



SWORD

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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

sclave and scrat  
    towhit towhat  
        whither dither slither

It were  
I gebornen

I hadn't the time for a daybook  
Sorridden 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 its 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*



## 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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.