

# New Poetry from Nicole Oquendo and James A.H. White

The following poems are reprinted with permission from the anthology [\*Pulse/Pulso: In Remembrance of Orlando\*](#) (Damaged Goods Press 2018), edited by Roy G. Guzmán and Miguel M. Morales.

## to be born

by Nicole Oquendo

my spine is queer, curved enough  
to hold me up while the news bends  
and sways us. every day we die, and  
one day it will be me, though statistically,  
according to these headlines,  
it's more likely to happen soon.

but there's new life to look forward to.  
last year, my family taught me how  
to press my chest and sculpt my own form.  
i make love now by giving and taking in equal measure.  
my brothers and sisters and those in between  
see me standing next to them, signing all of my names.



## Stained Glass

by James A.H. White

Fifty—the number of years my mother has lived. The number of paper clips currently interlocked in a small tin bucket on my work desk. According to motivational speaker Gail Blanke, the number of physical and emotional ties you should throw out of your life in order to find it again.

Some say many of them knew each other. It's often like that in our community. It's often like that in a nightclub. We recognize each other. There's no darkness dark enough to interrupt that.

The Orange County Medical Examiner's Office, with assistance from Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System, identified, notified, autopsied (if needed) and released all bodies to next of kin within 72 hours of the incident. That is, all but one victim, whose father wouldn't claim his gay son.

Phonesthesia is the term for sound symbolism, or, relating shapes to sounds. I see shame played like tetherball, see it shaped like the tennis ball as it flies, bound, around that metal pole, hear it on the slap of the child's open hand or deeper-chorused fist. I see shame falling on that victim's burial like the kind of rainstorm written into movie scripts—dark and heavy. I think of it registering unfairly on the faces of the closeted's families when they saw their loved one's body and recognized it for the first time.

An installation at Chicago's Contemporary Art Museum featured a row of bodies lined across a gallery and blanketed by white sheets that peaked at the noses and toes hidden but assumed molded beneath. A girl nearby says it all makes her sleepy before she falls to the floor and pretends to sleep—like the dead. On the morning of the shooting, I think of my brothers and sisters inside, not lined but scattered, sleep I imagine made clearer to the young as something much nearer, perhaps much whiter.

I break down hearing about the group that hid in the bathroom but were found then fired on, a couple in a stall injured not only by bullets but

shrapnel from the wall and  
door. Suppose the bathroom stall like a closet. Do you  
remember huddling? How about  
holding onto yourself beneath a traditional Jibarro straw hat  
or flower bonnet? How  
long did you wait before the car horn outside announced it had  
come to take you out  
dancing?