

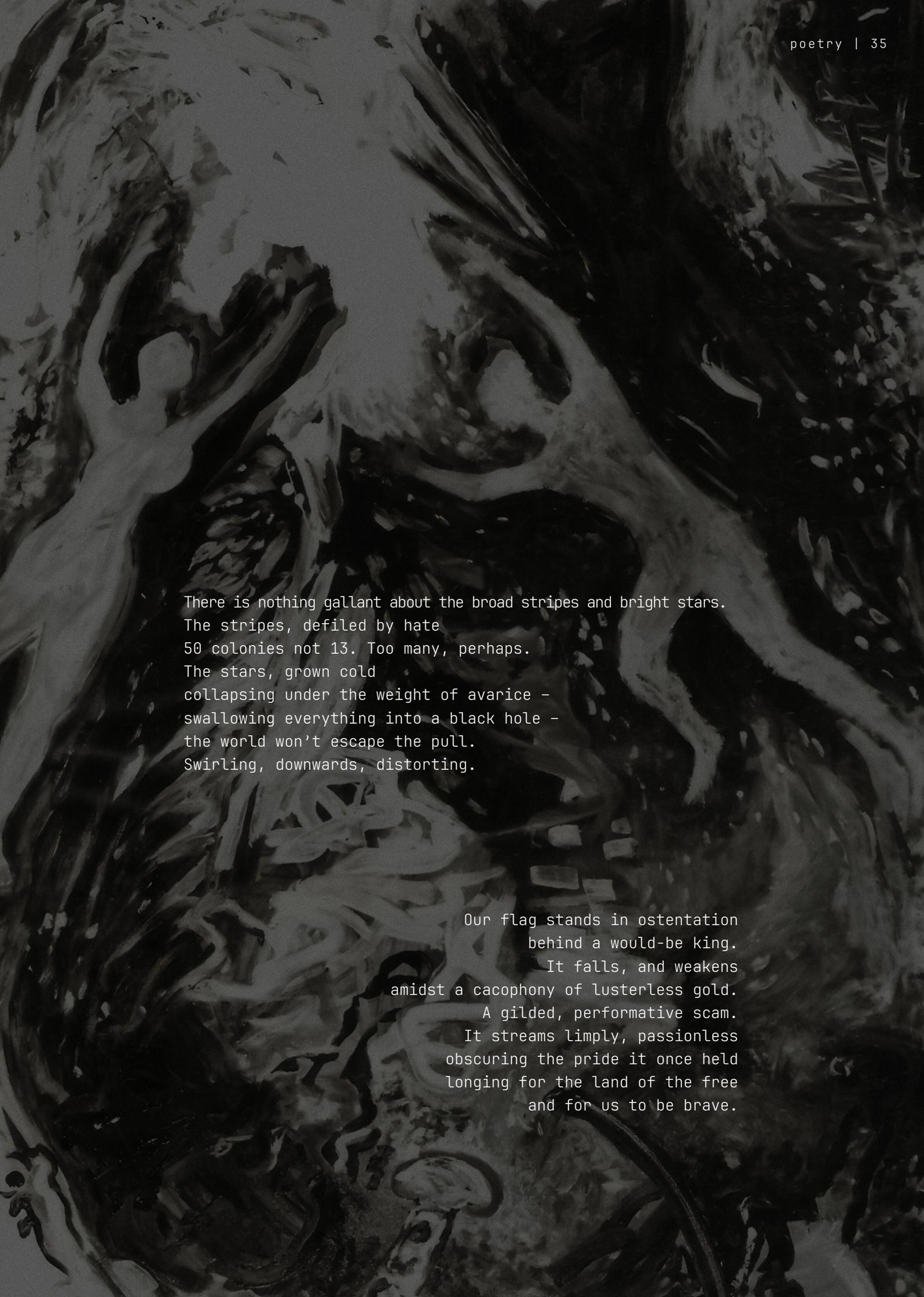
# **THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER, UNRAVELED**

by LAURA NTOUMANIS

“O! Say can you see, by the dawn’s early light?”  
I cannot see, my eyes, blindfolded.  
My hands, bound, tightly, the plastic cutting into my skin.  
My legs in chains, yet I don’t wish to run.  
Where else would I run to?  
I just wanted a better life, in a better place,  
yet now I’m being marched off to a prison  
in a country I do not know.  
I am meant to disappear.

“What so proudly we hail’d”,  
once upon a time.  
To whom do we now pledge allegiance?  
To a country, or a king?  
“No kings, no taxation without representation”  
was the battle cry of the founders  
of this (once) great country.  
And now we sit on land that isn’t ours  
letting a narcissistic dictator lead us astray.

The twilight, no longer gleaming,  
obscured by a chemical haze,  
as forests are felled, factories unchecked  
their waste seeping into the ground  
their fumes poisoning the air.  
‘Tis no matter  
we give ourselves to otherlives  
that AI will live for us.  
“People will come to love their oppression,” Huxley said.  
Wasn’t that about a dystopia?



There is nothing gallant about the broad stripes and bright stars.  
The stripes, defiled by hate  
50 colonies not 13. Too many, perhaps.  
The stars, grown cold  
collapsing under the weight of avarice -  
swallowing everything into a black hole -  
the world won't escape the pull.  
Swirling, downwards, distorting.

Our flag stands in ostentation  
behind a would-be king.  
It falls, and weakens  
amidst a cacophony of lusterless gold.  
A gilded, performative scam.  
It streams limply, passionless  
obscuring the pride it once held  
longing for the land of the free  
and for us to be brave.