



SAWORD

FALL 2018



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Introduction

Here at ~~S/W~~ORD, we like to keep ourselves, the editors, behind the scenes so that the beautiful and strange things that the issues showcase can stand and speak for themselves. For this issue, however, I need to speak for someone else; I'd like to dedicate this issue to my mother, Connie, who passed only a few weeks ago after a short yet brutal fight with cancer. Connie wasn't an artist or a writer, but she did love beauty and strangeness. She sought both out in her life, through her work, through her parenting, through her love. The woman was fierce but beautiful, just like we like the pieces to be in ~~S/W~~ORD. Her genetic code must have been laced with some need for beauty, because I believe she passed some on to me. Maybe she didn't understand all the things I wanted to do with my life, but she still celebrated my triumphs and sighed at my failings along with me. Words like "cheerleader" or "supporter" cheapen what she has been to the creation of this journal and all my other artistic and academic endeavors. She lured the artistic fire out of me in a world that seems settled and even fixated with fog and sand. A matador.

So now let's fix our eyes on the beautiful and the strange. With a word that is a sword, we make both air and wings.

WAKE

slave and scrat

towhit towhat

whither dither slither

It were

I geboren

I hadn't the time for a daybook

Sorriden between swobs undermoon.

whit, whist, thwist, twist.

And maditatennen I din'ner sleep;

I slape. I slaped.

forgate, forgoot.

I whill re-member.

I whill re-great.

'rhematoidal scoffuscations

indernodal, rendered over

flames and cavemeat.

Neanderthal latte:

No sugar.

Nothing bittersweet about a 12-week heart-beat-beat-beat-bee.

Nothing sweet.

Only bitter.

And a wake.

Joel Mitchell

Grow Up and Feel It

Take your average kid. Your average kid. An average kid. A kid. Take a kid. For instance, a kid with a nosebleed and a sudden taste for his own blood. Take that kid. Put him to bed and turn out the lights.

Sweep the hair from his face and place your hand alongside his cheek. Take the temperature of the room. Think about what is going to happen next. Don't be scared. No one's watching.

Jump out of the window. Run longways down a fat boulevard. Ignore the potholes. This road points to and fro. Feel the rush of wind in your hair. It blows you back, this rush. You have not felt this rush in so long. Where has it been? Tomorrow, return only to find the rush has found another friend. The friend is younger than you and likes pokemon whereas you like baseball cards.

A dream now. On an island, alone. Lapping at your feet, the water is too hot. Why is the water here so hot?

The particulars allude. The feeling, however. The feeling is there in all its glory. Something powerful in the gut. Something tremendous and slightly offkilter.

Feel the siren in the bone not the ear. Quiver. Now shiver. Now run.

The boy. The body. The boy as body.

I know. It went like this.

It was running. It was you and it was him and it was you teaching him how to run. He knew how to run but you were teaching him. Introduce yourself. He's younger than you. Got a dollop of gray hair. Some kind of birth effect. There is a resemblance. The differences are key. Smooth skin on account of lotion. Smooth skin on account of youth.

You keep running now, with the kid. The kid is following you and making you feel special. Like you have some kind of something, ya know? Like there's a reason the kid is here and you are here and it's not all chaos. Like someone asked

you to be here. Willed it.

Do you have a choice here?

Stop running. Take deep, sharp breaths. Lean over and put your hand on the kid's shoulder. Say, I think we've had enough for today. That's right, coach him. Feel the shoulder slip away. Lean over and tie your shoes to hide your shame.

Run. Run so far that your lungs are making time and a half. Punch the clock. Head home. Your head is no longer home.

Back in the dream, you are now in the real world. You are a beached whale on the rocks. Your beach has eroded. It's just water on the rocks. Vodka works better.

At the mall, sample some virtual reality. Slip the goggles over the boy's eyes. Take him to another world.

I cannot picture the face you make. I don't want to. Call the sketch artist in here.

After the mall, grab some pizza. Laugh at tomato sauce in places where tomato sauce should not be. Wipe tenderly.

Play cops and robbers out back. Avail yourself of state power.

Say Uncle.

Patterns form. Spidery cracks through the window of your life.

That night, lay in bed. Do not dream. In the dream, ask for forgiveness.

Touch him. Or don't.

You already know tomorrow there's gonna be another friend. Another boy. That boy will like pokemon. I already told you that.

Stop crying. I made you do it. Don't cry. It's not your fault.

At the end of the road, find yourself among the living again. That's right. The road you are on is a mighty fine road. You were dead and now you're alive. Alive

you can touch people. Make a difference in a life.

Remember.

You did not do anything. There was nothing to be done. It had already happened.

Close your eyes and look away now.

the boy in a bed not unlike your own the pillows down get angry the boy is not a boy but a thing a thing that has it's claws in you how did they get there? how did this happen? get angry just a kid you're only just a kid grow up find an alternative run for something give yourself over to something bigger than yourself feel it in your bones growing pains start transcending become one reach out and hold hold hold go! it has begun. your movements and maneuvers conspire to slander you! shut them up! show them your bonafides! start going faster get back to the feeling to that rush we spoke of it's here it's been waiting for you calling out your name a siren in the truest sense a warning to young seamen these seas be choppy and full of lice brush your hair like your mother taught you look presentable chin up you are allergic to down sneeze into the crook of your arm keep things clean clean up afterwards keep it under control smile to the canines do not give him the molars you are a dog you bite you do not grind this is a biting situation the situation has gotten out of hand you did that not me this time take the hand and make it your hand it's the only way look up with those big eyes ask why ask when ask what happened ask how come then come up with an answer hurry! you must have an answer! you search but you forgot to prepare for the test study hall a waste a finger in the nose and nothing more you should have studied this scantron has multiple answers on each line A and B both are right that cannot be you have graduated from scantrons now in the bluebook write something thoughtful about allergens on the page your handwriting turns slanted and inscrutable you make the teacher do the work it's about time they did the work about time they took some responsibility for what they made you do how they made you change say you did not want this say it loud scream it say you did not want this break the windows with your screams feel the vacuum of the room suck in the fresh air feel vital feel the gooseflesh on your back two backs a beast bring your head down and finish strong there is only so much time look on your work.

despair. shudder. turns out you've been training for this your whole life and you didn't know it. take a deep breath. close your eyes. put on your running shoes.

Run.

Run to the only man who understands.

Run to your father. Back to the house you were born in. You were born in the bedroom.

Stop on the stoop. Look down at your feet. Assure them of their convalescence. You will take good care of them. Now. Walk with intention. Step up. Do the right thing. Cross the threshold.

When you come in, give the man a knowing nod. You are now apiece.

Take a shower and let it run hot and long. Go to sleep in fresh flannel sheets.

Remind yourself of the people in your life who think highly of you. Think mile high. Think Olympus. Think the gods who would have done the same thing you'd done. Think he was lucky.

Slip in the tub. Develop concussion-like symptoms. Your sleep is dreamless. Unclear if it is really even sleep. Despite the weather, wear a hoodie with the strings drawn tight.

This is where you belong. Not there. Not that place. How old are you again? Do you need me to remind you how old you are? I can remind you of that. I can remind you of anything.

Get a job. A different job. Act out.

Move out of your father's house. Come back in six months.

In six months, you've developed a logic all your own. You are here and there and everywhere. You no longer run on account of reading something about running. You no longer search for the boy on account of you've found a place where there are lots of boys. The internet ruins you. The internet is your salvation. Your dad is still running dial-up. Gonna need to fix that.

When you do, read stories about how computer towers are a notorious place for cockroaches to come together and make a home. On account of warmth and on account of dark.

Let Dad tell his story of selling a Honus Wagner rookie card for an ice cream and a playboy. Ice cream sounds good right about now. A brain freeze is not unwelcome.

In the meantime:

Fuck yourself. Wish for someone to rub your feet. Dream about an island. Tell your father you like pokemon cards now.

Edge him out. It is your time now. This is your story too. A stage is the world is all of your potential energy on the precipice. Did he push you or did you jump? Squeeze your eyes shut. Think. That feeling he left you with. It was not yours to carry, was it? It was not yours to tend to. But you do, you do tend to it. You grab the ho. You grab the spade. You know the weeds look prettiest in the spring. Drink water. You must tend to yourself. Your tendrils must find their way. This soil is broken. Spread your roots. Dig deep. Down into the groundwater. That water's been running for years. Years without pump, filter, or flouride. Grow up. Turn everywhere and find yourself. Everywhere you look. These roots are deep and wide. On the surface, not much to work with, I admit. But dig deep and you'll find yourself underground. Go to sleep. You are in a mosh pit with the alt kids. Look at you go. Wake up. He is gone. Go back to sleep. You are playing an

oboe at band camp. You are kissing a girl. Wake up. He's still gone, but it's too cold. Shut the window. Go back to sleep. Wake up. The news is bad, but your television has been upgraded. You see blush and concealer where you did not see it before. Go to sleep. Feel creepy. Feel crawly. Feel like yourself. Wake up. You have bed bugs. Go back to sleep. In a new dream, he makes an appearance. He looks dirty and smells like wet dog. He suggests this was the only way it could be. That you could not meet in person ever again. That your connection is forever severed. Wake up. Yearn for that feeling. Go to sleep. Remember. Wake up. Forget. Go to sleep. Open your windows. Open all your windows. Scream for him to return. Scream for him to come back. It's that thing about dreams. Is it really you in there? Or is it something else? Something deep inside the electricity of your brain. Something more you than you? Scream for him. Scream for that moment in which you did not know yourself. You know yourself too well now. Much too well. This sleep will be the best sleep you've had in a while, and when you wake up, you will have lost your voice.

And at some point, you start to thinking about running. You think about running as a kid. The kind of running you do just to run. And you think about running like adults do. A running to something. For something. From something. So now. Think about playing pokemon with Sam across the street. Think how fast you run. How fast you choose the electric bird. That's who you'll be. Think about running in circles. Perfect circles. Think about your next friend. Think about the shock they'll receive. Imagine the electricity coursing through you. It fills your veins. You need things to fill your veins. You were full and then you were empty and then you were full of something else. And now you need things to fill your veins. Go. Go fill up. Brim with the shit. Then take your leave.

Someone should really do something about these potholes. They're everywhere. They've developed their own logic. Pothole qua pothole. Now the road no longer goes two ways, but a third, a depth you were not prepared for. Fling a rock into the pothole. Disrupt an ecosystem. Watch those perfect circles run everywhichway but together. Watch the oil shimmer on the surface. Suck it up and drink it deep. Keep drinking. Listen to your brain. It's telling you to stop. Stop please. This is not what we were made for. This is not what we were made to do. You are too eager to please. This instinct does not deserve pleasing. Does

not deserve pleasure. This is suicide, I say, suicide! Do you understand what you're doing. You're doing to this to both of us. But then the oil runs out and your brain is swimming in it. And then it is drowning. And then it has drowned.

The house where it happened. The road leading to and from. The bed made from gander and goose. The shoes made for a singular purpose. A bad grade on a test. Acidic soil and too much water. A television with bad reception. Pokemon. Baseball. A father who told too many stories and did not exercise. A missed opportunity. A fellow. A tremendous fellow. Feet that needed rubbing. Blisters on feet that need rubbing. A balm. A balmy type of day turned sour and wet. Rushing to work versus a rushing river. Two kinds of rushing. Two kinds of running. Two kinds of people. One terrible thing.

Blend it together and drink it. Call it a protein shake.

Did you know? The windows here are broken. This island has no fresh water. This road is now a plane.

Drew Bevis

*

Katherine is reading this
and in the slow rain between each word
she hears her lips closing in

the way a love note is folded
kept for years alone in a drawer
half wood, half as if its darkness

is after something else on the page
she can't remember touching before
vaguely, if someone older says so

though a star can be born and die
before its light reaches her eyes
holding on to these dim shapes

that have no sound yet –it's too soon
–she will forget how far and you
what she hears at every chance.

Simon Perchik

*

You still feel for skid marks
though your shadow is flat on its back
holds fast between the ground and evening

as if there's room for your hands
and the darkness that's not a wall
once it's left to itself

—not a scratch! and underneath
you skim off sideways
end over end the way rain

protects itself, escapes
in the dripping sound its edges
can't stop in time without falling off.

Simon Perchik

veins cast
across the ground
into the path of the wind
atomistic form
a moving force mutable
brings with it
the task of anchoring
this weight of flesh
against a brazen sky
nearby, the turning of a human face
to slake thirst
the air shimmers over a stony earth

Liz Howard



Fabrice Poussin



Fabrice Poussin



Fabrice Poussin



Fabrice Poussin

COGNITIO EXPERIMENTALIS

(Kinglet Song)

The Wren winces before the rift
Whistles at the rupture, whispers
Through a whistling rent in the veil
Stitched o'er a hole in the fullness

The Eagle's wings are patched sails that
Harness gales—star navigation
By the scruff of a horse's mane—
Andromeda eclipsed

Andromeda smothered
in a wingspan
backlit by it

Eagle, wind-hare, grows teary-eyed
As his great height tells more than asked
Of his pact with earth—paving stones
Choke the brown promenades below

Open-air claustrophobia
In the crusade against lightness—
The threadbare veil tears, the sun dims
Eagle's small stowaway

embraces the lightness
the Eagle flees
as he rises

Wren, rightful heir of weight, rather
Scrambles contra—the hitchhiker
Bounds songs note by note, amassing
Fractions soon to fill the fullness

Wing'd tortoise, songbird of the veil

Sees Cassiopeia lying
As Corona Borealis
Hangs from a sagging bough

above the weighted strain
lightly ascends
he who will reign

James Bradley

THE END OF THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE

Hands with wings lift a thing with just a touch
To exalted stations, fiefdom's phylum—

New movements in the manors, in the fields
Retainers sheathing swords for foreign words—

Counting Roman numeral skyscrapers
As they encounter the numinous sky

Counting Roman numeral skyscrapers
As they greet the multitudinous skies

Bashō's snows, melted into lonely streams
Of memory, off the edge of the world—

Shogunate's signets by the shogun, shunned—
The ronin's restless roving laid to rest

Laid to rest

James Bradley

THE TORCH OF NIHILITY

The
skin of
the blackness breaks—
The catacombs burst into th' eyes
of the Liar & his lord, the Lie

Torch firmly in tow—
The wonders of underworlds await
freely offered; water trickles down

from the stalactites above
In a moment of weakness
craving the pineal fruit
Destiny flashes in the distant dark
and falls like firework saliva at the mouth
of the cave

Warm light bites into darkness
like the teeth of a man
through pink flesh—

SWEET AS HONEY

All-in-all
a bitter
pill to
fall

James Bradley

LAMENT OF THE FRAGILE FRACTALS

In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni

-Guy Debord

We are the FRAGILE FRACTALS
We are the melancholiacs—
Dasein in the frigid shine of
Unfurled being
Singers beneath a discolored
Banner devoured & drained of time
As above so below—
We are those rare beings for whom
Being is th' issue
Those domesticated angels

Hypertrophied insects supping
Honey smeared on the tip
Of a razor blade

Decay decays to the day
Of malignancy then reverses
Until its exhaustion
And our exhaustion meet
In the sad song—swoon
When the crooner calls us by name

As we ferry feathers through violent
Weather upon wave-strewn open palms
And morally-ambiguous lifetimes
Aboard sleepless transatlantic flights

We see the sickness that surrounds us
As empty, & th' emptiness as sick

We are the FRAGILE FRACTALS
We are the melancholiacs—
Dead under a soaring sign known

As the NIGHTINGALE—
Our forbidden correspondent—
Singers under a false flag
Terror *ad nauseam* terror
As above so below—
Just falsettos fracturing our fear
We are the melancholiacs

James Bradley

Atone Without a Town

The stone fruit of repentance,
its pit looks into us. Facing
a drupe, the town of its text,
redeems a kernel. Dignity
is fortune lignified by light.
A furry interest develops.
Frowns cling to aggregate fruits,
none disperse like prayers.
Varieties of good and spring;
freestone sour cherries in
dawn's outer husk. Forgiveness
punishes to wither. Blackberry
brambles shine whiter then.

Jake Sheff

A Zip Line through Kitchen Smells for Judah Maccabee

A witty

stereotype's cross-purpose, palanquin of good breeding, urging every detail forward, you caparison the wind.

A biplane's proper shaming, in comparison, of zeppelins. The air involved in recollection's angel choir, real and red, you reared the re-aired grievances of former lives. On cypresses, time presses like a cat's tongue; but thanks

to you, today is
yesterday in sudden's lap. Around
the temples, irises;
no foreign foreground rises like
a closet closed. Indeed, the heartland
takes the form of
where it's from, in
need of heartless
moonlight to taste
impossibly like pear
and blue cheese.

Like voices on the
breeze, sunlight of
the Davidic line,
with notes of oak
and lemon, drinks
itself dry to be
the best in your
presence, forgetting what *you* want.

Jake Sheff

Smaller Mirrors

When a yellowing son
held his frail father,
when the moonbeams sank
into the seaside
a manic bloom rose
with the tense tendrils
of their wintry vines.
They allowed old time
to pause for their words
like cemeteries
hardened with mildew.
Tonight their frank faces
broke free of old masks

Asher Baumrin

60%

to stay alive I must believe I am water
inside my own body inside the river

my living an arrow shot into the forest
ghost slashed open by every stranger

who claims to walk on water when
nothing but air parting is the motion

of feet scrambling to become some
sacred proclamation it is not

James Croal Jackson

point of no return

One decimal dot
between a half
life of incompleteness
The fragment, airy - empty, and a whole
number everyone knows
or they feel
but nobody knows how it feels
because it goes
 unfelt
more like rayon.
More like mohair, more a hair shirt,
a monkey on the back and wrapped
up to the front
clinging since the sins the day
good and evil were distinguished
civil servants - the fire went out of their eyes
was extinguished - was extinguished
by a bite, a bit, a biting word,
 the word was not
not it!
It was
not imaginary and it was not good,
the mythic mouth fruit came right out
and down the spout
and life became slow death and
every number added right
beside the point
takes the sum
and the sun
and the summer
one digit further away.

Taylor Lett

the leftover moon
that belongs to everyone
that has their devices
plugged in that
have the eyes turned on
them that glow in the bright dark
tv shadow that is the silhouette
we see in the porch light
that could be lighting the porch
that we could sit on
and turn out the lights
that we might see
the leftover moon

where it sits is
above the city
is bouncing is light
is the dallas night
bouncing off of clouds

Above the clouds that is the moon
the moon on the leftover shelves
Hungover
Above the sandwich cheese and
meat things
things to grab
in the morning in a hurry
After the moon that is gone
or Hungover
Paler than the sky.

Taylor Lett

Contributors

Andrew Zawacki's latest poetry book, *Unsun : f/11*, is due next year from Coach House Books.

Joel Mitchell lives in London and his poetry is inspired by his daughter Hannah and wife Mary.

drew bevis is a writer out of umass-boston's mfa program. he thinks a word is never stronger than when its grasp on its own meaning is weak. find more of his writing at drewbevis.tumblr.com.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Osiris Poems* published by box of chalk, 2017. For more information, including free e-books, his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

Liz Howard is originally from Rochester, NY. She currently lives and works in Seattle. Her poems have appeared in local zines; *Anatomy Raw* #12; *Cranky* #1; *3rd Eye* #6, 7.

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, the *San Pedro River Review*, *S/WORD* as well as other publications.

James Bradley is an artist and writer living in Portland, Oregon. His paintings have been exhibited at the Berkeley Art Museum, the Verge Art Fair, and elsewhere. He co-edits Hexagon Press with his wife, Brittany. He received an MFA in painting from the California College of the Arts in 2009. <https://jamesdanielbradley.com/>

Jake Sheff is a major and pediatrician in the US Air Force, married with a daughter and six pets. Currently home is the Mojave Desert. Poems of Jake's are in or forthcoming from *Radius*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Cossack Review* and elsewhere. He won 1st place in the 2017 SFPA speculative poetry contest and was a finalist in the Rondeau Roundup's 2017 triolet contest. His chapbook is "Looting Versailles" (Alabaster Leaves Publishing).

Asher Baumrin is a Jewish poet, originally from the Upper West Side of Manhattan. He studied philosophy at the University of Chicago and has published poetry in a variety of online and print journals under various pseudonyms.

James Croal Jackson is the author of *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017). His poetry has appeared in *Rattle*, *Columbia Journal*, *Hobart*, and elsewhere. He edits *The Mantle* from Pittsburgh, PA. Find more at jimjakk.com.

I'm Taylor. I've never gotten used to referring to myself in the third person, even after years of practicing in front of a mirror. I write poetry, short stories, and extension requests for course papers. On my best nights I write bedtime stories for my kids that have nothing to do with proper tooth-brushing technique or why saying please and thank you is important. If that sounds tongue in cheek, it is and it isn't; I have a hard time writing things that aren't poetry. I really write those things and I really love writing them, and the kids I write them for. Except the extension requests; those mostly happen because I really love the other things. My main projects right now are a local group of writers I participate in (we showcase occasionally if you're ever in Dallas), finishing a degree so I don't have to turn in any more late papers, and trying to talk my sister into illustrating for me in the midst of her own art projects and course work. And there is you. Thank you for still reading poetry.