

**Tolle,**  
Take up and read!

**lege!**

**Tolle,**  
Take up and read!

**lege!**

So was I speake  
in the most be  
of my heart, when  
from a neighbour  
as of boy or girl,  
chanting, and oft

king and weeping  
bitter contrition  
O, lo! I heard  
my house a voice,  
I know not,  
repeating:

**Tolle,**

Take up and read!

**lege!**

**Tolle,**

Take up and read!

**lege!**

**Tolle,**

Take up and

**lege!**

**Tolle,**

Take up an

**lege!**



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# Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

Thank you to you for picking up this book, thank you to the Review Board for spending time with this content, to everyone who submitted work, to Oona for the beautiful calligraphy, to layout for the cool concept and gorgeous book, and to my fellow editors for making possible this edition of the *Creative Review*. And thank you to the Reed College Student Body, the Office for Student Engagement, and the English Department for funding the publication in its fourteenth year.

Please, enjoy.

With love,

*Content warning: rape mention, abuse mention, body gore, and nudity.*

reed

Creative Review  
2018–2019

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Poetry

# Holy Cross

Ben Read

Like a dream, nightgowned  
trees sway in silk. Their dark  
bodies are revealed as branches  
sag, let their white sleeves fall  
off their limbs. Down the mountain  
road that is every mountain road  
I walk. I am awake.  
The road bends ahead  
by a gabled house, warm in the blue  
night. I hear the voices of winter:  
greetings, gratitudes that leap  
from crystal to crystal up above  
the leaders of the hemlocks.  
Because of the hill, I cannot  
see where we have walked from.  
I know that when we turn  
back, we will come upon the same place  
we left, the cabin with broken snowshoes  
and cast iron skillets caked in dough, old  
bottles of wine. Yet  
I can convince myself, or perhaps deceive  
myself, that I will instead find  
Holy Cross Cemetery and you, ghost  
of my grandfather, gaunt  
and Italian and still listening  
to Neil Diamond like Mom remembers  
and who I have been told  
gave me my thick, dark hair that catches  
the snow. Or you alive in the window  
of your university, bent  
beside a green lamp over Hegel  
or the gospels or your ideas  
about God all around  
the world. Perhaps faith is  
the suspension of disbelief and God  
a good story. But no, there is not



more than this. There is this.  
The elderly pines, the ghastly sky.  
Not merely, not only, not just. It is  
enough. I have been standing here too long.  
Thirsty, I put my face in the snow.  
I open my mouth, take the cold in, let it rest  
on my tongue and swallow.

# Anatomically Correct

Ben Read

*Do you want to go to the store today?*

she asks.

*I need grapes and milk and English muffins.* If you slice open  
a pig's chest you already know  
what's inside. Do it neatly,  
from the base of the throat  
to the top of the groin,  
shoulder to shoulder.

Pull out the small intestine and stretch it out and measure it.  
Smile and pose because your pig's is the longest.

Hold it in your hands. Imagine  
it's your own. The condensed milk  
next to the soup

is on sale. *Where is the jam?*

I know where it is.

I want to put my fingers in it. Lick them clean.

There is a grape on the floor.

I step on it. I am sorry,

pig. I did not dissect you neatly.

Stained scalpel kidneys

pink thyroid bile and blood,

of course. I keep you secret.

The folds of my brain are grey and white

and if I unfolded

the cortex,

plucked out the amygdalae

and laid them out on my bed sheet, pinned them back and labeled them

I could not find the neuron, the nuclei that sparked

when I cut you.

*Are you ready to check out?*

Bag in one hand, her fingers in the other. I squeeze.

I want to look at her, unashamed.

I bought spinach and apples and penne.

I want to make her a meal, feed her

bite by bite.

## e<sup>pilogue</sup> *Ally Bahk*

it is almost always october for me, an october morning doing morning things,  
sitting around  
sloppily and

mourning things.

i am two boys drunk,  
one with an  
oil drum for a mouth,  
one with cracked lips,  
and i pull a dream from the archive bin and eat up,

chew quietly,  
always swallow,  
always emptying the plate for you. tonight i am meeting you for dinner under-  
neath my tongue  
but for now i am thinking about how to keep myself  
from kissing you.

of course i am just marveling you and i have marbled you yet again. of course i  
am just spinning you and i am spilling you yet again.  
i could hold you and  
hand-feed you blueberries

tonight if i wanted to come home, but tonight

i do not think  
i want to come home.

## Self portraiture *Ally Bahk*

my insides do not yet forgive my outsides and thus we are thick and rude. we sit here and we know this is silly but we still go ahead, kiss and make nothing better. some splotches of your skin are sloshed with sunshine but now it turns umber, now it turns ocher, yeah you were probably right anyway. this year i will keep making you ugly and say nothing new, swerve and swarm and shovel my way into you again. so if you're walking keep walking, i will measure you by how far i can want you. i will make things out of you so i can look at them up close and from a distance, separate your insides and your outsides and decide what's worth forgiving.

# Lucky Cloud

Quinn Spencer

Your eyelids fluttering with dawnshade and treelight I brewed us pots of coffee,  
but three each more dreggy mugs into the morning stains bloom under my arms  
and you lie unawoken.

Restless, I gather static on the robin egg carpet, a haunting in big slippers.  
Gossamer scraps of me drift away from the center,  
translucent pouring vinegar at the foot of your bed  
where last night we spilled wine.

Neighbors in bathrobes light cigarettes and leer from their balconies,  
for the room's low simmering heat has made me shirtless.

Like a cat on a still-warm seat, I most comfortably inhabit another's absence.  
I rifle through your cabinets, run my finger around the dusty rim of a pot lid,  
osmose you like a plume of steam.

Meticulous, I become your waking shadow, an endless reminder.  
Your sleeping body projects me at angles onto the walls,  
peering around into dusty corners from whence I come,  
to which I will return.

*How do I say it has nothing to do with your body?*

You are the mirror made flesh  
(or else I am)  
and we trace our shape in the other's reflection,  
wet and sinewed,  
drops cutting straight down through the fog  
(like so).

I long to be smoother than skin can be;  
do you understand that?

I want to watch you asleep through the window of my bus to work

and imagine we're flush with the panes,                      that we're that much closer.

# Warm

Io Blanchett

i want to become  
 just like my parents  
 with you.  
 by this i mean,  
 i want to run out of space  
 for the frozen dinners  
 in the refrigerator  
 that we share.  
 some days i'm looking at the world  
 through rose-tinted glasses  
 and when she looks back at me  
 her glasses are rosy-colored too.  
 but we are holding the screens away from each other  
 and i have let you listen  
 to plastic wheels on the road  
 even when you have asked me  
 not to yell at you  
 from across the room.  
 the night was dark  
 and the heater was broken  
 the heater IS broken  
 the bed is a massacre.  
 look, there was a desire  
 there was an insisting  
 a reassurance,  
 and now there's blood on the blanket.  
 and there's a cage  
 that is also a graveyard  
 but i would never tell you that.  
 there is a box  
 that's in the box  
 that held me

with nothing left inside and  
all this to explain  
why i saw the plates  
and i saw her crying  
and i called you just to say i was leaving.  
i called just to say,  
of course the heater's broken  
because the days keep getting shorter and shorter  
because this is where the road ends  
because sometimes i can be  
hysteria's receptacle  
and sometimes I can't.  
and when i stitch your arm back on  
my fingers fall off.  
so bring a flashlight  
and a needle and thread  
to sew on a new ending  
where i don't leave  
i don't ask you to turn on the heat  
unplug the headphones  
unstick me from the slanted crevice  
move my arms like a puppeteer.  
we pitch this tent  
together  
we stick our hands  
together  
like two halves  
of a broken pair of glasses:  
with drying boxed wine  
and red lipstick.  
and if you buy another blanket  
we can stay in this bed  
and keep each other  
warm.

As Didymus  
Emma McNeel

Thomas rests moments  
from warm body, skin  
wrapping muscle and bone,  
empty wounds, signs  
of some cast-off death.

His hand ventures  
between the folds of the robes  
of his Lord.

Every line of drapery cast  
leads to this. Christ gently reveals  
his own chest. All of Thomas's weight  
rests on one forward leg.

Stigmata lie prone  
on Christ's palms, the right raised as if to say  
*I forgive you, and I forgive  
what you are doing.*

It took touch  
for Thomas to understand. As the saying goes,  
he could not believe his eyes, but somehow fingertips  
were enough. I cannot say

I acted differently. When we stood before them,  
you mentioned their hands. I studied their bones,  
their veins. Looking at you

looking at me—  
Christ does not pass judgment,  
Thomas does not look ashamed. Where they stand now  
in the yellow windows of Orsanmichele  
their bronze eyes catch the light.



**T**wenty-Five Dollar Baby  
*Samrath Bhattacharya*

booty shorts and killawatt  
highlighter, gleaming in front of the lights  
of your supercharged ford f-150 pick-up truck.

honey, i got a new set.  
shellac, cause' press-ons aren't good enough.

i am your sinamon trophy wife  
mega-fine. rum, confetti, chili mango  
hotter than some blonde baby spice.

baby, pop cristal over my body.  
a pearly champagne shimmer, so sweet, drink.

# Thereof, Silence

Nicholas Luu

My body finds itself lost in waves of aphasic pleasure,—all mute,—unexpressed. Should I leap from the belltower, fly perhaps? I already feel free falling, gut tending upwards. But how would that leap appear in that reflexive Moment of Catharsis?

\*

Pleasure perhaps, but what of it? Do those flickers of a screen not excite just the same? Do not the shouts of a pundit—

The typeface of the front page,  
the tears of a mother—

Do they not all bring to surface those intangible feelings? Those joys, that sense of glee and ecstasy? Do they not measure me out, weigh me by the ounce? Do they not bring forth the unexpressed joy of it all?

\*

The future, an aggregate of past and present, less than the sum of its parts: A declension, a deceptive cadence, all ending unresolved. And unlike Hamlet I realize that it's been silence all along. Do I put music in a cage, do I limit its possibilities? Perhaps. But this is not the symphony I wanted to take part in.

\*

My father beat me, my father hurt me. My father yelled words that stung. My father smiled at the world while breaking my fingers in his grip. My mother watched.

\*

Treading water never felt so good as when water filled my lungs. But back on land, I never want to go back, though the ground swells, and my sea legs will never leave.

\*

I remained silent in adolescence. At the time I thought I spoke, I thought I yelled, I thought I told the world about the joy I felt when I flew, the pain of my falls. But looking back I realise I remained silent.

\*

I remember the moon. I saw on the screen the lunar surface and knew I would fly. In my bedroom I would keep the scrap metal I scrounged from school—I stole my father's duct tape and stapler and I took twine and glue from the garage until finally I built my rocket. I launched it in the day, aiming the rocket at the sun. I figured the moon would be up where the sun was by the time I got there.

\*

I told Sami about the moon. I told her about that lunar surface, and about the beautiful silence that separated me from the world. I told her that the silence sounded like music. I asked Sami to hold her hand, but I realised that I didn't. I didn't tell Sami about the moon. I didn't talk to Sami.

\*

I swear I told her. I swear we spoke. I swear our eyes would dance in stillness every time our gaze met. She knew about the moon. She knew about my trip to sea. In all those decades of passing her by whenever I could I know she knew.

\*

How was I expected to speak when my tongue had deep lacerations?

\*

I really try, I tell myself it's not my fault, but every repetition I find less persuasive. I find numb that which feels— Always numb, past or present. Reflecting loses its spark when drama leaves and normalcy reigns, and I really try. I am trying the best I can. I really tried.

\*

I once dreamt of a world devoid of fantasy. I was blind, though—and deaf, and mute, and numb all around. And I remained motionless. And the world was so beautiful, because I didn't need a single thing. I lay there in darkness feeling my hunger devour my entire being until I awoke.

\*

These ruminations, mere procrastinations. Hopeless attempts to sustain the past. I will never succeed in staving off the present, I will never enlarge the future. I will fly, or I will look at the cityscape as the bells toll and the sun rises. The sight—one I've seen a million times. The light caramelises over the outlines of skyscrapers, the sky's colour smarts against the edge of a light red's blade. Cars will start to clog, and people will gather round the bottom of the belltower to witness the spectacle of what is about to happen.

The Clock Shop  
*j.a. staudinger*

I stop in a clock shop.  
 It's ten-till-two; the clocks should all be due to chime  
 I kill time admiring "Tempus Fugit"  
 etched on ticking faces.

Now, their hands don't match reports  
 Grandfather tells it ten-till, still;  
 a flashier face says seven-past;  
 a piece themed Charlie Brown is dead at 5:05  
 so some start singing early.

Singing.  
 I expected clangs and dings and sudden  
 lock-step march,  
 mechanized order, not songs,  
 but these cheeky faces trickle chimes in loose file  
 making music much more water than I thought,  
 more stream than stone despite quartz hearts.  
 Gramps throws in two throaty notes,  
 a base amidst glissando tones,  
 neighbors whisper "when's the hour?"  
 gossip until nearby hands catch on and start  
 a bright and lasting ballroom dance  
 of polished pendulums and brass---  
 No sweet and mellow line of clocks---  
 instead Rube-Goldberg twister talks,  
 voice by ringing voice rebels  
 against the tick of my own time,  
 weaves lyrics different every instant,  
 tears the hour up and tosses  
 pieces to the wind like petals  
 from a flower.

I could stay, admire for a few more measures  
 maybe just a couple beats  
 till I forget to read  
                                   or talk  
 forget to call a clock--  
 remember only song.

# Anger Used *Rubi Vergara-Grindell*

Where does my anger go?  
 When the breeze picks up and  
 the leaves no longer crumble into dust.  
 Does it simply dissolve into the rain?  
 Or grow into the stems of some strong but curled plant.  
 Does it hide in the fat of my  
 things or the  
 bones of my jaw?  
 There are so many pockets  
 to                      fill  
 Un bolsillo más y  
 mi piel se deshace,  
 Agujeros en cada cicatriz.  
 Sometimes tears fall into  
 the spaces between guitar strings  
 and cherry pie.  
 But my body is soft  
 and they catch on my nipples,  
 pool in my ears.  
 “Anger used, does not destroy,” says Audre Lorde  
 But what about storage?  
 And timing? And leftovers?  
 My voice often cracks.

**k**<sup>iss</sup> *nilufar imanipassand*

the boundary between the hiss and the snake herself:  
the color of hangover-loud

at the collapse-upon-entry tunnel mouth:  
with the same shovel that digs bags under eyes

like skin swallowing the beat of a folding fan  
: swallow the behemoth

like a leaf barges in on a burial:  
with quiet reassurance no one is listening

the canopy of an umbrella pierced by horns:  
the shape of a grape.

Prose

## Salt of the Earth

*Sophia Kongshuang*

This used to be an ocean. The roads, the fields, the fences, all swallowed up by the gallons and gallons of water that covered the whole of it until not a single tree top was visible. Everyone used to know this, but then they forgot, so the boy leads a horse down the gravel road and thinks nothing of the fish bones that criss-cross in the chasms of earth beneath.

The sky is empty of clouds and the plants are settled low into the mud.

Coming down the opposite way is a man carrying a metal safe over his left shoulder. He is tall and thin, and walking stooped over to the right. He stares over the boy's head to the grey and yellow fields that arc beyond the thin fence.

The boy's question is harsh, but his voice wavers. The man looks down. He points toward a patch of dirt in the middle of the road, empty of grass or rocks. With a grunt of effort, he sets the safe down onto the bare earth. He tips it so the door faces up to the sky and begins to twirl the dial between his thumb and pointer finger.

The boy clutches the lead tighter.

The man asks a question, and the boy answers, then immediately bites his lip as if trying to shove the words back down his throat.

The man nods, twirling the dial finally to the number thirteen and pulling the door of the safe open. The boy steps forward despite himself. The horse yanks the lead out of the boy's hand and begins to run towards a small farmhouse. The boy does not notice.

There is light coming from the safe, and it casts the boy's face in pale green.

The man asks another question.

The boy's eyes flick back towards the farmhouse, yellow blocks of light thrown out from square windows. He thinks of the old chair by the fireplace. He thinks of his mother stitching patches onto worn denim, glasses half-perched on her nose. He doesn't answer.

From deep within the safe comes the faint sound of waves brushing against shore, back and forth, as if made of breath. As the boy leans in closer, an exhale of mist puffs upward, dampening his hair and filling his nose with a strange and unfamiliar scent. He closes his eyes. He thinks of the crackling of the fire, worn leather strips against the skin of his hands, steam rising from a warm cup and then waves, waves crashing and surging and swelling to a cacophony until the roar of them thunders against his skull.

The man asks the question again. This time the boy answers.

In the middle of a road that used to be an ocean, a woman kneels down beside an unfamiliar object. She pushes her glasses up over the bridge of her nose and points her flashlight into the dark opening, eyes following the pale beam all the way down.



## Anything Else? Sophia Kongshuang

The night is warm and full. You sit all the way in the corner of the booth, even though you are the only one in the diner. Thick slabs of yellow light stream in from the sign outside the window.

The waitress's feet smack across the linoleum. You take her in as she approaches, broad shoulders, billowing arms, wide hands. Her hair falls down her back, curly and dark, and her face is patterned in shallow creases. She gives you a tired smile. You order the usual, and she retreats into the background noise of the kitchen.

Her name is Rosa, and you have a dog together.

It was her idea, because she never had a dog growing up. She walks the dog in the morning while you sit in the kitchen and drink coffee. When she gets back, you have breakfast ready: fat pancakes and quivering golden eggs. In this life, you hold hands over embroidered placemats and watch raindrops fall past the window outside.

An ant crawls across the diner table, carrying a crumb the size of her own head.

You fold your fingers together. They look like tree roots, thick and bulging. You wonder if they will still fit between hers.

A cup of coffee is set in front of you. You stare down at your own shimmering reflection. Rosa slides into the cushioned bench, pulling in her stomach. You look up, and her coffee-shaped eyes stare back into yours. Her lips are a dark mauve that blends into the dusty booth beneath. You pick up the coffee and let it fall onto your tongue. It tastes of earth and rain.

Rosa tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and tilts her head. She shrinks before you, spiraling backwards until both her hands and yours are small and fresh. Her hair is larger and wilder, and the creases of her face are still yet to be. Her lips are bright cherries: so red, you can almost taste them. You feel a throbbing in your ankles from the heeled shoes you haven't worn in two decades.

Rosa smiles, and her teeth glow in the amber light. She stretches her hand across the table and metal bracelets chime together on her wrist. You reach out, and her hand fits into yours like a warm glove. The steam from the coffee softly kisses your skin.

In this life you let Rosa pull you out of the booth. You lean into her as you leave, cold raindrops shivering through your scalp.

There is a clink on the table as the plate is set before you. The eye of the egg stares into yours, refusing to blink. The waitress stands, shirt hugging her frame, hand curled around a fraying notebook. When she speaks to you, it is with a plum colored voice, and her words hover in the empty air.

You notice that in this life her eyes are not brown at all.

# M<sup>eat</sup>

*Molly Linden Herro*

She crept into the bed by the window on Monday. The crown of her head pressed against the cold glass, the little exposed section of scalp where her hair parted was only separated from the night by a transparent fraction of an inch. The thin quilt wouldn't cover her feet if she stretched all the way out, so she tucked her knees into the fetal position. The sheets felt grimy against her face.

Before she fell asleep, she listened to the sound of a thousand red soldiers marching in her ear. Her brain, which was practically touching the night air, whispered to her about hope and love and politics and death. She fell asleep slowly.

The next night, she slumped on the couch and dug soft red flesh out of a pint of Cherry Garcia, occasionally pressing a cherry between the side of the carton and the edge of her spoon until it sliced in half. She set the empty carton on the floor and drifted off with her chin on her chest and her arms limp at her sides. She slept on the couch in the living room until 2:18 when a fly entered her ear. She half woke up and made her way into her bedroom.

On Wednesday, she climbed into the window bed again, but now with a new haircut that she didn't like. Her hands were unfamiliar with her scalp, absentmindedly creeping up the back of her neck like ivy. She thought about the insignificance of her physical form as she fell asleep, then dreamed about being raped in an empty subway car in a dark tunnel.

On Thursday, she fell into bed as her landlord shut the door behind him. Flies were still buzzing by the couch where he had been sitting. She had had a long day but she knew that others had had even longer days and that the sun wouldn't even set in Alaska that night. As she slumped into bed, she felt worms in her stomach and her brain. She began to drift away, but something jerked her back inside her body and she slammed into the surface of the earth. Her limbs flailed for a moment, then curled closer to her body. She fell asleep cautiously.

On Friday, the first of the month, she laid still under her sheets and cursed every person in her building and their children and their grandchildren and their grandchildren. The woman who dumped cat litter down the toilet and clogged the drains every so often was right on the other side of her bedroom wall, and the girl whose loud music often pressed through her ceiling was above her. She wormed her fingers into the holes between quilt squares. The short, stiff hairs on her head prickled unevenly into the window. She was uncomfortable and she dreamed about her teeth falling out. They dropped one by one into a bottomless pool of moonlit water.

Facedown, she screamed into her pillow. Her body tensed up a moment later as the diabetic woman who lived below her banged her fat fist on the ceiling. She wished for her Accu-Check to malfunction. She leaned off the edge of her bed so her face was close to the floor and yelled, "It's Saturday night, get the fuck out of your apartment for once!" She flipped over and glanced at the clock. It was 9:09, so with any luck the landlord was already settled in and wouldn't come by to ask what the problem was. That night she dreamed that she was a salamander in a damp cave, her belly sliding over rocks, her sticky hands pulling her forward faster and faster.

The next night, she lay carefully on her left side. Her fingers crept along a newly stitched ridge that crossed from her ninth rib to the sixth, trailing a shiny line of Neosporin like a snail's mucus. Her body felt lighter, but more delicate. Hopefully this would hold him off for a while.

It didn't. On Monday night, her apartment was filled with the hum of flies. She swatted them away from her scar and watched the clock.

Her dream had come true. On Tuesday night, her tongue ran over thirty-two fresh pits in her gums. She gargled with antibacterial mouthwash and spit the foamy blue and red into her sink. She watched it drain as a rope of blood and saliva clung tenuously to her lip. It snapped off and coiled into the sink. She drained it down, stuffed cotton balls into the pits and lay down. The pain kept her up most of the night.

Wednesday night the flies were back. She hid under her quilt as they laid eggs in the apples left out on her nightstand.

On Thursday night, a new scar, almost thirteen inches long, wound like a snake two inches below the bottom of her ribcage. If she placed her hand on her torso, she could feel its hollowness. The eggs in the apples began to hatch.

On Friday night, there was a knock on the door. She waited silently, dread flooding through her. After a moment, she heard a key clicking in the lock and the door swung open. Her landlord leaned heavily on the doorframe.

She turned away from him and curled up to hide her scars, the vertebrae of her spine poking through her skin. She could feel him staring at her back, could imagine his dark eyes and the thick, greasy black hair brushing over them.

Her heartbeat was in a million places. *Take whatever you want*, she thought.

He turned and left. She began to cry as the door snapped shut.

As she placed her legs under the quilt on Saturday night, she noticed how pale they were. There were two more scars on her abdomen, one that mirrored the first, but on the left side, and another next to the crease where her thigh met her pelvis. She wondered if she would be able to pay rent on time. She dreamed that she was small, cowering on a huge empty swath of concrete, and that she was being circled by a hawk.

On Sunday, the maggots became cocoons. Their soft, translucent white skin contracted and hardened, darkening into a brownish-red. Her eyes focused blankly on the wrinkly brown spots on the apples, like the skin of an old man who had spent too much time in the sun. They were bruised black right around the three holes where she knew they were hiding. She wished that she could get out of bed to throw them away. Her body felt like a shell.

On Monday, the top of the first cocoon split open and exposed the pulsing white head of the fly, its velvety red eyes, a fringe of long eyelashes.

## CHRONOS

*LouEllingson*

Fall—the season of sunrise and chapped lips. Lou watches spider webs strung up in sunlit trees, like elastic strands of hair. The webs glow amber and transmit messages from one leaf to another, their electricity blinding her bleary eyes. One year past, she was laying in grass with Ramona’s snake hands. This autumn, Lou questions everything around her, but finds mostly loneliness and crisp air. She draws spiders in her notebook.

Winter—a tumbling through liquid darkness. Walking through a static night, Lou thinks she lives underwater, or in some cosmic vacuum. People float from here to there, a procession of monks carrying individual flames close to their organs. She notices them crumpled inwards, cautious of being extinguished. Amidst their email correspondence, Ramona asks Lou to share a secret. I’m afraid of the ocean, she replies.

Spring—sitting under the peppered shade of a cherry blossom tree, Lou feels anxious to grasp at time. She notices nostalgia as it happens. These blossoms are being whisked away just as they reach their gentle peak of existence. The last of the raindrops fall like crystalline tears, then shatter on the pavement. Lou sits on a motel bed that is more a pile of deflated springs and faded flowers than a site of sleep. She rehearses the words, “I love you,” but only behind the velvet cloak of skull and skin. The pathway to her lips—via vocal cord and courage—is too blocked up, too slick from rain. She watches Ramona step out of the bath.

Summer—and Lou is standing by the bed of hyacinth flowers that wilt under every ounce of heat. A droplet of sweat creeping across vertebrae. Waiting for Ramona to arrive. In her hands, she holds a brown-paper envelope inside of which is a letter. As she wrote, she imagined what the words would have looked like had they been dragged out of her fingertips. In the transferring of hands, the letter feels heavy. Lou sees her ghost fingers stretch miles away. She hangs upside down off her bed with rainbows in her eyelashes and sourness in her mouth. “I should have waited to eat this citrus when it would have been ripe,” Lou thought, while picturing stomach acid devouring the color orange.

## S titches

Lou Ellingson

By Saturday morning, Ingrid was carving apples again. I watched as she expertly sliced the fruit into slivers that wouldn't disturb her lipstick—red, red, red. The Swiss Army knife she wielded was both family heirloom and birthday present from the year her mom couldn't keep a job. I held my breath while the blade descended towards her thumb, the skin stretched thin. Her flesh was the kind of pale under which blue veins show more sharply than neon signs or cartography lines. Then, Ingrid was sucking blood, smiling. From her painted lips emerged the word: "Ouch."

The whole way to the hospital, I couldn't take my eyes off the peach-scented fir tree dangling from Ingrid's rearview mirror. The whole truck, an old Chevrolet, I think, smelled like James' Giant God Damn Peach. How bizarre, I thought, a fir tree that smells of summer; the aroma of one plant injected into another. I wonder if that's the message coded in my cat's meow when I slip into the unlocked garden gate, back from Ingrid's in the early morning, reeking of rosewater and cigarette smoke—her scent, not mine. With every turn of the road and turn of the wheel, Ingrid's thumb dripped a steady stream of blood into the already-soiled floor mats. They imbibed every ounce, and were quenched.

The next day, with Ingrid's opposable finger all stitched up, we went down to the lagoon to pretend we were insects in a tide pool. The pocket knife still clung to her belt loop, pressed next to her hipbone, giving me a glare that sent ribbons of envy down my spine. At the lagoon's edge, I protested of infections and murky water, but Ingrid only noticed its similar color to the waxy stitches dotting her wound. We swam to the far shore, the one with the willow trees. Floating there in the greenish water was a tiny spoon—probably the kind you stir sugar into tea with. I snatched it, trying to keep my feet from sinking into the suction-cup mouth of the mud below, and held it out to her. Treading water nearby, she asked, "Do you think it was earl grey or English breakfast?"

"Why not coffee?" I replied, picturing a countertop full of cups stained with black rings on their insides, all cooled down and forgotten.

"No good," she laughed as she swam back to the truck that smelled of peaches.

That was all before Ingrid was a ghost. Not that she died, just that she lingers in all places and things—haunting my present with our past. Presently, the only thing I know is that it is raining. Presently, I think about the last night I saw Ingrid. It was at the graveyard where our grandparents are buried. She did not ask to kiss me, she just tucked her good-luck fingers under my chin and did it. I had to remember to shut my eyes, they were still so wide open. Even though she draped me in the scratchy wing-span of a woolen blanket, my bones were as cold as the ones beneath tombstones and decaying flowers. I felt her heart beating beneath her black t-shirt and when I finally shut my eyes I saw it there, suspended in the emptiness of my eye sockets.

Pulsating, her heart looked like a midnight sun. The breeze through the graveyard exhaled nostalgic whispers for our blood stitched back into thumbs, our warm and unfamiliar lips, our eyes closed not in the slumber of death but out of shyness.

After the graveyard, I had walked down to my dusty mailbox. Inside, I found a flower, some dead ladybugs, and a note written over a map of the UK. The flower didn't smell like anything. The note was almost illegible, but eventually the scrawl of Sharpie untangled to read: "This love can't just be planting flowers in mailboxes,". Looking closer, I realized the flower was the one I had delivered to her mailbox not three days ago. I walked back up the path, through the unlocked garden gate, past the meow which this time I knew couldn't be a comment on my scent—I hadn't seen Ingrid in three days. Bending down, I wrapped my hands around her little cat skull. It was vibrating with a purr, though muffled by the gate of my fingers. Her bones felt so small, so easy to crush. The thought crossed my mind with complete clarity that I must be both fragile and clumsy.

Inside, the stairs were creaking. The doorknobs, creaking. The cupboards with the tiny spoons in them, creaking, creaking, the whole house was creaking and groaning with her last steps. As she left, I had pictured a whirlpool of bathwater created by pulling the plug with the chain on it. Hearing the engine of her truck start up, I had thought I smelled apples, but remembered they don't have a smell, really. Then, the house, the walls, the bathtub—they all looked at me and what I had written on the napkin sitting in my lap. Was it a napkin or a notebook? A map? The thin of my eyelids felt shaky, like they were drawn with a crayon. Every one of my organs was stirring. Praying vomit wouldn't come out, I opened my mouth and read what I had written on the napkin. I read to the house, the walls, the bathtub—because she wasn't there to listen. It went like this:

TODAY I DID NOT LEAVE MY HOUSE  
I DRANK ONE HUNDRED CUPS OF COFFEE  
AND COMPOSED A SYMPHONY  
TO THE VIBRATIONS OF MY BONES

TODAY I DID NOT LEAVE MY HOUSE  
I LAID SO STILL IN MY WHITE BED  
THAT I DISSOLVED INTO A SEA OF SETTLED DUST  
PALE LIKE PULVERIZED TEETH

TODAY I DID NOT LEAVE MY HOUSE  
BECAUSE THIS WAS THE LAST PLACE YOU LOOKED AT ME  
AND IF I WALK ACROSS THE THRESHOLD THAT YOU CROSSED FIRST  
I WON'T KNOW WHERE ELSE TO FIND YOU

Snow People  
Quinn Spencer

His snow wife was hunched over as she ascended the stoop, her grip weak on the railing. She looked through the open door like she didn't see him as if not seeing him, into the living room where the phone was ringing. The snow man, in repose on a deck chair, drew at the stub of a Parliament between his front two knuckles. The spring air eddied against the cold of his body, whipping the smoke into miniature tornadoes. He stifled a cough, and she glanced over as if he'd been about to speak. Surprised, they stared at one another for a moment; then she went inside to answer the phone.

A crow on a wire looked down on the house. It was not a snow crow but in fact just a regular crow. The snow man opened a Heineken with his teeth. Fragments of ice scattered across the porch, where they began to melt.



# TATTOOS

*Elaina Wittmer*

One day the tattoos will fade and I will be old with you beside me.

We will try to read them together. Foreign words, at one time less so, will sit unpracticed and clumsy on our tongues as we attempt to decipher a meaning from them. We knew it once but it's been forgotten.

The knowing is not always. The knowing requires maintenance and it requires a persistent hand. One day these tattoos will fade. One day I may ask myself where they came from, and you will be there to remind me. "Read them to me again," I will say, but you will not know how and I will have forgotten how to teach you.

My mother tongue will never leave me, but my ancestral tongues are lost. These words are no different. "Talk to me," I say. These words will one day be considered dead and I will lie with them and the tattoos will be faded.

"Read them to me again," I will want to ask. But I won't, my tongue long since lost to the dirt.

## DIALECT SHIFTS

*Elaina Wittmer*

You can't leave this town. You can walk away from it, but at a certain point, each step you take will only bring you closer. At a certain point, it affects the way you breathe. At a certain point, it affects the way you speak.

Every place I have ever lived has wormed its way inside me. I no longer remember how I'm supposed to speak. I've become an everywhere person from a nowhere town. How am I supposed to speak?

Why are you here? Why did you leave?

You can't leave it. Not really. You can absorb new accents like plastering wallpaper over a bright blue wall, but the color still seeps through. You can learn bus routes and train lines and how to navigate the world, but your fingers will still itch for the steering wheel. You can't escape your culture, but your new life doesn't want it.

I want to go home.

When my mother and my aunts and my grandmother talk about who lived in the house on the corner three generations back, my uncle tells me that one day that will be me, like this form of communication is somehow lesser than others. I don't defend them. I don't explain that I've lost the vocabulary to speak like that. I don't explain that sometimes I want it back.

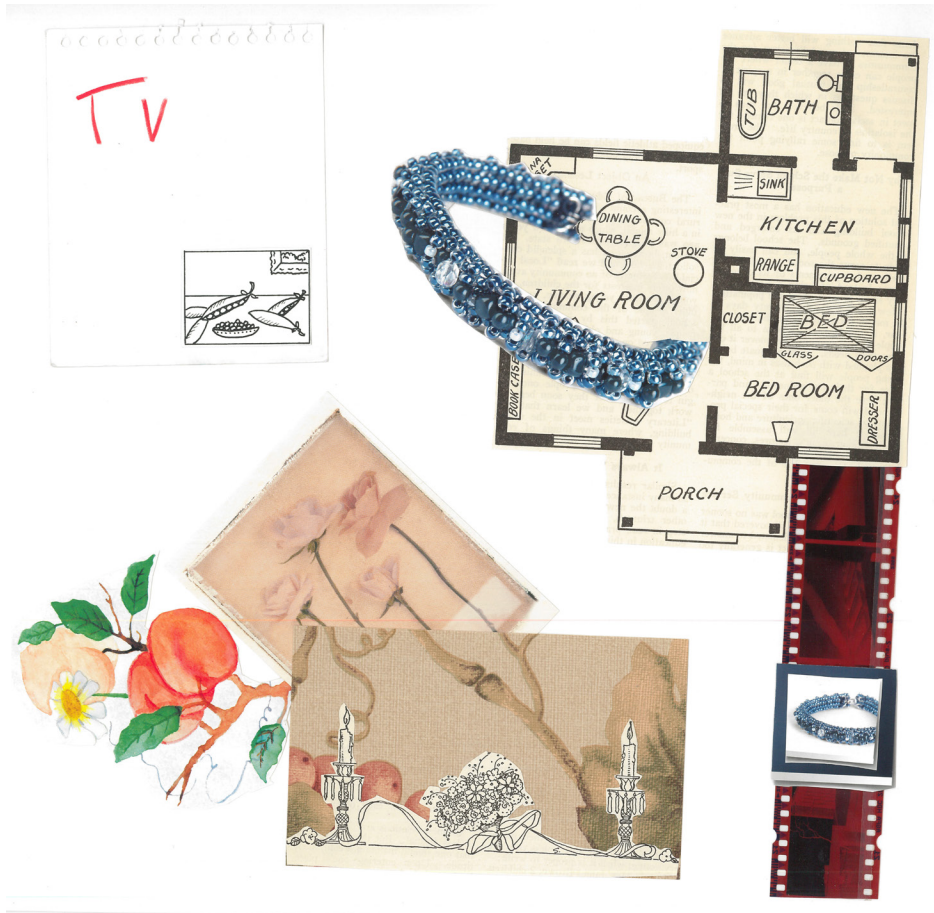
When we study dialect shifts in linguistics, I can no longer provide an accurate account of my own native accent. I repeat: I can no longer provide an accurate account of my own native accent.

Distance, the arbitrary measure of space, can hurt. The existence of nothingness between you and the place you want to be is unforgiving. But where do you want to be?

# Visual Arts & Photography



Perfect lives (the shed)  
Quinn Spencer

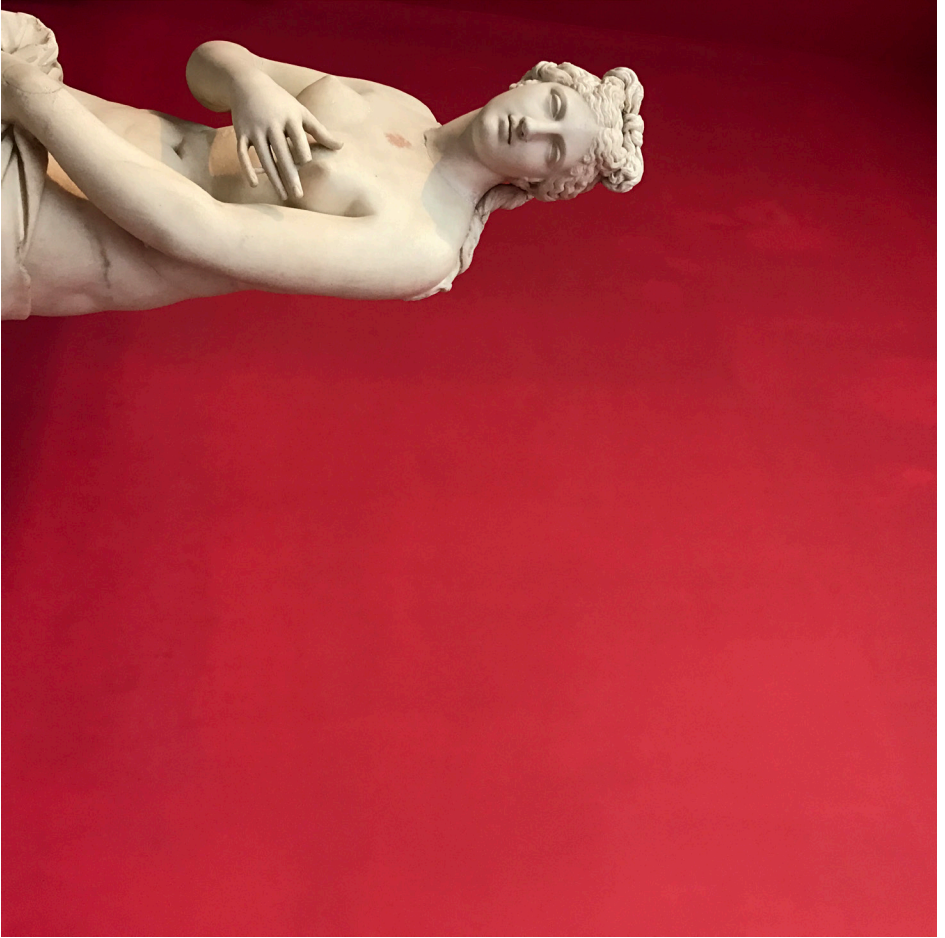


# Domesticities Quinn Spencer

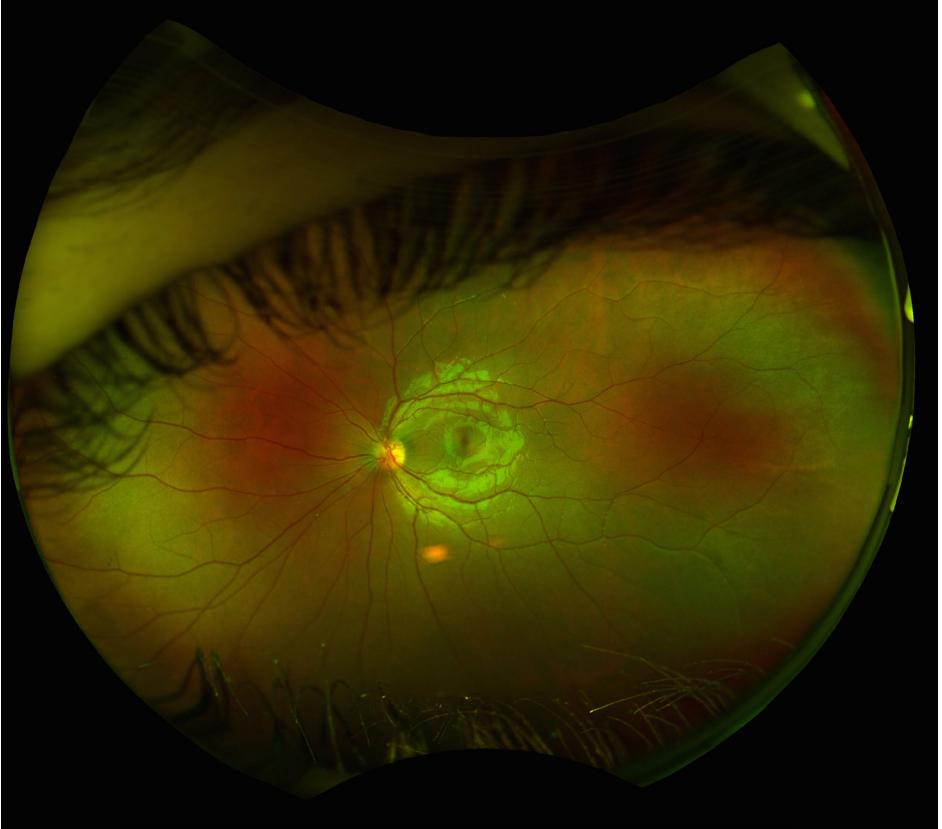




**C**hameleon Nipple Girl  
*Molly Linden Herro*



**E**<sup>ver</sup> Sight  
Max Nobel



**m**y right retina (2017), for the archives  
*nilufar imanipassand*





p<sup>astel boy</sup>  
M Prull



**O**nly Paths  
*Isabelle Berman*



P<sup>h</sup>ewa Tal  
*Isabelle Berman*

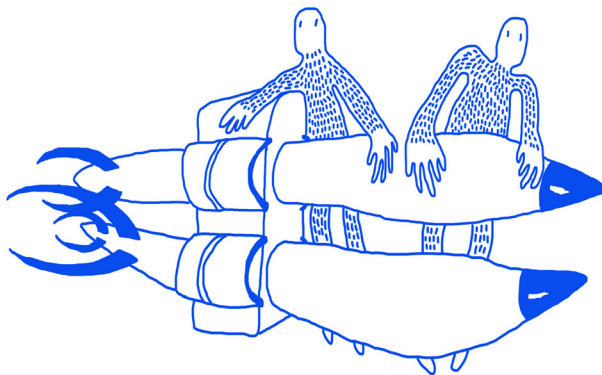


**T**he Desperate Man  
*Sierra Wilensky*





**M**elancholy Meat  
Max Nobel



**D**own to Corpus Christi  
*Saxton Fisher*



Agri-Culture  
Elaina Wittmer



**W**e Buy Groceries on the River  
*Kevin Xing*





Souvenir  
Kevin Xing

# Contributors

*Ally Bahk* is a Los Angeles native who still has poems from when she was in 6th grade. These are very funny.

*Ben Read* is a poet preoccupied with trees and rivers who dances tango and sometimes wants to be a bird, preferably an owl.

*Elaina Wittmer* is an in-between being from a nowhere town. They used to think street sweepers were a myth.

*Emma McNeel* grew up in the house on the left with the rosemary bushes and enjoys goldfish in her soup and ancient Greek. She would like to thank a person who will remain nameless.

*Io Blanchett* does not know what is going on at any given time and believes this is just a really sexy and valid aspect of their personality.

*Isabelle Berman* is still trying to figure it out. Meanwhile, she can be found adventuring with a pep in her step and a camera around her neck.

*j.a. staudinger* is a long-time writer, and first-time published poet. He owes it all to Reed, Samiya Bashir and Ursula K. Le Guin.

*Kevin Xing* mostly prefers original, non-filtered photos partly because he doesn't know how to photoshop.

*M Prull*: "M" is not an initial, nor does it stand for anything in particular. It is just their name.

*Max Nobel* is a writer from Chapel Hill, North Carolina hopefully coming on a sea change. He watches too many movies and occasionally takes photographs in his spare time.

*Molly Linden Herro* is a writer and artist who loves frogs.

*Nicholas Luu* is notable only in the lack of notable features they posses.

*nilufar imanipassand* is a bisexual iranian-american libra who can't escape stereotypes about her identities. her current work includes embracing them.

Once, *Rubi Vergara-Grindell* ran into a porcupine and then kept running.

*Samrath Bhattacharya* is perfectly incredible.

*Castle Córdoba* is running a poll on whether or not they can get away with a) inserting their name into this list and b) calling thor: ragnarok anti-zionist new media.

*Saxton Fisher* is a person who likes thunderstorms and electron orbitals and cars and cephalopods and spikey sculptures and their friends.

*Sierra Wilensky* is a junior art major at Reed. When she isn't taking photos or painting she is spending her pay check on walnut milk mochas.

*Lou Ellingson* is a walking, talking demon in a doll suit whose only friend is their venus fly trap.

*Sophia Kongshaug* is a linguistics major, procrastinator, and lover of breakfast at all hours of the day and night.

# Colophon

The *Reed College Creative Review* is published annually and distributed for free to the student body.

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