

YALE COLLEGE POETS

21 April 2020

Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library

Yale University

YALE COLLEGE POETS

Olivia Belliveau

Miles Kim

T.C. Martin

Jared Newman

Esther Ritchin

Patrick Shea

Tiana Wang

Maslen Bode Ward

Karina Xie

21 April 2020

Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library

Yale University

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Olivia Belliveau	1
Miles Kim	5
T.C. Martin	8
Jared Newman	12
Esther Ritchin	15
Patrick Shea	18
Tiana Wang	22
Maslen Bode Ward	25
Karina Xie	28
About the Poets	33

Co-sponsored by the Creative Writing Program, Department of English.

Copyright © 2020 by the authors.

BOND'S DOCK

The boats are all asleep.
There's a knot in your heart
and we haven't cut your hair yet –
we will.

You only say what you mean
with both feet in the water.
You loved a girl
who couldn't swim.

I imagine her
between us now, lovely
ankles bumping ours
like nudging fish.

In the parking lot behind us,
an exchange of vices.
The air between car windows
grows heavy.

I look at you in profile,
looking at your feet.

Water returns the sky
and I remember the two of you
in the sand, loving,
and I was loving the two of you.

Tonight I want you
to name the knot,
indict it.

Instead you list all the times
she was ever quiet:
kissing your nose,
wrapping herself small
on your kitchen floor.

You were gifted muscle
straining deftly under your skin and
I think of the one straining
thick and dumb behind ribs.

When your chest is heavy
you climb until the air is
thinner going in, mountains
or walls. Sitting here
must be low to you.

We sit so long on the bumbling dock
my skin forgets the water.

I wonder how long it would take you
to swim across the river
to beg for air on the opposite bank

to watch the houses losing their window lights,
one by one like loose teeth.

RIVER CROSSING AT GLYMUR

I

Its source must be sky –

snake-tongued
blue as life
over dust crumbling
weakly in green

How narrow it is
receding between hills,

how landscape was split just so
to let it well up like a fresh nick,

how banks were thumbled in neatly
to only just contain it

In life
behind bushes and bushes,
you can hear its living rushing
as you separate dry from dry

see it yawning bank to bank,
ridge of rocks wedging
open its great jaw –

water that hungers west,
mud-built maw foaming,

thrashes a single cable
waving in the wind
strung by someone
barefoot, brave

And tourists bustle,
shove and joke,
tucking awe aside

II

You've gotten as far
as design that yields
to nothing
not even its designer

Fingers find
the cable, cold from living
so close to water.

The soles of your feet
know this stone,
humming still
skimmed by rushing

If you weren't so sure
of your own weight
rocks could carry you to sea

But you step,
water at your ankles
roaring straight from sky.

BLACK CAR

The headlights open a clearing ahead
like a page of a book from childhood

I used to come here often and stop by the roadside. The hills
would appear
as layers that disappeared into fog
or opened into the bay, white with an excess of light

Now in the black hills there are forms
in the bushes and trees I can't see;
I've come to be sheltered from them

I remember you said that you liked the rain

Why you said it, in what place and with what tone of voice,
I don't

And a year later
on the afternoon of the snowy pond
when I wanted you again –

I still feel the wanting.
It's far, like a thought of a whale

NOTES ON TRAVEL

On the train, things seen once:

Egret, statue of the marsh border

Symbol of me in the truss

There is the life I live

There is the man with the swollen leg
whimpering through the subway

There is the building of brick and metal, covered in grime

The wall is a bare pastel of irrelevant color:
somewhere the math is wrong.
I have forgotten where to construct the metaphor.

The last time I remember peace I was by the ocean.

I was not at peace, but I saw it. It was simply
a movement in the harbor, the boats and planes in their routes
through the Boston harbor
the drunk people in their yachts shouting

the musicians roaring by the hotel
the dogs with short legs pulled along
the ladybugs in the cobblestone cracks and
the mosquitoes biting at the ankles

And none of us were at peace, and the harbor was at peace.

Always I am writing on planes
the suspension is important, it is
significant.

Periods: never appropriate (I have many thoughts and none
of them
go anywhere)

At the end of the week
a sigh. Always sighs have been
the same sigh.

I am looking at the remnants on the table
watching them, the cups and scraps of paper

trying to understand
their place there

LUCE

After The Comedy of Errors

marry me
marry me
marry me, dromio.

my besides-body
embellished with grease, rheum, barrenness
a doomsday body.

mend me, measure me,
my fat – all
my fat –
my not-fault,
my armed armadoes
of hip, carbuncles, buttocks,
forehead, hand, breast –
curtal diviner-creature.

an america in me,
wondrous globe-wench
without head-heart, all ballast.

speak:

about the countries in me.
what indies, where france,
why netherlands?

of my luck
for sir-reverence breadth –
very-very for you.

of myself:
bogs-beast of belgia
haunts from drudge
to claim her kitchen
and the flood of myself:

I
I
I.

HIPPOLYTA

After A Midsummer Night's Dream

with the silliest silver skies
our solemnities
“our nuptial hour”
seem'd gallant, new-bent,
“worthier.”

before: constancy, mutual dream.
duty, chance, days.
gone is my region.

with Theseus,
strange change:
hounds and night.
I behold. I bear. I
“come, Hippolyta.”
I am away, aweary,
and brief.

I steep my love
in moonshine, beshrew it
with transfigured prologue
such that
“come, my Hippolyta”
images to nothing.

sparta, cadmus,
hercules, crete:
finds of a government
howsoever sweet. I

“abjure for ever
the society of”

fountains.

I do not bow (but
to the moon.
moon, moon,
thunder, and moon.)

EXCERPTS FROM THE POLISH COMEDY

New haircut. Good mood. Revelation about painting.

Someone I haven't seen in years tells me she's been with a famous actor.

A celebrity, she clarifies, leaning back against the train window. When they were together, he was only Tim. Timmy. Filling a void in winter.

"I get it," she says, about nothing in particular. She says I'd recognize him instantly. He's so recognizable it's not even worth disclosing his full name.

Privately, I doubt her.

The lunar new year. Time to get going. If I could travel to a minor European city –

If I could lie down on Friday and awake to the smell of mold on Tuesday –

I tell my old friend about a Polish comedy I once saw. The cast is four men, all playing the protagonist, whose name is Cesary. Cesary wants desperately to enlist, but the army does not want him back. He was a rheumatic child.

On stage sits an upright piano, but no one plays it. The subtitles are broken, perhaps intentionally.

The audience, largely comprised of Poles, is delighted.

"I get it," she says, about the desire to laugh so knowledgeably. It is one of those eyelevel sunsets, the car lot flags waving in tandem with the cloud breakage.

There is a level of despondency I have yet to reach, like a chamber of warm water just below dune surface. I suppose the same might be said for Cesary, or the actors themselves. The sun folds fast into the highway ramp, and if I could just describe it –

If I could just follow its direction –

SECOND WIND

Second wind, let go of me.
Downstairs, at three a.m., bars evict their stragglers.
Like kids at recess, they crowd together, tear a parking sign
from the sidewalk curb.
No one heads home. Even when the cops show, nobody
bothers to heed them.
We're awake and on the precipice of something brilliant –
but what?
An idea for a multi-billion-dollar business? The title of a
heartbreaking poem?
If I have a wish, it is to know what's making the sound
emanating from behind
the ficus tree in the bathroom, and if the sound is a bat, for
the bat to die.
An hour passes. Then another. I microwave a chocolate bar
just to see
what will happen. I compare ticket prices across several
budget airlines.
What is it like, I wonder, in the tundra. When the bars
close there,
where does anyone go? When the cold of the night
becomes lethal, can a sleeping creature even tell?

RATS

"The madness of it, Miss Dickinson!"

"Star Atlas," Charles Simic

I, too, can see a graveyard from my window.
I sit on my desk, legs slanted
out the window, feet
firmly planted in what I call a balcony
and an architect calls a gutter but really,
what's a gutter but a balcony for rats.

I, too, don't think of death as destruction.
You and I sit affably in agony, getting high
to drop embers off the edge and watch them
flicker down. We're all rats up here, till the rain
makes my balcony a shipyard.

I, too, perch in possibility.
Up here we're stone or we're embers ourselves
and down there the passersby laugh and
the sky cracks at the sound and maybe someone
looks up and maybe someone gets high.

My mind is going numb too, Miss Dickinson.

REFLECTIONS

You have four sharpened pencils in a mug on your desk that stay there because you always use a fountain pen instead and so I call you obnoxious. I am in love with you, and I will never tell you that again and that is how I want to love you. You tell me that doing cocaine is bad because it contributes to mass murder and the destruction of countries. We are talking about this because yesterday Ronan and I walked in on people doing cocaine upstairs at a party. He nodded to them and we backed out of the room and went downstairs and danced until I felt parts of my shirt start to stick with sweat and then we danced more. I am in love with him too, but not in the way in which I am in love with you. I am in love with him in the way in which I am in love with wind that tangles my hair or blackjack or trees with the bark peeled off. I am in love with you in the way I am in love with the hour I forfeit every year to save daylight, and that same hour which returns to me in spring or the type of sunset where half the sky's on fire and half is a gentle pink or jet black ink just before it dries. Last night Ronan and I danced and the basement was so low that his hands hit the ceiling but he forgot every time and smudged the plaster with his fingertips over and over. Zach was there, in the other room, loudly agreeing with other boys about politics because to him that is more fun than dancing. I think I am in love with Zach in the way in which I am in love with hot pink clothing or raw cookie dough or the way my frayed phone charger hasn't broken yet and not the way I am in love with you. Last night, you were with your family at some rented house in New England. They flew in

and the flight takes just less than a day and you love them with an intensity that is so quiet, I forget it. Then I remember our first year when you brought your luggage to our last test so you could catch the shuttle that left an hour before our test was scheduled to end. I did not say goodbye to you, I was still taking the test. I had known you for five months, then. You have four sharpened pencils in a mug on your desk and you take the curtains off the window because you like to wake to light and you know which cardinal direction you're facing and you're thinking of growing your hair out and the face you make when you're drunk looks almost like Mick Jagger and you are a boy who owns a suit that fits you and that was the first thing I knew about you and you love with a quiet intensity and that is what I know about you now.

NORTH SEA
(*Schiermonnikoog*)

Around us stood a nature
full of nods or winks toward
something that countered its peace.

Slow, mechanic careen
of a grazing horse's head.
Wings of an egret spread and frozen

as if pulled by invisible string.
Bare trees, asleep in early spring.
Nests like blurred black hives.

The bridge where Thijs said last year
he came across a husband pulling his wife
from the creek where she had fallen,

lamenting the loss of his camera
that fell in the water too.

Ground littered with clover-heads,
a few narcissus poking up their funny orange
crowns. Ocean birds landing

across a lineless blanket of wild grass.
Grey-green and yellow tangle
of the salt marsh. At its end,

a curling footpath of mussel
shell bits, snaking to the beach then back
into town. And at the next junction

a path to a cemetery for sailors whose
bodies, over the years, had washed ashore.
Their gold earrings,

Thijs told us, worn as compensation
for those who found and buried them.

CITY WOODS

Biked through the park
toward the middle
where they keep the animals,

stopping first to sit
on a wide grassy lawn, dreamlike,
like where you'd dry off after baptism

and we lay listening to music.
Olivia's snake tattoo
was healing nicely, she showed Jo and me.

Then at the center
of the park, a break in the woods
and a wooden barn

and countless goats,
and two men who tended them
and gave them their feed, and who later attached

the milking apparatuses, the goats
staring blankly in their places
and the men doing the same.

I wondered where they went
on weekends, and who had taught them
to tend livestock,

found brief answers and then we were
gone, and our questions
shifted to small ones

about irregular patches of sun
carved by white poplar branches
along the path back to where the park

emptied its mouth to the street.
And how the light made the air hazy,
and how the light continued its fall

onto Jo's hair and Olivia's hair
while they rode close
in front of me,

and probably onto
the farmhands' heads too
and onto those of the animals,

when brought out
from their shelter to graze.

A FAMILY RECIPE THAT CANNOT BE FOLLOWED
WRITTEN DOWN

1.

To make jasmine tea, you need nine days and nights,
a wide-mouthed jar, and the stillness
in the silent hours, long after dusk
and the heat of the afternoon.

2.

As you look at the line of moonlight
on the wall, think:
Isn't it strange
how until last night you didn't notice
The cracks in the double-layered tea cups
Papa set out for you, the nice ones that do not burn
your knuckles. The tea that always cools on your tongue.

3.

You must remember that you are drinking jasmine tea.
Every cup might taste a little different, but—
the tea has not spoiled, nor has your mind done
that curious thing
of imagining troubles. The flowers' scent
changes with the season. You learn this
when you wake at dawn and go, yawning still,
to watch Papa cradle the just-opened blossoms
in his heavy hand.
Inhale when he holds them under your nose;
accept them into your own indelicate fingers when he offers.

4.

You must bury the white flowers beneath layers
of green tea leaves
before violet tints the place where the petals meet.
Bury them in a wide-mouthed jar you buy just for this.
Mama will say *there are too many at home*,
that *the jars for pickling work perfectly fine*.
But papa will insist, because this is nothing else.

5.

When you have your jar and it is boiled clean, when it is dry,
after the first layer of blossoms is underneath
the first layer of leaves,
and a day has passed—
repeat eight more times, starting from dawn.

6.

On the ninth day, wait for Papa to pick out shriveled jasmine,
then tousle tea leaves into the teapot. Warm the kettle
and sit on the edge of the kitchen chair as he pours. Fragrant tea
brushes the brims of two cups. When he offers one to you, sip
long, and do not interrupt him.

7.

After the silence
he will begin to tell you of his years in Singapore,
the white snake he saw near a trench there;

of how his love for abalone and shrimp grew
during his weeks by the sea.
When the water in the kettle is gone,
Papa will reach for a bottle of rice vinegar
and, with a steady hand, pour you a spoonful
to drink plain.

THE RODEO

A horse breaks its leg
bucking its rider on the Fourth of July.
White men in cowboy hats swarm the chute,
scattering when it opens. The horse flies into the sky.
The skin on its rear threatens to rupture.
It can hardly hold this energy – muscles twitching like atoms
when they bind and break apart to bind again.
My ankles flick, thighs tense,
neck swinging as I dip into a tango with the horse,
but I feel no pain when the horse breaks its leg.
My eyes are tied to the rider, bouncing like a doll,
desperate to maintain control. Like my mother,
leaning over the side of the Grand Canyon,
desperate to capture the sunset.
I am terrified she will fall off the edge, chasing a view.
Why would you die to conquer what is already yours?
The cowboy limps away triumphantly
when the horse breaks its leg.
Men ready to put its body into a special ambulance.
I want to describe this putting,
but I don't remember if I bothered to watch
or whether mom told me they would shoot it.
I never could confront the damaged bodies
of the half-dead trout at the hatchery.
One foot in front of the other,
down the side of the concrete raceway,
my net scooping floating fish.
Then a fish near death turns on its side,

towards me, pleading— so I scoop it too.
“Grab it by the tail and slap its head against the concrete,”
a coworker tells me, because it’s cruel to let a half-alive fish
suffocate in a bucket next to dead ones.
A slap is too close, so I place the fish at my feet,
and bring a garden hoe down on its head.
It takes five or six times, and the fish might still be moving,
but I put it in the bucket for the other dead fish to confront.
I remember this putting.
My eyes leave the cowboy hats as a girl in pink boots walks by,
holding a red balloon that tugs softly towards the moon.
I want to celebrate the Fourth of July with balloons, not rodeos,
the joy of containment and nothing to put away.
The last rodeo event is calf-dressing.
Women chase a calf around the stadium
like cans tied to a newlywed’s bumper.
They wrestle it to the ground, distort its limbs into sleeves,
cage a body with a t-shirt.
I want to laugh, but my elbows are bending
in ways they shouldn’t.
Tonight, we’ll continue celebrating in my uncle’s backyard.
Buckets of water from the creek will sit
next to fireworks he’s smuggled over state lines.
My mom, camera ready like a net, will miss when he lights one,
and I’ll fly into the sky, claiming it for a moment—
red and white and blue flickering below the stars.
I walk out of the rodeo staring down at my cowboy boots.
They’re all that’s left between me
and the cracked ground, damp with spilled beer.
A man strolling behind me says, “I like your boots,”

and then they are no longer mine.
What is more American than a white woman in cowboy boots
walking away from a dead horse?
Perhaps a daughter standing yards away from a canyon’s edge,
ashamed of her mother’s impulse
because she knows it is her own.

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE MOUNTAINS?

I was whisked away
to the monastery in the mountains,
back in the
Cultural Revolution, in the village
of Shuiji, in the province of Fujian.

I was only 8.
But I was real.
I was a phenomenon.

I memorized the prayers
for after waking and before sleeping.
Built them up like Lego's, first the words
then sentences
Paragraphs.

How long were you there?

8 months

What was it like?

When you are a true Buddhist, everything
is empty, the material world
is nothing, only spirituality
is left, and wealth, and
even family are nothing. This is why,
when the government found out
I was too little to be a monk,

I felt nothing. When the authorities
stole me away
back home,
I felt nothing.

and you need to be
strong enough,
support yourself

When my mother
and my father back home
left me for the next temple,
I felt nothing. I couldn't.

And the stars?

I would look at the stars,
sleep on the floor,
in the evening,
sit in the courtyard,
look up at the sky,
dreaming,
what's there
who's out there
who am I
escaping
reality

How did you come here?

My father brought me here.
I thanked him.

For what?

He helped me escape.

And the stars?
I tried to read poems,
daydreaming a little every day
I wanted to live in
my own world
but knew I had to survive
because life can be so terrible
because maybe your parents
your siblings die

I was the only
legal
immigrant
in a building
of people
who didn't
belong

I SING LIKE A MUSIC BOX

and I start wondering, will my kids forget,
and if they forget, will it be in pieces, like me?
or how much will there be left?

The notes drift in
and take me back to the time in the car
Yut yun you yut goa mong searng
Everyone has a dream
She continues, *learnng yun yeet gnoi woi sou searng*
Two people in love will ultimately hurt each other
She continues, *sam yun you sam sam*
sam

What's the next line again?
Something, someone, somewhere
Knows those lyrics

Everyone - you and me
But *yut yun* means one person
Yut means one
Learnng means two
Sam means three

One, two, three
If I sing out loud, I can get the rest across
Sam yun you sam yearng tong fu
Three people in love each have their own bitterness
And that's not it
Not quite it

My mom must have been younger
when she first listened to Vivian Lai's *Everybody has a dream*

I wonder if she was following her own dream
I wonder if she played it over and over
I wonder if she knew she would pass this song to me
I know, I know, every generation is different
But something, something at least to hold tight to?

There is something I've lost by living here
It comes back as a memory of something I can't have
And I think the sadness comes from hearing a voice so familiar,
Could be my mom's brother

What's the next line again

ABOUT THE POETS

OLIVIA BELLIVEAU is a senior in Trumbull College. She loves dancing and the outdoors. Olivia studies English and hopes to become a doctor (and, always, a poet).

MILES KIM is a senior art major, concentrating in painting.

T. C. MARTIN is a writer and Yale senior from southern Maryland. He will be pursuing an MFA in creative nonfiction at West Virginia University in the fall.

JARED NEWMAN is a writer from New York, where he was born and will die.

ESTHER RITCHIN is a senior at Yale College studying English. After graduation, she intends to work in the nonprofit industry, continue writing poetry in her free time, and, one day, get a dog.

PATRICK SHEA is a senior from central Massachusetts who likes oceans, shapes, long drives, and taking photos. He is a writer and Sociology major with interests in queer studies and visual culture.

TIANA WANG is double majoring in English and Sociology. Her senior thesis is on tea merchants and gift-giving in China, and she is currently enjoying a lovely course on classical Chinese poetry. She hopes to go to Alaska in the future to meet some seals.

MASLEN BODE WARD is a senior majoring in Applied Math and Ethnicity, Race, and Migration. She grew up in Boston, Massachusetts and has family in Ennis, Montana, where she spent her summers working at a fish hatchery. One of her special skills is spawning trout.

KARINA XIE is a senior English major from Queens, New York. She is interested in translation, oral history, and theater and performance. This fall, she will be teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in Baltimore, Maryland.

Yale UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Assembled for the occasion of the
2020 Yale College Poets reading