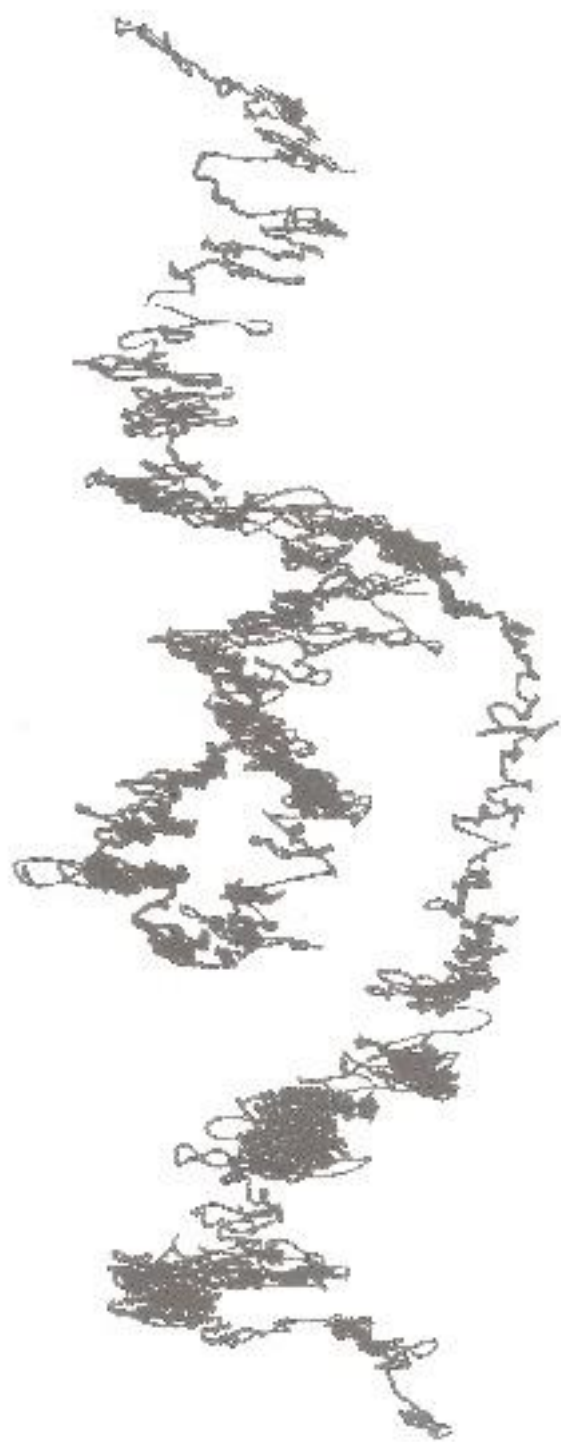


LEAVINGS



Issue 1.5



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whale doctor
Kip Shanks

a blue whale
circles the world
trade center like always.
porpoises are mammals,
i always forget.
they are the only
other mammal
who can modulate
their breathing. i wonder
if like us they hold
breath, pretending
they haven't seen
lockdown before.
when eugene's dick is in me
it's like shoving
your hand deep into
the third eye of
stephen malkmus and
shaking hands with
his psyche. it's almost
like you'll never
wait in line again.
there *is* something
about breathing there. anyway,
i wonder what
the parking lots
are up to? i only want
to be someplace
where i forget
to modulate
until grocery lists,
sunday, pregnant with
the hours of garage
lawn chair sitting.
when eugene's dick
is in me i get
to forget about
most things
for a while.
it's very different
to get swallowed
by a whale with teeth
than by one without,



the radio says
in the summer.
when i was five
i wanted to be
a whale doctor. now
i know i have my own
expanse of belly
to die in. i only want
to write blue
or dream of writing blue
the way photos on film
recall one ocean
or another.
i too can recall vast
of not enoughness.
like the night
we drove right into
the drunk driving
checkpoint after
white wine
and coke at stevie's.
while old tv's burned
kitty litter broken glass
irish dive bar pastorals.
how we hid under blankets
in the back seat
the way we learned
to sneak into theme parks.
i remember it was july.
i remember the fireworks
we pressed like flowers
between old receipts.
i remember how
during this we sang.



Applying Psalms 121 to a Gentile Samuel Adeyemi

Some years ago, I began shredding
my tongue, crumbling the chapel

once built in my mouth. I retired
my eyes watching the hills—they sang,

help will somebody water down, but daily
I died of thirst. Once, I tried to fetch God

with language; my voice—white ink
stitching white paper. There were no

angels to colour my ache. Perhaps
I'm oblivious to the dialect of heaven,

I gave God a wound to heal & he placed
a ribbon around the bleed. As if to say,

*look at your blood, pray & it will blue into
a stream*. But I do not know what to

weave from faith. Prayer reminds me
what absence tethers me from,

when I fold myself to kneel as a saint,
a lily wilts before my teeth. As if to say,

*crawl to your mother's feet & confess your
unbelief*. How do I say I am a church bell

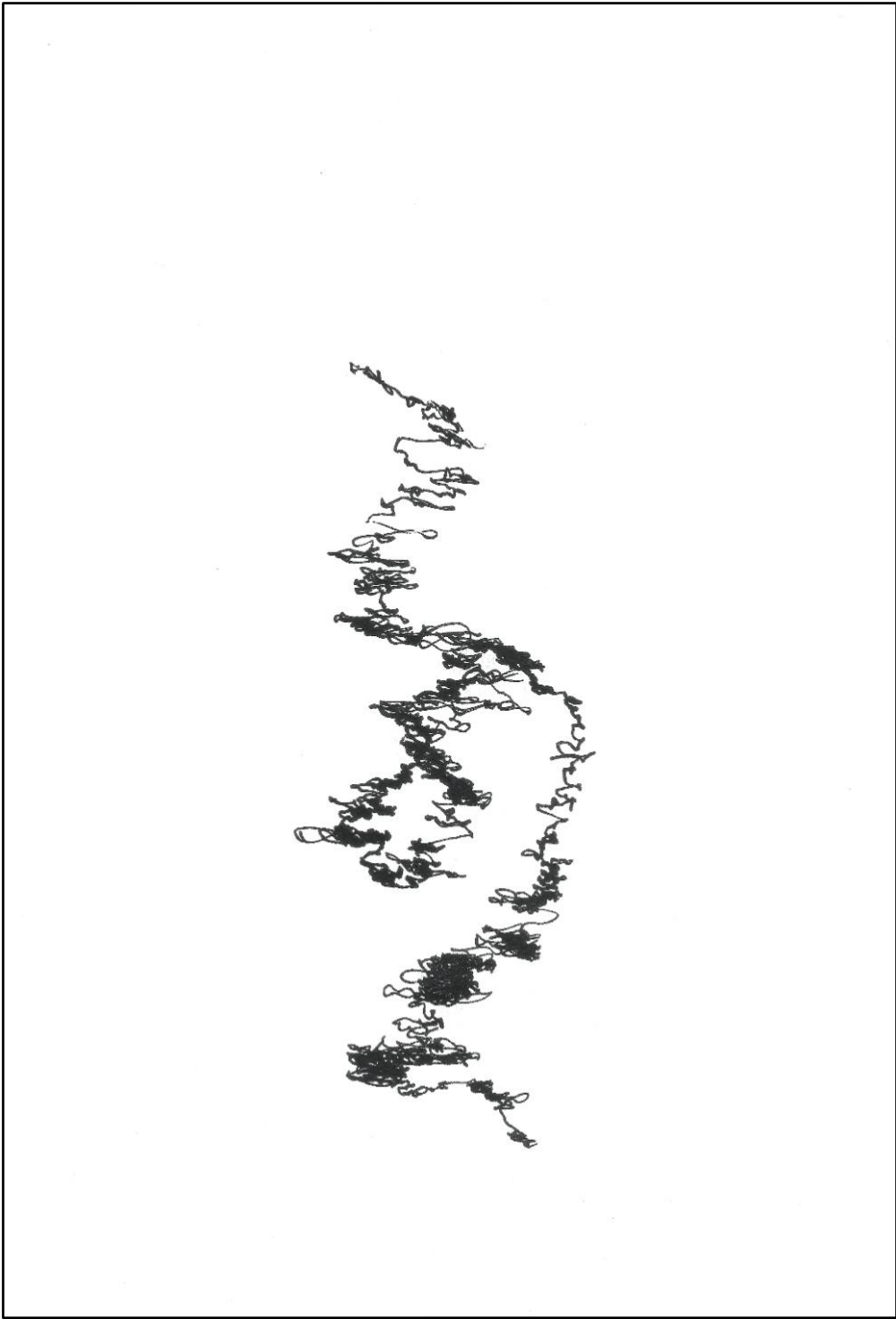
swaying without its tongue? Her heart—
a holy book my chaos must not set on fire.



Artist Statement

Alex Furtado

'Paths, Pulses' are spread densely between Canada's two largest economic centres, along the railroads that originally settled and unsettled folks. Aesthetically the work drafts associations with paths, roots, the effect that moving water has on land, the beat of one's heart, and wounds left on the surface of one's skin. These visual gestures speak to the experience of migration, settlement, and the land and people that are altered through both movement and stillness. At the same time, the multiple unique paths created by the technique are in argument with the singular path that I am carried across - the one that stretches across divisions of land and people and has placed itself over the aforementioned deviations in accepted cartographic records. The submitted work is in part of a series of immersive-drawings that present cartographic forms created by the influence of factors outside of my control. I sit on the train and let my hand be moved across the page over the course of the journey, allowing all external forces to help determine the result. The undulations of land and air, forces of gravity, train operator's technique, condition of the machine and its tracks, vibrations from the steps of those passing by, and the hand of the recorder are all present in the work. By allowing the recording body to be swayed as indifferently as is possible without removal I am able to capture the tension between myself, the land, and the machines that influence my navigation of these spheres. This presents anything but a straight line between two points nor a smooth bounding around any single discernible form.



Alex Furtado

Paths, Pulses



The Sound of Ribs Is /
Alina Stefanescu

The last time I saw your coffin, I ticked like those
crickets we counted, our backs
pressed, sweating invocations against hot cement.
My daughter's voice is solid aluminum, the hue of
fork before swallowing
entire streets choired by kudzu.
Beaded with green plastic bins.
You left me pinestraw, Cowboy
Junkies, rotting plums, the taste of terror
going metal in a mouth.
The first row of breaths after rain
Dying young, disappearing like leaves from a child's mind

/ A Wren's Nest

The wry village of
my mama's laughter:
it's ribbed little cage.

And rumor twigged
in the wren's reveille.
Ripped from the risk

of running away
is a way of saying
home is sloped

abruptly, a riddle
she left us, a ramp
into ruined tree

maps. Where is
our family. Set the
wrench near

the fulcrum. Tie
the fork to the
dish. The last

one who leaves
is a phantom.
Whose is this



sound, scherzo
of ribs. And the re-
past, this. Abyss.



Pat Tompkins

Ambiguity



Trial by Combat

Shannon Frost Greenstein

God had a black eye.

Becca knew she should feel proud of that. She had gotten in one good shot; she had made God reel.

But she was dizzy, and the air was burning in her lungs, and the acid was burning in her muscles, and she couldn't feel much of anything beyond the pain.

Vaguely, in some corner of her consciousness, she heard the ding of a bell.

“Corners!” barked the ref.

Becca trudged over to Will, who mopped up her blood and rubbed her shoulders and gave her sips of water to spit in a bucket like a sommelier.

An ethereal white noise was competing with the sound of Will's frantic coaching; the chorus of infinite voices in harmony, drifting from behind the shimmering bars of the massive gate erected beyond the ring, locked tight. It was a cacophony of laughter and excitement and delight and the barking of dogs whose owners have just come home, and a flash of light broke through the haze of Becca's agony as she remembered what it felt like to be happy.

She leaned back against the ropes and closed her eyes, feeling the rough fibers biting into the flesh of her shoulder blades.

“Becca!”

“What?!” she snapped without opening her eyes.

“Don't give up,” Will demanded urgently. “You're so close.”

“I'm losing,” Becca said through gritted teeth, and then her mouthpiece was in place and the chime of the bell echoed and she stopped thinking as she pushed herself off the ropes to her feet.

God came out swinging, and Becca attempted to dance out of His reach. But she was tired, and He was strong, and she found herself on the floor with her ears ringing before she even felt the right hook.

“One...,” she heard the referee begin. “Two.”

Vaguely, she wondered if she was dying. She wondered, when the ref reached 10, if it would all be over at last; she wondered if she would finally know absolution.

She wondered if Gideon had hurt this badly at the end.



Becca heard, above her own panting, above the lonely sound of blood rushing past her ears, the soothing exaltations echoing from beyond the iridescent gate. They promised peace and sleep and, above all, a respite from her omnipresent grief. They promised to fill the gaping hole in her soul. .

“Three...four...”

“Get up!”

Will’s distant voice suddenly shattered the pleasant numbness drifting through her as she waited for the ten-count to end.

“Get up, Becca!”

Still lying prone, Becca turned her head to look at him, safe in her corner. She felt a sharp pang of resentment at his command, at his glowing good health, at even his unconditional support, because none of that was going to make her feel less broken. None of that would bring her baby back.

“...five...”

“You can do it! This is your chance!”

Bleary-eyed, Becca struggled to align the multiple versions of Will currently dancing at the periphery of her vision. Chance? She knew there was something significant – some reason she was entered in this fight – but her head was throbbing and the thread of this thought was dangling out of reach.

“He hurt you, Becca! He didn’t care!” Will was shouting, and the referee was counting, and sound waves of pure joy were drifting from behind the glowing gates, and it was all too much to process at once.

“...six...seven...”

And then, through the roiling din in which she was drowning, Becca heard a tiny peal of laughter. She heard a single voice, from tiny vocal cords, from a stranger. It was a voice she should not have recognized, because she had never before heard it flit through the air; he had died before he could take a breath.

“Gideon?” she whispered.

“...eight...”

“Get *up*, Becca, keep fighting!”

With Will’s voice in her ears and Gideon’s laughter in her heart, the fuel her empty body so desperately needed, Becca struggled to her feet. She stood, swaying, while the ref looked at her



pupils and dark clouds – heavy with tears – hung in the sky, and God presided over it all, a smug look on His all-knowing face.

“Do you want to continue?” the referee questioned, and Becca considered.

She considered Will, still in her corner, always in her corner, sharing her grief.

She considered Gideon, on the other side of those lustrous bars, laughing.

She considered God, always her motivation, always her moral compass, through youth group and Divinity school and her work as a Pastor.

She considered, and she made her decision, and she took a deep breath, and she spoke to the referee.

“I want to continue.”

The ref steadied her, took a step back, nodded at God. Becca looked in His face and saw everything; the oceans and viruses and the Great Wall and sea horses and fire and her congregation and her infant son.

With a second wind, she rushed at Him with gloves raised. He was nimble and omnipotent, but she was mourning and filled with rage; women scorned have reason to rise again.

“This is for taking my son,” she thought, jabbing God in the chest. “This is for making me infertile afterwards.”

God was landing punches, too; through her anger, Becca could sense ribs breaking and flesh tearing and her nose bleeding again. With each of God’s blows, tectonic plates shifted and tsunamis crashed and entire galaxies were born, but she stayed upright.

“This is for calling me to you and then abandoning me,” she shouted silently in her mind, landing a mean left-hook against God’s chin. “This is for leaving me in the dark.”

Becca fought. She punched and weaved and fell and got up and punched again, pouring out her desperation, her pain, her resentment at being abandoned and her fury at God for denying her any chance at motherhood.

Seconds ticked by, but time had no meaning. Only Gideon’s laughter had meaning, all the way on the other side of the gate, and it meant that her crisis of faith was warranted; it meant her fury was justified.

The bell again, and the match was suddenly over, and Becca found herself slumped on the stool in her corner with no recollection of how she got there. She felt strangely empty, or flat; like she’d lost a whole dimension.

“What happened?” she asked Will dully.

“It’s a technical draw.”



A draw. A draw.

Becca knew she should have an opinion about that; she knew she should be elated or devastated or mildly annoyed or anything, really, except indifferent. But the only thing she wanted was to hear Gideon's voice again, and the harmony from beyond the gate had ceased; she heard only the heavy silence that is left in the wake of hope when it dashes by.

Will was forcing water between her lips, and Becca let it dribble absentmindedly from her mouth and down her throat. She had no idea what was supposed to happen next; she had never felt so alone.

"Fighters!" invited the ref, standing in the center of the ring. He extended one arm to Becca and one arm to God; they would share this victory and this loss.

God smiled, and it was beautiful. Becca could barely stand the beauty, like she could barely stand the joy when she read the pregnancy test all those months ago, like she could barely stand life without a child. Tears fell from her eyes, and she could not inhale for the briefest of moments.

Feeling like she was moving underwater, Becca rose to her feet and met God in the center of the ring. She stared at His black eye, wishing she had done more damage.

The ref gripped her wrist in one hand and God's in the other, raising them up, acknowledging each as both victor and loser. The match had been futile; Becca had no more answers than she had had before.

She sighed, defeated; somehow, she had still lost.

After a moment, God benevolently took back His hand, stepped around the referee, pivoted to face Becca head-on. She stared in His eyes and lost herself; then she lost everything else.

God reached out slowly, as if she were a cat He didn't want to spook, and placed his palm upon the crown of her skull.

"You are loved."

She didn't hear the words in her ears, but rather in her capillaries; in her carotid artery and her toenails and the pulse of blood in her wrist.

"You are exactly who you need to be."

She felt warmth flow through her aching joints, a dopamine rush that soothed her overtaxed nervous system. Gideon appeared in her mind's eye, as he had been in his sonogram; before he had been hers, when he still belonged to God.

He was never yours, spoke her inner monologue, the predominant voice in Becca's head ever since she lost her faith; the voice that urged her to sin and destruction, the voice that had replaced God.



“I am. I am here.”

You are forsaken, her inner monologue continued. *You are alone*.

Becca clamped her hands over her ears to block out the competing forces echoing through her temporal lobe. She felt close to madness; or, at least, felt as overwhelmed as she had been in the dark weeks after Gideon’s funeral, when sunlight felt no different than starlight and the Bishop suggested she stand down from the pulpit for a while and she surrendered the ability to love.

“I have always been with you.”

At that, all noise ceased and the quiet became a sound of its own.

God kissed her gently on the forehead; then He walked away, unlacing his gloves and untaping his hands, pausing to wait as the opalescent gate swung outward, vanishing from sight as it closed behind Him once again. The latch caught, and the echo of the lock rang out like a gunshot.

Becca flinched at the sound.

“Becca?”

Will was calling her tentatively from beyond the ring, looking as if he feared her reaction; it was a look he had been wearing often, lately, as her hormones regulated and her postpartum depression increased and she grew restless without her congregation to lead.

She exhaled, exploring the new flatness inside her chest and stomach and fingertips, the new sense of being *emptied*. Becca felt, deep within her fundamental self, the scars of her grief; they were ugly, and permanent, and as much a part of her as Gideon had been.

But she also felt grief’s absence.

The cavernous void now within her soul sang out, begging for sustenance like a hungry infant. Her intuition, numb all this time, awakened with a jolt; her brain, sludgy with atrophy, tried to start spinning.

Becca gazed at her husband measuringly; she walked slowly back into her corner where he waited.

“I’m ok,” she answered, and it wasn’t totally a lie.



Pat Tompkins

Rural Life



Revival

Nicole McCaffety

I sit at a rest stop in Texas,
Nestled on the knees of tree roots—

My grandmother spat my mother

Across the river & that familiar water hums
In my skin. Her heart is a gentle

devil chewing on my shoulder.

I listen to the grating of 18 wheelers
Sliding to a stop. My great uncle told me of pressing

Himself under a floorboard, against the heated metal of the van.
That it still hissed in his chest. He starved himself

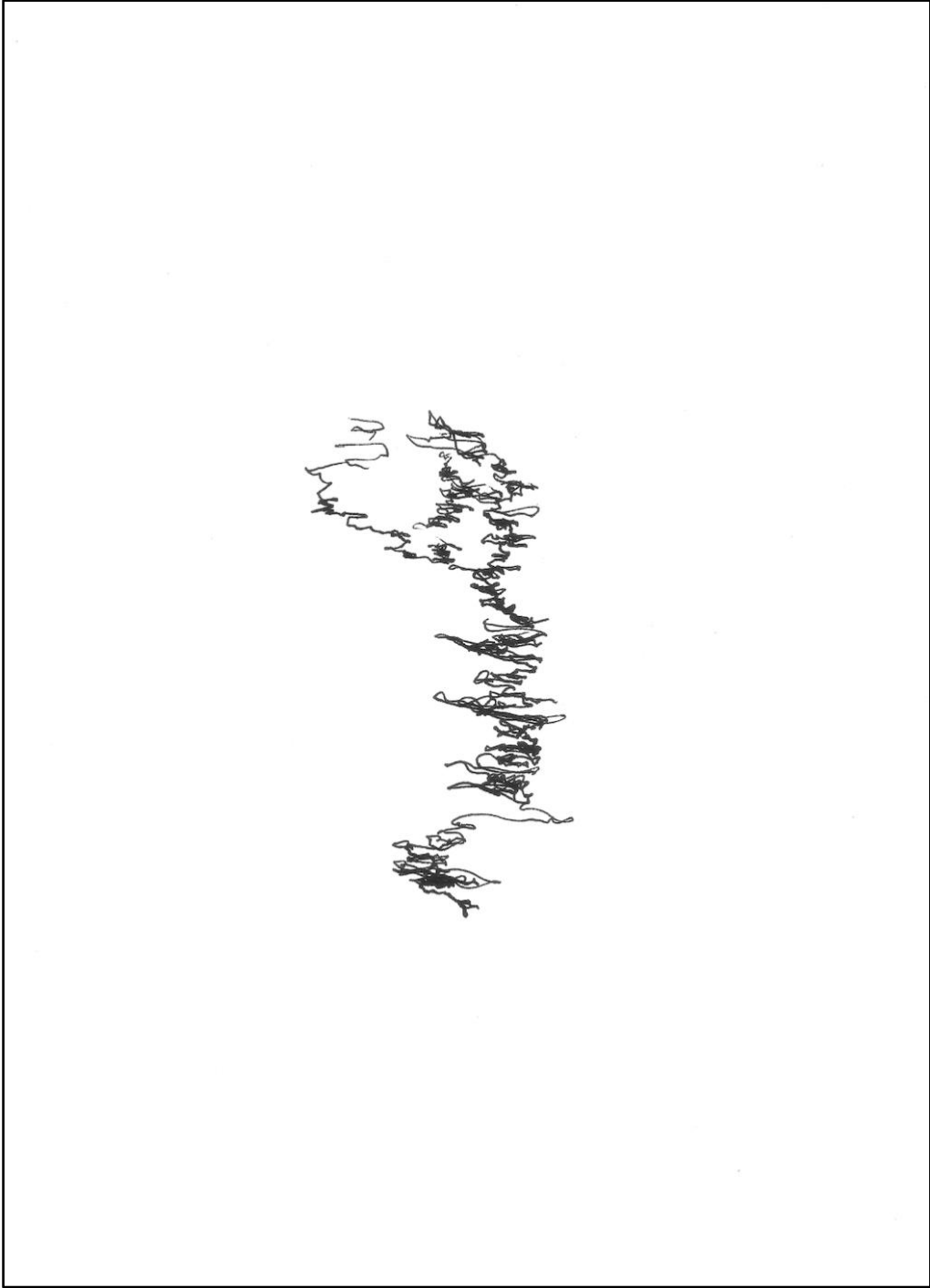
From handcuffs, his thumb
Disfigured from being dislocated againagainagain.

Do we all go alone? Is that the way we share
The border?
My hands are soft, it is my heels that are hard.

While I kneel in the dirt, my grandmother promises
Te reconozco.

Please, would you listen to the way the wind
Sings in my hair?
The same as the grass

between us.



Alex Furtado

Paths, Pulses



boyying (v. 3)

Adedayo Agarau

halleluyah, the boys cried from inside the church, & i was one of them.
centuries to come, a group of boys will pick five stones & bring down a bird
or burn a house or talk the demon out of their pockets. years ago, a packet of boys
went wild in a park & broke someone's side mirror, a man forgetting how young & wild
he once was called the police. now that is the beauty of forgetting your own iniquities.
i tried to drown myself in my father's bath-tub, made a jordan out of his inheritance.
this is because i got grief the size of a hand. watch the way it takes the shape of a fist.
i dreamt that something beat me out of sleep, & i wake up with a skin full of scars
a long line of amens made from cane-shapes. that morning, i broke the mirror.
i wrote a poem sometime & said that grief has no gender. but now i understand
that boy grief is the way the ground swallows a city all at once. why god created man
was because he was lonely. the purest grief is found in a lonely palm. god knew what
he did when he plucked eve out of a crumbling bone. i hit my head against the window glass
as a form of protest against creation. i hear the angels shiver, *we didn't beg to be angels. we
want to make mistakes & call it missed steps. we want to be children in someone's house & wingless
unable to be everywhere.* it's 6.33 am the morning bird is knocking on my window, & my eyes
forsake the gift of darkness, the magic of unknowing. the morning takes me, into a new mouth
full of wrongdoings. again, *my father says you are just a boy like you are just mis-born.*



Wind Patterns
Nica Giromini

Mornings I
take my way
down the bend
to worn-down
stones in a
cellar hole.
One step before
another, is that
not forward?

Of course, the
lows here are
wet with what
was rain. I know
I backtracked
to the point
where I lost what
I'm looking for
in the sound
of the field and

hearing it, I
stop in. I put my
nose in
ground. Flush
to the edge
of that hole
to hide from
wind patter
that is returning.

Have I left it
out? I thought of
a way how:
shadows of a
few birds fly
off across this
old field's face.
Never mind.
That's not flight.



Afterword

Alexandra Davies

I prefer the second given definition of *micro*, “a minute in scope or capability,” in relationship to *Leavings* new issue. Yes, shorter in duration, but the strength of its contents is evident piece after piece. These nine emerging artists are a formidable force that push the boundaries of prose, poetry, and art, especially now, during a pandemic. We, at *Leavings*, are proud to bring these artists to the forefront, and we aim to deliver more exceptional work from creators around the world as we proceed forward.

Our new issue begins Kip Shanks’s poem, “whale doctor,” a quick paced song that focuses on desire and nostalgia during the lockdown so many of us are still experiencing. The single strophe of Shanks’s poem pulls us in and reimagines the mundane. When you haven’t left your house in nearly ten months, the question “i wonder what/ the parking lots/ are up to?” feels normal. Our micro issue ends with Nica Giromini’s “Wind Patterns.” The wind and shadows are free to go, but his feelings of human stagnation persist. Both of these poems frame the idea that best represents this issue: the desire to escape the states we find ourselves in, both physically and emotionally.

In Adedayo Agarua’s “*boyying* (v. 3),” a snapshot of grief and the desire to leave the body behind, the poet writes “i tried to drown myself in my father’s bathtub, made a jordan out of his inheritance. / this is because i got grief the size of a hand. watch the way it takes the shape of a fist.” Nicole McCaffety’s “Revival” places us on the border between the U.S. and Mexico, watching 18 wheelers fly by. Then there is Alina Stefanescu’s “The Sound of Ribs Is // A Wren’s Nest” which carries us between the pains of abandonment in motherhood and childhood. Samuel Adeyemi’s “Applying Psalms 121 to a Gentile,” a prayer itself which marks the chaos that moves within ourselves, and an awareness of the potential damage that chaos can do to others. The notions set forth in Adeyemi’s poem are mirrored by the notions set forth in Shannon Frost Greenstein’s short story, “Trial by Combat,” a feminist undertaking and exploration of faith, and the internal struggle that so often results from faith.

I see the selected art in our micro issue focusing on “getting out.” We’ve included two of Alex Furtado’s “Paths, Pulses,” a map-like structure of weaving lines that communicate the land’s story of migration and settlement in Canada. Pat Tompkins’ photography invites us outside and juxtaposes the empty landscape with ominous signage. But where is the aggressive bull, where is the waste water? Well, you’ll have to seek it out yourself—that is, if you’re brave enough.



Contributors

Kip Shanks a poet from New Jersey, is currently an M.F.A candidate in poetry at the University of South Carolina. Their writing can be found in *Erase the Patriarchy* (University of Hell Press), *Divine Feminist Anthology* (Get Fresh Books, Forthcoming), *VICE*, and various NJ zines. In another life, they'd be a skywriting pilot, getting paid to draw hearts in the sky. You can find them on Instagram @kipshanks.

Samuel A. Adeyemi is a young writer from Nigeria. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Palette Poetry*, *Frontier Poetry*, *580 Split*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *The Shore*, *Jalada*, and elsewhere. When he is not writing, he enjoys watching anime and listening to a variety of music. You may reach him on Twitter and Instagram @samuelpoetry.

Alexander Da Costa-Furtado is a Toronto-based transdisciplinary artist and archivist. Their art practice engages notions of evidence and the act of record creation to examine issues of memory, translation, and preservation.

Alina Stefanescu was born in Romania and lives in Birmingham, Alabama with her partner and several intense mammals. Her writing can be found in diverse journals, including *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *FLOCK*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Virga*, *Whale Road Review*, and others. She serves as Poetry Editor for *Pidgeonholes*, Poetry Editor for *Random Sample Review*, Poetry Reviewer for *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, and Co-Director of PEN America's Birmingham Chapter. She was nominated for 5 Pushcart Prizes by various journals in 2019. A finalist for the 2019 Kurt Brown AWP Prize, Alina won the 2019 River Heron Poetry Prize. She still can't believe (or deserve) any of this. More online at www.alinastefanescuwriter.com.

Pat Tompkins is an editor in northern California. Her photos have appeared in *New Southern Fugitives*, *Third Wednesday*, *Existere*, and other publications.

Shannon Frost Greenstein (she/her) resides in Philadelphia with her children, soulmate, and cats. She is the author of "Pray for Us Sinners," a collection of fiction from Alien Buddha Press, and "More.," a poetry collection by Wild Pressed Books. Shannon is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, a Contributing Editor for *Barren Magazine*, and a former Ph.D. candidate in Continental Philosophy. Her work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Pithead Chapel*, *X-R-A-Y Lit Mag*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Rathalla Review*, and elsewhere. Follow Shannon at shannonfrostgreenstein.com or on Twitter at @ShannonFrostGre.

Nicole (Niky) McCaffety is a poet currently living and writing in Columbia, South Carolina.

Adedayo Agarau is the third-place winner of the Frontier Industry Prize, 2020. His chapbook, *Origin of Names*, was selected by Chris Abani and Kwame Dawes for New Generation African Poet (African Poetry Book Fund), 2020. He is the author of *The Arrival of Rain* chapbook. His works have appeared in *Agbowo*, *Frontier Poetry*, *Glass*, *Perhappened*, and elsewhere. Adedayo curated and edited *Memento: An Anthology of Contemporary Nigerian Poetry*. He is an Editor at



IceFloe and Assistant Editor at *Animal Heart Press*. Adedayo is a member of the Unserious Collective. You can find him on Twitter @adedayo_agarau or agarauadedayo.com.

Nica Giromini lives and teaches in Iowa City, Iowa, where he received his MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His work has appeared in the Colorado Review and the Harvard Advocate.