

ZENIADA



SUMMER 2022

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: Rebirth by Lillian Oliver.

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Kelly and Me and the Devil Makes Three

The devil talks to me. It suggests
offhand that I look at Kelly as she writes
thank-you notes that I never
deliver, as she asks "How are you?"
and I ignore the reply. It waits

for me like mice that chitter
under floorboards as Kelly and I
fall asleep, its voice slow
but conversational
like the ceiling after dark.

The devil notices I bought
cheap wine and rhinestone earrings

with money Kelly saved for gifts.
The devil raises its eyebrow
when Kelly trips as I leave a room.
Watch, it encourages,

speaking just often enough
that I no longer need it to—
that I am already asking myself
its questions.

KELLY MORGAN

I was born to a strange tree

I was born to a strange tree

Where fruit like me prune before they're grown.

At home, we're used to holding our breath and watching

As all elasticity

Leaves our lungs.

Our tongues shrivel and we wait as our skin browns and sours.

And there are the many hours I wonder,

"Will someone ever pick a little black girl like me?"

NYLA WHITE

A Secret Orthodoxy

I am not religious,
but I have still prayed—
from within brown polka dot sheets,
from the blue trundle,
from the back of the thumping volvo.

I have addressed God
with my eyes glued shut
and hands unclasped—
my asking always prefaced
with an unsaid please.

In an imagined shrine,
I make my own relics.
I cradle my fears
(let me wake up,
make her better,
make me look older,
please, please...).

Though I have never disclosed them to anyone,
I have prayed to you,
and I grasp onto my thanks:
I hold my end of the bargain.

I am not religious,
but I can sacrifice,
be sacrificed.
And, my god, I find myself praying,
still, in my own, numerical covenant,
blazing in my gold foil
as I continue anointing myself with
sweaty palms.

MAGGIE MERRILL

Karachi, 2019. a (not)girl holds her mother's hand a little too tight

Soft feet press into a bed of rose petals, red like the sari of a new bride, eyes cast down as she crosses the threshold into her new life. One day, I will call her *chachi* (aunt), but for now, she is just a freshly bloomed marigold. The bottoms of her feet are painted the color of carnations, stained under thick layers of *mehndi* that clung to her skin.

I'll watch her from a distance, as I step through the meadow that is the foyer, let myself reside amongst the affluence of flowers that ask me to stay in their arms.

Mama presses her hardened hands against the *dholki*, the claps of thunder masked by the bang of the drum that will echo throughout the house. Mama tells me it's not raining, but it is. She just can't see it yet.

I'll sit at her feet, press my face against the beads that are sewn into her *lehenga*. The beads will dig into my skin like an ice pick shattering the frozen river before the ice harvest.

If I press my cheek against it hard enough, I wonder if I will draw blood. Will I burst from the seams as the river does? Can I fragment open in the same way He does?

My younger self will come up to me, tiny hands grabbing for my *dupatta* as she pulls me down to press her lips against my ear. She asks me, "Who would do this for the daughter who marries a daughter?"

I snap my fingers, and she smiles at me like she knows something I do not. Like she knows something I do not yet know how to put into words. She dissipates into the air, dissolving into lush violet petals. I let them fall into my hands and crush them gently before I brush them underneath the couch. They will be vacuumed up by the cook's daughter later tonight, long forgotten.

When the stars drift down to the earth for
 the night to kiss the children on their
 round cheeks, I'll close my eyes and stick
 my tongue out like I'm trying to catch a
 snowflake. I hope that a spark will settle
 on my tongue and let me know that I come
 from a dynasty of sultanas, not queens.

Mama asks me what I'm doing, and I just shake my
 head and laugh. I cry into the koi fish pond and watch
 the fish lap up the saltiness from my tears. Koi fish
 are a freshwater species — they do not know that they
 are not meant to consume the saltiness of the sea. But
 how can they know, swallowing up the tears in the
 pond? How can they know their desire goes against
 their very biology? How can they know?

*What a horrid thing it is,
 I murmur,
 to not know that which you love
 is not meant for you.*

ANONYMOUS



LIO CHAN, ON THE WAY HOME

Genesis

The moon oozes like a split cactus. Clouds disintegrate like sugar.
People appear and disappear in intermittent windows.

Snow blows in and coats the city, and washes the dirt off my hands.
Clocks unravel like the snapping of fingers.

A lion creeps through the streets, shadows dragging up from his paws
and thinning themselves like fingers clawing over pavement.

I would drive my hall-mate to the doctor every day if she asked, if she asked
and if the clock fell apart in seven pieces—shattering into how many eons' bad luck?

"If" is my shadow. It falls from the frames of open doorways where cats yawn:
the word narrows into snarls of saliva pulling between their teeth.

A suicide attempt: a room in daytime
but the lights are off.

If I called a lion on the phone, the ringing would go to voicemail. If I separated
land into streets and deserts, that breath of life could make the cactus bloom.

Snowmelt seeps into pavement, spines buried in watery flesh
like leftover waters from the firmament percolating back into Earth.

Here is something shining like a mirror for the well and truly wicked,
something reflecting my image: I do not know if I'm a pagan or an infidel.

I draw on paper in charcoal and smudge the image when I hang it on the wall.
I take seven days to crawl under my bed, lean against the dirty clothes basket, and weep.

KELLY MORGAN



LIO CHAN, ME AND MY OTHER HALF

Amateur Cartography

Numb and limp, animalized out of my refined passions,
each epistolary fold smoothed into the evening's red jaw.
I saw a pinhole camera vision of us, the dinner table
at Nottingham Street. It was unusable footage: microwave rice,
Michael Mann movies, the stitching around the neck
of your maroon sweater, a fork to the wrists.
Soft with artificial sleep and leftovers I begin
to wonder if there was a question, a ways back,
someone forgot to ask.

If we resort to pulp and noble gasses, then of course,
we all hung around the First Avenue crowd.
We cut up Tremont for scrap metal and
choked on trains dining uphill. Here in the dark
we are not subject to maritime law, we are unfound,
there are only hands and blue television and hands.

C.G. COLEMAN

they
 promised
 no more
 no more
 destruction
 utter destruction
 according to
 the devil
 God,
 all those
 and
 me,
 saying:
 well
 if it so be
 I will
 be
 or the other—
 one
 both
 and also
 Remember
 ?
 he said
 to me: Look,
 devil.
 And he said
 there are two
 only:
 the mother
 and the whore

- 2a Gal. 3: 7 (7, 29);
 2 Ne. 10: 18 (18-19);
 3 Ne. 16: 13; 21: 6
 (6, 22); Abr. 2: 10
 (9-11).
 b 2 Ne. 6: 12; 10: 10
 (8-14); 3 Ne. 16: 6
 (6-7); 20: 27; Morm.
 5: 19.
 c TG Israel, Deliverance
 of; Israel, Restoration
 of; Lands of
 Inheritance.
 3a Ps. 57: 6; Matt. 7: 2
 (1-2); 1 Ne. 22: 14
 (13-14); D&C 10: 26
 (25-27); 109: 25.
 b Alma 19: 29.

- TG Damnation; Hell.
 4a TG Bondage, Spiritual.
 5a 1 Ne. 13: 39 (34-42);
 22: 9.
 b TG Repentance.
 6a 2 Ne. 28: 32.
 7a Isa. 29: 14; 1 Ne. 13:
 35; 22: 8; 2 Ne. 27: 26;
 29: 1 (1-2); D&C 4: 1.
 TG Restoration of the
 Gospel.
 b TG God, Works of.
 c TG Peace; Peace of God.
 d Jer. 21: 8.
 TG Eternal Life.
 e 2 Ne. 2: 29 (26-29);
 Alma 12: 11 (9-11).

- 8a TG Abrahamic
 Covenant; Israel,
 Mission of.
 9a 1 Ne. 15: 35; D&C 1:
 35.
 TG Devil, Church of.
 10a 1 Ne. 22: 23; 2 Ne. 26:
 20; Morm. 8: 28
 (25-41).
 TG Church.
 b 1 Ne. 13: 4 (4-6),
 26 (26, 34).
 c TG Devil, Church of;
 False Prophets.
 d 2 Ne. 10: 16.
 e Rev. 17: 15 (5, 15).
 [Between 600 and 592 B.C.]

Angelize

after Francesca Woodman

A body cannot angelize
without darkness, without shaft
of broken cola machine
deep in the pelvis.
A body cannot angelize
without hanging, cannot
hang without dying—
dying to self, I mean, dying
to self, to shirts
of polyester-cotton mix,
to the curling iron
on, to the camera
on, to the wallpaper
on, cannot die without plasterizing,
without turning body
into wood
and crinoline and light.
I will not be your phone girl.
I will not be your wasteland.
I will not be your kitchen cupboard
or your mudroom
or your basement.

I will eat the phone
before I let you talk to me
like that again. I will pry open
my own jaw—be boa
and viper, gut and poison,
before I let you turn me doll.

I will angelize
and my heart will never break
on linoleum and concrete.

ALENA COLEMAN

Girldom Elegy

after Mary Oliver

Come with me into the field of sunflowers,
she told me once in the heat of '08.
I laced my fingers over my lips
and blew bubbles through the sunflower seeds
crushed under my teeth. We sat,
her and I, on a bench made of melded pennies.
She unraveled her sweetgrass tongue and sang
the song the sunflowers were humming.

I wish I still knew the prayers
she kissed into my cheek between those flowers,
but now all the seeds have sprouted
out my brain, and that old field burned
in cigarette-gasoline, and some man parks his busted cars
where once her finger swirled dirt into my name.

ALENA COLEMAN

Last Supper

vast windows hung like
portraits on your walls,
welcoming in the night sky and the sea.
you smiled-
pointed out the moon.
we all looked at her for a moment
silent
noticing the way she leaned down to kiss the breakers.
my cheek rested on your granite countertop as you made dinner.

SONCERA BALL

How big is the Milky Way galaxy? (space scares me, I don't know how my sister is so fascinated by it)

Do you think it can hold five-thousand planets in its starry bucket
As it collects the broken shells of stars?
I'd like to think that somewhere in that unknowable
Black abyss of infinite ?'s
There is an entire breathing city (the size of three whole heavens!)
With cosmos dangling from a black hole's swirling chandelier.

And yet, a crumple of a wrapper,
A single slingshot aimed by a mighty solar ray...
Maybe that will be its downfall.

A sweet defeat into molten chocolate flooding the galaxy,
Freeing every nova, dwarf star,
Sugared ring of Saturn and
Astronaut lost to the enchanted, candied mansion of space.

- All is liberated back into the black. -

But with cursed curiosity we still float closer,
Missing the sweetness of oblivion that comes with
the reckless, childlike fascination in a chocolate bar galaxy.

I can concede to this thought of decadent destruction:
My last moments smelling & tasting & burning & feeling & searing into
me with the softness of cacao powder and the irony of it blending in
perfectly with our ashes.

MIA HUERTA

CONTRIBUTORS

SONCERA BALL is a freshman at Princeton University who plans to study philosophy, creative writing, and music. Some of her favorite pastimes are sleeping in, ruminating, listening to loud music in the car, and eating.

LIO CHAN is a sophomore majoring in illustration at Rhode Island School of Design. They like to illustrate environmental art and art that explores themes of fear. They bring their dog Ace into every conversation.

ALENA COLEMAN grew up in New Harmony, Indiana--a utopian experiment turned living museum. She is a senior at the University of Notre Dame studying English and Spanish. Her work has also appeared in *Asterism*, *Re:Visions*, and *Juggler*. She hopes that all your fences have gates.

C.G. COLEMAN is a first year at Barnard College of Columbia University studying English and philosophy. They have previously published work in *Quarto Magazine* and *ANGLES*. They are from the DC area and are passionate about new wave films, love letters, kitchen sink dramas, film photography, 60s music, and long walks around the city.

MIDGE HARTSHORN is an undergraduate at Mount Holyoke College, double majoring in mathematics and astronomy. They were raised in an orthodox Mormon household in Idaho, and have been navigating their loss of faith through writing. In their limited free time, Midge enjoys knitting, reading science fiction, and re-watching episodes of *The West Wing*.

CONTRIBUTORS

MIA HUERTA was born and raised in the suburbs outside Chicago and has just finished her freshman year at Kenyon College in Ohio. She is double majoring in Spanish and English with a concentration in creative writing.

MAGGIE MERRILL is an undergraduate at Pomona College studying English and Classics. This is her first poem published in *Zeniada*.

KELLY MORGAN is a recent graduate of Vanderbilt University where she served as editor-in-chief of *Vanderbilt Review* and poetry editor of *SciLit Review*. Her poems are published or forthcoming in *Oakland Review*, *Rainy Day Magazine*, *Blue Route Literary Journal*, *Collision Literary Magazine*, and elsewhere.

LILLIAN OLIVER is a Johns Hopkins senior who explores the subjects of life and rebirth through elements of traditional Tibetan culture. As part of a series dedicated to examining ancient Tibetan artifacts from personal travels and museum exhibits, her 'rebirth' painting exemplifies her current life and challenges the Western perspective of death.

NYLA WHITE is an undergraduate at Montclair State University, majoring in communications and media studies with a minor in creative writing. She considers her poetry, narratives, and art as a creative outlet and means of expressing her faith. In her free time she enjoys sporadic dates with her friends, attending church, video-making, doing makeup, or serial binge-watching shows with her family.

ANONYMOUS is an undergraduate at Barnard College.

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