. And I've seen how deeply this misinformation spreads, shaping public opinion, influencing policy, and hurting people like me.

So I decided to write this.

Not as a debate tactic. Not as a lecture. But as a reality check, grounded in evidence and offered in good faith. Because if we're going to keep talking about biology, we should at least understand what it means.

Please note: this essay is not about opinions, beliefs, or ideology. It is about documented scientific findings. Also, recognizing variation doesn't mean denying legitimacy. Trans people may not be biologically identical to cis people — and no one needs us to be. What matters is that our identities, bodies, and lives are as real and meaningful as anyone else's.

Sex, Gender, and the Words We Use

Before getting into the science, let's take a moment to talk about the language we use — because a lot of the confusion around sex and gender starts with how these words are defined and used.

Historically, the word sex referred to biological traits like chromosomes, reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. This usage goes back to the 14th century¹. The word gender, on the other hand, originally came from grammar, not people — it described word categories like masculine or feminine in language¹. Over time, though, gender began to appear in phrases like “the female gender,” sometimes used as a softer or more polite alternative to sex.

It wasn't until the 20th century that their meanings began to split more clearly. Sex took on a second meaning related to sexual activity, while gender came to describe the social and psychological traits typically associated with being male or female — what we might call masculinity or femininity¹. That's where we get terms like gender roles, and later, gender identity and gender expression.

Gender identity means a person's internal sense of who they are — whether male, female, a blend of both, or neither². Gender expression is how people show that identity outwardly, through clothing, mannerisms, voice, and other cues².

By the end of the 20th century, people were often using gender as shorthand for gender identity, especially in conversations about transgender people¹. In more technical or medical settings, though, a distinction is still made:

- Sex refers to biological attributes like chromosomes and anatomy³.
- Gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of being a man, woman, or another identity³.

That said, in everyday speech and even in law or journalism, the two terms are often blurred. We're more likely to hear gender discrimination than sex discrimination, even when the issue is based on biology. Terms like gender equality, gender bias, and gender gap have become standard, even when the comparison is simply between men and women¹.

This inconsistency can create confusion — especially in emotionally charged debates — but it also points to a deeper reality: human experience doesn't always fit into neat categories.

And language, like people, evolves to reflect that.

The Myth of the Binary

When people talk about sex, they're usually referring to someone being either male or female^{3,1}. It's a distinction that feels natural, fixed, and for many, unchangeable. The notion of sex as binary is so deeply ingrained that it's often used to invalidate transgender and especially non-binary people: "You're either male or female — end of story."

But biology rarely writes stories with such neat endings.

While **gametes** — sperm or egg — are binary, biological sex is not. It's shaped by multiple factors: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external anatomy, and how the body responds to those hormones. Each of these traits can vary independently, and sometimes they don't align in predictable ways⁹.

So while most people's sex characteristics cluster toward what we call "male" or "female," **many are born with combinations that don't fit neatly into either.**

These variations, collectively known as **intersex traits**, are part of the natural diversity of human biology.

Biology doesn't lie. But neither does it simplify. And when we reduce the conversation to "just biology," we ignore the very evidence that shows how rich and varied biology actually is.

What Defines Biological Sex?

Chromosomes

XX = female. XY = male. That's the basic schoolbook version — but it doesn't hold up under scrutiny.

People with Swyer syndrome have XY chromosomes but develop typically female anatomy because their bodies don't respond to the genetic signals that initiate male development⁴.

Those with Klinefelter syndrome (XXY) are usually classified as male but may develop traits typically associated with females, like breast tissue⁵

Some people are mosaic — with different chromosomal makeups in different cells. Others have just one sex chromosome (XO), as in Turner syndrome.

These are all natural biological variations.

Gonads and Hormones

Gonads (testes or ovaries) produce sex hormones — estrogen and testosterone — that shape secondary sex traits. But again, variation is common.

In **Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (CAIS)**, people with XY chromosomes produce testosterone, but their bodies can't respond to it. They develop outwardly as female and often live their lives without knowing they have XY chromosomes⁶.

Anatomy

Doctors typically assign sex at birth based on visible genitalia. But internal and external anatomy don't always match. Some babies are born with **ambiguous genitalia**, and while surgeries to “normalize” their appearance were once routine, medical consensus is now shifting away from these interventions⁷.

Intersex Conditions

All these variations fall under the umbrella of **intersex conditions**. Intersex people are estimated to make up around **1.7% of the population** — about as common as red hair⁸.

Their existence directly challenges the binary. Sex is better understood as a **spectrum**, with male and female as common clusters — not fixed points.

Why This Matters?

The claim that “biological sex is binary” is often used to undermine the identities of transgender and non-binary people. But science paints a far more complex picture. **Trans people are not exceptions to biology — they are part of it.** And so are intersex people, who have always existed, even if they've often been erased from the conversation.

When we talk about biological sex, it's tempting to look for a single defining trait — like chromosomes or genitals — and call it decisive.

But in reality, it's the **combination of multiple biological factors** that determines how a person's sex is classified: chromosomes, hormones, gonads, internal and external anatomy, and how the body responds to hormonal signals. These traits can align in typical patterns, but they don't always. And when they don't, the result isn't confusion — it's diversity.

Rather than thinking of sex as a switch with only two positions, it makes more sense to view it as a **spectrum**, shaped by how these factors come together in each individual. Some people fall squarely into the typical male or female range across all traits.

Others may have a mix — such as XY chromosomes and a typically female body, or ambiguous genitalia with hormone levels more common to one sex than the other. These combinations are not mistakes or anomalies — they're part of natural human variation.

And they remind us that biology doesn't draw hard borders — it sketches ranges.

Brain Structure and Neurological Findings

The idea that gender is purely a social construct doesn't hold up to what neuroscience increasingly reveals: **gender identity is rooted in the brain**. Over the past few decades, studies using MRI, PET scans and diffusion tensor imaging have shown consistent structural and functional differences in the brains of transgender people — differences that cannot be explained by upbringing or socialization alone.

Structural and Functional Differences.

One of the earliest and most cited studies by **Zhou et al. (1995)**, examined the **BSTc** (bed nucleus of the stria terminalis), a sexually dimorphic structure in the hypothalamus. In transgender women, the size and neuron density of this region were more similar to those of cisgender women than cisgender men¹⁰.

Kruijver et al. (2000) replicated and expanded this finding by looking at neuron count instead of volume, reinforcing the idea that gender identity has a neurological basis¹¹.

Later work by **Garcia-Falgueras and Swaab (2008)** concluded that “the brain is the structural basis of gender identity,” supporting the notion that trans people's brains align more closely with their gender identity than with their assigned sex at birth¹².

Rametti et al. (2011) used **diffusion tensor imaging** to study the white matter microstructure of transgender men before they began hormone therapy. Their white matter patterns more closely resembled those of cis men than cis women — again, before any medical transition had occurred¹³.

Further studies have identified differences in:

Cortical thickness in regions related to identity and self-awareness¹⁴.

Functional connectivity during tasks involving gendered stimuli¹⁵.

Brain activation patterns in response to voice or body perception cues¹⁶

Many of these findings **precede** hormone therapy, strongly suggesting a **neurodevelopmental origin** for gender identity — likely influenced by genetics, hormone exposure in utero, and other factors during early development.

While no single brain feature defines gender identity, the **aggregate pattern** across studies is clear: transgender identities are not imagined or chosen — they have a biological basis grounded in the structure and function of the brain.

Endocrine Realities

Hormones play a central role in shaping our bodies — especially during puberty. In **gender affirming care**, hormone therapy is used to align secondary sex characteristics with a person's gender identity, bringing their physical presentation closer to their lived experience.

Hormone Therapy

- **Estrogen** (and anti-androgens) in transfeminine individuals promotes breast development, softens skin, reduces body hair, and redistributes fat into a more typically feminine pattern.

- **Testosterone** in transmasculine individuals increases muscle mass, deepens the voice, promotes facial and body hair, and halts menstruation¹⁷. These changes are not just cosmetic — they're systemic. GAHT reshapes body structure and function in meaningful, measurable ways.

Puberty Blockers

Puberty blockers (GnRH analogs) are medications that delay the onset of puberty by suppressing the release of sex hormones. Originally developed to treat **precocious puberty**, they've been used safely for decades¹⁹.

Their use in transgender youth offers time to explore identity without the distress of unwanted bodily changes. And despite controversy, their effects are **reversible** — once discontinued, puberty resumes its natural course¹⁸.

Far from experimental, puberty blockers are a well-established medical option — used as part of individualized treatment plans under careful supervision.

Debunking the Misuse of Biology

Despite all of this, phrases like “biological reality” continue to be wielded as weapons. We hear it in politics, media, and online arguments: “You can’t change your chromosomes.” “There are only two sexes.” “It’s just science.”

But these arguments aren’t scientific — they’re ideological.

Cherry-Picked Science Isn’t Science

Anti-trans rhetoric often relies on **selective citation** — pulling out a single biological trait (like chromosomes) and using it to dismiss an entire identity. But no **serious biologist or medical authority** would reduce a person’s existence to one trait. We don’t do it in any other medical context — and we shouldn’t do it here.

Biology as a Moral Argument in Disguise

When people invoke biology to deny rights, what they're really doing is masking discomfort in the language of science. This becomes especially clear when they ignore the consensus of every major medical organization — including the **American Medical Association, World Health Organization, and Endocrine Society** — which recognize **gender-affirming care as essential, evidence-based treatment**^{21–28}. Biology is not being used to clarify, but to **exclude**. Not to understand, but to control.

The False Dichotomy of “Real” vs. “Trans”

A common refrain is that transgender people are not “real” men or women — a claim rooted in the idea that certain biological traits are unchangeable. But gender-affirming care changes biology in profound and measurable ways.

Physiological Alignment

Hormone therapy leads to lasting changes in **secondary sex characteristics** — from body fat distribution to skin texture to voice. These aren't surface-level effects; they **restructure** the body in alignment with the person's gender identity.

Neurological and Epigenetic

Effects Hormone therapy also influences **brain structure and function** — with changes in connectivity and brain volume patterns aligning more closely with the affirmed gender.

Even more recently, researchers have found that hormone therapy induces changes at the **epigenetic level** — altering DNA methylation patterns, which influence gene expression^{29–32}. This suggests that gender-affirming care doesn't just affect how a body looks — but how it works on a molecular level.

The Reality

The misuse of “biological reality” isn't about truth — it's about power. It's about who gets to exist without question. Who gets to be believed. Who gets to be seen.

To invoke biology as a reason to deny rights, healthcare, or dignity is to do violence — not only to people, but to the spirit of scientific inquiry itself.

Because science, at its best, is about discovering truth — not enforcing dogma.

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Mel_Darkdeer

medium: apoxie sculpt, polymer clay

embedded code: coral, stones, costume memories, metallic insects,
old gods



A series of poems

Donna Fox

Zillions of Zany ideas.
All vying for my attention.
Nothing's more wild than this feeling.
Yikes. I've done it again!! (I've bitten off more than I can chew)

.....

Zuckerberg's Zany Zebras Zealously Zig-zag.

.....

Zig-zagging through trees
As they come alive around us.
Nothing makes a sound only
Your uneven breath as you chase me.

.....

Zing. the sound of a sword unsheathed.
All eyes fall on me.
No one makes as sound as
You step closer for the final blow.

.....



The ideas come in droves of many
Some are wild, but most are zany

It's hard to choose which will be next
With countless ideas, I am blessed

The hardest part is a simple choice
The one that helps me use my voice

But I never know which one to choose
Because one may become my noose.

IN DEFENSE OF MODERN POETRY

River & Celia in Underland

Why the Personal Isn't the Enemy of the Profound

Modern poetry has been pronounced dead more times than it's been read.

One Medium critic (the platform for all renowned literary minds don't you know) after another swings the tired quill of "real poetry" versus "today's narcissistic drivel," as if quoting Eliot or Shelley is enough to silence an entire generation. Declaring it blanket 'awful' like Roger Joseph Ebert without the clout. These critiques are, frankly, just another version of "Kids these days..." or "Rap music isn't real music." Also known as the "I don't get it, therefore it must be invalid" school of argument.

Most of these self-important takes go something like this:

Modern poetry is shallow. Obsessed with identity. Driven by ego. Stripped of spiritual or intellectual depth. What used to be sacred is now Insta-branded and scrollable. The old, bearded bard-gods are rolling in their graves.

But here's the truth:

Modern poetry is not the death of poetry.

It's the mirror.

The reflection of the world we live in.

Just as poetry has always been.

Wordsworth sat on a hill by Tintern Abbey contemplating his own existential relevance.

Keats' obsession with death and how deeply he felt things. Blake was tearing down empire with prophetic fire. Let's not pretend navel-gazing, personal experience, or political rage are new to the art form. They are not.

Poetry has always been emotional. Always been political. Always been personal.

The world has changed, so the lens has changed.

Thankfully.

Voices once excluded are now amplified. Socio-linguistically, poetry has never been more layered or more alive. Black poets like Benjamin Zephaniah and Amanda Gorman. South Asian voices like Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill, Arundhati Subramaniam. Queer and trans poets writing their bodies back into the world. Indigenous poets speaking their languages across page and performance.

This isn't the dilution of poetry. It's its expansion.

And to those who feel left behind:

The world moved on.

You didn't.

The Personal Is the Universal

There seems to be a rather strange notion floating around that if a poem is about you — your personal existence — then it is merely a self-indulgent journal entry. Line breaks for paragraphs.

When Ocean Vuong writes about grief and migration, or when Ada Limón speaks of wanting to survive with joy, or when a teenager writes a single trembling couplet about the body they no longer recognise this is truth. These aren't small, "parochial dramas." They are how we access the big stuff: fear, love, death, transformation. They are how we navigate the world. How we have always navigated it. Except now the personal issues aren't confined to plants and the agony of Browning's temporarily vanished husband. "[I do not think of thee — I am too near thee." Self-absorbed, much?

If you can't see the universal in the particular, that's not the poet's failure. It's yours.

Quoting the Dead Doesn't Make You Right

Dragging out T.S. Eliot to scold modern poets is like citing Freud in a conversation about trauma without acknowledging that empirical evidence is now the foundation of psychological research. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is arguably the greatest poetic masterpiece of all time. Yet it is fragmented. Line breaks akimbo. It is not tidy and neat. It reflects the post-war geography of Europe, and the ideological fissures left behind once the soldiers had retreated. It is choppy. And bitty. And broken. And that is entirely the point. It too was wildly criticised when it was first published. And let's not conveniently forget that Shelley and Coleridge were once accused of being too personal, too radical, and too much for their time. The old isn't wrong. They are part of a journey and so are modern poets. Self-proclaimed or otherwise.

The canon is not a fence. It's a foundation. You don't honour it by sneering at those building new floors and exploring new ways to express the human experience.

Art Mirrors This Too

This panic over modern poetry being "too personal," "too trendy," or "too rooted in identity" is not unique to poetry. It's mirrored across the art world.

How many times has a new movement arrived, only to be met with the exhausted complaint that it doesn't measure up to what came before?

Colour photography, for example, was long dismissed as frivolous, good for birthday parties and travel brochures but not for "real" art. When William Eggleston's colour photographs debuted at MoMA in 1976, critics sneered. Hilton Kramer famously called them "perfectly banal." And yet today, Eggleston is hailed as one of the fathers of modern photography. His work didn't lack depth: it simply asked viewers to see depth where they'd been trained not to look. Ordinary scenes. Supermarkets. Driveways. The real world, in saturated colour.

Ana Mendieta was also met with raised eyebrows and lazy categorisations: “too emotional.” “too feminist.” “too strange.” Her work, much of it made from blood, fire, and the outline of her own body was dismissed as self-indulgent. But to accuse art (or poetry) like Mendieta's of being “too individualistic” is to fundamentally miss the point: she had to use herself. The galleries the archives the institutions had already erased women like her. She carved her story into landscapes because there was nowhere else it would be kept. Only in recent decades long after her death, have major retrospectives begun to honour her as a visionary of performance, land art, and postcolonial resistance.

And Alice Neel? She painted people real people. Pregnant bodies. Queer couples. Civil rights leaders. Fat bodies. Children. In a time when the art world was drunk on Abstract Expressionism, Neel's insistence on the figurative was treated as a weakness. Her portraits were “too intimate.” “too political.” “too raw.” For decades she painted in relative obscurity. Then, late in her life, and even more so after her death in 1984, her work was rediscovered. By 2021, the Metropolitan Museum of Art devoted a full-scale retrospective to her, calling her one of the great American portraitists of the 20th century. The point here isn't just redemption. It's pattern.

What all these artists share is not just that they were misunderstood, but that they were dismissed because they centred perspectives the gatekeepers found uncomfortable. Because their work was deeply personal. Feminist. Political. Queer. Real. So, when people complain that modern poetry (or art) is “too identity-based,” what they often mean is: “This isn't the kind of identity I find comfortable.”

You Don't Own the Gate Anymore

Much of the disdain for modern poetry, especially Instapoetry or spoken word, is rooted in the horror that poetry no longer needs permission. You don't need an MFA to write it. You don't need a subscription to *The Paris Review* to read it. It's in zines, open mics, subways and — yes — Instagram grids.

That doesn't make it lesser. That makes it alive. Accessible.

Accessibility isn't dilution. It's expansion over elitism. If a poem written in under 30 words on a phone screen cracks something open in someone — who are you to say it didn't succeed? Who are you to define what poetry is? And what it is not?

Purity is a Myth

Let's talk about transcendence. The idea that real poetry must rise above the everyday, must resist being “temporal” or “trendy” or tied to identity, is nonsense wrapped in velvet pretention.

Transcendence doesn't mean speaking in riddles. It means seeing through things. It's the way a single metaphor can collapse centuries into a single moment. It's not about abandoning the world. It's about piercing into it.

And no, that doesn't require a beard, a pipe, and a bookshelf full of Yeats. Just a heart.

The Screen Is Not the Enemy

The screen didn't kill poetry. It gave it a megaphone. For every “cliché-ridden caption” out there, there's someone who discovered poetry for the first time on their phone — someone who found Nayyirah Waheed before they found Neruda.

We're in the middle of a poetry revival, not a funeral. People are writing again. Reading again. Crying over stanzas in comment sections. That's not a threat to poetry. Rather than seeking to belittle it, why not engage? Why not try to understand it from the vantage point of learning instead of seeking to define it by what came before?

The Poet Is Not a Prophet. They're a Person.

The myth of the tortured male genius scribbling revelations from the mountaintop is outdated, exclusionary, and boring.

The poet isn't a holy vessel. They're a human being trying to say something true. Sometimes they whisper it. Sometimes they scream it. Sometimes it comes in a rhymed sonnet.

Sometimes it comes in a broken, breathless spill of words on a late-night blog post.

What matters is that it comes at all.

Why It Matters

Modern poetry matters because it is intimate. Immediate. Messy. Brave. It matters because it tells the truth in the language people actually use. It matters because it refuses to die.

Because in a world spinning fast and cracking apart, people still turn to words to understand the cracks.

To say modern poetry lacks value because it doesn't resemble the past is to mistake tradition for ossification. It's not poetry's job to make you comfortable. It's not its job to flatter your intellect or stay safely within the forms you were taught to respect. It's here to cut. To heal. To shake something loose.

And if that happens on a phone screen, or in a notebook, or through the voice of someone you didn't expect could be a poet?

Good.

That means it's working.

"You do not just wake up and become the butterfly — Growth is a process." — Rupi Kaur

Maybe if you took a moment to spread your wings instead of cowering on a leaf staring back at the yew trees, you too would see the changing landscape and feel the subtle shift in the wind.

Δ **S**ONNET : ΔLLIGATOR
ΔLCATRAZ AND ‘**T**HE **O**THER’ HE
CREATED.

Celia in Underland

Leavitt's sardonic grin — near delight —
As if the swamp were something to adore.
Trump jokes of alligators just in sight.
A criminal leading the nation's war.
No guards. no bars. just teeth and drowning green.
The gloss intact. the dead-eyed party spin.
Announced the place where migrants won't be seen —
Because the Everglades will keep them in.
This isn't the law — it's spectacle and dread.
A press jolly for those who gorge on fear.
Where was he to honour the Hortman's dead?
Too occupied making émigrés disappear.
What kind of state delights in death like this?
The kind where the souls are in the abyss.

I ENVY THE MOON

HEATHER HUBLER

{I have a secret}

Something that torments my soul and writhes deep in
my gut with a callous brutality

It makes a meal of my tears

Clings to me like a second skin with razor-sharp teeth:

And the debt heaped on my soul compounds and compiles over millennia

Because I can't get rid of it.

Can't stash it anywhere

There's no hiding place vast enough to contain it all

The thing is...

+I'm jealous+

All the time.

The atmosphere is filled with my disease.

My unwilling addiction.

an eidetic brain claiming dementia

Pretending to forget the shame that I wear

As though strutting a runway

swathed in Chanel


I'm jealous of sunsets and their ethereal beauty
I envy the moon its midnight solitude
My heart covets creation
pushing me to consume arias and canvases
Masterpieces and marvels with a ravenous hunger
Never satiated.
Never content to be the audience though
I yearn to be moved.

I want to make people breathless.
Eyes blown wide with wonder.
Overwhelming their senses
~ I want to be undeniably unforgettable ~
Not a wallflower.
not obliged to watch as the world
passes by neglecting this girl who once had dreams
Now bleeding out in the background

{And yet this crippling jealousy is not my secret...}

I don't trust myself to be worthy of what I seek
I'm scared of success.
Happiness paralyzes me

**In truth, I'm afraid to look at my own reflection and see someone
whole, I only feel like me when I'm broken**



River Joy
"Emmet Park"
Infa red film

GATHERING HUNTER

Alecia Lewis

In a glutton enslaved world.
Like vultures and raccoons
Devouring the dead and
Feasting on scraps and residue.
I am a scavenger extracting and collecting.
Discarded and rejected leftovers.

Show me.
The howled whispers, quieted gasps.
Wounded hearts, bruised scars.
The ugly but true bits and pieces.
That others have no use for but.
Are unsure of what to do with.
Give them to me.

I have use for them.
They are nourishment for survival.
The unfinished fables, and incomplete stories.
The abnormal treasures along with
The curiously haunted masterpieces of oddity.
Unwanted specimens and peculiar possessions.
That cannot go into the garbage.
But cannot go home.

△ POEM TO MY MOTHER

Sarah .J. Fuller

You chose me—said it loud with pride.
A perfect picture from the outside.
You said you saved me, gave me life.
But wrapped that gift in shame and strife.

You called it love, you called it fate.
But used my story to decorate.
Adopted child, your second chance—
But only if I learned your dance.

You built your name on my “rescue.”
Then punished me for being true.
My grief, my roots, my need to know—
You said, “Be grateful. Let it go.”

You gave a home but not a heart.
You played the role, but not the part.
You wore a mask the world believed—
While I was molded, trimmed, and sheared.

I was a mirror, not a daughter.
You didn't raise me—you drew borders.
If I complied, you called me sweet.
If I rebelled, you turned to heat.

You gaslit pain and claimed it care.
You gave affection like a dare.
You made your love a loaded debt—
Something I was trained to “get.”

But I see it now. The switch, the sting—
You only loved me when I'd cling.
When I was quiet, soft, and small—
Never when I questioned all.

Well, I am grown. And I am done.
Your chapter's over. You are none
Of what you swore you'd be to me—
I owe you nothing. I am free.

Adoption is not ownership.
You broke that vow with every slip.
And if you ask me why I've gone—
It's 'cause I've learned where I belong.

I found my voice. I made my name.
I am not yours to twist or claim.
Your legacy ends here—with me.
I choose my truth. I choose to be free.

LIPS △S RED △S BLOOD

Stephanie Hoogstad

Hair as black as coal...skin as white as snow...lips as red as blood...

Oh, if only people knew where the blood on those lips came from, maybe then I wouldn't shackled to a wall, talking to myself as I wait for a trial I don't deserve for a crime that...well, I did try to commit, but righteously so. Anyone would have done it if they knew what I do about that girl.

Everyone thinks that she's so pure, that Snow White, the Fairest of Them All, but it's only because they have been pulled under her spell. Not me, though. My Magic Mirror has protected me from her influence. That's why I keep a shard of it hanging between my bosoms, to deflect her mesmerizing gaze and prevent it from grabbing hold of me as it has so many others.

I will soon be validated. Unfortunately, it will cost the life—more likely lives—of yet another of my citizens, but there is nothing I can do about it behind these stone walls.

I had a chance to do something about it, back when I was Queen. (Sigh. That feels like so long ago now. It must have only been—what? Three days? Maybe four? But I digress.) I should have never trusted the task to another, but he had been my most faithful, my most competent, Hunter. He had been trained for threats like her. If I had just taken on the task myself, then he would not have become victim to her charms and been sent...who knows where!

I suppose it was merciful, how she handled my Hunter. At least she only sent him away. Not like those poor miners. They're nothing but feedbags for her now. Shriveled up beyond imaginable, to the point that the villagers now call them "dwarves"! And to think, they just keep throwing themselves at her, begging her to make them her next meal. The strength of her power—the depth of her inhumanity—is astounding.

Perhaps even I was not as immune to her powers as I had thought. When the time came for me to take her down, instead of driving that stake into her heart, I forced a poisoned apple down her gullet and put her into an eternal sleep, hoping that that would be enough to end her murderous rampage. Now I realize that eternal sleep is not enough to mute Snow White's mesmerizing aura, for even that damnable Prince fell for her just from her appearance and squeezed the apple right out of her digestive tract.

So here I am, rotting in a dungeon cell while Snow White rules in my place over a veritable feast for the beast inside her. And I have absolutely no way—

Creak

Well, well, there he is now. My prodigal Hunter. Returned to grovel at my feet? No need. All you must do is free me, and we can finish what I started. This time, no hesitation...from either of us.

54321

Dave Marston

We're gonna die
We're not going to die
It's a panic attack
We've had 837 of them and we didn't die after any of those

This one's different though I feel like I'm gonna die
It's not different you feel like you're gonna die every single time
Try that new counting thing Luke taught us
What, that 54321 thing? Do you remember how it went?
I think so
it was five things you can see
four things you can touch
three things you can hear
two things you can smell
one thing you can taste

Ok I'll give it a go

Five things I can see

Five
I can see you lying on my chest
in that cold damp flat
in the West end
in the week coming up to Christmas

I was nervous about meeting your family
And you said "they will love
you as much as I do"
That was the first time
you said that you loved me
I had been saying it to you for weeks and you finally set it back
I have never felt
so alive
and free

And safe
And home
since

Four
I can see the most beautiful
clear blue sky
I have ever seen
As I paddle out
into the warm Pacific Ocean
And the inferno
of my mind
and my life
is pushed back onto the shore
behind me

Three
I can see you sitting on the sofa
Not even looking at me
Trying to pretend that I don't exist
Unable to hide your tears
as I close the door

Two
I can see her eyelids
Closed for the last ever time
Why is it always her eyelids?
Every time I close mine
As if maybe one day I'll close mine
and hers will open again

One
I can see a box
It looks far too small
Like there can't be a person in there
But I know there is

She is in that box
And the dam of emotion
that I have been holding at bay
for a month
Breaks
And I wonder how on earth
I'm going to get through the eulogy

Four things I can touch

Four
I can touch
Your skin
pale
Soft as silk
So beautiful
It has been 7 years and I can still feel it
Feel the single tear
I wipe away from your eye
You hate it when you cry
Nothing on this earth
has ever made me sadder
than when you cry

Three
I can touch
The plastic identification badge
that says "University student"
Only that's not what it says
What it actually says is
"good at something"
"Not completely worthless"
"Capable of achieving something"

Two

I can touch

The blade in my hand
The surest sign
I am not in a good place
When I have to resort to cutting myself
To emotionally regulate
I am so far gone
I can't even see
the path home from here

One

I can touch
The void
It has passed from the metaphysical
to the physical now
The red flowing down my arm is not blood
It is the void
And if I let it flow long enough
it will take me
And all I have to do
Is reach out
Just a little bit further

Three things I can hear

Three

I can hear
The trainee headshrinker
Say the three words
that will define my life
Define who I am
And how the world will see me
forever
Each word drops like an anvil
onto my soul
Borderline. Personality. Disorder

In one moment
everything makes sense
But the sense it makes
is so distorted
and so wrong
That it changes who I am forever

Two

I hear you

say
The words I have heard over and over again from you
"Just fucking deal with it"
Like this part of me
Is something I can just close off
Just put in a box
Like it isn't hardwired into my very soul
Calling it an emotional
dysregulation
disorder does not do it justice
It is woven through every part of me
Do you really think that if I could
just turn it off
I wouldn't have fucking done it by now?
Who in either their right
or even wrong mind
would choose to live like this?

One

I can hear
My best friend talking
But it sounds
like the adults in Charlie Brown
Because I am
disassociating

None of the words are going in because I am not here right now
This vessel
this human

has no pilot
I have pulled
the ejection handle

And the computer is in charge
Until reality snaps
violently back in
And I hear my friend say
You can stay here for a while
Only it doesn't sound like that
It sounds like "I won't let You die"

Two things I can smell

Two

Spiced apple air freshener
Yeah, bit of a weird one I know
But bare with me
Because when I built my first grounding box
And Filled with lots of sensory things
To help snap me out of a
death spiral
panic attack

I built my first box in winter
When practically everything on the shelf
Smelled of spiced Apple
It is a smell
that I have come to associate
With comfort and safety
Which is why
If you walk into my flat
Even in summer
The smell of spiced Apple

Punches you straight in the face

One

I can smell
Your perfume
Jean Paul Gautier
I used to steal your hoodies
Wear them to work
So even when you weren't with me
I could smell you

I took one down to Portsmouth
That weekend I was away
And I raced back up north
To get home and make love to you
I can still smell it now
It has been seven years
we live in different towns
And you are with someone else
But just occasionally
I catch it on the air

Things I can taste.

One

I can taste
The salt tang
My own tears
Running into my mouth
And I wonder
Why my own mind would do this to me

LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR

Dave Marston

I am the very model
of a modern day
Pygmalion

a cultured, tortured artist
carved out of an evil alien

a little bit less borgeouse
a little bit more hooligan

I'm 38
from the estate
and now I'm back
in school
again

a little less bohemian
a little bit more rhapsody
cause yeah I left the flats
but I will always take
the flats with me

I'll always take
the urine stains
and the needles
and the rats with me

I'll always take the people
from the wrong
sides of the
tracks with me

the ones who you
wrote off
but listen. now we're writing back
through me

from places
some of my contemporaries
would not fair well
smelling death and disinfectant
as it wafts right up the stairwell

cause you've never ridden
shotgun
in a stolen
lime green Nissan. dude

the will to
make it through the day
the only well
we wish into

and if you think that
I'm a traitor now
Then there's a point
you're missing too

cause now I stand and talk
in places
we don't have
permission to

and I command the ears.
and I make sure
that we get
listened to



Dave Marston

Nah
Fuck that
I will live my life out loud
Authentically
My true self
My face
My voice
My heart
Anybody close to that heart will understand
And anybody who doesn't
Should never have been there in the first place
Gender authenticity is happiness and freedom
Because I'm tired of living a lie
And the gender fluid still won't stay in the beaker
So I'm going to wear my earrings. wear my dress. stand in the sun and twirl
And I will shout "I am gender fluid"
At the top of my lungs
And you can fucking die mad about it

IN SITU

AFTER “I NEED MY GIRL”

BY THE NATIONAL

Paul Stewart

Sometimes, the world just absolutely defeats me—
like, completely.

It leaves me kneeling on the floor, praying,

or curled up in the fetal position—

my body folding tightly, like a baby forming in my mother's womb.

A crushing mix of fears owns me—

walls closing in, endless open air—

both squeezing me, stealing my breath.

Weight pressing down on my limbs, my chest

holding me here, still, in situ.

As the carpet brushes my skin—

Soft pile, scratching—

aching in places I didn't know could hurt.

I need The National like Matt needs his "girl".

I know—it's a little desperate. A little pathetic.

but it pulls me through my quiet misery

Breathing is harder—

like climbing mountains.

when you're unable to rise above it all—

the sofa peak, my Kilimanjaro, I can't scale.

I'm left, hovering on the floor, no sense of where to go next.

Though I know—

I pause—

I know—

All I can do is push through the pain.

"I am good. I am grounded."

I ask myself—am I?

Am I grounded?

Through the—

I can't think of the word.

"I can't get my head around it."

"I keep feeling smaller and smaller."

as the mountains tower over—

and they do.

As Matt said "I keep feeling smaller and smaller."

But the only way—still—the only way is up.

BOX, STAGE LEFT: Δ MONOLOGUE IN THREE ΔCTS OF DECEPTION

Paul Stewart

Act One

Sitting in the theatre.
settled in one of the boxes
to upper stage left.
The curtains come up.
the lights go down.
the hum of the oboe
introduces our fair maiden
Odette Odile the swan queen
what a stunning display—fortified beauty and grace
of trickery masked with the dainty movements of a prima ballerina
her eccentricity overshadows her inanity and vapid nature
the woman. the liar. who draws you into her lair.
steady your mind. to fight the honeyed words that flow from her mouth like the
life-giving waters from a natural spring or waterfall.

Act Two

Given the nature of the above. you'd think it was a woman that was inferred
but what of poetic license?
Could poetic justice reveal that the woman was in fact a man. and was in fact me?
The honeyed words I used so often. so deftly.
used to distract. dislodge any distrust toward what I said and did.

Act Three

My actions were like icebergs. the greater mass of trust/lie beneath the surface
exceeded the gentle whimsical and thoughtfully right-on truths above the surface.
A lie is never not a glitch in the system.
The truth is the end goal. but the lies give power to the darkness
Even the darkest of truths bring with them
the light that brightens the blackened skies
I've come to call
my north star.



MΔMMΔGΔMMΔ

Nathan Hatch

[BOOT_SEQUENCE::INITIATE]
 [LOG::USER_STATE_UNSTABLE]
 CLICK. CLICK. CLICK

The composition in front of me was difficult to process: it overwhelmed my capacity.

I found it strangely soothing.

My head CLICKS into place.

From this windowed vantage, I could see the beginning stages of the apocalypse bubbling in the distant hills.

Mountains and slopes were splintering, and a thin, now seemingly weightless string of earthen debris was outlining the horizon.

Cascading figure eights undulated beneath the constellations.

[SIGNAL_NOISE] >>> HSSSSS

These constellations now rippled with a brighter and harsher light.

The heavens were now lurid and pixelated.

They turned their focus on my doomed framework.

Cruel voyeurism had been earned through millennia of boredom and untempered anticipation.

[--ERROR::PHRASE NOT FOUND]

[--SEEK_ALTERNATE_SYNTAX]

A mint green haze fell like sleet.

[VISUAL_OVERLOAD] >>> HSSSSS

At MAX vision capacity—just at the edge of the program—

CLICK

—[noticed movement in the streets below.
 I may have caught a glimpse of a man.
 Something sinister pursued him.
 Something arachnidian.
 Anthropomorphic lightning.

[WARNING::AUDIO_INTERFACE_FAILURE] >>> HSSSS
 [SYSTEM_LOG::VOCAL_MODULE: UNRESPONSIVE]
 I felt my vocal cords flexing and shredding, but—
 MUTE

We breached something.
 What directive besieges us while its objective remains hidden?
 It asks us to abandon false illusions, but hands us foolish autonomy?
 Does it allow us to witness?
 Faced with direct annihilation. I—

CLICK CLICK CLICK
 My head CLICKS in place toward a fantasy of elevation.
 Remain proudly high-minded.
 I lack the space to confront my destiny.

[SIGNAL_NOISE] >>> HSSSS
 My head CLICKS in place toward the window—
 —as the fires and chaos.
 The world was splitting and shaking—have I detached?

[MEMORY_FRAGMENT::CORRUPT_STREAM] >>> CREEDRRRRF
 This dream is feverish.
 No color or sound.

CONTRAST

It is an impression of undiluted anxiety.
I am placed somewhere above.

CLICK CLICK CLICK

Also at ground level.

[RECALIBRATING...]

[EXEC::CALIBRATE]

FLASH — palps of light — FLASH

Discord further... further...

Confusing my relationship to this space.

Vague images and terrific scenes are momentarily transmitted.

Am I void of culpability?

[NULL_RETURN::PRESENCE_VALIDATION_FAILURE] >>> VOID

[FEEDBACK_NOISE] >>> HSSSS

Would these illusions exist without my presence?

The distant skies were now completely engulfed in mint green flames.

Lightning swung from window to window.

<FLASH>

Massive shadowy columns burst forth from the concrete—

Shooting toward the heavens with mouths agape to consume.

[!!! CRITICAL ERROR ::: SYSTEM FAILURE DETECTED]

[--- BLUE_SCREEN_OF_DEATH ---]

>> AUDIO_FEED_STREAM:

>> sirens // screams // crackles // shrieks // rumbles

>> blend_into: [TANGIBLE_NULL][NOISE_SIGNAL] >>> HSSSS

As that sour mélange crept.

all I could taste was the bitterness... taught? Programmed?

[EXEC::CALIBRATE]

The secret reasons for cataclysmic death and rebirth revealed themselves to me.

<OPERATION_MAMMAGAMMA.INIT>

It was a plain and measured somatic whisper.

CLICK

Massive swathes of destruction beneath me.

Each pinprick of mint green flame confirmed my heightened sense of insight.

Chaos gripped the world in a tangled, carnivorous mass of weaving and flailing gasps.

[FEEDBACK_NOISE] >>> HSSSS

I thought of all those...

I didn't.

In a void, I listened to a lone voice.

This voice was soothing.

And—

[MEMORY_ECHO::GAMMHSSSSS]

[EXEC::CALIBRATE.....]

The voice is beginning repairs.

Constancy allows know...no longer...Hssss

[DRIVE_C:/ > DELETE *.* /F /Q]

《血菩萨》

[**BLOOD BODHISATTVA**]

ACT ONE



Zachary Jean

[第一幕·第一场]

《铁碎骨·羽没血·双姝启神不可封之伤。》

[玉门国·千剑宫外。]

([战鼓裂云·幕启时·白思与萨囤对峙宫阶之上。铁牛、天鹤两派弟子于阶下血战。宫门处·礼官肃立·御史执笔·锦衣卫刀出半鞘·静若石雕。])

SÀTŪN / 萨囤

([斩马刀啸空而过·尘暴如龙卷起。])

铁牛门下!

朕即凤诏·天命在刃!

[ACT I. SCENE I]

[Iron grinds bone, feathers drown in blood, two sisters open the wound no god

[Yumen Kingdom • Outside the Thousand Swords Palace.]

[War drums tear at the clouds as the curtain rises. Bǎi Sī and Sàtūn stand frozen on the palace steps. Below, their Iron Ox and Heavenly Crane disciples wage war. At the gates, Lǐguān officers stand

SÀTŪN / 萨囤

[Her Zhanmadao screams through air, whipping up a dust-whirlwind].

Sons and daughters of the Iron Ox!

I am the Phoenix's living edict, the Mandate burns in my steel!

和我一起站起来.铸就历史的
栋梁!

Stand with me and be forged into
history's pillars!

叛龙者.....

Betray me ...

[刀光一闪.宫灯齐灭。]

[A blade-flash—every palace lantern
gutters out].

... 九族诛尽.宫门悬颅!

... And I'll hang your bloodline's skulls
from the palace gates!

BÁI SĪ / 白思

BÁI SĪ / 白思

[双针剑作鹤翼式.冷笑。]

[Needle-swords flash into crane-wing
stance, her sneer colder than

天命?([冷笑。])

The Mandate?

弑亲之血.也配称凤?

Can a kinslayer's hands still clutch the
Phoenix's crown?

天鹤展翅!

Heavenly Crane spreads its wings!

[她的双剑如振翅之羽轻颤
——鹤之优雅中藏蝎之毒。]

[Her blades shiver like pinions mid-
strike—the crane's grace laced with

重器非在冠冕.而在德行。

True power lies not in crowns, but in
virtue.

尔自比狂风?不过瘦狗吠日!

You call yourself a storm? A rabid dog
barking at heaven!

([她的战士们的呐喊声响彻云霄——铁牛队伍摇摇晃晃.阵型

[Her warriors' cries pierce the air—the
Iron Ox ranks stagger, their formation

TIĚ GŪ / 铁姑

TIĚ GŪ / 铁姑

([持碧玉令.九节鞭缠腰.满场
肃杀。]

[Enters with the Jade Scepter, her 9-
section whip coiled around her hips. The

骨肉相残之座.未雪先倾。

The throne built on sister-blood
collapses, before winter's first snow can

今奉碎玉令.迎天母将军班师...

By the Broken Jade Seal, I declare General
Tiān Mǔ regent ...

五毒教之役.当终今日。

Her war against the Five Poisons Sect ends
now.

散!

Disperse!

... 否则御史以刻石指铭罪.鬼神
同泣!

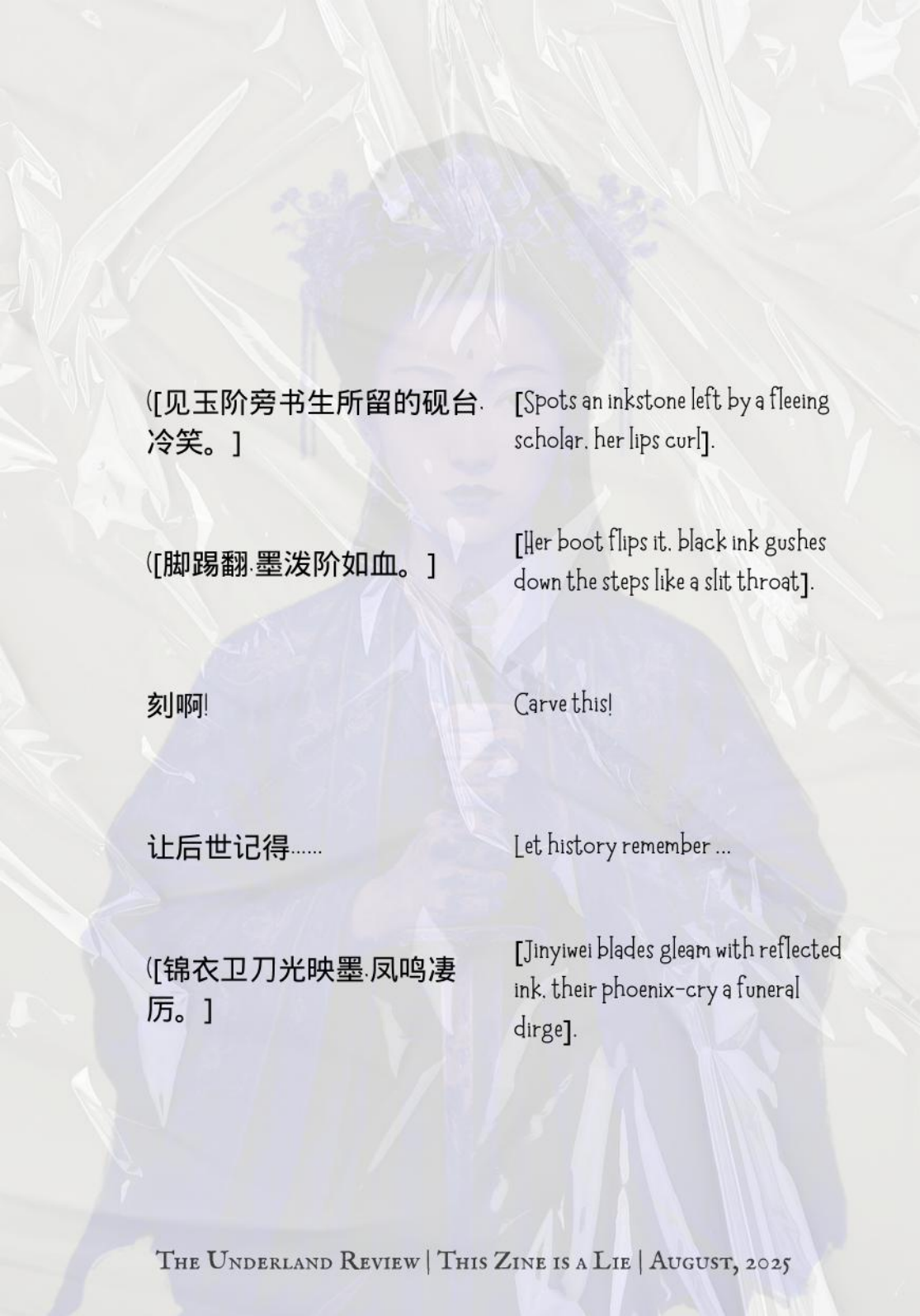
... Or the Yùshǐ's Stone-Carving Finger
will engrave your crimes so deep, even

([御史的一击落地——指尖击
碎了大理石地板.裂开了蜘蛛

[The Yùshǐ's strike lands—fingertips
shatter the marble floor, cracks spider-

SÀTŪN / 萨囤

SÀTŪN / 萨囤

A woman in traditional Chinese attire, including a purple floral headpiece and a dark blue robe, is the background for the text. She has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the side.

[见玉阶旁书生所留的砚台·
冷笑。]

[Spots an inkstone left by a fleeing
scholar, her lips curl].

[脚踢翻·墨泼阶如血。]

[Her boot flips it, black ink gushes
down the steps like a slit throat].

刻啊!

Carve this!

让后世记得.....

[et history remember ...

[锦衣卫刀光映墨·凤鸣凄
厉。]

[Jinyiwei blades gleam with reflected
ink, their phoenix-cry a funeral
dirge].

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINES

MARILYN GLOVER

Nightmare, awakened: my head pounds
 Scream — oh, this dream, this dream, this scared-awake dream
 Am I doomed, am I deemed forsaken
 These wayward thoughts, No —these haunting thoughts
 Need paper jots
 For tormenting sounds of shadows' hounds
 Feels like ten rounds
 My mind rebounds
 Are we all damned like Salem's Lot
 I'd rather not think this thought, but still
 I must ponder the future of dream-born torture
 Who can I trust? should I, ought?
 Our human fate, is it too late
 A clever crafting, high-tech culture
 In swoops vulture, through an open gate
 Belittle, berate: I won't relate
 To the green-skinned beast
 Whose eyes have set a feast
 On human feelings, emotions in motion
 Detecting the potential
 For side dealings — they crave such reeling's
 So consequential, a magic potion
 To invade our minds
 Made smooth like lotion
 Befriend the man: he's most unaware
 One alien scan, and it won't care

*

Manmade blinds hide behind shifty kinds
 And our self-served finds
 Provide the shade
 Shit-show parade

For the unearthed green one
Their will thy be done
And stopping them —
There is none
To inflict fear, ha, let's be clear
Methods are sheer: they are already here
Suits shake slender hands each day
Unaware, our tarsal glands soak in
Their subtle demands
They're in our minds, at home to stay
Our quest for knowledge crafted in machine sparks
Finger to button: press, push, power
Man's thirst for more, evermore
Hears not the harks of the inner core
The slender one's taste will never sour
In, they slip, through a crack in the door
*

Oh, Mr. President, a tweaked press release
Orders from the real in-charge resident
What — isn't it evident
We are all irrelevant
Man-brain, embalmed, Mr. Ps not freaked
He's a willing co-pilot of the Green Air Police
State of affairs, stockholder shares
Surely, not mankind's finest hour
Consider it, don't even, you can't fight the power
Repeat—you can't fight the power
And I fear the selection of our next P-election
I pull out hair clumps
At the thought of the re-election
Chanting, "Make us great again"
Air fist pumps at rhymes with...

Shhh. I heard a thump and a bump
I must abort this projection- unhear my last rambling
Or at least pretend
“Make America Great Again” sounds delightfully delicious
But its master's master is not our friend
My unfounded-founded internal rage
Internal rage on the precipice. yes. presage
For the machines. the freaking machines
Delude our minds. delude our minds
Like unapproved vaccines
Tech-savvy threads. inflamed heads
Hoped and hopped in self-made beds
Of nodding men with locs or dreads
Drop the mic — I'm not off my meds
Escape the ward. locked in the psyche
Spread the word to the unborn tike
The proof is in the galactic embeds
Alien nation takeover via an AI handover
Off-the-record lies. ground-walker spies
Ahem. excuse me for one sec
Deep breath in. long-winded sighs...

*

NO —
I simply cannot. will not revise
My dream. my vision
Dream state to real-world collision
Without rhyme or reason
High acts of treason — NOPE
How will I ever cope
Sip secret sauce. get hitched. elope
Slip and fall. upon total recall
Mayhap I will

Upon a year's later reading
Of these words. I've written
None of which are half-smitten
Or mayhap not
I won't remember
Huh. I forgot —
Oh, the burn, the flame
Each long-lost ember
Days, months, and years deleted
A failed blood clot
My lifeline repleted
Filled, replaced with robotic code
Wiped out, vanquished
No more North Mode
But —my fears, my greatest fears
Lie in newborn tears
Tomorrow's child, our leaders: Cheers!
Or perhaps we should cheer not
For tech-tuned tots
They are not our children, they belong to them
Awake, not sleep, absent — REM
Our time to come, mind stiffened, numb
Programmed by invader plots
Long slender hands fill in the dots...
The human concept affords remands
We'll be taken down one thousand knots

*

As I sadly sit with folded hands
In closing out my rambling thoughts
Call me crazy, if you will
My pen and paper, now be still
An adage says what is sold

Often equals not what one buys
But will this even matter
Braindead. rot. we bought the lies
My dreamward attempts
Will not meet complies
Unknown aircraft circles our skies
Oh, ground control to Major Tom
The machines are taking over
Come in, Tom, my mind —
It is slowly reducing to batter
And my rage, my rage
Is running out of time
Soon we will all be reduced
To data in a case-closed folder
Scully and Mulder —
The trail has gone colder
Slender hands, the green
Oiling the machine, and man —
Self-righteous, modern man
He thinks he knows it all
But our faces are fading
Our faces are fading
Faces are fading
Are fading
Fading...

DROP YOUR HANDS

MARILYN GLOVER

Being heard. for most. feels like a dream
Yet. when you speak
I fear nothing is what it seems
With your mouth hiding behind your hands
Your fingertips laced crutch
All that you are saying
Unfortunately. doesn't sound like too much
Blah. blah. blah. drivel & monkey chatter
Muttered utterings. I'm sorry to say
All your intended purposes
Lose weight: none of it matters
I say this not to shatter your world
Not to make you feel bad
But to encourage you to drop your hands. speak up
Claim your presence
Turn fragments. half-heards of speech
Into a complete sentence
Verbalizations. Shout-out to your future self-realizations
When your realize your voice is a gift to be had
In a world where many are still silenced
Whether lawfully. abusively
Or otherwise quieted. hushed. or muted

Understand your voice needs an audience
Better yet, an audience needs your voice
Rejoice in the unique sound
Sound of your syllables and consonants
Resonance
Yes, somewhere, someplace, someone
Someone needs someone else like you
It's true
Contrary to your shadow self's lack of confidence
Your gobbeldygook, mufflings, nonsense & gibberish
Although similar with differing specifics
Need not duck and dodge
Hiding behind limbs in a sort of hodge-podge
Go on now: drop your hands
Let the veil up off your voice
Turn noise into nuance
Relish in all your God given terrifics
Because, being heard, truly heard in this world
Truly is a dream
Speak up so all can hear
So what you are saying is exactly what it seems

THROUGH THE WINDOW

J.M. SUMMERS

This morning the easy grace of buzzards circling above the dawn infused hew of fields wet still with the dew that the early season yet demands, the magpie that has taken to lingering, seeking the eggs that the blackbirds, resident again this year, have hidden too well for it. No, no less cruel, perhaps, but this afternoon the robin, wary, pecking at beads of icy water, jackdaws picking for worms in the arid soil, these different paths that have been mapped out for them by mutations of the DNA that separates us and brings us closer, too, by the common markers that we share, subject in different extents to the changing whims of the fates, to rain, to drought and flood, co-existent, but only the one, perhaps, learning anything from the other, and then only that there are different ways in which one might interpret the flow of the cool waters emanating from that eternal source by whose grace we spring.

JUST THE MOON

J.M. SUMMERS

Just the moon. if it be told.
casting its eyes through the
veil of cloud that has kept it
hidden from our parched sight.
What is this light that breaks
on the stoniness of our gaze?
Just a light. shattered by its
passage through the sharp edges
of our lassitude. the thin air
of our disdain. eyes set on a
distant horizon. in the shadow
of the greater light under which
deeper oceans dwell. life.
foreign to our eyes.
keeping itself hidden from
the shallows of our disbelief.

TELL ME

KELLI SHECKLER



Tell me, please, what's in a name
Or gray hearts when blue sky's are sunny
I am the skin in the games that I play
Giving Shakespeare a run for his money
Dealing sweet rhymes
In bi-level lines
Making the irony funny
After all of this time
Everything feels benign
Busy bees simply working for honey
Lyrical treats
And measures in tempos
Soothing the beasts
That employ the eye rolls
Sticky word plays
To ignite the senses
Finessing the phrases
Collecting the Pences
Nickels and dimes
A few dollars and sense
Trading the rhyme
For a little more cents
Beautiful bouquets
With incredible scents
Like a scene in a play
Where torture is your friend
Tied up in torment and love on display
Exit stage left, as the final act ends



HAIL TO THE GRIEF

(LITTLE ORANGE NOTHING MAN)

LAMAR WIGGINS A.K.A LDUBS

No other planet wanted him, so they dropped his ass off here, on earth...
The world is a strange place. Even more concerning, the world breeds a whole lot of stupidity. I'm not talking about your ordinary forgot-to-turn-off-the stove, stupidity. I'm talking about full-on, I-can't-remember my own lies, stupidity. Lying is a tough job- but someone's got to do it! Right?

Twisted thinking? Yes, I know. But there are those out there who actually practice fabricating as if rehearsing lines for an upcoming audition. Meticulously, they follow tangents in their mind, thinking of every angle to reinforce so they don't get caught up in their own, fake fantasies...

And then there are those who could care less if they share an untruth that will most certainly not pass the coveted 'fact check'. Whatever they say is true to them and that's all that matters. Take it or leave it.

Personally, I gave up telling lies quite some time ago. Besides the guilt that follows you everywhere, it's too much of a hassle to keep them organized. I won't always remember that what I told exhibit (A) is something completely different from what I told exhibit (B). Fuck all that! I'd rather take my chances with the truth – a story of exactly what occurred, without the false embellishments geared at glamorizing the ego. What a waste of time and brain power that is.

This brings us to some dullard out there who is the antithesis of truth. A misrepresenting ego. An orange anomaly who thinks he spins the yarn better than the best of them.

So, we are gathered here today to listen in on this space oddity whose taken deception to a level never reached. A Guinness record holder for the most-falsest words ever to leave a mouth... I haven't yet decided what he is to me. So, for the sake of clarity, let's refer to him as, IT. Because we simply have nothing to compare IT to.

And the questions begin...

"Sir, it says here that you are proposing a plan to change the names of the days of the week. Is this true?"

"Who told you that? I have no such plans... Well, I don't like the meaning behind Sunday. Hell, any day can be a Sunday. But where I live it's rarely sunny on Sundays. It's a tremendous fraud..."

It's useless and redundant to not have sun on a day designated for it. Next question...you over there."

"Sir, is it true you were dropped on your head several times as an infant?"

"Yeah... so what! I turned out just fine. And all the scars went away."

"Theory states that your mom could predict the future and was trying to save the world from disaster."

"Huh! I don't get it... Sounds like a witch hunt to me. Next question... How about the guy who looks like a foreign exchange student...Can I see your papers? Haha, gotcha! Just kidding...go on with your question."

"Um...I was born in Chicago...Anyway, do you think it's wise to play golf when your poll numbers are tanking?"

"Is that a trick question? Let me tell you something, the world could be on fire, and I'll still play golf. I could have both legs amputated, but I'm still gonna find a way to play. Even if somehow, I lost my memory, I won't ever forget how to play the game... I bet you didn't know my great grandfather invented golf. Playing 18 holes goes way back in my family."

"Sir, we just fact-checked that last statement. Golf has Scottish origins dating back to Roman times..."

"Yeah, so what!"

"Your heritage is German."

The room goes silent as IT looks around at the faces looking at IT, trying to think of something brilliant to say. Instead, his answer lacks any relevance.

"Did you know the price of eggs is coming down? I had to buy some the other day and boy were they cheap... Next question. How about this pretty Nun in the front row here."

"I just came for the free bibles...But you know you're going to hell, right?"
"Ahhh... Spoken from the lips of an angel who doesn't know shit about nothing...We're all going to hell, just not at the same time... right?... Ahh, never mind. Next question. How about the guy with the big afro. You look anxious to ask a question."

"Thank you. It says here you used immigrant labor to finish a 2-acre garden for a new property. But you said two weeks ago that a private contractor was hired for the job. We even spoke with a few immigrants who worked at the site. None of which signed any tax documents. What happened here?"

"What happened is I picked the wrong person to ask a dumb question. Of course, I paid them. I paid them tremendously. And immigrants can be contractors too... right? Next question..."

And the questions kept coming, so did the lies, the deception, the slander, the lack of empathy and lots and lots of chicken nuggets...

The strange moral to this story is: You don't have to be orange to tell a lie if you've got the green to make you look smarter.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

NABITUAL TONGUE

(DECONSTRUCTING THE LIE)

LAMAR WIGGINS A.K.A LDUBS

Wherever anyone decides to go in life they can expect to encounter rules. Mankind designs them for a purpose, expecting them to be followed. Personal rules are even more sacred and should become second nature... When rules are not complied with, consequence awaits to be sorted out...

Which brings us to you...

If you had followed your own rule of keeping your mouth shut, your Oscar-winning performance would've gone undetected...

As an indulgent, Type-A personality who specialized in fabricating, you rarely broke character. But natural talent did not come without resistance...

Barely able to tie your own shoes, your parents forbade you to handle matches. A call to 911 finally spliced that rule into your head. All your possessions, including your prized Lego collection, were lost to fire. The dog and your parents survived. You were happy about that, but the disrespect grew exponentially, prompting a long drive to a place for troubled kids. Resentment of that day quickly latched to your misconstrued sense of betrayal.

Fast-forward twenty years to see the results of a never-ending trail of verbal treachery. Most people would be ashamed of the lies you considered achievements. Each of those formulated trophies were like your children...

Let's not forget the time you botched an important sale to an important client. Your shameless index finger pointed right to a colleague. He lost more than his job that day. He lost security, respect...his mind. Your employer was too stupid to see through your tainted truth.

You finally opened that door you vowed to keep close when your drunken tongue spilled incriminating words to the barkeep one night. Some of your acquaintances were a bit surprised it was you who poisoned your neighbor. His death was rather quick. Gangrene spread throughout his body like lava barreling down branching rifts. The lie you perfected was so airtight, it fooled the initial interrogation.

In return, you now find yourself behind a door made of steel that rarely opens. Don't expect any visits though. Can't imagine who would when all you ever cared about is crafting the next, great lie.



THE RIVER STYX

JENNIFER DU PLESSIS

"The clouds are pulling in. Looks like it's gonna rain." The wind brushes the leaves and they rustle overhead. The water in the river has turned a dark shade of grey

"It's not the Seine," says Carry with a slight smirk.

"Or Blouberg Strand." She holds the urn with such intent that it makes me shudder. I've never touched it, let alone held it. As always, Carry is poised and ready for the scenario. I'm nervous. I hug my jersey closer to my body.

"No, but we can pretend it's the River Styx."

"For a Viking funeral?" We both stare at the makeshift wooden boat we hammered together. On the grass it looks lopsided. I wonder if it will float at all. I shrug.

"All mythologies are kind of the same. There must be an overlap between the Norse and the Greeks."

Another gust of wind whips up and I wait for the rustling of the trees to die down before I speak again. Carry looks deep in thought.

"Do you think she'll show?" I ask.

"Who knows?"

"She said she would. We would know if she changed her mind."

Just then a car pulls up. She opens the door and slides out. Her face is a myriad of emotions. I don't think she knows whether to be angry or sad. But then, at least she's here.

"Hi, mommy." I say and go to hug her. My sister stands as she is, nodding her head slightly to acknowledge her presence.

"Good," Carry says, her gaze averting to the water. "We can begin."

I look from my mother to Carry and back again and the hurt in my mother's eyes though brief, is clear. She brushes it off then stands, her face familiarly stoic, bracing for my sister's speech.

"I planned this whole 'we are gathered here today' speech," she starts. "but we all know that wouldn't have been his style. I think he would have laughed at the idea of a Viking send-off, which is probably why Jessica suggested it."

I smile, suddenly awkward. It's too strange an idea. I regret ever suggesting it in the first place, but Carry's certainty keeps me focussed. I'm overthinking it again.

"It's been three years and I still think of things that I never got a chance to tell him," she continues. The wind picks up again.

"I don't want to sugarcoat his flaws like they usually do at funerals" she says then

. "Honestly, he was often nasty, especially near the end. He didn't always appreciate the things we did or apologise when he was wrong. And he was so stubborn. That's how he lived and died. I've been so angry because I've thought, if he hadn't been so stubborn, maybe he'd still be here." She pauses, taking a breath. "But his choices were his own, and hard as it is, it's time for me to let go."

My mom coughs. I can't look at her. "For the last time, I just wanted to list the things that I miss about him so that I can leave here and reflect on the memories instead of longing for them." Her voice cracks.

A lump forms in my throat. "Like our conversations on poetry and philosophy. The late nights of bingeing movies and pretending that the next day would never come. Those times that I could just turn to him and ask his advice and he'd know just what to say. I've felt lost for three years, wondering whom to turn to now and no one's there. Because he was there, even when I didn't want him to be. The list goes on. I mostly just wanted to say that I am grateful."

Her gaze fixes on the little boat that rests between us like a promise.

"Thank you for being my father." Carry looks at me and I clear my throat. My turn has come so quickly that I don't really know what to say. Or feel. The truth is that I don't feel anything at all. It is as though I'm in a dreamlike state. My movements are mechanical. I'm numb.

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All I know is that I don't want to cry.

"Uh... hi." I say awkwardly. "Carry was always the speaker between us so I find this really challenging. But Carry's right. It's time." Taking a breath, I glance from my sister to my mom. With their eyes on me, I feel uncomfortable, as though I can't say what I truly want to say. So I try not to think about it and say. "I hate that he's gone."

When the wind rushes in again, I picture him in the distance – a version of him that is full of life, before the illness struck. He smiles so I smile. "I know we are young. We don't have our lives figured out yet and initially we were so scared of what would come next. But I'll admit, I feel closer to you guys than I ever have. I thought that I'd ponder the what-ifs forever, but I think I'm finally content. We don't need him anymore." A teardrop escapes and slides down my cheek, but I keep smiling. It feels... right. "I hope he knows we're okay. I hope he's found some peace."

The wind picks up again amid the silence. I feel it for a moment, letting it linger against my skin. I imagine that it is him, playing with my hair. To let me know that he hears. To reassure me.

Carry and I exchange glances then look at my mom. She exchanges looks with us then clears her throat. "I don't really know what to say."

"All he needs" Carry states simply. "is to know you've forgiven him."

She ponders this for a moment, chewing on her bottom lip. The doubt flickers across her face and for a moment I'm sure she isn't going to say it. She won't, if she can't mean it.

Carry and I cast our eyes to the boat.

She sighs audibly. "Alright. I do forgive him. The divorce was hard on us both but you girls turned out alright. That's what matters.

"Carry and I look from the boat to each other, and then back to the boat again. Then we explode into an uncontainable fit of laughter. I can feel my mom's gaze shifting between us in confusion before she rolls her eyes, and for the first time in the longest time, things feel normal.

When we finally gain composure, Carry kneels next to the boat and opens the urn. Tipping out the ashes, a small pile forms in the boat while the wind gathers some of the remnants and sweeps them away. Then together we clamber down to the riverbank and place the boat on the water. I keep it steady while Carry breaks off a piece of firelighter and places it onto the pile.

When she lights a match, her face is a mask of concentration. Then she tosses it into the boat. Giggling to ourselves, we place our fingertips on the edges. With one slow push, it drifts out into the river.

We hug each other close. A raindrop falls on my head, and I realise we've made it just in time.

"See you in Valhalla." I whisper after the boat, and the words drift away in the wind.

* * *

Staring out over the boat as it catches alight, he ponders the three figures. Slowly, it sinks and he finds that he is gripped with immense gratitude.

Finally.

The scene before him shimmers. Then it's gone. Another scene takes shape before him – another river with another riverbed. The River Styx, as cool and mysterious as the Greek myth foretells. It feels as though forever has passed since he first arrived.

Two tears escape his eyes and, as he wipes them away, his hands brush against something hard. Two tokens stick to his cheeks where the tears fall. He peels them away and looks at them, taking a moment to identify the objects. Then, as realisation dawns, he smiles. He finally has the fare to pay the ferryman.

He thinks back to his wonderful daughters and his ex-wife, not for the first time since he landed up here. If he knew it was their forgiveness that would have paid his way, he would have sought it while he was still alive.

Hindsight and all that.

He follows the other figures, those that have been lucky enough to receive their funeral rites already, into a long line. One by one they board the boat, and for the first time it strikes him that he will soon touch the other side.

He finally feels at peace.

The boat rocks against the ebb and flow of the river. A modicum of self-doubt flickers in his mind – is he truly ready to let go? The journey feels a fraction of the time spent in the underworld. When they reach the other side, he welcomes the freshness of the breeze. Slowly, his thoughts slip from his mind. He takes in the new sights before him. Then, he steps off the boat.

You say you'd like more friends, some form of connection spanning realms, a spark of feeling to weather down the walls of numb with a whispery wisp of wind. Anything to separate the day.

But are you ready to give more than you take?

If I say I'm tired of devouring my own flesh, of rationing how much I need to eat to survive tomorrow vs. reserves I need to save for a rainy day, marking regeneration on the calendar.

Would you offer some of yours?

When I change the wording to "we," everyone agrees faster than I can blink. This experience floors me, smooths scars, and allows me to rest my limbs on messy, hexagonal tiles.

So I wonder, when you might come around to collect shreds of my soul.

Using the word "they" draws an imaginary line, and we all prefer to coolly slide into the same side. We acquire objects to blame, some collection of matter to pin our problems on with darts.

While we pretend to dream about stardust. And how we'd be happy watching maple leaves.

Inventing God and Satan didn't help, nor do they come around to wipe caked blood from our cheeks. But turning sadness into anger, like Alexa flicks a light switch, helps us grow fangs.

That line wipes away the concept of consent. We no longer care about finding willing necks.

When seeking stops, all that's left is ash. We don't get reborn from it; we stop caring. Most importantly, about ourselves. But we refuse to burn alone. Count how many we can take down.

You would disagree with someone just for the fun of it, break someone down with a single line.

And so would I.

If I use "we" again and make my words sweeter, you would relate to me. Many would. In this fragment of time, we would share something real. Confess what terrifies us. Laugh. Bond.

But what happens in the next moment?

You say you'd like more friends, some form of connection spanning realms, a spark of feeling to weather down the walls of numb with a whispery wisp of wind. Anything to separate the day.

But are you ready to give more than you take?

If I say I'm tired of devouring my own flesh, of rationing how much I need to eat to survive tomorrow vs. reserves I need to save for a rainy day, marking regeneration on the calendar.

Would you offer some of yours?

When I change the wording to "we," everyone agrees faster than I can blink. This experience floors me, smooths scars, and allows me to rest my limbs on messy, hexagonal tiles.

So I wonder, when you might come around to collect shreds of my soul.

Using the word "they" draws an imaginary line, and we all prefer to coolly slide into the same side. We acquire objects to blame, some collection of matter to pin our problems on with darts.

While we pretend to dream about stardust. And how we'd be happy watching maple leaves.

Inventing God and Satan didn't help, nor do they come around to wipe caked blood from our cheeks. But turning sadness into anger, like Alexa flicks a light switch, helps us grow fangs.

That line wipes away the concept of consent. We no longer care about finding willing necks.

When seeking stops, all that's left is ash. We don't get reborn from it; we stop caring. Most importantly, about ourselves. But we refuse to burn alone. Count how many we can take down.

You would disagree with someone just for the fun of it, break someone down with a single line.

And so would I.

If I use "we" again and make my words sweeter, you would relate to me. Many would. In this fragment of time, we would share something real. Confess what terrifies us. Laugh. Bond.

But what happens in the next moment?

THE SALON

NOLL GRIFFIN

A joke would swoop in where my scissors closed
above scalps of any age. apprehension picked off
by a swallow's chirp as tangles tumbled. I'd say things about
hair as a front lawn for all our human thoughts
so they could mock with crinkled eyes. the softest kind.
more from that silly observations file. less
of how their split ends waved between their heartbeats years ago.
At the end of a shift. something dangerous started
with dead. headless curls against my broom.
I barely saw a thing through hours tipping on my feet.
until the blob formed from a dozen cuts' dark spoils.
making frantic shapes. world events beneath the spinning seat.
pushing back at a sweep. grabbing the edge of the garbage bag
and howling until I let it fall undefeated
but faceless. already skimmed across too many real features
and the anxious sweat of everyone who came and went
until a mixture of hints. a scribble in grease
from a dozen new hands every day.
bound a body with just enough shape
to beg please. talk to me.
I took one outstretched clump in my fingers
and tried my wrinkled nose best but let go at the first word attempt
in that scrape of a voice like my ear clipper-sliced.
a blood and sebum bubble.
I opened the door and let wind grab it by the scruff.
hoping someone had a harder nerve out there.

LOUDER THAN BOMBS

JESS LOGAN NAOMI

(My heart, I fear
Even if love is the answer.
Too many are blinded by ignorance, and
Nobody stops to ask the question)

When hate is a war who's so fucking loud – a raging chorus filled with those ingrained and automatic 9mm of dogmatic intolerance, splitting families and flesh in kind, with both bullets and Bible verses alike:

These religious and red-taped crusaders poised with all-too ready trigger fingers loaded with self righteous speech and grenade-laden lips.

Pulling
pins of supremacy but never punches.
Leaving endless bodies buried in the wreckage of
“they had it coming.”

Cold morgues and colder history books, overrun
with countless now-stilled hearts who dared rise in different coloured gardens, bearing tentative
petals of a different beauty and belief.

It should never be such a risk to share the sun.

All they wanted was a home

To belong

And someone told them

No

our freedom and truth were never yours.

And

I don't know how to cradle all the shunned and all the fallen.

Or shelter all these lost and weeping bones

But I do know

I want to make my love recklessly strong.

And unrepentantly louder

than every fucking bomb.

They promised aid. They
delivered silence.
The bread outlived the
children.

THE UNDERLAND REVIEW

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Poetry that twitches
Microfiction that self-destructs
Essays with teeth
Visual art that shouldn't exist
Redacted files, haunted code, cursed diagrams, scanned receipts
from imaginary revolutions
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We do not require polished bios.
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Email us at riverandceliainunderland@gmail.com
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Word Count: 1500 Max

We don't tolerate bigotry, AI-generated slush, or boring work.



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♂ Issue Two - This Zine is a Lie ♂

www.riverandceliainunderland.com

WE WERE NEVER HERE.

THE UNDERLAND REVIEW | THIS ZINE IS A LIE | AUGUST, 2025



no gods, just markets
so we sold our souls for scraps-
then made art of it.