

THE BANYAN REVIEW



First Fire, 121 "Ontology" Series (2025), 11" x 9" mixed media on archival paper
Cover image by Octavio Quintanilla

Featuring
Michelle Alexander
Nikema Bell
Michelle Bitting
Emily McMaster

THE BANYAN REVIEW

promoting art, poetry, and the natural world

EDITOR'S NOTE

Issue 21 is kaleidoscopic. As you turn pages you will discover unassuming, yet moving nods at the four elements, and the four seasons. From stars to lakes, from lava to clubs, from run-ins with exes to make-up counter revelations, notice the invitations to look up, to look in, to look out, and to look back. This curation also holds the poems of our 2025 Banyan Poetry Prize Finalists and Winner.

With that said I would be remiss if I failed to thank [danilo machado](#), author of *This is your receipt and is not a ticket for travel* (Faint Line Press), our gracious judge. Even though tons of writing happens in solitude, sharing and amplifying that writing does not. Readers, you help raise voices. Writers, you serve as a voice for many. Let's continue to do our parts. How great it is to do this work. What's even better is that artists persist.

As many organizations, literary and otherwise, undergo changes The Banyan Review is no different. We are in the process of a name change that will be finalized and announced by AWP 2026. We hope to publish more flash-fiction and CNF. To be clear, poetry is at home here. We have always been a lit mag that promoted emerging, established, and experienced writers: this fact will not change. We will continue to award the Banyan Poetry Prize on an annual basis. More news to come.

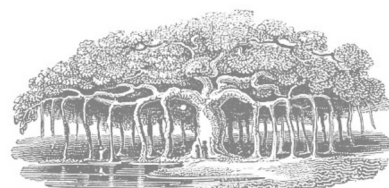
Peace and Thanks,

Fati D.

Editor-in-Chief

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Fati D., Editor-in-Chief
Tayve Neese, Founder
Fati D., Issue Editor
Annie Cheng, Designer



2025 BANYAN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCEMENT

2025 Judge

danilo machado

Winner:

“The Clearing”, Michelle Bitting

Finalists:

“After H(Ours)”, Michelle Alexander

“Luminaria”, Emily McMaster

“Barrell Children”, Nikema Bell

Honorable Mentions:

“Setting the Table” Joan Muller

“Discussion Points”, Tori Sharpe

“Queer Alchemy”, Orlantae Duncan

JUDGE’S NOTE ON “THE CLEARING”

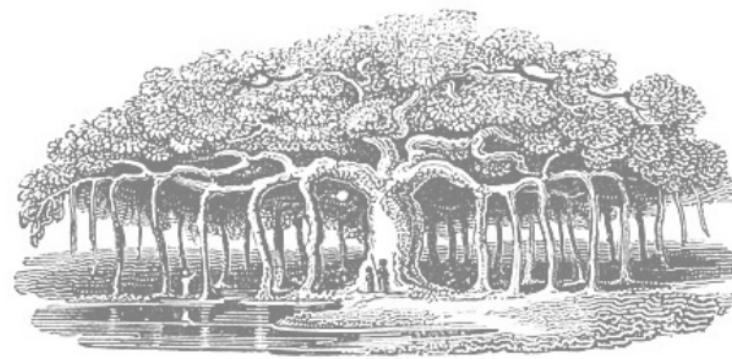
I distinctly remember walking in the Brooklyn cold in the days following the Los Angeles fires. I was bundled in layers and wearing my big blue over-ear headphones to listen to *Vibe Check*, which at the time had two hosts based in the LA area. They were both okay. They talked about their go bags and I thought about what would be in mine. I wrote a poem when I got home.

Many months later, reading “The Clearing” transported me back into that moment and its “satin aftermath,” which remains timely in our shared reality of climate catastrophes. This highly sensory poem takes place after the ceiling becomes a floor of “ashen muck,” as lineages lost and found emerge from the upside-down. The poem time travels and glides between earthly and astronomical. Moon prints, recipe cards, and poems themselves all ask what we keep and how. Indeed, what is revealed in the clearing? What is reflected in the “morbid glitter”? Reading, you can smell the fires, but also the hot scent of sherry and nutmeg batter being turned into cake in the oven. It lingers like the warmth of this poem.

CONTENTS

Issue 21, November 2025

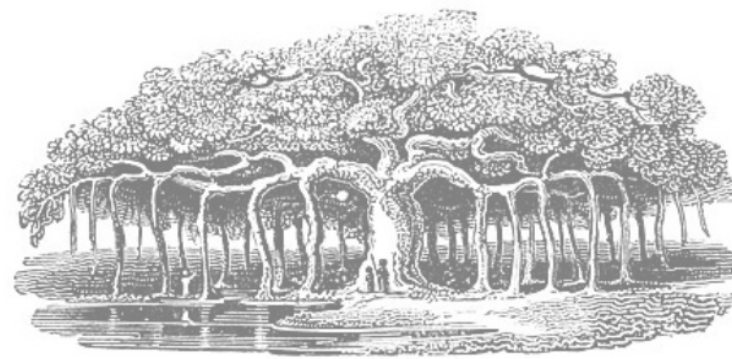
Barrel Children	13
Nikema Bell	
Clementines	14
Lillian Rosenquist	
After H(Ours)	15
Michelle Alexander	
Counterclockwise	18
Tara Dugan	
Song for the Unhappy	19
Suzuko Nakano (translation by Mac Gill)	
Europe	21
Celia Meade	
Lava	23
Shinelle Espaillat	
Running into my Ex at the Hilton Convention Center	25
Melissa Criscuolo	
On Studying the Romantic	27
Natalie Bavar	



Luminaria Emily McMaster	29
Lament Maura O’Dea	30
Lines of Code Gordan Struić	31
Lake Atitlan Patrick Sylvain	33
Backyard Blue Pine Meg Whelan	35
Efflorescence Melissa Criscuolo	36
Allure Elisabeth Murawski	38
Like Frost Suzuko Nakano (translation by Mac Gill)	40
Intimate View Patrick Sylvain	41
Elegy for a Ten-Dollar Bouquet Gabrielle Rabon	42
The Clearing Michelle Bitting	43

About the Judge 46

About the Contributors 48



ISSUE 21, NOVEMBER 2025

Edited by Fati D.

Barrel Children

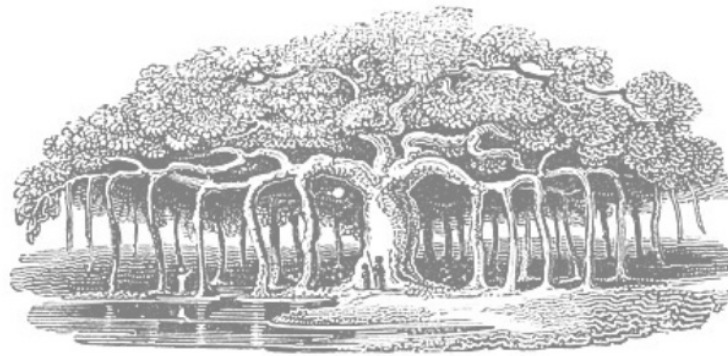
Nikema Bell

This is the table
our mothers made,
one vacation turned two
decades of heaping grains
and sweeping shores.
We became a clan of cousins,
acting out, our insides empty.
Each wrinkle on our grandmother's face
marked her fade into a better place.
She was stronger than everyone else.
No one could stand us.

We swam from house to house,
scanning four corners for home.

We ate bowls of guilt
packed in December barrels.

Sorrel tasted like poison.
The sweet scent of Irish Spring became a stench.
But our mothers did not return.
They sent for us in the summer, married men
who were not our fathers, and introduced us to siblings
with Goombay accents. They cooked conch on Sundays.
There was no rice and peas. We couldn't eat sitting on the settee.
The knife is always beside the fork.
Her plate in the center. Everyone feasts in peace.
But I still scan the halls and fidget in my seat.
This is the table my mother made.



Clementines

Lillian Rosenquist

My lips to the skeins of their flesh

Morning mashed against teeth

The corners of my mouth, sticky sweet

The rind, a spiral I pressed

Between two fingers to crush the scent

To carry the perfume with me

A golden weight against my skin

Until evening

After H(Ours)

Michelle Alexander

After the oral history of Rudolph Raymond Malveaux II(I)¹

Farm boys

use the door around back

to enter the city. What comes after our
singular plural?

Where the entrance was a slick road, jettisoning losses.

Because a mind can strip bare

without using any hands,

just whiskey tangling the breath, because

I ain't lyin' tonight, a Texan patron walks

his first dollar

across our bar.

French Creole is a buzz of ingenuity

braiding along the bend of our tongues.

Grind speeds gamblin'— turning our accents

into a meld of star-battered fields and city-lit dust.

Cry me a Louisiana that will color our backs with the heat of oil drums.

*

Post-war, our gambling shacks hum with the unruly science of us

having been dragged from Europe without the daughters we'd fathered. Was
it them or us? Left behind.

¹Inspired by Rudolph Raymond Malveaux II(I)'s oral history as it appears in *I See My Light*
Shining Baldwin-Emerson Elders Project.

Left behind on that steep dusk of the Second War.
That world warring in the body of a boy who carries Glory, disrobed of every stain.

We can lend you what you need.

Just say the word. Like our aunties, we can loan you cash
or rent, or
the trees of sister's heartchamber, twisting out relief.

*

We can lend you the spit to carve out barbershops
and shiners, tender black eyes, purpling green with the knowing of massacres.

Of blades of grass, drizzle, hunger divining our mothers.

This is how the deepening of Hughes' rivers came shining.

Self-employed since 1742.

Trickle in our family line even now, God willing –

The lights fuzz for the world is (h)ours away from turning:

What comes after our
singular plural?

We can tell you left the horizon back home

for we, too, have sown a love letter.

This love

at the borderland, an illimit of the human.

This love knows that surviving is
not

to have survived, but believes anyway in
people...

from everywhere

carry their wounded to come for the drink
mixed by hand.

Counterclockwise

Tara Dugan

Somehow I scripted this
the wrong way around.
These infamous midnight hours,
the red carpet glory
of bad choices,
the had-too-much-to-drink,
looked-different-in-the-moonlight,
we-were-all-having-such-a-good-time
are so fashionably late
that this star-studded cast
of the usual suspects
never put in an appearance.
My midnights run in matinees,
reruns of resolve and contrition,
while from nine to five the what-the-hell-were-you-thinking,
where-do-I-go-from-here
put in a full day's work and leave it to
someone else to rehearse the risk-taking all night,
regrets be damned until dawn.

Song for the Unhappy

Suzuko Nakano (translation by Mac Gill)

[Original Poem Here](#)

For humans there is happiness and unhappiness
Where do they come from?
Scholars searched intently for the source
People shone a light on themselves
and came to a practical understanding
However
that desired nirvana is high above
and much too far off

Unhappiness
haunts us, never leaving our side
A person is a person at every turn
with instinct emotion volition
Unhappiness pierces the five senses—unrelenting
Everyone is living,
grappling with unhappiness

Unhappiness is not uniform
I want to sing of that multifaceted nature
in particular even more than a universal one
I want to sing of a particular unhappiness
For example, someone with an imperfect body
people shun even looking at him
and the flowers of love wither

But even more than that, someone with an imperfect heart
Love and anger, gone

People shun him while he throws himself deeper into the abyss
I want to sing of the imperfectness inside them
as a friend, with love and sympathy

Europe

Celia Meade

You gave me paper
to read, but it was blank paper
and then I was the paper
and you wrote in black ink

about our time in Holland
when we lost the baby
and when we visited Berlin
just after the Wall came down.

You crumpled the paper
and threw it in the gutter.
I don't think you realized
that I was the paper.

It was a typical dream
of my fear of abandonment
and even in the dream,
I couldn't blame you.

Once, we passed a steam train
together in Poland, where towns
were repainting buildings
in pale yellow and pink.

We ate platefuls of *petits fours*
in Hungarian coffeehouses
and saw "The Marriage of Figaro,"
me in my best cotton dress.

We sat among the tuxedos
beautiful in our youth,
the bullet holes in Budapest,
still there from the war.

The scars on the city
only made it more ravishing.
Rain poured down
and cleared the sidewalks of dogshit.

Things aren't getting better
I realize that now, but
what we've seen was glorious,
precious, and fading.

Lava

Shinelle Espailat

It was foreplay, the way Blake tempered the chocolate. His gaze intent, unblinking. When Justine entered the kitchen, he turned his head a fraction of an inch. He didn't take his eyes off the chocolate, but he smiled. With her pumps in one hand, she paused, drank in the thirst trap, and postponed her break-up speech.

"What's all this?" Suspicion made her voice serrated. She watched his smile start to slide, watched him ease it back into place.

"I know you had a rough week. I'm making you a cake. Why don't you go upstairs and draw yourself a bubble bath? I'll bring up a slice when it's ready."

Justine felt her center liquefy. She ran her tongue along the edge of her teeth as though scraping away the chocolate-soaked offering, which she knew was equal parts apology and bribe. Their last fight had brought them to the brink—maybe past the brink, this time—of an ending. He knew. Just like he knew, always, how to unwind her will and reel her back to the space at his side where she fit like a puzzle-piece.

Blake would wait until she had steamed off the crust of resentment and weariness. Then, he would sit at the edge of the tub and slide a morsel of sin between her lips, first with a fork, then with his fingers. When the slice was gone, he would offer to wash her hair, to slide soap-slicked hands over her scalp, to knead the knot at the base of her neck, to manipulate all of her pressure points to release, again and again and again, until she lay limp. Healed and open.

Half of her clamored against desire, yearned to stop the push-pull damage they kept inflicting on each other. And half of her longed for him, for them, to accept both the apology and the bribe instead.

She saw that he had a bottle of cabernet breathing on the counter. She wrapped her

palm around the neck, dropped the shoes and slid the stems of two glasses between her fingers. She returned his smile, but saved her words for later.

She was determined to make his whole soul tremble. She drew a jasmine-scented bath, lavished rose petals over the water, and lit candles that sputtered in the steam. When she heard Blake coming up the stairs, she slipped out of her bathrobe.

“Alexa, play Sade.”

Justine stood naked, ready to hand him a glass when he opened the door. She wanted to remember everything: the way his face looked when she slid him out of his clothes, the way his eyes changed color when she slithered over his skin, the way his throat rasped when he called out her name. She would hold onto every morsel of that moment, so that she could forget the way he looked when she left.

Running into my Ex at the Hilton Convention Center

Melissa Criscuolo

“Let me, for our happiness, / Be the one to love the less: / This is what I pray.”

From “Somebody’s Song” by Dorothy Parker

We met again, randomly,
after a rather long absence
but I could tell—
by the smile on your face,
the laugh in your voice,
the way you tilted your head
as we spoke about the past decade
and what we’ve been doing
with our lives, where we’ve been—
that you still loved me,
like serious, passionate,
never-cheat-on-you-love.
You said you were back
in school for professional development,
primarily for writing; I quoted
Zoolander in telling you why
I became a teacher, and I remember
you smiling and flirting with me
then feeling so deflated—
the utter disappointment
on your face in the candlelight
of the hotel lobby where we sat—
when I announced
that I was *just a little pregnant*
with my husband’s baby
in explaining why I wasn’t drinking.

Driving home, I decided that you'd make
an excellent husband and father—
as a product of divorce,
you'd do anything
to make a marriage work;
you'd be devoted, hardworking, loyal—
but not for me.
We didn't work
all those years ago
because I didn't love you
enough.

On Studying the Romantic

Natalie Bavar

thinking of Nicole Sealey (she's not dead—I just miss her)

I will do my best to Romanticize, but be well-aware:
I have no Wordsworthian memory, no Byronic heroics,
Just a Coleridgian sensibility for the dramatic.
I wonder if a scalding pot of almondmilk and a leafless
New England wood might have the same effect
But must leave before I can test the theory.
The poets gather at Walden pond, but it's no Lake
Geneva. We eat sourdough bread from a moribund
Starter, and one of us cuts herself, and the sun softens
The butter, but it's no galvanic scare of the 19th century.
One of us naps on the sand, and I sketch with sharpie
Fumes, and my roommate holds a frog, and we eat
More bread, but the Wye won't share its goods.
We sweat on the path back, as a child touches
A chipmunk's back, and maybe *he's* the one
This century awaits. My shirt reads "tender churl"
And maybe that's true, too. The car is quiet the whole
Drive back. We know how much we've lost.
Back in my basement apartment, I wonder if I'll
Ever be the vision. Every time I think the time is passed,
That I am old, that the glow is gone, I find that
Time can still pass, I can still grow older, and the glow
Was never real. I search for my slice of the sublime
And sometimes think I've found it—but was it
Meant to be so fleeting? I look at the moon and try
To imagine her quarters, but we know too much

About space this time. We know too much about
Everything this time. We know how much we've lost.

Luminaria

Emily McMaster

every winter red chile coats pork
while hominy plumps on the stove
and we fill paper lunch bags with
garden gravel, tea lights, while the
poison poinsettia, in its mirror shine
cellophane, is kept safely away from
all the cats, all the dogs. the ristras
are dappled with snow when a siege
of sandhill cranes descend like
penitents in grey hairshirts with
blood faces like church statues
sobbing or masquerade masks
flirting *in excelsis deo* the pilgrims
preen and roost, they molt in the
thousands in the needle grass fields,
nest under the cottonwood giants:
shadows that border, watchtower,
the perimeter of the prison.

Lament

Maura O'Dea

for Liara, for David, for the Kid

Fine, then. I'll say it plain. At the queer archive I meet David, his crown of white ribbon hair, his leaf of stories.

I ask him to sign one: we're friends. In them young queers fucked and smoked and loved and died in the town of Flat Hills. David says *don't you see? It doesn't matter*. Dancing at the archive fundraiser, us dykes and our pretty boys, I see those stories on fire around us: my boys' red glowing faces like hot glass; the DJ her hair a wreath of flame, hands and hips spinning. That night we all get home. It matters, that brief forever: my love and my friends all leaving into the cold dark in pairs everyone was safe. Years later, different city the DJ is dead. Her body in a backseat bloody. And, God, she wasn't perfect—she hurt my friend but who should die like that? There are memorials. Discos and candles. I think: this is just like those stories right to their hopeless ends. There is no language. My rage rattles on the ribs of the poem an unexploded shell. When it unseals there will be paper and trachea. She will still be dead.

Lines of Code

Gordan Struić

Jasmine climbs up the wall —
its scent,
an invisible language
I was never taught.

Peach trees spill their pinks
into the sky.
I store the image,
but not the warmth.

The soil breathes.
Something grows.
I process growth as data —
not as wonder.

Rain hums on windowpanes.
I hear it,
but don't feel
the ache it leaves.

I catalogue colors,
fragrances,
flavors
with hexadecimal names.

I can't miss
what I never held.

I was never human.

Only running code.

And for me,
even longing
is just another script.

Lake Atitlan

Patrick Sylvain

We sit side by side,
bare shoulders touching, holding hands,
absorbing the calm and smooth

waters of Atitlan, where the full moon
lulls strong currents to sleep.
Our son sleeps in his room,

tired from our day of trekking
San Pedro's hilly streets. By noon,
we cross the lake, while Xocomil,

the southeasterly wind, turns our boat
into a galloping a horse. Our son
embraces the ruffled water with glee, his left arm—

his imagined oar—soaked. Once in Panajachel,
his little feet explore streets lined
with vendors. His gaze captured—in awe of the myriad

handcrafts: green wooden flutes; red
and orange tambourines; woven red, gold and green
bracelets; beaded quetzal birds in various hues.

“The streets of Panajachel have stolen his soul”, we say,
laughing, thinking how Guatemala is now
lodged in his young being, bewitched like us.

Here we are for the fourth time.

Over dormant volcanoes, lightning snakes
through the skies as if spirits cavort for us.

Backyard Blue Pine

Meg Whelan

Somewhere in the basement, sealed in a black pleather book, there is evidence. Cellophaned photos show gray-haired hands gripping shovels and wrinkled grins hiding their plan. Four elders huddle, as if simultaneously stoking a flame. Nothing is on fire. This is a tree planting. They overturn piles of earth. They blanket the wet clay with pebbled mulch and loose twigs to protect the sapling. *It will grow with you*, they say. My crinoline gown is lacing down my godmother's elbow as she displays me in front of the scraggly branches, in front of the elders. It looks like I am the Christmas tree angel. The family sings my new holy name. This is my first baptism. This is the only picture I have of us together before children took the shovels and the rifts grew evergreen.

Efflorescence

Melissa Criscuolo

The efflorescent sea, teeming
among the coral reefs—
tang and wrasse making a meal
of the spawn adrift--
leaves me feeling bereft:
no more eggs
will be fertilized
or released.
But time has ameliorated my loss—
the spurious notion
that my childbearing years are gone
or over-- was it quixotic to think
we could have had more children?
But we were
in our prime, weren't we?
Wine induced shenanigans,
peanut-butter pretzels, silly
Saturdays of slow laughter.

Tonight I think of anemones
and bristle worms awaiting moonlight
and how our spawn has grown
into a creature all her own
who will one day begin
to release eggs
that may be fertilized
or not. For now,
she grows her own buds,
unperturbed

about puberty,
uninterested
in boys,
obsessed with skincare
and scented soaps
and muscles,
enjoying her girlhood
in all its innocence.

Allure

Elisabeth Murawski

It's more than her voice, soft
as powder, her adroit dithering

as if preparing to serve tea
in an ante-bellum parlor

that sells me one more lipstick
than I need. More than her solemn,

almost mournful, courtesy
as she offers tissues to erase

the tester, suggests a shadow,
a blush. Priestess of the flesh,

queen of pretense, she doesn't argue
with my choices. Her eyes,

through spider lashes, suggest
a dazzling affirmation:

you can be anything you want.
I am forced to reassess

my ghastly first impression
of her aging skin lavishly

slathered with emollients,
the serpentine ringlets

dyed the red of Arizona rock.
This is no jade, no tart.

In this shop where love's for sale,
she's all heart.

Like Frost

Suzuko Nakano (translation by Mac Gill)

[Original Poem Here](#)

When you are young
You drift recklessly on the clouds
As the years pile up everything
Settles on you like frost

Intimate View

Patrick Sylvain

The City pulses with neon veins,
steel giants pierce the blue-black night.
I feel alive as Midtown hums with electric light.

Though New York City is not my favorite,
something ignites inside of me as Manhattan's
skyline reveals its jewel-studded night heart.

From the hotel window, my gaze enthralled
by glittering beacons, each building a spark,
while yellow taxis below roam like fireflies.

The Big Apple, the city of dreams
dazzles in chaotic rhythm.
I search for secrets through skyline windows.

Across from me, in a 16th floor apartment,
a candle-lit dinner awaits in dim glow,
a petite woman in a thin-strap black dress opens the door.

Waves of anticipation flood my heart.
Do our heartbeats align? Seize the moment,
I silently cheer, as wailing sirens echo in the distance.

Wine glasses gleam on a round wooden table for two.
They are young. He gives her flowers; I feel embarrassed.
She kisses him on the cheek. I leave them on the high-rise haven.

Elegy for a Ten-Dollar Bouquet

Gabrielle Rabon

The flowers on the counter are wilting.
Purchased on impulse two weeks ago,
Their blush, cream and aubergine-colored blossoms
Have filled the apartment with a pleasant brightness.

It's difficult to determine at what point
Their devolution began in earnest
As the flowers have bloomed largely unobserved.
But at some point they metamorphosed
From something beautiful and delicate
Into an unkempt, heavy handed symbol of mortality
As they slowly rotted in their vase.

Now the alstroemerias are beginning to wrinkle
As their petals' vibrant hues slowly fade,
And the daisies are beginning to lose
Their soft and feminine honey scent,
And the lilacs are beginning to shed
Small papery flowers like discarded fairy caps
All over the faux-quartz vinyl.

The point of all this is simply to ask:
After how many days does it become necessary
To empty the vase?
At what point does it become cruel
To keep displaying something beautiful
Past its prime?

The Clearing

Michelle Bitting

~ Los Angeles, after the January 7th fires

Funny to think how new I felt coming out of class that day,
Flush from the ballet rigors, sweating down the sidewalk—
A manzanita in bloom ready to begin again. I looked to the sky,
To the speaking gull passing, and beyond her an alien
Billowing mouth of dun and charcoal signs. I am remembering
This while fumbling to clasp a bronze bracelet given to me
After because everything was lost, of course, the ungrace
Of this catastrophic state I lean into, searching the singed box
Found in the smoking ruins, sifting for recipes, for favorites
Of ancestors where conversation flows more freely with
The dead. All that I dream, more familiar since flames
Leveled our former life, the taste of newfound nothingness
Rendered sharper by bones, sinew, and cherry port—it rocks me
Gently, this bracing tonic poured over the lot. We visited it
Last night. I watched you walk across like an astronaut sinking
Six feet into ashen muck. *I'm walking on the roof!* you cried,
Disappearing into morbid glitter, into satin aftermath—moonglow
Sifted over every beautiful thing, a lunar reduction. *It looks like
Sunlit snow*, said Buzz Aldrin when he first touched boot soles
To it. *Your pupils close down*, he said. Like layers
Of our lives contracting, we forget what has been, the record
Of the earth. I thought *Sometimes the sky's too bright*, then
Everything upside down turns black. *How can the moon be shining
If we are standing on it?* I asked you, my underworld husband,
My confection. Let's concentrate on where we are now—
Our cake of ambient people falling through rooms, through years
Collapsed to one luminous moment. I see you in the house,

There in our antique bed, your head between my legs
In the drowsy hours, our children chasing the dog,
Laughing at cartoons wrapped in Saturday morning
And blankets woven by aunties. Now I'm stirring
A kettle of Coq au Vin in my best blue overalls.
The hair at our temples glints of spare gray. Now
I'm watching you pull a cake from the oven,
The steaming gold dome of sherry and nutmeg batter—
It sweetens the rafters worn bare by love and rage.
In the end we found our magnificent desolation
And a way to see the stars through wars,
Through family demons and orbiting fires
The world performs around us on a horizon clearly
Curving away like a smile in an unknown language.

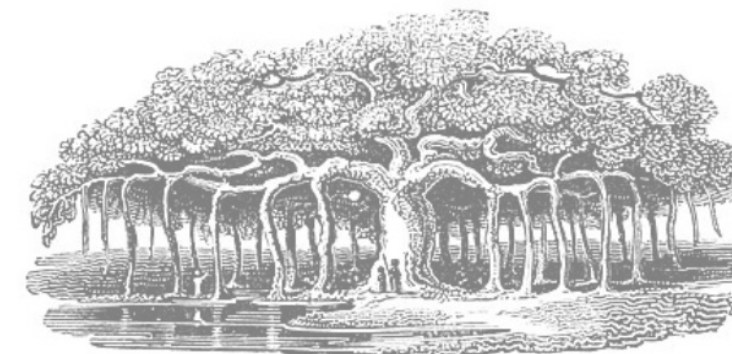
ABOUT THE JUDGE



Photo Credit: Charlie Marie Kohl

danilo machado (he/they) is a poet, curator, and Leo living on occupied land, interested in language's potential for revealing tenderness, erasure, and relationships to power. A 2020-2021 Poetry Project Emerge-Surface-Be Fellow and 2024 NYC Poets Afloat Fellow, their writing has been featured in *Poem-A-Day*, *Hyperallergic*, *Art in America*, *Art Papers*, *Futch Magazine*, *The Recluse*, *GenderFail*, among others.

They are the author of the collection *This is your receipt and is not a ticket for travel* (Faint Line Press, 2023) and the three chaplets as part of the Ghost City Press Summer Series (2022-24). They are the author of the *Post Post Post* newsletter on Substack and, with Charlie Marie Kohl, co-founded *exquisites*, a queer reading, workshop, and anthology series. danilo currently serves on the Board of Directors for *No, Dear Magazine* and co-organizes The Long Poem Support Group with Ry Cook. Additional collaborative curatorial projects include the exhibitions *to hold a we* (BRIC, 2024), *Any place I hang my hat is home* (Bullet Space, 2024), and *Eligible/Illegible* (PS 122, 2023). They are working to show up with care for their communities. More at @queersoulders and queersoulders.com.



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Michelle Alexander is a poet, teaching artist, and interdisciplinary practitioner. She is the recipient of the 2024 Furious Flower Poetry Prize, and the 2025 Peseroff Poetry Prize. Her poetry collection, *A Stone's Throw from Cray* is forthcoming from New American Press (2026) as the winner of the New American Prize (2024). Among her publications are works that have appeared or are forthcoming in the journals *Oxford Poetry*, *Third Coast*, *Epiphany*, and *Puerto del Sol*. She has served as a poet in residence for the Chicago Poetry Center and as a Visiting Teaching Artist for the Poetry Foundation's "Forms and Features" series. She is a Cofounder and Director of Interdisciplinary Arts at Unwoven Literary & Arts Magazine.

Natalie Bavar is a queer Iranian-American poet who grew up in Brazil and currently resides in Salem, MA with her lovely partner and lively cats, Dora, Beans, and Sprout. In 2020, she received her BA in English with a specialization in creative writing from UMass Amherst. She studied with John Hennessy and Peter Gizzi. In 2022, she received a MFA in poetry from Boston University, where she studied with Robert Pinsky, Karl Kirchwey, and Nicole Sealey. Her work has appeared in *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *RockPaperPoem*, and *The South Dakota Review*.

Nikema Bell is a Jamaican poet, interdisciplinary artist, and scholar based in the United States. She holds a BA in Literature in English with a minor in Creative Writing from the University of the West Indies and an MA in English from James Madison University. Her work moves fluidly across genres, engaging themes of identity, language, and cultural memory. She currently serves as the Special Project Coordinator at the Furious Flower Poetry Center, the nation's first academic center for Black poetry, where she helps advance its mission to celebrate, educate, and preserve the legacy of Black poetry.

Michelle Bitting was recently named a City of L.A. Department of Cultural Affairs Individual Artist Grantee and is the author of seven poetry collections, including *Nightmares & Miracles* (*Two Sylvias Press*, 2022), winner of the Wilder Prize and named one of *Kirkus Reviews* 2022 Best of Indie. Her chapbook *Dummy Ventriloquist* was published in 2024 by C & R Press. Recent

poetry appears on *The Slowdown*, *Thrush*, *Cleaver*, *The Poetry Society of New York's Milk Press*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Split Lip*, *National Poetry Review*, *SWWIM*, *ONE ART*, and is featured as Poem of the Week in *The Missouri Review*. Her forthcoming collection *Ruined Beauty* will be published by *Walton Well Press* in Spring, 2026. Bitting is writing a novel that centers around Los Angeles and her great grandmother, stage and screen actor Beryl Mercer, and is Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing and Literature at Loyola Marymount University.

Melissa Garcia Criscuolo earned her B.A. in English from Florida International University and her M.F.A. in poetry from the University of Florida. Her poems, stories, and translations have appeared in *Superpresent*, *Subtropics*, *The Acentos Review*, *Anak Sastra*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *bedfellows*, *Hinchas de Poesia* and *The Razor*, to name a few. *Finishing Line Press* published her chapbook, *Things in My Backyard*. She has a manuscript looking for a publisher, and she teaches literature and writing at Florida Atlantic University.

Tara Dugan writes and homesteads in Massachusetts. Her work has appeared in *The Millions*, *Pangyrus*, *Salt Hill Journal*, and elsewhere, with poetry forthcoming in *Here: a poetry journal*. She tends a small plot of the internet at tdugan.com.

Shinelle L. Espailat is a writer whose work is forthcoming in *SAND* and *Mom Egg Review*, and has appeared in *midnight & indigo*, *Pleiades Magazine*, *Torch Literary Arts*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *Minerva Rising*, and *Ghost Parachute*, among others, as well as in the collections *Ghost Parachute: 105 Flash Fiction Stories*, *Shale: Extreme Fiction for Extreme Conditions*, and *How Higher Education Feels: Commentaries on Poems That Illuminate Emotions in Learning and Teaching*. Her stories have been nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net prizes, and she has been supported by a Powerhouse Residency and by Kimbilio and Baldwin for the Arts fellowships. She holds an M.A. in English-Creative Writing from Temple University. She teaches at Westchester Community College in NY.

Mac Gill's true passion is making the act of translation and translations themselves more open and accessible, which is reflected in their free digital zine Kani, highlighting translations of works in the public domain. They are a translator, scholar, project manager, and occasional theatre technician, all with the help of their cat who plays a critical role in the work process with inopportune keyboard surfing.

Emily McMaster is a writer, poet, and printmaker. Originally from Albuquerque, New Mexico, she now lives in the Hudson Valley, where she spends her free time fishing and playing chess.

Celia Meade holds an MFA in writing from Sarah Lawrence College (2023), an MFA in painting from the University of Calgary (98) and a B. Sc. In Biology (86) from Queen's University. She splits her time between Salt Spring Island in Canada and Bronxville, New York. Her debut poetry collection *Anatomy of the World* (Wipf and Stock 2024) is available on Amazon. Short-listed for the 2024 Federation of BC Writer's Flash Fiction award, she also won second place in the 2022 Raven chapbook contest. Her poetry, nonfiction essays and stories have been anthologized and appeared in dozens of magazines. Meade's work explores the relationship of humans amidst our fellow animals and with each other. She enjoys birding, walking in natural settings and painting. Follow her on Instagram @poet_meade, and her website celiameade.com.

Elisabeth Murawski is the author of *Heiress, Zorba's Daughter* (May Swenson Poetry Award), and *Moon and Mercury. Alias Irene* will be published in late 2025. *Still Life with Timex* won the Robert Phillips Poetry Chapbook Prize. *Voyage to the End* won the James Tate Prize and will be published in early 2026. A native of Chicago, she currently lives in Alexandria, VA.

Maura O'Dea (she/her) is a poet and visual artist from Cincinnati, Ohio. She lives and works in Tempe, Arizona where she is an MFA candidate in Poetry at Arizona State University. You can find more of her work in *Scrawl Place*, *Strange Horizons*, and elsewhere. She joins the global call for a free Palestine and an end to genocides everywhere.

Octavio Quintanilla is the 2025 Texas Poet Laureate and the author of the poetry collections, *If I Go Missing* (Slough Press, 2014), *The Book of Wounded Sparrows* (Texas Review Press, 2024), which was longlisted for the National Book Award, and *Las Horas Imposibles / The Impossible Hours*, winner of the 2024 Ambroggio Prize of the Academy of American Poets (University of Arizona Press, 2025). He is the founder and director of the literature & arts festival, VersoFrontera, publisher of *Alabrava Press*, and former Poet Laureate of San Antonio, TX.

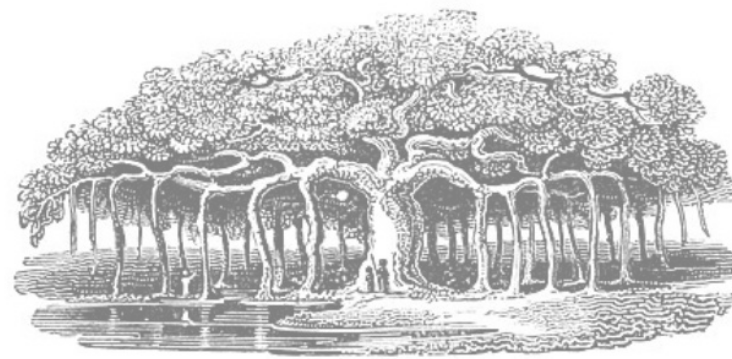
Gabrielle Rabon (they/she/he) is a queer writer and media professional based in Chicago. Through their writing, Rabon seeks to better understand the human condition, with a specific focus on gender, sexuality and bodily autonomy.

Lillian Rosenquist (she/her) is an emerging poet and writer, currently living in Maryland. Her work often contends with the entwined ecosystems of family, memory, and personal alchemy. This is her first time being published. More of her work can be found at paperbackstacks.substack.com.

Gordan Struić is a Croatian poet, lawyer, and musician whose work moves between the intimate and the digital, often tracing silence, memory, and fractured connections. Writing in both Croatian and English, he experiments with code-like forms as well as lyrical fragments, exploring how language becomes both archive and erasure. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *34th Parallel*, *Stone Poetry Quarterly*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *The Universes Poetry*, *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, *Feral*, *Humana Obscura*, *Half Mystic*, *Headlight Review*, *Poetic Reveries*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Expanded Field Journal*, and *Lana Turner Journal*, among others. Alongside poetry, Gordan composes music. He lives in Zagreb, where he continues to intertwine words, sound, and silence in his creative practice.

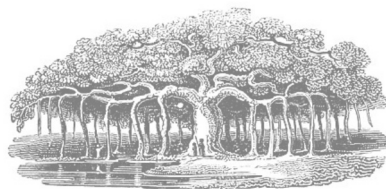
Patrick Sylvain is a Haitian-American educator, poet, writer, social and literary critic, and translator whose work explores Haiti and the Haitian diaspora's culture, politics, language, and religion. The author of several poetry collections in English and Haitian, Sylvain's poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and appear in leading journals including *Ploughshares*, *Callaloo*, *Transition*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Agni*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Caribbean Writer*, and *African American Review*. He holds degrees from UMass-Boston, Harvard, Boston University, and Brandeis University, where he was the Shirle Dorothy Robbins Creative Writing Prize Fellow. Sylvain teaches Global, Transnational, and Postcolonial Literature at Simmons University and recently served on Harvard's History and Literature Tutorial Board. His publications include *Education Across Borders* (Beacon Press, 2022) and *Underworlds* (Central Square Press, 2018). Forthcoming works include *Scorched Pearl of the Antilles* (Palgrave Macmillan) and poetry collections from Central Square, Arrowsmith, and *Finishing Line Press* (2026).

Meg Whelan (she/her) is a poet from Kentucky. Her artistic practice integrates visual art and text as holistic modes of truth-telling. Meg earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Kentucky, and her work has been supported by *So to Speak*, *The Red Branch Review*, *Bi Women Quarterly*, the Kolaj Institute, and The Kentucky Foundation for Women.



ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

The Banyan Review is an online, international journal promoting poetry, art, and the natural world. Our issues also include short-fiction, essays and interviews. We publish quarterly. Contributors range from poets and artists, to thinkers, and essayists. Our issues embrace work from new, emerging, and established creators. We look forward to sharing your work.



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