

Fahmidan Journal
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Half-Sleep III Tuur Verheyde

A sky clad in darkening hues,
Clouds of lead-like blue,
Billowing pillars
Of heavenly warning;

A land, soothingly green,
Seasoned by small spots
Of sweet-scented bloom.
In the forefront, crops
Swaying their golden heads;
Beyond, the walled garden
Of Remembrance: Alabaster
Blocks amassing stilly
Like pawns in the tall
Shadow of a rook-like
Cross: shepherd to the shades
Of the war dead loss;
Beyond still, at the horizon's
Blackening crest, there
Rests the deep green
Of woodland edge:
Shield wall to this verdant
Peace, last impediment
To Man's impetuous red.

This scene sinks through closing
Eyes amidst the late autumnal
Bleak. To you, perhaps
It speaks of wistful
Summers and sultry storms,
To me, with every hint of
Distant rumbling it sings
Of home.

Tuur Verheyde is a twenty-four year old Belgian poet. His work endeavours to capture the weirdness of the 21st century; its globalised art, culture, politics and problems. Tuur's poetry seeks to further cultural, spiritual, political and emotional connectivity on an international level. His work is personal and outward looking and seeks to accurately represent the blurred boundaries between the real, the surreal and the hyperreal, as well meshing the personal with the political and the spiritual.

A Wildflower Belongs To Nothing But The Dirt
Kristin Garth

A wildflower belongs to nothing but
the dirt. You stumbled onto something soft,
already hurt, fragrant in impressions that
strange fingertips have left. Hold me aloft
to fashion romance of a theft, to rend
in pieces reciting cultivated
names of girls you would not condescend
to crush as games. Discard when sated
on unfamiliar ground, the broken parts of
me know their way down. How to forego
the molecules of pride holding me above.
Degrade enough to hide safety below.
I have learned to hide a season from the hurt.
I have learned to make a beauty out of dirt.

Kristin Garth is a Pushcart, Rhysling nominated sonneteer and a Best of the Net finalist. Her sonnets have stalked journals like Glass, Yes, Five:2:One, Luna Luna and more. She is the author of many books of poetry including The Stakes (Really Serious Literature) and a short story collection You Don't Want This. She is the editor of seven anthologies and the founder of Pink Plastic House a tiny journal and co-founder of Performance Anxiety, an online poetry reading series. Follow her on Twitter: (@lolaandjolie) and her website kristingarth.com

Lit
Jason de Koff

Chewing the tapered end of a tallow candle,
I await the frosted morning
that seems to take a force of will
to share its golden embrace.
The candles from last summer's store
were a disappointment from the first lighting.
The guttering flame made my book pages tremble
and quiver
more than my old, cold bones.
So there's no light for the winter nights
and the sleep
that would make time move faster,
avoids me.
Instead, I am left to ponder
all of the thoughts left in this world.
Even then there are no answers,
only the darkness and the waiting.
I may not have long to live,
but without light
there is less living to do.

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He is a Pushcart Prize nominee and has been published in a number of journals including C&P Quarterly, Bandit Fiction, The Daily Drunk, Sledgehammer Lit, Ayaskala, Fahmidan Journal, Near Window, Briefly Zine and Words & Whispers. His chapbook, "Words on Pages", is currently available on Amazon at <https://amzn.to/3eookJk> Twitter handle: @JasonPdK3

Unmapping Critical Distance To Get To Ethical Distance

Anna Nguyen

Before I relocated to a small, rural town called Hannover in Germany, I met up with my friend Asako Serizawa. We both lived in the Boston-Cambridge area, and I playfully called her my neighbor, despite the many neighborhoods that separated us. She and her partner had come to visit us, in the bare apartment where only two suitcases, a bewildered tortoise-shell cat, and an air mattress remained.

She brought with her a signed paperback release of her story collection, *Inheritors*, and some loose-leaf tea. Parting gifts, one I could take with me and the other I could consume before I left the country.

Outside, while noshing on Neapolitan pizza from a nearby Frank Pepe's, I shared with her my dismay at continued bad academic practices and expectations. Relocating to a different university and different program would not necessarily make my life easier despite promises that begin with "nothing like that happens here". Absolute statements are easily disproved. And those who believe in their institutions' innocence should know better by now.

In many ways, all of my conversations with Asako -- that one in-person exchange and many, many DMs -- are about our different writing experiences and expectations. That day, I recounted what a professor had promoted as a good form of research. Speaking of her tendency to comparatively analyze countries, the professor invoked "critical distance" as a method. This framing conjures up a lot of seemingly common-sense questions that need some careful consideration: Who gets to be critical and distant? What exactly is being compared and for what reason? What details are left out in analyzing stories that originate in a distant place? Oftentimes, data translates into generalizations and statistics. The output of studies that are so often cited are pulverized, translated observations, focusing on the universal rather than the particular. Nuances are elided because we want to say something big about the world. And sometimes these big statements are simple reductions, truisms at best. Truisms are digestible and quotable, easy to reduce into tweets or extracted and recited in other essays or research articles.

And so I lamented, listing all of the tiresome things I had heard and experienced in graduate classes, graduate fellowships, and in academic conversations. But this notion of critical distance was even more amusing to me, as I would relocate to an American Studies faculty in Germany. I expected to hear similar justifications.

Asako had been listening, her eyes wide and her face expressing disbelief. She cried out, "that's not critical distance! That's just distance!"

I laughed.

Even merely dropping "critical", which has been another term that signifies a departure from inadequate conceptual language, the word "distance" has material implications. Maps, streets, roads, spaces, partitions. Yet, both distance and critical distance are not simply the metaphorical boundaries the writer creates for themselves. Distance, too, might invoke objectivity, an obvious lasting aspiration from the Enlightenment. And I don't mean

objectivity that scientists proclaim as facts created by science, but rather the writer and scholar's quest for telling some version of the truth.

Replacing the passive voice with an assertive "I" can take up the form of intersubjectivity, as feminist scholars of science like Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway tell us. They want us to steer away from the patriarchal and conventional gentlemen's science. Objectivity matters, and objectivity should account for lived experiences as scientific empiricism. But the category of lived experiences has been contested. Whose lived experiences matter and how do we write about them without fetishizing trauma? If violence is part of the story, why do we need to prove -- in statistics and in such formal analytical language! -- that it continues to exist?

Although my research and writing do not involve comparative analysis between countries, a sense of criticality and objectivity continues to creep in during my writing processes. I write personal essays and I use citations, especially from literary and social theorists. In particular, I find myself writing about both of my parents because I'm now at an age where I'm trying to understand them. Many who write about their families will remark that some sort of distance is needed, that we shouldn't take our families for granted, that it's not necessarily easier to write about them. This is especially pertinent when violence and colonialism are part of their stories and displacement. What I struggle with is how much I should tell in my own analysis of my memories and how to corroborate those memories with my mother's testimonies. This process is repetitive. I speak to my mother in her language and I'm translating fragments of our conversation into English. During this translation and revising process, many important things are lost, I know. But most damning is that I am also weaving in citations to strengthen the perspective I wish to instill in the reader, someone who may share similar reading materials.

This reader is not my mother. In fact, my mother cannot read English. Therein is the problem. She becomes another subject for my curious inquiry, and her stories are read (I hope), but her life remains the same. I don't think it's the critical distance that reinforced its boundary between parent-child, writer-interviewee. It's the language that becomes part of the distancing. My learned theoretical language does not make her life better. But I learn from her.

In *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, a chapter written by sociologist Karen E. Fields is titled "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly". It's a story about her grandmother who lived through Jim Crow and how memory could be a welcoming aspect of the scientific enterprise. Of the title, Fields wrote:

"Nothing is more fully agreed than the certainty that memory fails. Memory fails, leaving blanks, and memory collaborates with forces separate from actual past events, forces such as an individual's wishes, a group's suggestions, a moment's connotations, an environment's clues, an emotion's demands, a self's evolution, a mind's manufacturer of order, and yes, even a researcher's objectives. In these collaborations, and in others I have not thought of, memory acquires well-noted imperfections. We seek to understand these imperfections systematically if we are scholars of memory, in itself, and we seek to correct for them if we are scholars who use memory as a source. As researchers, we bind ourselves to skepticism about memory and to a definite methodological mistrust of those rememberers who are our informants. We are fully attentive to the fact that memory fails." (pg. 171-172)

Despite these limitations, Fields quickly followed up with “But memory also succeeds. It succeeds enormously and profoundly, for it is fundamental to human life, not to say synonymous with it” (172). A researcher does not simply “listen” to their subjects about their everyday lives; as trained researchers, they also require “skepticism, suspicion, a certain condescension, and above all a constantly open second channel in which to place those bits of testimony that are destined to float out of the interaction, back toward some sources of corroboration. This is alien to human communication” (174).

This case study is based on her grandmother’s memoir and her own dilemmas of research. In one illuminating account of reflexivity, Fields thought about the methodological mistrust required in her training. She told her grandmother that she intended to speak to “certain white folks downtown” to compare her memories with others’ oral testimonies (174). Her grandmother was outraged that part of the research was to “check” her own stories, a betrayal of confidence. An argument ensued, one about accurate scholarly historical work. Her grandmother, she felt, was writing about a history that reflects the present. These are different accounts and different ways of telling history.

There are many lessons that we, as readers and writers, can learn from this case study. Fields does not outrightly reject the scientific method as a way to conduct research but does address its limitations as she unpacks this story, her grandmother’s reaction, and the ethics of doing such research. And so I think of this chapter often, whenever I reread the unfinished essays and stories that I’ve written about my family.

Because some form of certainty is needed in a world where so much uncertainty remains, the scientific method and a sense of objectivity may provide relief to some writers. Although I hesitate to accept any kind of objective language or metaphorical likeness to scientific empiricism, I do wish to think of a different way of sharing and writing stories that aren’t necessarily ours. Boundaries are important and very much needed. Yet, critical distance cannot be the tool we use to appoint ourselves as the close-but-distant storytellers. And scientific objectivity cannot provide the borders that we build around ourselves and our texts to protect ourselves as fallible researchers and writers.

And there’s another word we can think about. “Ethics”. Like “critical”, ethics has been another reminder for the need of benevolent practice, a replacement for something that isn’t inclusive. Why ethics is the foil of scientific research, I’m not sure. “Ethics” shouldn’t have to remind scholars or writers that they should hold themselves accountable. But here we are.

If we need some kind of distance, then perhaps the alternative to critical distance could be “ethical distance” (12), an idiom Katherine McKittrick uses in *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Although I have been explicit about a certain kind of science, here I want to note that McKittrick’s use of science isn’t necessarily capital S science. Science is a way of rethinking the types of stories already available, has been available, and will be available through the work of Black creatives and scholars in Black Studies. McKittrick wants to attend to the type of knowledges that has not always been prioritized in our understanding of science and stories, some of which deal with histories of racial violence, losses, and erasures that place pressures on how Black communities live. To tell these stories, McKittrick suggests that we must generate and write with an ethical distance. Grieving, she recognizes, is part of this ethical distance.

Ethical distance will not solve all of the dilemmas and tensions I have shared here. But it's a place to begin, one that abandons pretenses of objectivity and recognizes more humanity compared to the coldness of critical distance.

Anna Nguyen is a PhD student and instructor in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Leibniz Universität Hannover in Germany. She was a 2020-2021 fellow at the Science, Technology and Society Program at Harvard University. Her research focuses on the rhetoric, composition and literary studies of science, literature on food, citations, and social theory. She is especially interested in theoretical creative non-fiction, where social theory, thinking about food, and first-person narrative blend without enforcing academic conventions. She hosts a podcast, *Critical Literary Consumption*.

burial envy, or séances after 9/11
H. Hamilton

leather wallet / lint and flies / capture and release / birth as
satanic ritual / only the pale man / king of nazareth / lamb gagging

myrrh & frankincense / wearing chastity / a covered bruise / maman
reach for a hijab / supposedly / separation politics / some people

think they own / scorched earth / but the land isn't burning / cry
wolf / to see the neighbors / wary as cats / alleys humid with gases

keep your mouth shut / warmonger / maman lifts heavy boxes
stands on her feet / red as frostbite / try as you might to injure

she will dream tonight / dead cousins and aunts / who see
you / ink-eyed & soot-lashed / breath cool & sweet

cold watermelon / lavish & tender / lion mothers, lion
fathers / remember the spaces / inhabited / hurting

the otherworld gossamer / animated / awake
o precious corpses / meritorious choir / endless

steps / remember to call / lead us up
to the silent tower

H. Hamilton is an Iranian-American poet who lives and works in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Their work has been featured in Persephone's Daughters and Anti-Heroin Chic

Aubade
Maria Bolaños

Each day, it is woman's work
to make the world.
Memory and dream mingle and fade
into the brightening sky. She,
with her walis tingting, sweeping
sleep from the concrete and clay
of the doorstep, bent down to coax kisses
upon the earth, wish-wishing
good morning, good morning.
Later in the afternoon, she will collect
chismis that the chirping birds have left
like offerings at the altar
of her window screen,
lace gardens of sampaguita together
for selling outside the church;
with any left over she might go to the station
or some other place that needs
a patron saint of hope and of goodbyes.
But for now, it is still early,
and she makes all the time in the world.
She bids me to come sit
at the kitchen table, where she tells me
the stories no one else hears
and the way to sing love
songs in another language. She laughs
and the sound is like jasmine
rice raining free and plenty
into the basket. We begin
the humble task of keeping time—
winnowing the clouds,
sifting through the grains of each day.

Ballad of the Trickster
Maria Bolaños

The government had removed all the bodies from the desert, except for the skulls of the giants worn smooth by rain and time. The first ghosts arrived on a pirate ship. It came out of the fog and when the fog left, it didn't. Then men started singing cowboy songs and mass-producing ghost towns. You wouldn't see the ghost towns unless you went looking.

At night the dogs prowl for campfires, sniffing for us. They are afraid when we gather, afraid when we shake hands. The hills conspire with us. We carve codes into the rock faces, trade in songs on the black market, whistle and hum in pitches they can't hear. How to give ourselves love. They are afraid of what we know.

Every so often, we see our faces on the news. We are wanted for being unwanted. They chase us, we shapeshift and escape each time. We're spiders, we're foxes with many tails. We're tikbalang, the way we run so far and fast we confound them. We jackrabbit down the dirt roads, laughing at them.

They call us stranger, outlaw, enemy. They don't know our real names. They can't understand me when I say to them: I am a mountain; I am a wind so wild it flows like freedom; I was born in a volcano; I come from a hundred lands. When I say these words, only the ones who have lost something, too, can understand. We nod to one another, they don't see. They think it is only a myth. And the black market grows.

Let the dogs howl. Tonight the sky covers us, that old crow's wing. Tonight the stars twinkle their secrets at us. Remember us, we are coming back to you. And we have shifted again. Tonight we are sampaguita pushing up from the skulls of sleeping giants, growing a new planet, shining as bright as the stars.

Maria Bolaños (she/her/they) is a Filipina American poet, co-Editor in Chief for Mariás at Sampaguitas magazine, and co-Founder of Sampaguita Press. She was nominated for the 2021-2022 Best of the Net anthology, and their poems are featured in US-based publications such as Touchstone Literary Magazine, Cut Fruit Collective's Cut Fruit Stories, and decomp journal; as well as international publications such as South Africa-based Antigone and Singapore-based Yuzu Press. Follow her work on IG and Twitter @mariabeewrites.

LIFELINE FOR DELUSIONS

Zoha Sh.

where you see me again
ghosts of time lying side by side new beds new houses old homes the
closest anyone has ever come to touching their heartbreak

my heart is a ticking clock
beating in reverse to the rhythm of prayer uttered in the dark
whispering please, inch
just a little closer

erase the years the tears the fears reincarnate first love with
your arm around my waist
resurrect youth by lacing
your fingers through mine

i close my eyes & it smells like late spring, a memorial to a
storybook first kiss from long ago
the spaces between us reminiscing over your mouth on my neck

you shift closer & i wonder if it's on purpose, if our hands are wandering
to three years ago, if the silence is grieving a younger set of eyes
meeting in the night, brimming with future

morning comes with rude awakening & parallel universes are dying
stars dissipating, but you smile at me in the early sunlight
like a lifeline for delusions

i tuck it away, a souvenir from history
think if you could just keep looking at me like maybe i'm still
the sun, i'll pretend you're thinking it too

Zoha Sh. is a queer South Asian Muslim writer. Her work primarily explores issues of identity and the personal as political. She is a strong believer in love poems being a powerful revolutionary force.

FRIDAY IS THE BEST DAY OF THE WEEK TO FIRE AN EMPLOYEE

J. Archer Avary

when they come for you at your desk, you play it cool. you gather your belongings nonchalantly, aware all eyes in the room are on you. your coworkers watch not because you're their friend. most of them detest you. they watch because this is the most interesting thing that will happen to them all day.

when they sit you down with HR, you feel optimism. in a way you are being set free. you are another box to tick in her long day of responsibilities, and as such, no pleasantries are afforded. the HR manager who joked when she took your ID badge photo on your first day scowled as she reclaimed the lanyard.

when two big security guards arrive to escort you from the premises, you notice your coworkers have abandoned their work pod. they press up to the glass of the HR office, hoping for a spectacle. they want to see these beefcakes drag you out by the collar of your ill-fitting secondhand sport coat.

when it happens its underwhelming. you resist your impulsive side. they stare like jealous inmates as you stride by, onward to freedom. they remember your first day at work, when you still cared enough to make yourself presentable. 'it's always the quiet ones,' they say, as they return to their desks.

when you step out into the late morning sunshine, something has changed. the birds sense it too, they're singing a different song. it almost hurts you to breathe, the air is so clean and fresh you want to exceed your capacity. you wife will have words to say later, but for now, you are completely at peace.

J. Archer Avary (he/him) is a former TV weatherman and champion lionfish hunter. He was born in Albuquerque and now lives in the northeast of England. Twitter: @j_archer_avary

Petis

Sara Louise Wheeler

She worried about me, as a student,
would I be eating properly? So,
she sent my brother and his wife to my halls,
with 'potato chop' and carrot pickle
in a comedy mug straight out of the seventies
closed at the top with cling film.

They looked good though, so
I lapped them up, then learnt
how to cook them for myself.

Lightly spiced mince with peas,
ensconced in a mash potato ball,
rolled in egg and breadcrumbs,
fried until crispy, fluffy, spicy layers
tumble forward, mixing
with rice and pickle – 'petis'
according to my recipe book.

Tasty food and sweet memories
of lovely, lovely Rose.

This poem is part of a new collection I am preparing about my Goan-Welsh extended family.

As I thaw the chicken breasts...

Sara Louise Wheeler

Her seven languages
and all her experiences,
were worth nothing in this new land.

She worked in a factory,
then at home filled her freezer
with chicken breasts;

every time the family went out –
could they bring some more?

Her role as homemaker
taking over, haunting her

until one day the family intervened –
distracting her whilst
they cleared the chicken breasts out.

And to this day, thawing chicken breasts
always remind me of her story.

This poem is part of a new collection I am preparing about my Goan-Welsh extended family.

Chip Shop Welsh¹ and Ivory Tower English

Sara Louise Wheeler

The languages of my mind are split in two,
and they couldn't be more different.
Rhos¹ Welsh, from the village on the hill,
'wrong' but natural.

My English then, cobbled
from portrayals in the world of film -
Andrews, Kerr and Alec G,
were my professors Higgins.

The world and their church² accept me,
from behind my veneer and affectation;
my written English, after a fashion³
'correct' and of a high standard.

But I feel a certain distance from
that which I write in the 'thin language'⁴,
whilst there's a chasm between my beloved language,
and that which is considered refined.

¹ Reference to this article about 'Diglossia':

Madoc-Jones, I., Parry, O., Jones, D., (2013) The 'Chip Shop Welsh': Aspects of 'Welsh speaking' identity in contemporary Wales, Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism, Vol.13, No.3. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/sena.12049>

² Rhosllannerchrugog, a village whose dialect is heavily influenced by the coal mining industry of the past, and which is markedly different from mainstream, 'correct' Welsh.

³ In translating this idiom from Welsh, I have for the first time come to understand its literal meaning and have been surprised!

⁴ Here the terminology used in Welsh to describe English is difficult to translate so I chose the nearest English word in terms of meaning.

We three depigmented...

Sara Louise Wheeler

I so seldom see people, who look like me,
depigmented - except for portrayals
of evil in corporeal form – the tired,
old, stereotype.

Yet here today, on this zoom call
miraculously – we are three!

I am excited, seriously -
what are the odds?

Though, quite high, actually
as I consider the nature
of the meeting, about increasing
representation of disabled people
in the arts...

a minority of minority,
I've found my tribe at last.

Sara Louise Wheeler is a Welsh poet, writer, and visual artist. She writes the column 'O'r Gororau' (From the borders) for Barddas Welsh poetry magazine, in which she explores all kinds of topics relating to marginal experiences. Sara is currently working on a variety of projects, including: Y Dywysoges Arian' (The Silver Princess) a trilingual opera-ballet with Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru; Creativity is Mistakes – a pilot project for Welsh visual artists, with Disability Arts Cymru; and two new poetry collections which she is hoping to release in 2022 – Confylsiwn/ Convulsion, and Cwilt Clytwaith Goareig/ A Goan-Welsh patchwork quilt.

Treatise on My Birth
Jannah Yusuf Al-Jamil

Every year, I learn new details of my birth: you were late,
you took too long to arrive, you were painful, you were difficult,
you were loud. Most of that is still true. They cut
my mother's stomach after twenty-four hours of labor
to free her from me. Free me from her. Whichever works. There is one detail
of my birth I have always known: I was born
on Ashura, when Musa parted the Red Sea and escaped Firawn,
God's most evil creation. My father was fasting while my mother went
into labor. I think this makes sense. My family is often told
that we have a lot of noor:
God's light in our faces and our actions. Noor was one of the names I never got
along with Yusuf, Sarah, Hanna: holy figures
and holy things. In the end, they called me an adjective, a quality of God,
in hopes that I would emulate it. You could enumerate the things I am, starting with
wahid for firstborn daughter and ending with ashrah for the day I was born. This year, I
turned
seventeen. It sounds like a big number, maybe because
it's the oldest I have ever been. In my mind, it is the oldest I will ever be, as childhood
seems like an eternity that cannot end. Maybe it's so big
because of the song, because the night is still young. Ever since
I could write, I have jotted down story ideas to remember. In my notes app, there is
a little line of what might become poetry from last summer, titled
for seventeen poem: Pick up the sands of time in your cupped hands
and start moving, Dancing Queen! I think I move into seventeen
the same way I was born: with too-late enthusiasm, yelling at the top of my lungs,
screaming to be heard, desperate to be part of the sea, desperate to part it.

The Worshiper's Catalog of Sins Jannah Yusuf Al-Jamil

My sister has a full-length mirror in front of her musallah. I think that it must be some sort of sin to be able to watch yourself while praying; have your eyes drawn away from God to something much lesser. It's ironic that the worshiper has a bigger catalog of sins than the atheist, beginning with a for adultery & z for zina -- see, they're both the same thing. There's a joke in my family about how my grandfather will eat any animal that God says is halal -- he'll see a bunny tramp around our backyard & say

we could make biryani with it. The Prophet only ate meat once every forty days. Some words in English have double-meanings that are significantly less holy:

prey & pray, fast & fast. In Arabic, nearly every word comes from a three letter root. Masjid comes from sajdah comes from س ج د:

to be humbled. You show up in front of God to be humbled; say subhana rabbi al 'ala when you're at your lowest. There's a prostration for forgetfulness. I know only one language in its entirety &

I've forgotten the others -- here

is my forehead on the ground. There are twenty-eight letters in Arabic. Some are described, perhaps lackingly, as softer & harder. A gentle s, a throaty one. The word for God's greatest sin, shirk, starts with a trilling ش, as if your concern of wrongdoing is hushed. Sajdah is a soft س, too, like forgiveness can come easy if you can admit you forgot. Tawba is a simple, smiling ت. God loves those

who purify themselves (2:222). The language

is easy enough to butcher for the anglophone, perhaps to garner hope that God can forgive you for the transgression of translation,

the sin of single-mindedness, of being apart from

his holy book & language. I know the catalog of sins in English, they're softer that way. I

fear that in Arabic, they could begin with ظ & ذ & ض &

I could never get them past my lips to repent.

Jannah Yusuf Al-Jamil is a young Muslim-American writer and the head literary reader of antinarrative (@antinarrativeZ). Talk to them about vigilantes. They have been recognized in IMPOSTOR, Pollux Journal, Overheard, Yuzu Press, and elsewhere. Find them online at jannahyusufaljamil.carrd.co.

No explanation necessary
Premalatha Karupiah

I have been told,
That my duty is to serve, because service brings meaning to my life.
And only through this service to a man I become divine
I have been told that I am Shakti, the one with ultimate power,
Power that I would only achieve through my submission to him
I have been told that it is my responsibility to care, to care for him and only him
For his life defines mine

So, I asked,
What am I, a wagon to carry the world's definitions?
Why is my worth determined by him?
Why is the meaning of my life is dictated by others?
Why are people always telling me what is good for me?
One tells me,
This is how our ancestors lived for centuries,
How convenient I thought, how does one question the dead ancestors
Another says this is how God meant you to be,
Yes of course, how do I, a mere mortal argue with God
Then there are quotes from history, legends, nature, whatever, whatever, whatever...
Stop! everyone stop!
I asked again,
Am I not an independent existence? Can't I exist for being me, make my own meaning?
Me, a woman has spoken, I will choose what I want to be or whom I want to be...
and no explanation is necessary nor will be given.

Premalatha Karupiah is a sociologist at the School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Her research focuses femininity and beauty culture. She writes about her experiences and experiences of women in everyday life. She writes because the world deserves diverse voices. Twitter @lovelatha

practice makes perfect
Matthew E. Henry

the hit rate for the average cop
is rarely above 50%—
for every two rounds fired,
plaster is statistically
a more likely resting place
than a sleeping suspect's spine.
given all the Black blood
spilled with legal precision,
sum the number of bullets
gone wide—suspects missed
like a white border, the paper
outside the darkness

of center mass.

**when my colleagues hear our employer confused me with the only other Black teacher
in the district
Matthew E. Henry**

wait, there's another Black teacher?

what the actual fuck?

do you at least look alike?

does he have a PhD too?

Jesus Christ...

you've been here for 7 years...

I wish this surprised me.

hasn't he been here for like five minutes?

mother of God...

isn't he a learning assistant?

you look nothing alike.

oh for fuck's sake.

we have another Black teacher?

Matthew E. Henry (MEH) is the author of the poetry chapbooks *Teaching While Black* and *Dust & Ashes*. His full-length collection, *the Colored page*, is forthcoming from Sundress Publications. MEH's recent poetry and prose is appearing or forthcoming in *The Florida Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry East*, *Shenandoah* and *Zone 3*. MEH's an educator who received his MFA yet continued to spend money he didn't have completing an MA in theology and a PhD in education. You can find him at www.MEHPoeting.com writing about education, race, religion, and burning oppressive systems to the ground.

Salt Water Woman
D. Keali'i MacKenzie

Body talk
her Chanel No. 5

– two sets of lungs
for the hard work.

– all orange light,
sweetened smoke,
maroon balloons.

She has been here
long enough to slip the first
taboos into her wave of hair.
Never forget that

– or
how she taught fishermen
the value of hooks and twine.

Her signals move November
into the Pleiades' calabash
simply because she can.

– because she knows true constellations,

but most importantly,
like a spray of salted perfume,
she doesn't have to worry
where consequences land.

Failed Rites
D. Keali'i MacKenzie

Springfield, Massachusetts
Summer, 1997

You wanted him. Slow. A night drawn in haze and gauze, humid air intensifying slick bodies. Knew this at fifteen. The sweet horror of wanting - then loving - after another boy. Guilt brought you to your knees. Each prayer for change, a lost opportunity for confession. You couldn't tell him, so as penance you attempted to famish desire. Failed. Tossed and turned at night. Found relief in your hand down at your crotch, wished it was his hand instead. Arm across your chest, his hand in sweet unrelenting motion.

What scared you most was how you imagined the after: back to torso, a long sigh, mornings after a hopeful promise of ... you didn't even have the words for 'relationship.' Yet alone a queer one.

You wrote him letters. Mailed them into silence. If only you remembered what words you scrawled. Was silence acknowledgement? Did he cypher your feelings between the lines, the poor penmanship? Fear? You couldn't say it outloud. Couldn't write it. Saw words collapse under the weight of possibility. Still, desire pushed you to pen him everything except what you wanted.

No response. Not one syllable came back. Not even a 'no.' Which in the end was its own reply.

D. Keali'i MacKenzie is the author of the chapbook *From Hunger to Prayer* (Silver Needle Press). A queer poet of Kanaka Maoli, European, and Chinese descent; his work appears in, or is forthcoming from: *Home (Is)lands: New Art & Writing from Guahan & Hawai'i*, *homology lit*, and *The Operating System Experimental Speculative Poetics*. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is a past member of the Worcester Poetry Slam team. He received an MA in Pacific Islands Studies, and an MLISc, from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Grief's Front Porch Leela Raj-Sankar

Somewhere on the southern tip of India, there is a small blue house with a mango tree and laundry lines in the front yard. A house where we were awoken each morning by the incessant screeching of the birds in the park across the street. A house where my grandfather and I sat on opposite sides of the couch while I read and he did Sudoku. A house that always smelled of my grandmother's cooking. A house in a city that was blazing hot, even in the dead of winter. A house that my mom called me from every day for a month, right after my grandfather died and she got on a plane for the first time since the pandemic started. A house that I haven't seen in years, not since I was twelve and still ashamed of where I came from, not since my grandparents were taller than me and I still thought everyone I knew would live forever. A house that I can only remember in hazy flashes. A house that let me get away with being a bad Indian, my elementary-grade Tamil, my abysmal knowledge of my own culture, my annoyingly picky taste in food. A house that let me get away with being a bad American, too. A house that has seen me cry. A house that has seen my mother cry. A house that my memory turns into a labyrinth, something important hiding behind every corner, stories that evaporate as soon as I try to put pen to paper. A house where people loved each other. A house where people grew old together. A house that witnessed endless pill bottles and oxygen machines and a rotating cast of nurses. A house where I finally understood the difference between my *chronic* and his *terminal*. A house so drenched in anxiety you could roll the slick oil-spill taste of panic over and over across your tongue. A house my grandfather adored. A house my sister adored. A house I adored. A house that survived monsoons and flooding and sickness. A house where morning after morning, my grandmother would smile and hand me sweet coffee while my mom made a disapproving noise in the background. A house with a permanent indent of my grandfather's spot on the sofa. A house I can only picture in blinding sunlight. A house I want to know like the back of my hand. A house I never want to think of again. A house I wish I had paid more attention to. A house where I realized what I had been missing out on all those years just for the sake of fitting in. A house where my mother found envelopes upon envelopes of photos from when I was a baby, and I didn't cry but her eyes were so red that I think she did, and on the other side of the world, I bit my lip and waited for the grief to become less heavy, waited for it to become as familiar to me as that brilliant blue trim, waited to feel less guilty about not asking, not engaging, just sitting there in silence, not realizing how much time I really had left. A house that death covered tenderly with a shroud. A house my mom and my aunt painstakingly packed into boxes to be sold. A house that, all things considered, I'll probably never set foot in again. A house. That's all it is: brick and mortar. A bright house on a bright street a million light-years away. A house where people loved and lost and loved again. A house where I thought, looking at it for maybe the last time in my life: *I don't recall it being this small.*

Leela Raj-Sankar is an Indian-American teenager from Arizona. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in Yuzu Press, Brave Voices Magazine, and CLOVES Literary, among others. In his spare time, he can usually be found watching bad television or taking long naps. Say hi to her on Twitter @sickgirlisms.

In Pursuit of the Deer God Marisabel Rodriguez

It seems only the kingdom holds
Answers to the questions of
Life, and after. Existence, and memory.

For months, I used to pass a deer carcass
on the side of the road, refusing to look,
resisting my temptation to look, avoiding
the topic just as I avoided its eyes, praying
I could drown in my ignorance
swim away from the sand and existentialism.

My ritual, safeguarding my purity, was to tilt
my head to the side, wait as it passed. Until one day,
when traffic was slow, when music had paused,
fucking deadzones, when there was nothing
standing, between me and the deer, the deer and
me, The deer I could smell right outside my door.

I think to myself, “is this it?” Is this the same
kind of death we adorn with roses and relics,
place in caskets, cry over, follow a dress code for?
Is this meant to inspire the grief that consumes us,
depletes and dominates? Do you think they’re in
heaven or hell? Did they get last rites, shit,
did they even get *communion*? Do you think they
Believed God was human? Blonde? Merciful? I wish
I’d had the chance to ask their thoughts on the
Book of Genesis.

What if they have a special agreement with God?
Is it written anywhere? Do you think they were
Christian or Catholic? Jewish or Muslim?
Wouldn’t the simplest answer Be Buddhist?
Which religion endorses killing for necessity?

Years later I’m driving down a different highway
Watching the road turn to wine, across all lanes,
Some pieces scattered, others in a neat pile.
Like a grave with no stone, on the shoulder.
I see no yellow tape, no police rushing to the scene, no
lover on their knees crying out their name. Not even
A fucking *candle*. Now I may have never seen heaven,
But after all that carnage and unconsecrated bone,
falling under tire after tire, I know I’ve seen hell.

Marisabel Rodriguez is a Venezuelan writer and alumna of Loyola University New Orleans. She has worked for NOR, and Object Lessons, and is currently a Poetry Editor for Chestnut Review, and Interviewer for 433 Magazine. Most of her work is currently in purgatory (on her laptop), but she promises it won't stay that way forever, and she will definitely tweet about it when she regains the brainpower to think critically about religion, sociology, and culture @Lafienda.

Red meat
Jenna Cahusac de Caux

We do this thing every week,
Cook red meat.
Watch the blood smoke,
Letting it snake into a long
Hazy rope.

In the noose
You laugh amicably
At my loud voice,
At the silvery, thick air
Tying a lovely bow
Around your hair.

I remember the music
You played
As the smoke touched
The ceiling lights.
Arabic drums.
Hitting the same rhythm
The oil catches
Over and over till the stove
Lights blue.

We eat quickly,
No end in sight.
Why do we feel the need
Every week
To mark this meeting
Into the calendar?

A mixture of simple flavours
Remoulds the room into
The kitchen with harsh
Shade-less lights
And full voices
We both knew some time ago.

The mouthfuls become a reminder
Of hot countries steeped in oil,
And conversations that slither
Into a language understood
But spoken brokenly.

After I soak the blackened pans,
After I see the sink water turn pink
The room now under no guise of smoke,

I realise why we need do this thing every week.
I realise and I know somehow
Why we eat red meat.

Jenna Cahusac de Caux is a third-year student studying English at the University of Bristol. She writes poetry and short fiction in her spare time, inspired mainly by Frank O'Hara's philosophy of Personism.

'Life isn't what happens to us, but what happens between us.'

Rist, Sen, and the Gendered Politics of Development

Irteqa Khan

In their respective works, French scholar of development studies Gilbert Rist and prominent Indian economist Amartya Sen center their arguments around the concept of “development” and its complex and often disputed connotations. Rist writes of development from a strong socio-historical perspective and problematizes the “trendy” use of the word over the past sixty years, its increasing ubiquity in the contemporary era, and how it has become a “buzzword” or popular reference to issues ranging from agriculture, to urban planning, international trade, poverty reduction, personal well-being, and industrial production among other things (Gilbert Rist, “Development as a Buzzword,” *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4-5 (2007): 485-491). According to Rist, development is a moving yet performative notion hardly questioned by the international community and in spite of its undeniable failures in improving the conditions of the poor (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”). Moreover, it is widely accepted as a panacea to the very real social, economic, cultural, environmental, and political inequalities that exist between developed countries in the Global North and developing countries in the Global South. In the exhausting aftermath of the Cold War, the term was oxymoronically associated with environmental sustainability and economic growth and reformulated as “sustainable development” (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”). Rist goes on to emphasize the need to frame development in “down-to-earth” terms which plainly state what it is about and what it promotes; the “general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations in order to increase the production of commodities geared by means of market exchange, to effective demand” (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”). In this way, recognizing the “social practices” that underscore the radically “destructive,” capital-centred, and socially divisive nature of development enables us to contextualize it not wishfully as a “history of progress,”

but more truthfully as a “history of successive losses” (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”). Similarly, development creates hegemonic categories of global “haves” and “have-nots” or the “powerful” and the “powerless” and promotes the idea that “everyone is for sale” and that human beings are “resources” to be bought, exchanged, and sold (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”). When we conceptualize development as a sort of “humanitarian corporation” administered in the interests of Western ruling class capitalist elites and to the detriment of BIPOC, ethnoreligious minorities, women, immigrants, the poor, and disabled individuals or those who identify as members of the LGBTQ community among other historically marginalized groups worldwide, we begin to see the ways in which it has been employed time and time again to promote a system that is manifestly inequitable, unsustainable, and unfit to live in (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”). The considerable benefits that it grants to a small minority are *not* enough to justify its continuing acceptance and suggestion that so long as we uncritically endorse globalization and neoliberal models of economic growth as “prerequisites” to peace and prosperity, “things will be better tomorrow” (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”). Rist makes it abundantly clear that “development” is neither ahistorical nor apolitical, but is inherently and conclusively the totality of historical, political, social, and environmental forces interacting and mutually creating symbolic meanings over time (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”).

Meanwhile, Sen grounds his analysis in politico-economic and philosophical overtones and defines development as the “process of expanding human freedom,” freedoms which make up social and economic facilities, political and civil rights, technological progress, and industrialization, and are both the *end* and the *means* of development (Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999) 3-34). He also imagines development as freedom beyond income and the mechanism by which individuals can elongate their sense of self and their quality of life. On the other hand, Sen highlights

“unfreedoms” (poverty, tyranny, social deprivation, intolerance, and repression) which encumber an individual’s ability to live their life as they would like, especially large populations in the world today who are deprived of civil and political liberties by authoritarian rulers and regimes (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). Freedoms, then, are not only the basis for the evaluation of *human progress*, but are also “empirically” linked to one another and serve as principal determinants of agency and social effectiveness (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). In the context of the market economy, which helps expand income, wealth, and economic opportunities (Sen, *Development as Freedom*), the “freedom” to give and receive words, goods, or gifts is part of the way human beings live and move in society and relate to one another (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). “Deprivations” can result when people are denied the economic opportunities that markets offer and support (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). More importantly, Sen relays that while there is no “precise criterion” of development, there *is* a critical need to identify the diversity of individuals’ freedoms (which are experienced differently by everyone), to question the narrowness with which development is interpreted in current times, to ponder if and how development is an accurate measure of human freedoms and agency, to remove the *unfreedoms* from which members of society suffer, and to realize the wide-ranging implications of development on institutional authority and structural inequalities so we can find ways to meaningfully promote freedom for everyone, including underprivileged populations (Sen, *Development as Freedom*).

In understanding how the development process is *gendered*, we can look to Sen’s concept of “participatory freedom,” which he believes has yielded questions that “plague” the force and reach of development theory (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). The active agency of women and their capacity to incite social change has been severely overlooked in development studies and instead replaced with a narrative of suppression and victimization.

Scholars also tend to magnify this incongruity in the development process as a “women and gender” issue, specifically the ways in which the right of women to participate in freedom has been “choked off” on the basis of “traditional values” (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). Since participation in society requires knowledge and basic educational skills, denying the right to schooling, for example, to young women and girls in the Global South, stands in immediate opposition to the basic conditions of participatory freedom (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). “Development as freedom” thus has extensive implications not only for the overall objectives of development, but also for the social, political, environmental, cultural, and economic processes and procedures that would be considerably enriched by the intersectional and equitable participation of women, girls, and sexual minorities globally (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). Martha Nussbaum, an American philosopher who worked on the “capabilities approach” to development with Sen in the 1980s, advises that in many nations women are not full equals under the law. They are commonly treated as dispensable instruments and lack essential support for leading lives that are fully human (Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: the Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 1-35). International political and economic thought should thus be observant towards the special problems women across the globe (particularly in the Global South) face because of sex— problems, which left unaddressed, make it hard to tackle complex issues of poverty and development (Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*). For this reason, political approaches to development need to be evaluated for their ability to detect these problems and make appropriate recommendations for solutions (Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*).

Furthermore, institutionally recognizing women, girls, and sexual minorities such as transgender and non-binary individuals as human beings with salient forms of knowledge and experience transcends simply increasing the volume at which they are integrated into political

and economic structures and social institutions. We must also strive to abandon the deeply-rooted belief that economic growth alone can deliver social justice (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”). If *good* development is qualified as “endogenous” (or “bottom-up”), “human,” and “social” (Rist, “Development as a Buzzword”), its politics should facilitate a holistically *feminist* reshaping of society on a political, social, cultural, and economic level and help create spaces for women, girls, and sexual minorities to be heard and acknowledged as opposed to silenced and ostracized. Development and participatory freedom also intrinsically tie into improving the lives of women, girls, and sexual minorities outside of institutions, particularly those living in the Global South, who, on a daily basis, are adversely affected by the violence of poverty, racism, classism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, and a lack of opportunity to engage in a diverse range of activities among other things. Rigorous and robust development processes must emphasize that women, girls, and sexual minorities gaining the ability to participate in freedom has ramifications which benefit the *whole* of society. They must be allowed to fully and freely decide which practices and traditions they wish to follow and which they wish to reject regardless of what patriarchal symbols like national or local “guardians,” political leaders, and cultural “experts” proclaim (Sen, *Development as Freedom*). Hence, when it comes to the politics of development, advocacy, equity, and intersectionality are vital to exposing the profound inequalities entrenched in systems and structures that exclude women, girls, and sexual minorities worldwide from collaboratively partaking in policies, programs, and projects that speak to very real and pressing issues in all areas and at all levels.

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Irteqa Khan (she/her) is a Muslim-Canadian writer and poet of color. She holds an Honours degree in History and an MA in Political Studies from the University of Saskatchewan. Irteqa writes primarily about the psychospiritual, cultural, and linguistic gradations of diasporic living. Her writing has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and appears in *L'Éphémère Review*, *The Brown Orient*, *Spring Magazine*, *Homology Lit*, *Anomaly*, *Honey Literary*, and *Mixed Mag* among others. Irteqa's debut poetry chapbook, *rēza rēza*, was published with Gap Riot Press in 2020.

Instructions for the funeral
Hilary Tam

- i. Dress my corpse in
The billowing tulle of forgotten women
And soak me in their screams.
Paint my sunken eyes
With lipstick
And mascara on my cracked mouth
Hide all the truth and the grit
Under reds and blacks and blues

- ii. Phone the people who love that I love them
And say I am not dead
I am just rotting.
One day they will see me again, in the rubble
Buried underneath white lilies and carnations
That they threw before I was even gone
Say I am well
Really, I am
Because this sweet sleep embraces me in a way I have never known

- iii. Host the funeral wherever
But make sure I am far away from where sun kisses horizon
Close to where oceans do not forgive.
No one is to attend; not even you
Only I can deliver the eulogy
That pays homage to a broken body
Only I will sing my own songs

- iv. Do not reassemble
These fragmented bones.
Put me in the heart of the city
Amongst the hustle
Where the maggots will fill the holes And
Businessmen will deflate my lungs with
Freshly shined Brioni shoes
Maybe one day my organs will fertilise
Dying seeds in the gutters
And quiet flowers will blossom.

Hilary Tam is an aspiring young writer from Hong Kong. She adores poetry, flash fiction and any kind of soulful writing. In her free time, you can find her writing, reading, listening to music and rewatching Gilmore Girls for the umpteenth time.

Home Is a Divided Promise
Anastasia DiFonzo

In a high-rise apartment in Maine,
 I took my first breath, exhaled
 my only honest cry, apple-red
 face, blood-bathed body

for the very first time.
 I don't remember the bold
 October leaves, never crackled
 beneath my newborn feet.

We fled while I was still a fraction.
 Western sunsets promise power,
 so we shunned our solid ground
 for golden four-wheeled shelter,

rebirth eager on our lips. By the grace
 of madness, we found our castle. Here,
 I learned to grow, each shed hope
 a new chance at life.

Men came and went, bowed
 on command under the largest
 chandelier. I nested in my home,
 mind-bended my first survival kit.

I still honor that book,
 still chase beauty,
 speak in verse
 to save my life.

Anastasia DiFonzo (she/her) is a San Diego based poet with a cat named Klaus. Her debut chapbook, *A Certain Serenity*, is forthcoming with Puna Press in April of 2022. Currently, her work can be found in *Olney Magazine*, *Serotonin Poetry*, *Tempered Runes Press*, and elsewhere. When she's not writing, she can be found hugging her cat, drinking tea, and/or staring blankly into the abyss. Feel free to contact her at anastasiadifonzo.com, or on Instagram @anastasia.difonzo or Twitter @anmidaludi.