



CROAK

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CROAK

ISSUE 2





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Cover art: “Pink Frog” by Rosemary James

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POLLY BUCKINGHAM
CONSTANT JUNE RAIN

The ponds film over with paint-thick algae,
a trap door into a second spring. The frenzied
flowers don't know when to stop. The goats
have too much to eat, waterfalls roar and shake
like hungry trolls, and rocks dress up for a night
on the town. Mosquitoes and crickets and frogs
swing dance. Fiddles cut the dark and gusty sky.
Even stars get in the act, divebombing
the clouds with their tiny lights. I have been
far away. Tonight the darkness stands close,
hums swampy tunes—*Come home where
life can whirl around you, desperate
with growth and shine.*

JACOB HATFIELD

WEST CREEK HIGH GETTING CEREBRAL

soaked doc martins, summer humidity
in tennessee temp, blazing
bees decimate
lurking silent tree line, one floating
chuck 70, bodies still
with grass to back, gas station lighter
shoved in pocket, evidence in carmine
fading into eyes, ultraviolet emitter understands
enough to lay down, muttered voices
guide firefly from ground to
air to hand to
// // //
never ask the moon to explain
the things that happen under her glow,
under her violent silence
instead, watch shoes coming up on the creek bed,
tadpoles shushing the flowing water,
crawdads moving in grace, toads feeling the light
on oily skin, fireflies lighting up what she cannot

CODY BLOOMFIELD
STAR RISE FOR NOCTURNAL GUYS



Fig. 1: "Star Rise for Nocturnal Guys." Watercolor.

PAUL HOSTOVSKY
THAT LIGHT

My mother loved Claude Monet.
But then she loved everything French—
tout ça—and wanted me to love it, too.

But I didn't love French. Madame Pearl
dropped her r's in high school and I couldn't
stop laughing. She told me to leave, *sortez*,

which sounded like *sautéz*. So I jumped
like a frog out the door and down the hall,
laughing all the way to the principal's office.

Those water lilies were everywhere
on the walls in our house. My mother
loved them. But they gave me the impression

of an army of invisible bullfrogs going
ribbit, ribbit. I think everything is interesting
if you're of a mind to see it in that light.

Claude Monet probably understood this
as he sat by his wife's deathbed, transfixed
by that light playing on her dead face.

The stoners in my high school definitely
understood that everything is intoxicatingly
interesting if you're of a mind to see it

in that light. And then there was my grandmother
in her hospital bed, liver spots and moles
speckling her wrinkled face and neck

which made her look like a toad beneath
the white sheets. Surrounded by doctors
and nurses and children and grandchildren—

she was of a mind to see the pulse oximeter
that they'd placed on her left index finger
as the most interesting thing in the room,

more interesting than anything else in recent
memory, which was mostly gone by then
anyway. She cocked her head like a bird

or a philosopher contemplating a crumb
on God's table under the light—that light—
and said to her children and grandchildren

and all of the strangers working together
to keep her from dying: "What is the name
of this thing? It's so interesting. I don't think

I've ever seen one before in my life."

MARIELLE MADDEN
PIP



Fig. 2: "Pip." Photography and digital.

ANTHY STROM

FROG IN A FIELD OF GOLDEN REEDS

Frog in a field of golden reeds
Templing in these old and frayed weeds
Sun-spots glowing under thick autumn sun
Burrow so deep,
Let there be uninterrupted sleep
Beneath warm mud and sweet silt

BETH SHERMAN

ALL TOADS ARE FROGS

But not all frogs are toads, my mother tells me.
We're in the day room, next to the terrarium.
Frogs have teeth, she says.
Frogs can live 20 years, longer in the woods.
Today is a good day. She painted flowers by numbers, listened to a story, ate her lunch, learned some Fun Amphibian Facts.
There are other women in the day room, some in wheelchairs, most staring at nothing, like they're watching invisible TV. Nurses cycle in and out.
Look, my mother says, pointing to the tank.
Two frogs. One drinks from a tiny swimming pool. The other sits in a rope hammock. There are artificial climbing vines, a mossy basking area, a hidden cave, even a lounge chair with a teeny cup holder.
Their habitat looks nicer than my mother's room, which she shares with Ethel Tamarkin, who's recovering from hip surgery.
They shed their skin and eat it, my mother continues.
They ride bikes when we're not looking.
They buy lipstick at the mall.
My mother reaches over and removes the lid, sticks her hand inside.
Don't, I say, thinking about salmonella, hundreds of invisible, dangerous bacteria.
But she's already removed a pale green frog with yellow eyes and gold spots on its back. It fits in the palm of her hand like a charm.
I look around. No nurses. No one is paying attention to us.
She's brought the frog up to her lips. I'm horrified that she might kiss it, but instead she starts whispering in its ear.
Mom. Don't. Stop, she says to the frog.
Words I've been repeating for the past year.
The frog looks bored, though maybe that's his resting face.
They can scream, my mother says.
And I imagine what that sounds like—the high-pitched wail of the lost.

DANIELLE DOUGHTY
AMERICAN TOAD



Fig. 3: "American Toad." Color ink pens on paper.

MATTHEW LEE
THE STAGES OF LIFE

I
in the milky pond
frogs mating—
devilish eyes!

II
dewdrops crown the frog's head
greedy gulps of moss
trapped under the canoe

III
though the frog shivers
the rain does not
stop

IV
limping frog
leaves a trail
of sated leeches

V
frog in backstroke
white belly to the sun
webbed feet ripple

NATHAN FAKO
DEAD FROG (SORRY)

Belly up, fat
tongue out, centered
& dead in the road I found a frog.
The stray mutt who'd walk with me
picked it up with a sniff & wag.
Walking the dog into Oklahoma morning,
I wished for the summer to end.
No more of the trailer with tin steps hot
& sharp on my bare feet. No more
fishing for perch in a creek near Skiatook
with those naked boys.
Did I know I was gay? I knew
the country didn't want me.
And Alice pushed me in the creek
when I refused to kiss.
Maybe none of this is true—
maybe that's how the frog felt.

NAT RAUM
SKINBREATHER

when i ask *would you bathe me if an evil witch turned me into a frog?* i am really asking *are you still in love with me?* i know everyone tires of my scratched-record tendencies, so i come up with more than one way to say the same thing. you are embedded in me—no wonder i have blinked twice and simultaneously known you for ten years, an entire lifetime. i feel the water pour over my head, down my face. i breathe moisture and air and affection all the same: through membrane of paperthin skin. so when i ask *how are you?* i am really asking *do you think we were frogs together in a past life? did you love me then, too? am i so wrong to think i have loved you across centuries?*

ARCHER L

ORANGE YOU GLAD TO SEE A FROG?

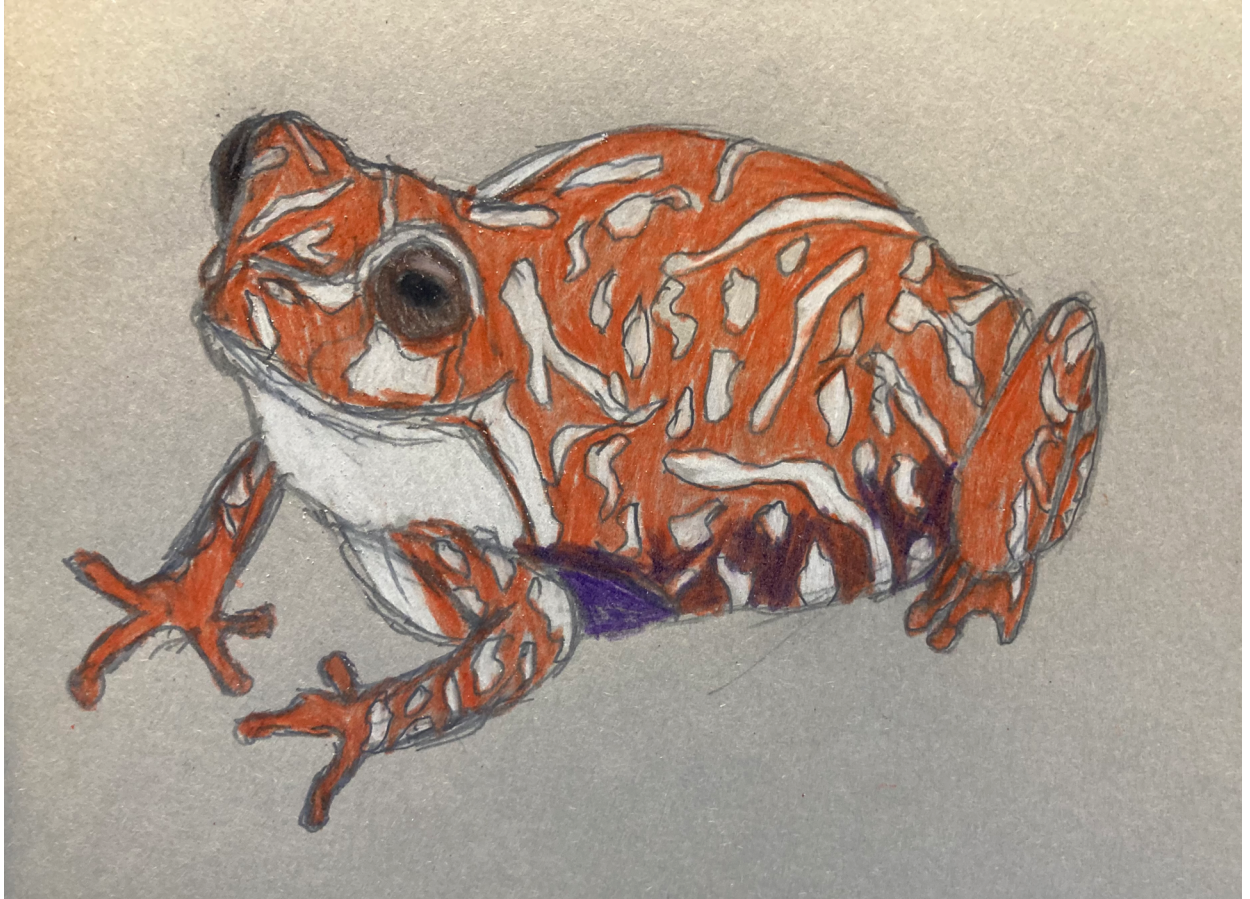


Fig. 4: "Orange you glad to see a Frog?" Colored pencils on paper.

SARAH ROONEY
THE ARMY'S CHORUS

In 2020 I met up with my friend Jennie at Cannon Hill Park on the South Hill. We'd been cooped up because of mandates and sickness. We spread out her blanket, sewn with a variety of leftover quilt squares combined in an entrancing pattern.

We laid out our navy-filigreed white china to enjoy afternoon tea and socialize like we hadn't been able to in the cold. But as we sat to chat and snack, the pond shook itself to life.

That's when I heard them sing: a song of low throat hum.

"There's an entire chorus of frogs here," I said.

"It's beautiful, right? Those frogs, American Bullfrogs, they're actually invasive!"

My eyes focused on one of the brazen Bullfrogs. I saw him, that outlaw, swimming with no care, propelling himself leisurely across the murky water. I watched as the other animals provided a wide berth for him. On the outskirts of the pond, ducks waded carefully through the tall grass with their ducklings dipping under the water to play or grab a quick bite. Turtles hovered close to the edge of the pond. The fish were unseen. No small birds flew above the water despite the bugs swarming just over its surface.

It was that day that I found out about the American Bullfrog's voracious omnivorous appetite and relentless spawning. Frogs cannot live without meat. Something I never knew. Looking at it again, the pond was filled with what seemed more frog than fish. Was it their fault they flourished in an environment that they were brought into as a supplementary food source, a capitalistic venture?

I now know that it is more legal to kill them than keep them. There's no need for a permit and the means to their end doesn't matter. In fact, saving one of them could lead to the death of thousands of native species. They who are cannibal. These quick and brutal killers of small fowl, turtles, and frogs.

I still cannot shake the sound of their beautiful forceful thrumming. I fear for the small ones living in those waters. I want to save them and I cannot bring myself to dish out what the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife might deem as justice or perhaps Darwinism.

Instead, my eyes are stuck on the dexterity and grace of their legs bounding through water. Instead, my ears resonate with their humming while I carefully fill my belly with Earl Grey tea and homemade brownies. I watch their survival in hopes to better understand the complexity and fragility of my own.

JONATHAN JOHNSON

KERMIT

So the phone doesn't ring so much anymore,
not that phones actually ring these days,
but you know what I mean. The world's moved on.

Once, an elderly lady in an assisted-living community
painted me. A friendly portrait. Handsome and happy.
For as long as she could get out, she kept me—

a plush me—fastened to the grill of her P.T. Cruiser
like a figurehead maiden or dragon on a ship
above the breaking waves. Except, a frog above the slush.

She had me on her scarf, too, both sides, like twins,
and enjoyed when the young baristas said "I love your scarf"
at her haunt just off the local campus.

That painting hung a long time above her usual table
after she'd gone. Now, even the coffee shop's long over and done.
There's a lot of my old mugs out there on Ebay.

And Pez dispensers! Remember Pez? Gosh.
But who knows where that painting's gone. I'm not complaining.
Have you heard Ray Charles cover "It's Not Easy Being Green?"

Or how about Willie's "Rainbow Connection?"
And people once saw something of themselves
in me. How many frogs get to say that?

And I still get a little work now and then,
thanks to the old fallbacks PBS and Macy's Thanksgiving Day.
But it's like the Buddhists say; everything goes away.

Like the Swamp. Some manufacturing guy from Chicago
bought the whole shore. Um hm. Runs his Jet Skis
back and forth and shoots fireworks a couple times a year.

Sure it's sad. But you gotta move on. I've found
a marsh on public land with cattails and redwing blackbirds
and delicious dragonflies, all amphitheatered by velvety pines.

Am-phi-theatered, am-phi-theatered. Amphi-...theatered.
Look, there's only so many days in a life.
The moon comes out like a spotlight just after sunset,
and I've still got the banjo.



Fig. 5: "Toad Mug on a Mug." Clay.

MACKENZIE
TOAD MUG ON A MUG

HANNAH TENDO
SMALL FRY

Small Fry
was a tadpole,
a pollywog,
but is now, without question,
a slimy, green, ribbiting,
amphibian.

(And a posh one at that!)

He lives in a stylish apartment.
It has a waterfall and a log
and a live bamboo tree
and a few fish
and a marvelous view of the changing seasons.

He has a most sophisticated palate.
His meals are delivered through a catering service.
He dines primarily on crickets—
named crickets, of course.
Jimmy, Jerry, Kevin, and so forth.

He goes on a daily constitution,
laps around his lake,
and has the luxury to rest when he wishes.
He floats in the middle,
intelligent eyes wide open,
webbed feet flicking ever so slightly.

He lives the good life,
with young faces peeking in at him at all times.

Oh how nice it must be
to be
Small Fry.

SIXTHTEAS
MOTHER AND CHILDREN



Fig. 6: "Mother and Children." Digital.

DINCENIX

**SPRING HAS ARRIVED WHEN THE FROGS
ARE CHILLING AT POND AGAIN.**



Fig. 7: "Spring has arrived when the frogs are chilling again." Digital pixel art.

CJ THE TALL POET
SOONER RATHER THAN LATER

The misty sky buried Ann's reflection
A few relaxed water hawthorns
Floated underneath an outdated bridge
Perhaps new paint can be applied to it
An uproar so sudden had startled me
Of course it's a mosquito wave
Whenever the aquatic ancient creature
Awakens from a refreshing slumber
Sooner rather than later
Everything will be alright

KARA BEECHLER
SHADWICK ROAD

murky waters conceal
lime green frogs
this place alleviates
my throbbing knees from falling from the willow tree,
this morning
rain dances off the tin roof, one last homage to the sky above
my hand emerges
holding something sticky and warm,
it peers through my fingers with its bulging eyes and
tries to escape my grip
with a fearsome leap
i'm sure i named it something
i can't remember what
now

there's a polaroid photograph of my sister and i on the porch
with the wild animal
i wonder
if i'd still set it free
in the distance

i hear tires grip
the gravel
it sends a cloud
of smoke my way
anger is the name
of my father

CALEB EDMONDSON
BLUE

There was a field I wanted to roll around in.
I wanted to throw my body

into bushes until breath turned to pinpricks.
I wanted my shoulders to melt

into coneflowers while bullfrog croaks fell
across an evening sky so long.

I wanted your breath folded between my breath,
your arms pretzeled soft

around my own. I wanted this & bluebirds & more
frogs & more minutes

in a moment. I wanted. I want. Because I do.
Because there is a blue light

that comes on above your garage door as the moon
blinks with the streetlamps

& I see it when I'm not there. Because
when I get in late from the city,

when I leave some dinner party with dark wine
& finger foods, I imagine blue.

But there's no field at my doorstep,
only a buzz.

RITABUUK
FROG DOODLE COMPILATION



Fig. 8: "Frog Doodle Compilation." Ballpoint pen on paper.

PORTIA YU
PARABOLIC INSTANCES

A frog jumps from a lily
to a lily, but between the two
it disappears

in this moment: a body
is absent, no legs extended
there is a rounded kind of stillness

from one second to the next
there is, inserted,
a pause

between two houses, a narrow alley
between two words, a breath
between two waves, the smoothness of water

this is the same parabola
extended, contracted
inverted over a horizon

a frog exists on the crest of a wave
and between two crests exists a point
in which no frog exists

from one lily and the next
an absence
leaping

AUTHOR BIOS

ANTHY STROM

Certified hermit Anthy Strom might be found in a bog near you.

ARCHER L

Archer is an artist and writer who has been interested in frogs his whole life. He is now the proud owner of two wood frogs who manage to stir up quite the drama, despite being frogs.

BETH SHERMAN

Beth Sherman's writing has been published in over 100 literary journals and appears in Best Microfiction 2024. She's a Pushcart, BSF, and BOTN nominee.

CALEB EDMONDSON

Caleb Edmondson is a writer from Akron, OH, who is currently finishing up his MFA studies at Bowling Green State University. He enjoys walks and sitting by bodies of water.

CJ THE TALL POET

CJ The Tall Poet is a poet, digital artist, and author based in Chula Vista, California who's currently attending Cal State University San Marcos for a degree in Literature and Writing. Their writing has appeared in Bardics-Anonymous, Journal of Expressive Writing, redrosethorns and elsewhere. CJ randomly creates frog artwork.

CODY BLOOMFIELD

Cody is a longtime herp enthusiast. They have had frog companions for most of the past two decades and currently keep Jeepers Creepers, a Whites Tree Frog. After a childhood in frog-deficient lands, they now enjoy stumbling across the occasional wild frog in East Coast waters.

DANIELLE DOUGHTY

Danielle is a citizen, scientist, and artist who loves learning about the natural world. Frogs are wonderful harbingers of spring, and she loves American toads in particular. Toads rule!

DINCHENIX

Dinchenix is a Pixel Artist with a love for all kinds of wetland creatures. Growing up surrounded by ponds and the sea, frogs sing the songs of her childhood.

HANNAH TENDO

Hannah is a scribbler and doodler located in a treehouse studio in Hawaii. While at first averse to amphibians, they snuck their way into her heart when her nephew brought home a slew of tadpoles from a local river. Hannah's projects can be found on her website www.hannahtendo.com.

JACOB HATFIELD

Jacob Hatfield is a poet writing out of Middle Tennessee. Everything is about frogs for him and he loves finding them on the side of his house and ribbit-ing along with them. (Insta: @jacobandthefrogs).

JONATHAN JOHNSON

Jonathan Johnson is the author of seven books, including the October 2025 releases *Pine*, a collection of poems, and *The Little Lights of Town*, a collection of stories. Kermit was among his earliest teachers.

KARA BEECHLER

Kara Beechler is a lifelong lover of words, and frogs. She used to catch them in ponds near her home in the mountains of Tennessee and eventually learned that letting them hop free is a better option. You can find her on Instagram @karabeechler.

MACKENZIE

Mackenzie (Pointy Dog Ceramics) is a small batch potter making weird and cute nature pottery in Columbus, OH. She does love frogs, but as a clumsy and somewhat slow moving person, toads are more her speed.

MARIELLE MADDEN

Marielle is a chef and writer from CNY that rarely has the opportunity to see frogs nowadays, and misses them and their peeping dearly.

MATTHEW LEE

Matthew Lee is a writer and editor living with cancer in Melbourne, Australia. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Meniscus Literary Journal*, *North of Oxford Journal*, and *Neologism Poetry Journal*, among others. He wishes there were more frogs in Melbourne so that he could write more poems about them.

NAT RAUM

nat raum spent their childhood in the forest outside Baltimore, obsessed with frogs, toads, and Toad. They have always written and made art, which you can find at natraum.com.

PAUL HOSTOVSKY

Paul Hostovsky makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter. He has kept his day job all these years just in case the poetry thing didn't work out. He has always liked what Marianne Moore said about poetry: "Imaginary gardens with real toads in them."

POLLY BUCKINGHAM

Author of three books, Polly Buckingham is editor of Willow Springs magazine and teaches at Eastern Washington University. Polly once snuck a toad onto a sailboat that capsized. Though the demise of the toad can only be guessed, Polly learned that wild animals belong in the wild.

PORTIA YU

Portia Yu is a writer from Hong Kong. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Strange Horizons, LIKE A FEVER and Frontier , among others. In addition, she has appeared in Where Else: An International Hong Kong Poetry Anthology. She has written poems about many animals such as bees, tigers, fish, snails, and of course, frogs.

RITABUUK

Ritabuuk is someone who likes to doodle frogs along the margins of her notes.

ROSEMARY JAMES

Rosemary has always had a deep appreciation for all amphibians and reptiles and frequently uses them in her artwork. She mainly creates via procreate and oil painting and her Instagram handle is @gaiasblueearth

SARAH ROONEY

Sarah Rooney is a NB poet who created "Speakeasy" Open Mic in March of 2022. They co-organize "Foray for the Arts," a traveling multidisciplinary, monthly event series in Spokane with Greg Bem. They are pursuing their MFA in poetry at EWU and their first chapbook, Mother Media, was published in October, 2023. They can be found on instagram at @_mixophrygonium_.

SIXTHTEAS

The artist for Mother and Children, Sixthteas is known to have taken a liking towards frogs since they were young. Finding intrigue in their cute appearance and nature.

EDITORS' NOTE

Croak is thrilled to present its second issue! In this issue we celebrate fond frog memories and mourn frogs since departed. The poems and prose in this issue focus on movement, whimsy, and other aspects of the frog condition. Most of the art pieces in this issue depict the individualistic and contemplative nature of frogs and toads. We hope you too will contemplate the great meanings of flies, lily pads, and galaxies beyond our own.

The picture below was taken in Spokane at our local bookstore cafe: Jupiter's Eye, where we put the final touches of this issue together. Jupiter's Eye will be hosting a meet & greet event to celebrate the release of *Croak*'s first two issues. If you're in town, come join us on May 10th from 5-7PM for some froggy drinks, crafts, and readings.

Thank you for reading our second issue, now EAT IT WHOLE.

Kurtis, Rook, and Shraya
Croak Editors



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