



# ZENIADA

WINTER 2023



# ZENIADA

POETRY & ART MAGAZINE

Johns Hopkins University

**ZENIADA** seeks poetry that TALKS HARD and art that CURLS  
the floorboards like smoke billowing from the mouth of a small  
god and SMACKS like 5 gum and a mean girl's SLAP.

Cover art: Plein Air by Lio Chan.

# WINTER 2023

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## nonhuman residents of the Skinner Museum

At first, I want to be  
the birds, trapped murdered beauties  
staring at an invisible wall  
close enough to touch, imagining flight-

but I am not the birds, so I want  
to be the tusked skull beside them,  
someone's unidentifiable  
head robbed of hunger for their bodies.

At a different angle, I can place  
a bird between the mottled teeth.  
Imagine the stillness, the lack  
of breaking bone.

A crucial mystery that I, skull,  
could have teeth so vital  
in a wide and steady jaw, and still  
be scrubbed clean of skin,

set my face at rest alone among  
the collected quiet trembling of birds  
and rocks and a thousand unnamed objects.  
That our forms hum with magic.

I, human, stand in the paralyzed  
resonance of stopped hearts  
and am both bone and quivering.  
I document imperatives in my blood:

To clutch the claustrophobic need  
to fly into a window and fall down dead,  
injuries internal, plumage undefiled.  
like a well-earned coat of moss.

The spotted sandpiper feels my eyes  
on his back and pretends to live.  
His beak never closes around the false stone  
on which he fixes his attention,  
hoping in its dull plastic light  
to divine a future.

*JULIA MOSER*



# Seductress Dress

*after Renee Stout*

i'm        huh!  
      simply  
that bitch who's  
splendid, sexy,  
squishy and  
sweet.

i love bubblegum pink seams but  
he paramour'd up with hoes & harlots,  
so my skin imitates the deep Red Sea.  
He gotta mend this: come here & open wide,  
      swallow my areolas, aromas,  
ass—this dress is a byproduct of one love, me.  
so eat my liquid mixture of life and femininity,  
      die.

be seduced        shuteye  
      feel the spirit;  
choke. let ur body  
fold into GDK<sup>1</sup>  
      fingers.  
      be a <3  
      that's  
      love loc'd  
dirtied by none w/  
      bless'd cowries  
bloodshot red tulle—  
shimmering        in the sun

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<sup>1</sup> Chicago Gang.

## Clingy

The stinging bite of regret whets my shame and the ruddy pink blush  
Awash my cheeks. Buttermilk curlicue receiver trills trills but I refuse to answer,  
Screening the howling yowling jowls of stunted memories that taunt me. I'm besotted  
With my recollections, one day fearing they'll turn to shapeless nameless speechless blobs that I'll  
pretend to have kept. I primp and fluff them like a Miss America's do'  
Lovingly groomed whenever my throat is overgrown with the thorns and brambles and brush of Grief's  
bosom. My mother is away taming the wolves, reaching for an answer as she gives us the Excess of a  
dismembered love. I'd rather stay here with you than reach enlightenment.  
Can we please keep making the same mistakes together? Mutilated and gnarled,  
The hope I left in that house is impassioned. I'll moon over it and be charmed once again, because this  
time feels different. These ruptures of girlhood, moments in the clouds,  
Smearred with the bloody etching of my broken fingernails.

LILY BOUCHER



LIO CHAN, PLEIN AIR

## What's Easier

At the nail salon, the women  
pad around in paper sandals,

manicured Midases waving the gel  
and glittered moods they picked

off the shelves. Under blue light,  
my mother's hands harden into

pink petals. How happy I am  
to carry over to her the new

Marie Claire and a Dixie cup  
of juice, rifle through her tote for a tip.

I've always liked beauty best  
in its beforeness, Britney blasting

while liquid liner spatters  
the mirror—the mall and all

its glitzy potential, easier  
than hope. All those almost-there

hours, minutes, seconds like the six  
separate and smaller-than-

sequin dots that become  
a flower on my big blue toe.

*LEXI PELLE*

# Just Your Average Tuesday

*after Dean Young*

When I worked at the convenience store off Elmwood and Monroe, Isaac, golden retriever in all but species and diet, would occasionally bring in his pet turtle, mentioning something about the neighborhood pet-sitter being unavailable, though Kyla claimed, in a scant, quiet moment restocking the chip aisle, that Isaac couldn't afford to pay him, since the kid was the only one on the block who could adjust his wages each year to account for inflation, but either way the turtle sat in its travel terrarium on the checkout counter like a display case advertising the pet store next door, black shell crowned with spikes like a spider-spun web of hexagonal beige, watching us with beady eyes like we were the latest installment of its favorite office drama. The little golden bell the owners put over the entrance years ago, that most of us were convinced fell off of one of their Christmas decorations and that they decided to keep it in a drawer until its repurposing – as opposed to putting it back – would ring every time a customer or strong wind graced the threshold of our local grey-tiled CVS competitor with their presence, sometimes with enough force to snap the perpetually-fraying string it's tied on, sending it careening down, tinkling on the floor like a misshapen dog toy that Isaac inevitably chased after to put back in its place of dubious honor, having already gone through half the skein of white string I brought in last month to keep the bell captive like a flailing moth first caught in spider silk, but looking no worse for wear as if it were the Nokia of bells, caroling about how things were back in its evergreen days of being in storage 352 days of the year. Sometimes the bell brought small, clustered families in the middle of a long car ride looking for an out-of-the-way place in a small suburb off the highway to take a bathroom stop and a small handful of M&M packs and sour candy for little ones doing a good job going potty; other times it brought lone teens taking one look at Kyla before sharply veering away from the beer aisle, reconsidering trying to pass off their fake ID to someone who graduated two years ago and likely had the misfortune of still remembering their faces. Kyla snorts, muttering about how they wouldn't have been able to pull it off even if she wasn't there – the turtle had a special way

of unsettling liars, after all – and she turns to face me, dark eyes staring intently in mine, daring me to challenge her when she later tells the store owner, turtle as her witness, that *“No, sir, I didn’t see the homeless man stealing food from the aisle behind me while my back was turned, but he did offer us a piece of twine when your bell fell off the string again.”*

SERA ROSTAN

# My lover will not look me in the eye

I spit my teeth into my hands  
and hold them up  
to her chin

for barter.  
A creature I must have  
summoned,

she cracks at my offering  
and leaves the room.

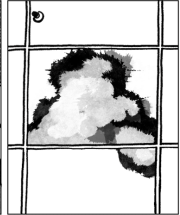
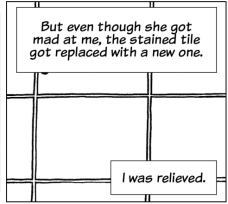
I wail  
until I cut my tongue out,  
snap clothespins  
to the horrible thing

and hang it out to dry.

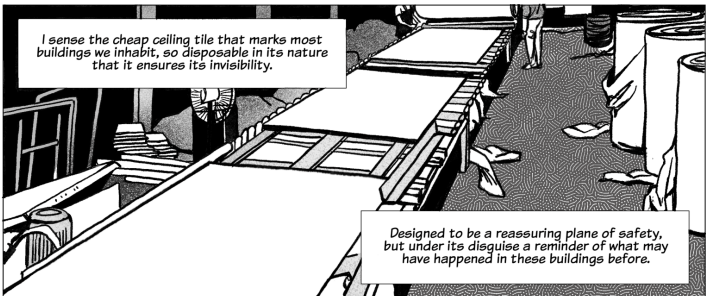
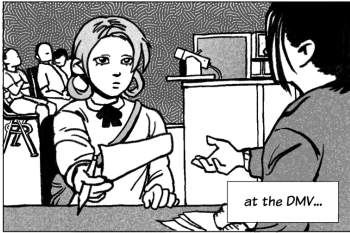
I swallow my teeth  
like sleeping pills

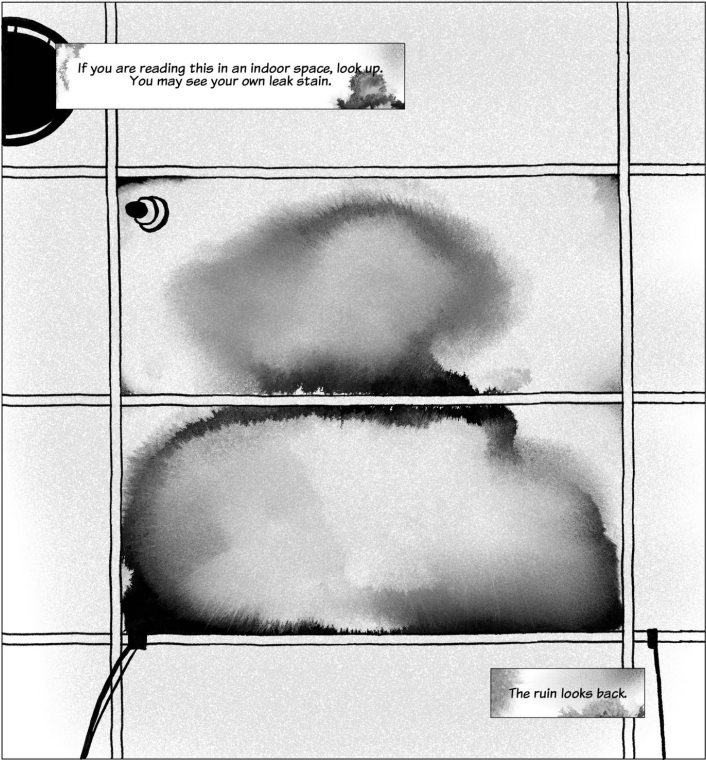
knowing her spit  
would be softer  
on my stomach.

MAIA SCHWALLIE









LIO CHAN, THE RUIN

## girl gets sunburned

there's god \_\_\_\_\_ damn desire  
here in fresno \_\_\_\_\_ right now  
a corn stalk \_\_\_\_\_ splits itself  
upward \_\_\_\_\_ from the grates  
of the serrated \_\_\_\_\_ sewer mouth  
funny how \_\_\_\_\_ seed can spark  
in so much \_\_\_\_\_ darkness  
how a body \_\_\_\_\_ survives  
the spaces bet \_\_\_\_\_ ween its cage  
horse revealed \_\_\_\_\_ in green slats  
across the chain \_\_\_\_\_ link freeway  
in pieces \_\_\_\_\_ a palm tree  
turning into \_\_\_\_\_ another turning  
into \_\_\_\_\_ another  
things standing \_\_\_\_\_ still won't see  
i turn to the left \_\_\_\_\_ and Erika  
happens Erika \_\_\_\_\_ where i left her  
in that garage \_\_\_\_\_ of smoke  
and shadow \_\_\_\_\_ only enough  
shards of Ultra \_\_\_\_\_ to catch a disco  
ball moment \_\_\_\_\_ of her  
she asks me \_\_\_\_\_ to put  
the car \_\_\_\_\_ in reverse  
to travel back \_\_\_\_\_ before  
all this camp \_\_\_\_\_ and hay  
tell the sprout \_\_\_\_\_ of me  
that the cage \_\_\_\_\_ is not  
what fractions us \_\_\_\_\_ but the desire  
for light \_\_\_\_\_ for what light  
might make \_\_\_\_\_ of waste  
when i was told \_\_\_\_\_ they found  
a neon yellow \_\_\_\_\_ BIC in her  
pocket i did \_\_\_\_\_ not ask  
for it back \_\_\_\_\_ today  
every building \_\_\_\_\_ i run past  
reflects comic \_\_\_\_\_ strip copies  
of girl \_\_\_\_\_ behind chipped

window paint\_\_\_\_\_snow men  
flip book\_\_\_\_\_image  
of escape\_\_\_\_\_i tell myself  
i need this\_\_\_\_\_to know  
that i can vanish\_\_\_\_\_completely  
and still mark\_\_\_\_\_the page  
tan lines proof\_\_\_\_\_that i tried  
to make the gaps\_\_\_\_\_real

*EMILY PEACOCK*

## Piros Yesterday

until yesterday I'd never met her in swelter  
magyarország in july when  
I suck seeds from her apricots I  
call her by her name not my  
own bastard tongue's  
anyways, she was red yesterday  
dripping from my commissure  
raptured by an overspread palacsinta  
overexcited knife for overfinom  
even though my teeth nearly chipped  
the matyó blue plate as I lapped  
jam for jam until the dish  
feigned clean like mornings  
when I pulled mint for my  
tea like I do weeds from  
anya's garden before breakfast  
I boil water and I watch her star  
through steam and sweat and know  
no tomorrow will be the same but  
I fear I'll never know plum like that again

*BAILEY DUNN*

## The Way We Dressed In Winter

Infinity scarf tossed over spaghetti straps,  
stockings pulled up under miniskirts.

In the snowy courtyard before school  
each morning, we waved each other over

with Red Hot Rio and I Just Can't Cope  
-Acabana manicures. What kept us warm

was something akin to self-expression  
sliding into back seats, bouncing away

the chill in cheap boots. The boys  
in their thick beanies and sloppy layers

stuffed under long sleeves—Michael  
or Tommy or some other backwards

baseball cap—would try to wow us  
with stories of bravery or stupidity

like when Jesse broke his hand on  
his stepfather's four-door or when Frankie,

on a dare, french-kissed a frozen flagpole.  
He really did. Lost a whole layer of tongue.

Stripped down to our desire  
to be looked at, we wanted to go

under the chilly bleachers with who  
we were or were going to be,

have little to take off and  
just our breath to clothe the air.

LEXI PELLE









# CONTRIBUTORS

LILY BOUCHER is a third-year at Agnes Scott College studying English Literature. She enjoys spending too much money on books, rewatching *Sex and the City*, running errands with her mom, and snacking on olives. She's interested in Eastern European and Asian writing, and plans to go to France to study literature further.

LIO CHAN (they/he) is currently an Illustration major at Rhode Island School of Design ('24) who loves to explore narrative and/or sequential artwork such as comics, animation, and cinematic illustrations. When not worsening his (potential) carpal tunnel, they can be found playing *Fire Emblem* and walking his dog Ace.

BAILEY DUNN is a biracial, queer, disabled poet and writer from Central New York. They are an undergraduate at Montclair State University double majoring in German and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies and minoring in Creative Writing. They love the simple things in life: books, bowties, weird words, and very climbable trees.

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# CONTRIBUTORS

EMILY PEACOCK is a poet and senior at Fresno State University. She serves as an editorial assistant for the literary journal *Flies, Cockroaches, & Poets*, and a forthcoming *Nikkei WWII Incarceration* anthology. She hopes to make creative writing more accessible to incarcerated youth and currently works with Poetic Justice, a nonprofit that offers free poetry workshops to incarcerated women.

LEXI PELLE was the winner of the 2022 Jack McCarthy Book prize. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *Ninth Letter*, *One Art*, *Abandon Journal*, and *3Elements Review*. Her debut book, *Let Go With The Lights On*, will be released in May.

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