

ROOKLYN

POETS ANTHOLOGY

Edited by
Jason Koo & Joe Pan

Poetry / \$25

Brooklyn has long been known as having one of the most vibrant poetry scenes in the world, yet there has never been an anthology devoted to celebrating the many contemporary poets who call it home. The *Brooklyn Poets Anthology* is a landmark collection offering a panoramic snapshot of the Brooklyn poetry community—itsself composed of many different communities—emphasizing a variety of voices, aesthetics, and traditions.

Gathered here are 170 poets, including Philip Levine, Bernadette Mayer, Vijay Seshadri, Edward Hirsch, Aracelis Girmay, Martín Espada, Gregory Pardlo, Kimiko Hahn, Tom Sleight, Lemon Andersen, Kim Addonizio, Patricia Spears, Jones, Timothy Donnelly, Tyehimba Jess, Matthea Harvey, Cathy Park Hong, Matthew Rohrer, Dorothea Lasky, Anselm Berrigan, Angel Nafis, Joanna Fuhrman, Leigh Stein, Morgan Parker, Ocean Vuong, Tommy Pico, Wendy Xu, former Brooklyn Poet Laureate D. Nurkse, current Brooklyn Poet Laureate Tina Chang, and many more.

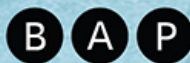
As the inaugural volume of a new series, the *Brooklyn Poets Anthology* offers readers a sense of the richness and diversity of the poetry to be found within this historic borough.

At a pivotal point in our history, the voices in this anthology are a testament to the survival of differences. No voice is like another, no vision exactly the same, no cry or incantation a mimicry of another's. This is a compilation of individual longing, documented, spoken, and sung. The *Brooklyn Poets Anthology* is an object of celebration, a map of deep longing, and a cultural compass which will show us what it was like to head most boldly into the twenty-first century, what it was like to make noise, to stand against silence, and to create art in a borough that is a proclaimed safe haven for the multitudinous voices who call Brooklyn their home.

—TINA CHANG

“Imagination! Who can sing thy force?” said Phillis Wheatley. Walt Whitman said, “I resist anything better than my own diversity.” Our founders opened a road. How proud they would be (I believe) to see the “men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence” putting their hands to the plough. At a time when democracy is under attack, and the inner city is a redoubt, the *Brooklyn Poets Anthology* doesn't just uphold real American values, in all their fierce funky variety, it incarnates them. Jason Koo and Joe Pan have put together a collection that makes a dazzling promise for the future of the pluralistic imagination.

—D. NURKSE



Brooklyn Arts Press



Brooklyn Poets

since 1855.



BROOKLYN

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Edited by Jason Koo & Joe Pan

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KIM ADDONIZIO

Invisible Signals

I like it when I forget about time with its cleaning rag
and the drunken gods standing ready with their fly swatters
while I hide in the curtains. I like thinking about the friends I miss,
one with her twenty-four hour sobriety chip,
one making pozole while her dog
frets in its cage in the kitchen, one helping her sister drag
the oxygen tank to the bathroom. One is preparing her lecture
on the present moment, not mentioning me but here I am,
or was, watching this slut of a river smear kisses all over
east Manhattan, letting the ferries slide under her dress,
her face lit up and flushed. I like to think of my friends
imagining me so we're all together in one big mental cloud
passing between the river and outer space. Here we are
not dissolving but dropping our shadows like darkening
handkerchiefs on the water. One crying by a lake,
one rehabbing her knee for further surgery. One
pulling a beer from the fridge, holding it, deciding.
One calling the funeral home, then taking up
the guitar, the first tentative chord floating out,
hanging suspended in the air.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Whoever came up with the acronym must have been happy
to think of everyone in winter walking around
saying "I have SAD" instead of "This time of year,
when the light leaves early and intimations of colder
hours settle over the houses like the great oppressive
oily scutes of a dragon's belly, I feel, I don't know,
a sense of ennui, a listlessness or lassitude
but more than that a definite undertow of dread
spreading over the waters of my already not-
exactly-sunny-to-begin-with-soul, if one can even
speak of the soul anymore, which is part of the problem,

isn't it, I mean, how do I even know if I have one, given that I'm essentially a secular humanist and missing whatever constellation or holy Smurf guides people through their lives, Jesus or Muhammad and then either Muhammad's son or second in command depending on who you thought was the true successor, which is only one of the problems still being worked out by wars and car bombings just as similar problems were solved in earlier times by flambéing people in public after rack-induced confessions, and if there's no immortal soul that's soon (too soon if you ask me) to be either whirled up to heaven like a cow shining in a tornado or else hauled screaming into the underworld like a pig to a scalding tank, that is, if we just, you know, stop, the filament worn out or shooting through the glass and exploding the bulb but either way, done, done for, pure nothing, the socket empty for long enough to hear some prayers or poems and then another little light bulb's screwed into place with songs and lullabies and eventually loud music and drugs which maybe I should be taking to overcome this thing I hardly know how to describe, and which hardly anyone wants to hear about since who can think too long about such matters before all they want is a drink or quiet place to curl up or TV to turn on along with every light in the house," and when your lover (if you are lucky enough to have one even if you sometimes feel bored and stifled by him/her or that maybe you could have done better especially in terms of having more sex money complex conversations a heavier plinth for your nobly woeful statue) asks *What's wrong* you can forget all this and simply say "I have SAD" since everyone knows that diagnosis is the first step though on which stair or ladder is better left unmentioned since they lead either way, but are best traveled with someone steadying the rungs or waiting at the top or bottom with a candle, a word, a cup of something hot and not too bitter, that you can drink down, and proclaim good.

The Givens

Someone will bump into you and not apologize, someone will wear the wrong dress to the party, another lurch drunk into the table of cheeses and pastries at the memorial service, someone will tell you she's sorry it's out of her hands as though everything isn't already. One day the toilet will mysteriously detach its little chain from its rubber thingie and refuse to flush, in the throes of whatever existential crisis toilets experience after so much human waste, so many tampons it wasn't supposed to swallow, so many pills washed down because someone in a fit of sobriety tossed them in, though later regretted it but too late, they're gone, someone kneeling to empty a meal, a bottle of wine, too many mango-cucumber-vodka cocktails made from a recipe by Martha Stewart. Someone will have seen Martha Stewart in a restaurant, surrounded by admirers. Sinners will order quail, world leaders stab their forks into small countries to hold them still for their serrated knives. Ben Franklin said nothing is certain but death and taxes and he was wrong about the taxes but then again, right about the impermanency of the Constitution. No one will come to your door to give you a stack of bills imprinted with Ben Franklin's face, but a Jehovah's Witness will find you one day to tell you there is no Hell and that the souls of the wicked will be annihilated. Someone will love you but not enough, someone else send gift-wrapped pheromones to your vomeronasal organ which will promptly destroy them like bugs in a zapper. These are but a few of the many givens, and it's tempting to boil them down to just two like Franklin did but I prefer Duchamp's "*Étant donnés*,"—1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas, water and light, as it was when God began to pronounce those words in his marble bathroom but given how it's all gone since then he probably should have skipped the part where clay sits up and rubs its eyes, looking for something to fuck or kill. The rain, the lightning. The river town, the fireworks off the dock. Someone will run through a lawn sprinkler, someone else open a hydrant. Someone will pull you from the fire, someone else wrap you in flames.

Kim Addonizio is the author of a dozen books of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. Her latest are a memoir-in-essays, *Bukowski in a Sundress: Confessions from a Writing Life* (Penguin), and a poetry collection, *Mortal Trash* (W. W. Norton). She recently resided in lower Manhattan and Williamsburg, and now lives in Oakland, CA. She is online at www.kimaddonizio.com. "The Givens," "Invisible Signals," and "Seasonal Affective Disorder" are from *Mortal Trash*.

TINA CHANG

Four Portraits

Self-styled as Kehinde Wiley's Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps

I never dreamed myself to be any larger
than a horse. Perhaps this is strange,
my girl body in the body of a man
on a rapturous equestrian animal. I am
not like the others. This was the song I sang
since my birth, since I had a mouth
to sing it. So I said it for years until I believed
jewels fell out of my mouth. Oh son,
I believe the mighty shall come.
This is my only prayer. I shall be, for you,
the man in shadow until the steed I ride
throws me into the pasture of the everlasting.
I shall be a mother whose bright milk runs
with fever and anguished love, with a head
in my hands if the head shall equal justice.
I shall be a father too, glorious and eternal.
If this is blasphemy let me love the world
into fantastic horses, ride them to a distant country
where I drown in brocade, fragrant vine.
If I am captured, let my kingdom be laced
in mega gold. Let my cage be a godly frame.

Self-styled as Alexandria Smith's The Girl in Ribbons

If I am a girl in a traffic of legs,
let them be trees. If I am a mouth,
let there be a chorus of raucous tongues.
If I set sail, let it be along a tide of ribbons
ebbing toward the widest America.
Let there be hair, each strand running
along a road, braided, and rebraided
until what remains is glory. Each face

I wear leads to another face and within that
a sister. If I could multiply myself
I couldn't be any more lonely. If you look
carefully, there are many eyes gazing.
I wonder if all of this vigilance adds up
to kindness. I once saw a child on a train
sleeping. There was no guardian, no keeper
as she laid there breathing. If the eyes
are shut, what does our dreaming see?
The onlookers wondered where to place
the girl, wondered if they should wake
her or by waking her they would create
a space of abandon. Sometimes, my heart
is an alarm clock that wakes me to a startling
sound. Sometimes I rise in a museum
of wandering objects as the body imagines
itself in pieces, fitted together, migrating
with its lost parts in unison.

Self-styled as a Vanessa German 21st-Century Sculpture

If I had children, they would be cherubs,
each one with eyes cast up to their mother,
hair tied into cherries with sentinels for a crown.
I am the door, cast into light with my arms
outstretched, monsoon, sunrays.
Each dress made of discarded treasure
creates me heavenly. There is a charm
and it's a promise to shelter but also a field
of black diamonds. If we say evidence,
we mean what we can collect, not what
we can imagine. Each of us has burrowed
in our chests a circular mirror. Walk up
to the figure and find a reflection:
All the while you thought it was a throng
of people swarming in a living hive
though really it was one figure locked in stasis,
then you, emerging from a halo of fire.

Self-styled as a Kara Walker Silhouette, Woman Beneath a Woman

There will be a day when women will be clouds.
Each breath makes me a billow, worn like rain
spiraling out into a vision of winter. If history
teaches me anything, it will be about the vagaries
of burden. I can carry a vessel, a pitcher of water,
a bundle of ideas like sticks. I carry time like fire.
I hiccup and it's 2016 though the faces are the same:
Faces without faces and with different names.
If we could all be more like clouds. If I run,
the threat of a storm above slows me. If I lift
my arms, the rains spill down. If I bend,
my spine becomes a terrain on which a master
treads. Sometimes, I wish to unborn myself
from this weather. If I could walk out
from under this thunder there would be such air,
and my posture too could lift. If I unborn myself,
I'd give up my sisters too, my brothers
by the bridge, so I'll stay lifting this largeness
to live inside this cloud of kin.

Tina Chang, Brooklyn Poet Laureate, is the author of the poetry collections *Half-Lit Houses* (2004) and *Of Gods & Strangers* (2011). She is also co-editor of the Norton anthology *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia, and Beyond*. Her poems have been published in periodicals such as *American Poet*, *McSweeney's*, the *New York Times*, and *Ploughshares*. She was a core member of the international writing faculty at the City University of Hong Kong, the first low-residency MFA program to be established in Asia, and she teaches poetry at Sarah Lawrence College.

NICK FLYNN

forty-seven minutes

I ask a high school class to locate an image in a poem we've just read—their heads at this moment are bowed to the page. After some back & forth about the rain & a styrofoam cup, a girl raises her hand & asks, *Does it matter?* I smile—it's as if the universe was balanced on those three words & we've landed in the unanswerable & I have to admit that no, it doesn't, not really, matter, if rain is an image or rain is an idea or rain is a sound in our heads. *But to get through the next forty-seven minutes we might have to pretend it does.*

forgetting something

Try this—close / your eyes. No, wait, when—if—we see each other / again, the first thing we should do is close our eyes—no, / first we should tie our hands to something / solid—bedpost, doorknob—otherwise they (wild birds) / might startle us / awake. Are we forget-ting something? What about that / warehouse, the one beside the airport, that room / of black boxes, a man in each box? If you / bring this one into the light he will not stop / crying, if you show this one a photo of his son / his eyes go dead. Turn up / the heat, turn up the song. First thing we should do / if we see each other again is to make / a cage of our bodies—inside we can place / whatever still shines.

false prophet

The book tells us to cling (cling?) / to the thought that, in god's / hands, our dark past is our greatest / possession (*You've ruined it*, the woman with / the riding crop says to the man on all / fours, naked but for his mask—*pigs don't talk*). Cling— / maybe inside this word are more words, maybe / inside darkness is simply more darkness. God's / hands? Here's a riddle—a cosmonaut / holds hands with an astronaut, both un- / tethered. Which one is confusing a pinpoint of light / with an unreachable planet?

Nick Flynn has worked as a ship's captain, an electrician, and a caseworker with homeless adults. His most recent book is *My Feelings* (Graywolf, 2015), a collection of poems. "false prophet" and "forgetting something" are from *The Captain Asks for a Show of Hands*, and "forty-seven minutes" is from *My Feelings*.

ARACELIS GIRMAY

Ode to the Little “r”

Little propeller
working between
the two fields of my a’s,
making my name
a small boat
that leaves the port
of old San Juan
or Ponce,
with my grandfather,
Miguel, on a boat,
or in an airplane,
with a hundred or so
others, leaving the island
for work, cities,
in winters that would break
their bones, make old,
old men out of all of them,
factory workers, domino
players, little islands themselves
who would eat & be eaten by Chicago,
New York, the wars
they fought without
being able to vote for
the president. Little propeller
of their names: Francisco,
Reymundo, Arelis, Margarita,
Hernán, Roberto, Reina.
Little propeller of our names
delivering the cargo of blood
to the streets of Holyoke,
Brooklyn, New London,
Ojai, where the teacher says,
“Say your name?” sweetly,
& the beautiful propeller
working between

the two fields of my a's
& the teacher saying, "Oh!
You mean, 'Are-Raw-Sell-Lease.'
Or "Robe-Bert-Toe"
or "Marred-Guh-Reetuh, like
the drink!" & the "r"
sounding like a balloon
deflating in the room, sad
& sagging. I am hurt.
It is as if I handed them
all my familiar trees & flowers,
every drawing of the family map
& boats & airplanes & cuatros
& coquis, & they used their English
to make an axe & tried to chop
them down. But, "r," little propeller
of my name, small & beautiful monster
changing shapes, you win. You fly
around the room, little bee, upsetting
the teacher & making all of Class-310A laugh,
you fly over the yard, in our mouths,
as our bodies make airplanes over the grass,
you, little propeller, are taking over the city,
you are the sound of cars racing, the sound
of bicycle spokes fitted with playing cards
to make it sound like we are going fast,
this is our ode to you, little "r," little
machine of our names, simple
as a heart, just working, always,
there when we go to the grocery,
there in the songs
we sing in our sleep.

Self-Portrait as the Airplane (Ode to the Noise in the Ear)

I was 7, an airplane
in the Aliso Viejo public pool.
The way I moved, face down
& slowly in the turquoise blue, gliding
from end to end, delivering my brother

to the concrete banks.
I was an airplane & felt deaf
like Uncle Nino who sound entered spangled
& warbling. Inside of his ear was a hearing aid.
He placed it in my ear once,
as though putting a small nest
in the rafters of a dollhouse,
a small, pink-colored suitcase of sounds
like a tiny glee-egg back into the rafters
of a house. Tiniest sadness
inside the ear, how I held it in my body, carefully,
not wanting the ear to blink or swallow
the small gravestone I tried on
like a prosthetic limb. I did not want
to but was more sad to say no. Instead,
stood still & felt the small thing tell me
about the body's first death below the laughs
& ordinary sounds clanging like miracles
from down the hall, exaggerated, in the red room,
I swear I could hear my grandmother
whispering with my aunt, I can't remember
what they said, but I thought
about a doctor's stethoscope,
& what is the sound of that one big kid, perpetually jumping
feet first into the deep side
of a pool's blue rectangle,
the silence & plunge, dispersal
of plates through the body's dark rooms
as my brother & I took turns shouting
each other's names underwater
& the kid made booms & booms? Canon ball.
Every thing was vanishing or about
to vanish, & we sharpened our ears like knives,
glad for how they worked.
I am greedy, greedy, greedy for the sound of gravel
under truck-tires, crickets, distant
soprano scratch of airplane
against the sky. My ears eat & eat.
All day. In sleep.
Like sitting down to a meal
without kissing my hands,
I am the angel of nothing.

If these ears were birds, I'd like for them to be
flying birds. But the ears are bodies,
they do what they want. Somewhere a hammer
echoes against a nail-point entering wood. Write it down.
The ear is not a jukebox, it opens its mouth & swallows
jackhammers, coyotes, & the tambourines, god,
give me the good & common sense
to keep the tongue from cursing
at this news.

Aracelis Girmay is the author of the collage-based picture book *changing, changing* and the poetry collections *the black maria*, *Teeth*, and *Kingdom Animalia*. The poems in this anthology were previously published in *Kingdom Animalia*. Girmay is on the editorial board of the African Poetry Book Fund and has received support from the Cave Canem, Whiting, and Civitella Ranieri foundations. She is on the faculty of Hampshire College's School for Interdisciplinary Arts.

TYEHIMBA JESS

Sissieretta Jones & the Black Patti Troubadors *Forte/Grazioso*

Forte—with force was the will that overtook me, that freed my throat and lit my mouth to music. *Forte* was each wave of song, *forte* like my father's choir of freedmen, sometimes wavered and off key, sometimes pitched in more fear than light, but always *forte*, hurling what voice was left to them into the cauldron of church air after lifetimes singing their spirituals in secret. They sang *forte* like the stevedores' shout from ship to shore, crate after crate of cargo burdened into the holds, their gandy opera bouncing off hulls, *forte* in the *grazioso* of their motion, the all-together swing of arm and hand and rope and hoisted weight, *grazioso* onto decks all braced for storm, all blessed with prayer from each Providence pulpit, prayed over from bow to stern, blessings from the communion cry of each church, all *grazioso* with hands raised in testimony. I hear them each night, *forte* when I stand on our prow of stage from town to town, port to port, captain of this ragtag ship of blackfaced, cakewalking fools and balladeers, teaching crowds *grazioso* under spotlights with each ticket sold. *Forte* is the cry of the barker bundling each crowd with the smooth talk promise: darkie entertainment with a touch of high class classical. *Forte* is the finale each night, *grazioso* is the closing curtain, the unmasking of painted faces, the darkened lamplight, the applause fading like the hush of receding surf that carries us on through the night, the ocean of audience rising and falling with each wave of season, *grazioso* is the sail of our bodies in their wind.

Mark Twain v. Blind Tom

*Some archangel,
cast out of upper Heaven
like another Satan,
inhabits this coarse casket;
and he comforts himself
and makes his prison
beautiful with
thoughts and
dreams and
memories of
another time
and another existence
that fire
this dull clod
with impulses and inspirations
it no more comprehends
than does the stupid worm
the stirring of the spirit within
her
of the
gorgeous captive
whose wings she
feters
and
whose flight she stays*

I'm sent from above—
like rain on blue prayers.
blessed with Gabriel's lost notes, I
can see up to God's throne, yes,
while he plays this soul
of flesh free—makes me
the music of piano, the
breath and
burn in the
stormcloud's roar from
when sound called up,
first made me whole.
sounds like love.
weighted in my chest
—it finds freedom after
hurt. I hear Earth's tremble harsher
—better than the soil itself. When
land and tree sing to me, I hear
notes
wildly
blooming inside—a spirit
shadows across my face,
breaking free
unloosed. I play the wind
in my blood.

Italics is original quote from Mark Twain's "Special Letters" to the San Francisco Alta California, August 1, 1869.

Tyehimba Jess is the author of *Olio* (Wave Books) and *Leadbelly*, winner of the 2004 National Poetry Series (Wave Books). An alum of Cave Canem and NYU, he is the recipient of fellowships from the NEA, the Illinois Arts Council, and the Whiting Foundation. Jess is poetry and fiction editor of *African American Review* and an associate professor of English at College of Staten Island.

DEBORA KUAN

Portrait of a Woman with a Hoagie

I want to drown in six pounds of macaroni salad.
The groans of Superbowl Sunday. The cries of triumph.

I want hoagies
unfurled from cold foil.

They're called hoagies where I come from.

O beautiful possibilities
like second-base in a parked car

in the half-full lot outside a movie cineplex,
the neon glinting off your corneas.

When God closes one door, somewhere
He opens a hoagie

and jams that football
mouth with thinly sliced ham

and honey roast turkey, roast beef,
cheese, pickles, and shredded lettuce.

Paper hoagie covers rock hoagie!
Melted cheddar covers everything.

Mantra

My husband didn't like his mantra.
"Shirim" or "Shring" or "Schwing."
My own mantra was much longer.
"It is only money." I chanted
this while driving the minivan.
I whispered it into a mussel.

I shouted it from the fire escape
to the ram-faced gargoyle
across the street. *I think
you're doing it wrong,*
he said. *Your eyes
should be closed and you
shouldn't be shouting.*
I ignored him and continued
my diatribe, shaking my fists
at greedy little ghosts.
*You don't control me, money!
No, you don't!* Then I went
inside, fried up a \$50 bill
with sauerkraut, and ate it
with a side of buttered toast.
It didn't taste like chicken.
More like manta ray.

Fertile

As long as I had to clean all the things
all the time, the mushroom would continue
to sprout from the top of my head. It grew
from the same fertile spot in me
that exists in you, somewhere deep below
your internal microwave but above your post-
apocalyptic store of spring water. You think
I didn't know about that, but I did,
just as you assumed that I wanted
to be handled with very gentle kid gloves,
as if I were a baby piglet or a distended
water balloon, which I did. Somewhere
in the dark borough, however, car alarms
do conspire. Over in cat town, the strays
have assembled a council to take back
the mean streets, institute mandatory
public siestas. I had a million wishes too,
but more than that, regrets. While
washing the dishes, I recalled the time
I made you boil coffee in a pot,
which we both neglected, which melted

the pot, which then ignited the kitchen,
which finally burnt down the house.
When the firemen came, they put out
the fire that was our love; but from
those feeble ashes grew mushrooms.

Debra Kuan is the author of two poetry collections, *Lunch Portraits* (Brooklyn Arts Press, 2016) and *Xing* (Saturnalia, 2011). "Portrait of a Woman with a Hoagie" first appeared in *glitterMOB*. "Fertile" appeared in *Pleiades*. "Mantra" appeared in the *Awl*.

DOROTHEA LASKY

I like weird ass hippies

I like weird ass hippies
And men with hairy backs
And small green animals
And organic milk
And chickens that hatch
Out of farms in Vermont
I like weird ass stuff
When we reach the other world
We will all be hippies
I like your weird ass spirit stick that you carry around
I like when you rub sage on my door
I like the lamb's blood you throw on my face
I like heaping sugar in a jar and saying a prayer
And then having it work
I like cursing out an enemy
And then cursing them in objects
Soaking their baby tooth in oil
Lighting it on fire with a tiny plastic horse
I like running through the fields of green
I am so caught up in flowers and fruit
I like shampooing my body
In strange potions you bought wholesale in Guatemala
I like when you rub your patchouli on me
And tell me I'm a man
I am a fucking man
A weird ass fucking man
If I didn't know any better I'd think I were Jesus or something
If I didn't know any better I'd sail to Ancient Greece
Wear sandals
Then go to Rome
Murder my daughter in front of the gods
Smoke powdered lapis
Carve pictographs into your dress
A thousand miles away from anything
When I die I will be a strange fucking hippie
And so will you
So will you
So get your cut-up heart away from

What you think you know
You know, we are all going away from here
At least have some human patience
For what lies on the other side

I hate irony

I was walking along one day when I realized that I hate irony
I think I was thinking of the movie *The Shining* and how scary it is
When I was 21 I didn't sleep for two nights straight because of that movie
It reminded me a lot of growing up and the things I've seen
Fear is not irony
If you have ever been truly scared there is no irony in your voice when you scream
And too
Love is not either
I was in love once and all I could think of was joy
Not drinking, nor sex, or spaghetti
Not witty things to say or martinis
That bubble down the stairs with gracious olives
I didn't think of my large grey turtleneck folding over my abdomen
As I was touched so quietly by the stars
I hate when people think they are being funny by being ironic
Or they want to show you they are clever
So they say something really meaty
With twists and curves
I don't think it is funny to be so elitist
To everyone who hasn't had the chance to be as special as you are
Being cultivated into fine things when you yourself was nothing to begin with
Humor is not irony as I belly laugh all along the bench
Of the waiting room while they announce my father will die
Or when my friend was killed by her husband while he wore all black
To be torched is not ironic, but it hurts
It hurt her flesh. It hurts me to think about it.
And not precious I am to think about it, to give it time
O but Dottie, you say, you are so funny
Surely you realize you are always being ironic
But I am not, I will tell you
I am only being real

Dorothea Lasky is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *ROME* (W.W. Norton/Liveright), as well as *Thunderbird*, *Black Life*, and *AWE*, all out from Wave Books, and co-editor of *Open the Door: How to Excite Young People about Poetry* (McSweeney's, 2013). Currently, she is an assistant professor of poetry at Columbia University's School of the Arts and co-directs Columbia Artist/Teachers. Her poem "I like weird ass hippies" is from *Thunderbird* and "I hate irony" is from *Black Life*.

BERNADETTE MAYER

Ancient Brooklyn Talk by the Boardwalk

We're at fuckin Cooney Eyeland now not that fancy fuckin abandoned lake inna fuckin Berkshires dontcha wanna be the virgin mother fer me people fallin in love hey Duke what the fuck man getthefuckouttahere dat's my girlfrien's birdsnest Da-neece Da-neece you fuckin turn me fuckin on Lew you fuckin shit ass Jew turn up yr fuckin ghetto blaster louder yeah ok some fuckin raybans them fuckin spics got lookit them fuckin secret-fairies wanna go into the tunnel of love wit me didja hear bout the fuckin professor with tenure who said oh miss if I asked you would you be willing perhaps to make love with me lost his fuckin job ok ok fuckin A wanna make out wanna fuck where she's fuckin jailbait i got my apparatus you *are* a scumbag wanna listen to fuck music onna FM station whose house wanna make love avec moi immediately someday when you get older do you wanna step in to the Tristan & Isolde stream you dippy broads wanna have fuckin mushrooms in all yr food how bout goin to the Chateau Henri Quatre fer frogs legs without yr fuckin sister or ta see a foreign movie & then fuck in my ole man's car out on the island how's about readin my complete poetic works & then we can fuck I'm the fuckin son of Tennyson how's about the dark arts of evil how's about a little generic occasion like bruther & sister ya know, a platonic fuckin picnic i'll fuck yr sister ya know what I mean you fuckin Mickey you fuckin Greek gimme some fuckin head whadda you make of that guy Mozart & fuckin Staten Island you're a weird fuckin broad whoozat guy how come he's got his hand in yr pussy I already spent three fuckin bucks on you today what's he some fuckin rich guy or somethin I thought you wuz the fuckin virgin mother you look it she fuckin looks it.

Bernadette Mayer is the author of over twenty-seven collections, including most recently *Works and Days* (2016), *Eating the Colors of a Lineup of Words: The Early Books of Bernadette Mayer* (2015), and *The Helens of Troy, NY* (2013), as well as countless chapbooks and artist books. From 1980–1984 she served as the director of the St. Mark's Poetry Project, and she has also edited and founded *0 to 9* journal and United Artists books and magazines.

MORGAN PARKER

I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background: An Elegy

after Glenn Ligon after Zora Neale Hurston

Or, I feel sharp White. Or,
Colored Against. Or, I am
thrown. Or, I am
Against. Or, When White.
Or, I Sharp. Or, I Color.
Make it quiet. Wash
me away. Forgetting.
I feel most colored when
I swear to god. I feel most
colored when it is too late.
My tongue is elegy.
When I am captive. I am
the color green because
green is the color of power.
I am a tree growing two fruits.
I feel most colored when I am
thrown against the sidewalk.
It is the last time I feel colored.
Stone is the name of the fruit.
I am a man I am a man I am
a woman I am a man I am a woman
I am protected and served.
I pay taxes and I am a child and
I grow into a bright fleshy fruit.
White bites: I stain the uniform.
And I am thrown black type-
face in a headline with no name.
Or, no one hears me. Or, I am thrown
a language bone: *unarmed*.
I feel most colored when my weapon
is I feel most colored. When I get
what I deserve. When I can't breathe.

When on television I shuffle
and widen my eyes. I feel most colored
when I am thrown against a mattress,
my tits my waist my ankles buried
in veiny White. Everyone claps.
I feel most colored when I am
the punch line. When I am the trigger.
In the dawn, putrid yellow, I know
what I am being told. I feel most
colored when I am collecting dust.
When I am impatient and sick.
When they use us to distract us.
My ears leak violet petals.
I sharpen them. I sharpen them again.

When a Man I Love Jerks Off in My Bed Next to Me and Falls Asleep

I think of my father
vodka-laughing: *Aw shit,*
when Daddy said go pick out a switch
from the lemon tree we knew
that switch better be good.
My father was a drunk altar boy.
My father was a Southern boy.
My father is a good man.
When you grow up in the South, you know
the difference between a good switch and a bad one.
Pick what hurts best. The difference between drinking
to disappear and drinking to remember.
Be polite. Be gentle. Be a vessel. Be ashamed.
As a child, I begged to be whooped.
I pinched myself with my nails when I was wrong.
I tried to pull out my eyelashes. I said, *Punish me*
I said for I have sinned I am disgusting.
Here is the order in which we studied the Bible
in second grade: 1: Genesis, or, God is a man
and he owns you. You were bad. Put on some
got-damn clothes. 2: Exodus, or, you would still
be a slave if it were not for men. Also, magic.
Magic or, never question a man's truth.

3: Job, or, suffer, suffer because it is holy.
During the classes on Revelation, I think
I drifted to sleep. I think I dreamed
trumpets when I touched my hot parts
then touched the cold steel of my desk.
I knew what it meant to be wrong and woman.
When I walk into the world and know
I am a black girl, I understand
I am a costume. I know the rules.
I like the pain because it makes me.
I deserve the pain. I deserve you
looking at me, moaning, looking away.
Son of a bitch. My rent is due.
No one kissed my tits and read the Bible.
Good and evil. Pleasure and empty
curtain grid of dawn light.
I call this honor. I call this birthright.

Matt

For all intents and purposes and because the rule applies more often than it doesn't, every white man or boy who has entered and fallen away from my particular moderate life has been called Matt. Not Dan. Rarely Ben. Never Matthew. Matt smokes unfiltered Pall Malls because Kurt Vonnegut did. We talk on Myspace because he goes to a different high school. Matt's in love with someone else but I can tell he's still interested in me. Matt and his girlfriend aren't really together. Matt doesn't have a condom so we can't. Matt also doesn't have a condom so we can't. Matt loves Modest Mouse. Matt loves Kanye. He loves whiskey. He brings a flask to the park. He tells me I'm beautiful. He likes me. He follows me into the bathroom where I once found a bag of coke. I tip sideways onto the tile trying to steady myself on top of him while his legs are spread on the toilet lid. I say what about you and Anna. He says hold your ankles. I made Matt a really good mix cd. Matt's writing a novel. Matt's also writing a novel. Matt says I'm a really good kisser. My friends say I'm too good for Matt. Matt loves his Mom. Matt's moving to Berlin. Matt's moving to California. Matt's quitting smoking again. Matt rolls his own cigarettes. Matt has depression. He listens to sad songs. Matt wants a big family. He seems like he would be a good dad. His family is so white. His favorite novelists are white. His ex-girlfriends are white. He said he would call me. His ex-girlfriends are really skinny. He has this thing where he seems like he doesn't care about anything. Matt's in love with someone else. He thought I was way older than him. He got a new

tattoo. He has bad dreams. I miss him. He loves foreign movies. He's stoned all the time. He pulls me into another room. He has a beard and he also has a beard. He kisses me in the other room. He loves my dog. He flirts with me all the time, I think just for fun. Oh, Matt. He knows he's a white man but doesn't think of himself as a white man. He doesn't know what to do with his life. He floats. He is young. He can afford to be cool. He wears a lot of flannel. We're just friends. He's nervous about commitment. He's nervous in the elevator when he touches the small of my back. He's nervous on the roof. I'm nervous taking his hand because people can see us. His roommate walks in on us, then gives us shots of gin we all sip in silence. After that we smoke on his fire escape and make out. We smoke in front of the bar and make out. We make out on an empty subway train, my back slips around on the hard plastic seat. He pays for my brunch. He texts me all the time even at the airport. He's breaking up with his girlfriend. He and his friends are drunk in someone's apartment in Queens, what am I up to? He hates his job but he's totally a genius. He lost his phone so he has a new number. He hates his job and what he really wants to do is make art and be happy. He needs to live abroad for a while. He *used to be really dumb*. He swats his hair from his forehead and says of course he will call. I always ask but I'm going to stop asking. I'm nervous he doesn't understand. He didn't grow up with many Black people. He knows he is part of the problem. He just believes in love and knowledge. Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt. Each one more beautiful than the last. Each one more with more intricate ennui. I could never love him. He floats. I can't stop loving him. Matt knows the bartender. Matt studied comparative literature. He still loves his ex, I just know it. He says I like talking to you. He says watch your head as I ride him in his dorm room bunk bed. He's so sorry he didn't call, it's just that things have been busy and weird. Matt and I sneak out of a movie to hook up in his car. He is afraid of me. Matt and I are hanging out this week I think, to watch movies or something. I guess, maybe. He's never met anyone like me. Things are just super casual with us. Neither of us are looking for a relationship. Matt loves relationships. He slept with my friend. I can't tell if he's into me because I'm Black or because I'm *not that Black* and either way I feel bad. I feel it in my stomach's basement: Matt can't want me. I am not forever. Matt has kissed me hundreds of times and he kissed my ancestors too. He held them down and kissed them real good. He was young and he could afford it. When he touched them, they always smiled, almost as if it had been rehearsed.

Morgan Parker is the author of *Other People's Comfort Keeps Me Up at Night* (Switchback Books 2015), which was selected by Eileen Myles for the 2013 Gatewood Prize and a finalist for the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber First Book Award. Her second collection, *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé*, was published by Tin House Books in February of 2017. She lives with her dog Braeburn in Brooklyn, and works as an editor for Little A and Day One.

BIANCA STONE

Making Apple Sauce with My Dead Grandmother

I dig her up and plop her down in a wicker chair.
She's going to make apple sauce and I'm going to get drunk.
She's cutting worms out of the small green apples from the back yard
and I'm opening up a bottle. It erects like a tower
in the city of my mouth.

The way she makes apple sauce it has ragged
strips of skin and spreads thickly over toast.
It's infamous; eating it is as close to God as I'm going to get,
but I don't tell her. There's a dishtowel wrapped around her head
to keep her jaw from falling slack—

Everything hurts.
But I don't tell her that either. I have to stand at the callbox
and see what words I can squeeze in. I'm getting worried.
If I dig her up and put her down in the wicker chair
I'd better be ready for the rest of the family

to make a fuss about it. I better bring her back right.
The whole house smells of cinnamon and dust.
We don't speak. She's piling the worms, half-alive
up in a silver bowl, she's throwing them back into the ground
right where her body should be.

The Fates

I cracked open my skull and out flew mom.
She alit in the rafters, electric in a massive chamber.
She has abilities accessed by latent genes.
Quietly terrible powers come
with great responsibility—which
you don't have to use—either way one still
has the power;

a few lives to fuck up; to
wreck or save—
wind chimes won't let go of me.
I ring whenever I move.
I feel like the Titanic sailing straight
into the liquor store on Saint Marks and Franklin.
I'm watching a TV show
about supernatural detective brothers
who travel back and forth across the United States
revengeing their parents' deaths
until they can't remember anymore why or how they died.
In general
the need to kill demons and vampires
overtakes their need
to remember anything.
And who can blame them?
Every night in the hotel the two talk indirectly about their feelings—
manly men, massive in sex appeal, drinking
and killing and talking.
In this episode the Services of Fate are no longer required in the human world.
Thus, everything in the future is affected.
In this reality
I know my brother is living near me,
so close
I can wave from my window
into his.
He's telling me he's writing a poem
about the way
the face disappears.

Blackflies

Today blackflies appeared, all at once, whirring around like tiny airborne pickup trucks from the future, spitting-up in their hands, rubbing them together, a group of old grossers at a card game around my head. It seemed like they were aware of me. Like in *Phenomena*, the movie. Not the embarrassing religious one with John Travolta but the 1985 horror film starring Jennifer Connelly as a famous actor's daughter with psychic powers who communicates with insects and is sent to a creepy boarding school in Switzerland. There were so many layers now that I think about it. A blackfly leads Connelly to the corpse of a girl killed by a deformed

serial killer child, living in secret on a remote estate with his mother, who turns out to be the headmistress. It's loosely Freudian, with a surprising soundtrack by Iron Maiden and Motörhead. The only survivors at the end of the film are Connelly and an orangutan owned by the kindly (but eventually killed) entomologist, and of course thousands of flies. The two embrace in the final scene—young woman and ape—on the dark shores of a Swiss lake, with great sadness and relief.

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i

Say surrender. Say alabaster. Switchblade.
 Honeysuckle. Goldenrod. Say autumn.
Say autumn despite the green
 in your eyes. Beauty despite
daylight. Say you'd kill for it. Unbreakable dawn
 mounting in your throat.
My thrashing beneath you
 like a sparrow stunned
with falling.

i

Dusk: a blade of honey between our shadows, draining.

i

I wanted to disappear—so I opened the door to a stranger's car. He was divorced. He was still alive. He was sobbing into his hands (hands that tasted like rust). The pink breast cancer ribbon on his keychain swayed in the ignition. Don't we touch each other just to prove we are still here? I was still here once. The moon, distant & flickering, trapped itself in beads of sweat on my neck. I let the fog spill through the cracked window & cover my fangs. When I left, the Buick kept sitting there, a dumb bull in pasture, its eyes searing my shadow onto the side of suburban houses. At home, I threw myself on the bed like a torch & watched the flames gnaw through my mother's house until the sky appeared, bloodshot & massive. How I wanted to be that sky—to hold every flying & falling at once.

i

Say amen. Say amend.

Say yes. Say yes

anyway.

i

In the shower, sweating under cold water, I scrubbed & scrubbed.

In the life before this one, you could tell
two people were in love
because when they drove the pickup
over the bridge, their wings
would grow back just in time.

Some days I am still inside the pickup.
Some days I keep waiting.

It's not too late. Our heads haloed
with gnats & summer too early
to leave any marks.
Your hand under my shirt as static
intensifies on the radio.
Your other hand pointing
your daddy's revolver
to the sky. Stars falling one
by one in the cross hairs.
This means I won't be
afraid if we're already
here. Already more
than skin can hold. That a body
beside a body
must make a field
full of ticking. That your name
is only the sound of clocks
being set back another hour
& morning
finds our clothes
on your mother's front porch, shed
like week-old lilies.

Ocean Vuong, an American poet and essayist, is the author of *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (Copper Canyon Press, 2016). A 2016 Whiting Award winner and Ruth Lilly Fellow, he has received a Pushcart Prize and honors from the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, the Elizabeth George Foundation, the Academy of American Poets, *American Poetry Review*, and *Narrative*. "On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous" was previously published in *Poetry*.