

Metamorphosis

Spiritus Mundi Review

Issue 5



EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

The theme of *metamorphosis* is particularly pertinent as we enter a new year. For many, this is a time of reflection, growth, and change.

For Spiritus Mundi Review, this past year was one of experimentation: for this first time, we offered feedback on submissions. The process of combing through submissions and giving commentary lengthened our review period, but we aim to continue to offer feedback to support young artists and writers in the future. We thank all who submitted for their patience as we responded to all feedback requests and a record number of submissions.

In Issue 5 of Spiritus Mundi Review, you will find 15 poems, prose pieces, and art pieces that exhibit how young creatives responded to the theme of *metamorphosis*. Our contributors hail from Nigeria, Ireland, Switzerland, Romania, Indonesia, the Philippines, Poland, and all across the US. Their unique works are a testament to the power of youth innovation and creativity.

Thank you, as always, to the wonderful Spiritus Mundi staff, our amazing contributors, and our readers. Our work would not be possible without your continued support. We hope you enjoy Issue 5: Metamorphosis!

Sincerely,
Breanna Crossman
Editor-in-Chief of Spiritus Mundi Review





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BEFORE WE GO*

BRANDON SHANE

It was always going to be this way;
dirty cement aside on asphalt street stricken
with potholes and felonies for weeds stuck in
the cracks, a lover's arms wrapped around numb
shoulders squeezing the last ounce of passion.

The world is strange, yet none of us are allowed
to be such a thing, hiding behind trees and hoping
their bleeding bark is enough to hide us from mad
men hunting for another rose to pluck. Thorns
deliver wounds to adventurers, and the coyotes
howl to their moon God, while all innocence bare
scars from those taken long ago.

Perhaps the future will hold a different fate, but
that has always been said, we are all stuck on whale
lines, and are being heaved onto a ship for reaping,
Take now, for there will be no other time, do it until
there is nothing pure left in my body & then drink
the juice and savor the remaining sweetness.

*Previously published in On- The-High Literary Journal

HERENCIA

CHRISTIANE WILLIAMS-VIGIL

When it came Tio Ramon's time to die, the family silently rejoiced. They gathered around his bed, waiting with hopeful anticipation. Some sobbed quietly, ashamed to feel glee over his passing.

As a child, Tio Ramon was sweet and soft-spoken. He put the needs of the family above his own. He began working for the mine company. They sent him deep into the earth to carve out pieces of silver and gold. Whatever money he earned, he gave it selflessly to his mother to use as she saw fit.

His sixteenth birthday passed, and there was a cave-in at his site. The collapsed tunnel separated him from the rest of the team. Rescue crews hurried to pull away the stones by hand, calling out to him frequently to remain calm. They heard him screaming, and he pleaded with them to hurry, saying he wasn't alone. Hours pinned him inside the dark pits, and his cries grew softer. At last, when they pulled him out, his body was raw with self-inflicted scratches.

The family immediately noticed

something was wrong. Tio Ramon's voice became graveled and hoarse. He walked with a crouching posture and relished in wickedness. No kindness or gentle gestures brought a smile to his face. No woman stayed by his side long enough to bare him children. At every family gathering, he lurked in dark corners of the room where kerosene lamp lights wouldn't reach. The children stayed on the opposite side of the room, avoiding his serpent-like glare. Locking eyes with him meant being the target of his merciless ranting and brutal teasing.

On the day of his death, the sky became an inky gray. Tradition dictated that he should have had an audience with a priest, but he shrieked at every holy man who attempted to cross the threshold into the adobe home.

When he began to spit up dark, blackish blood, everyone held their breath. At last, they'd be free of his venomous company. Anna's mother warned her not to stand too close to him. Even though he was bound to the bed, she still feared he had enough strength left to swipe at them.

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Night fell, and they covered him in a white blanket embroidered with delicate flower and bird patterns. The eldest women covered their silver hair with black veils and hung rosary beads around their wrists. They circled around him, softly muttering quick ‘Ave Marias’ despite his snarls.

Sticky foam began seeping from the corner of his lips. Outside, heavy rains beat against the roof, bringing in the smell of creosote and dirt. The metal bedframe rattled suddenly, and the candles flickered from unfelt wind. Anna’s mother moved her fingertips from her forehead to chest, to shoulders in the sign of the cross.

The bed gave a great leap just as lightning flashed outside. It crashed against the terracotta tiles, making everyone’s ears wince from the scrapping sound. The bed bounced up and down without assistance. Anna couldn’t help herself. She took slow steps forward in a trance-like motion.

“Anna, get back!” her mother screamed as others used their weight to try and

keep the frame steady. Anna ignored her, bumping up against Tio Ramon’s legs. She gazed into his eyes. They rolled up into his head as he convulsed. The sheets covering him moved like ocean waves swelling and dipping with vigor.

The movement stopped. A gurgle sounded from Tio Ramon’s mouth. His body lay still, and his chest collapsed in a final exhale. Those holding the bed down stepped back suddenly, screaming with terror.

Black-scaled snakes slipped out from under the sheets, slithering in all directions. Anna remained frozen in place, processing with awful slowness. One of the snakes twisted up her leg, disappearing as it furred behind her thigh. She swatted at herself, crying and gesturing to where it had gone.

She clutched her chest and sank to her knees.

“Help her!” her mother ordered to the

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CHRISTIANE WILLIAMS-VIGIL

others as she tried to scoop Anna into her arms. Anna's eyes widened with horror as her body shook.

"It's inside," she moaned, going limp in her mother's arms. They carried Anna to the living room, laying her carefully on the floor. Her eyes snapped open as her mother began to smooth out her hair.

"Are you alright?" her mother asked. Anna swatted away her mother's arm with a hard slap. She sat up, looking at her mother from under her eyebrows. The family recoiled, sensing the familiar dark energy that had been Ramon's.

When it came time for Tia Anna to die, my family gathered around her bed. No one wanted to help a bitter woman with prayers of comfort. My mom told me we still had to be there for her at the end. "It's a tradition that we help lift the soul to heaven." I rolled my eyes. If they let her wretched ass into the pearly gates, I'll think twice about stepping inside.

We all gathered around her bed, close to midnight. Her eighty-year-old body lay crumpled into a fetal position, and her hands were twisted into claw shapes. I almost felt sorry for her at the moment. Then I remembered how she stole my Tia Julia's husband, only to ditch him two weeks later.

She rolled her head up towards the ceiling. Her silver braided hair frizzled and escaped the loose hair tie. Her breathing started to slow into guttural sips of air. From the corners of her lips, little bubbles of spit formed, turning into a pink froth. It dribbled down the sides of her head into the deep crevices of her ear canals.

The bed suddenly rattled, catching us off guard. I held my hands up as it bumped up again, hitting me in the shins. "Step back," my cousin warned when the bed shook harder. The clanking metal frame buckled, and screws dropped with hard pings to the floor. I looked into my Tia Anna's eyes. They were milky and moving back into her skull. The blanket

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CHRISTIANE WILLIAMS-VIGIL

covering her swung off, hitting my mother like a tidal wave. Tia Anna exhaled. Her body deflated like it had been punctured.

Her skin bulged and expanded. Black slithering snakes moved out of her, leaving behind bloodless cavities where they had been sleeping. I covered my mouth, staggering back as the icy-cold shock hit me in the stomach. The snakes slipped off the bed, darting off in different directions. Something grabbed my ankle, like a firm hand, causing me to fall back. A snake twisted quickly up my leg in a tight coil. I kicked, trying to get it off. Its head sank into my thigh as if I were made of clay. Like a knife, it dug into each layer of flesh.

I saw fire. Voices screamed into my ears, and I sensed my soul divide. Murky, black blood swam into my veins, replacing the bright red fluids. Cracks spread across my bones, forcing me onto my knees. Around the room, I could hear praying. Each word was like a whip on my back.

I threw myself toward my family, pleading

with them to stop. The room went dark, and inside I felt the snake settle into its new space, content.

They lifted me onto a stretcher when I woke up. An EMT slapped an oxygen mask over my mouth, and fresh air burned my nostrils. The green strap of it cut into the skin just behind my ears. My body stung with hot and confined tension. I needed to get out of there. Through the mask, I could see my mother's face. Her eyes were swollen from crying, and her lip bunched up in a pout. She looked pathetic, sitting there with her hands clasped like a child. I told her ass I didn't want to watch Tia Anna drop dead. I hope she's happy now. This is all her fucking fault.

She reached out to brush a strand of hair out of my face. I swung, landing a hard slap against her face. My mother recoiled, hugging herself. Her eyes widened as I sat up and started to rip the IV lines out of the crease of my arm. The EMT beside her pressed me back down, using all his

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CHRISTIANE WILLIAMS-VIGIL

weight to hold me. I threw my head back, letting out a loud, hoarse laugh. He locked eyes with me, and I could feel the fear radiating from him. The euphoria of it swam through my thick blood, filling me and craving his pain. I calmly slid my fingers up under his chin. And then I sank my fingernails into the deep basin with one hard push.

OUR TALES

JOHN CHINAKA ONYECHE

This tale begins at the shore
In my country, we adore the sea
Everything that comes from the sea
We thought them gods and goddesses
So the ships docked and we ran to them
They bowed before our thrones
And we fall before their *Gins*
In exchange, we became a burden
To their ships and our rivers
Many became feeds to the whales
To maintain a balance to the ship
Many dropped to become our gods
So when we arrived at the other side
We remembered, our tales
They all began at the mouth of the river
and end at the desert

I NOTICE THE WAY YOUR SKIN DIPS

ASHTON PALMER

I notice the way your skin dips.

I know it as a birthplace, an effervescent memory.

I know it is the changing

flesh: the dregs, grit, tender ashes I swirl as coffee

grains; a radiator spine that heats

bodies near &

there I am.

We've grown older; I know your facial constellations,

I feel your smooth hands shake in pressure

a boiling point with no limit; I notice

the growth, buds in pure colours, sprouting in transformation -

sprouts of foreboding movement, dancing piles

that leisurely deepen the caterpillar hole -

caving in the forest engravings of stretch marks, acne, rosacea, oil & freckles

from a warm September. I notice the way your skin dips;

& now waits

for metamorphosis.

THE TRANSITIONS

RAYMOND LIU

We are looking. The stars shatter. Perhaps it happens before or after something else, or perhaps the light emanating from one was a bastion for the others, or even still that their sentience was progenitor of a phalanx. Of course, lacking mid temporal lobes, it matters very little to them. They must know as much about themselves as Hoag's object knows about Giotto and his circle. This latter paid too early his visit to Earth to have known Hoag, although one would like to believe that, had they inhabited the same century, they would've met over a communal beverage of some sort—the type that, living on American soil, Robin would be 9 years too young for. Although the figure would be closer to 6, should he choose to bypass the dicier legalities, which is to say, all of them. It's his birthday—the day Robin Haas crosses the precipice between 11 and 12. Not a single one of the onlookers realizes that he's now at approximately an equidistant temporal length from the inception of Cuneiform and the invention of a chimeric pseudo-perpetual motion machine. He has been there for his entire life. “—too many...”

“It's not.”

“Well, then, where's the cut-off? It's got to stop eventually doesn't it? I mean, when the hell would you stop, if not twelve? The numbered ones exist for a reason, don't they?”
“Depends on the size of the cake, which we clearly bought first. For Christ's sake, it's a ten-inch cake. God forbid I couldn't place twelve candles on it.”

Benno Haas is the one armed with an almost mistakeable-for-belligerent staccato of rhetoric. His wife Diane has been at his side long enough to understand a subtextual non-aggression; his habit spawns from an unbridled, almost childish curiosity, only manifesting itself under a cloak of masculine stand-offishness. The two have spent the past 7 and a half minutes arguing about whether numerical or traditionally cylindrical candles should be used for a 12th birthday. It has devolved into a linguistic tennis match, the metric of victory being who can continue the longest.

THE TRANSITIONS

RAYMOND LIU

Robin himself is deeply entranced. His candles, the now forsaken subjects of conversation, have now dwindled to mere 2 centimeter stubs, bottom halves, mere remnants of their once regal numerical selves. The collision of wax dripping down the sides and cake frosting is dangerously imminent. He's listening in on the debate, trying not to hear what either side is saying. This is a needlessly Herculean task; any sort of binary recognition nullifies his attention. He'd subconsciously like to believe that there are three distinct entities in front of him, not just a mother and father but whatever is between them, a drunkenly amorphous and airborne third thing. The snippets that he does unintentionally catch remind him of the fourth: his cake. This, in turn, has the sort of bizarre domino effect exclusive to human beings long past the primordial need for survival— that allows everything to recirculate back to themselves, but not before passing by some cosmic figures, large things relevant by virtue of their large-ness alone. For Robin, these are the stars. He's old enough to know the concept of a universe, and to know that it shares the first three letters with 'unite'. He will perhaps never be old enough to understand it. Everything is not a thing; and if it were, what would be the point of the prefix? This is the sort of mental excursion that earns him a congratulatory interjection from the nearest adult, while always seeming to elude their memories upon second mention, as well as— “Well, why don't we just ask him then?”

Equipped with an uncannily honed ability of recognizing when the conversation has set its sights on him, Robin speaks for the first time in eight minutes.

“I like them both.”

He's met with two simultaneous glassy stares, and then a dual acquiescence. The situation is almost amusingly comparable to Mozart and Salieri's attempts to impress Joseph II, a thought that none of the present figures have as of yet entertained.

THE TRANSITIONS

RAYMOND LIU

The rest of the celebrations continue so procedurally one could mistake them for industrial; and perhaps they are. The idea that whatever redemptive power is found in shooting stars might also be present in a birthday cake, the most universal of praying apparatuses, struck its yearly chord in Robin's head. Then the reverberations follow him throughout the evening. Safely tucked into bed after completion of his nightly rituals (serene sleep somehow always found itself affiliated with the enjoyment of a pop-up book), he stares upward at his cot mobile, a miniaturized solar system never displaced since toddlerhood. Slumber seeping in, he's content to watch and remark upon the grace of smooth elliptical orbits, the leisurely spinning without stutter of planets overhead. Then silence, interrupted only by soft snores, synonymous with the inception of whatever world he's decamped to.

It's an illusory precipice to be standing at. The connection's medium is there. Of course it is; it's Robin himself. But the numbers— how one can be moving forward for 365.25 days and never fall off until the very last moment... shrouded in whatever vapor makes up the numbers in the first place. Whether the day is important because a rotation around the sun marks his numerical ascension, or whether he marks, as others do, the spot where the tellurian desire to pass by the same space again can be fulfilled— Anticipation has robbed this day of its grandeur. It is somewhat akin to being lost in the belly of the beast, realizing that its cavernous and absurdly unacidic interior is, in actuality, quite languorous.

The elliptical path has been traced once more. Eons of submission to gravity's oppression have ironed out the kinks in the system, aided by those who dwell on Earth's body, who faithfully and happily accept their subjugation at the hands of centripetal force, going as far as to immortalize its power in numbers and candles

THE TRANSITIONS

RAYMOND LIU

and cakes and holidays and all sorts of things contiguous with the advent of a rotation. The Haas family is content to linger once more around a cake. This is a patisserie for which none of them share a particular enthusiasm. But its loss is unthinkable; what else would bind together the years aside from Robin himself, who is far too human and fleshy and less-than-divine? At his newfound age of 13, he can remark the whole process' congruence with the darning of holes in fabric, an act often pursued by his late grandmother.

Robin has entered an age where he's just about beginning to truly grasp concepts like irony, and symbols, but is struggling to differentiate between adjectives and adverbs at school. Lately he's been pressured by his parents to read, which has led him down a rabbit hole of searching for the quote-on-quote "best books", and has put a copy of Mann's *The Magic Mountain* in his hands. His perambulation through the Swiss sanatorium and the Zauberberg itself has yielded about as much as one would expect a 12/13-year old to glean. But the notion of decaying men arguing about time, sickness and love retains an elusive allure, even when many of the words are far too polysyllabic for a little boy to devote himself to. He can't help but think(although he certainly wouldn't phrase it this way) that the book is just a proxy for those grand, "humongous topics", and that even the literary devices and technical terms that his teacher prattles on about are but mere acolytes of some grander truth. And truth itself, to his understanding naturally being "good" and sought after, makes people run about in a frenzy trying to chain down any vessels to it.

As wisps of thought chisel their way through his brain, he blows out this year's candles, who find themselves awkwardly arranged in the haphazard way in which one arranges any 13 objects on a circular surface.

—

THE TRANSITIONS

RAYMOND LIU

Cacophony illuminates the room. Perhaps its very act of bequeathing life to the air allows it to escape itself, forever nearing but never attaining the asymptotic status of polyphony. Robin would like to imagine that sounds could be jealous of each other. That they could experience an interaction beyond the horizon of simplistic constructive or destructive, which was all he understands at the moment.

Robin is less than ensnared by the physics principles behind sound waves, moreso in their interconnectivity. In the same way that the miniature solar system of his first decade on Earth was irrevocably connected; the same way that the 14 candles on his cake seem to breathe in unison. This is his first birthday amongst peers, which asserts in him an indeterminate feeling that the event has lost its intimacy, like a private ritual sacrosanct for its seclusion which has been broadcast on live television. His skills of observation have been sharpened to no end, having entered the age wherein one commits incessant acts of voyeurism behind sullen facades. Each of his acquaintances(a scarce few could be referred to as friends) are proving to be impossibly disparate. Try as he might, Robin is having monumental difficulty in weaving together a canvas with only ever-oscillating linens at his disposal. This in turn gives way to an unreasonably abstruse anguish, cut short by the occasional “Happy birthday, man”, or any one of the more memorable and unlikely interruptions.

These interjections, analogous to a slightly unreliable, arthritic clockwork, remind him of the solemn ticking of lives, the lone candlesticks, one after another, paying their taxes and servitudes, then making their dejected departure. And there it is again, this skillful act of inattention to each and every child, allowing the locus of attention to evaporate and uniformly project itself every which way. That the intimacy could've been subconsciously misplaced rather than lost was not an apparition of his mind. That one could avoid being soft and fleshy and all the hings he unavoidably was, that the fleeting seconds were his sanctuary rather than a

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celestial sin; that he could bear neither the tension of chords vibrating in unison with others nor the solitude of singularity. What was it...? A quote about connections missing by trillions of dark miles, by years of frozen silence? Or perhaps another about shattered stars, the primordial essence of which would never escape their unfortunate modality? Candles, cornflower in color, living and breathing their little lives away, an ultimate climax unbeknownst to them in the imminent fata morgana. Wispy thoughts inhabiting the minds of little children, yet to condensate into permanent residence.

And yet here they were, coalesced into little sticks of wax, imbued with the power of myopia, bearing their sanctified history from time immemorial. We had begun with fire, and at the great foot of every year, each epoch, it is with fire that we end. He watches the smoke dissipate. It is languishing and contorting, but so is everything else. The transitions of years themselves are lost in grander revolutions, and, for just a moment, he is struck with trepidation, filled with dismay at the lack of vacant seats in eternity, at the absence of chords strung on one instrument, save aboard motion itself.

IATRODECTUS

LIA GRAYVER

robed in white silk, she sets the table,
does not swat away at the flies

she asks what he'll have for dinner
you, he replies, and she laughs; he grabs her chin
and she meets his gaze full-on
with her only two eyes

he holds one of her hands—she lifts the spoon to her mouth with the other does not also
reach for the bread and the butter
at the same time

she kisses back with her mouth closed
no danger posed by her
innocuous canines

in his room, she seeks out no corners,
no reason to hide—no weapon (slipper or book) in his hand
but he does chase, now a hunter
of a different kind

she finds that, though made in his image, he is predator
her existence no infringement of his territory
and she is prey
still war is waged, siege laid

IATRODECTUS

LIA GRAYVER

and if this is love

to her body, the marks of his indiscriminate wrath

she would rather be abhorred

marring its smooth and hairless skin

both draped in man-made sheets, he goes to sleep; she does not pester

though in her slowly-sprawling limbs rage and hunger fester as he

snores on; but, oh, to so crassly trespass

turns this wife's

red hourglass

THE MUSE AND THE GODDESS

SAM CASEY

Whereas Homer's stories was the first of Calliope's creations to be written down, it was not the first of all stories. Each culture had their own Muses and Goddesses and stories as well. In truth, there were many like Calliope of matching or superior skill. And throughout the ages, Calliope had become quite friendly with three such deities. Now often these deities and our muse would meet and swap their latest triumphs and following they would vote, most often each voting for their own. But every century or so, a story would be created so great that each deity would bow her head to the creator and stay true to their role of judge. Thus, the winning deity would get her due. As the competitive spirit thrived in all of them, they of course kept track of their winnings. And as Calliope went to one such gathering, currently tied for first, she smirked knowing the title would soon be hers.

After pleasantries were exchanged, the ladies all settled into a long night of listening. As is custom, the one ranked fourth began. She spoke an epic tale

with an attractive hero overcoming obstacles for his one true love. The listeners had heard renditions of this tale before, but this one was without a doubt the best thus far. It was truly a masterpiece that will hold its place in its canon for eons to come. And yet, Calliope's smile did not fade. As the applause died down, the next deity stood and began to weave a fantastic web of love, deceit, magic, human faults and a society doomed to fail. The story was important and would change the fate of a nation forever. The applause was thunderous, as if trying to replicate the story's worth with the loudness of sound. Countries across the continent closed their shutters for the storm they thought soon would come. Babies awoke to the shushing of their mothers and domesticated dogs cowered in whatever shelter they could find. And yet, Calliope's smile did not fade.

As our muse looked at her contender, with contained excitement exploding from her visage, the Goddess chuckled and said, "You may go first Calliope."

THE MUSE AND THE GODDESS

SAM CASEY

Up our muse stood, unfurled her jib, rigged her main and sailed straight into her wide ocean. Precision of language with eloquence of speech buoyed her ship forward. Debris, icebergs and chunks of earth itself shattered as the indestructible ship broke every convention with ruthless, deliberate intent. There were no themes in the sky to guide the crew and yet the ship did not waiver from its course.

And as Calliope cut through waves with unerring pace, she built upon the distance from the start as fathoms turned to miles turned to decades turned to eons until eventually it became unmeasurable. And at the helm going a speed unmatched by anything the world had yet to see, Calliope suddenly stopped the ship. There was a calm, pregnant pause weighing on the deities and filling up the night before our muse's ship burst apart in an unexpected and fiery explosion, the force of which causing all the seas everywhere to be displaced then sucked back in and shooting as a geyser to the heavens. Slack-jawed,

the deities realized Calliope had created something truly new. The silence remained for a long while as if any movement would erase their memory of the story they just heard. As Calliope looked out at her companions, her smile did not fade. Slowly, the final goddess rose.

"Well met, dear. Well met." Calliope sat and prepared herself to listen. The story started slow with tinges of the familiar. As it continued, Calliope picked up pieces of her stories, stories she had told the group, stories she had hoarded for herself and even stories she had yet to finish or even form. And when spoken by the goddess, our muse's stories had been refined, sharpened, bettered. Listening to the goddess, Calliope felt as if she was looking in the mirror at a more beautiful version of herself, one she had yet to become. Transfixed, Calliope began to glean portions of the other deities' stories as well and saw the same awed expression upon them. And, sure enough, she heard the same familiar ring of stories from countless

THE MUSE AND THE GODDESS

SAM CASEY

other countries- when did this goddess have time to collect them all? The best, however, were the threads pulled from the goddess' own land. It was as if she pulled precious metal out of each tale and smithed it into the strongest weapon. The story transcended narration itself. It was, in a word, perfect.

And yet Calliope's smile did not fade. It did, however, twitch. The goddess concluded and sat. "Let's vote!" Calliope quickly said, trying to smother that budding tinge of self-doubt. Now, my dear reader, all voting was done anonymously, but I'll treat you to what even our muse did not know. There were two clear stories contending for first and Calliope, knowing what was at stake, voted for herself. The two deities who had listened to both stories were still deeply enamored by the most recent story and voted for it. The goddess judged each story she heard by the same standard she had used for eons and after applying it to her own story and to Calliope's, she determined Calliope's was better and voted thus. 2-2. Tie. This had not

happened before. One deity offered a solution: the goddess and the muse must argue the merits of their stories and then the group will revote. This course of action was approved by all judges.

As Calliope went first with the stories, the goddess began the debate. She spoke about the standards by which a story should be weighed and how her story excelled. It was quite logical and the audience found themselves agreeing completely, whereas the speaker remained unpersuaded. Calliope was convinced by the logic of her opponent and looking at the others, she knew that she'd been beat. Yet, in good faith to the competition and its rituals, she rose and gave a passionate appeal that reawakened the emotions of Calliope's story in the listeners. She sat down and they voted again. Calliope voted for the goddess over herself as her conscience and duty as a judge instructed. One of the deities, however, had snapped from the goddess's spell and could not stop the fervor that Calliope's speech and story had awoken in her. She voted with her heart and

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SAM CASEY

changed it to Calliope. 2-2. Frustrated silence. "We are voting for which story is the best, correct?" Questioned one deity.

had awoken in her. She voted with her heart and changed it to Calliope. 2-2. Frustrated silence. "We are voting for which story is the best, correct?" Questioned one deity.

At this point a young girl named Theresa was walking by thinking of her future as a mother or a lover. Calliope, tired and weary, pointed her out- the deciding vote! Yes, all the deities quickly agreed and rendered themselves visible. In truth, Theresa had been questioning her preferences and leaning rather hard to one side, but now seeing four goddesses of unique and unsurpassed beauty, the flame she had been suppressing all these years spread out of control like wildfire. One of the deities took charge, "Come hither, child." Dumbstruck, Theresa obeyed. "You are to listen to two stories and tell us which you think is best. Simple enough, yes?" Theresa nodded as her

vocal chords were still inoperable. "Sit, child, sit. These stories are not short."

The goddess began once again. To say little Theresa was enraptured would be an understatement. When the goddess finished, there was no applause as they did not want to bias their new judge. Calliope followed and Theresa became absorbed. At points, Calliope was afraid Theresa might scream aloud and in honesty, she probably would have if she were not so spellbound. Calliope hit her fiery end and awaited judgment. Theresa cleared her throat before stammering, "th-they were both excellent but I think the first one is the best." Curious, a deity asked, "Why, my child?" To which Theresa responded, "I liked it the most." Rage built in Calliope but when she saw happiness on her friend's face it soon dissipated. Sighing deeply, Calliope looked at the judge who lost her her crown and said, "For your wisdom, I shall grant you this gift." With that, Calliope opened Theresa's inner eye and gifted her with the power of prophecy.

THE MUSE AND THE GODDESS

SAM CASEY

But the goddess knew this gift was too much and- as no goddess may undo what another has done- condemned Theresa with perpetual blindness in return for her acquisition of foresight, lightening the reward by the detriment.

MOTH, IN THE DARK

WINDA HASUKI

Mother,

I'm sorry for not being the god

I used to be when I was five,

who wrapped her tiny fingers around

yours, turning them back to a cocoon,

who sat on your lap demanding more of

anything she could get, but mainly more of you

Mother,

I know that even in my baby skin

I was already a face you can't recognize;

so you cropped my ears, you stitched

your name to my chest, the purple thread

embedded deeper than vein, the gashes

have healed—I just can't forget it was there

Mother,

let me introduce myself again.

I am now a moth who's scared of light.

I flap my wings under my bed, I hit

the floor every time, but no one ever

see me fall, not once, do you have it in you

to be happy for me this time?

MOTH, IN THE DARK

WINDA HASUKI

Mother,

I know I've been ignoring your prayers,
but on a good day, it's the thought of you
that makes me open the curtain, despite
the yellowing bruise, despite the crippling ache,
I stand still at the sight of dawn,
I let the beginnings be

OUTSIDE EDEN

BELLA MAJAM

eve contemplates her birth.

sculpted from flesh

of the beloved,

she swears she was more stone than human,

more blinded infant

than wife.

she preferred

the bitterness of soil

to the sweetness

of a man's

form,

but when did it matter?

they say when she bit

the apple

she listened

to that cloying croak

of lucifer,

both tricked and trickster,

her fate sealed

when god looked

at the wetness

OUTSIDE EDEN

BELLA MAJAM

of her lips,

but don't they know

women can be punished for much less? it was a starless evening.

under the cover of those

dew-bearing leaves,

eve parted

herself

for herself,

shivered like a snake

shedding its skin,

and even god

could not tell

if she was naked then.

THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (AND “SOMETIMES” SACRIFICES)

ALICIA TURNER

People will say we're in love.

- Hannibal Lecter, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)

the boy wanted to want // the girl coveted his cocoon // how he morphed into
anything // she had a hunger for any word that she could chew through // right there
// like a buffet of bruises // forgot to ask permission to cut him open // again //
slaughtered scales in the name of sacrifice // again // clipped the moths wings &
wore them like a welcome // how they grew uneven // how they grew divided // tore
through him like a broken language // bite by bite // he didn't react // not really // bit
his tongue before he could speak // but had he opened his mouth // he would've said
that she'd never get quite full // not really //
of anything but herself //
of anything but mercy

AND I STILL LOVE YOU

AUDREY WU

you like the impermanence:

when we ride the train, you can't sit still for too long

you tire of the song after the first chorus

once it's lost its appeal

you leap frog from her to me

as if we are subway stops

and you are a frequent rider

i fold my gum wrappers

into origami hearts when you offer me

a piece, i take a bite, gingerly

and savor the sharp bursts of spearmint

you tire of the gum after an hour

once it's lost its flavor

you chew me up and spit me out

leaving teeth marks in my flesh

i gasp and you don't ask if it's out of pleasure or pain

i cried to the woman at the star market about you, and she hugged me and gave me a
bundle of green grapes

somehow they still tasted like you.

catherine at the five guys

told me to be indifferent

but indifference seems insufferable when you still don't meet my eyes. you once noticed

AND I STILL LOVE YOU

AUDREY WU

me carving little
moons into my forearm
and asked whether i could
scan my scars at the grocery store register and get a discount? you said your mom
would've thought it
was funny that i wanted to die
and once, you even called me beautiful
when we were braided in the pith of
your sheets, your hands folded over my body, molding my waist

and if beauty is in the eye of the
beholder, why must it
be holding me around the neck
with hands disguised as yours
(mahogany)
and why do i flinch at the sound of
sirens and everytime you raise your hand i can see the bruise ripening like a plum

the kind you wouldn't pick at the store you scan your card
and hand me a jelly donut
and an apricot
and the juice dribbles down my chin
i thought it would be different this time that you might mean it when you said you
wanted me

AND I STILL LOVE YOU

AUDREY WU

but i am temporary and you
have painted over me
and forgotten the last four digits of my number.

A FABLE OF FEAR.

DIACOS LOVE

scorching irises with one intention: ascension
tongue glides across my rigid alignment of teeth
typically loose-lipped, now cursed with muted speech
my mouth eats rain to forget tears and snot

body longs to embrace the sea

I am unable to swim.
No trust fund or safety net,
A nigga is bound to inudate, well,
only in my dreams cus' I knows betta than to try

The Ocean does and doesn't take an L
for it loves leo-sun, and scorpio-moons.

The Sun rises then drops into evening,
pupils adjust to the stillness of night.

The Moon slips through uncanny emotions
pacifying deadly waves, for me

This is the power of a mother's love—————

Vibrations from raindrops
dent leveled waters

A FABLE OF FEAR.

DIACOS LOVE

Distorted in appearance but it don't
matter for i've already lost myself.
Eyes gape and cold winds pinch my
spine, an enchanting reflection
of me, pure, unpolished,
a rarity; As the ocean is a church
mouse, and God is memory.

Silently, water spirits persuade me:
jump in.
jump in.
Options make me spoiled

fuck this.
fuck this.
Will I reincarnate with my homies?

Still standing over this stale water.
My body longs to embrace its stable face,
But to stab this water means that I am a thief
Robbing my descendants of a chance
To live, To be, to swim, unlike me/wait

The best teacher is example: wait
I'm drowning | I'm drowning

A FABLE OF FEAR.

DIACOS LOVE

The water tastes like sweat?

It burns | It burns

I's getting maced by mermaids,
water seizes my lungs like a drug raid,
as tears mingle with tropic space

I extend my arms to the sky
and clutch the air with no lung
a smoldering sensation tears,
through muscle and fat
no more humanity
as three legs clapse into one
not enough wisdom to swim
so the ancestors guide me by ear.
i can hear them clear.
more sirens, sprout from afar
scarlet and deep blue in appearance
but they sound as ugly as shit
-ah. it burns more and more so I say
fuck it,
And jump in:
Eyes open
Sirens wail
memory/lost

A FABLE OF FEAR.

DIACOS LOVE

Amygdala hell

Man all I hear is,
WEE-WOO-WEE-WOO n' a,
OINK OINK OINK.

Sirens are anchors to reality
a reminder of my philosophy.

FUCK THE POLICE.

I hop out of bed,
Aries-Rising.

A RING THAT FELL INTO A HOLE... DREAMS OF FISH

IRINA TALL



YOU, TOO, ARE A VISITOR IN THIS BODY OF YOURS

CHIDERA SOLOMON ANIKPE

*The caterpillar does not morph into a butterfly until it comes to the realization that its
body is a cocoon for the beauty within and sheds its cage.*

-Chukwuderaodesigo.

i.

You are ten years old and your mother still calls you 'babym' -that endearing word that fuses Igbo into English and carries with it, the thick aura of her love. My baby. My own.

You have never said this to her but you do not like that word. It is too emphatic on babyiness, on childishness, and you are no longer a child.

She does not know this, your mother, but you have grown past infancy, have morphed into a near adult and it is because you know things. Do things. Things that other children do not know. Secret things that even most adults cannot do.

One such thing is that you can easily metamorphose into otherness. You like this ability, hold it dear to your heart, desperately coveted. You learn it during the time when your mother allows you to start bathing yourself, in the time when you begin to develop a gentle shame at the starkness of your nudity in the face of other people's presence. In the bathroom, door locked to ward off any invasion of your privacy, you take your penis in your hands -it is not yet as grown as Udoka's own and you hope that it might never grow that big- and you push it tightly backwards. Before it can spring back to its original place, you clamp your legs together and suddenly you are a girl. Champion and shining and without a penis. A new creation. Starkly beautiful, almost ethereal.

You call her Iruka.

YOU, TOO, ARE A VISITOR IN THIS BODY OF YOURS

CHIDERA SOLOMON ANIKPE

ii.

You are eleven when a woman looks at you for a moment too long and says to your mother who has taken you and your brothers to church, “You did not tell me that you had such a beautiful daughter. I thought you only had boys.”

It is an obvious joke, one that even you are not too young to understand. But your mother does not join the woman in her laughter. Udoka, your eldest brother -he is nineteen at the time- pulls you behind him, a scowl turning his face into an almost frightening mask.

Chukwudaalu, your second eldest brother -he is fourteen- laughs with the woman. Later that day, after you have all returned home from mass, your mother will take out a belt and whip him silly. She will say, "Is this how you want to disgrace me, *gbo? Anuofia!*" Her voice will be a thunderous shout, each word punctuated by the crack of the belt, by the terrible scream of your frightened brother. She will flog him until all her anger has been vented and your father will merely watch as she beat him, eyes sullen and uncaring and glaringly apathetic. He will glance sparingly at you before turning to watch the soap opera on the television and you will always remember seeing a small fleeting thing in his eyes, a thing too reminiscent of disgust.

It will scare you.

But in that moment, just as the woman continues to laugh with Chukwudaalu as an accomplice in her humor, the both of them wholly oblivious to your mother’s unamused face, you glance very briefly at the woman's breasts that peek out from her low-chest lace top, those two voluptuous balls of flesh that heave and jiggle as she laughs, and you pray in your mind that your own breasts may be as big as her own.

YOU, TOO, ARE A VISITOR IN THIS BODY OF YOURS

CHIDERA SOLOMON ANIKPE

iii.

You like poems; the sultry ambiguity that they carry, the way words flounder and disperse and merge together like a labyrinth; steadily growing, stretching out, swallowing space, and yet still remaining exactly as it is. You like that you do not always readily understand them, these poems, that they cause you to pause, to think and dissect and sew back together until you are almost certain that you can see the words dissolving into your skin, filling your pockets of void, making you whole.

But you do not write poems. Can not write poems.

Everything you write does not carry the semblance of poetry, they look too much like stories, easily decipherable, plain, never fluid, carrying a tenseness that is almost awkward.

But there is one that you have written that does not readily disappoint you, that causes you to smile -albeit briefly- because it molds you into a puzzle, tears you to pieces and remakes you; a rebirth of your self, a creation.

You read that poem aloud in your literature class one day. You are fifteen and your voice shakes with apprehension. It clashes against the sudden bravery that seems to thrum against your bones, solidifying you, anchoring you.

Your classmates laugh after you read it, their voices loud with malicious humor as they chant 'boy-girl' and 'homo' at you, the words hurtling from their lips like tiny missiles, launching through your skin, exploding into tiny waves of shivers against your bones.

You look at your literature teacher, Mrs. Adeniyi -the wiry thin woman who wears overly dramatic Ankara gowns with worn out ankle length sandals that she believes to be 'stylish' and 'trendy' but are in truth, simply odd- and you feel a thing like fear settle into your stomach.

YOU, TOO, ARE A VISITOR IN THIS BODY OF YOURS

CHIDERA SOLOMON ANIKPE

She calls your mother that day, the both of you sitting across from the school principal who has settled into twirling a pen in his hands while he watches you with over-played concern in his eyes.

“I’m worried about him, sir.” Mrs. Adeniyi says just before she calls your mother.

“He wrote a poem about fantasizing to be a woman. Very unnatural!”

The principal nods, his eyes find your own and unease scatters over your skin.

Later, when you think about that moment, you will realize that you were not wholly scared of them -only mildly discomfited by their sudden interest in you- and the thought will make you, quite oddly, want to laugh.

“Is this true, Mr. Anozie.” The principal asks, adequately surprised. He calls you by your surname. You are thankful for this.

You do not answer. There is no need for an answer.

When Mrs. Adeniyi calls your mother, her voice is softened with concern, the kind that is dishonest and melodramatic. She calls your mother ‘mummy’ and for a small moment you imagine that she is your sister, a daughter of your mother, eating at the worn dining table in your house and saying things like “Mummy I want to drink juice.”

The thought unsettles you.

“Mrs. Anozie, we are very concerned about your son.”

A pause.

“Ah! No mummy, he is not in any physical danger.”

Another pause.

“Yes mummy. It’s just that he wrote a poem in class today and the contents were very disturbing.”

You stop listening. You simply allow your mind to run away past the principal’s office,

YOU, TOO, ARE A VISITOR IN THIS BODY OF YOURS

CHIDERA SOLOMON ANIKPE

through the school gate and into yonder.

Your mother comes to collect you personally from school, beaming with false smiles and greeting each teacher jovially as she promises to correct you.

“He’s just a teenager. You know how unpredictable they can be.” Insert false laugh.

“I will make sure to correct him.” A solemn nod of her head.

“God will deliver him. Amen.” Another mighty shake of her head.

Then she takes you home and says nothing else to you. Your father watches you for a small while and then he looks away.

Later, she hands you her phone with the briskness of a person who does not want to spend any moment more than they ought to with you. “Your brother, Udoka, wants to talk to you.” And then she walks away before you have even had the chance to place the phone against your ear.

“Hello broda, good evening.” You say into the phone.

“Baby boy, *kedu?* How are you?” he speaks to you in Igbo and you instinctively answer in Igbo. He only ever speaks Igbo in dire situations.

“*Adim mma.* I am well.”

He hums in response.

“Mummy was telling me about what happened. I want to hear from your point of view.”

You cry that day on the phone with him, sobs swallow every word that try to make their way out of your throat and he consoles you gently, whispering ‘ndo, sorry’, ‘I am here for you’, ‘talk to me’.

Your mother transfers you to another school a week later.

Your father says nothing.

YOU, TOO, ARE A VISITOR IN THIS BODY OF YOURS

CHIDERA SOLOMON ANIKPE

iv.

Aramide calls you by your true name on the day when she discovers the diary carefully tucked underneath the folds of your mattress.

You are twenty one years old and a third year student of the Literatures at the University of Jos. She is your girlfriend of two years. The same girl for whom you practiced online pickup lines before your mirror every morning for two weeks in your first year. The one who -on the day you braved yourself enough to say 'Hey, are you fast food, cos I would love to take you out'- said, "I've seen you looking at me for forever now. *Shey* you want to wait till I have grandchildren before you ask me out *abi?*"

You are startled when you walk into your hostel room and find her seated on your bed, your diary -blue paper back studded with faux crystals- balanced on her thighs. She is not reading it when you walk into the room, the pages are closed, but you can tell from the solemnity around her that she has seen enough.

"Are you gay?" There is something familiar in her voice. Hurt. Anger. Betrayal. Never quite one or the other. It is stark and bright and yet it carries a vagueness that displaces you. Unfurls you.

"I love you, Ara." The response is a reflex. A sob jerks into your throat but you do not let it out. You are not worthy of those tears. Not in the face of her grief.

"You are not answering my question, ogbeni." You sense it now, the vague thing that bellies her voice. It is a juxtaposition of fury and despair, a marriage of rage and dejection.

"I don't like boys." You reinforce the strength in your voice. It is a false show of vigor but you perform it nonetheless and you hope that the steadiness of your voice might

YOU, TOO, ARE A VISITOR IN THIS BODY OF YOURS

CHIDERA SOLOMON ANIKPE

influence her into stability, might anchor her away from her grief.

"I read the diary, my friend. I'm not stupid, you know?"

"I know what it looks like. But I don't like boys, I swear on my life."

She says nothing for a small while. The silence becomes grave and stifling.

"It says in this book that your real name is Iruka." It is not a question, but her tone invites you to answer.

You nod. The action illuminates the stiffness of your joints, the tenseness in your shoulders, the apprehension packed into the curves of your muscles.

"Iruka."

It is only then that you begin to cry.

GLOSSARY

Babym: A fusion of the English word 'baby' and the Igbo word 'mu' which means 'mine'. Babym means 'my baby' or 'my child'.

Gbo : The Igbo equivalent for 'right?'

Anuofia : An Igbo word for 'wild animal'. Usually used in the context of insulting a person.

Broda : A Nigerian pidgin equivalent for 'older brother'.

Kedu : Igbo word for 'how are you?'

Adim mma : Igbo equivalent for 'I am fine' or 'I am well'.

Ndo : Igbo word for 'sorry'.

Shey : The Yoruba equivalent for 'Do you want to...?'

Abi : Yoruba word for 'right?'

Ogbeni: Yoruba word for 'Mr. Man'. Normally used in hostile/ non-friendly situations.

List of Contributors

Martha Muniz is a 21-year-old illustrator based in San Diego, California. She loves all things folklore, history, and Gothic mystery. You can find more of her art on Instagram: @amnessie

Brandon Shane is a twenty-seven year old poet, born in Yokosuka Japan, he is now a resident of San Diego. He is an alum of California State University Long Beach, where he majored in English, now pursuing an MFA. You can find his work in Acropolis Journal, Grim & Gilded, Livina Press, Discretionary Love, among others, see him on Twitter @Ruishanewrites.

Christiane Williams-Vigil is a Xicana writer from El Paso, Texas. Her work has been published in various literary magazines such as Marias at Sampaguitas, Fatal Flaw Literary Magazine, The Write Launch, Chismosa Press, and Latinx Literatures. Currently, she is a contributing staff writer for Alebrijes Review. website and social media: www.christianewilliams-vigil.com IG: @christyvigilwriter

John Chinaka Onyeche is an author, poet, and an African-Historian. A husband, father of two lovely kids (Sobeife & Chisimdiri). He is from Nigeria. John writes from the city of Port Harcourt Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ashton Palmer is a sixteen-year old, transgender writer from Northern Ireland. He enjoys reading both modern and nineteenth century poetry, his favourite poets include Edgar Allan Poe, Ocean Vuong and Richard Siken. He enjoys writing in contemporary, modern poetry styles and writing horror flash-fictions.

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Raymond Liu is an aspiring Chinese-American writer who currently resides in Geneva, Switzerland. The postmodernists are most notable inspirations in his work (i.e. Pynchon, Gaddis, etc.), and he is an avid Joyce aficionado. His hobbies include drawing, writing, reading and playing basketball. At the time of his writing this, he hopes to pursue law, with literature lingering not far behind.

Lia Grayver is the pseudonym of a 20-year-old Romanian writer currently studying Comparative & English literature. When not poring over her BA paper on post-feminism, she writes the occasional poem and daydreams about swimming in rivers of coffee.

Sam Casey is a Military Instructor in the English Department at the United States Naval Academy. She is 29 years old and originally from Lynchburg, VA. She has been published under pen-name Porter Jenkins with *The Minison Project: Sonnet Collection vol 4*, and *Wrong Turn Lit. Her Poetry Collection, Erotic Trauma*, will be published with the Naked Cat in October of 2023.

Winda Hasuki is a 23-year-old who lives in Indonesia. She spends most of her time tutoring, working on research, being distracted, and thinking about rabbits.

Bella Majam is a writer from Manila, Philippines. Her work is forthcoming in Gantala Press, Ice Lolly Review, fifth wheel press, and others. She also serves as a prose editor for HaluHalo Journal, a publication which aims to highlight Southeast Asian voices. You can find more of her work @beelaurr on Instagram.

List of Contributors

Alicia Turner (she/her/hers) is a 30 year-old butterfly/moth-hybrid who holds an MA in English and is an English Instructor, poet, & storyteller from the US. She believes that writing is welcoming yourself back home. Her work is featured or forthcoming in Luphyr Magazine, The Expressionist Literary Magazine, Hot Pot Magazine, Manifest Collective Magazine, The Tide Rises Lit. Journal, Perfumed Pages Magazine, Wellness Zine Magazine, Beneath the Mask, The Hemlock Journal, RECESSES Zine, among others.

Audrey Wu (she/her) is a high school writer living in Cambridge, MA. She edits for a variety of literary magazines, has been published in Curio Cabinet Magazine and Poetry4Progress, and attended workshops such as Iowa's Young Writers Studio And Kenyon Young Writers Review among others. Audrey focuses on writing personal poetry to heal and when not writing, enjoys baking, crocheting and binging rom-coms. You can find her on Instagram @notaudreywu.

Diacos Love is a poet and musician from Chicago, IL.

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

Chidera Solomon Anikpe is a twenty-one year old, queer, Nigerian storyteller and lover of contemporary literatures.