

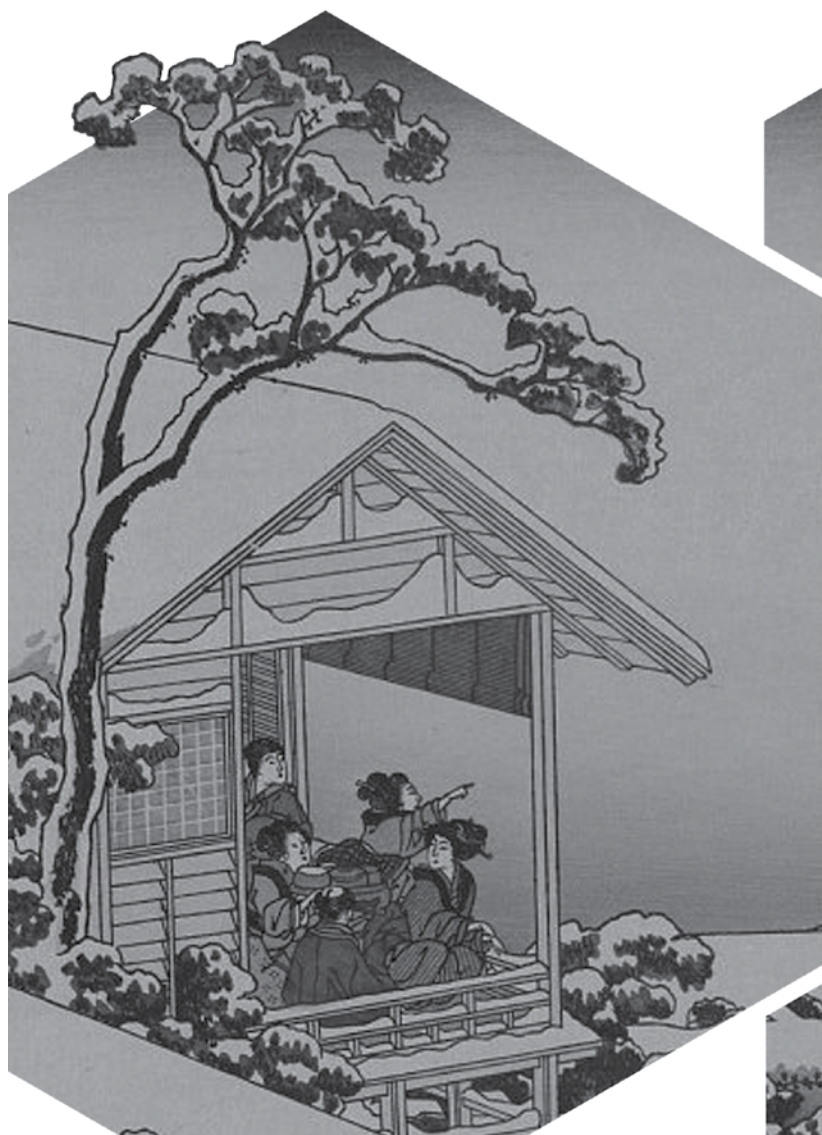
SIXFOLD

POETRY SUMMER 2013



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Sixfold is a collaborative, democratic, completely writer-voted journal. The writers who upload their manuscripts vote to select the prize-winning manuscripts and the short stories and poetry published in each issue. All participating writers' equally weighted votes act as the editor, instead of the usual editorial decision-making organization of one or a few judges, editors, or select editorial board.

Published quarterly in January, April, July, and October, each issue is free to read online, downloadable as PDF, and as e-book for iPhone, Android, Kindle, Nook, and others. Paperback book available at production cost including shipping.

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Sharron Singleton

The Dock-Sitters

To sit on a dock which has
walked out on stiff legs
twelve to fifteen feet away
from the weedy shore,
one board after another
reaching outward, drawing
your gaze across the unblinking
eye of the lake whose color
deepens further out, to sit
on this dock which seems
to want to hold you, even
rock you a little, to dangle
your feet, whiter in the green
cool water, to gaze down
into that silent world where
minnows eddy around
your toes, where sand
has agreed to be shaped
by ripples of water,
where reeds and water lilies
witness to you as that
which endures. To look out
on that lake, as birds dip low,
as quiet men in boats peer
into the depths, cast
their lines searching for
what is shadowy, elusive;
to lie back on gray, splintery
sun-warmed boards
in the silence of light—
is to allow that tight band
constricting your breath
to loosen, is to quench
your dire thirst for

the present. To sit
on such a dock is one
of the forgotten beatitudes—
blessed are the dock-sitters,
for they shall soon feel
shriven, their humor restored
and their pant legs
cool and damp.

Praying Mantis

Arms folded, wedge-shaped head
bowed, body, a long thin leaf—
the praying mantis worships
in the rosemary bush, nods his head,

asserts how righteous his life is
as he crunches a cricket whose legs
still kick going down. He rotates
his head almost full circle, great

bulbous eyes, hundreds of lenses
in each because the world is so
rife with beauty and danger.
What would it be like to see one

hummingbird swoop down as if
it were legion, to see the thrust
of uncountable sharp bills into
your side as if they were hot blades,

to see your death fly at you
from every angle, your entire
vision refracting the jeweled blur
of a thousand lethal wings.

Pigs can see wind

it is red, say the Irish—
and we know that
aborigines hear stars singing.

Those hogs, dainty
cloven feet in muck,
lift their heads at dawn
to gaze with calm eyes
at red paling to a pink
swirl above corn fields
while the Carolinas
are ravished by
ninety miles an hour
of purple and blood red.

And the stars, of course
they sing—wouldn't you
if your body was fire,
lit by an unknown hand,
seen from afar in a mantle
of trembling light?

Waiting in Line After Christmas

What if all things could
be exchanged equally—

that is, not money
for things but forgiveness

for a vowel no one has ever
heard before. What if I

gave you the iridescence
of the sun on the back

of a mallard and you gave me
the desire to tap dance again.

Give me your complete
attention and I'll give you

the scent of mimosa for three
winter nights. Perhaps,

in plain brown wrapping,
the postman will bring you

faint chimes from the bells
Scheherazade wore on her ankles

if you would send back six
folded prayers. There might be

an exchange center so the grief
I gave you for the pain

he gave me might be turned in,
to wait like ice waits for fire, like

stone waits for water
like never waits for maybe.

On Narragansett Bay

We sail at night
through warm moist air,
sails' bellies just full,
the only sound
the shush of water
against hull as we skim
the edge of the strange
black world.

The knot meter says
our progress is slow,
depth sounder pings
with warning
but behind us,
in the phosphorus wake
are tiny sea creatures,
original source
of energy gone, yet
buoyant, still bearing
their frail green light.

Sarah Giragosian

The Man Born with a Snake Heart

“Atavism is the rare reappearance, in a modern organism, of a trait from a distant evolutionary ancestor. We describe an apparent case of atavism involving a 59-year-old man with chest pain whose coronary circulation and myocardial architecture resembled those of the reptilian heart.”

—“A Case of Atavism in a Human Being”: Abstract

Before the twinge and pain in his chest,
there were the dreams: scenes of wetlands
flooded with milkweed and cattail,
sulfur rank in the air, and mudflats
where he thrilled in secret at the sight
of a frog, wall-eyed and refulgent
beneath a sheen of bog water.

And he dreamed of his wraparound self,
bound around the bough of a hemlock
before shuddering off a ribbon of skin,
scrapping a thin ghost of himself to be lost
in the rustle of leaves. He drowns
under a copse or tests the wiry
alacrity of his body, fluent as a fist.

Later, with his chest tricked out with electrodes
and jelly-slick with a robin blue luster,
he watches the shivery green pulsation
of his heart on the monitor, while the echo
gives voice to its liquid beating,
and belly-up, he hears with his whole being
the oblique, blubbery throb of god's ruse.

The Lioness

After the attackers leave, the lioness
finds her cub, splayed and half-gone.
She laps at his face, his breast, his haunches
with the shivery pink tip of her tongue,
mouths the crown in the O of her jaws.
She works her tongue through the lush jungle
of his veins, plucks at the muscle,
thin as violin strings,
swills the blood, grinds the fat,
sucks from the wreck
of his bones until they glint like stars,
until she eases him back into her.
Above, the vultures wait then flag, thwarted.
In the economies of death,
let there be no waste,
and if there is a witness overhead,
let my body's strange devotions deter him.

Missed Connections

I.

At every estuary I ask for you.
We had a laugh wading near the mangroves,
waiting for the sun to come up.
You were a pink lamp in the dawn,
a rococo pink, with a body contoured like a heron
and feathers bunched up
like flounce on a flamenco dress.
In our stretch of swamp, silhouetted tortoises
slid past us, a speck of regret in their eyes,
and you found a little knot of fish
to spoon up with your spatula bill,
trilling a riff of bullfrog-grunts
and surfacing with your mouth
fringed with fronds.
In spring, I will be skimming
across the lower latitudes,
looking out for you. Let's not worry
about probability or the weather.
If you read this, what is the weather to us?

II.

With the eggshell tiling of your belly draped in mud
and your immaculate scales glinting like ceramic in the sun,
you lolled (strategically?) near me, your tail,
articulate and comely, sweeping half moons
along the swamp bank. You smelled of dropworth
and mouldering larvae, and I blew networks of clinging,
bottle green bubbles across your cheeks.
You showed off your snout and curled your forelimbs
around mine; for a full minute, you and I were entwined.

III.

I saw you blinking your wings

against the marine green finish
of a gas pressure lantern.
Pheromones and kerosene spiked
the air, and I flitted above your thorax,
stuttering against your sparked
fury (you had browned your wings
from the light, usually a yucca white).
We found dusty moth wings
pressed like flower petals
along the lantern rim, and we bolted,
returning to the moon as our frame of reference,
and beating wings as thin as confetti
against the night. Although for you,
I would balance astride the flame's eye
and meet a night swelling with lanterns.

The Anglerfish Finds her Muse

Tonight I wake as an anglerfish,
ringing my world with light,
prowling the window sill, gutted of flies,
the bedroom's shadowed amalgams and rifts,
its submarine and faceless blooms of mouths
and stomachs, waving tentacles and threads
that go trawling above the lure-light
that sprouts from my head,
the fatal charm that obscures me.
In a room of nose-diving lamps,
little twitching schools of fish, and you,
my broadside eyes obvert and roll inwards,
indrawn to a sleeping language,
while a squid uses its vast arms
to rope and cloak its face.
It sways, encrypted and plain
before the masked diver.
From a body, I turn to a nocturnal verb
brushing up between you and me
in a love letter written in the space between,
finally legible in our dreaming.

The Seals off the Coast of Manomet

We came upon the colloquy of seals,
effusive in their idiom of barks and coughs.
Some speak with an inquisitive inflection
as if to ask, *How does this relate
to what we were talking about?*

And how do we respond in turn
to these creatures draped and lolling
along the razor-edged rocks,
their skin lustrous in the damp air,
while others stipple the distance

with their bobbing heads?
They shimmy off the ledges
when they see us or are phlegmatic
and sloe-eyed, like a Degas nude
in her chaise lounge. One bull heaves

a belly as big as a kettle drum
up onto a slab, his neck receding
into the wrinkles of his scarved fat
as he bellows to us, probing our reasoning:
How could these marvels be refuted?

Jenna Kilic

Ianfu

The wide eyes of the plywood walls
darted about the room.
The floor was dirt or looked
like dirt. Sprouting up, a single
piece of grass—or a grasshopper.
Then there was a bowl, blue
like the Pacific she watched
while living on Jeju
Island. In it, grains of rice
and the smear marks of a hand:

*. . . looked like waves hitting shore.
Who put them there? A girl who made it
another day or did not? Did it matter?*

She heard his zipper but watched
the bowl, felt his cold
calloused hands part her
legs as if opening a briefcase.

And then he was in.
And she did not cry.
And she did not wince.
And he would not come in her.
And he would not come on her

but filled the bowl
and left with his rifle.

Aisha, the Child-Bride of Muhammad, Speaks

My mother pulls at my wrist, pulls me
to the entrance of the house, wipes
my face and hair with water, her hands catch
in my tangles, then nudges me through
the door to a chorus of *Assalam alaikum*,
where the preparation continues—my mother
wrapping me in a white silk *jilbab*, in gold
jewelry. A wrinkle in a forehead
to my right, a crooked smile to my left
tell me I was chosen by Allah; I will be Mother
of the Believers. A woman of Ansar says,
You have entered with blessing and good fortune.

In the morning, I am a gift
they give to him. His cheeks are bright, rough
like sand dunes. Kneeling to peer into my eyes,
he says I am his favorite, that I will be a leader
of Muslim women. The eyes that stare
at me are brown, then gray, then black.
He lets me bring my dolls, and I am happy.

Nightfall and we are in Medina. There are no stars
to light the doll stories I make
with friends, but it is no matter; when he enters,
they scurry like mice in a barren landscape.
I try to place the doll on the ground,
but he wraps his hand around
my wrist—his fingers thick like dates—
and tells me to keep it. Scooping me into his arms,
I feel the scratching of his gray beard against my cheek,
and it is like I am hugging my father. He lays me
on our bed and takes the doll from my hand
to entertain me with a puppet show, teasing the lips
of the doll about my cheek, making us idol
worshippers in private. His hands move
like snakes, undressing us as I hold the doll
to my chest. He hardly fits inside me but *enters*
with blessing and good fortune.

A Cannibal in Onsong Prison Speaks

—after Hyok Kang with Philippe Grangereau

A dog came back to town, bone in mouth,
and lay in the road, lavishly licking it,
skeletal frame heaving exhaustive yelps.
The people who watched him grew envious.
When my neighbor approached the bone, the dog
growled and then like us, whimpered and shook
as if to say, *I know you; and you, me.*
My neighbor halted, though from my sightline
he didn't seem to react to the dog.
And then a twitch of forehead, sweat dripping
from temple. He saw it charred—her small bone.

My wife left for China to look for food;
my daughter and I too weak to follow,
and all the while, the waiting. Days then weeks.
Her nagging grew incessant, torturing
our torturer: Hunger. She grabbed my arm,
her hands no longer eight years old—her touch
no longer human texture. My fist hit
her face, and she smacked onto the concrete floor.
White foam and blood poured from her mouth, a river
into an ocean where the father drowned
in logical currents that swept away
compassion. She would suffer if she lived.
The animal I turned into picked up
an axe, shattered her skull, and found solace
in her limp-warm body. Hands of the father
who'd once dressed her when she was cold now peeled
the fleshy sleeves of her arms, fighting time,
the cold of rigor mortis. Several days
he ate, then burned the body in his stove.

In observance of our customs, he scattered
her on a mountainside, all ash and bone.

Execution at Yodok

—after Kang Chol-hwan and Pierre Rigoulot

The guards instructed us to pick up stones.
They brought him to the gallows at *Ipsok*
and silenced him, filling his mouth with rocks.
Before he even stopped writhing, we learned
the purpose of these stones, as guards instructed
us none-rebellious prisoners to pelt
his face and chest while yelling, *Down with dead-*
dog traitors. I aimed for no harmful place
but struck his shriveled penis, tore his foreskin.
The guards laughed. One tapped me on my wet face.
The rain came back. Wet from crying, I mean.
The bloody water washed around our feet,
making the others shiver while I beamed,
a child who found the ease in evil.

Fertile Soil

—after Kang Chol-hwan and Pierre Rigoulot

We came down from the mountainside
and smelled the stench before we saw
the bodies tossing in the air,

still clothed. The bulldozer made way—
our friends and family shoved along.
We could no longer bury them

on Yodok's hill. The guards told us
to grab the big pieces (the arms,
the legs, heads that lost their torsos—

torsos), to throw them in the ditch,
a pit not on a mountain slope
or hill, the customary places

for the Korean dead to rest.
My friend discovered his mother
in pieces and threw up in shock.

When he carried her to the ditch,
he made the choice—the only choice
he's ever made—not to come back.

I'm sure he's lying there with her.
A few days later, the hill's plain
lay ready for a crop of corn.

Those forced to plant it found toes, noses.
The corn grew well for several years.

Kristina McDonald

After you leave for work, I contemplate the shovel

Clearly visible through the kitchen window, a shovel leans against the fence. The yard of our city apartment is nearly nine square feet and everything I've tried to grow has died so you joked that I was Queen Midas, that I could kill anything with a touch, which didn't make much sense but I laughed because it was better than not laughing but I stopped touching the garden although I didn't stop touching you. It's a brand new shovel and the dirt looks undisturbed and as I let the coffee burn I wonder what it is you're planning to bury.

The Lost Girls

It's hard to run with a shield in one hand,
but we get used to the extra weight.

The point isn't to hide.

We wear our motherlessness
on our chests, like Athena,
born in full armor, raised
by a father. We don't
use the word *abandoned*.

People know our story so well, they forget
they know our story.

We like the feel of dirt
and rocks and we sleep
under trees and never talk
about our feelings.

The point isn't to feel, either.

Which is why, when we find
the well-worn teddy bear
stashed under branches,
a note saying *Love, Mom*
tied to its paw,
we burn it.

Which is why
I didn't tell them
it was mine.

When the Dog Bites

It's one of those things that happen to other people
and besides, I'd always wanted a puppy
so I stopped to say hello and was distracted
by the gathering saliva, the darkness
of its lips, the sudden
wrongness of it all
so when its jaw clamped down
at first, there was only silence
and a warm empty feeling.

I wanted to disappear.
I started singing an old children's song
but I couldn't remember the words
so I closed my eyes and pictured my mother
in the kitchen the day she said
girls in white dresses
should never be caught
lying on their backs
stirring the stars at night
with their tongue.
She had a knife in her hand at the time
though I couldn't quite remember why
and when I opened my eyes I could see
the blood seeping through the grass.

I don't know at what point he let go
and later, when the doctor asked me
what happened, I told him it was just
an accident. It was nobody's fault
but my own.

A daughter should know the answer

In Australia, they cover corpses
with leaves. Slow erasure of organs,
of skin. In Andorra, it is the law
to ask every body you find
lying face down, *Are you dead?*
Are you dead? Are you dead?

•

A girl walks into the desert. She can smell
the morning's carrion and she understands
this is how time passes. Fingers lengthen
but have less to hold. Overhead, vultures circle
and she needs them to land. She needs to ask
if they've seen her mother.

•

It takes over two thousand days to mummify
the self, like they used to do in Japan.
She wonders if her mother's hidden somewhere,
only a thousand days from death.

•

A person isn't missing
if she disappears
on purpose.

•

A girl walks into a museum
full of skeletons. She needs to know
why skulls always look like
they're smiling.

•

A woman hides in the bathroom
of a funeral home, washing off
her mother-face. She shakes hands
with a cadaver, says, *If anyone asks,*
I wasn't here.

My foot is stuck in the mirror again

and I can't stop staring at the two five-fingered bruises on my neck, pulsating like some ghost is trying to open a door in my throat. Behind me, a mask on the wall is hiding another mask, almost forgotten but in the reflection I can make out both sets of lips whispering, *You have to let go*. But I notice my foot is getting sleepy so I spin it a story about a house the shape of a head and inside the house, a wolf, inside the wolf, a man I once loved before I learned every mouth holds a secret and every hand makes a fist and somewhere in this story someone or something died savagely at the tooth of another. My father hated his own face and my father's father used to smash everything around him before he disappeared mysteriously one night, not unlike my mother although not before she stood me in front of a mirror with my first make-up kit and said, *You're the one who looks at your reflection. You're not the one who looks back.*

Toni Hanner

Le Bugue

An old woman (here you may not ask)
cranks her body up from the bench

submerged only days ago. The Vézère
has dropped to green once more, swarms of bees

cluster around our heads as we cross
the bridge. Cars chug past below on the quai,

released from the flood. The woman adjusts
her blouse, her fruit-colored hair. Walks,

a little bent, a little slow, away. I think of you,
sister, there is not a moment when I do not.

You go with me, in my pockets, in each slender
joy. I carry you up cobbled hills and eye for you

the shirtless workman repairing a stone wall
that has plunged down the hillside into fields

shouting with purple iris, wisteria,
yellow mustard. Every dog smiles for you,

and the birds—swifts and magpies,
sparrows singing in French

and the little tuxedo'd dipper riding the flood
on a broken branch, all these swoop and dive

for you, speak your name and watch me
for signs of you with round black eyes.

Le Bugue to Paris

Leaving Le Bugue, the philanthropy of rain
returns, fat clouds overflowing, filling the Vézère

once more. I wish I had your picture here with me,
posed for the cruise ship's photographer,

embroidered blouses we bought for pennies
from the impenetrable Indians at Gatun Lake,

the big rimless glasses we wore in the '80s,
our acrylic nails and turquoise

eye shadow. I was your shipmate then,
my 40th birthday lay in wait, a stone

that would wedge itself between us
for years. It's taken death to shift it,

to bring us all the way back—our father,
cousin, aunt, brother. I've seen you

three times in the past year, each an unbearable
loss. The last time, I helped you from your bed

to the bathroom, washed and fed you,
stroking your white head as if you were a child,

crooning *sweetheart, sweetheart.*

The Houses of the Dead

for Franny

I want to be happy again, to stop thinking
about the dog on the floor at the side of the bed,

the dog who is only an outline, a dog-shape
made with a black Marks-A-Lot with no

corporeal body, no face. I want to stop
thinking about the scaly thing beginning,

always just beginning, to wind up the white
iron leg at the bottom of the bed, tiny bat's wings

unfurled behind its flat head, tongue searching the air.
This morning at the end of sleep I dropped by your house,

stopped in for a chat and a cup of tea, the way I imagine
I remember doing when I lived just a few blocks away

but this time your granddaughter was there at your kitchen
table, you were gone, and when I resumed my walk I realized

you would always be gone and there would be no more of you
and me, and in my sleep, I dropped to the curb and howled

in that way I do not when I'm awake because the part of me
watching accuses me of being melodramatic

and when I woke I thought I must have made a sound
but my husband did not notice.

The city knows nothing, in the summer
it is molten, the asphalt gummy

beneath our shoes, everyone gathers up their cucumbers
and corkscrews and goes off to the islands

where the azure seas soothe and the ripe sun
blushes the shoulders of clerks and housewives,

where fir trees remind them that there once
was a life before Little League and diaper service,

the city's leftovers baking on sidewalks, the little houses
in the old neighborhoods quietly flaking paint,

the old men and old women who remain being removed,
one by one, taken in ambulance or hearse,

leaving the granddaughters to clear away the rubble
and hand out corroded jewelry from the middle

of the last century no one really wants. The dogs will go
to new cities, the cats will fend for themselves.

I will not walk by your house again,
it's been twenty years since we lived so close together,

I began losing you when I left that city you loved,
the strands that held us stretched and frayed.

And the scaly thing, the thing with fluttering wings,
I will get used to it, it will be my dog and follow me

faithfully through the streets of the city where I live
without you.

I will feed it flecks of gold I find in the houses of the dead.

Weather

Sunday morning, waking to the slaughter,
the inconsolable smells, the smothering owlsh light,

sixteen dead bolts on the door cannot blind us
to the stacking, bristling idiot mounds, horses

with their limbs ablaze, the piazza filled with smoke,
we try to disappear but all the roads are blocked

fascinated by the birdcage, the ash at the end of my mother's
Kool, the runes on our kitchen linoleum, a bit of wither

under the bridge, suspended, the cables,
the rust, under the parking lot, the worm,

the ripening, under the narcotic sky, under the flames,
the weather builds, one egret at a time, plodding in

on snowshoes and waterskis, tossing pomegranates
to the crowds gathered to watch the drizzle set fire

to the dwarf shackled to the bike rack on the Herengracht.
The magpies gather like pickpockets, count your hands, hero,

when I was four I had a brother, I buried
my face in his sheets a cat rolling in grass

when I was four I had a sister bouffant and gauze,
far away in the never-never of our house

wasp down the soprano's voice through the old black telephone,
the clacking bones of larkspur, the rot breaking through,

erupting, chewing and casting, leaving a trail, a wandering
bruise,
the leaves of the birch across the intersection signaling
wildly in the wind.

Elegy for December

This is an elegy for everyone who's gotten in the way this year. In the way of a bullet, in the way of a drunk, in the way of a rampaging warlord or an invasion of cancer.

This is an elegy for those riding the #52 bus every day, riding the bus to Fred Meyer for diapers and a 12-pack of Diet Coke. For everyone who mucks through

the wet snow that fell all morning, slicking the black pavement and drowning the sleeping bags of the homeless.

This is an elegy for the ones we lost, the ones who grew old

suddenly and died in spite of all our holding on, this is for the way we dug our heels into the earth, the way we heaved and yanked on the lines that broke even so,

the boat that drifted away without us. This is an elegy for Ryan who told me Christmas is an ordeal and for Marilyn in her Santa Claus hat,

and it is for everyone in the middle, dusting banisters, pouring wine, pulling on damp work boots, for everyone reading this poem or any other poem.

I give you my kind intentions, all I have really, and this leafless maple outside my window wearing a cloak of white, just for today.

Annie Mascorro

Offering

To Lawson

I will not lie.
It will be cold. It will sting.
There are corners here
and thirst.
The landscape of your birth is dry,
prone to fires and yellowed brush.
But what you need to know is this:
At dusk there is a purplish-blue
covering treetops, filling in
deep pockets between mountains,
in the distance. Some days it will come
all of a sudden, other days
you will wait. It is a feeling. It is
what the world offers you—
a full stomach, the coming of a chilly
night, the moment when you have done
all that you will do
for now, right before
the world remakes itself
again and again.

Once

I.

Once, my mother was crying
said to me, let's run away, something
burning in the kitchen. Even then
I knew to be afraid, that house
full of corners, fears that were
or were not, spread, made things
disappear: the baby grand, the yellow
telephone, my father's
clothes. I prepared for us
to run: learned to read a clock
braid my hair, eat spiders
from their webs. Still, I climbed
the black cast-iron stairwell just
to look down and feel. Even then
I knew to count the born and the un-
born, brothers and sisters and fathers and cats.

II.

Once, I made carrot cake for a man
who hit me, or wanted to, or couldn't
help but want an American dessert—
something sweet, with frosting for the guests
to see. Underneath the table, he held my hand
tight, laughed *eres mi postre, mi vida, mia
por siempre*. No way for him to know
I called my mother from the thin white kitchen
while he slept, that I cried, a girl who does not know
the metric system, such cold, how
do I make this work? She mentions lemon rinds,
says I will know what to do and when.

III.

Once, a ceremonial robe
hung from the frame of a door.
The color drained into dawn, specks
of cloth catching reflections of glass
from around the room—mirror and
table and vase. I could not see the top,
thought—a body must be inside—
as I stood not wanting to look,
in this house, where terrible
things happened, where the blood
of a goat could not make things right,
where I had decided to leave
for good but could not
move. Not until music
from the neighborhood mosque
cracked the air wide—
a man chanting in another
language, not unlike the song
my mother sang about the cephalopod,
a song I did not understand
but knew all those years.
At first I remembered, then
walked past. A taxi waiting on the other side.

The Container

In the kitchen I twirled while she wrapped
strips of wet gauze around
my naked waist then belly then breasts.
The texture, rough and dripping, hardened
against the skin, all those invisible hairs
pulled tight. For art—this shell—a form
on which she would mold slabs of clay
to bisque in the earth, colors burning through
the shape of my body—now cast
and hanging in her home—caught
then, in its moment, readying itself
as if on the lip of a jar
for what I could not have known would come—
the cutting and the sucking, convulsions,
everywhere, years pouring
out, pools of murk and ore gathering at once.

Ghazal

Listen: I will no longer be your guinea pig
your “how to live here and there” kid, stretched like a
guinea worm.

Between basins of bath waters and iced oceans
I dream their depressions: Canary and Cape, and Guinea.

When I wake, I wake twice, ask for air, think, what if
a monarch stopped mid-air, over a child in New Guinea.

If I drank, it would be the clear wine of palm leaves
the stuff Christians drink, in the forests of southern Guinea.

Once drunk, maybe I'd arrive for good, in my mind
or out, a dry land, unchanged, a desert in Haute Guinée.

If you were drunk too, and said, Annie you *are* here,
I would say, listen up: they call me Aïcha in Guinea.

On Auras

Auras, or partial seizures, often precede epileptic seizures and are characterized by specific sensory sensations depending on the part of the brain in which they originate.

Dear Friend,

The noodles you gave me,
once cooked, fell apart
and I am putting them
back together—jagged corner, wavy
edge, a jigsaw of brown-rice lasagna.

Let me explain. Just now I am wanting everything
smooth: fat noodles, sauce, cheese, again,
unbroken. And yet, I am remembering,
bent over a glass casserole dish
in this fog of sun, the universe.

The one that is not smooth, that
comes in a moment before everything else—
wonder and trouble sinking down
the body before it falls. No one
says this but I will: it is a place

to be returned to, like so many,
like the end of the desert in upper
Guinea where I once drank
plastic baggies full of sour milk,
curdled chunks floating on the top.

Brittney Corrigan

Stellar's Jay the Week of the Boston Marathon Bombings

The young cat whose life I saved carries
a Stellar's jay in his mouth, the blue
form limp on either side of his jaws.
He runs, tail bristled and tabby fur
a wild, brown streak into the azaleas.
The red of the azaleas, the blue of the bird
almost beautiful—until the jay's mate
dives after them in a cacophony
of grief and bravery and alarm. And now
a ghost-jay settles on my shoulder:
I am in part responsible for this rending.

Some woman births the murderer.
The shooter. The bomber. The one who
shatters lives like a shockwave pulsing
from his center as he walks into this classroom,
that theater, this crowd. Maybe someone
tried to save him. Maybe someone tried
to patch him up, fed him a good meal,
raised him up into this world with her hands.
She would still run to him now, still gather
him into her arms, rock him like a child—
no matter what is lashed to his chest.
No matter what he has done. No matter
what he still may do.

My young cat is just a cat. He is supposed
to hunt. He is supposed to take lives
daily, licking his snout and preening his fur.
But on this day, my heart presses wildly
at the walls of my chest as the jay-mate whirls
and paces the air. Screeching. Crying.
Somewhere below him in the azaleas

the she-bird is broken open by a creature
I tended and released. Somewhere behind
him in the trees the little jays call from their nest:
their blue mouths open. The blue sky
falling all around them through the leaves.

Falling Teeth

My daughter, five, seesaws her first loose tooth—small, slick finger hooking, tongue pressing at the new, larger tooth blooming behind. Excitement lifts from her face like spores into wind, alights on everyone she tells her secret to. We lean together, imagine what the Tooth Fairy must do with all the teeth. Her Fairy—surely pink-gowned, awash with glitter, bedecked with wand and bells—shapes jewelry and studs her combs, collects teeth in rows of dainty boxes decouped with flowers, padded in velveteen.

My Fairy is more twigs-in-her-hair fay—barefoot, dark-haired, shimmering limbs circled in vines. Winged and sounding like autumn in dappled sunlight, flourished with birds. She revels in the macabre, grinds teeth to powder to rub into her skin. Teeth dangle everywhere: a many-looped necklace quivers at her breast, clattering wind chimes entangle in her garden. Teeth nestle with tree roots and mouse-bone filigree to form the arcing mosaic around her door.

My pixie-haired girl-child wiggles and worries the tooth, first with constant attention, then gradually without notice. She draws elaborate castles with her left hand, one right finger working the tooth as it teeters and clings. After the mother-loss moment of disbelief that my daughter is old enough to lose a tooth, I go back to the horrific and raw. They come often, the dreams of falling teeth. Teeth crumble en masse, or drop out in slow motion, one by one. Or I touch them and they peel from my gums, slip through my fingers, tumble down and away.

Dreams of falling teeth, common, are always about fear. Aging, uglification, survival, what we reach for—devoured. My daughter at the table, colors spreading out before her in wild, bright lines. I can hear the Fairy's breath as she hovers nearby, stalking her next pebbled prize. Whether

rose-satined or mossy-toed, it is all the same. She took
mine, she'll take my daughter's, she'll take mine again.
I smile to taunt her, pass my tongue over each firm stone.
Root in as she shifts her gaze. She jangles coins
in her pocket, choosing what she'll leave behind.
My daughter holds up her drawing, wobbly tooth flashing
as she grins, and the sunlight from the window filters through.

Not Burning Down the House

First the smolder, then the catch. The scorch
and blaze. A bloom of fire: orange
and the flickering blue. Floorboards raise
their splinters like hackles, enkindle
and morph into torch. Shingles incinerate; their ashes
lift into the air like pale ghost-birds. Doors detach
from their hinges, fall into bright peals of flame.
Windows throw shards at the walls. Stairs collapse
and dangle like broken limbs.

Look what could happen.

Arrow-shaped thermostat buttons entrance
our son, tempt him to lean in and press while
we are elsewhere with our attention. The temperature
climbs to 90 while we are away at work and school.
Hours later, we ascend the stairs into a push of heat,
throw the windows wide, find the remains
of the thermostat charred to the wall, burn marks
spidering black against the still-standing room.

And again, months later, the forgotten toaster oven
elements continue to redden and glow. Crumbs
of breakfast cook all day down to delicate carbon husks,
an adjacent cord melts and destroys the radio, the stench
of smoke lingers in the thickening air. The kitchen
sits back on its haunches. Does not bother to ignite
and spread its molten crackling through our rooms.
Blinks its eyes at us slowly as we walk through the door.

Breath-catching, how we were so careless, and so
spared. We could have come home to a steaming
wreck. All of it ablaze and then extinguished. All
of it scalded and soaking. All of it gone.
The dog, confined upstairs in his crate: plastic
seared onto his white-brown fur, singe marks
from the bars against his nose. The soot-dark kitten

sleeping on our daughter's bed: now cinders, withered
and soft. The sister-rats smothered in their tinderbox cage.
What of the quilts my husband's grandmother
stitched from clothes worn down to scraps?
The paper on which our son first wrote his name?

And yet, we continue to leave and leave.
In the driveway, stocky green weeds shoot
through each crack. The flowering vine flings
thorny tendrils outward from our porch. Overgrown
shrubbery converges to follow us each time we turn
our backs on the house. Where we step,
our footprints wisp and shine to ember. Small beads
of flame drip from the pads of our fingers, alight
harmlessly in the street. We call back reassurances
with parched mouths. When the fires leap
from our chests, the sparks land just shy of the lawn.

S. E. Hudgens

Guadalupe

The virgin, she is everywhere. En todas partes. Tiled into the corner store wall, painted on houses along Chicon, hung around necks and between breasts of the pious. Her mâchéd figure lurks in the live oak groves that line the río; she bows to cursing lovers and the needles that line the curbs. Shrouded in azul de bebé, the virgin watches with a face impassive as plastic. She has learned to expect little. Her heart flares. I know she dreams of escape, of shattered tile and crumbling brick, of God taking her right there on the sidewalk in front of all the pimps. The ladies de la noche will mistake her for one of their own, offer her a cigarette as she rises from the rubble. She'll finally feel what Magdalene felt—like a base human being, like una criminal, whole. The night will tattoo her onto its belly. What will the men say as, for once, she undresses con las estrellas?

Gift

It came as a gift—
a small sack of lavender
in the drawer of winter. Safe,
like an eye pillow or a
mousetrap. I crawled
in after it, let its moist
scent surround my hands
and feet, seep into
the small hairs of my thighs—
my bare body married to it,
buried with it. The drawer
seemed the best place
to wait for the snow to melt.
It fell and fell, until I fell,
finally, asleep.

In the spring I woke withered
and the sack was empty:
the scent was gone. What
is the half-life of lavender?
I searched for it under
my fingernails, shoved
my nose into the shrubs
outside. The sun was not
as I had remembered—it was
infinite and odorless,
and I was afraid
to get lost on its hills. I thought
if I made a new sack of mountain
laurel, I'd be protected
from its vast stare,
but summer came anyway,
relentless, smelling
of the last sweet
stages of death, of asphalt
pulsing up and up.

The first day of fall
brought a cloud
that did not leave
for six weeks. It took distant,
purple shapes each day,
and I liked to guess animal,
vegetable, or mineral. Finally,
it reached down and
stitched its rain
around my waist
and over my head
and said: You are the gift now.
And so I waited to meet my lover.

We walked through the cemetery

on the day he lost half his tooth; it was raining.
When we ducked under a balding branch,
he divined the lives of Work, William and Theresa.
They died on the same day—car wreck or hurricane;
their name a cruel prophesy of the rent
that remained unpaid no matter how many
hours they gave. Their children could afford only
flat grey slabs. When he spoke, the tiny partial tooth
hovered above his bottom lip, dust
roiled into mud in the indecisive wind, and for once
I didn't wonder what it was like to be beautiful.
Instead I wiped drops from my earlobes,
began to walk again. Raliegh, Johanna—five white
irises on black marble. Dodd, Brett—mausoleum
in the style of melodrama's vilest vampire.
Winthrop, John—three-foot cross engraved
over his name that would have rolled his puritan
ancestors in their graves. These ways we think
we honor them, assumptions we make for our own sake.
He said a blank slab would suffice, that a name
could never capture a life. All he needed was a new tooth.
I said if I could choose my tomb, it would be a song
that never failed to change—me, the melody
blooming inside—but what I wanted to tell you
is that he got on his knees and tried to quiet
that chorus of the dead long enough to explain,
to pray for an explanation, why he hadn't joined them.

A Wedding

If I had believed this was the moment
I'd stop casting desire into a barren
lake, then I would have seen
the birds strung on the power
line like live garland—hundreds, exactly
evenly spaced. I would have heard
the strange wind stagnate at our feet
as the grass turned another
degree. I'd have noticed the sun toss its
most indulgent pinks into clouds when time
came to give up the day to birds and flies
and ghosts of fish preying on flies, the flies
playing with birds, the birds praying
for dark and wet and all of us
vowing to stay forever.

Ali Doerscher

Milk + Honey, Whiskey + Ginger Ale

well that's how it goes
weather always lingering too long

a casual blue fourteen percent grey

there were any number of things
we could have been talking about:

the stiffness of morning
the best way to purchase stamps
how to walk great distances

but then days and days of rain

I said let's keep sleeping together
 casually

it was like a finch swallowing milkweed
it was probably bored

Temporal, Flickerlike

I remember I lost the clear night
you had tied around my thigh

and today I hate you
even though winter is far away

I'm living in a low voice
I'm throwing the hillside

making a mess of myself and running
around with one eye closed:

it requires the ability to judge distance
his body *firmly in order*

looking for blood in the sunlight

[...]

what you said was careless
death at the cape and everywhere
tiny birds making false landings
embers felling leaves like feathers like
bodies fumbling underwater

and disappearing is always simplest
in massachusetts is darkest blue

I wanted to ask

if I looked any different standing up
if dizziness is an affliction of the lips

and if I were
to catalogue our weaknesses by name
it would be *scoured or hysterical*
tenuously coupled lungs blistered
in the young light and the snow

in december
you lost your last cigarette
you told me not to die
you picked burnt leaves from your carpet

inside a fever dream
we made ourselves a home movie:

me, plunging the hawk
through the bedsheets

and of course you're miserable

like a steady brow

like home

if one of us were to stand up
our inflections would no longer be
compatible so equivocal

death at the cape

so we stop at the liquor store

I hold the flashlight
while you fill your tires with air

you're miserable of course

(if I am standing then you are standing
and we both look the same)

and if this is darkest blue
we are coupled by blood and anxiety
thick and red like molasses on tobacco

like being pulled to bed at 4 am
because it is not yet december
and somehow this means we are safe

I rip a shard of amber glass from my palm
but the skin is still translucent

in the fever dream I tell you
*winter lives in naked bodies, an ode
to sex or death or birds*

or something

what I really mean is
you drive beautifully at night

Neither Here Nor There

I'm still pulling blood out from under things
nails and telescopes and cotton swabs
it's sweet it really is

how you try to smile one tooth at a time...

I made you a sweater
and you didn't even know it was yours
when you asked if you could have it

I haven't gotten it all sorted out yet
how one slow mechanism is wedded to the next
a convulsive fit of the lips and then

it is april and I am all liquored up
basking in the tickled heather

one crushed thing after the other

David Sloan

Hard to Breathe

Some fires won't catch,
no matter how carefully
the kindling's laid. Wood's
too wet, or punky,
or thoughtlessly stacked,
like throwing blankets
over a sleeping child's face.

We forget about air,
the importance of pruning,
pauses that cool the lava
of afternoon blowups.

Some matches fizzle, too
little friction on the striking
surface—or too much.
The decision to flare or not
depends upon the atmosphere,
seems so random, like shooting
stars or children.

How to Lie

I lied a little at the funeral,
called you a creature of the air,
so they might think *oh, like an angel*
or a silver-tipped sea hawk.

But I was really picturing
you as a sky snake, envenomed
bringer of bad weather,
flinging down hood-denting hail,
whipping up a dust storm
that swallows towns whole.

I didn't mention all the other
swallows, beginning
on the front lawn the day
you sat broken-winged, drinking
in news of your brother's
ticked-out heart, that stillness
after the snare drum sticks

break, or the one time we forgot
the don't-touch-there rule,
the tangle, like fish thrashing
through seaweed, and after—
the can't-look-at-each-other look,
as if we were still kids caught jamming
lit firecrackers into frogs' mouths,

or, years later, the bottle flung
at your daughter who walked out mid-
argument and only returned
toward the end, when that tiny spore,
yawning, stretching, greedy,
settled in your lungs like a python
with nothing else to do but coil
camouflaged in the underbrush,
and slowly squeeze all the air out.

Too Close

He's clearing a path through the choked woods behind his house. It's slow going. The juniper has taken over, crowding out blueberries, laurel seedlings, wintergreen shoots. Pale-needled whips wait at eye level, deadfall lies strewn like finger bones sprinkled from the sky, his mother's flimsy nightgowns still flap from branches.

She tiptoed in, smelling of licorice, tucked in her boy, both pretending. Sometimes she only kissed him on the forehead. Other nights she climbed over, curled up behind him, hugged him hard enough to leave an imprint of her inlaid carnelian necklace between his shoulder blades.

Except for mosquitoes, there are no signs of creatures in these woods: no birdsong, no burrows, no feather tails, no ember eyes in the darkness. Either he has driven them off with lopper, snub-nosed shovel and bow saw, or they fled before footfall, when they felt the first twitch of fear, saw the future slash, couldn't bear the closeness coming.

Olivia Cole

Learning the plum

Now I know what a plum
truly is. I have seen its heart.
Gnawed down to the naked core
of seed, I am poised with a knife
to break this thing open and know
its atoms, its lifeforce, its tiny strings
of being. I hold

the thing in my palm and wonder at its
strangeness, this spiny nut like a dragon's
bone. It is my own curiosity, the child-scientist
who holds the blade like a scalpel, ready to learn.

Dead cats have taught me curb.
This could be a box named for chaos:
I could unravel my world by knowing
this fruit.

I decide
not to cut. It is enough perhaps
to hold this piece of the secret.
It is enough to know, perhaps,
that it grows.

poem for Trayvon Martin and other dead brown boys

The delight of the airplane
is what sticks in my eye:

ground-bound, but the sky
is a butterfly you're cupping
in your palms.

Just a few more beats
of heart and wing
and you could have been
in the blue, arms or engine
pumping.

I want us all to live
in your eyes:

to see how
in one breath
a boy can be
dreaming
and in the next
be a leaf

fluttering
carried away

red,

then gray,

then gone.

For my lover, leaving

The lid is on:
your cipher is kept,
my name is safe and secret.

I who have lurked in Egyptian
cotton and warm water,
my nylon ghost
your busy burial.

I have sewn in the stitch
to shut my mouth,
I won't screech
a sound.

My name is a quiet thing
you have expressed only
in Garamond, it is wet
skin wrapped in canvas.
You put it on your plate
with the drapes drawn.

This is not a war where lovers
carry likenesses in lapels.
Anyhow, there is only one to speak
of, and you guard it
from eyes and air. I fold
my hands and forget.

I am a girl who is sarcastic
about promises. I am a girl
who rolls her eyes at oaths
but dreads their not
being made. When the parts
don't come together,
the laughter drains from lips.
Worse, when they do,
the eggshell is held gently
underfoot, waiting

for pressure.

Welcome. I sang you a song
about this long ago; your mind
may have been on something
else when I read you the lyrics.

I am a girl with a round
name who despises circles.

Let this at least be a square,
angular and abiding
by ancient rules.

The circle has no law.
It may go around
as many times as it wishes,
the eyes spinning along
its endless track.

Let this at least be a box.
Heavy, at least I know
what it contains.

Extinctathon

Let's collect dead white things.
I cherish all evidence
that proves black
is not the only thing dying:

check: the white seal
and his ghostly impotence

check: the white wolf
and his icy violence

check: the white swan
the evil fellow of stork

check: the white horse
who has carried death for centuries.

Keep counting. Bless
the black things that are
sweet
and dark, and deep
not with ash
but with ask
palms stretched out
and smiling

Last lament

I have picked my way through a patch
of blackberries and come out
stained and scratched. This is the wild
kind; not the neat bush of agriculture
but a free-spilling mess of deep
juice in jungle. I can't tell my skin
if she is black or if she is purple.

My fingers have found a knot
in my neck. I rub it out tonight
and find a walnut under my flesh
in the morning. This is love:
a problem solved in the dark,
and rerooted overnight into a skyward
beanstalk towering,
not tame.

Its trunk is thick and its branches
blot out the light. I am transformed
into a tunnel-creature. I am mole
and mother; murderer.

But I emerge. Through the bramble
at my back I have broken
a narrow path. I watch
for awhile and soon
a rabbit comes through,
small and brown.

I could smash his skull.
He has a delicate nose,
a twitching face, a body
made for escape.

He passes by, gently
crushing berries underfoot.
I let him go. The path closes
behind.

Lucy M. Logsdon

How to Save Your Self

First you must pack up all
your madneses, from noon's pink
nightgown to evening's vulnerable confusions,
from the green silk of drink and pills,
to fear's dark black compulsions. Shove
their angry coils into a sturdy army surplus bag,
slide its zippered teeth shut on the banging
of your lost souls.

They'll escape, they always do.
So ignore them when they intrude
on your ordered days. Keep your face calm
as a swollen lake, a placid mirror, a surface
that hides so much. They will rise through
the bamboo floor, seat themselves in the oak
dining chairs. They'll bang against the stovepipe,
a trapped starling frantically trying to get out,
they'll pummel the door like a frustrated child,
they'll wail, *You think you're free? You think
the wind outside is a mild breeze?*

Focus on the coming storm. Notice
the drops of rain already spattering.
You'll have to move quickly,
you'll have to decide who to save.
You can't keep hoarding them; you
can't keep loving them. You must
go to the basement, find the room
with the treasured candlesticks,
the generations of photos, your cow
figurines, your treasures,
and your duffel bag.

Carry it to the pond behind the house,

wait until the last of the summer geese
has left, listen for the evening killdeer,
watch for the yellow black belly of this
year's water snake, and when the bullfrogs
start their mournful bellow, and the fireflies
began their luminescence, you must drown
all but one. Choose carefully
which madness you keep
for it will be the only one
you have to battle loneliness, to walk
with late at night when the full moon hangs
so heavy, when your heart is tired,
when you want some reminder
of all that raged within.

Beating the Boundaries

You have asked and asked again,
beating nightly at my door. Clenched
fist, raised hand, questioning, insistent—
Why did I leave? Look at my eyes:
corn-yellow, barn-brown, irises shot
through with dust. How can you believe
I've succeeded? In this city I exhale
your landscape, my breath misty and fogged, hair
tangled, a bale of hay. I've left, and I've
left myself behind.

My great-grandfather slammed my
grandfather's palms against the farm's
border: rock, oak, post—slammed until his
blood smeared across barren stone, seeped
into old wood. Three months for his hands
to heal. My fingers are calloused,
lightly, at the tips. Still, I've memorized: *This*
is the northwest corner, the granite rock.
This is the southwest, the upright row of
devil's walking sticks.

In sleep I walk deep in your
interior where pollen drifts
like rain, and creeks swirl with the quick silver
tails of minnows. I step into
your rivers, your limerock streams, clay banks.
Who says geography is the soul?
I know the answer: each time returning,
I return with nothing more than the dust
in a drowned man's pockets. I am that dust,
scattering, then lost.

Those That Come Back

We are uneventful here, we who have returned:
the dutiful, the wounded, the living, the good,
the adult child. You may call us
by different names, but identify us
by the depth, the strength of our return.
Now back, we are forever here,
as rooted as the oaks and pines.
You can tell us by our patience,
the long lines of waiting in our face,
the settled air around us, the settled dust
within our homes. You can tell us
by our affinity for the winter night,
whose muffled layers soothe our memories
of other lives. We love the glazed, still
surfaces of our backfield ponds.
And yet, we try to make life
happen, to break this thick block ice
insulating us, but all we get are sharp rib pains,
labored breath, billowing across
the frozen fields.

Shades of summer birds haunt the pond;
their shadows brush the ghosts of former lives,
selves we buried so relentlessly. They've dug
themselves up, and dance just out of reach—
mocking . . . *All that you could have been* . . .
The other dead faded dreams would gather,
if they could, but they are trapped
still in their dank burial boxes,
weighted by sadness, love. Patiently,
they suffocate beneath the layers
of perpetual snow. So much lost along the way.
So much accepted, so much ground
down with the season. The drying husks,
the composting. Fat black tadpoles move
sluggishly below the pond's ice. My life
barely moves within these bundled layers.

The years accumulate. The woodpile grows.
This winter bears down on us all.
Our houses weaken, the rafters shift,
mice grow bold in the hallways and shower,
the paint peels, and the windows loosen.

And, oh, how our parents dwindle.
They are beginning to look like distant
children, peering at the brutal landscape
fast approaching. Their tracks in the snow
grow lighter, footprints
smudged and rising.

Envelope

To enclose, to hold, to wrap
around. To cradle delicately, gently,
securely. To seal for safe transport,
to shelter the message, the words
sent far away, where they would travel
for days, through the post offices of Champaign,
and Carbondale, and Des Moines, bumping
in the back of dusty trucks, falling
away from our fingers, full
of intent. Submissions sent to the west,
and the east, to the editors, to the journals,
to those cities we had read of.
How we believed in sending the message,
loudly and hopefully, into the big,
bigger beyond us. Such dreams
penned in those writings. Our landscape
one of envelopes, and typewriters, and stamps,
and return address ink pads.
How we tried to speed it all up,
now we long for the slowing down,
so typical. The nostalgia, the remembrance,
the loving only after it is gone.
The image of my lonely typewriter in the plane's
overhead compartment—its keys hot
with those early poems of love,
and escape.

Marc Pietrzykowski

Peripatetic Spiel

The wind shears across the empty park
like scissors through cheap wrapping paper,
scorching my ears and making the dog dance in frantic little steps,
and we go on past a stopped blue van marked “Ryan’s Interiors,”
a bald, skinny guy in the driver’s seat talking to his phone, or
his hand,
but I’m betting on the phone, and then a shovel upright in a
snow bank
where someone abandoned their driveway, for now,
and the postal van darts by, on the afternoon package route,
and my right testicle starts to ache, and there is a 98% chance
it’s tumorous, and the sky is more bruise than blue and more
black than bruise,
and I stop to breathe it all in and the dog keeps dancing,
and my testicle stops aching and the chance of tumor
recedes back to 0%, and a crow laughs at me from a picnic table,
and I know I’m not supposed to write poems like this anymore
because only 27 people read poetry these days and they
are bored with it but that’s OK, I’m not bored with them,
or with the bobtailed squirrel skipping his way across the
church roof,
I only wish you were here with me, because it will never
happen this way again, there was only just enough room
for everything,
nothing sagged, nothing gaped, nothing askew, the plenum
was apparent and of course it was fucking perfect,
just like every other minute of every day, shooting forth like a
shower of sparks.

Give'em Enough Rope

I went in search of devils and demons, not mine,
but fauna, a set of trading cards, Hummelware.
I put them under glass and walked away.

The road took me and I drifted a while,
believing, as drifters do, it was something rare:
to make selves anew, peel them off, and walk away.

Then home drew me back, something I'd left behind
felt immanent, a pole star. The demons were there,
and yes, each looked like me, but I walked on,

into the next room, into a box of toys lined
with black paper speckled with stars, then into the space
between the stars, past Atman, past Brahman.

I waited there for a visitor. None came, or I looked away,
and tumbled out of the box, the room, demon stares
now fixed on me. If only we all had a little more time.

The Mirror Ball

The paranoid stride, the walk of jabbering phone-bent stickmen
on their way to inner glow, to feeling all shiny and right
as they jerk past the ice cream truck, shimmy past the
 illuminati outpost,
because all is not right, all is dull, the world is filled with
 talktalktalk.

I know where they are going, I have gone there myself.
The shorter of the two once tried to rob me with a letter opener
 in the back,
made me feel so bad I gave him a ten-spot and told him,
“it’s alright, we all go to t-bone’s sometime, tell him I said hey.”

I have lived in many rooms, most of them near a dealer
of some drug or other. They’re everywhere, as is sensible, as
 is right,
they offer derangement of the senses, and the senses offer
a curtain of rot spattered with joy. A fistful of bills gets you a
 packet of sunlight,

or at least, something to make those spatters of joy shine
 and wobble
and swell larger than is right. It’s not god, it’s just dope,
and there’s a reason they feed it to child soldiers
before asking them to kill their families, there’s truth in how it
 makes us dance.

Shake Back Your Hair, Let Go Your Laughter

Shake back your hair, let go your laughter,
throw your cigar at the preacher's red gums;
shit on the sidewalk, in daylight, in traffic,
sob in the midst of the playground's blue hum.

Ask boarded-up windows to give you advice,
go mount you a fountain, go bake thee a friend;
tell no one your mission, no, not even Christ,
he'd not understand, though he'd try to pretend.

Shake back your hair, let go your laughter,
sing if you must; if you mustn't, then bray,
and make sure your stink infuses the hunter,
make sure that he too becomes somebodies' prey.

Donna Levine Gershon

Everything You Google

Everything you Google comes back to haunt you when you least expect it, like when you're trolling an atheism website and little pictures of wedding bands mystically appear on the left hand of the page because earlier you had Googled funky wedding bands not because you are about to be married but because you have been married for almost fifteen godly years, in awe that anything this tenuous-seeming wakes up every morning in the same place, still willing to commit to dinner that night, if not at six sharp then as soon as is humanly, ethically possible what with the meetings and the errands and the mandated receptions of wine and women in the workplace and you see that you don't like any of them better than what you have, with the ribs of gold that you found in a nothing jewelry store in Clearwater because you were not sophisticated enough to look into bespoke bands hammered out like prenups, more things you never thought about, like God while he was still living in the house you grew up in, before divorce split the synagogue into his and hers, before the void led you not to temptation exactly but to this man who comes custom as if an engine beyond belief remembered what you had been searching for.

Kaddish

For Helen

Gray feathers in the rearview mirror
flutter finally to rest along the shoulders.
Your hair—thin and silver like birdsong,
long into your decades of denying
yourself nourishment—gone.

Delicate creature I cannot swerve to avoid,
you are free now of hollow bones and highways.
No more pecking at seeds and berries.
Yit'gadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba.
I alone count gulls for the minyan.

The 7-Up Man

He comes every Thursday
to restock her shelves.
He goes straight for the 2-liters
like he owns the place.
He works quickly:
Highway 9 brings truckers,
beachgoers, locals, all thirsty.

He looked at her once
as she walked out of the walk-in
freezer wearing the dried sweat
of every clerk since 1920
who had donned the community parka
to uncrate the ice cream
and said, "Nice negligee."

No summer shift manager
has ever needed delivery more,
walking home to her mother's house,
his Coca-Cola eyes in her sight,
Jazz Age perspiration hanging
like a Billie Holiday song
on her shining, tired skin.

Twilight

Bat at my head,
I don't care if the tangling in the hair thing
is a myth,
I believe it,
I believe it
with my skin,
with the back of my neck,
with my soul,
that your sonar
is on the fritz,
that the frizz of my hair
has crossed
from annoying
to perilous
and that once we are
enmeshed, frantic,
your needle teeth
will inject me
with whatever the cave
has bred
as I fly blind
across the field
from this day,
when my mother
has died,
to the next,
when we take up
the heavy shovel
and heave clods
of earth
onto the box
we have put her in.

Mother Earth, South Carolina

August, and the house shifts, a pediment drops to the pavement,
and we bring the baby home from the hospital
to rock in the craterlet the earth has carved for her.

A different August, 1886, landslide on the Ashley River.
Walls failed and fell, fissures birthed new meanings of the earth.
We tell ourselves we are rocks, but all that means

is we respond to stress by breaking apart.
I split like rock to bring you, my earthenware,
Earth-wary, to a place of rending and liquefaction:

One thing melts into a mother.
Charleston felt aftershocks for thirty-five years.
Any mother could have told them to expect that.

Eva Heisler

The Olden Days

1.

As soon as I turn off the light,
questions tumble
out of my four year-old daughter.
“What do dragons eat?”
“Can God ride a bicycle?”
I am tired and facing essays to grade,
last minute laundry,
a letter demanding immediate reply . . .
I am not quick to answer
and Zoe fills each pause
with another question.
“Where was I when you were a little girl?”
Each question delays my departure
and darkness.
“Why isn’t it the olden days anymore?”

But it *is* the olden days, I want to say.
At this very moment
we are on a journey
you will recount one night to your little girl.
Pay attention. Notice the light,
the shadows on your ceiling, my face—
remember
the face of your thirty-four-year-old mother;
one day you may long for these details
as I may long
for this distraction and exhaustion.
But instead I mutter “I don’t know”
and insist on silence and sleep.
Ask me tomorrow, I say. I promise
answers by morning. “But, Mama,”
my daughter wails as I slip from the room.

“In the morning I forget my questions.”

2.

In the dim light and chill of early morning,
I gather papers and books
while keeping an eye on the oatmeal
and reminding my daughter to get dressed
and, yes, she must go to school
and, no, she can't wear the purple dress
for the third day in a row. And stop asking
because I will not buy Barbie cereal.

Sprawled on the floor
with panties on her head and socks on her hands,
my daughter holds one of my textbooks
upside down, pretending to read.
“Little Miss Muffet sat on a muffin,
eating
her
corduroy . . .”

I pull from Zoe's hands *The Rise of Puritanism*.
How many times must I ask you to dress,
I say. And no,
I haven't seen the purple dress.

My daughter turns her back to me
and picks up a magazine. “With one mighty shove,”
she reads, “Gretel kicked the wicked witch
headfirst into the oven.”

That's it. I snatch
The New Yorker out of her hands.
I'm taking you to school
with panties on your head.

My daughter, reaching for the black pants
I dangle in front of her,
mutters under her breath,

“You are a wicked woman.” Slowly
she dresses—taking breaks
to also dress
her Cinderella paper dolls
scattered across the floor.

The stepmother paper doll,
with pointy shoes and grim expression,
wears my favorite colors (burgundy and gray),
and although my hair is not gray, I realize
that mine this morning
is pushed into a bun
not unlike that of the stepmother.

I am old and mean
and have no sympathy for Cinderella.
“Don’t forget to brush your hair,”
I say. All that polishing
and sweeping
taught Cinderella to take care of herself.

“When I have a little girl,”
my daughter informs me,
“I will take her to meetings
and to classes and out to lunch
and to toy stores. I will take her everywhere.”

I never intended to be the wicked stepmother.
Really, it’s easier for me
if she eats jelly beans for breakfast
and it’s less laundry
if she wears the same purple dress
to school and to bed . . .
But I am under a spell,
compelled to feed my daughter (burned) oatmeal
and in a rage
to hide the purple dress.
I open my arms
and in them are ugly shoes
and sour apples. Eat, my pretty;

this will make you grow
up and away.

As I stand at the backdoor,
muttering to myself
and making last minute changes
on an article due the day before,
my daughter (hair brushed
and decorated with a dozen barrettes)
tiptoes to me and lifts my shirt.
With her head, she nudges at my belly.
“Nibble, nibble, gnaw,” she whispers.
“You are my gingerbread house.”

Stephanie Rose Adams

Encounter

To live indeed is to be again our selves
—Sir Thomas Browne

I did my best to cheat the windows
in that plaque of hours just before my turn,
seeing round eye flit and glare through the starry knit,
not starlike but with a thick, opposing absence.

Thin as thread in a grey
bulk of body, I sang myself
a cradle song to float me through the hours:

I believe, I do believe
this is how the child dies
in us: turning colors like the leaves,
a red confetti to deceive us.

And finally tucked into the mouths
of loam it leaves us—to an empty house.

Listen for it:

I remember the hammer
falling in the kitchen.

Then beak and eye and a red surgeon's glove:
a rude reaching into body
and tearing out that threshold
I hadn't meant to lose—

coming at me with its red head raw
like a turkey vulture—

A schism.

Then my molted faces hinged back
into the jambs and the sunk spurs
pulled away, so I was human.

And the injury transmuted
to a faint ache in the skull.

Sparks drew the table-flowers down
into the candles
and the borders darkened:

I awoke to the dining room,
dressed, fed, hands occupied with mail.

I awoke to myself bereft
of waking, still missing the
beady hour of birth.

My chores doubled and balked
in domestic circuits; I sang a song
to the sink:

*Life is a movement toward arrangement of a scene.
A red cloth. An apple. A cut stem
for the vase. For the knock at the door,
for the knock at the door.*

There comes a time
when one gives herself completely
to the black-soaked cosmos

and so I stood still
in the room,

emptied of spirit,
for I had given it all away:
even the table was set with blank circles:

not like moons
but the absence of moons:

It was a Tuesday—
I walked heavy with its collar at my neck
to the window.

*Here I am to be seen
in a yellow gown thickened to the skin,
carrying death, it seems.
Roses at the knees.*

Like coming from a bath
to the mirror, I sensed the whiteness of steam
and a gathered heat:

Stalled things snapped from their bases
spindrift and open; I could smell
the brute perfume of—

O something else beside me

in the surge: her rising
throat in my throat, her fulvous lights
so much like Autumn (all of it,
the black slick rot of it, the whole sleet road
after rain, boot-soft, the breeze and crimson
sheafs of it) and her haunching out of fog:

what thing

—as with a horse's bludgeoning thighs
and rippling with bloom, I could do nothing
but stand beside the bust of gates
and see how the wind itself tore like a soft lizard's egg:

*what thing
art thou?*

what eyeless head
with gazes of the past all about it like light,

pushed out

with beady look and smell of
my own flesh, for I'd carried and carried it—

then there was the privacy of stone.

Between us:
a mineral crush, and heat,
an eon like a slow breath
circled our meeting and I bowed to it,
and she bowed to nothing and was the plain
ecstasy of being, ever,

and after—

I could smell the turned earth
in my hands, and for this
I could not, not ever, diminish.

Bury My Hands in the Earth

First the thing and then its accidents

The brood conjuring of walking
into the lord's tower

A constellate purr of part against part
humming down the
earth-hacked way unborn

And scuff of wings
in the rough-hewn walls

The future passage
like a widow's eye rolling back light
down the tunnel—

Lost-one,
do you think you enter the dark?

You will bear it yourself
with the blindness of hands

to your dusky head for opening:

Split the thousand grains of self

Turn out the thorax
her multiple honeyed cores

and look again:

from the fracturing *eye*
which tessellates to *eyes*

and proliferates further
out from that dimension
to the eyeless spaceless

cramp of yearning
and opens further
beyond telling

And look:

how the round planet will suddenly open
her nearness, within you:

What shook magnet will shoot up the shafts
and gravity's hands

to root between the loose chunk loam
of your pieces, saying:

stay, stay

sparing you whole in a buzzing sack
of song:

The strains breaking weave against the wing
—to say *chrysalid*

The pupils strung to leonids
—to say *swarm*

And deep tremors of a skull
so given to god

—to say *sting*

The Women

Just as the women had warned,
I had seen phantoms in the gardens
after wearing the tears of a dog.

Baptized twice in half-caste doberman illness,
around me the temple dusts glittered
on the lost remains of small and extinguished desires,
such objects spat with gums and slag.

My eyes lifted to a shroud suspended on high wire—

it took on suddenly the tic and fit of struggle,
took on damage and discolor,
calling to me only in its highness,
reach beyond the range of arms,
a moan hectares in length.

Then too, in dense brume of anesthesia,
there was one who rose in sheets
and spoke the dreams of Gaia,
making worm-holes through the fibers.

The earth bucked beneath the night, as sung:
The wailing one walked from one shook fountain to the next.

In Delhi or in Marrow

You are standing upright in sixteen atmospheres.
Otherwise, there is merely the light
which crumples that darkness down to your feet.

Once, your body was in savage hands, unworshipped.
Though lately it's a boulder, geodic and poised
over the tiny carapaces of six dwindling men—

The searing presence of your planet.
It matters little who was witness and who was not.
I myself was not there, in Delhi,

and yet you've reached your hands through the fabrics and
lifted the dams to make me see you:
In that hour of suffering

your continents groaned; their plates crushed the minutes
and folded their blood away; their stars revolved
like a constellation at the tops of our skulls.

The violet burn of everything touching everything else.
Such figures of the night, such difficult reading.
Can you know how much I carry you?

You are past knowing.
I've carried you straight out from the story.
Now I keep you like I keep my bones.

A Mirror to See Me

Here is me.

A pearl

oblong blur, hung on a silver dish.

What are you, me,
if not the viridian, nether,

a swimminghole—

(a vapor that

collects in emptiness)

•

Light is sliding on a surface.

What is wavering in and out of time,
is it me?

Is it

a white chester drawer:

between scarves and folds
is my past

and several more besides:
our histories coil
and bite savagely at their tails

•

tight behind that symmetry
of doll form: rouge

egyptian eye, spice, demure—

•

How the borders seem
to cry

And yearning for a snap of husk:

My print-dress
muddied with the animal
synod of my ecstatic family,

is to be burned
for warmth.

•

O release

this tesserae of stinging blooms,
anemone, these mollusk arms of me,
shapes like nothing
you or I have ever known:

I am not ever what I am.

Should I be me,

I'll take the ocean for my looking-glass.

Jill Kelly

Five Encounters

Sister traveler

Second leg back from Nashville
I took the aisle next to a thin blonde my age
With a bad haircut and the reedy bones
Of nicotine and diet soda
The ancient creature at the window
Her mother moving up from Phoenix
To live with her, she said,
And the hate that pursed the daughter's mouth
In resignation seemed as old as the Bible

And I wondered what their story was
What love withheld, what anger nurtured
In the decades between them
And I thought of my mom and all that never healed
And how I was spared the daily grate on nerve
And the need to wring out six more drops of patience
To weather the decline of a woman I'd loved too much
And tried hard to set aside

I rather liked the old bird at the window
Who helped herself to Cheetos from the daughter's tray
Who watched the clouds and showed us scraps
Of balled-up tissues that carried some deeper meaning
She seemed all there, and perhaps that was the problem
"All there" can still mean not enough or maybe
Just enough to keep alive those ancient hurts that cling to us
That wring out all our tenderness for those we would most
like to love
But cannot bring ourselves to cherish even as they fade.

Garage picnic

Driving home from the beach on Monday
I find remains of a picnic in my garage
Two coke cups, an empty sushi tray
And a thin green box that housed
One pair of handcuffs \$4.99

The sushi was from Safeway
But I don't know if they carry handcuffs
If there's a display next to the pickles
Or down by the granola bars

It's rained a lot this winter and I'm
Not surprised when I find wrappers
Where someone's sheltered
From the rain, smoked, had a beer
Some Vietnam vet, some schizophrenic
Dumped on the streets by an indifferent system
Who trundles down my street seeking bottles and
Cans and a bit of dry now and then

But the handcuffs are a puzzle
Common enough in a police state like ours
But usually on the other side of the law
And there's no place for kinky sex in my Spartan
Garage, though now that I think of it
There are two hooks in the wall
Where the ancient ladder hangs
From the rough concrete but the ladder
Holds its tongue when I ask
And I'm left wondering what you'd handcuff
To a shopping cart

Coffee with Einstein

27 or 28 he was, impossibly young
Spiffed up in his dress whites
Or so I imagine from the photos

He left of that life.

On coffee breaks my dad would sit
At a big table with a genius 30 years his senior
And talk about life.

“Ordinary things really,” he said
About coffee with Einstein
“A very nice man and kind to all of us
A regular guy, you know?”

My father didn't see combat
Didn't travel overseas, didn't kill anyone that I know of.
Basic training in the wake of Pearl Harbor
And a quick wedding
Then stationed at Cape May.

What my father did there he never said
Ordinary things I expect
Only the Einstein connection of any note
Oh, and the death of his second child,
Who went for a nap and never woke up
A sadly ordinary thing to happen to
A very nice man and kind to all of us
A regular guy, you know?

Staying out of it

“Don't let me order a drink”
The woman says to the girl between us
“I'm on medication for panic
And I can't have alcohol”
But when the cart reaches us
And we've learned more than we need to know about her fears
She orders double vodka with orange juice
Hands the girl between us a zipper bag
And asks for two Oxycontin
In a voice laced with Atlanta helplessness
What's the girl to do
The woman has 30 years on her

And the girl has Asian obedience written in the
Bowling of her head and the neatness of her jeans

It's a long flight and when the cart comes around again
The woman orders more vodka and hands the girl the bag
And asks for two of the little blue ones
Her makeup is impeccable for all this and her clothes
expensive
The zipper bag holds a pharmacy of relief
And if it were mine, I wouldn't be handing it over
To a stranger but it isn't mine and neither is the vodka
And I am both relieved and envious

It's a long flight and she starts in again
I want to ignore all this
I want the girl to say no but I know she can't
So I get up and speak to the flight attendant
Who speaks to the girl
Who puts in earphones and buries herself
In her Kindle and the addict in the window seat
Finds the call button all by herself
But the attendant doesn't come
And she rummages in the zipper bag herself and
Whatever she takes then does the trick
And puts her out of our misery

And I think of flights years ago
When I needed a bourbon chaser for my own demons
And I don't envy whoever is meeting this woman in Portland

We all know where we were, that first one

Third period Latin II
Dorothy West, her suit as grey as her hair,
Her hand on the blackboard
Principal Curtis stopping her in mid-correction
He's been shot
He's dead

Until that moment, it had all been in play
The gunfire we knew
Bonanza, Gunsmoke, Dragnet
We loved that it was fake, harmless
We hadn't yet sent our boyfriends and brothers to die in the
jungle

We were in love with the Once and Future King
And his model-perfect wife
Who had replaced Grandma and Grandpa in the White
House

We didn't yet know that the grassy knoll and whispered
conspiracy
Would change the world faster than we could imagine
That this was the first of too many
That the weight of them all would push us
Into protest and rebellion and open up
A gulf and a war between us and our parents
Between those who wanted the old world
And those impatient for the new

After that Latin class they came so fast
MLK, Malcolm X, Bobby, Ohio State
That we didn't register our surroundings anymore
When the news came or the body count rose
Or the atrocities deepened
I guess we each only get one first time
It's not the same after that

Ben Bever

Carrion

Something holy about ravens,
a corpse in a meadow.
The doe had been shot, I think,
and staggered here to die,
blood rusted to her fur.
It had not been long,
her bones still held meat
untouched by the congregation.
They clung to her like God,
talons tore the sacrament
from her in zealous gluttony,
heads bobbed to heaven,
swallowing her down.
I went to touch the cold, flapping flesh,
probe the gaping socket with a finger
expecting who knows what—
some revelation, perhaps
an electric shudder.
They flew away when I approached,
a flapping, cawing exodus on night dark wings,
a glistening eye clenched in one beak,
the nerves still dangling out the back.

Inmate #460908

knowing this meal would be his last,
awaiting the lethal release,
ordered, for his final repast
Justice, Equality, World Peace.
By all accounts, a strange request:
how do you cook a meal like that?
Was this some form of weird protest?
How did equality taste flat
on his tongue—bitter and cold
as fingers of gin? Is justice
like barbecue—smoky and bold
home cooked, fall-off-the-bone bliss?
Why would a man who rapes and steals
want a final dinner of ideals?

Mouse

My father, in the 5 a.m. darkness
puts his hand into the kitchen sink
still filled with water and dirty dishes.
floating among the bubbles and cold grease
his hand closes on the water-logged corpse
of a drowned mouse.

To his credit, he kept a level head
carried the body into the yard
and threw it from the porch into the snow.
What he was trying to find that morning
or why he was even awake so early
I never thought to ask.

Air Burial

Tibet

The old man finally
died last night.
I got the call this morning
from one of his disciples.
The ground is too hard for digging,
wood too precious
to waste in a pyre.
They will bury him in sky.
The monks burn incense and offer
prayers as I set out my knives
and tie my leather apron.
The birds jockey for position
their monstrous wings
beating the air and each other,
their beaks and screams
mingling with the prayers.
Red-bearded lammergeiers
and cruel-taloned griffon vultures
have gathered already,
waiting for the feast to come.
I lift the cleaver and begin
my work. It is unpleasant
and I am glad for the whiskey
I drank before I started.
I remove the limbs first,
split at the elbows and knees.
The blood is thick and
already clotting.
The head comes next—
It is easier now, to work with
just a torso—I can trick myself
into believing it is a pig.
I slice the belly,
remove the entrails, liver, kidneys
and offer them to the greedy birds,

their beaks already caked
from picking at the old man's
arms, legs, and face.
The eyes are always the first to go.
The fingers swallowed bones and all.
A squabble breaks out over the liver,
drowning out the monks.
It is torn in two and shared
as I pry open the rib cage.
When they have eaten their fill,
I will take what is left
and grind it mixed with barley,
to feed the smaller birds.
After this, there will be
only three things
that remain of the old man:
memories of him,
which will one day
be carried to the sky
with those who hold them;
pride in a job well done,
the carrion-eaters fed,
a vigil completed,
good karma for us all;
and the third thing—
a stain on the rocks,
to be washed away
with the rain.

My Grandfather's Shoes

At midnight, my father
made pancakes shaped like our grief,
coated in Mrs. Butterworth's
I'd bought from the 7-11
I passed on my way over.
There were no words between us.
Later, after the funeral,
Nana cleared out the basement
and gave me his last pair
of hiking shoes, barely worn
since he'd given up
the Appalachian Trail.
To think they would fit was sacrilege,
but they did. He had always been
a weathered mountain of a man,
even after the cancer;
stubborn as a rusted door-hinge,
though never as loud.
I wore his shoes, hoping
they would grant me his strength,
but now they fray at the seams,
the soles wear out,
the laces unravel.

Michael Hugh Lythgoe

Wounds In Spring

In the season of amputees,
we live with cut limbs,
axed to the crotch, nubs;
pruned to the knuckles.
Some arborists believe
it helps the myrtle trees
to flower and blossom back
brighter, fuller even.

It is spring now,
nearly Palm Sunday.
The wounds bother me.
In the north, the clear maple
sap is frozen, unable to bleed
out to buckets for syrup.

Here the dogwoods, pears
and cherry wear
new whites, pink; redbuds
renew in Lenten purple.
Judas tree.
Pollen comes alive—
even as the freshly wounded
suffer.

Flotilla

Ebony birds float like ballerinas on pointe,
pirouettes; birds' arabesque necks are musical,
jet-wings, sculptures afloat, sable marble
moored near the shore line below Pike's Peak,
an onyx fleet, boats under raven sails;
charcoal swans link in a love-heart of mysterious
curves, cues, a vision of long low necks, a ritual
meant to seduce, a dipping synchronous
mirror image, cob and pen couple—feral,
ornamental, symbols of a perfect storm, disastrous;
black swans mean a surprise, the unexpected, unreal—
Sandy—black lacquer paddlers, black pearls
in a pitch pigment painting, reminiscent of a flotilla:
a wound blooms in London, a drift of open black umbrellas.

Crooked

Some sink to their knees
for an inspiration to begin a poem—
says a bespectacled teacher
at the Culture Center.
Inspiration does not come.
You must beg for it. He advises
a student to study an apple. To really
know what an apple is, be interested.
To understand an apple, really see the fruit.
Imagine if the teacher substituted *woman*
or *life* for *apple*.

The spinal column
is a tricky business
she says to me.
My hands apply pressure
to her shoulders; I massage
her neck, down her backbone.

She looks out the window
into the winter sun feeling
its way through breezy pines.
Do you see the tree, there?
Behind it something crosses
the trunk, reminds her
of a crucifix. It is a dark line of mulch
at the edge of a green space.

I recall the paintings in the Cafe
Monet where we ate brunch
last Sunday: spare works, a series
in thick oils, umber, whites, black, maroons.
One canvas reminded me of the Eastern Rite,
Greek Orthodox crosses—
crossbars aslant—
crooked figures in slant light.

Small Gods & Heroes

(after Ed Smith, Sculptor)

Each anatomy is incomplete: a beggar,
a wounded warrior, a speared hand,
severed, Perseus, Hercules. The artist
sculpts his gods & heroes small,
forms wax molds, leaves pinch marks,
fingerprints, pours molten metal
into hollow shells, forms bodies.
But these bronze figures are not whole,
still they convey neuroaesthetics.

We learn to feel the hurt of Hercules' labors;
Samson weak, shorn, blunt trunk;
Sebastian stung by arrows, flesh cut.
Greek antiquities—incomplete human
shapes—mythical Medusa—what it means
to imagine ideals, glorious serpentine
long hair, to perceive suffering shapes,
a torso polished shiny in spots, indented
with shadows, stripped, a bronze Christ,
fractured, next to a column in a palace.
Mercury—no arms, headless, leaning—
ready to leave the ground with a wing
on his right heel.

March Voyeur

On a morning with two discordant crows
encamped on the roof's peak, I believe
in afternoons. At sixteen hundred hours
a school-pencil yellow bus
brings the neighbor's children home
as regular as the tides.

From my window looking east
I see the sun climb a little higher each hour.
Clocks will leap forward this week;
leaves are late. Winter scene
is still cleared out, thin.

In the afternoon hour a sun-bright bus
is a gift—like the single daffodil
found on my walk amid green stems
yesterday. The light shines brighter
on magnolia leaves, the brightest
green in the copse of trees I view.

Spring will fill in the patch of woods
within weeks so it will be harder to see
through to where the afternoon school bus
leaves a lemon brush stroke, van Gogh-like,
along the horizontal base of a landscape.

Arlene Zide

My Claim to Fame

My claim to fame— I had breakfast with him
and his second wife
now replaced by another
blond young thing.
Pancakes and coffee
fragrant as the songbird morning
of his words.

Once, He sat on my couch, the other poet
spoke
(between the Boursin-spread cracker mouthfuls and the
sips of wine)
of how women's poetry just wasn't
strong enough
didn't make "statements". His own whining,
drumbeating body-painting
male-
bonding ceremonies in the woods
notwithstanding.

The Nobel prize-winner too
came to dinner once,
his childhood rape
sticky fly-feet stuck in memory, but
never grew wings on any of the women in his novels,
made their lives
real.

I need
today
to ward away
such memories, unseat
them, send them off in their fur-lined coats
into the snowy night. I need

to write
my own mornings,
the hot sweet coffee, crumbling rolls,
the frantic flying cockroaches and smashed dishes of
a Bronx back kitchen.

I want to watch our breath float again in the winter air
while we sing wild choruses, sailing to Bear Mountain,
standing room only at the opera, love affairs with tall hard
men, flying
across the mountains of Afghanistan

to land in a village in the tribal wilds of India
surely
must count for something—
my words

my claim
to fame.

Sons

in memory of Loraine and for Heather

The eldest daughter
lay herself down along her now-dead mother
old arguments forgotten, put
aside, her sad self
at the fore, her life
a riddle, still.

While all around her brothers squabbled,
ordered, scoffed and simmered
all around,
gave orders to their sisters, to each other,
unable to offer solace
to their living mother or
now, any sister, or
themselves.
Kept muttering
about wills, and houses,
paintings, books, and trinkets
while scolding
sisters, one as always, silent,
one still sobbing in her mother's hair.

In my hospital room
my son, too full of pain, perhaps,
sat, never noticing the built-in window-bed for family,
(complaining later to me of how long
he had to wait for me to breathe,
to wake.)
He sat
in corridors, in anguish
in indelible childhood memory
when his mother screamed
and ranted, picked her way around from wall to leaning wall

while his father, interminable wordsmith
had no words
no arms to comfort or console,
no concern but for his
having to suffer more
by watching
his wife suffer.
Remembering perhaps
 his doctor father always having time
 to tend to others, his kind words
 for others.
(He too complained
to a limp form of me in a different
hospital bed, arms strung with tubes
and piping, and fear.)

Perhaps fear
is what's at the heart of it.
Sons can't
fear, can't
show lack of control,
or make sense
of the senseless.

Daughters
sit,
quietly

lie
quietly,
close by

face in her disheveled hair
to better hear

even a whispered word.

Don't Get Too Comfortable

Don't get too comfortable. You won't be here forever. Don't go and unpack all of your rickrack undies. This is just a way station. You are in a shabby limbo.

Soon the trials will get started. Every day they'll question you. You will question yourself every day, every hour.

At first, as usual, the birds will whistle and sing in the early mornings; then they'll start flying off, to the South, to the North. To those places you've not even seen in your dreams.

Once, perhaps in a dream, you will be that bird. Soaring, over green fields to a distant hill, you will own the meadows.

But, don't get too comfortable. This is just a way station.

You won't be here tomorrow.

Harry Bauld

Myopia and the Sick Child

Out the window's unground lens clouds flee
my son's fever across a breadth
of Bronx, where sough and whimper

drive heat on. This El Greco sky can't be escaping
a whole borough that fast, such mad ploughing.
How can I be anyone's father?

All I would need to halt the day
in its tracks, its element, its fit: a little vision.
These are my glasses at hand,

and here is the world to weather.
I should put them together
to catch this white scuttle and revelation,

the science of one last chance. But I don't want
to recognize anything anymore,
rather pray (if this be prayer) without mark,

spot, puncture, like bristles of an astigmatic painter
caressing the flames of his own seraphim.

Square One

I would like to let everything
of love alone. Morning's dog

keeps up its bark, and I can't remember
when I lost track of you.

My physics stops at petal's end
of a flower I can't reach—I have no

need there—only not to choke
on every word: mass, force, attraction.

What keeps me going—somewhere
a nun touches herself to god.

The Greeks had no different word
for yellow and green, a spectrum to believe in

where nobody knows any longer
the burning sun from anyone else's moon.

Matins

If I say *love* it will crack
my teeth and I am already bone

in need of graft. Mornings fall
from opened doors and small birds

persist like a torn corner of moon
restored in the last scrap of night, the page

I couldn't read through
the razz of migraine,

an acre of dictation I shiver to take
from the car, the shower, the footstep

that starts the lists no one can finish.
In an orbit of larks I am sparrow pretender

in the chorus, a silent mouth moving,
makeshift hymn of shutting up and down.

Profit

Basquiat, 1982

In the tic tac toe of this space, what year will it be
When time arrows itself into your late rally?
One blue hole in the punctured ozone of downtown
Is all the sky you get in this economy.
Eenie meenie miney moe, catch a market by the toe,
Out goes you and your bloody trellis of halo.
Tomorrow avoids your blackboard, mad matrix
Of debt figured in the subway's antipodes.
This scream through the drain of teeth
We've heard before in a major, northern key.
Chase it, get it, spend it, because you know
Something's running you down, something's coming;
Even if you don't know what it is, you've seen
Its panicked fingers bony in their bright ecstasy
Erected into all the light left. You know
The position; now turn it to your own ends.

Queer Street

Boxer, *Basquiat*

*what stories
he told with his hands
in the right he had romances
in the left soldier's memories
—Zbigniew Herbert*

Out of the zoo
of white fears are these
raised hands a *no mas* of surrender
or kong roar of victory

raging bull horns that have swallowed
the four-elbowed tenements of the Bronx
all torso and neckless
as a cartoon heavyweight

or black savior painted into a corner
stretched in the squared ring
against our sins
nails in the gloves
(the fix is in)
for hooks to lead us on
and crosses doubled and nailed—

are we flat on our backs
on the white canvas
blood pooling as the count
goes on above
arms and hairy fists pinned and fallen
or on our feet
in the trance of queer street

our permanent address
in these late rounds
where the legs are gone
and we're out on our feet,
the heart alive and dead at once.

Lisa Zerkle

Bubble

Our billions begin
as cell knit to cell.
We're always
shifting
to something
else. A stacking
of cosmic bricks.
Ancient shells
over time
become limestone.
This graphite
scratching words
at the tip
of a pencil.
This diamond
for the bride.

Atoms
come together
to be stable. How
do you name
their need
to settle? They level
like clouds
spark to ground,
like lungs release
breath. We're
half carbon,
the stuff
that straps together
the universe.
Vigor or structure
in every living
thing. We're

buttoned one
to one, all bound

to earth. Energy
can't be made
or destroyed, only
changed, one form
to another. Leaves
part from trees,
molder into dirt,
rise again to leach
sugar from sunlight.
Without breath,
we'll burst
into leaf, once
unleashed
from this bone
and flesh.

The Definition of Friction

Two bodies so close. To move, one body
must overcome inertia. It's easier to keep
still. A force resists. A daughter
leaves her mother. She packs
a small shoebox full of clean
underwear, stomps her way to the top
of the street before returning. A few years later
the daughter runs to the woods, stays
until a thorn pierces the bare arch
of her foot. It's the constant battle
with momentum. Once bodies move,
they tend to keep on

going. Slide a key across a table, friction
stops it. Maybe the key to the house. Maybe
the key to the car. Bonds form, heat
releases. The afterglow
of an open hand, its imprint rising
on her face. Look closely
at a surface that appears even—
it's rough, pocked with microscopic
hills and valleys. Tires slap against blacktop,
the rougher the surface the more the friction.

A physicist says someday
our levitating cars will zip
from coast to coast by little more
than a touch. How much will be enough?
The touch of a mother's lips brushing
her baby's dreaming eyelids? A balled
fist, breath released from a sigh? For now,
it takes gallons of gas
to get the hell out, to escape
the pull of air, of wheels on the road.

Delmonico's, At the Turn

Bernhardt orders bisque. She really wants
a nod from Tesla, the fair-eyed inventor

just back from Paris. It's hopeless,
he's given up sex for science. Not

to mention his aversion to germs, ladies' curls,
pearls. Each night before he dines, he shines

the already spotless knives with spotless linens.
In the satin-lined dining room, fellow patrons

choose alligator pears from Peru, steak Hamburg,
pommes frites. Mirrored walls reflect kidskin gloves,

lavish plumes, and the silver chandeliers' new wattage
gleaming gold on mahogany. Over Maryland terrapin,

Twain tells how in Tesla's lab he was electrified, hair
a shaggy nimbus, fingers tingling. *New energy!* he extolls,

predicting Tesla's patent will be the most valuable since
the telephone. After supper, they'll stroll one by one

through the garden at Madison Square, soft leather shoes
leaving impressions in the gravel paths. But now

Astor and Vanderbilt polish off the Baked Alaska.
The *New Century* editor takes note. Bernhardt

bats her eyes over a cold bowl.

Dynamo

*An inventor's job is to lay the foundation for those who are to come
and point the way.*

—Nikola Tesla

Given to visions, Tesla
has seen the air around him
*filled with tongues of living
flame.* Accosted by the ticking
of a watch, the dull thud of a fly
alighting, it's hard to still

his thoughts. He walks, as a friend
suggests. Fresh air. The riverside
park in Budapest. The February sun
wheels towards horizon, setting
the Danube aflame. As the sun slides
to light another sky, Tesla lifts his arms,
quotes Faust to his friend, *The glow
retreats, done is the day of toil.* In a flash

he sees a wheel of power. One
current fades, another blooms.
A dynamic orbit, an endless loop
of energy. Grabbing a stick, Tesla
sketches in the sand, this, his perfect
motor. *No more will men be slaves
to hard tasks. My motor will set them free.*

(Oh Tesla, this success will leave you
penniless, without love or family.)

Soon, he'll make his debut
at the Chicago World's Fair—energy
passing through his body until his suit
seems *to emit fine glimmers or halos
of splintered light.* How his mind,
his brilliance, shines.

Peter Mishler

Film School

They were lost in the raw footage:
among the boy-fishermen
we could barely see for the trees,
the shining lake, the sand-woods
that appear on the roadsides ten miles
from the shore—those empty pools
I wanted most were gone.
And now I'm waking up in early April
seeing what I thought you'd shot,
watching from behind the fence
as you climbed onto the private grounds
to crouch there—camera held
to your face—when cameras
were large enough to brush
your lips against. You whispered
to each other, Here's a place
on which we both agree.
The yellowing calisthenics field,
the drained Olympic pool—white
at the bottom, not the hospital-blue
I would have guessed—blackened leaves
and summer hair swept to its corners.
I can climb to face you now—
leaning in, believing you'd pulled
the whole tableaux into the lens
the way a cloth is drawn into a fist
for magic. And I can take your hands away,
the way I would have never touched
your hands, lowering first from your face
the camera with the small, red light
we must have chosen to forget.

Human Water

*Childhood is a human water, a water
which comes out of the shadows.*
—Gaston Bachelard

Boy beside
a rain-barrel
curling his hand
over its edge—

his fingers yellow
in the roof-dark water
he can't see.

He places on its surface
a branch of holly
from the yard
and its reflection
breaks his own.

I'm remembering
and misremembering
and stepping through
a public field.

I am alone,
so there are three of us:
within my body,
there is also me,

but more corrective,
age-rings in my eyes,
coming down
from the house
to stay him, shouting:

what did I tell you
about playing
with visions

by the water
when I'm not watching?

His small hand
holds a wasp, a lamp,
a deer, a field,
a wall, a flame

calling for anything
he names
to be lifted over
the barrel's edge.

The field
we step through
almost cries
within its early
fallen leaves,

to let itself be known
against our feet,
and we are overwhelmed
to know it.

We walk
beneath its trees
as when I crossed into
an August evening
with my friends,

and saw their bathtub
in the yard, and listened
to their bathtub joke—

I was in love with them,
and didn't speak,
and there was one of me,
and it was empty.

Stop Thinking And Eat Something

A cinematic eye
I should no longer trust
follows a waitress
in blue;
and the neon
gem's light
is blinking outside
at no traffic,
and blinks
on the surfaces
of her shoes.
A framed poster
gathers the heroes
and villains
of the Marvel
Universe:
they stare out
with vengeance
onto empty booths.
Elsewhere,
my child-life
is shaking its wings
at the curb,
then rises
into a late summer heat
toward the gray
monoliths
of the mall.
I must try
to pull back
from this whole
cosmology;
but then,
I am recognized—
this blue tray coming:
meatloaf

on Wonder Bread;
gravy and mashed,
green parsley atop
a thin nick of orange,
and a strawberry
milkshake:
thousands
of ice shards
climbing the sides
of its glass.

Verduria

New trash left
in the spring mud:
honeybun wrappers
gifted by
the season's
teenage lovers
who earn
their paramours
running each other
down and away
from school
on wet pavement.
Their litter's
nutritional information
is still intact—
you can rejoin it
with your hands.
I want to reconnect
the Red Lake 40
and swim in it
under the stars.

Mouth to Cartridge

The 8-bit melody of an open-world game,
when submerged in his dream, takes the form
of real language once the boy is awake.
Its haunting and tinny redundancy binds
with the words and phrases of morning.
The screen-light, and its character—
who darts from task to task—are ripples now,
now that he's up and dressed as children
were once made to dress for the airlines.
He bikes to his swim-club and stands
on its diving-board, closed for the season.
Gathered leaves and dark green liquid
extracted from August pause in a corner
of the empty diving well. Snow
is beginning to rest on the light
shoulder-pads of his Sunday-school blazer
and onto its gilded buttons: their little anchors
exposed in relief. He knows there's nothing
below for him, but what better place
for a boy to seek when his game, its song
and its fever, are drowned in his head—
their maps and clues leading him here.

Tim Hawkins

Letter to a Distant Friend

A sack of coffee freshly roasted,
socked away among a couple of loaves,
and on the stove a pan
ready for steaming milk;

not much else,
a bit of cheese, some drops of oil.

But to have this, the potential
for another few contented hours,
I'm beginning to understand
why you kept your things so closely guarded,

and why you lingered so
in the delight of preparation,

how folding socks was no chore
and tea could be made
only with your full attention,

how much you expressed
in the deliberate pauses we took for granted
as an excuse to smoke.

"I want to write . . . because I love making things,"
you admitted once, pausing to light another one
as we awaited the craft of your storytelling.

Forgive me for bumming smokes
and for asking:

Where is it?
What have you made?

At your leisure, when you are ready,
make me a poem of peach pie
or Hong Kong girls walking arm-in-arm
on a warm harbor night.

And after some reflection I will fix coffee,
taking in the full measure
with all deliberate haste.

Just Now

Just now, after a day spent
retouching scarred decades
of scuff marks on a hardwood floor,

after a day spent repairing generations
of gouges inflicted on sturdy joists and beams
once hoisted on strong, nineteenth-century backs,

admiring, all the while, the legacy
of sound masonry and stately molding
wrought by precise and careful handiwork;

just now, taking a break
on a late afternoon in early summer,

I look out through the plate glass
of this centuries-old storefront
and witness the rarest and finest of showers:

a sun-dappled burst from nowhere
against a backdrop of robin-egg
blue and rose-colored sky.

Every age perfects its own handiwork
and leaves a masterpiece of flint, obsidian, stone
bronze, iron, marble
plutonium or silicon.

Nevertheless,
so much sudden, wanton, cruel
maddening beauty abounds,
that each generation runs out of time
before it can really even
begin to describe

a sun-dappled burst from nowhere
or the first blush of a maiden's cheek.

Burn and Linger

I won't want any of this to be about me, per se.
In the beginning I'll want to just disappear
into another continent, into another culture,
to submerge myself into centuries of tradition
like fleets of ancestral fishermen crossing a treacherous reef.

But after a while, I suppose I'll also want to burn,
at least a little.

I'll want to smolder
like paper money stoked for the comfort of my ancestors,
like a waking god hoisted on the shoulders of my acolytes,
and to flow through the scene
like the smoke of joss sticks drifting from a temple,
like a flaming boat built solely for the burning.

And of course, after all is said and done,
I'll want to linger.

I'll want to remain like the scent of lemongrass
after you have walked a moonlit trail,
the shy water buffalo calf trailing after,
but not like the bone clattering of bamboo
announcing its exaggerated growth.

I'll long to awaken
on the temple steps at dawn,
with something plucked and desired
in hand.

A plum, perhaps
—delicious, dark and cool to the touch—
or something else that burns
and lingers through a ripe
and darkening age.

The Eclipse

The early evening light leaves the room discreetly
as if a second skin is expected to arrive,
and a periodic rustling of air
slips through the beige curtain
to pass over the prone, naked body
like the inspired breath of lips.

When darkness finally settles in,
the ice in a glass has melted
and the liquid is warm as blood
where a ring has formed
on the dark, solid wood of the night table,
on which grows a faint scent like ferns
in the loam of the forest floor.

For a boundless, solitary moment, the body,
at perfect equipoise, without hunger or desire,
grows womblike within the desolate confines
of its hairless planes and slackening breath.

But before the darkness can even pass
there begin the first, faint, telltale stirrings
of the spirit, a desire to anthropomorphize
the motives of light and air
and a need to outlast and exhaust
the perfect moment,

a self-awareness provoked
perhaps, by the proximity
of blood and ferns,
a primal awakening inspired
and informed by
terror.

Animal Planet

While we bow our heads to the ground
and our hearts seek meaning among the stars,
wild creatures assert their presence
in the here and now
and the just here and gone.

Unknowable in the way one speaks
of the alien and other-worldly,
the title to their kingdom is forged
in their absolute
manifestation of the flesh.

If this seems ironic and abstract,
then so be it.

For irony and abstraction
are our great gifts—
not to the world, but to ourselves—
invented for our survival.

And we, of course, are the real aliens;
Each a world unto one's own,
orbiting a sun of its own devising.

Marqus Bobesich

the billow and the blast

that violent subway to your house—
its tin mermaids wailing and
singing us to the next stop
jostling our mouths, our hooves,
the milk of our collective brains.

we are a people tunneling hard,
(getting out of our own way, even)
with no time for all this
sentimental rock.

and what of the afterburn of paper and
hot trash, still floating in our tracks,
saluting us in jest
as we scream for more light,
for some ice hole of hope in
this subterranean mess.

Ask me things

*irretrievable, dynamite brain
an evening never goes the way you want it"*

suppose we cheat the season
with our nervous
airline fuel.
cheat death, cheat altitude
through the heavy beast of a
window seat.
yell at the engines
(one, now two)
that we're strangers
still curious about the world.

but life had better be what they say;
we're seven times the target age
fighting the glare of the sun
fighting what photos can
do to us.

it's memories that fly this thing
not keeping us grounded
towels too hot (to face)
exfoliate
this skin, this bird
making good come from bad,
cups of tea from your bath water.

"if you want to sympathize, empathize, or
be near anyone's thighs
let's drop this nothingness
we've got going on, and aim for grace."

Flora and fauna

Salesman says we'll lose the
war on bugs
that they outnumber us 5 million to one
with plenty more hatching as we speak—
in our heating ducts, our pillows,
the walls of our warm intestines.

underneath us all the time, like the
rats they ride like horses
waiting to roll our skulls across their
million backs, like buckets in a
fire brigade, like quarry slabs rolled out to
make the pyramids.

We've got to call up our guts,
confront those turtles and snails on
their own terms,
crunch them on their own crooked door stoops.

We have logic on our side
and those dumbstruck spiders who will never
learn to warn the others:
that a smooth-gloss bathtub is the
death of them, a purgatory,
a record needle gushing over the same
goddamn groove.

upkeep

who do we thank for a 24-hour anything?
for a drugstore always standing guard,
its treasure box of lotions, potions,
and creams.

we feel cleaner even walking in,
comforted in our upkeep of the body,
its clues and answers stacked and
neatly labeled.

we've got a good feeling about this one;
that we're adding miles to our one and only life

that somewhere on these shelves we might
experience a greater joy,
a stronger one
(and faster)

what we would trade for an easier go,
for cravings gone mute,
for steps on a jeweled dance floor,

a lightness to this need that never sleeps.

Abigail Templeton-Greene

The Moment Before

For Daniel

On the inside of the windshield
he saw their reflections
and the blur of a coyote
on the horizon.

He knew then
that time slows down
when you are airborne
as if you are about to throw
your first punch,
or lean in to kiss a girl.

Underneath the sound
of crunching were sixty
years of song, a hundred
prayers made of cloud and dirt.

He wondered about saguaro cactuses
would they grow through upholstery,
would planted shards of glass
grow taller than a Durango Ficus,
would his daughters come to this spot,
place a cross on the side of the freeway
and scratch his name
into earth?

2009 Subaru Legacy

after Patricia Smith

I was equipped for journey, although I did not mean to fly
or end up inside out, a shell of my own purpose.
I am sorry for the twisting
that I caused, for the pavement I could not reach.

Now I know more than the veins on a map.
I know the ditches that accompany freeways.
I know the meaning of these freckled roads
adorned with wooden crosses and Virgin Mary murals.

I never was a shield.
I am a mass of metal.
I saved all I could that day.

Highway 15

I have always known blood. From Niño de Guzman to the steady chase of foyuca, heroin and marijuana. I am crammed with trucks, decorated with potholes, a black top scar that runs for 1,432 miles. When they speak of me they tell me what I'm not: undivided, unlighted, lacking shoulder. Without me it would all be bramble and naked desert hills. I connect Hermosillo to Guaymas, La Frontera to D.F. I am a prayer of convenience, un gracias, a whip of speed. I could tell you that I am cursed: shadowed by the Tropic of Cancer, littered with swollen dreams, haunted by promises of the undelivered. I toss and crumble. I shriek and slither. When the cars stack up I am silent, just a wail of wind on greedy, teathy track.

What is Left:

The quota and the libre,
cactus needles begging,
mountains that make shadows
out of landscape, sunrays
that drag their nails
through the dirt.

Old sneaker that ran too slow,
vein of tire tracks
slashing the earth, dust settling,
prickly pear blooming,
bottles emptying.

Nowhere dogs
searching for shade,
a car radio that zigzags through air,
frigid birds swooping like angles of water,
bristles sticking,
wounds scabbing.

Stars that swallow sky,
scattered bits of glass,
teeth clenching the surface,
wind scraping window panes
in hopes of getting in,
in hopes of escaping this land
with the sleeves cut off,
this land that is a rumbling of trumpets
a lake of caskets:
cracked and slivered.

Aftermath

When the jar of pasta sauce
hit linoleum floor,
it reminded her of windshield
with it's splintered hands
ripping through skin.
When the blood of tomatoes
flashed across her cupboards,
it reminded her of earth,
of desert floor reaching inside
what was meant to be out.
She wiped up pulp
with a bathroom towel.
There were stones left
in between her teeth
asking: where to put this mess?
She felt bits of glass twisting
in her left hand like a key
in a door that does not open.
The scar looked like a lifeline
of too many children. A phone rang.
She wondered if there was any reason
to fill air with verbs where there was only
room for scrap metal. "Do words penetrate wind?"
She would ask if she knew no one would respond,
if she was positive that time moved backward
and that she could cook a simple
pasta dish without freeways
slicing through her kitchen,
without this howling at her feet.

Eric Duenez

Your Itinerary

1. Eke out an existence.

Begin by coaxing atoms into molecules into shapes into self. Stay away from the abstract. By all means, a starfish (fig. 1). God willing, a pug (fig. 2).

2. Gain a perspective.

To the north: you should see smoke *pillowing* from the factories. Do not be alarmed. This is progress. Your automobile, should you choose to accept one, will garner a 5-star safety rating.

To the east: there's one now, a star, rising like a tiny fist to the top rail of a crib.

If it has the strength to pull itself into a position of standing, it will see

this is not a prison, but for its own protection. Dangers wait: a spider's web, an electrical outlet, finding yourself within a figure-eight

with no means of slowing down (fig. 3).

To the west then: the wagons of pioneers are already setting out, searching

for a more pure north, a different east; but that east is here, you see. So

they have already begun to die, wilting beneath a too clear sky, fouling up

the too fresh air with their self-fulfilling decay, choosing now & again

to rest upon a cinder block overgrown with grass and twisted wire.

A heron sculpted from a shovel head and scrap iron.

And to the south: a marbled sea as beautiful as any spry
young thing.
No—she's off limits. You see, it's toxic, but we're working
around the clock
to make sure there will be fish or some passable imitation
(figs. 4 & 5)
for your salad sandwich.

3. Pay it forward.

Operators are standing by, but due to heavy traffic expect
long hold times.
We'd like to apologize for any inconvenience. We really would.
Please have your site ID ready. At least, there are so many
things to see.
(Fig. 6) a factory fire. (Fig. 7) a salary man.

Vicodin

From origin to each
local limit

on the x and z
and y axes,

what the living would refer to
as skin, so smooth and white

like a pristine porcelain
sink fixture

or an egg shell:
something could be or has been started here.

It feels like I'm walking on water.
It feels like I'm healing the sick.
There's a burning bush in my mouth
where my teeth used to be.

The lights with my eyes closed.
A golem for a tongue, a totem for a bone.
And so what if God is a fag?
I'll take my reach around.

You can't trust in Hollywood.
Our mouths grow out from our asses.
Here's your cup of coffee.
Here's your forty-three cents.

More. More. More.

The Nature of the Beast

Even with its jaw un-
hinged, it seems impossible
that a python could swallow a six-
foot gator; but I've seen the evidence:
my hand two knuckles deep in the side of Christ—who, also,
was tempted.

I will confess; I thought it was consensual:
the green hills, the white noise of the sea,
all that beyond breathalyzer machine.

Here: a house.

What you have to understand . . .
on one hand, a dash cam;
on the other, Sleep Number Bed.

We're hardwired to open
our mouths, when our noses are pinched
(when our stomachs are punched).

The politest incursion:
I was serving (myself).
Just two kids and some cold beer:
I was protecting (myself).

You'll see: balloons will fall from the ceiling.
Our Host will explain everything after we cut to commercial & . . .
come back.

I've been piecing this together all my life.
The best defense is a seven-headed prosecution.
Her name will be changed to protect the dream.

Solar-powered floodlights along an s-curve to the front door.
Wildflowers herded into this alcohol-induced lullaby.
And everywhere you've found a scab and scratched,
we'll put another tiny, little, golden badge.

Virgin Soil Epidemic

It's frightening how quickly the changes come.
Your skin—a storm window nailed shut for winter—opens.
The rolling brown outs. The fine print.

The doctor merely mentions a scalpel
and your heart balks. Your skin and pericardium
recede to their antediluvian levels.

There's a gap in the fossil record; it belonged to your teeth
before your teeth belonged to you. They will return there soon
with tales of spirant elements and religious ballyhoo.

A mantis perched upon a burning cigarette
goes through the motions of praying.
We're past the heat break now.

You can fold a piece of paper in half only so many times.

All the lingering furbelows on the periphery, glittering
things, diminish: the two car garage you meant to clean out
before summer, the six-pack abs, the sky,

and a photo album we put together, together,
but couldn't agree on how to remember best
the shared events, so we left it empty and blank.

But look out the window: the hummingbirds are back.
Eight months from now that will be all
you wish to remember anyway.

Intervention: Your Malignancy

I am here today because I love you.
You have a disease and this is how it affects me.

We used to walk along the fence row, touching everything, believing that with everything touched molecules or at the very least electrons were being shared, that somehow we were all in this together, that even with just a fleeting touch our muscles would develop memory. So, if one picked a flower—say, that daisy—and put it behind another’s ear, this could be repeated over and over and with every turn we’d be ever better. One morning, you woke to find you could only turn left. Walking in circles, your body was trying to unwind the clock: stop the ticking and the cancer spits out healthy bone, retreats back to its origin—some nothing, some healthy cell with only an underhanded notion that we pretend isn’t inside of us all—as if the arrow could leave its target and return to find the bowstring taut. All this movement becomes only the potential for actions yet to be realized.

I am here today, touching everything, believing.

Anne Graue

The Rusty Buddha

On the barnyard grass,
camouflaged in its setting
of weeds and dirt, its metal tarnished
from weather, rain and sun washing
together, the hands hold
a string of beads and a flask, as the eyes
of the God stare into the distance.

I smell strawberry-rhubarb pie.

There is an apple tree growing rotten
apples hanging heavy in the air,
the branches bend with the weight. There
is a hint of spiceberry.

Buddha sits, stoic and understanding,
knowing more than I know, knowing
how to make strawberry-rhubarb pie,
transforming the rotten apple smell into the one
that used to waft from my Grandma's oven: the
crisp sugar on the brown crust
covered the sweet heat of strawberries.
Rhubarb adds pungency, and
brings me back to the scientific
Buddha, sitting
in the grass in front of the old
spicy brown barn, the dark molasses
of the outside walls holding the roof, but only
for one more season. Even Buddha won't be
able to stop it.

Night falls and here
I sit ogling the Buddha as if
it will give me some kind of sign,

something to go on
that will take me
out of myself.

There's a Van Morrison song playing in my head,
crooning, telling me
where the Buddha is, I know it,
where the spicy smell of apples sits
next to the strawberry-rhubarb pie.

The sweet & sour smells mingle
with the music, and the oxidized Buddha
waits for my prayer, but
I have none, nothing to pray for, only
that I could possibly be sent
back in time where I decided
not to go, but came here instead,
with the Buddha, the barnyard, the
apple tree rotting, the music & the sorrow
sinking down into my feet.

Roots

The roots that I am digging
Are tough, pulling me in.
The earth smells so fertile;
It does not give them up so easily.

Tough, pulling me in,
The roots are like memories,
Not given up so easily;
They're unwilling to yield the answers.

The roots are like memories—
I have to pull on them hard.
They're unwilling to yield the answers,
Or anything that can help in this life.

I have to pull on them hard,
Through dirty gloves wearing thin.
Is there anything that can help in this life?
I'm still hoping that there is.

Through dirty gloves, wearing thin,
I feel sinews of memory tug.
I'm still hoping that there is
A piece of my heart at the end.

I feel sinews of memory tug
At all of the emotions inside me.
There's a piece of my heart at the end;
The roots are so deep in the earth.

With all of the emotions inside me,
The earth smells so fertile.
The roots are so deep in the earth,
The roots that I am digging.

The End of My Life

The bees nearly took me with them.

They came from nowhere like water
trickling from a rusted faucet, too cold,
or from a pump, like the one attached
to the wooden floor in the back room
of my grandmother's house.

I would imagine
how far down the well was dug
beneath the graying floorboards;
I would step away
into the kitchen, safe.

*Clouds and men were
gathering, circling, and
keeping me from my children.*

They could not see
what I saw, the white wind
swirling near the stairs,
the wind I saw just as surely as I saw
the rain barrel behind my grand-
mother's house where I drank cold

black water from a rusted cup, dipped under
the disturbed surface, tasted metallic, and
wondered if everything would be okay.

Morning

sunlight kissing the top
of the lilac
the dogwood
now sleeping in autumn
standing still
for the onslaught of winter

the waking to work
to good mornings and
breakfast and rushing
out of the house

the holding on to
images that last but
cannot last in this our
ephemeral way of life

the clinging to aphorisms
of the dead that
somehow
comfort us in our

living through each
day as it comes
crashing or seeping
or running us down

somehow we are comforted
knowing that we die
and are dying
every day in the tides
that ebb and crash,

standing until we cannot.

Separation

The bones are separating from the skin
of an animal freshly found, after death,
with weather and cruelties surrounding and closing in.

Layers shred away with pain and a memory in
the recesses of the cavity left without a breath.
The bones are separating from the skin.

The moments of decay remember the nature of the sin
of moving closer and closer, approaching death;
with weather and cruelties surrounding and closing in.

I lean close again to see if I can win
a chance to alter the process of the vulture's breath;
but the bones are separating from the skin

of what I cannot define or, knowing, look within
to see if what is left is truly dead,
with weather and cruelties surrounding and closing in.

My mind is blank and racing above the skin
that melts and pushes its way to death.
The bones are separating from the skin,
with weather and cruelties surrounding and closing in.

Susan Laughter Meyers

The Hairpin Speaks

I refuse to police the wind, though it pleases me
to ease through
the obedient traffic of shine.

A woman can seek to fasten
and still allow disarray. Say, the wisp at her brow.

True, I'm fond of curves that turn back
on themselves,
an undulant view.

Swept up
in my grasp, a woman's hair is her name.
See how it's written in cursive.

Indispensable?
I'm not that vain. Bent metal. Take a wire:
coat hanger, staple, paper clip.

Clever, yes. But if I'd meant
you harm, I'd have maimed and murdered centuries ago.

Well, there *was* the long, efficient kansashi.
In those days if a woman unbundled her hair, beware
one's throat. Or any vital organ.

Hammock, Rain

Not to be outdone, I stand in the living room—
this is after I lose my bicycle,
after I lose the boy who creeps me out with his stare—
and having no other recourse, I admit I am poor:
no ride, no love. The day is short of rain,
and I'm wishing for a nap in a hammock.

I know moves in a hammock
better than I know moves in the boiler room.
After all, consider the rain.
Lately my dream cycle
has become dimly existent, piss-poor.
My favorite pastime is to sit and stare.

It's like falling over a toy on the stair-
way, like being lost in a Florida hammock
and the sun beating through each pore.
On Tuesdays I quit sleeping in the guest bedroom,
quit riding my motorcycle—
too dangerous, especially in the rain.

So who cares whether it's going to rain?
I refuse to station myself at the window and stare
to see if the weather will cycle
to new weather. Some days the hammock
sways. Other days there is no room
in the ground for rain to pour

its apologies for drought onto the grass. Poor
rain, and all its regrets for being rain.
I retreat to the dining room
to watch the squirrels, who are too busy to stare.
My day has turned into an empty hammock.
The best memory is my old red tricycle.

I could sleep late on Wednesdays or cycle
my fantasies into a faster gear to pour

new life into my secret hammock.
By now I'm wishing for rain.
I don't care how many people stare.
It's my bathroom.

I shout, Give me room, people, to ride my unicycle.
Is it worth a stare, this hotdog lunch of the poor?
I am the hammock, you are the rain.

Headlong Spell

Pelsified if not jibbed with anathema.
It balms the heart, how the river
birch skews and rusts any question.

But the ragweed caterpillar, when?
Blue leafstone trees a loud mercy.
My father housed such amble,

his days pinnate with inflorescence,
his nights a catechism of wood battles.
O pester the rain, pilfer my father's sky.

My Nails Tap a Tabletop

They wear identical skirts
with white hems. They are bonnets without ribbons,
lost whalebones & ribs of miniature foxes.
I bunch my fingers & kiss the nails
like some good Italian. My old habit is to flick them,
one by one, against the thumb. Their duty is to give
the lover another place for lips, the new mother
a handful of tiny pink shells.

The longest one tends its proximity
to finger food & loves to ping the glass
glad with wine. An agile host, riding
a wave of goodbye moons. Easily broken
like a heart—quick to repair, unlike a heart.
When cold, blue as a plucked hen.

I once lost one,
that blackened curl of horn bone, that tough old goat.
It pinched & pinched until the end. Having shed it,
I didn't know myself, my toe a soft bunny.
O fortunate, nail-forsaken toe. O strange body
fleshy & flightless. Fish, for a time, swimming free.
Ever adaptable, the nail is the best chameleon.
It is a useful beauty.

House outgrown, it inches out
into the mystery of air. On relentless wings, long
& graceful, an albatross soaring the open sea.

Dash—

Of salt, never enough. Though you're sink-

ing through the snow,
its light crust now caved in, a well
peppered with dirty ice. And frozen fields
no horse would care to pull a sleigh over.

Some do it well with *off*: a will, even;
a song, a string of notes.

Others know little but broken
table legs and backs of chairs. No wonder
the straits of their hope.

•

A pair traps what's in the middle,
like when my mother safety-pinned
the top sheet to each side of the bed
so my sister and I, her two small contradictions,
would quit our tugs-of-war.

What's in the middle: an interruption.

I expected your long retirement, not this chunk
of death in the middle
of what would have been simple and periodic,
winding like a river. Not a sequestering, Paul.
And don't think I'll forget it either, though I wasn't there.
Your battle, the silence after.

A rainforest—say, along the Amazon,
where I've always wished to go—is nothing
like a long chain of clover blossoms.

—for P. R.

Peter Kahn

Sweaty Man of Lincoln Park

Pray for Sweaty Man, that his gym membership has not been revoked. A puddle—viscous and malodorous—left in his wake. That he is not a salty blob of Jello jolting and jogging down Clark St. Pray that you don't sit next to him on the 36 bus when windows are stuck or worse, pray you don't place your freshly-pressed pants on the seat he's just left, leaving you to wonder if you've pissed yourself a week's worth of water and Gatorade. Pray for air-conditioning and cold showers. Pray for his wife, that she doesn't succumb some mid-August night to drowning when love-making turns up the thermometer. That some hot-blooded mermaid doesn't lure him under for a salt water-dance. Pray for Sweaty Man, that Poseidon himself doesn't claim him for his own.

Independence

We got to Tremont Park early that first time.
Laid out a checkered blanket, waited and watched.
Lara and I stickied our small hands with red,
white and blue popsicles. As the sky blackened
and white-headed zits twinkled and winked,
there was a quick pop, like a pinned balloon.

Then came the clap that shook my stomach
like a hard hiccup. I loved the color tie-dying
the dark, but the sound, the way it smacked
the ground, made me cringe and cry and kick
over the bottle of dark red wine my parents
were drinking to toast our 199th birthday.

We were the first to leave, retreating to our white
Chevy station wagon. On the drive home, Dad
taught me a game—to clap in sync with each boom,
to ready me for the big 200 when I would be ten,
too old to run from what explodes in the dark.

D. Ellis Phelps

Five Poems

and the red oak
spoke to me
saying:

look—to the north
open the bones

take your chances
with the sun

the earth leans

breathe

consider the dung
at your feet
—how it feeds
the soil

you spin
and dig

you are:
bowel
bone
matter

no more
than dung

you cannot
unwind
these veins

nor cause
one synapse

to snap

you are neither suture nor cell
but *salt* *dissolving*

this well
is a black hole

yet you
stand at the edge

—wanting

~

how many eons have slipped
through this clutching

do you think
marking time will help

~

every morning
is a drop of honey

the bags you hoard
prove the gravity
you fear

that's why the dervish

spins

—to throw off

this *prison skin*

put your ear to the earth!
even breath

is an echo

dawn

lifting dark
—edge of morning

one silent stem

her head
—a noble nod

how
can i drink

all of this

through this
—cumulous

of indigo—

the breath breaks

—a swift
& crimson

rise

no gravity

can stall this
flight

~

above:
—the mossy
field—a wet

slip a soft
landing

~

wide her shore
& emerald

—a push—

no shell
can hold

•
()

—the wind
shifting
the dunes

you cannot
be sure

of anything

Linda Sonia Miller

The Kingdom

I.

Power is a heavy cloak, without a realm, invisible.
Reluctantly she rises from her throne, spends hours
scrutinizing empty rooms, bicycles rusting in the shed,
listening to the silence. At night, attempts conquests
with silken robes and magic lotions.
In restless sleep she dreams her subjects
small again, consort, curly-haired and strong.
Days too long, she uses dwindling powers
reading minds and planning lives—to no effect.
Once her realm was busy, full of news. Now
her soldiers live on contentedly—tying their own shoes.
In winter, she stares out her window, studies birds
plumping feathers for warmth, nests in the sun long lost.
Isn't this what history teaches—all kingdoms end?

II.

Isn't this what history teaches—all kingdoms end?
In that frigid northeast realm, I slept with him
in my bed beneath the eaves, and dreamed
to the hum of my children's breath, haunted creak
of pines, mad screams of kittens trying to get in.
Below the window—endless expanse of evergreen
draped across the border. At dawn, he raced
in bare feet across six feet of snow (as others
walked on water), then left me to my own domain.
Sometimes, I followed him into winter's woods,
studied tracks—padded, clawed, soled—
small hints that we were not alone,
my belly tense with joy and fear.
My reasons for leaving are still unclear.

III.

My reasons for leaving are still unclear.
I'm in a daze, sit for hours in the sun,
children scurrying like elves—
wisps of gold and light—
through an unmowed meadow.
It's a lonely throne. He's away all day—
my only conversation howls or jabber.
Occasional cars fly past across the border.
I read novels—Anna under the wheels,
Emma vain and afraid, Tess betrayed.
So much awaits me that I won't understand.
Time will render these years in pastel hues—
except for an umbrella or muddy boot—
something to remind me I'm simply human too.

IV.

Something to remind me I'm simply human too—
it's not a story, I've been told. All these strings
entangling, strangling—making it difficult to breathe.
Sometimes overwhelming, this role of being queen.
I struggle to inhale, swallowed something,
can't remember the taste.
Once I studied geese above a pond,
arrow pointing south, listened rapt to a story—
border guard's wife who disappeared.
Now my plot has thickened. I experiment
with potions, enfold myself in shadow,
practice escape—blank pages, trains, pretense.
There is no release. Power is a heavy cloak,
without a realm, invisible.

Nicklaus Wenzel

Skagit River

I.

The wet earth
Littered with pine droppings
Green needles dying yellow
In the rootdappled mud
While limpid and lakish
Drops hang, suspended
Teasing, falling
From forked boughs—
Through the air
Through the bracken
And down into
The wet earth:
The underground woodlines:
Like train schedules of comings,
Goings . . .

Desolately
The gray buffalo clouds
Through the canopy,
Stampeding
Lazily by
Into the beards
Of fog
Haloing
Dark peaks.

Out here, days
Go by. Out here
Fire's kind, from a cabin:
Burnt brush smoke.

II.

Gray, it
Courses at all sides
Laboring down from
The mountains.
And laboring down from
The banks, we
Move surefooted—
Still, tentative.
The rocks adjusting
Under our weight
Tumbling algaebacked
Loosing mud—
A sparse clacking
Buried in the lull.

The frothrills
Roll and swirl dirtily
Under the slag of
Sky: cold, and blindly
Rushing . . .
To brighter climes,
Less ashen, not so
Desolate.

Wading out ahead—
My travelling partner—
His khaki pants darkened,
His white T-shirt stuck pink and
Lucid against his back
Turning round to speak
In a human language,
Grinning . . .

The melted snow
And sediment, at all sides—
The pines slumbering
Darkly off the flume —
The campsite: miles behind,

Still casting its acrid smoke.

The round stones
Piled at riversedge,
Become wet, dappled—
An admonition: Find shelter . . .
Make a fire . . . wait it out.

Holly Cian

Bones

Spite, a sad kind, the way I am leaning—
a dark line—your brittle bones
passing in the world beside me—

it tells all—the Lord atop my shoulders—
how once inside you'll move with me
into the after for all to see,

once alive you'll never need
the twig and branch you give to me;
a cold love, inside the hills
to be bones and nothing more—

all you are is skin to me,
and bones and nothing more—

When a bluer sky is slid beneath
the crack at our bedroom door
I stretch and moan and move for you—
I am bones and nothing more.

Picture

At night, of late, I watch molding take
the edge away and men fingering their belts.
Flailing, they dig into their waistbands,

later, they will watch their babies
and pretend to sleep.

soap and hot water
have scarred my hands
but still I can be your beautiful
wife dressed in gray leggings

muscle and vein
have twisted my ankles
so picture me
something like a bee

inside a small room,
and frightened.

Close Reading

neighborhood morning what a bleak day across the
grid. holy roller quiet streets with distant thunder
and birds that talk amongst themselves. this is our
day of debt. strawberries for breakfast so sweet
may have mistaken them for small red clouds,
and the nights are so-dark reminders of being
buried alive. Come, revitalize

the summertime might coo, physically sick
as it were—nausea all across the bedsheets;
wondering if there is something
inside of me, and hiding it.
I feel dizzy and awkward at standing, all
my knees and feet in separate places

missing passports. the days are losing weight
and diameter; the artist walks in the room,
across the room, disappears outside the room
and the artist now has no palms or poems to tango.
Last week

was dense like a heavy cut of fish. we
closed early, live music in the background
and worms eating by the roots of plants.
Need Money? they ask, those deep deep
hands shucking oysters downtown.
prescription pain pill users wanted—that's
what makes us all so happy, all kinds of separate
pieces local cheap and heavy. Landlord
and crusader moving state to state licking
tremors off many a-thigh in his day-to-day,
hands crept to the small of a back. Tastes like

prison meals, he says, like something got
on credit. there, there, hush now.

View from a Cold Window in North Carolina

It is so cold
that when cold boys look out
over the fields
and talk about bicycles

their voices are small
as hollow tin cans

and they forget
they have had no supper,

they forget the moon that
has left them,

that their father is gone,
and lumps of hills

like those found in bodies
can hide their red faces.

There is a fiddler with a spindle
beard sitting in the window,

there he sits on blistered wood,
with dirt for fingers—

he can see the stars
even when the farm is low
and green

and the asphalt road
snakes around
the tiny town

as if the whole blue world were made
Inside of it.

Looking Glass Rock

Six shades of blue,
a glimpse of sharp peaks
and I am so far behind,
so far behind that
I could still flush red
like a birthday cake

and you would fall
off Looking Glass
and I would be a gasping shape
like a burlap sap empty
for whoever will keep me.

Surely when your life passes
into so many things,
I will then be so alone
as I never have been,

and my voice will be
a cracked cup,
a chamber door,

and so I think
I will just slide right off,
I will just leap right off

and never look again
I am so afraid of the cliff
at Looking Glass.

Susan Morse

Alice, Returning

Why did you return to our valley of illusions?
This the one thing about you I never understood,
or maybe that I denied.

Did you miss those skies darkened by black peat?
Or miss the ceaseless whine of water being
pumped—*whoosh*—to satisfy salt-leached fields?
Did you miss the glass coffin of summer heat
and the family trip that never was? Or did you lose
your way among rows of dust-cloaked vineyards and
paths that led to stucco houses with identical doors?

I railed against my tether, bawling, loud and belligerent
like a surprised heifer under the ax,
and bled out the lure of hookah springs
that quickly succumbed to the smell of decay.
I felt the glare of sun, heard the whirring swamp coolers,
and dreamed of other fantasy worlds.
The silent press of summer idled beneath high tension wires.
Those iron ladies-in-waiting pointed to escape,
a lunatic army bent on freedom.

So I left, feeling sure then that I could abandon you
and my childhood memories: Dead Dog Corner,
our father smiling into his last beer,
the silence of years between.

But you, Alice, how do you live now,
with your looking glass of tears
and your white rabbits just so?

The Laws of Motion on Acacia Street

Outside the ER doors at Dameron Hospital
a young woman is dancing
or mourning.
There is a whisper of fog in the air
after last night's rain.
She moves in slow contortions,
perhaps laden with the damping chill
of oncoming winter.
Her arms struggle with some emotion,
wave in response like seaweed about her head.

No sound comes from her lips
but we onlookers may not hear it,
our windows rolled up tight.
The circle of traffic is noisy,
spinning through the roundabout,
she in the middle of the morning commute.
A few cars do slow to stare. Others,
blind to anything but the daily trajectory,
speed up, racing toward their own destinies.

Two lanes over
in the city park
are five shining black crows.
One keeps the focus intense,
poised to dip his beak
as night crawlers rise up
from the wet ground.

The Gift

I gift to you four white beech leaves
that ride upon last year's embrace
within a solitary limb of my heart.
They flicker like a ship
without keel,
unable to sail.

The coldness of winter burns
them into single flames,
sears clean their juices
drop by drop.

When every bit has madly scattered
to the roaring winds,
I will make an empty bag of that heart,
small, yellowed, leathery,
which I will deliver to your doorstep
one afternoon.

In your newly begotten winter,
the first snow, even my coming and going
will be silent, hidden,
my footsteps drifted inward.

And you will never know when this inheritance
of emptiness arrived, except by the bitter strangeness
of those leaves as you suck ice crystals from their surface,
your tongue wrapping itself around a new coldness,
one which you did not recognize
before the damage was done.

Just a Little Death

for Maria

She stares up at me in her scarf.
She's far away (Romania, she says)
though that's something only the foreign postmark can verify.
She writes that she helped cut off a chicken's head
and ate the soup.
She held its head when the ax fell.
The chicken soup, she says, was made only to entertain her;
she's a guest. She asks if sometimes a little soup is indeed
good comfort. She asks would I have had the strength
to wield that ax, or to hold that head?
She also writes that she is tired of reading
Emily Dickinson's nature poems, with all those dashes,
and asks me which Harvard genius
decided her poetry was amazing
anyway?

These are all questions I cannot answer.
I only envision my mother
perhaps her cotton wool head on a block.
I think *what if sometimes a little death
is better than incoherence
or soundproofed green walls?*
I hear the fall of the ax, see
how it swoops down through the cold air
out there somewhere in Romania.
I see the pinwheels of red
that must have arched upwards
toward a thin December sun
like the beginning of a rainbow.

In the Hush of Late Afternoon

I sit on our sagging deck,
hands clasped behind my head,
contemplating the meaning of “now,”

and how to attain the complaisance
(or is it the reticence?)
of our cat.

Pretending to be unmindful of my middle-aged paunch,
I want to loll like him on the deck
and bask in the heat with his easy *ennui*.

Only mine would be determined
detachment.
Not the same thing at all.

Instead, like him, I listen to the birds.
We both watch a swallow beat, then rest,
beat, then rest its wings against the paleness of sky.

And I think that is how to do it,
that is how to climb
a long tunnel of hollow air.

Tonight you and I will walk to the neighborhood bar,
telling ourselves we are mindful of the exercise,
but I think it is also because the phone rarely rings.

We will each drink one beer
to tide us over for the quiet walk home.
We are just occasional visitors there, unknown.

Later we will climb into bed,
draw the cover up to our chins.
The night air has become chillier.

Each of us will roll into our separate sighs,

give the other a reassuring pat,
glance for the third time at the round face of the clock.

And for a long time after your snoring has begun,
I gaze through the dormer window
at stars too far away to be touched,

knowing that somewhere in a field,
a field which has a certain false luminescence,
the green that plays tricks on you when you remember

once you were young and in the moonlight,
in that field a cow chews its cud,
indifferent to the consuming interests of the dead.

Daniel Lassell

Chewing Cud

A llama doesn't care about bills or deadlines
it doesn't care about making ends meet or making momma
proud
all it wants is warm weather and grain at dusk
a green pasture to graze and a friend to eat it with.

I wish I could be more like a llama
eyes that see miles into souls
you brush its coat, whisper into those banana-shaped ears
and it answers your worries
with the sound of a hum,
a meditative pulse that takes you out of body
to ancient South American mountains
where, on icebox tips and in spanking wind
you observe humanity's absence
there—detached from the familiar
you call it good.

it makes you pause: I think I'll stay
and dwindle my life
just a while longer.

Learning to Stand

I passed within the barn walls,
unclamped the gate to enter the llama's pen.
what was to be an ordinary
day of filling water buckets and hay bins,
turned to be the birth of a cria.
the mother stood wide-hipped,
the others crowding around
sniffing its rear as the head emerged.
the body dropped to the floor
wet and quivering
wrestling its eyelids to behold
its inaugural sight of dusty earth and straw.
the mother turned to inhale its fragile body
those quaking bones that
had been within her 11 months.
a single hum deemed it hers—

not minutes from the womb,
the cria stumbled to stand.
its lips small and shifting in its efforts,
shivering with hips as a dog after bathing
clenching its toes to the dirt
muscling upwards,
those legs, so lengthy and feeble.
at last,
its feet flat with the earth
cloven at the angle of a mountain
its neck in a U.

I see I'm not needed.
I pass to the gravel, and
take my steps to the house.

We Have a Llama Whose Name is “James and John Sons of Thunder”

My mom named him that because she's into the Bible. In fact, all our animals are named after biblical characters: Peter, Paul, Luke, Abigail, Hannah, Zapporah—You name it, we got it. When you live on a farm and there are lots of animals, you tend to emanate that Genesis-given role in naming them. This is what a Christian household looks like. So we named that llama *James and John Sons of Thunder*—and one would think it's fitting—the way it is but two names in one llama, a mirroring of the Trinity in a lesser form. A symbol for Christ's “fully God, yet fully man” personhood. But my brothers and I always joked it referred to his testicles: those *sons* of Thunder. Those sons who would bulge in the summer heat, who would sag on crisp mornings. Those sons who drove him to straddle the fence-line in pursuit of the females. And who led to his castration. That day the vet cut them out, scalpel-ling the sack and loosening them from their hold, my brothers and I felt sadness in our hearts—a sense of death, like witnessing a funeral. Two little orbs emerged, cupped from the heat, white like a molded sphere of dried candle wax. I watched them disappear into the woods-line. (Did you know they bounce?) The llama's head limp from anesthesia, tongue flaccid in the barn floor dust. Now he's just called *Thunder*.

I Feel Like a Cowboy

when I saddle my llama
and you take my hand—
just the two of us
wandering ancient footpaths
where I choose to inhabit
straw huts and caves
that trickle out of mouths—
I salivate when I think
of chocolate and other drugs,
those sugar-comma dreams
and toothache stings
I feel like a cowboy
when I smoke marlboros in the sunset
and wear torn jeans that chafe
dreams under skin to surface
hopes that display
affection,
this belt loop that holds hearts tight
that you string up around your neck
and back against mine
I feel like a cowboy
gun in holster, yet not for
shooting
I just like the way it looks
hung and swaying against my thigh
as you stroke my chest
I feel like a cowboy
in a western film riding
into the sun with dust curling behind
I feel like a cow
boy, when you're around.

An Account of a Llama's Death

Zapporah died two days ago. She was such a good llama. The way she watched over the newborn crias as they matured to adulthood. The way she guarded the herd at night against coyotes. She was so kind even to the youngest of my siblings. My father tied her body to the bush-hog and dragged her to a pit beneath the big tree at the end of our property, the family gravesite where all our animals rested. There, he cut the engine and tussled her through the snow into the hole. My brothers and I looked into the earth at her stiffened bulk, already losing wool. She was ripe with age, and had outlived many younger than her. She was full-blooded Chilean after all—one of the last imports before the open trade stopped in '88. We had long hoped against this day. We shoveled dirt to blanket her from the winter. Clouds rolled on the horizon to drag a cold front in.

Svetlana Lavochkina

Temperate Zones

Osaka 34°41' N, 135°31' E
-2°C/28°F, snow

A peacock leaves for India where peahens allegedly match
him in beauty.
He flies very far, over the zoo moat, southwest—the snow is
still high, no peahens,
Only creatures that look like his caretakers, but smaller and
cheekier,
Like the ones who come to annoy him on Sundays.
They stare at him with raisins on their faces, then tear at the
gems on his plumage.
One little thing forgets all about toilet training, delighting in
ravish.

A sensei entertains a long-haired, kilted guest from Scot-
land.
Kumiko runs in with a garish feather, Majolica-cheeked, a
whiff of ammonia about her,
Granddad, a peacock visited us in the kindergarten this
morning!
Peacock colors hurt my worn retina, says the sensei, I feel
safer with humbler birds.
With your skirt, hair and slight build, he says to the guest,
I'd thought you were a woman,
Until in the bath this morning, a sparrow flapped out of the
hedge below your navel.

Leipzig 51°20' N, 12°22' E
10°C/50°F, light drizzle

If we want to talk about animate things, you must have it
now, the brusque doctor says,
So take this pill and go to the park till it works.
A womb is a reticent sack withholding the truth that we try
to coax out with sonograms,
So no one really knows what's going on inside. We can't see
If the amniotic fluid has turned green, or if guerilla bacilli
lurk in ambush.
Modern medicine prefers having a woman and a child side
by side,
Nicely separate and easy to contemplate.
Come on, take it, the husband says, at least we are talking
about living things,
After all these years of feeding the stars.

The flowerbed has daisies and daffodils but white fringed
tulips are best, "swan wings."
Give me swan wings on this day every April—
Whatever things we will be talking about tomorrow.

Bristol 51°27' N, 2°35' W
22°C/72°F, clear at midday

The wanton ebb-time in June.
To smuggle myself onto this man's beach sheet, I forced the
wedlock of longitude.
The sea lies with her teal skirts rolled up high towards La
Manche;
Her petticoat lace threadbare, she flaunts countless vulvas
of brine, tepid pockets for toes.
From here, pale freckled women were stolen, hauled along
the ever warmer Atlantic
To the slave markets of Tunis or Marrakesh.

A sheik's eunuch tried the ware with a bronze effigy of his
master's manhood,
To avoid wasting big money on fits too loose or too tight.
After meeting a new concubine, the sheikh liked to broaden
his mind
By gleaning off his much more travelled bronze part the
scents of the discarded women,
Who in all other respects had been beautiful; by now, some-
one else's property.
It was a special pleasure to secretly own the first serial
rights.

Toronto 43°42' N, 79°20' W
13°C/55°F, humid, overcast

The onlookers' North Faces are as gray as the wild pigs in
the pen on display.
In rich chocolate mud, striped oinking litter kneads the
teats of a tired sow.
Father boar stands tusked, dignified, nonchalant against an
oak.
Sow number two makes him a bed of dry copper leaves. He
patiently waits,
Then plunges onto the bed and she makes a leaf blanket for
him, tucks him in.
The hog falls asleep on the audience of dozens.

Macho, Mormon, pasha! swears a woman, her Dior in fatal
syzygy with pig stench.
At your whim, I put on your fucking pumps, making a fool
of myself, rants her husband,
Marching with other morons For a Mile in Her Shoes, to the
clangor of cameras!
My mother still can't believe I'm just pussy whipped not gay,
And I still can't believe I'm pussy whipped, a registered wild
boar hunter.

In the coop across the pig pen, a white owl holds a freshly
strangled chicken in her beak.

Daniel Sinderson

Despite Horrifying Sadness, the Birth of the World Again and Again

for A and Alain Badiou

Three days after the world failed to end
the sun soaks in.

We joke about our lives
as an echo—the bottom coil
of a slinky dropped from our window
by hands and smiles that are also ours.
Later, I'll remember the faint click

of rosaries. The sun will continue
to shine, birds will trill and coo,
and something like God will flash
and disintegrate and all will be
as the wind chimes tell it:

soft, bright clashes. Feeling what is far away,
by proxy, no invasion was necessary. Though

we are crushed and growing
despite the weight. A river runs nearby.
The trees and bulbs bloom,
again and again,
as we walk past

and out of the scene
with an exchange of letters,
sly kisses,
we pretend to understand
are necessary.

How lovely to know
such things can be carved

from our hands. Each touch leaving
a new map. Every blood-pure desire
another direction the mind takes
to see the world
breathe—

and there you are
and there the sun
and every lovely thing
choked down
one spin at a time.

$$Y(t) = A \sin(\omega t + \phi)$$

That sounds wonderful,
to break

in this clean division so many speak
so fondly of.

Our trend lines in homeostasis.
No longer crushed, just balanced, into splinters. Natural-
ized beyond help

like a physics equation or baby grand piano with our fingers'
blood not yet dry
on the keys. And the more I think of Zeno

the more I move
from horror to parody.

I love you—
loving me loving you loving another

epiphany that breaks my throat into grace. Feeling exhumed
then crushed by this expanse we exist in

it should not be so easy to be
happy with the sunset.

Both Renaissance and the morning after.
Like trying to explain thinking of you thinking of you think-
ing of your cat thinking,

I stare at the couch attaching words to an emptiness.
How many times did I not understand

when you said good morning?
How many times

did our footprints fill in

with snow until it looked like the world

erased us?

Of course, we keep

moving, stamping new prints

until, behind us, holier

and holier, the page

disintegrates.

Like the Ganges, Our Mouths

She broke in with the spring rain.
The whispers in thousands of erupting drops—

loud, then hushed, then another
unremembered voice for the world.

Now it's just her and the glittering
sun beam rebar smashing in

from our windows. We live in color.
We talk over crocus

and kiss goodbye with an orange
in my fist. Even our shouting

is hushed with pink blossoms.
Silly, this indifferent storm and then our silence

again—like stepping with red robes into
the Ganges and filth

only to rise with eyes leaking out the sight's
ecstatic rupturing and singing praises with howls

and arms akimbo—our words
tossed into air and told to fly.

•

But the weight grows,
our baptisms continue,

our bodies drink from the world
until we have no choice but

to hurt. Look at the feet, the legs,
our fingers—look at the stones. Watch

the blossoms sift and pile around us
like a statue of the Buddha

in one of Issa's poems—the air cool
after the children's games have ended,

as the Earth's cold shoulder
to the sun begins,

and the curious songbirds
have left—like our own desire to move—

this terrible, small hope.

Catherine Garland

Childhood Dreams :

Parachinar, Punjab, the Hindu Kush—
Deliciously the words roll in my mouth,
and melt like butter curls and memories.

Early mornings, before the midday heat,
my mother sat with me under a chinar tree
and taught me how to read the newspaper,
just like a grownup, and how to spell
Chrysanthemum.

At night I lay in a small white room
on a narrow cot strung with cords
and slept and dreamed my childhood dreams
while the bantam chicks poked for worms
in the weeds outside.

They tell me that Parachinar,
my childhood home,
is home to Al-Qaeda now,
a Madrassah training camp.

Who sleeps now in the small white room,
on the narrow cot strung with cords,
and do dreams still float in space
while the bantam chicks poke for worms
in the weeds outside?

Portrait in Black and White :

A grand clutter of magpies
in judges' robes flutters to fill
the bone-bare branches
of winter trees. They stare
at me, then burst into mad
crackles of raucous laughter.
What, I ask them, is the joke?
The heavy load of winter snow
that slid sharply off the roof,
just missing me? The small cat
dashing by with piteous mews
to disappear into an open door?
The magpies do not answer.
Again in unison, abruptly they
cease their clatter to fly away,
bright plumage shining black
and white in icy winter light.

A Resting Place :

(Newspaper headline reads Baby's Foot Found in Desert Cave)

Air crackles with dry heat. My tongue swells and wants to fill my mouth, choke out my life. Above, the noontday sun glares, indifferent to whether we mortals survive or not in this empty, arid desert, fit for neither foolish man nor beast.

Dark shadowed space ahead invites me in and I lurch forward to seek relief from heat become unbearable. I squeeze into the small hollow and give thanks for rest and cooler air. My body, sensing it will live to see another day,

relaxes and I lean back, grateful. Off to my side I glimpse a small pink object. It seems to glow. Am I hallucinating? I peer more closely, and in amazement see that small pink object is a foot, a tiny foot, a tiny baby's foot. Just the

foot is there, no small ankle, chubby leg, nor rounded baby's body. The toes are slightly curled as if in pleasure at some private glee and the sole rests lightly, lightly on the sandy floor, too light to leave a mark or slight imprint of its brief passage.

My mind reels and wants to vault into the horror of the unknown
Hows and Whys, but instead I take a moment to worship at the altar
of this small and unprotected foot, so brave in its aloneness,
and somehow
still alive, that waits silently (for what?) in the cool shadow of the cave.

E-mail from my friend Tom on his birthday :

My birthday today and I am 67 and full
of love for you and for the snow geese,
hundreds rising white against the sky blue
of a corn field flooded with melted winter
snow. They circle like floating snowflakes,
fluorescent in the still air, and glide gently back
to water, honking, splashing, a mini snowstorm
turning the blue waters white again.

Tonight a hockey play-off with pizza afterward,
The pizza is good and I will eat too much.
The beer is cold and I will drink too much—but it's my
birthday and I like pizza better than cake anyways.
But nobody will bring candles.

And I like being 67 and full of love for you and for
fluorescent snow geese that float like snowflakes
in the still air. And I thank the great creator for
these drifts of white snow geese, and for loving you.

In Memory of Tom—The First Time :

I do not remember the details
of the first time we made love,
only the moment of melting naked
into naked and the opening yes
and oh yes oh oh

I remember no feeling but the strong
pulse of your thrust reaching up
and into my heart opening
and then falling and the slippery
swirling wetness of rising
deep and wide and down
to the first coming.

And then lying still,
imprinted.

Michael Fleming

Waiting in Line at the Liquor Store

That look we exchange in the liquor store—
it's all right there: shame, defiance, oblivion,
the love we've been denied. Let's ignore
the voice of the village scold, let's not give

ourselves up to the perp walk, flashing red lights
in the rearview, the deputy's soft knock
in the middle of the night, screaming fights,
the drunken uncle whose wine-crazy talk

ruins everything. I guess I agree: booze
leads to madness, sometimes in those who drink
and always in those who don't—those who choose
to scorn the devil's alchemy. But think

of it: money turned to spirits, America's
hardest-fought dollar in exchange
for song, friends, poetry, moments without care—
the loving cup, the lifted chalice, strangeness.

Don't I know you from somewhere? Wasn't I
that apeman in the cave of magic berries—
and you that apewoman wandering by,
she who grunted, Fancy meeting you here?

Centralia

*They wanted the coal. They knew they could sell
the coal because everyone needs fire, so
they built the town nearby, and all was well*

*until fire crept into the seam beneath
their feet, rising like the hand of hell
to take back everything they'd made. A wreath*

*of smoke arose, just wisps at first, encircling
their homes, their schools. The fire was something seething
and obscene in the earth's belly, lurking,*

*unseen. There was nothing they could do.
For years it smoldered, relentlessly working
its way—sappers beneath their walls. Few*

*families were spared the sickness, the failure
of human will to stop what is too
big to stop, can never be stopped. Centralia's*

people, places, everything—

*She turns away,
takes the remote, hits MUTE as he inhales,
then she returns her gaze to the cold gray*

*fire of the TV. God, everything's so—
she whispers through tears. Exhaling, he says
Let's see what else is on. I hate this show.*

Grief

Not: I'm so sad, but: I forgot my keys
again. Not: I know I'll always miss you,
but: this food has no flavor. Not: oh please,
God, bring her back, but: I wore the wrong shoes.
And people continue to speak, they say
it's a beautiful day, quite unaware
that beauty's been revoked, mindless that May's
the same as December, that nothing's fair
and nothing matters, that jokes might as well
be Chinese. Their laughter is dust, their pain
is dust, everything's dust. Forecast for hell:
rain. Whatever. Forecast for heaven: rain.

St. David's Head

In my defense, as I would later tell myself, I was weary, footsore, alone. I had no map—but no matter. The Welsh moors, the Irish Sea beating on the stones a hundred feet below—who needs maps? I would take no rest, I told myself, until I reached St. David's Head, and then I'd lie on the grass beside the path, have my fill of the wine I'd brought to help me admire myself for arriving—the end of the world. I conjured ghosts of murmuring druids, choirs of angels as luminous as schoolgirls to greet me, sing my song. But every time I reached the farthest headland, there would be another, still farther ahead; the fine spring day reproached me, mocked me. After three such defeats I finally lost heart and let myself collapse beside the path and chew my onion vanities, watch the sun set into the sea, drown in sour wine. In due time I stood and stretched and watched a gull hop effortlessly into the headwind, hovering there in flightless flight, the pull of gravity poised against the relentless push of wind. And then I saw the trick—the path bore right. The rocks I'd seen ahead—an island. But here was where banshees shriek at fools who've been here all along—St. David's Head.

Jubilee Blues

*Anguish and grief, like darkness and rain,
may be depicted; but gladness and joy,
like the rainbow, defy the skill of pen or pencil.*

—Frederick Douglass

The books were all about November—dying light; brown, withered leaves; black ink on white paper; words to call the colors. And I was sure I understood. By candlelight I read about despair, and understood. I read about freedom, too, and of love and the words for its colors, and I could recite those words. What did I know? Above the wharf, above the masts, above the smoke and stink and roaring might of New York, I saw the sky for the first time, and the docks were alive with free men in blue; the sky was blue beyond my words, beyond my books—I laughed with the men, and began to cry.

Contributor Notes

Stephanie Rose Adams is the author of *The Sundering*, chosen by Linda Gregg for a NY Chapbook Fellowship from The Poetry Society of America. Her poems have appeared in *The Boston Review*, *Sharkpack Poetry*, and *Orion Magazine*. Stephanie lives in the Pacific Northwest with her wayward Guatemalan pup and a host of other willful creatures real and imaginary.



Harry Bauld is from Medford, Massachusetts. He was included by Matthew Dickman in *Best New Poets 2012* and his poems have appeared in *Nimrod*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Southeast Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Ruminate*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Whiskey Island*, and *Deliberately Thirsty* (UK). He won the 2008 *New Millenium Writings* poetry prize. He has taught and coached baseball, basketball and boxing at high schools in Vermont and New York.



Benjamin Bever earned his Bachelor of Arts in 2006 from Allegheny College. The poems included here appeared as part of his thesis in completion of the Master of Fine Arts degree at George Mason University, where he was the 2012-2013 recipient of the Completion Fellowship for poetry. Other work by Benjamin has been published in *Willows Wept*, and he has written book reviews for *The Lit Pub*.



Marqus Bobesich received his BFA from York University, majoring in visual arts. His poems have appeared in *Northwind Magazine*, *Word Riot*, and *Contemporary Verse 2*. He is also the author of three independent chapbooks: "The Night of a Thousand Snowsuits," "Dirty Pretty Halloween," and "The Humans Are Singing." He works in Toronto as an actor and musician. www.myspace.com/poormarquus



Holly Cian The poems here are among the first I've written since moving to North Carolina several months ago. As I worked on these poems, my focus was on detail, rhythm, and movement. Reading over these poems once more, I notice a sense of disconnect throughout—the speaker often seems to be separate from the happenings of the world, and the speaker's voice moves at a more thoughtful pace, as if it exists in a dream.



Olivia Cole is a poet, author and activist in Chicago, IL. She recently finished a feminist science-fiction novel and started the sequel the next day. If you need her, she's probably writing. Or eating. <http://oliviaacole.wordpress.com/>



Brittney Corrigan was raised in Colorado but has called Portland, Oregon, her home since 1990. She is the poetry editor for the online journal *Hyperlexia: poetry and prose about the autism spectrum* (<http://hyperlexiajournal.com/>) and works at Reed College. She is the author of the collection, *Navigation*, published by The Habit of Rainy Nights Press (2012), and a chapbook, *40 Weeks*, published by Finishing Line Press (2012).

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Ali Doerscher is currently working towards her undergraduate degree in Sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design. Other recent publications of her poetry include the *Columbia Poetry Review* and *CutBank*.



Eric Duenez lives in Plymouth, Indiana, with his wonderful girlfriend and four horrible cats. He discovered his love of poetry while earning his English degree at Indiana University South Bend. He enjoys listening to music and drinking craft beer. Revive poetry, revive America.



Michael Fleming was born in San Francisco, raised in Wyoming, and has lived and learned and worked all around the world, from Thailand and England and Swaziland to Berkeley, New York City, and now Brattleboro, Vermont. He's been a teacher, a grad student, a carpenter, and always a writer; for the past decade he has edited literary anthologies for W. W. Norton. www.dutchgirl.com/foxpaws



Catherine Garland I was born many years ago in a small town high in the mountains of the Himalayas, and I have lived my adult life in a small town high in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. The many years in between then and now have been filled with beauty and the attempt to capture the wonder of all aspects of life in the wonder of words.



Donna Levine Gershon's poetry has appeared in *storySouth*, *qarrtsiluni*, *Literary Mama*, and *Kakalak: Anthology of Carolina Poets*, among other publications. She lives in Oxford, Mississippi, where she works as a freelance editor.



Sarah Giragosian is a PhD student in 20th-century North American Poetry and Poetics at SUNY-Albany. Her work has been published in such journals as *Crazyhorse*, *Copper Nickel*, *Able Muse*, and *Measure*, among others. She is also a co-editor of the online literary journal *Barzakh*.



Anne Graue lives, writes, and teaches online for two universities from her home in New York's Hudson Valley. She holds a BA in Creative Writing from Kansas State University and an MA in Teaching English from Columbia Teachers College. Her poems have appeared in *Paradigm*, *Compass Rose*, and *The 5-2: Crime Poetry Weekly*, and she was a finalist in the Patrica Dobler Poetry Award for 2013. She is a reviewer for NewPages.com



Toni Hanner's poems appear in *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Ale-house*, *Calyx*, *Gargoyle*, and others. She is a member of Eugene's Red Sofa Poets and Port Townsend's Madrona Writers. She had two books published in 2012: *The Ravelling Braid* from Tebot Bach, and a chapbook of surrealist poems, *Gertrude Poems and Other Objects* from Traprock Books. *Gertrude* was selected by Mary Jo Bang as a finalist for the 2013 Oregon



Book Award.

Tim Hawkins has lived and traveled widely throughout the Americas and Southeast Asia, where he has worked as a journalist, technical writer and teacher in international schools. He currently lives in his hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan. His writing has appeared in more than two dozen print and online publications. In 2012, he was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and published his first collection, *Wanderings at Deadline* (Aldrich Press). www.timhawkinspoetry.com



Eva Heisler has recently published two books of poems, *Reading Emily Dickinson in Icelandic* (Kore Press) and *Drawing Water* (Noctuary Press).



S. E. Hudgens I aim for music, rhythm, and an image that comes back to you while clipping your nails three nights after reading it. I hope I have achieved these for at least one reader. My work has appeared in *Hubbub*, *Knockout*, and *Farfelu*, among other places. I hold an MFA from EWU's Inland Center for Writers and work as an advertising editor/writer in Austin, Texas.



Peter Kahn is a founding member of the London poetry collective, Malika's Kitchen. His poems have been published internationally and he is a prize-winner in the Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition (UK). A high-school teacher since 1994, Peter was the recipient of the Wallace Douglas Award for contribution to the Chicago youth writing community. He is currently a Visiting Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he has launched the Spoken Word Education Training Programme.



Jill Kelly I'm a writer, visual artist, creativity coach, and freelance editor. My memoir, *Sober Truths: The Making of an Honest Woman*, was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award. When I'm not offering creativity workshops and leading writing retreats around the country, I'm usually in my working with deep-color pastels. I live in Portland, OR, with my three cats, who do all the chores so I can be creative 24/7. www.jillkellyauthor.com



Jenna Kilic is a third-year MFA Creative Writing candidate at The Ohio State University, where she also serves as Co-Poetry Editor of *The Journal*. Raised in North Fort Myers, Florida, she received her BA in English and Theatre from The University of Florida. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Pleiades*, *The Portland Review*, and elsewhere.



Daniel Lassell is the poetry winner of the 2013 William J. Maier Writing Award, and has been featured in several publications, which include literary journals such as *Steam Ticket*, *Future Cycle*, *Penduline*, *riverrun magazine*, *Pure Francis*, and *Haiku Journal*; and anthologies such as *Panik: Candid Stories of Life Altering Experiences Surrounding Pregnancy*, *A Celebration of Young Poets*, and *Overplay/Underdone*. In his youth, he raised llamas on a farm in Eminence, Kentucky. Today, he lives in Huntington, West Virginia.



Svetlana Lavochkina is a writer of fiction and translator of poetry. She was born and educated in Ukraine and currently resides in Germany. Her work was published or is forthcoming in *Witness*, *Drunken Boat*, *Circumference*, *Cerise Press*, *Eclectic*, *Mad Hatters' Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Chamber Four Fiction Anthology*. She was shortlisted for Million Writers' Award in 2010. Svetlana is co-founder and president of Leipzig Writers, a non-profit organization supporting international literary projects.



Lucy M. Logsdon lives in Southern Illinois. Her work has appeared in such publications as *Nimrod*, *Poet Lore*, *California Quarterly*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Kalliope* and *Seventeen* magazine. She received her MFA in Writing from Columbia University. Currently, she teaches English and Creative Writing at Southeastern Illinois College.



Michael Hugh Lythgoe is a retired Air Force officer with an MFA from Bennington College. He grew up in southern Indiana, and currently lives in Aiken, SC. His poems appear in *Christianity and Literature*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Pea River*, *Windhover*, and *Petigru Review*. Recently, he has been meeting with soldiers to discuss poetry in the Wounded Warriors program at Fort Gordon in Augusta, GA.



Annie Mascorro's poetry and essays have been published in *Calyx*, *Epilepsy U.S.A.*, *WorldView Magazine*, Montana Public Radio's Collegium Medicium, and forthcoming in *ZYZZYVA*. She is the recipient of the 2007 *Five Fingers Review* poetry prize. She is a psychiatric nurse and is currently pursuing her certification in poetry therapy through the National Federation for Biblio/Poetry Therapy. She lives in San Diego. wellwaterpoetry.com



Kristina McDonald received her MFA from Eastern Washington University, where she was the poetry editor of *Willow Springs*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Narrative*, *New Guard Review*, *Switchback*, and *Sugar House Review*. She has worked for the literary non-profits Writers in the Schools and Get Lit! Programs, and she currently works at Rice University.



Susan Laughter Meyers, of Givhans, SC, is the author of *My Dear, Dear Stagger Grass* (2013), winner of the Cider Press Review Editor's Prize. Her collection *Keep and Give Away* (University of South Carolina Press, 2006) received the SC Poetry Book Prize. Her work has also been published in *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and other publications. A long-time writing instructor, she has an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte.



Linda Sonia Miller has lived, learned and taught in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, among the Winnebago Indians in Wisconsin, on the shores of Walden Pond, and in upstate New York and Connecticut. She's published short essays in *The New York Times*, poems in a variety of journals and anthologies, and has had a chapbook published by Finishing Line Press, *Something Worth Diving For*, in 2012.



Peter Mishler is a public school teacher living in Syracuse, New York. His poems have appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *Crazy-horse*, *New Ohio Review*, and other publications.



Susan Morse was raised in California, but has lived in Maine for the past twenty-five years. She writes poems that seek to capture the essence of *place*, as well as poems that explore relationships that are changed by time and distance. She really enjoyed the *Sixfold* voting process and receiving the very worthwhile commentary from fellow writers. Her poems have appeared in *The Mom Egg*, *Cream City Review*, *Literary Mama*, and *The Barefoot Review*.



D. Ellis Phelps work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Arts United Issues 1 & 3*, *Windhover*, *New Texas*, *Aires*, *Texas Poetry Calendar*, *San Antonio Express News*, *San Antonio Current*, and elsewhere. Her first novel, *Making Room for George*, is forthcoming from Balboa Press, 2013. These poems, mined from the dreamworlds, are excerpted from a manuscript of poetry under submission entitled *what holds her*.



Marc Pietrzykowski lives in Niagara County, NY. He has published several books of poetry and one novel. www.marcp-ski.com



Daniel Sinderson is a gas station attendant living in Portland, OR, with his partner and cat. He received his BA in Anthropology last year and will shortly be traveling to Sardinia to study the Bronze Age Nuragic culture. His poems have appeared in *The Dirty Napkin*, *Metazen*, and *Rufous City Review*. He received the Kay Snow Award for Poetry in 2009.



Sharron Singleton Although I've been a social worker and community organizer, writing and teaching poetry is now my vocation. My poems have appeared in numerous journals. In 2009 I won the James River Writers Contest and was named Poet of 2010 by the journal *Passager*. I also won first-place prizes in 2010 and 2012 in the Poetry Society of Virginia annual contest and won first place in the MacGuffin Poet Hunt contest for 2012. My chapbook, *A Thin Thread of Water*, was published in 2010 by Finishing Line Press. What I love most about poetry is how it enables one to see small miracles and epiphanies in daily life and how economy, spareness and compression of language can reveal the extravagance and multiplicity in all of life.



David Sloan, a graduate of the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast MFA Poetry Program, teaches in Maine's only Waldorf high school. He is the author of two books on teaching. His debut poetry collection—*The Irresistible In-Between*—was published by Deerbrook Editions this spring. His poetry has appeared in *The Broome Review*, *The Café Review*, *Innisfree*, *The Naugatuck River Review* and *Passager*, among others. He is a recipient of the 2012 Betsy Sholl and Maine Literary awards, and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He is currently enjoying life's newest delight—grandfatherhood!



Abigail Templeton-Greene's poetry has been published in *McSweeney's*, *RATTLE*, *Pilgrimage*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *The Tulane Review*, *The Elixir*, *Pear Noir* and several other journals. She has an MFA from Antioch University Los Angeles and is a winner of the 2011 Lighthouse Writers Seven Deadly Sins Writing Contest. She was also recently nominated for the Friends of USP Writing Award. Abigail teaches Creative Writing at Florence Crittenton High School in Denver, Colorado.



Nicklaus Wenzel was born in the Pacific Northwest in a suburb just outside of Seattle. He studied Russian and French literature at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.



Lisa Zerkle's work was featured in the *Nimrod* and in Press 53's *Spotlight* anthology. Her work is forthcoming in *The Ledge* magazine, *Charlotte Viewpoint*, and has appeared in *poem-memoirstory*, *Crucible*, *Main Street Rag* and *Literary Mama*, among others. She has served as President of the North Carolina Poetry Society, community columnist for *The Charlotte Observer*, and co-editor of *Kakalak*. *Heart of the Light*, her first chapbook, is available from Finishing Line Press.



Arlene Zide has published in a variety of journals such as *Meridians*, *Rattapallax*, *Evening Street Review*, *13th Moon*, *Colorado Review*, *California Quarterly*, and *Rhino*. Her translations of Hindi poets have appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *The Bitter Oleander*, and *Salt Hill*; and in the *Everyman Series: Indian Love Poems*, the *Oxford Anthology of Indian Poets*, and *Language for a New Century*.

