

INTRODUCTION: AZALEAS AND SO ON

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Wallace Stevens famously placed flowers amongst the “things that are in the dump [...] and the things that will be,” hoping to find a “purifying change” between “that disgust and this.” In the late twentieth century, we have witnessed a “shift from a culture defined by its production to a culture defined by its waste,” as Cythia Deitering puts it. As garbage and toxicity have become more and more pervasive, the “slow violence” of the environmental degradation has remained strangely slippery, difficult to grasp and reflect in artistic representations. It has thus become an urgent need to explore those narratives that not only attempt to capture the degradation of the environment, but also focus on those human communities that have become residual or waste(d). The poets in this section keenly bring these ubiquitous and polymorphous materializations of waste to the fore, challenging askew narratives of progress fueled by the global capitalist paradigm of growth. In “republic,” D.A. Powell unveils the pernicious consequences of the progressive automation of the countryside. The refuse hidden in our pipelines overflows in Laura-Gray Street’s revision of Darwin’s optimism in “An Entangled Bank.” Craig Santos Perez’s playful “One fish, Two fish, Plastics, Dead fish” addresses the pollution of water and the depletion of the marine wildlife that are consequence of capitalist driven overfishing and global warming. Evelyn Reilly’s “Hence Mystical Cosmetic Over Sunset Landfill” reminds us of the omnipresence of plastic, that hyper-object silently taking over the earth. In “Agents Orange, Yellow, and Red,” Adam Dickinson responds to the results of chemical tests on his blood, while mocking the polarizing politicization of ecological matters. Finally, the violence exerted at the margins of the empire is denounced in Rita Wong’s “sort by day, burn by night,” which exposes the heinous side of technological commodities; and through the lives tragically lost but not forgotten in Martín Espada’s “Floaters.”



WORKS CITED

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D.A. POWELL,¹ *republic*

soon, industry and agriculture converged
and the combustion engine
sowed the dirtclod truck farms green
with onion tops and chicory

mowed the hay, fed the swine and mutton
through belts and chutes

cleared the blue oak and the chaparral
chipping the wood for mulch

back-filled the marshes
replacing buckbean with dent corn

removed the unsavory foliage of quag
made the land into a production
made it *produce*, pistoned and oiled
and forged against its own nature

and—with enterprise—built silos
stockyards, warehouses, processing plants
abattoirs, walk-in refrigerators, canneries, mills
& centers of distribution

it meant something—in spite of machinery—
to say *the country*, to say *apple season*
though what it meant was a kind of nose-thumbing
and a kind of sweetness
as when one says *how quaint*
knowing that a refined listener understands the doubleness

and the leveling of the land, enduing it in sameness, cured malaria
as the standing water in low glades disappeared,
as the muskegs drained
typhoid and yellow fever decreased
even milksickness abated
thanks to the rise of the feeding pen
cattle no longer grazing on white snakeroot

¹ D.A. Powell's most recent collection is *Low Hanging Fruit* from Foundlings Press. He is the recipient of the 2019 John Updike Award from the American Academy of Arts & Letters, as well as awards from the Academy of American Poets and the National Book Critics Circle. He makes his home in San Francisco, California, where he teaches at the University of San Francisco.



vanquished: the germs that bedeviled the rural areas
the rural areas also

vanquished: made monochromatic and mechanized, made suburban
now,
the illnesses we contract are chronic illnesses: dyspepsia, arthritis
heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, asthma
chronic pain, allergies, anxiety, emphysema
diabetes, cirrhosis, lyme disease, aids
chronic fatigue syndrome, malnutrition, morbid obesity
hypertension, cancers of the various kinds: bladder bone eye lymph
mouth ovary thyroid liver colon bileduct lung
breast throat & sundry areas of the brain

we are no better in accounting for death, and no worse: we still die
we carry our uninhabited mortal frames back to the land
cover them in sod, we take the land to the brink
of our dying: it stands watch, dutifully, artfully
enriched with sewer sludge and urea
to green against eternity of green

hocus-pocus: here is a pig in a farrowing crate
eating its own feces
human in its ability to litter inside a cage
to nest, to grow gravid and to throw its young

I know I should be mindful of dangerous analogy:
the pig is only the pig
and we aren't merely the wide-open field
flattened to a space resembling nothing

you want me to tell you the marvels of invention? that we persevere
that the time of flourishing is at hand? I should like to think it

meanwhile, where have I put the notebook on which I was scribbling

it began like:

“the smell of droppings and that narrow country road...”



– with Darwin and Thoreau

An entangled bank. It is interesting to contemplate humid June on the skin like wet feathers in Saran Wrap. Picking the sticky fabric (cotton blends, polyester, vinyl) from my sweaty legs, I have to strip myself like a quick jerk of Band Aid or masking tape from the car seat. Sun block, lotions, creams stew into an oil slicking down arms and chest and forehead. Innumerable little streams overlap and interlace, one with another, exhibiting a sort of hybrid-, shall we say, product. Few phenomena give me more delight than that kind of money in the bank. You and I are clothed with many kinds of trafficking. And the world, oh, the world is rank with early-bird specials twittering amongst the tax cuts; insect repellents of all varieties tizzying up the place, and erratic earthworms thrashing like heavy-metal bangers at the street curbs. It is interesting to contemplate the way sand pours off our eroded slopes like lava, pulled down over the headwaters like balaclavas. Everyone stays focused on the cash flow, which takes the forms of the lacinated and imbricated phalluses of bureaucratic henchmen. Just think of brain coral, of lung fish, of bowels and all kinds of excrements. We contrive a system to transport all our runoff to the treatment plant, where it is treated, well, like shit and excreted. Piped through entangled banks and spit back into the watershed. In heavy rains, volume exceeds capacity and overflows, by design – so interesting to contemplate – into your neighborhood streams, rivers, lakes, aquifers, wells. And not only stormwater but also untreated human and industrial waste and debris, all running blissfully together as one intoxicated toxic stream, transformed, converted, wholly baptized and foaming at the mouth,

² Laura-Gray Street (www.lauragrastreet.com) is author of *Pigment and Fume* and *Shift Work*, and co-editor of *The Eco-poetry Anthology* and *A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia*. A 2022–2025 fellow with the Black Earth Institute, Street is a professor of English, directs the Creative Writing and Visiting Writers Series Program, and edits *Revolute*, the MFA's literary journal, at Randolph College in Lynchburg, Virginia.



like the born again in the parking lot yesterday,
who, bless his heart, collared me when afternoon
had hit its steamiest, when I was unsticking myself
from the car seat. Few phenomena give more delight.
But it's important to stay calm and enjoy the amenities.
There is no end to the heaps of liver, lights, and bowels.
True, what I say is somewhat excrementitious in character,
but isn't it interesting to contemplate the plain liquid idioms
undulating along the ripple marks on the river bottom,
age after age, stratum upon stratum. Even the godless,
and accountants, must recognize the stubborn beauty
of such waves, and how from so simple, so rudimentary
a beginning such hopelessly entangled forms
have been, and are being, brewed.



Craig SANTOS PEREZ,³ *One fish, Two fish, Plastics, Dead fish*

recycling Dr. Seuss

Some fish are sold for sashimi,
some are sold to canneries,
and some are caught by hungry slaves
to feed what wealthy tourists crave!

Farmed fish, Fish sticks, Frankenfish, Collapse

From the Pacific to the Atlantic,
from the Indian to the Arctic,
from here to there,
dead zones are everywhere!

Overfishing, Purse seine, Ghost fishing, Bycatch

This one has a little radiation.
This one has a little mercury.
O me! O my! What schools
of bloated fish float by!

Here are fish that used to spawn, but now the water is too warm

Some are predators and some are prey,
Who will survive? I can't say.
Say! Look at its tumors! One, two, three...
How many tumors do *you* see?

Two fish, One fish, Filet-o-Fish, No fish



³ Craig Santos Perez is an indigenous Pacific Islander from Guam. He is the co-editor of six anthologies and the author of six books of poetry. He is a professor in the English department at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, where he teaches creative writing, eco-poetry, and Pacific literature.

Evelyn REILLY,⁴ *Hence Mystical Cosmetic Over Sunset Landfill*

Answer: Styrofoam deathlessness

Question: How long does it take?

& all the time singing in my throat
little dead Greek lady
in your eternity.saddle
[hat: 59% Acrylic 41% Modacrylic]
[ornamental trim: 24% Polyvinyl 76% Polyamide]

holding a vial
enwrapped

Enter: 8,9,13,14,17-ethynyl-13-methyl-
7,8,9,11,12,14,15,16-octahydro-cyclopenta-diol
(aka environmental sources of hormonal activity
(side effects include tenderness, dizziness

and aberrations of the vision

(please just pass the passout juice now!)

Answer: It is a misconception that materials
biodegrade in a meaningful timeframe

Answer: Thought to be composters landfills
are actually vast mummifiers

of waste
and waste's companions
still stunning all-color

heap-like & manifold.of

foam 1 : a mass of fine bubbles on the surface of a liquid
2 : a light cellular material resulting from the introduction
of gas during manufacture 3 : frothy saliva 4 : the SEA
(lit.)
which can be molded into almost anything
& cousin to.thingsartistic:

⁴ Evelyn Reilly is a New York-based poet, scholar, and environmentalist. Her books include *Styrofoam*, *Apocalypso* and *Echolocation*, all published by Roof Books. Her poetry has appeared in many anthologies and was recently included in the *Feral Atlas: The More-than-Human Anthropocene*, a multimedia compendium of work by scientists, thinkers, poets and artists. She is a member of the Steering Committee of the climate activist group 350NYC.



Kristen J

*A low oven and a watchful eye turns bits
of used plastic meat trays into keychain ornaments.*

Monica T

Soft and satisfying for infant teething if you first freeze.

posted 10/11/2007 at thriftyfun.com

hosted by FPPG the Foodservice Plastic Packaging Group

All this.formation

Anddeformation

& barely able to see sea

*beyond the dense congregation of species successful in environments
where the diversity of plants and animals has been radically diminished*

(for all averred, we had killed the bird [enter albatross

stand-in of choice

hence this mood of moods

this.fucked.flux.lux.crux

(broken piece of lamp garbage)

sunset 400 lux

LCD computer screen 300 lux

full moon .25 lux

starlight .0005 lux

that which fallsoutside.thespectrum

antarctic fowl.cherubim

& dearest docent

holding hands for the briefest moment of shared materiality
among lontermheritage styrene

Gee, this.stationaryparticulatecloud actually improves the sunset.

What the sea brought: poly.flotsam.faux.foam

&Floam®

*a kind of slime with polystyrene beads in it
that can be used to transform almost any object
into a unique work of art*





Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love.
Herman Melville, Moby Dick, XLII, "The Whiteness of the Whale"

Adam DICKINSON,⁵ *AGENTS ORANGE, YELLOW AND RED*

*2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzodioxin (serum): 1.304348 pg/g lipid*⁶

You are either for chlorine
or for the plague.
Right now is the cleanest
we have ever been, and for this
you must love aerial defoliants
or you love communism.
Under the bandage of this one-industry
town closing ranks around staples
of forestry and fish, the wound
is wide-eyed and headstrong.
Through the clearing, freshwater carp
blink past the graves of missionaries
who introduced them to the New World.
Northern rivers are warmed
by the paper mill's piss, which,
like making the world safe for democracy,
slowly leaked into my childhood, yellowing
the lipophilic paperbacks of my
adipose fat. You are for pulp
or for poverty. You respect
the Constitution or you stare
at the ground lost in bankruptcies
for herring gull beaks or blurred
embryos in cormorant colonies.
Every erected media platform reduces
the problem of war to a problem
of tint. During the Orange Revolution,
Viktor Yushchenko was poisoned
by government agents who haywired
his food with dioxin. His face flared
into pages of acne. You are either

⁵ Adam Dickinson is the author of four books of poetry. His latest book, *Anatomic* (Coach House Books), which won the Alanna Bondar Memorial Book Prize from the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada, involves the results of chemical and microbial testing on his body. His work has been nominated for major literary prizes in Canada including the Governor General's Award for Poetry and the Trillium Book Award for Poetry, and has been translated into Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Norwegian, and Polish. He teaches English and Creative Writing at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada.

⁶ Dickinson wrote "Agents Orange, Yellow, and Red" in response to discovering the dioxin 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzodioxin in his blood. The poem reflects on the complex history of the chemical as well as his own potential exposure history.



for the red or the white blood cells,
for the tops of trees, or the bottoms.

I filled seventy-six vials of blood. The centrifuge I used would take only small tubes, which is why I needed so many. My veins were a mess. I took short breaks to walk around the room swinging my hands. By the end of it, I was drawing from both arms and yanking on the tourniquet with my teeth.

My generous assistant was not a trained phlebotomist. We did it during his free time at the university. The university eventually found out what we had done. New policies were put in place.



Rita WONG,⁷ *sort by day, burn by night*

circuit boards
most profitable & most dangerous
if you live in guiyu village,
one of the hundred thousand people who
 “liberate recyclable metals”
into canals & rivers,
turning them into acid sludge,
 swollen with lead,
 barium leachate, mercury bromide.
o keyboard irony: the shiny laptop
 a compilation of lead, aluminum, iron,
 plastics, orchestrated mercury, arsenic, antimony...
sing me the toxic ditty of silica:
 “*Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-masse.*”^{*}
where do metals come from?
where do they return?
bony bodies inhale carcinogenic toner dust,
burn copper-laden wires,
peer at old cathay, cathode ray tubes.
what if your pentium got dumped in guiyu village?
 your garbage, some else’s cancer?
economy of scale
shrinks us all
global whether
here or there
collapses cancer
consumes en-masse



^{*} *Walt Whitman, “One’s Self I Sing”*
Upon watching the video Exporting Harm, <http://www.ban.org/>

⁷ Rita Wong is the author of four books of poetry: *monkeypuzzle* (Press Gang, 1998), *forage* (Nightwood Editions, 2007), *sybil unrest* (Line Books, 2008, with Larissa Lai) and *undercurrent* (Nightwood Editions, 2015). *forage* was the winner of the 2008 Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize and Canada Reads Poetry 2011. Wong is an associate professor in the Critical and Cultural Studies department at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design on the unceded Coast Salish territories also known as Vancouver.



Ok, I'm gonna go ahead and ask...have ya'll ever seen floaters this clean. I'm not trying to be an a\$\$ but I HAVE NEVER SEEN FLOATERS LIKE THIS, could this be another edited photo. We've all seen the dems and liberal parties do some pretty sick things. –Anonymous post, “I’m 10-15” Border Patrol Facebook group

Like a beer bottle thrown into the river by a boy too drunk to cry,
like the shard of a Styrofoam cup drained of coffee brown as the river,
like the plank of a fishing boat broken in half by the river, the dead float.
And the dead have a name: *floaters*, say the men of the Border Patrol,
keeping watch all night by the river, hearts pumping coffee as they say
the word *floaters*, soft as a bubble, hard as a shoe as it nudges the body,
to see if it breathes, to see if it moans, to see if it sits up and speaks.

And the dead have names, a feast day parade of names, names that
dress all in red, names that twirl skirts, names that blow whistles,
names that shake rattles, names that sing in praise of the saints:
Say *Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez*. Say *Angie Valeria Martínez Ávalos*.
See how they rise off the tongue, the calling of bird to bird somewhere
in the trees above our heads, trilling in the dark heart of the leaves.

Say what we know of them now they are dead: Óscar slapped dough
for pizza with oven-blistered fingers. Daughter Valeria sang, banging
a toy guitar. He slipped free of the apron he wore in the blast of the oven,
sold the motorcycle he would kick till it sputtered to life, counted off
pesos for the journey across the river, and the last of his twenty-five
years, and the last of her twenty-three months. There is another name
that beats its wings in the heart of the trees: Say *Tania Vanessa Ávalos*,
Óscar’s wife and Valeria’s mother, the witness stumbling along the river.

Now their names rise off her tongue: Say *Óscar y Valeria*. He swam
from Matamoros across to Brownsville, the girl slung around his neck,
stood her in the weeds on the Texas side of the river, swore to return
with her mother in hand, turning his back as fathers do who later say:
I turned around and she was gone. In the time it takes for a bird to hop
from branch to branch, Valeria jumped in the river after her father.
Maybe he called out her name as he swept her up from the river;
maybe the river drowned out his voice as the water swept them away.

⁸ Martín Espada’s latest book of poems is called *Floaters* (2021), winner of the National Book Award and a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Other collections of poems include *Vivas to Those Who Have Failed* (2016), *The Trouble Ball* (2011), and *Alabanza* (2003). He is the editor of *What Saves Us: Poems of Empathy and Outrage in the Age of Trump* (2019). He has received the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Shelley Memorial Award, the Robert Creeley Award, an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, a Letras Boricuas Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He teaches at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.



Tania called out the names of the saints, but the saints drowned in the stupor of birds in the dark, their cages covered with blankets. The men on patrol would never hear their pleas for asylum, watching for *floaters*, hearts pumping coffee all night on the Texas side of the river.

No one, they say, had ever seen *floaters this clean*: Óscar's black shirt yanked up to the armpits, Valeria's arm slung around her father's neck even after the light left her eyes, both face down in the weeds, back on the Mexican side of the river. *Another edited photo*: See how her head disappears in his shirt, the waterlogged diaper bunched in her pants, the blue of the blue cans. The radio warned us about the *crisis actors* we see at one school shooting after another; the man called Óscar will breathe, sit up, speak, tug the black shirt over his head, shower off the mud and shake hands with the photographer.

Yet, the floaters did not float down the Río Grande like Olympians showing off the backstroke, nor did their souls float up to Dallas, land of rumored jobs and a president shot in the head as he waved from his motorcade. No bubbles rose from their breath in the mud, light as the iridescent circles of soap that would fascinate a two-year old.

And the dead still have names, names that sing in praise of the saints, names that flower in blossoms of white, a cortege of names dressed all in black, trailing the coffins to the cemetery. Carve their names in headlines and gravestones they would never know in the kitchens of this cacophonous world. Enter their names in the book of names. Say *Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez*; say *Angie Valeria Martínez Ávalos*. Bury them in a corner of the cemetery named for the sainted archbishop of the poor, shot in the heart saying mass, bullets bought by the taxes I paid when I worked as a bouncer and fractured my hand forty years ago, and bumper stickers read: *El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam*.

When the last bubble of breath escapes the body, may the men who speak of floaters, who have never seen floaters this clean, float through the clouds to the heavens, where they paddle the air as they wait for the saint who flips through the keys on his ring like a drowsy janitor, till he fingers the key that turns the lock and shuts the gate on their babble-tongued faces, and they plunge back to earth, a shower of hailstones pelting the river, the Mexican side of the river.



