

poetry
creative nonfiction
spring 2025



issue:
“Flâneurs”

big club!

editor's note

I was taking care of so many things today I forgot to eat, and when I did, my stomach did not feel right. I was at some cafeteria, stuck in a time lapse of people coming and going. But it was getting late, so I descended to the basement of a community center nearby to use their bathroom. And it did calm me, only to then remember it was getting on time to close—I was almost locked in the basement for the night! So I exited a backdoor, which opened to the middle of a staircase: a little place with some benches, above which you could see the stars. And as I knew it would be a while until I would be ready to go back home, I decided this was the perfect time to write about this publication, *Big Club*, and its inaugural issue, “Flâneurs.”

The wisdom of the flâneur that always passes through is that all things will come to pass. This publication, I created for an assignment under Kaya Press. It is, as of now, temporary. But *this* may last. I wanted to publish my friends from home and abroad, all burgeoning in their writing careers in some shape or form. I figured it would be nice to hold onto a piece of them as we go separate ways. And as is this motley crew, the character of this volume is necessarily exploratory, not just geographically but culturally. Hence, flâneur: an idler or loungeur, someone aimlessly walking the city observing without specific aims, a passionate spectator.

E. Willow kicks us off with a cat on a sill. In this cat's town there is nothing more important than to see, which, through the speaker, becomes loaded with an agnosticism to “being part of.” We then travel to France through Chloe Gaume's work, observing myriad lost connections in public transit, where the porosity of bodies gestures to a porosity in nationalisms. This wavering is not a desire for detachment as much as it is a response to being inextricably attached in contradictory ways. In this way Alyssa Wong rails against the conventions of Asian diasporic poetry, as does moody garland consider the ambivalences in having loved and lost in a piece I can only say resembles stand-up comedy. These internal contradictions, for the writers featured in this issue, become performance in some way or another.

This search for pleasure without contradictions as a marginalized person can become disorienting. Aarushi Gupta reveals how otherwise progressive sets of morals and values can turn on their head in the search for someone who may understand you. As we pass through each other's lives, we are in some way changed with each connection. In an overstuffed world full of potential connections, we may find ourselves constantly evolving to try and meet them. In the face of disappointment, self-solidity becomes tempting. But after a certain point, what we are still left with is ourselves. This, we will not see pass, at least not in our lifetimes.

— Alex Bravo

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poetry

E. Willow

The Little Grey Thing That Sits on the Sill

It had a routine. It sits by the window, tail swishing back and forth, watching the neighbors go by. I could never tell if it was bored or observant.

"Y'all both look alike, all the way down to the beady eyes ya both got!" My friend Bernice shouted, her voice shrill in comparison to her usual rich rasp. Her chipped baby blue nail polished finger playfully pointing out to me and it, while we biked down our neighborhood street. I stared back at the little grey thing on the window sill.

Amber colored eyes slowly blinking at me.

Grey fur shimmering in the sun.

Maybe they and I are alike, we exist to watch.

To see.

Maybe find the joy in sitting still and doing nothing that others may see as unimportant.

Chloe Gaume

(Metro) RER A and (Train) Line L

I love traveling in your veins.
I get to traverse anywhere I please,
The crowded, monumental city boulevard
To the underrated buzzing small towns.

Forwards
and
backwards,

With the
Sudden
Stops
Followed
By

The polylingual announcement
(in order: French, English, German, and finally to Spanish):
Attention à la marche en descendant du train
Please mind the gap between the train and the platform.

Funnily enough, the French version is never that polite.

I love being your blood cell, stirring in your plasma,
Carrying whatever essentials and gifts I have
And passing them off to the next cell,

My goal:
Observing your bloodstream,

Watching how the other cells interact (or don't),

Especially the occasional sleepy cell trying to stay awake;

Observing your changing body,
How you went from blood clots and plaque galore
To open, restored, and sleek systems.

I love being your blood so much,
That I sometimes forget I am only a transfusion.
Tourist because I don't live here,
but foreign enough to know this is my home too,

Alyssa Wong

Asian Poem

I slip my porcelain feet
From their Converse constraints
Feet bound
By America
As I put on
My soft cloth slippers
I am
Chinese again

Chinese A(meri)gain

When I am home
I must be soft
Quiet
Delicate
The perfect daughter
Honor thy mother and father

But filial piety
Is its own bound foot

At home in my floral silk dress
My chopstick fingers
Hold my plastic chopsticks
Over a porcelain bowl
Of warm rice and soy sauce

At school I asked
For lunchables
But at home
Warm bursts of dumpling fill my
Lotus flower mouth

They say
My food smells
But this scent
Fills my bamboo skeleton
Warms my red lantern heart

I know now
My plump panda face
Is beautiful like a plum blossom
My slanted almond eyes
Hold thousands of years
Of history

As the monkey king journeyed to the west
So too do I make my mandarin mark
In my western home

moody garland

Valentine's Day on the Hill

It's raining and cold so I take my umbrella with me
to get a pizza and hot water for tea
to soothe my throat because it's raining and cold

but because it's raining and cold my umbrella
gets in the way of me opening the door to my dorm
and I spill 182° water on my hands and body,

the 182° water for the tea I was going to have
because it's raining and cold. A couple
in each other's arms standing by the doors

looking outside the glass facade of our dorm
because it's raining and cold watched me struggle
with my umbrella and the door and spill 182° water

on my hands and body. Steam plumes from my coat.
I make light of it, "At least I'm not cold."
They held my umbrella for me under the awning

with pity eyes where it was neither raining nor cold.
I looked to the floor where I put my pizza, where
my tea-water was. Or was not. We said nothing.



*creative
nonfiction*

Counterpart

Like every meeting, lecture, party, and flight, I planned the right time to fall in love. I made a promise to myself when I began college that if I hadn't dated someone by my senior year, I would resort to a dating app. I talked down on the mindless swiping and gamification of dating. In fact, love is something that I hoped would find me without trying. After all, I was nineteen in Los Angeles—the options should have been endless. I silently looked at every new connection wondering if this was the one. Was this the friend that turns into a lover? Love at first sight? Or maybe, my 'invisible string'?

On February 13th, it rained, and I watched *Saving Face* over a bowl of hot ramen. I found myself thinking about lovelessness again. I tried not to let the fact that I had never been pursued bother me, but I also felt that, at my age, girls were supposed to be the ones with options. Girls were supposed to be able to pick and choose what, and who, they wanted. I wondered if my choice to 'plan' love for later years may have just been a deflection of my inability to attract it.

Maybe I mistook the absence of physical warmth for the absence of social warmth, or maybe I used spontaneity to push back at my sophomore slump. But, in a sudden burst, I scrapped my four-year plan to find love. It was stupid to believe it would ever find me if I didn't even try to look for it first. I took this idea to one of my close friends, someone who embraces risk and rejects embarrassment in a way I can only envy. He, of course, encouraged me to do it.

So, to hell with the plan, and watch out world! I downloaded Hinge.

My first match was with a boy who had a family of raccoons in his backyard. He wished me happy Valentine's day (as it was, then, the 14th) after we had shared a total of four texts, and I got icked out. One of my matches felt more like a carbon copy than a counterpart of mine. One unsuccessfully tried to convince me he was a Mormon, and as stupid as it was, it really did make me laugh. People complimented me, and for once in my life, I felt pursued.

After a week or two, the likes plateaued. I checked Hinge as much as my other social media accounts, seeking the instant but meaningless gratification of a like. It was scary how quickly the app took control of my attention. Every fear I had about Hinge and its users was true: I became the one mindlessly swiping. I became a player in the dating game, knowing that there was only one winner—

the company. I knew the app prioritized money-making over matchmaking, but this awareness couldn't change how plainly *horrible* it made me feel. Every like I didn't get made me more self-critical. I have faith in my intelligence and kindness, so as the interest I received on the app dwindled to near-zero, I scrambled to figure out what it was that could be wrong with me. Every question led me to only one answer: my appearance.

Within weeks of downloading Hinge, doubt crept into every moment where I felt beautiful. Maybe I felt pretty, but surely I wasn't *actually* pretty. And if I wasn't *actually* pretty, then it doesn't make sense to artificially feel that I was. I second-guessed every picture I took, every compliment I got, and every look in the mirror. I felt permanently, unfixably ugly.

I was miserable, and I was also keenly aware of how stupid my misery was. I knew my experience was nothing personal. I knew that it might be different in a different city, at a different age, or in a different month of the year. Yet, despite everything I knew, the fact of the matter was that a single app had dragged my self-esteem down to the worst it had ever been.

The truth is, I didn't actually mind how many Hinge likes I had as much as how many I was supposed to have. My female friends on Hinge talk about all the weird messages they receive, the ugly guys that like them, and reaching the match limit. Women online talk about how the gender ratio on dating apps, heterosexually, favors women over men. Women attract, and men chase. Women get to pick, and men have to be picked. That is what I was taught, what I expected, and selfishly, what I wanted.

A dating app ruined my self-image, but I was already fragilely confident, risk-averse, and sensitive. I was the perfect person for Hinge to hurt. I know some, thicker-skinned than me, who can stay on, and some, luckier than me, who meet their matches instantly. I also know some, smarter than me, who know better than to download it in the first place.

Three months have passed since I first downloaded Hinge, and despite every way that it hurts me, I am still on it. It has made a space for itself in the group of apps I check daily, and my self-esteem still shifts as a function of my success on the app. I take pictures of myself and see them through a lens of desirability and attractiveness. It's embarrassing, really: me, a self-proclaimed opponent of online dating, joining an app and getting hurt. It's like jumping off a cliff and feigning surprise when you drop, like crashing on the ground and ignoring the blood—like healing, then jumping again.

There is one month until my senior year of college. Like every meeting, lecture, party, and flight, I planned the right time to fall in love. What I wasn't able to plan for was the fallout.

contributors

moody garland is God's favorite girlfailure. [Here is their website.](#)

Chloe Gaume is a UCLA student who studies English and creative writing. Since she embodies many different identities and stories, her unique background provides her with a perspective on lesser-known experiences. She aims to uncover them through her writing. In her free time, she enjoys journaling and photography.

Aarushi Gupta is a psychology and global health student at UCLA, but has the honor of calling Maryland home. Every now and then, she posts similar creative nonfiction pieces to her personal Substack, *Leaving Behind Gray*.

E. Willow will figure it out while she finishes Chapter Two.

Alyssa Wong is a writer and Barbie collector originally from Hong Kong, currently studying English and biology at UCLA. Her love of storytelling began in childhood, when she would use stuffed toys to enact complex family sagas exploring guilt, betrayal, and the suffering of outcasts. Since then, Alyssa has exchanged the medium of doll monologues for the written word. They have also lost all their baby teeth. Alyssa has participated in creative writing workshops at UCLA and at the Iowa Young Writers' Studio. Their work has previously appeared in *The Madison Journal of Literary Criticism*, *samfiftyfour*, *Precipice Magazine*, and *New Flash Fiction Review*. You can find Alyssa at <https://alyssaaung.wordpress.com/>.



featuring moody garland *Chloe Gaume* Aarushi Gupta *E. Willow* Alyssa Wong edited by Alex Bravo

