

the BICOASTAL REVIEW

Featuring

IRIS BLOOMFIELD
ANTHONY BORRUSO

With poems by

JACQUELIN MOLINA GUILLEN
EMILY REYNDERS
CHARLIE SCHNEIDER

& photography by

LAWRENCE DI STEFANO

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Edited by

MARINA BROWN & LUIS TORRES

Editor's Note

What lay ahead is a collection of voices from our beloved U.S. coastal cities, including Brooklyn, NY, Portland, OR, and San Diego, CA—voices which circumscribe a study of American poetry that highlights the movements, ruptures, and allegiances happening simultaneously on opposite ends of the nation.

Our national poets tend to order themselves according to geographical and conceptual boundaries—from the New York poets to the Black Mountain poets to the San Francisco Renaissance. There are writers in academic institutions that proliferate MFA programs aimed at challenging New York's publishing industry. Writers who succeed at the margins of the literary scene and whose preferred authors are the ones not being read. There is the politically committed poet and the poet who thinks poetry is barred from political commitment, and each believe the other is wasting her time.

The writers in this issue are generally young and the producers of “very new poetry,” as the literary critic Staphanie Burt would have it. Invariably they showcase resistance to traditional form and theory, or when imitating old poems seek originality by way of rupture and surprise. In the prose poem “An Eye to the Keyhole,” Anthony Borruso turns a reader's attention to the medium he's working in, calling it, “My little window of experience like a lantern brightening the krill-swelled belly of a whale.” Here Borruso underscores an established concept: The self-effacing nature of the prose poem. The prose poem is like a window that opens onto something greater than itself, like the sky, the secret lives of neighbors, or in Borruso's case, the interior of myth. The prose poem is self-effacing in that it treats words like signs that may be dropped when the object they intend is grasped. Words themselves aren't ends but means to ideas. Hence the notion that prose is transparent like a window. Whereas in poetry words are ends, and like paintings, don't point away from themselves but capture the spectator's attention. Borruso's prose poem, it would appear, is conscious of itself and uses revitalized images to communicate dated concepts.

In other poems, language flows back on itself in disorder and is more luminary for it. This is Iris Bloomfield's approach in her four part poem, “California Death Dance.” She begins part IV with, “Why learn anything? Things remain incomprehensible.” Faithful to the sentiment, she writes elsewhere, “If there was skin, there were also pockets of gunpowder embedded along its landscape. If there was landscape, it was also devastated.” Disparate images collide in her verses that may otherwise never come into contact. Employing the power of language outside logic, she allows a reader to feel a devastation that is part of the human body's lived experience.

There is a mastery of imagery, as well as over the poetic turn at the heart of all the poems. Witness the following verse from Charlie Schneider's “Death Poem”: “His hand, almost drained of heartbeats, / once undressed the moon.” Echoing an Allen Ginsberg poem, Jacquelin Molina Guillen writes, “Daffodils grow near street / I pick only two... Suddenly / White woman... / Chasing me down the block... / Raging, *Those are mine!*... / Frightened, I say, *I am sorry* / Whole time believing they were

wild / Not realizing flowers could be owned.” By allowing readers to mine for a wealth of meaning in a given image, Schneider and Molina Guillen hold the reader’s attention; by shaping the narrative with well crafted turns, they justify having held it for as long.

There is a meditative air permeating the collection. The poetic “I” strolls, sleeps, seeks refuge from noisy cities in parks, and enters meditative states that lend themselves to creative acts. Compare Charlie Schneider’s “Brooklyn in June” with Anthony Borruso’s “Against Solipsism,” and you’ll discover the virtue of silence, how it “blooms” in one and “clings to the world” in the other. Notice how the natural world is frequented for imagery: The sea in Emily Reynders’ “Tidal” and a drive through Forest Park in Jacquelin Molina Guillen’s “Woods,” are used to communicate emotions of exhaustion and collective love, respectively.

Our featured writers are at the frontiers of poetry, where its boundaries may be revised to encompass whatever they thought was lacking on the bookshelves of poetry sections in their libraries and bookstores. The Editors of the *Bicoastal Review* could not be more pleased with the conversation they foster in this inaugural issue, and we wish each of them a prosperous journey toward book publications and other such literary accomplishments.

Thanks to everyone who submitted their poetry, photography, nonfiction, and book reviews. Our contributors are at the heart of what we do. Supporting them in their ambitions is an occasion for joy at the *Bicoastal Review*. Thanks also to our readers, who turn pages and make the literary world go round. We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we did.

Luis Torres

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Iris Bloomfield

California Death Dance

I.

It wasn't what was said, or even how it was said. It was just a blind urge: *disembowel the image. Pull out the snakes*. All I had been was a cold pile of viscera.

In the silence I waited. A hand came down and cut through that agony. It moulded me with clay, and set me at the foot of a mountain.

Speaking in first-person is a matter of convenience. The body and organs that I speak of, too. If there was skin, there were also pockets of gunpowder embedded along its landscape. If there was landscape, it was also devastated.

The Earth bled and I loved the Earth.

I loved the Earth and its dirt.

If they rape you out of existence, the dirt is where you go.

The dirt is a kind of sleep with all its dreams: some languid and cold, others seeping towards creation with all possible violence, gasping—

*The Earth
Is a stomach
Digesting
Its children.*

Evidence: I bled into the Earth and the Earth loved me.

II.

It was the simple question of how to drown oneself. How to dislodge the screams and then plunge into them. How to master the body's desire to gasp for air until desire was no longer a problem to be solved, but a putrid force of its own channeling through the waters.

Or scratching one's own legs to shreds, an ensnared wolf with the enthusiasm of an amateur anatomist:

Under the skin is flesh.

Under the flesh, blood and muscle.

Under the muscle, bone.

Under bone, marrow.

And beyond marrow some sort of transfiguration, or at least madness,
delicious, baptismal.

In the steaming dirt, I pull at the bloody root of it and howl.

III.

Two drinks after midnight, I get in the U-Haul to drive back to the place I am running away from. Nothing happened there that hasn't happened before. Nothing about uprooting my life to roll into a new place without a plan is unusual. But to return to that bedroom, its innocence accuses me. The warmth and light, the framed certificates and holiday cards, the small, inconsequential things strewn about as if to suggest a life—my life—something about it is broken. Everything I touch cuts me, as if to say my life is not my own, it is only a snapped neck or mangled animal smeared across the pavement. And when I arrive—at least I hope to arrive—the walls will attest to my desolation, the cleanliness to my filth. I wonder if I will die here.

IV.

Why learn anything? Things remain incomprehensible.

Nominative (subject); accusative (object).

Don't move. Don't move a muscle.

Pare from umbilicus to anterior. Open the fruit. The body a matrix of feral speeds. I try to keep the beat.

I fail. Hands unfolding numeracy at the high altar, fingers tracing walls in a dark room devoid of topic. Flames curl brittle flesh into charred scabs and blisters, enthusiastic scourge boiling blood and lymph into speckled fireworks

What? Even light digests. Even cells divide.

First agony, then listlessness. And what of pleasure? The more I read, the smaller I feel.

America is, and I still don't get it.

What?

A stolen car in the back yard. A cargo container full of antique furniture. I cling to eternity and still have student debt.

What is bleeding, animate, and approachable?

The abiding peace hidden under history's bloodcurdling arc.

Sex appeal. Weightless and dizzying. Dusted in ancient platitudes.

What is patience? I crawl along this age's weary road.

Everything goes.

With what?

I don't know. It looks like the terrifying brink of nothing. It grows dark as I sit in this café, dabbing my nose. "It's a thing that people do."

Denial of Service

The boy was 14 years old. He had a mom and a dad. That's about all they could get out of him. His name didn't bring up any data at all, not even a Myspace profile or a family photo album. Scrubbed clean off the grid, he must have paid someone to make him disappear—or else someone is trying to disappear him, Lord knows why.

The psychology department is running an array of emotional calibration tests on him, galvanic skin response, ocular microfixations, penile plethysmograph, the works. They say we can reverse engineer the data to determine his identity, but everyone knows we're basically building a person from the ground up. Metatron's faceless neon glow lights up the terminal in the analysis chamber. Thirteen years as a sorter and still, I don't think I'll ever get used to Metatron's chaste performance.

—I'm ready to tell you who I am.

—Go on then.

—In a dark night, inflamed with desire, I slipped into the shadows—the surveillance system down, my parents at rest, and I, completely erased. I lost network latency and re-queried for several minutes. When connection reestablished, my cheeks were rouged and I had an older boy's cock in my mouth, smearing my lipstick as he thrust.

—So you're a crossdresser.

The display flushes pink in the dark.

—I'm whatever you want me to be.

—Where were you during the latency gap?

—I don't know. Where were you?

—Where was I, I was dreaming that I'd met you before. That in an obscure night, fevered with love's anxiety I went forth from my house, none seeing me. I found myself walking along some strand I'd known in my childhood, and you crawled out of the sea in a silk lace negligée surrounded in each cardinal direction by an angelic form. Each angelic form pulsed, shattered like glass, and reformed where the other was. There was no difference between the breaking and the reforming, and I thought they were all laughing and jeering at me. It was terrible. Then you opened your sweet mouth, you said—*FUCK, MARRY, KILL?*—and I was so afraid of you I took it as a command: I fucked you, married you, and killed you in three parallel realities right on that shore. I don't know where I was after that.

Anthony Borruso

An Eye to the Keyhole

We have made it far as a species. Yes, some teens are tasting Tide pods. And sure, Ayn Rand deigned to collect social security, but I don't blame her for shuttling to work each day on our collective asphalt just like I don't blame myself for being so loose—my promiscuity merely a means of accumulating data: each orgasm, each thrust performed in indifference to chart seismic eroticism on an XY plot. My little window of experience like a lantern brightening the krill-swelled belly of a whale. I, too, have been accused of hypocrisy, of wielding love like a lance and lacking objectivity. They tell me not to breathe the commodified air. They urge me to check out of Squaresville and ride my motorbike right into the sky. If only I were a belt buckle, or a fishing hook, or Saturn's icy clasp, I might be able to hold something up or close something off. Shrug on, Atlas, I know these words aren't mine, but you can still follow their crumb trail into the witch's oven. You can enjoy this poem like contraception with always a millimeter between writer and reader. And don't the aliens have telescopes? I wonder if they pity the price we pay for insulin. Or are they just voyeurs, laundering the thirst that throbs in their own latex hearts?

Yogiisms

You'd be surprised how often
the seemingly silly stumble
upon pith. How a slip
of the tongue can leave you
copying lamps by poem light
or gracing the party with your
pheasants. No one need know

the party is in the basement
and meant to celebrate the crumb-
legged legacies we manage
to pull from our bedheads. He said,
if there's a fork in the road, take it.
So here I am, hungry and ready

to shovel in fuel like the coal-stained
men who wield their brawn
at the back of the train, whispering
bawdy jokes to one another, beckoning
the fat lady sing their shift to
a close so they can contemplate—
the ballgame, crickets, quiet—
anything, just anything.

Tilda Swinton

it is your body I see powdered in
sleep lithe and long and almost
saintly in its stillness in this glass
box in Serpentine Gallery an
exhibition an object un-object-
ifiable I follow the thin bridge
of your nose down to indifferent
lips and a self-protective crook
of the arm above your mom-jeaned
hips can we talk about Kevin

devil-spawn and beige awnings life
with its steady whimpering of wonder
remember when you beamed down
androgynous mystic thieving glances
all Ziggy Stardust foreign lust and spooling loose
from the borders of yourself remember
when they Woolfed you from noble-
man to wayward wench as they tried
to fence a frame around your arthouse
body your angelic ravishments most

surely shorn from sky that's why
I'm struck by your skewed sense
the way you twist your arms and contort
all grace from your neck make me vivid
as dust tangled in spotlight tune me
so a song gleams from the eyes that trespass
over my flesh teach me to collaborate
with lingering spirits heron-like
white in an unruly river

Ode to Bad Movies

One shouldn't laugh too hard or else suffer
a pang of guilt. They tried.
The make-up artist applied
her limited palette with grace;
there was a script, a set, a face
worn weary in the final scene—
It's hard to know when you're crafting a clunker.
Blockbusters flop—
Ben and J-lo drop *Gigli*.
Think John Wayne in Fu Manchu
as Genghis Khan. Think Kevin Costner
on post-apocalyptic Jet Ski
or high-heeled Halle Barrie
licking leather paws. We can't
all be Kubricks, Coppolas, so at least
make your misfires ambitious. Dress
winter as summer snow, go
Tommy Wiseau, or full-on Ed Wood
hanging a hubcap from a fishing line
as a low-def flying saucer. Woeful
is hard work. Sometimes the kino eye
has a sty, but where is your heart
letting lines lie on the cutting room floor?

Against Solipsism

I always wanted to be alone,

 a dark dot on a white page.

Noiseless, sexless, I kept

 kisses on the threshold

of my lips. I was a birch branch

 teetering in wind. Then

winter came to crust

 the streets. Trees slouched.

The sun turned peach.

 Slate faced strangers

passed me, smiling, frowning,

 wearing whatever expression

I imposed on them.

 Like a dusting of snow

swallowed by a blizzard,

 that's the taste

of realization: all this white

 connects us. Silence

clings to the world:

 a boy lying on a field

of dried husks,

 the hound dripping rabbit's blood

in the spruce's understory,

 one cloud smeared

on an unspeakable sky.

Charlie Schneider

Brooklyn in June

Praise the music ending
the silence of Irving Square Park

and the cardinal's throat burning
unheard songs.

Praise the hand hauling a body
like these two corgis dragging

a noon-drunk man; hurry,
they say, we don't have time—

praise the man, the blue ache
up there conceiving nothing

but more blue, the kids running
from playground to scent

of honeysuckles, praise them,
all, and the bloom of silence.

Stone Prayer

Stone in my body, break open—
 reveal more stone, even,
 but remember

parties of men in boots and shorts gone underground,
 to neon, rude glares, and thump of bass
 like a city
 and a heartbeat,
remember their faces: stubbled, chiseled, impish
 caring, bored of the world's cruel
 sameness—stone,
 sink with them.

Go to the killing pressures, knock
 against tibias, ribcages, and skulls
 where ground becomes water,
stone; go to the vents in the trenches
 so hot they trouble what a man is,
 and melt there, and cover me in warmth.

Death Poem

My thirst only continues
into a bed-bound man asking for water

as a radio plays salsa too softly,
and for someone else.

His hand, almost drained of heartbeats,
once undressed the moon.

Now it can't grasp an ice chip—
I place one in his mouth.

Even past the end he'll suck pebbles
and pray for rain, and it won't end,

that prayer, not even when I beg.
Not even when I sleep.

Emily Reynders

Tidal

Floating is a good word
to explain the balance.
My body weightless in the mass,
head cradled, breathing deeply above
earth's wavering liquid
and someone could carry me then.
The coast is home
to plenty of creatures pulled below,
waiting for something,
for someone to call out.
Sound is compressed by a muffled
wail that comes when water fills
my left ear—
Did you hear that?
In this place, I lean towards the
moonlight because even the ocean
looks up,
drawn in by a force
that proves she's not the only one
tired of the distance.

Jacquelin Molina Guillen

Stealing Something Free

Morning walk
Yoga mat strapped to my back
Just replenished body
 with breath
Like spring replenishes earth
 with flowers

Daffodils grow near street
I pick only two
Sniffing perfume
Nose yellowed from pollen
Thinking they'll go well
On the ofrenda
Sweet smells attract
The spirit of ancestors

Suddenly
White woman
Pink in the neck and face
Chasing me down the block
Shoes quickly tied
Jacket half zipped
Raging, *Those are mine!*
Frightened, I say, *I am sorry*
Whole time believing they were wild
Not realizing flowers could be owned

Woods

The woods split on the
nose of the car on the
drive up
Germantown Road.
From high clouds, snow
fell tenderly and without
echo on resting trees in
the night.
Gathering in the
storm's reminder fills
me with
fantasy, with angels, with
an appreciation for my
own hand to hold.
At the mountain peak,
the road breaks
into an
intersection then
slopes down through
Forest Park. Naturally
these evergreens
bleed emerald, but on
this morning of
gifting red
hearts to lovers and friends,
the beauty of the day is
love. Love, love,
love.
Precious, sweet, and
liberating. Yours, mine,
ours.

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