

selected work

published poems
by nat raum

a chainsaw whirrs through february air

First published in Identity Theory

and once again, i think of Nex Benedict.
i try to imagine the bathroom—green walls,
tiles bloodied. imagine the echoes of a ruckus
like the wails of chains through wood
in a foggy forest. imagine a world
where every trans person who deserves
better—which is to say, all of us—
is anointed with moondust and a crown
of violets, revered in the eyes of all
that surround us. the mechanical whining
fades to tv static and tinnitus. the only thing
more unnatural than the sound of treefelling
is the urge to kill a child for the very light
they radiate from tiny fingertips.

how to remember the recipe

First published in Gone Lawn

forget the way the sun hangs in the south half of the sky and floods your grandmother's kitchen with morning light. forget the delftblue tile backsplash, sporadically scattered with figures at play. ignore the turkey bacon you requested; ignore the cardinal-red cushions, embroidered in gold, padding the table's bench seats. for this recipe, all you need to remember is the crunch of seared potato cooked in butter, salted and peppered to taste. be patient—achieving that type of crunch takes longer than you realized. as you peel the potatoes, forget how you used to sleep in until breakfast magically appeared on the table. forget nights spent mixing potions out of hotel shampoo and toothpaste, afternoons digging through the box of crayons to find the well-used shocking pink one. dice the potatoes and pay no mind to the clock. place the potato cubes in the pan—hear how they sizzle when melted butter and hot metal find their raw edges. meditate to the sound of simmering. cook until crispy.

to a home on god's celestial shore

After Albert Brumley; first published in ballast

creaky honda civic engine groans its way
through the bottom of the valley as the sun
sets through tornadocoded clouds, bathing
the evening in orangedusts and ambermists
as i rocket over knolls, huckleberry vapor
swirling my lips as serpents would, coiling
to oblivion. i swear i was born to feel asphalt
through four rubber rings while they grip
the road and all of its ridges, to sing *i'll fly away*
oh glory against the rippling of air through
the window as i approach the highway,
starkfluorescent under streetlamps until
there is nothing but dark. have i mentioned
that headlights are getting too goddamn bright
these days, that i haven't always had an astigmatism
but i think i got covid once, before we knew
it was covid? and now that thing i read about
the virus and human retinas is etched into me
like the time i found out that a plastic straw,
at just the right angle and velocity in a car crash,
can bore its way through the roof of an un
suspecting mouth. some things just ruin you
like that. i was naked when i saw my first cock
roach and i've never showered the same.
and when the rain starts, i will gently depress
my brakes and let the flow of traffic take me
over—i still recall skids on exit ramps full
of puddling potholes when i thought
i could drive like a god in the rain.

i explain animal crossing to my lover

First published in Exacting Clam

a dog runs the town hall and a raccoon
owns the general store. hedgehog sisters

dictate fashion trends; a pigeon pours you
your daily café au lait. a blue squirrel
tells you his furniture is just like him,
only softer, and you understand

completely. a macaroni penguin sends
you a gift in the mail and you nearly cry,

overcome by the kindness you find
so rare in your day to day. your neighbors
all ask if you are okay when you spend
too long playing. your baseline was never

okay. you barely remember the game
without strife to surround you. in fact,

the island may be a metaphor for your fervent
desire to hear a little more waves crashing
on perfect powder-sands, a little less grief
in your heart. you have learned

to shift shapes in ways that would break
other people's bones; to say you start

up system, travel via biplane to remote
oceanside getaway, and pass several hours
in a state you could only describe
as sedated—to say you do it all

as a way to unwind would still be,
to you, putting it lightly.

eternal return as organizing an attaché case full of weapons

After Resident Evil 4; first published in Poet Lore

never simple, never realistic.
never enough room for black bass (L).
never space for anything but golden
chicken eggs, green herb stacked
on top of red herb on top of yellow.
never enough pesetas to upgrade
firepower, only rate of fire. never
associated this with memory
until now, when i am always arranging
this briefcase, certain i can't possibly
need all of these flash grenades.

poem in which you become the “you”

First published in HAD

- I. i am
 - A. writing
 - 1. an ars poetica
 - a) in which i bury you,
 - b) in which i close the widest point of the wound myself,
 - 2. a farewell.
 - B. still crying
 - 1. in my car sometimes.
 - 2. for your specter.
- II. the thing is
 - A. i never saw your talons
 - 1. until it was too late,
 - 2. and now that’s all i can see.
 - 3. and maybe they didn’t exist,
 - a) but then
 - (1) why am i bleeding?
 - B. neither of us are blameless.
- III. we both
 - A. feel alone sometimes,
 - B. cache scars in favor of so-called selflessness.
 - 1. what good does that do anyone?
 - a) at least
 - (1) i explode instead of rot.
 - (2) there are still pieces of me in the end.
- IV. you flit
 - A. between
 - 1. lover and enemy,
 - 2. half-dead, half-alive.
- V. i dig
 - A. a shallow grave,
 - 1. still in a sort of denial.
 - B. for something that still feels like you.
 - 1. i end up
 - a) elbow-deep,
 - b) empty-handed.

better off dead

First published in Jarnal

because you see, i will always mourn
you in the most morose fashion,

regardless of breaths still drawn thru

your restless lungs. i will grieve
you in unhopped farmhouse saisons

and letters left off the end of words,

every autumn sunday when tyrian
purples take the field, every oyster

shucked and swallowed. i do not

want to feel the same ache as passing
abby's funeral chapel each time i see

your front door fly by on my drive

home, locked to me; do not remind me
that everything is temporary but death.

iris von everec blacks out

First published in Poetry Online

The Nowhere Inn, Novigrad

sodden triple mead is honeyed
 in the sense that it's sweet underneath
 the teeth that ravage my most anxious
 preoccupations pulling them
like its own crooked canines
 from wearied gums and now i am
 debutante belle of a ball we can't
 afford anymore i sold my last
canvas for this round and the next
 one and the next one i need to get
 to novigrad more they love me
 in novigrad where spirit flows
purer than water most of the time
 where everyone knows the name
signed to my paintings but nobody
 tethers moniker to face unburden
 me from my humanly aches
 stacked tall in the shadows
of the cellar untie me from
 whichever version of ecstasy
 this life aspires to be sold
on a promise and backed only
 by creatures more feeble than the salesman

self-portrait as baltimore

First published in Stanchion

because listen, i have been vilified
too long for everything i am and also
everything i'm not. i am a creature
of habit, papas bravas or cheesy tots
or any other number of meals
which have retired from the city
but live forever in the memory
of my taste buds. i am chronically
all talk and impulsive actions.
of course i went to the charles
to get my copy of the *beat* tonight
and of course i went to tapas after
and of course i drove home with bass
from "walla walla" rattling my civic
because i can only stand noise
when i am its originator. i have never
existed as neatly in any block of baltimore
as now, blurry memories of midtown
ligatured with southeast scenes, the kind
of cinematic crispness i once looked too
closely at, thought *surely this cannot
be real*. i have never felt this energy
outside the city—it simmers down
eutaw street to just above camden
yards and hangs a left. it dissipates
in garden suburbs that wouldn't claim
us, goblins and rats of the night
scavenging for new parts of ourselves,
personality traits. my therapist says
we have a particular survivalism here—
it is not lost on me, the comparison.

pride as a corner bar

First published in Baltimore Beat

much like my poetry, i swear am queer
by accident, backed into its corner

by boys with playground mentalities,
but this isn't a poem about them.

my chest swells when chosen family
from philadelphia looks around

brewer's art basement, crowds into little
red room at club charles and thanks

me for bringing them there. in los angeles,
someone tells me the beauty of baltimore

is that someone's corner bar is some bar
that someone else has never heard of,

and vice versa. i was still straight
when i lived on john street, barely bi

when i moved north to remington.
i was pin-straight the night the hippo

closed, but i was there—because
who among us didn't start a staunch ally,

an impassioned plea on behalf of communities
i'll later wish i'd been part of sooner? now

genderless, i find myself proud, but still
learning how we all weave together,

perennially early to the party but late
to the game. how comforting to find

in time: the first rule of queerness is to dissolve

all rules, to be bell hooks' *self that is at odds*,

inventing, thriving, living. i don't want
a life without that anymore—and that means

i am okay that there are people who do not
know my corner bar for all of the ways

its pours and people have shaped the self
with which i sleep so soundly.