

The background features a stylized landscape with rolling hills in shades of brown, orange, and green. A large, bright white sun or moon is positioned in the upper center, set against a teal sky. The text 'NEW DREAMS' is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font in the upper left quadrant.

NEW DREAMS

Poems by

Kay Ulanday Barrett

Bernard Ferguson

torrin a. greathouse

Khadijah Queen



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Curated by

William Johnson and Malcolm Tariq

2021

Acknowledgements

New Dreams was created in collaboration with Lambda Literary and Cave Canem as part of the Poetry Coalition's collaborative exploration of the theme "It is burning./ It is dreaming./ It is waking up.: Poetry & Environmental Justice." This folio aims to demonstrate how poetry can positively provoke questions in communities about environmental justice and spark increased engagement with this urgent topic.

The Poetry Coalition is a national alliance of more than 25 organizations dedicated to working together to promote the value poets bring to our culture and the important contribution poetry makes in the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds. Members are nonprofit organizations whose primary mission is to promote poets and poetry, and/or multi-genre literary organizations that serve poets in the disability community and of specific racial, ethnic, or gender identities, backgrounds, or communities. All members present poets at live events. The Academy of American Poets is the administrative and fiscal coordinator of the Poetry Coalition, which is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Founded by Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady in 1996 to remedy the under-representation and isolation of African American poets in the literary landscape, **Cave Canem** is a home for the many voices of Black poetry and is committed to cultivating the artistic and professional growth of Black poets. It has grown from a gathering of 26 writers to an influential movement with a renowned faculty and an international fellowship of over 500. Cave Canem's programs and publications enlarge the American literary canon; democratize archives; and expand for students, poets, and readers the notion of

what's possible and valuable in poetry. Its programs include an annual retreat, community workshops, lectures, and reading and panel series. Its three book prizes, delivered in collaboration with five prestigious presses, have launched the careers of several poets, including former U.S. Poet Laureates Natasha Trethewey and Tracey K. Smith.

For over 30 years, **Lambda Literary** has championed LGBTQ books and authors. No other organization in the world serves LGBTQ writers and readers more comprehensively than Lambda Literary. We believe that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer literature is fundamental to the preservation of our culture, and that LGBTQ lives are affirmed when our stories are written, published, and read.

Folio design and cover art by Christopher J. Greggs

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Poet Bios

Kay Ulanday Barrett is a poet, performer, and cultural strategist. Barrett's poetry collection *More Than Organs* (Sibling Rivalry Press) received a 2021 Stonewall Book Honor Award by the American Library Association. K. has featured at The Lincoln Center, The United Nations, Symphony Space, The Poetry Foundation, Princeton University, The Dodge Poetry Foundation, The Hemispheric Institute, and Brooklyn Museum. They've received fellowships from MacDowell, Lambda Literary Review, Drunken Boat, VONA, and Macondo. Their contributions are found in *The New York Times*, *Asian American Literary Review*, *them.*, *NYLON*, *Vogue*, *PBS News Hour*, *Buzzfeed*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Advocate*, *The Rumpus*, *F(r)iction*, *RaceForward*, and more. In their political work, they have served on boards and committees for The Transgender Law Center, Sylvia Rivera Law Project, The Disability Justice Collective, Res Artis, and recently was on the advisory committee for *Crip Camp*, a documentary on Netflix. Currently, they remix their mama's recipes and reside in Jersey City with their jowly dog. www.kaybarrett.net

Bernard Ferguson (he/him and they/them) is a Bahamian poet and proser. By great luck, he's the winner of the 2019 Hurston/Wright College Writers Award and the 2019 92Y Discovery Contest, among others. His work has been supported by NYU's Global Research Initiative, New York's Writers in the Public Schools, The Atlantic Center for the Arts, and Joshua Tree Highlands Artist Residency. By the kindness of friends and editors, his work has been featured, published or is forthcoming in *The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and elsewhere. He's currently working on a nonfiction project, *The Climate Sirens*

(Graywolf, 2023), about Hurricane Dorian, the Alliance of Small Island States, and how small islands have been facing the climate crisis for decades.

torrin a. greathouse is a transgender, cripple-punk, MFA candidate at the University of Minnesota. Her work is published in *POETRY*, *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Best New Poets 2020*. torrin recently received the National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship; they have also received fellowships from the Effing Foundation, Zoeglossia, and the University of Arizona Poetry Center. torrin is the author of two chapbooks, *There is a Case That I am* (Damaged Goods Press, 2017) and *boy/girl/ghost* (TAR Chapbook Series, 2018). Their debut collection, *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound*, winner of the Ballard Spahr Prize for Poetry, was published in 2020 by Milkweed Editions.

Khadijah Queen is the author of six books, including *I'm So Fine: A List of Famous Men & What I Had On* (2017), praised in *O Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Rain Taxi*, *Los Angeles Review*, and elsewhere as "quietly devastating," and "a portrait of defiance that turns the male gaze inside out." Poems and essays appear in *Harper's Magazine*, *Buzzfeed*, *North American Women Poets in the 21st Century*, *American Poetry Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and widely elsewhere. Her latest poetry collection, *Anodyne*, was published in August 2020 by Tin House. She teaches creative writing at University of Colorado, Boulder, and holds a PhD in English from the University of Denver.

NEW DREAMS

NEW DREAMS

Kay Ulanday Barrett

This poem centers its thinking and ache from a pre-COVID world of being Disabled in an ecosystem and climate that has been compromised by capitalism. How terror becomes normalized everyday, how it becomes an archive where people suffer, but the very ways we connect, we love, and romance is unduly altered. It's a realistic poem mapping how earth offers itself energy to revitalize and where the world can be anew without humans, and yet, what happened if we persevered still with our love? I think it's a selfish poem from people who need physical intimacy in a landscape riddled with borders. What's the cost of being daring?

Love, artifact

The air is thicker or jar of jam.

We're breathing in bulbous catastrophe but with
layers of plexiglass over our faces, *breathing*
is a loose word. Shit, wearing masks
used to be
fashion statement, not need.

When they kiss you for the first time, masks
are off. There is only 3 hours of free space air for us
a day. This is what you choose to do with it:

Get wet like the ancestors before us,
fumble hair strands
in eager crooks of palms,
make garden of the minute,
bury your heart in the mud,
make pulse bigger.

It wasn't always this way.
Lovers could sufficiently waste one
another's time on the last planet.
This is what old newspaper headlines state.
Bumbling lungs that didn't have to beg for air.

Plants used to be our source, corals made way for
more minutes. Oxygen of earth from earth.

That was then.

On this dome, we sneak glances over love interests
in aluminum. Save up our devotion in moments.
We can't be remarkable in our eruptions like our grandparents

Spontaneity is fossil. Fingertips have long
forgotten the concept of kinetic.

Why did we let it get to this point—

God what would you do if they just touched
your cheek without planning to?

A new life they promised us. One better after the climate
stopped grappling with our mistakes. We made far
too many, and now to kiss is daydream thing.

Love,
Artifact.

Please—
Take off your helmet.
Welcome the storm.

We can learn to breathe again or
let us just cherish this air,
let us inhale even it breaks us for trying.

Bernard Ferguson

I've been thinking about what we owe to one another, and the ways we are allowed to hold each other accountable. I've witnessed and been subjected to numerous kinds of violence recently—emotional and interpersonal on one hand, cultural and racial on the other—and my attempts to hold accountable those responsible has been met with aggression, erasure, or silence. The lesson seems to be that no one owes anyone anything. But I don't think that's true. Speaking personally, I think that the unmet demands of justice—the cardinal bone of which is accountability—will breed, eventually, a need for vengeance. In trying to further my thinking on this, I tried to learn from the land. I tried to imagine that what has happened to me is perhaps comparable to similar narratives happening, on a larger scale, to the planet.

why make promises at all

why make promises at all if, when the erosion erodes, there will be nothing left of the roots? —not mine nor yours nor that of the grandfather redwood, older than my life, older than the tally of years and lives that came before mine.

atrocities happen in the world of minutia a few hundred thousand by the second: a child stomping victorious atop the head of the daffodil; the rain disappearing, suddenly, from one coordinate and then reappearing, fused, with the rain at another; the foreign cells metastasizing in silence until the tragedy is terminal.

the silence—that's the problem. right before you begin the journey across the grassland, coins in your pocket, blood in your heart, you'd think they'd tell you the truth: no one has to answer for anything. someone decided death was the one bone we share and we have been bending toward it, altogether, ever since. at least spike your dopamine, at least deplete what you cannot protect. your narrative rivals the planet's narrative because they are the same: despite our fortunes, eventually, ruin arrived.

torrin a. greathouse

This poem is an attempt to render my reckoning with, and failure to extricate myself from, the logics of late Anthropocene capitalism. As a disabled, chronically ill, trans person, my existence is profoundly entangled with the medical industrial complex and the many vectors of harm it inflicts on the planet. Simultaneously, I was interested in critiquing the poetry industry's connections to Big Pharma money from my subject position as someone who survives using the medications those pharmaceutical companies produce.

Fundamentally, this poem intends to question the seductive logic of the Individual Carbon Footprint, that American culture has been sold for decades. Meanwhile, according to a 2015 Oxfam study, the richest 10% of the world population are responsible for half of all greenhouse gas emissions. This deceptive conception redirects blame away from those most responsible for harm while erasing the double-bind faced by those more reliant on systems like the medical industrial complex. Often, it slips dangerously toward eco-fascism in the single alternative that it offers for people like me: die for the good of this planet.

The Cost

As a kid, I tore fallen Fall leaves
 into strips where their veins
 split, ripped splints of gold
 from the season's rot & called
 myself rich. Now, a dozen
 seasons sicker, I wait in another
 off-white room & wonder
 about the cost: the gold
 mined to line an MRI, its pale mouth
 that means to swallow me. Tell me
 how the spider web of fluid
 strung across the back branches
 of my brain has grown—might still be
 growing. I wonder how much blood
 stains its metal teeth, who died
 for its ugly grin. Think next
 of my hormones & the myth,
 now outdated, of their synthesis

from horse's piss—instead,
 the by-product of soy farming;
 trail of deforestation, displacement
 & worker exploitation. Industrial
 pesticides leaching into the dirt.
 The chemicals my body carries
 into the water table, slowly shifting
 the biology of fish. The small pharmacy
 I make inside my guts to manufacture
 survival—the wreckage
 I imagine must exit me. Monthly,
 pink band-aids decorate the softest
 flesh I can find to perforate.
 A coffee can on my desk collects
 the used injections that keep
 my migraines at bay. One month
 The Poetry Foundation signs a check
 I cash & flip to pay the scrip.
 The trick—of course—the meds

are made by Eli Lilly. An endowment
 reimbursing itself. A slight of hand.
 A child's magic quarter on a string.
 With each dose, my insurance warns me
 about the device's rate of failure.
 Their needles, fragile & uninsured.
 Each year: How many broken? How
 many wasted & misplaced into growing
 island seafills of medical debris?
 How many not-yet-empty inhalers hiss
 their contents into the sea, or pill
 bottles crumble into microplastic
 beads. How many components
 of my daily living cannot be made
 without unmaking? My cane's
 lightweight weave of carbon fiber
 folded together with layer by layer
 of petroleum pitch; a lineage of
 off-shore drills & oil slicking beaches

with spilled crude. Milled steel
strip, a brace to keep my wrist in place,
a laundry list of toxic emissions. Even
the coffee I drank to draft this poem.
I can't write myself out of this
corner or into an answer. I can't
extract myself from this machine
of extraction. We both know
where this line of thinking leads.
I am not expected to make it
out of this lyric—this logic
—alive. My body's cost
too high. How can the world afford
the greed of me allowing myself
to continue breathing? The poem begs
a question. I search for an answer
that doesn't taste of blood.

Khadijah Queen

We're only here for a flash of time to witness, to steward, to persevere through, to embrace joy in the natural world we're part of, that sustains us, that it is our privilege to preserve. I've always felt closest to and in awe of the universe of the sea; its beauty, its sense of renewal. I tried to capture the stakes of loss if we ignore our call to act with care to protect our planet.

Natural Law

The snowiest white
makes sky into rice paper—

branches drawing bare
lyric into soft panic for the earth's future.

Morning after snow
oaken arms reach up. Birds' nests disappear

as clumps fatten them, fall
as natural law begins life as haiku, pastoral, aseptic

wilderness of language smudged in
ink sleet, colored pencil, blue fingerprints meant to score

blank pulp into palimpsest, endangered as red
maple leaves, ice-coated, spiking the sunset ash.

Couplets, those old heirlooms, quicken to the animal
songs of *Our Planet*, *Giants of the Deep*

Blue, the neon-rich seas alive
and dying while I read jagged ink cliffs,

marks like sound waves, frequencies
in the dictionary of the throat, landscape and seascape

forbears too pained to pronounce vast enough
 revolutions, the crisis of change crenellating

faster than echo, flight, lullaby
 blizzard-light stranding us in faux stillness. Afraid,

harrowing salvage, selvage, preferring a volcanic
 necklace of isles in magazine gloss, mythologized beauty

screened in blue light, in our lit rooms, narrated out
 of complexity. Vacant talk of rights, regulations

tuning maps of scratches on minuscule
 cave skulls, whaleskin, unnamed humans, sundry

fossils to ignore the acts of living,
 to deem the leopard shark, otter and sea lion

seeking protection in kelp canopies, the wrasse
 hunting urchins to eat—black, stripped open to neon

flesh and white lace for the shared feast,
 or purple snack, snap in the mouth, control

gestures learned over millennia—not global
 citizens. When and how to interfere? Now,

back on land, a morning question:
 is the ivy mass as ancient as cathedral bells

ringing skyward? If what grows between staircase cracks
 lends the stone to its own potential, remember even weeds

know how to survive. A dawn walk over cobblestones,
 alone with myself and a thousand years, I imagine blue

sea-churn eager, cresting into mystic
 zones a planet across. Traveling in two infinities

to witness fifty tons of muscle dive, dividing waves,
 to intersect a silverfish cloud making its own

direction, to feel the nerve of unison, superlative
 orisons as soothers of us, far from late heat

or never brought to sun to recover,
 as if unwritten

forgiveness is fuel enough
 for continuous acts of beginning.