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cover art by  
Irina Tall



# verum

for trans joy, for trans  
rage. for trans love. for  
trans life. for trans  
liberation.

issue 4

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# GIRL

IRINA TALL



V E R U M L I T E R A R Y P R E S S

# EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear reader,

As of November 12, 2023, five hundred eighty six (586) anti-trans bills have been proposed. I know more will come. Suffice to say that the road to this issue has been a long one. So I have found myself examining the nature of being in a life that is largely restricted, and often determined, by legislation. What I have found and sought out for this issue is a testament to the vibrancy and pull of community in a space that is under attack. As libraries, schools, and clubs become increasingly subjected to anti-trans ideology, I wanted to draw together some lasting proof of trans existence. It is a core belief of mine that words are a form of resistance. Joy, anger, breath, and every action of a suppressed life is an act against that suppression. These poems, this art, are a form of resistance.

We will always resist,  
Jude

---

# STUPID TRANS ALLEGORY

BY ATLAS-EEL H.

Call out to the bone maker.  
You may now forge yourself,

So hold close what you love  
And leave unleashed the remains of a you unlike in form  
Leave anything mold soaked and bitter at the door-  
You no longer need it.

Rifle through each sculpture,  
Weight it fairly and never be afraid to reach for the hammer.

The bone maker holds no grudge against those who forge their own footing

Whatever you find in this becomes yours  
And it is only yours because it feels like it is yours  
Weigh it against the piles  
Hold it against your exposed lungs and see electric

Forge yourself, young one  
But do not be afraid to bring a friend.

No good art is made alone.

---

# praise for multicellular eukaryotes

BY LIAM STRONG

critique of wolvishness: howler as feint, failed fact check, lie. critique of sleep: which is to curfew, to regulate blinking, fold the infinitive into a dog whelk, known for not traditionally

resting. critique of critiques: the trans body is not equal or less than a transplant. critique of plant(ing): starch on the cellular level, algaec template with no need for anatomy. critique of the

human body: as a junction, not an interstate. as an uncomplicated isotope. as a popularity, as petrified in chert. as an entity bearing fangs, wanting to be a nightmare, but having no howl.

---

# Is There Any Truth in Imagination?

(after Sealey's cento for the night i said, "i love you")

BY BRYCE DELANEY WALLS

Making is almost transparent.

Out into the soft air, into the  
stone without thinking.

Listen, I sink my sharp teeth into the meat,  
we must admit, we do the sad dance far too well  
and tonight we are burnt out from chasing the  
sort of face; or taking  
nothing like this.

You kiss a crab on the mouth  
and pause.

A half mile off  
a line or groove I love  
sometimes it falls apart, sometimes I need help.

I know that wind  
the sad ocean waves the sad directionless leaps  
my body from breastbone  
to waist. It speaks of  
each night, as onto a bed of silk sheets,  
the tear drops hang like paintings and  
the space between us is  
closed for remodeling.

# The Answer to All These Questions is Freedom

*for Vayr*

BY CASSANDRA WHITAKER

Wonder. Floated. Today. A group of queer students from three schools met. Played. Games. Shared stories and laughed. A few cried. Queer elders watched; wonder floated. The center of queerness, that afternoon, in our county, laughed all around us. The first flag flown was the Juneteenth flag. A student asked what it meant. There were at least three other trans females. Besides myself. At school. Together. Fourteen trans males. Together. Wonder floated. A discord of enbys. At one point. Everyone in the front. Held a plush toy; like holding onto clouds. A room. Full of queers. Straight peers. Holding onto their skin. A voice revealed a truth. And so did another. And another.



---

# And My Maker As My Bride

BY WEST AMBROSE

took him by my side/put the keys between his teeth/and roared/my doom as my joyride/my  
passenger seat/as my electric chair/my comrade/my equal/my dagger and cloche/my angel from  
myth/godless/revving past eighty/all the red lights/like exposed photos flags waving/Mon  
amoureux, il est au diable/viva la implicitly/the running of the bulls/he pulls the  
shift/gasp/freeze/tar/smoking, it's a new city/and they've got no laws/about the time we  
take/another hotel floor/with his scarves on the table/and his wings on the door/we drank  
deeply/from the lies of others/and stitched a truth/back to the bare bones/we filled room after  
room with water/we drank in rust and kissed it all golden/the light over his body/made the  
shadows of mine/eclipsed the boundaries of

modernism/and painted the wishes back to/touch/my heaven, it's heavy/it's not for the faint of  
heart/my hermit/my Hamlet/my healer/swathed in/agony/O do not give me anything/but the  
courage of men/who learn by tearing themselves apart/do not tell me of your/decency and  
whims/until you've loved a man/stubborn enough/to prove the world wrong on your behalf/do  
not weigh in salt/all the ways you've waded/waited/wished and listed/the attributes and  
flaws/until you meet a man who teaches you to drown with him/do not love at all

---

# The Mother Of Ike's Children Tells Tina

BY JOSHUA MERCHANT

she's not even worth the bullet  
and the trigger coos. Tina, now  
wired, watches a woman fall asleep  
standing up. I am sitting next to my mother  
who sounded horrified watching a woman  
become zombified, preparing for a bullet  
as a gift for suffering; baby mama. hopeful  
widow. soon, one with god.

years later, while watching this film  
alone I remember begging my partner  
with the same fear in my voice after all  
the stolen glass pipes and cheating.  
I remember how hike rhymes with  
how lost I never want to be again.

ii. "I was wildin"

not without a tent. boots. a flare  
gun. a box of matches. I, the combat  
knife, wasn't born serrated and yet

sometimes I stink of raw meat. I survive.  
preferably next to a lake or a river.  
somewhere embers can easily be put  
out when attracting unwanted wildlife.  
I have enough wilder pumping  
through me to quake a generator  
when pulled- doesn't mean I want to  
be flung when the cable of me is strung.

iii.

there are many ways my mother asked  
and sometimes answered her own questions:  
a tooth sucked. "mmmm" humming through her  
concerned or intrigued mouth. a whimper.  
a scream. bible in hand. a laugh from the gut.  
"what yall want to eat?" "lets go see a movie!"  
"put on 'What's Love Got To Do With It?'"

iv.

the scene where  
Tina slams his car  
door and the wind-  
shield cracks. that's what  
it sounds like when  
I don't cry. that was  
always one of my  
favorite parts of  
the movie.

v.

and still I question  
the hypocrisy of wanting

a ring. or someone who  
can keep a promise.

not as a chokehold. anything  
but the shovel. a shuffle maybe.

a bounce in the shoulders. dare  
I say a pair of hands around my waist

while I wear out some fringe  
and call him in the morning.

vi.

"best believe this shit ain't over"

vii.

that's what scares me.  
her child came home.  
cheek bone rouged.  
eyebrow torn. lip full  
on one side. that's  
what scares me too,  
ghosts. and they way

they can go from wicker  
baskets, to wicker chair  
to wicker men. the way  
I'm told they begat each other.

---

# Steel Bodyblock

BY CLEM FLOWERS

Take care

you sweet dumb bird-

world's full

of teeth

waiting to bite

but so long

as you know

where to look

for the jaws of life,

you'll be okay

so long as you

learn to memorize

your colors-

blue pink white pink yellow cyan pink purple blue yellow white purple black

you'll be okay

as long as you

don't let the sounds

of hate venom fire lighting agony rage

knock you and yours off

the desert path

you'll be okay

so long

as you know

where to look

for the jaws of life,

you'll be okay

---

# drug of choice or, rabbitholes

BY ENNE TATISHCHEVA

I

i drink down oceans of metaphors / similes taste  
like ash on my tongue / my life is filled with  
hyperbole because they have taught me how to  
survive / there is something about forgetting that feels  
like remembering and when i remember, i am always  
grasping at straws of things that are already gone

II

i like to think that in the back of my head  
there is a quiet i am always chasing / how  
long until i reach the end of the labyrinth / when  
will i get to the center? / the end? the beginning? /  
time is a circle and i am chasing something / uncatchable  
the secret i am always writing around is that nothing  
about me has felt real / there. / now you know.

III

i am losing myself in stories / falling towards something  
i have always known but forgotten far longer / i  
am only ever brave enough to open the book / i have  
never gotten to the last page / i do not want to  
come back / please / please let me stay here / and  
the words ask — forever? / and i answer — as long  
as you'll have me



## IV

poetry has always been cruel because it is remembering /  
and i never realize how much i have forgotten until  
i am writing / (?) / the green apple tree in the backyard  
that we could never get to grow apples / how i decided  
tulips would be my favorite flower / they were mom's  
favorite too / the unmistakable sweetness of rain  
during a may thunderstorm (honey?flowers?pollen?) /  
when i knew that you loved me (do you still?)

## V

drug of choice: rain on bare skin / drug of choice:  
the smell of yellow tulips / drug of choice: long summer  
nights that feel suffocating/ drug of choice: running  
away from the consequences/ drug of choice:  
words, sounds, syllables, alliteration, simile, assonance,  
metaphors / writing myself into something that you can  
reach out and touch / am i tangible yet? / when i breathe out,  
does it fog in the air? / i think i will forever be missing  
memories / i have never wanted (anything/nothing/  
to be whole/to be nonexistent) / when i die, bury me in a field of  
extended metaphors

# Wishful Pink.

BY ZUGGIE TATE

I truly believe  
a brighter day waits  
just beyond the horizon  
but it's nighttime  
right now  
my feet can't carry me through the darkness  
I am not fast enough to outrun an advance  
or the call of a prowling man  
whose teeth sharpen  
eyes wilding with the moon  
This night is an Antebellum South  
my North Star is time  
The distance between me & freedom feels like lightyears  
insurmountable amounts of space  
it's hard for me to say this  
I rarely speak outside my house barely open my mouth  
when hollahed at  
less my voice becomes a Judas  
my body a fearful disciple  
everything in this moment betraying me

to a death  
at the hands of these evil ass men  
In my heart, I know  
the breaking of a beautiful morning is racing toward me  
at the speed of light, I know  
that one day, the world won't revolve against the orbits of my sisters' & mine  
I know that there will come a time when we will take to the street  
dawning the brand new day, I can feel true  
as warming sunlight  
can't convince me otherwise  
I just pray that I am not the last brick  
holding back this dam  
hope that I will get to see the promised land  
that I am not just the bones my sisters carry in with them

# 40%

BY KHALIL DANIELS

Consider me under your arms— soft breaths, slow  
rhythms / Then envision me on July 11th,  
2019, / When I was no longer supposed to be here; /  
Forged my deadname in a past cemetery of  
daffodils & daisies / My body turned violet and bruised,  
wrists of rose & amaryllis / Eyes rolled  
back into the heavens, mouth frothed / Scissors on the  
bathroom floor / Hair by the counter /  
Picture me as the 40% / Picture me / Picture me &  
cherish my living / Though I should have died  
many years ago / I live, I live / With scars on my chests  
and mouth full of rage / I live, I live /  
Violets burst from burnt ground— how lucky / I am under  
your arms / I am more alive than  
hyacinths on may mornings / I live, I live / Far from 40%

# AUTHOR BIOS

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

**Irina Tall (Novikova)** is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

**Atlas-Eel H.** can be found on Twitter, Itch.io & Tumblr under the @theirATLAS) His work carves indiscriminately at the different parts of her, usually getting pretty mucky in the process. Atlas is fat, poor, and trans. She is mentally ill, hard of hearing, and loves you dearly. His previous collections are available on [itch.io](https://itch.io) and she would love to hear from you.

**Liam Strong** (they/them) is a queer neurodivergent straight-edge punk writer who earned their B.A. in writing from University of Wisconsin-Superior. They're the author of the chapbook *Everyone's Left the Hometown Show* (Bottlecap Press, 2023). They are most likely gardening somewhere in Northern Michigan.

**Bryce Delaney Walls** is a nonbinary poet from South Bend, Indiana. Their work has appeared in *The Free Library of the Internet Void*, *On-the-High Literary Journal*, and forthcoming in *LEON Literary Review*. You can find them on twitter @BryceDelaney\_.

**Cassandra Whitaker** (she/they) is a trans writer from Virginia whose work has been published in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Beestung*, *Conjunctions*, and other places. They are a member of the *National Book Critics Circle* and an educator.

**West Ambrose** is a writer and grad student. His twitter is @westofcanon and his website is [westofcanon.com](http://westofcanon.com) where you can find creative works inspired by antiquity and classic lit. The website, [westofcanon.com](http://westofcanon.com), is also the home of the *Crow's Nest* and *HLK Quarterly*, an opportunity for the folks of many/any disciplines with interest in nautical and seaward things.

**Joshua Merchant** is a Black Queer native of East Oakland exploring what it means to be human as an intersectional being. A lot of what they've been exploring as of late has been in the realm of loving and learning what that means while processing trauma, loss, and heartbreak. They feel as though it has become too common to deny access to our true source of power as a means of feeling powerful, especially for those of us more marginalized than others - a collective trauma response if you will. However, they've come to recognize that without showing up for ourselves and each other, everything else is null and void. Innately, everything Merchant writes is a love letter to the unapologetically Black and unabashedly Queer. Because of this they've had the honor to witness their work being held and understood in literary journals such as 580Split, Roi Fianeant Press, Snow Flake Magazine, Corporeal, Anvil Tongue, Verum Literary Press, Ice Floe Press, Mongoose and elsewhere. They've also received the 2023 San Francisco Foundation/Nomadic Press Literary Award for poetry and have been nominated for the 2023 Best of the Net Poetry Award.

**Clem Flowers** (They/ Them) is a poet, low rent aesthete, gorgeous monstrosity, pizza man lover, and generally queer as hell cryptid, living in a cozy apartment with their wonderful spouse & sweet calico kitty. Found on Twitter @clem\_flowers & on Bluesky at [clemflowers.bsky.social](https://clemflowers.bsky.social).

**Enne** is a student at the University of California, Berkeley, where they study English Literature and Sociology, and occasionally write poems, as well. They write poetry to come to an understanding of the love and compassion that we owe to one another and to ourselves. Some of their favorite poets include William Wordsworth, Ocean Vuong, and Mary Oliver.

**Zuggie Tate** (she/her) is a Black, Trans, larger-bodied woman and a graduate of Case Western Reserve University with a BA in Sociology. She is the recipient of Margie Hope's Living Heritage Award in recognition of her work as a poet and advocate for trans issues. She currently works full-time as a writer, performance artist, and gig worker. Zuggie has been published in the Black Midwest Anthology and has forthcoming work in Shade Journal and Exposed Bone Press. She is currently based in Cleveland, OH.

**Khalil Daniels** is a sixteen year old trans black poet from the heart of Texas who hopes to share their writing with the world one day, to let other queer bipoc know that they aren't alone, and that there is joy even in the darkest parts of queerness.