

# SIXFOLD

POETRY FALL 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.

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# Chris Joyner

## Wrestlemania III

So much depends upon  
a scoop slam, an atomic  
leg drop. Hulk Hogan's shirt:  
red wheelbarrow ripped open

as if by tornado or rust.  
Jacked, his waxed skin  
glazed with sweat, he is flexed  
perfection. Bleached strands

worn like a bald-rimmed crown,  
if ever he was apex, it is now:  
all 7'5" 500 pounds of André the Giant  
muscled impossibly overhead

like a mythological burden,  
like Muybridge's mid-gallop,  
airborne horse. Though too young  
to have witnessed, I somehow remember

gripping rabbit ears, counting to three  
as Hogan peeled back the Giant's leg.  
I remember my father posing, partly  
to me, partly to himself,

*What makes a man?* but never  
the answer. I am trying  
to pretend I don't see the future  
in his now slouching breasts,

or deeper inside slack flesh,  
his heart hammering like a one-  
armed carpenter worked too long  
into the gloam. I am child again,

beside him under what relief  
(I'd yet to fathom) a hot shower  
bestows blue-collar bones.  
Naked, I make lathering

grease from his hands  
a game. Father, can I know  
of love's inglorious sacrifices?  
Can I someday sing of its gristle?

Can I? Can I sing?

# Hatred and Honey

Fledgling blunders, routine  
tragedies, a dusk-bourbon sky

chasing us home. Suburbia—  
what's salvageable:

this viewfinder of warped images?  
Or rather, memory as a hose

untangled with coordination  
and patience? Copper-sweet

water the spigot rewards?  
Now the sour must of an office

where my uncle hid monolithic  
stacks of skin magazines, all airbrushed

areolas and bush. When it seemed enough  
to simply palm my flesh

like an injured chick. Flash  
to swimsuit snatched below

my bony knees, prick a sudden  
offering to the golden

lifeguard with Fibonacci curls.  
How the yelp I mustered

before bolting sounded  
not my own. A summer anthem,

shame became inescapable,  
became like gravity

teaching the moon  
to orbit alone.

So I lifted weights in our oily garage,  
tore muscle like sacrament bread.

The friend I hated most once snapped  
my hockey stick in half for no reason

other than cruelty craves reaction.  
So too he set fire to a pine

in the neighboring woods;  
I entered briefly to see it blaze—

        a blood-red exclamation.  
That was how it went: rarely living

between hatred and honey, not rebellious  
but ignorant of consequence

until we witnessed how indifferent  
and vibrant the flames, how surely,

when stepped on, a rusted nail  
settles the soft meat.

This tender recess left  
once the nail is loosed.



# Ode to Mosh

But for now, 17, we are  
acned and beautiful, tornadic

in our angst. The venue's strobe-  
dark striates our flail

neon/black/neon/black.  
Lost in an undulation of knuckles

and chains, bedraggled bangs  
and B.O., we are tossed—

paper lanterns in a storm—

slip, are lifted, return

to riffs clipping the beer-thick air,  
kick drums pummeling our love

for the necessary rebellion  
punk rock affords. After,  
the lingering

sting in our ears we smuggle  
home like anything good  
that fades. But for now our bodies,

apertures through which  
revolt and song, prism brilliantly—  
solar flares through stained glass.

## Ode to Asymmetry

Bless the smaller, left breast, untethered, swimming  
under faded cotton you wear to bed,  
mattress begun to cup like hands  
held out for the drizzle of our sleep.

Bless the 37 crumpled drafts of “Virtuvian Man”  
Da Vinci, flustered, arced into his waste bin.  
Drafts with one testicle slightly drooped,  
one longer leg, six fingers, wonky eye.

Bless the crooked pocket sewn for pennies  
in a country not quite our antipode. The unpredictable  
course blood runs from a needle-nicked finger.  
The unpredictable course by which cancer conquers,  
finally, the dictator’s lymph and marrow.

Bless the fractal crack of lightning,  
its flighty refusal to lick the same ground.  
The drunk man struck while scrawling  
sloppily, with earnest into the oaks’ flank  
he hearts her—a declaration  
to whichever sidereal big shot  
rules over us but does not appear  
to reward our psalms.

Which is not the way I feel for you now,  
Honey-Bum, as you saunter braless, against  
exhaustion, toward the commitment  
of another dawn. Not asymmetrical, exactly, our love  
but chiral, Icarian in its fluctuations. Not golden  
our mean but a perfectly flawed stone  
in a ring too small. This, the only way  
I’d have it: waltzing off-beat,  
mismatched,  
mooching booze  
at oblivion’s dance party.

# Carey Russell

## Visiting Hours

Let's build a tent of sweaters  
and huddle like bullfrogs.

Come snuggle so close to me  
you can hear my hair  
chaff against your skull.

The sky is a dying violet  
veined in silent oaks.

I leave you my voice  
in nurses' footsteps climbing  
up the white linoleum.  
That and clean socks.

Almostleaves haze about these  
late March branches. They candle  
to green in the last reaches  
of the sunset before winking out.  
Is that what you thought  
your death would look like?

I am still coming home  
to your hanging shirts.

## Domestic

Through muscled roots, past black spring  
soil, I buried your old dog.

Her old dog, you would say, watching him  
search the house for her, hopeful,

her clothes still in the closet, hair still  
in the brush. You still slept then

in linens embroidered in tight stitches,  
her initials rising like scars. Now pale

ovals and rectangles hang where her  
pictures had, shadows of those

boxed photographs you still avoid.  
This is the season of her

dying. And deep into hard earth that scours  
the shovel, I buried the dog.

# Egret

At the end of summer the egret stands  
    where the green reeds blacken  
into deep. White and alone, velvet  
    he greets  
    cranberry vines  
crumpling his gown then smoothing it.  
    His yellow metal eye,  
layered by millions of years, the unbroken  
    clouds of a storm, and all  
    the weight that keeps You  
from me and holds us to the earth.  
Egret tell me you've met a god  
    so reckless that he will love  
us all equally.



## After Hours

Clever sticks scratch the liver  
spotted lake, the first green  
unraveling. She is left.  
Clouds cross her gaze  
and a few unassembled stars.

How cold it is in this house.  
These inescapable thoughts,  
all that can and cannot be  
healed, how and how long.

It is all still now, her vision  
washed out. A history carved  
in her feet and emptied space.  
All night long the room shifts

to fit the absence. An act  
of god could shake her,  
a tremor in the earth  
of her body and the stretch of

water so black it burns.

# Into the Valley

I returned home for this, an Appalachian  
valley where once-green hills hold

the breath of the dead between them and lift  
from each morning a fresh bandage

of mist. I watched the lowering, her coffin  
rocking into the ground, a cradle

swaddled in gravel and dirt. Early fog sank in  
so dense I could tear it like bread.

The gaze of the mourners followed me,  
their eyes black scattering birds.

A fine ice dusted, silently silvered  
my hair into my mother's.

Cupping my hands, I gathered cold globes  
of breath, watched them whisper away.

Do the dead hold their mouths in their hands  
like this to know what is left of them?

When I left, I took the valley with me,  
the train slicing the fields, leaving

its stiff suture. She is survived by me.

# Marc Pietrzykowski

## Cabinet of Wonders

Hefting Mrs. O out of bed required  
a winch and a cradle of straps  
and a hard ear: she cried, at least  
more often than wailing, wordless,  
the occasional bark. No wonder,  
both hips were shattered, her spine  
nearly a question mark.

So, her soft sobs were welcome  
Tuesday morning, before bath,  
and her sudden shrieks ignored,  
at first, until we saw her fist  
jabbing toward the floor: a small,  
pink, heart-shaped box had fallen  
and lay beside the bedpan.

Jamilla opened it, and up sprung  
a tiny ballerina, en pointe,  
pirouetting to Für Elise,  
gears plinking slowly, slowly,  
the song Mrs. O's sister practiced  
forever, in the front parlor,  
the sun colored vase of lilies  
atop the piano, hair in a shaggy bun.

We all listened as it slowed  
to a crawl, one note, one more,  
then hung, unresolved, on the C.  
Mrs. O didn't have to cry, Jamilla  
turned the key before breathing,  
let it play, let it wind down again,  
then turned the key once more  
to watch the ballerina twirl.

# **I Am Glad I Have Seen Racehorses, Women, Mountains**

I am glad I have seen racehorses, women, mountains,  
glad I have sung, stretched my back, peeled skin from my  
sun-burnt arms;

I am grateful to have had a good enemy,  
and to have fought, knowing there is no end to fighting.

There are few things to believe, and many things to know,  
and they are all mixed up in a rusty can,  
but when you are thirsty, even the rust  
tastes of life. I am glad I have seen pumpkins, contortionists,

a mound of snow the size of a house; glad to have stunk a while  
in the hole left by love, to have smiled  
when an enemy was injured without reason,  
to have realized there was a day the battle would end, for me.

There are tunnels and crevices beneath our feet, and weeds  
springing up from between them, and beneath that, yes,  
it is hot, but it is not a heat that concerns us, nothing  
human there,  
though we may, given time, be ground down again into that  
molten sea.

# When This Plane Goes Down, I Want To Be Sitting Beside You

When this plane goes down, I want to be sitting beside you,  
your hand atop mine, my hand resting on your thigh  
when the air cracks in two and the oxygen masks drop  
and the attendants float around the cabin like lost balloons,  
the ones without enough helium to lose themselves in the sky,  
when all the screams become one scream and we push it  
behind us and start to fall, your hand atop mine, my hand  
resting on your thigh, toward the trifling patchwork of farm  
and park and baseball diamond, or toward the circuit board  
of a city shivering. We can fall toward the men and women  
who live as though the world is already burning, the ones  
whom god has called to rise from this scabrous plain, or the ones  
who sell their brothers and sisters daily to the mulch pile  
for another chance at glory, no, not even glory, for another  
chance to rule and power is the only rule, power grinds  
mountains into dust and dust into fuel and fuel is the beast  
that carries them into the fortress, locks the gates and pays  
the mercenaries to walk the walls, it tints their sunglasses  
and wraps the wires they stick in their ears. Or we could fall  
toward the center of the ideogram, the heart of the advertisement,  
the mainspring, the all-seeing eye, and pray for absorption  
so, rather than die, we might multiply and occupy the other world,  
the one we make with our bodies in space, the one that floats  
up from our bodies like scent rising from a rose, the map  
that we carry and share and inscribe together—but that is not  
a life, yearning to be another stain on the wine-press, one more  
palimpsest lurking on channel 132, 257, 308; instead,  
let's just fall, your hand atop mine, my hand on your thigh,  
and look at me so we might live each in the others' eye,  
an infinite recursion of selves and eyes, each smiling the same,  
each ringed with hair alive in the wind that strokes the earth.



# The Mower Obeys The Covenant

—after Marvell

The grass keeps on growing,  
and I keep on mowing,  
and then there's the room where I cry.

The carnivals come  
and the cancer creeps up pantlegs  
and lovers draw their curtains  
and go about their days.

The grass keeps on growing,  
and I keep on mowing,  
and then there's the room where I cry.

I work, I follow the covenant;  
I am a homeowner and a responsible  
digit. If only they knew  
how I longed for a sea of blood.

The grass keeps on growing,  
and I keep on mowing,  
and then there's the room where I cry.

Instead, the food court.  
Instead, I watch the carousel  
turning, a galaxy of fiberglass horses  
collapsing too slow for the eye.

The grass keeps on growing,  
and I keep on mowing,  
and goddamn I wish I knew why.

# Jonathan Travelstead

## Prayer of the K-12

Lord, let me start with one pull,  
my bar shuddering in your calloused hand  
as you ratchet my disc  
to the scream that melts cast iron.  
I pass through it, a ghost through rebar.  
Chattering teeth, set on the floor and released.  
On a house of cards, a tidal wave.  
So much you have engineered, Lord.  
I beg you let loose my chain  
so with my carbide teeth  
I can chew through the paper of this world.  
*My god!* let me do what you made me to do,  
and growl beneath your trigger finger.  
Let me tear this place in two.

## Prayer of the Maul

Let me sweep aside a factory wall, Lord,  
cinder-blocks preventing passage  
to an engine room scrolled in flame.  
I am the grunt before thought.  
My load is greater than your stamina,  
and though I am your simplest machine  
if you let yourself love too much  
what is inside the mountain  
I am sure to burst your colossal heart.  
Even in my dreams  
I am a juggernaut ready to destroy all things.  
I pray only that you heft me  
from that place between your shoulders.  
Let me be the one chosen.

# Jennifer Lowers Warren

## Our Daughter's Skin

He left for Tikrit when milk,  
not language, was pooling  
in our daughter's mouth.  
A drowsy suckle.

He is prepared for saw-scaled vipers  
and scorpions curled  
in the toe of his no-shine boots  
but not her dialogue.  
She is sand skinned  
and camel haired,  
everything glistening.  
He's seen the underside of baby shine,  
dark grit, bodies turned inside out.

He knows her skin is just casing  
and beautiful features are  
just pieces, ground sausage.  
Tightly packed.

Easily scattered.

## God's Hips

I have hips like God's.  
Ample and unbroken,  
a thick sway.  
Children slopped out of me  
and into cupped hands like  
yolks slipping, shell to bowl.

God gave birth too,  
oceans and continents crowning.  
Stars fell from his strained divinity  
like tears. He sweated light.  
Thighs spread. Elasticity tested.  
Omnipotence intact.

# Operation Iraqi Freedom

After an IED they search  
and wager,  
comparing body parts,  
one against the other.  
My husband finds the  
biggest chunk—  
five hundred for the face.  
They favor circumference  
over length.

## Eve Hitchhikes in Hawaii

I pick her up at Haleiwa Beach Park,  
home to the North Shore hungry.  
She carries a plastic bag  
full of strawberry guavas  
and three cigarettes,  
half smoked and stubbed for later.  
A conservationist.  
She reaches into the backseat,  
touches the inside of my daughter's ankle,  
legs turned out in sleep.

She whispers,  
"Soft like Abel, Cain's toes."

We talk about spearfishing  
for Uluva and trapping the feral pigs  
that rut along the ridgeline trails.  
She leans deep into the floorboard  
and pulls her shirt up,  
showing me her coral scarred back.  
Then rising with a smile,  
crooks both arms against her body  
as if still nursing  
both brothers.

## Eve's Response

“Well I met him under the tree while Adam was wallowing  
in his dreams of God and the grass.  
I was bored, Adam was oblivious and He was handsome.  
He tongued my innocence.

I was an eternity too young to know the difference  
between the systematic tick on the clitoris  
and the slow tap of someone knocking  
against the wall of my heart.

I sucked syrupy mangos from his fingers and went back to Adam  
with the juice still on my lips.”



# Jeff Burt

## The Mapmaker's Legend

Life cannot be limited to the Compass Rose  
And the scale and the symbols of demarcation,  
hues presenting heights of apprehension  
and lows of depression, places to stop  
and get off if only to wheeze, appreciate.

All the careful study of the distances and graphs  
will not prepare one to travel, and cannot describe  
the years spent dwelling in a single dot  
desperate and willing to depart.

The sun's face in the center of the Rose  
will not shine in the valleys of loneliness  
you will run your fingers through  
like an imaginary woman's long hair, who sat before you  
and was gone before you could see her face.

Only the symbol for railroad tracks will be true,  
the lines with crosses that look like stitches  
that run up and down over all terrains  
seemingly holding the map together,

closing wounds and scratches and leaving scars  
of remembrance, your head cracked open  
by an inadvertent elbow at school,  
the glass imbedded in your palm  
when you smashed the pane hearing cancer,

the bypass for your heart broken once too often  
that meant you no longer wanted to love,  
the second set of stitches for your heart  
because you couldn't live without loving.

## Tribute for Phyllis

She punished the laundry, scraping the jeans of her boys  
knuckles white against the washboard  
flapped and snapped dishtowels and rags like a randy bully  
in the high school shower against the butt of the basin  
and clipped the clothespins with revenge to hold the sheets  
that had been bleached and softened and breeze dried.  
She could make shirts weep and undershirts cry  
and boxers mourn as they pinned on the line.  
Disease flew from her ferocity, and comfort came  
when she'd hold the swaddling clothes to her nose  
and sniff and smile as if something holy had taken place.  
When she walked down the river the rocks remembered  
and the riprap still murmurs her praise.

# History

The Greeks would jump and dance about  
mawkish-faced and freaks afoot,  
and Prospero the Roman had an ugly face  
scourged by smallpox and missing an ear,  
so was a natural for amusement between acts of play.  
But Prospero the Roman had seen an egret  
from the Nile stand on one leg peering into water  
then slowly trade its balance to the other,  
so in his pantomime he played the bird  
to which crowds booed and threw things at him,  
but several asked for a private performance,  
so he followed storks and cranes in landings  
and takings off, the slow circling head of a female swan  
as she knew her young had died,  
the nightingale with upturned throat  
that sang until its voice exhausted,  
and when his time for performance came  
he mimicked the storks and cranes,  
and did the egret to murmurs of appreciation,  
and the crowd was pleased, left gasping,  
and for his finale performed the nightingale in song  
by stretching his neck upwards as if to God  
with his arms like wings forcing out the last of his breath,  
then the circling of the swan  
with his body, and left the audience hushed.  
When he performed before the Emperor,  
with executions and maulings of slaves on the fare,  
he was whisked off stage after the act  
and banished for life to a quarry outside of Rome.  
But a thousand girls had the seen the mime,  
and when brushing hair they would stand on one foot,  
when walking down stairs would hold out their arms  
as if cranes landing in a field, when imagining a lover  
would strain their neck and appeal to God,  
and when unrequited, slowly circle to the ground.

# The Lost Pilot

Nestled in the far distances  
my imagination had roamed  
in the nether land,  
still I am near to and nearing my home.  
Frieda, my grandmotherly neighbor,  
waves me in, the lost pilot  
returning from the army air corps.  
Yet after the fantasy recedes  
its repercussions linger:  
I step over a fence  
and it rapidly disappears,  
the steadily burgeoning sun  
wades through formidable leaves,  
air widens, and twilight shadows  
fly over drought-shrivelled grass.  
The paint on a primitive church shines  
pudgy and white,  
billowing like a parachute.  
I smile, listen:  
the wood is not laughing.  
In the dry hot wind button-black susans  
tango and rock,  
dust waltzes  
to unheard-of music, Frieda's wave  
a metronome of my heart.

With each thing both fanciful  
and real, how flat the imagining man,  
a solid body with spirit  
which cannot by any artifice  
detach itself from flesh  
and vanish in a vaporous ascension  
to the promise of joy.  
How, when we can believe  
all the feather, bone  
and beak of our existence was born  
of a central egg, can

we not set the mind skyward,  
free in its flight?  
Like gravity the daily routines  
pull down magnificent creations,  
and it is one continuum  
between fancy and fact,  
the two ends of the pole  
with which we balance  
unaware of any safety net,  
the tipping of one end too high  
sure to flip us off the wire.

So I feel: it is hot.  
While there are no limits  
to the distance a dream may take,  
the clock of my body yanks  
me back to the small seam  
of time I continually try  
to rip—a far journey  
in a short span.  
And though reentry  
to the war-torn fortress  
of a common world is loss,  
an unshielded burning,  
the greater intensity  
of rapid associations  
reduced to a linear conversation,  
it is the condensation,  
the subsequent recalling  
of the imagined event  
which makes the fantasy desired.  
The ether I once was  
vanishes, and I reappear  
glistening and whole, joy  
rising to the surface of my face,  
death and logic submersing  
to become a sediment  
from which I can only toss and swell above.  
I am liquid, a lake,  
and the trickle from the hose

is a river replenishing  
my arid head,  
and a beer is the storm  
dousing the kiln  
of my thinning throat.

## Three Threads

In Mason jars the machine, the wood, the metal,  
the button-head, slotted, crossed,  
whorled, knurled, tipped to explode, bound,  
locked, washered, starred, bolted, nutted,  
used, saved, reclaimed from rust.  
All these threads, mechanical stitches,  
filling punched, drilled holes  
to keep the world from falling apart.  
I have not found a fastener  
for the hole since you've departed.

# Patricia Percival

## Giving in to What If

*after Steve Scafidì*

If I only wrote about what I knew, as once  
Plath wrote of moons, mannequins,  
and the grievous words of yew and elm—  
I would tell of the last call my brother made,  
when he said he wouldn't come for Christmas  
and I tried to change his mind, and he insisted,  
and I had the flu and didn't, maybe, hear  
the tone of his voice. Or I'd only write  
of diapers, cakes baked, and failed tomatoes,  
or of fees simple, encumbered and joint.

But I prefer to imagine life  
in the animal kingdom, where,  
as I understand it,  
they get by without what ifs.  
Here I can drift, a sea turtle  
on ocean currents, weightless  
from Thailand to the Golden Isles,  
and not once consider  
the half-ton of gravity  
I bore across the sand  
at nesting time, and will again,  
when the moon draws me ashore.  
As a crane I'm blessed with a mate  
who chose me for life and is happy,  
who doesn't brood about the crane  
one creek over, the one with plumper knobs  
on her knees, knobs he'd like  
the other males to envy  
during annual migration.  
I am a crow, immersed  
in the collective mind of the murder,  
and when the phone rings



someone, at least one of us,  
has heard that tone of voice before,  
remembers the up-shot, and tells me,  
*your brother needs help.*  
*Go now.*

# Waiting for the Good Humor Man

*Houston, 1962*

Prone beneath mimosas,  
the picture-book God  
of rules and hellfire  
deferred to the grace  
of the natural world.  
Pompons rained on me,  
already dazed  
by the scent of heat  
rising off asphalt,  
the smell visible  
as a mirage  
in a foreign legion film.

And though I don't believe  
my catechism, as I did then,  
I've kept my eyes open to visions,  
mild thunderbolts which saints  
might call the voice of God:  
After a storm, starfish  
littered the beach at Sanibel,  
hundreds of six-armed bodies  
expelled from the deep.  
And fifty years ago, I saw  
lilies of the valley emerge,  
pristine, from the charnel  
of rotten leaves.

# Prescription for the Use of Scottish Footwear

When you hike, wear heavy socks and brogues,  
so your eyes may rise above the narrow path,  
ignore the common gait, trust one foot  
to find its place before the other.

Toes safe, scan the landscape for love.  
Stride through fields of waist-high grass,  
fodder before it's scythed to bale, and borrow  
a few stalks to carry. The world's in hand—

food for winter, seeds of next year's crop.  
Kick a pinecone straight down a gravel road,  
on parade for crowds of spiderwort  
and sumac cheering from the ditch. Notice

that suitors vie for your attention:  
the eager moon, risen early into sheer sky  
and the sun boasting in scarlet and plum.  
Write your name on the bones

of the old smokehouse, to tie you  
to the past, and keep a fragment  
in the pocket of your winter coat, a gift  
to find each year. At night, in the warmth

of your fireside, pick burrs from your socks  
and burn them. Listen to your problems pop  
and sizzle. Savor their resinous smell.  
Watch them curl to cashmere smoke.

# Birds of Suburbia: Blue-Gray Heron

Misplaced here by the interstate,  
you soar above Baskin-Robbins,  
sapling legs sailing behind,  
neck folded into blades  
of Da Vinci wings,  
his dream of flight.  
From here you wear no blue,  
your silhouette all shade  
glued flat to an ochre sky.

In this landscape of Starbucks,  
your exotic form drags behind  
a rusty tin can of foreboding.  
Where are your moss-draped oaks?

I rejoice each spring and fall  
when our house is a stop on your route,  
like Sweat's bar-b-q in Soperton  
for Atlantans en route to Savannah.  
I look out the west window  
and there you are  
a gawky Giacometti  
knob-kneed and statue-still.  
Perched on the brick ledge  
or one leg submerged  
you eye the buffet:  
former denizens of our fishbowl  
and offspring of bream  
pulled from Nancy Creek  
by children on summer break.  
Then I see your slate spectrum flash.

You're welcome here, eat up.  
The goldfish translate sun too,  
but are more prolific, their design  
less esoteric, less like a secret  
whispered in Genesis.

# Losing My Drift

In line for coffee, waiting my turn,  
a song transports me back.  
Joni Mitchell just released *Hejira*, and I race  
down *the fine white lines of the free, free way*.

I'm vaguely aware that what other patrons see  
is a middle-aged woman, spaced out in Starbucks,  
her hair in disarray, atypical of the neighborhood.  
She seems to think it's her duty to explain the draft  
and women's lib to young people who missed the Sixties,  
these young people who seem to be running everything  
(when did they take over?)

I don't know this woman, but she's always around.  
Easily distracted, she has binges of attention,  
interrupts everything she does to start  
something else, keeps piles in every room,  
monuments to projects she means to finish.  
One pile on her desk is for vanishing wetlands,  
one for stupid real estate projects  
she will deplore in letters to editors  
(Joni was right about that *tree museum*),  
and one of unfiled items for her garden notebook,  
data about plants that died years ago.

One pile is for an essay on hypocrisy.  
The same politicians against stem cell research  
say *bombs away* at the drop of a hat, unbothered by thousands  
of dead civilians. Frankly, she just wants to slap  
her friends who voted to keep them in office and say, *WISE UP!*

At this point it's obvious the disgruntled boomer  
has taken control of this poem that was supposed to be  
about the grad student who stood atop Balsam Mountain  
decades ago and thought society was progressing.

I was going to write about the self, or selves,

about how what seems lost, isn't.  
But the self that soars over the valley like a Red Tail  
is also the slippery fish, still shining,  
but scarred from flopping in the bottom  
of an old canoe, which is the body, I guess,  
and it's drifting down stream, heading for the falls.

# Toni Hanner

## 1960—Lanny

When I touched Lanny's arm, up where her white sleeve ended, there were bees humming beneath her warm skin.

When I smelled Lanny's hair, her straightened hair the dull black of asphalt, it was sweet, just on the edge of turning.

When I touched Lanny's hair, smoothed my hand over the rough surface so unlike my own black silk—

Lanny's skin the color of Sanka in the jar, a stone hot in the sun, flecks of glistening fool's gold.

We took off our clothes and lay giggling in her bed. We hid her brother's magazines under the covers

and marveled at the pale women, their enormous breasts, and marveled at each other's flat chests,

her little buttons a color I had no name for. I remember talking dirty, biting the pillows to keep

from screaming with laughter and something else. We had  
no idea

what any of it meant, all I knew was that I wanted my arms

around her thin little body I wanted to lie on top of her with my face in the sweaty hollow between her neck and bony

shoulder, I wanted a world I would not learn how to name until Lanny disappeared.

# Catalina

*for Gloria*

How did we decide—you nodded right or left,  
I followed. Did we tell our parents—how  
did we get there neither of us

had a car or a license. In the photo we sit smoking  
on a blanket on what must be a beach  
although you can't see the ocean—maybe

it's a hotel swimming pool. Bikinis, my sly, shy  
almond eyes. Your mouth prim, your body  
already hatching your future. Seniors in high school,

college freshmen, I remember nothing  
but being there, Catalina, *26 miles across the sea*,  
the Avalon Ballroom's graceful decay lording it over

daytrippers like us. We took a rickshaw,  
night came with the usual terrors. You  
went out on a boat with a stranger,

he had a yacht or was pretending to be  
a man with a yacht. I don't remember where  
I slept or how we got home. Just this photo,

smoke from my Lucky  
a curtain drawn across my face.



# On Funerals

Over the land bridge to Idaho,  
when my father died we didn't

it's how the Eskimos got there  
and the Portuguese, my aunt's

family, rows of Berriochoas  
in Shoshone, animate as dust

swirling above ground, but when  
my father died we just went home.

Africa, the Great Wall, we re-hung  
the wallpaper in the corner cathedral,

we swept up the dust from Chernobyl  
and fed each other with eyedroppers.

Now they come so fast, it's hard  
to keep track, my brother my sister

eventual only eighty years ago, now ellipses  
in my mother's autobiography. Oh yes,

she started it, my mother, with her June  
snowfall, the monks gathering in their yellow,

her purple bruises, her flesh too yielding,  
as if she were melting there in the salt flats

now each flies off after her, massive wing-beats,  
we are already forgotten.

## Boxes

Sister, here is your box, it has no stairs.  
I will take you out when I need a slide  
rule, a compass. Brother, your box

is tall, you will need to stand. If you grow  
tired, ring the bell and someone will come  
to turn you onto your side.

If you see our father  
please tell him his supper  
is getting cold.

# After Dreams of the Dead

## All Night, My Father

I wake late, bones aching and stiff.  
A busy night of dead sisters

and living sibyls, a mother  
somewhere, stirring the pot.

My ignorant calendar tells me  
to send my brother a birthday card.

He'd be 76 on Wednesday, catching up  
with our sister, now both are ash. I bought

tiny cork-stoppered bottles, thinking to collect  
everyone, line them up on the mantle,

now I'm not so sure, I have my father, maybe  
he's all I need, my blood,

my horse, shambling through family  
in a flail, a smolder. The parentheses around

my father and me raising the hair  
on the back of my neck, I conjure him,

he strides hobble-gaited through all the watchkeepers,  
they can't see him and if they did, he'd seem a fool.

Inside the pale gold glass, ash sticks  
together, wanting to hold some form.

# Christopher Dulaney

## Uncle

They found him on his face in a motel room  
where he paid rent with his hands, painting walls  
and cutting lawn, keeping things up—

There were notes on the upright  
that I could not play,  
keys that would not sound.

You were afraid of his hands. You all were,  
as if they had buried a part of you,  
deep enough, you all had thought;  
until it came time to bury him,  
his death in your minds  
like water too hot for the skin.  
It was still morning and you were all old  
and thinking the same things—  
just as helpless as you were then,  
those nights when you were young  
and he, deaf drunk, found you  
cold and still and silent

There were notes on the upright  
that I could not play,  
keys that would not sound.

It was me who held his cold hands  
who straightened his curled fingers  
so that they could lie flat like the rest of him,  
crying like the rest of the room,  
thinking of how  
you were only girls then and already  
full of feelings without names;  
left with the ugliness of his touch,  
the blame of his hands:

as if they had buried a part of you,  
deep enough, you had thought—  
there were moments in the night,  
in your night—

They were notes on the upright  
that I could not play,  
keys that would not sound.

# Somehow, Distance Becomes A Bosom I am Gawking At

Today I walked to work with a Steinbeckian tractor for a heart,  
a dust covered machine lurching towards the Bethlehem  
    behind my eyelids,  
overworked from plowing the cropless field of our love. I am stuck  
    in oscillation  
between honesty and victimhood, searching myself over  
    for a wound.  
I turn around to spot no trail of blood or chain and ball—I yield  
    only a sense, a memory  
slipping in and out of focus: Wrongness.  
I woke today from a dream of Krishna dancing with his gopis,  
    my dream self juggling a blue desire to be recognized, to  
    be collected  
into the arms of God, to be seen dancing,  
chanting the Maha Mantra with my eyes closed  
    out on my permanent lunch break.

But these wrongs, even renouncement can't smother:  
the injuries acquiesced along the curves and protrusions of togetherness—  
    the yo-yoing of the heart, the titter tatter of my brain—  
    my hands  
    always in your braids,  
fucking them up. In the dream, Krishna laughs as I approach him,  
and his laugh is an ocean, electric with death, darkened by sex. I  
    am embarrassed.  
Ashamed of the limits of my love for you,  
guilty for pretending they could be any less severe,  
for never taking my eyes off the distance I would place between us.  
In another dream, you were the turtle crossing the road  
    that I didn't swerve to miss,  
    that I told myself  
I had only nicked.

# Unsearchable

*“The heart is deceitful above all things,  
& desperately wicked: who can know it?”  
—Jeremiah 17:9*

If I open it up to find it bare,  
unadorned with the sap of experience,  
beating fast, (though I’m breathing slow),  
I find its red almost insolent, the way it’s  
both bright and pale, shimmering and dark,  
the way it wavers but doesn’t fall, like  
infrastructure made with the earth in mind.  
As if we are children playing on staircases,  
faced with the peril of the questions we  
didn’t think to ask, or else older, grown and  
always mesmerized by the consequences  
we seem to escape; dogged with the trouble  
of looking out and only seeing our wide-eyed selves.  
I start to think of light as the first  
and most elegant fiction refracted by what  
is really there: a parched desert bush, a fruit tree  
by a stream, my hand as I reach out to touch you,  
always and forever wishing that each time I do  
really is *the good flesh continuing*.  
I am aware that I shouldn’t trust it,  
that it is not mine to search—  
but here, with you, beneath this blanket  
of coalescent days, perhaps I am  
folding into the thing of it now,  
perhaps I am catching on.

## Fever in My Pocket

Up until now I'd lost it, that tune you'd hum between A and B,  
us alone and on foot, our stomachs ruined with an idea:

the difference between wisdom and ignorance,  
between how the two make you act.

How you'd known all the ways to keep me out,  
and yet neither of us knew when to let me in,

nor did we guess that when you did it would  
do nothing for our stomachs. Even months later,

with you off for summer, the light still  
pours through the hole in the window above

the sink from the last time you sent me home.

Alone in my kitchen,

I shake the thought of us around in my head

like a riff from *Exile*

on *Mainstreet* or a lyric

from *Blonde on Blonde*,

how the one bleeds

helplessly into the other,

how a plea is a plea

and every time the a/c clicks on or off

I hear myself singing

—*come, come on down Sweet*

*Virginia—*

—*because sometimes it gets so hard*

*you see?*

Because someone once taught me that flour  
doesn't rise unless you've remembered to sift it first,

and like your dress on so many of those dead note  
nights, I am afraid we are not self-rising.

There's a difference between someone you've fallen  
mad for and a lonely pool of light,

but I don't think I've found it.



# Skipping to the Back of the Qur'an

I.

*With hardship comes ease*

*with hardship comes ease*

Twice it reads

and I think

practice

practice

practice

Earlier

I read

as sure as rain as grass is green

*this is a discerning recitation*

*not a flippant jest*

II.

There is an image of denial

as men reclining in mirth

and as I read of their damned fate

I am afraid

I myself

am too in love with distraction

At times

these old recitations

are less words on a page

and more the coarse

whistle of wind eroding rock

the only cruelty of God is time

III.

A garden and a river

and always a cup of nectar in your hand

hatred

and

injury

removed from your breast

*the blind are not*

*the same as the seeing*

God

be gentle for a while

do not leave me alone to my pleasure

# Suzanne Burns

## Window Shopping

Whether or not we ordered the same cup of coffee  
in two different ways or punctured the skin  
of a ripened fig with two separate nails  
to unlock the jewels clasped inside,  
on that Saturday afternoon in late March  
we loved each other over the forced majesty  
of charcuterie plates wondering where their hearts went,  
valentines even the sort of people  
who talk about eating kumquats,  
standing in line to buy kumquats, leave behind,  
always excusing life's bloody things.  
The butcher tells us on Tuesdays he slices open a pig,  
unfurling a roll of pink silk to expose the puzzle beneath.  
The Sturm und Drang of his tattoos pitch and yaw  
as he sharpens a knife I imagine plunging into you  
in front of that Sylvia Plath mural we passed.  
I once saw a bell jar descend over a village scene,  
Swiss Christmas, reindeer lawn, ribbon candy  
tripping on its own psychedelic stripes.  
You replaced my dream of either skiing the Alps  
or becoming the next Sylvia Plath,  
who even wanted to die each spring, forgetting  
how with Ted Hughes at Court Green  
she once churned among the butter of daffodils.  
You never need to pick me flowers or write poems  
when your close body makes me forget my words  
and what happened to all the boys in school  
who thought kumquats were obscene  
and W.C. Fields beckoning his "little kumquat"  
to him, the newest and youngest blonde girl  
unlocking more puzzles on the silver screen  
while I wait to cut open and climb inside of you.  
It is more than wanting to know your view of things,  
what you stand in line to eat,

how to erase the times you shared crackers and cheese  
in another woman's picnic scene,  
how she understood the provenance of gourmet eating  
while miles away from both of you  
I sharpened the edge of my lonely knife  
and waited to start the kind of romance  
that does not need a plate of figs and honey  
or you dipping a finger in her empty wine glass  
to mark that one sweet spot that will never wash clean.

# Having a Gelato with You

is maybe what Frank O'Hara really meant  
because these years sitting across from you  
have made me rupture with presumptuousness.  
People like summer because for a few months  
they no longer smell death tying itself into their shoes.  
The busses run without incident. People say,  
Well, Goddamn! only to compliment a perfected belly flop  
or the way daisies press themselves between novel pages  
like Prom corsages, if Prom meant watching bugs  
line up on picnic blankets, that forgotten smear of deviled egg  
harnessing enough good cheer to last until winter.  
I love to kiss you until I forget winter exists.  
Even your tongue, cold from scoops  
of pistachio or spearmint, asks me  
to mouth the words, "summer dress."  
I want you to follow me to our hotel like we just met  
and there will never be anything on television  
better than watching me brush my teeth  
and be extra quiet when I spit.  
Having a gelato with you lets me catalog the way  
your eyebrows scuttle across your face but never overlap.  
You order steaks with that red ribbon middle,  
turning blood into a gift more than a predicament.  
I want to memorize each of your innumerable facts.  
You like museums, so I pretend to like museums  
though even in Paris they seemed nothing but dead.  
Around you I am glad the way kids are glad  
the Easter bunny never forgets cheap candy  
tastes better hidden in grass and Mona Lisa  
looks better in photographs. Having a gelato with you  
is a portrait with your tiny spoon and cup.  
Is this how you looked as a baby? I never think about babies  
unless I am around your pinked coin face.  
I swallow chocolate and wish you could have seen me  
once stalk these streets in my plaid 90's dress  
when ice cream meant a cherry on top,  
the girl from Twin Peaks who could tie the stem in a knot

and make everyone dream of her snowy skin,  
even in summer when the Portland boys got me alone,  
disappointed my tongue never learned that trick.  
Having a gelato with you is knowing you will say  
all the things even men in fairytales forget.

*It is okay if your feet are too big.*

*Who needs that stupid glass shoe?*

Having a gelato with you makes me want to call you art.  
No museum means more, though I know  
what you will say when we see lilies behind our eyes,  
our impressions of sloppy, waterlogged stars,  
that French Braille of paint.

Before we met I sat on a bench in front of my first Monet  
and held my breath. I can't remember if I really cried  
at all that blue like I said,  
but having a gelato with you makes me understand  
that if we opened our eyes at the very same time  
there would be something more than tears.

## Room Service

I have never asked if your wife knows  
how we always order dessert,  
concoctions of chocolate or caramel,  
butterflied sponge cake cut soft on the bias  
yielding to the urgency of your mouth  
the way I imagine you unzipping my dress with your teeth.  
I wonder if I might tell you, in the hotel above where we sit,  
to use your hands instead,  
that a husband and a father is not meant  
to follow me upstairs like the beginning of a foreign film  
where the leading man is really a woman  
and the flowers symbolize anything but flowers.  
No one knows how I once danced with a man upstairs,  
a party in a suite, both of us moving closer  
than when lovers joke about being *thisclose*,  
my summer dress breezing around his body,  
heat steaming between my legs as if something inside me  
insisted he knew it was there, how I only said yes  
because there was no one to sing along to Black Sabbath  
playing on the radio in the next room,  
the man never guessing me for a fan  
and having no time to love me or the flower pinned in my hair  
as I pretended to be some other kind of woman  
who would never bake cupcakes for a birthday.  
I doubt what you say about staying loyal to your home base  
and hope no man ever describes me as a baseball cliché  
while a waiter glides past us with crème brulee,  
a room service tray meant to entice other diners  
away from their husbands and wives.  
I have ordered room service with boys  
who liked to watch porn and eat sushi off my thighs  
and men who designed sugar as foreplay,  
a crescendo of spoons eternally tapping for that one sweet spot.  
I could have almost loved you if we ate lunch outside,  
this time our hands butterflying each other  
as we wonder what will come of the day,  
the thought of spending time with crème brulee

no more delicious than buying an old record from the store  
next door,  
a former hard rock anthem blazed on its sleeve  
as we remember how it feels getting to first base,  
that rocketing red glare before we grow old enough  
to need secret sugar off a tray,  
that edible Cinderella shoe,  
to find each other even a little bit charming.



# The Light in Your Kitchen Window

You do not know I am standing out here  
like something, for once, that belongs in the dark.  
I am not afraid of an errant zombie  
lost and looking for brains  
or the kind of man who collects fingers in a box,  
breath catching the way it does  
on the biggest and best carnival ride  
at the thought of cutting off the tips  
where my composed shadows play against your front walk.  
There is a circus in my heart for you.  
What I mean is more than the roar of a lonely woman  
masquerading as a ghost beneath the streetlight.  
You have tried many times to turn me  
into your own private ghost  
by the way you keep your lips closed now when we kiss,  
and how we never kiss,  
and how you dropped my nickname somewhere out back,  
but this sideshow we exist in is still filled with hope.  
There is cotton candy there, too,  
electric pink dross of good dreams  
before all we did was go around saying,  
or refusing to say, *I'm sorry*.  
We have washed and dried dishes in the same sink  
so this is nothing to shut your blinds to,  
the way I wave before you go to the bed  
I have loved you in and out of too many times  
to keep hidden in my own special box.  
I am standing outside your window  
watching you water plants, make tomorrow's sandwich,  
force yourself not to wave back.  
I mean the kind of sorry that might sound better  
translated into the private language we once spoke  
when we liked the same movies we hadn't even seen,  
Laurel and Hardy and that piano  
negotiating their thirty-nine steps  
onto a list of favorites we meant to sip hot chocolate to,  
some certain look shared between us

no other certain looks could compete with.  
The look that keeps me anchored in front of your window  
long after the lights go out,  
long after you tuck yourself in  
by negotiating your body to turn from where I once slept,  
somehow a little afraid of what will happen next.

## The Last Supper

Even the day before Christmas  
they bring a slice of lime on a saucer  
to float in my Diet Coke like we are celebrating.  
The next table over cracks walnuts,  
reveals blue veins with their cheese knives  
and I wonder if they are also pretending  
their brother is still alive.

I want to say, Wait, this is specific.

We are different the way everyone thinks they are different.

Someone orders wine. I can never taste  
the chocolate or the leather and wonder  
if the aged oak barrel looks like the cartoon  
of a man jumping over Niagara Falls.

Those suspenders must save him every time.

To create the illusion of appetite before dinner  
we walked past all the downtown mannequins  
I once starved myself to look like.

Now we spend too much on steak and lobster  
and order dessert in our brother's honor  
that everyone just pushes around on their plates.

Sometimes nights in Portland feel customized for pleasure.

Midnight dirty snowball donut runs, pretending  
to get married at The Church of Elvis, 1991,  
when everyone good was still alive, like Kelly  
and Kurt Cobain and Paul Newman and your mother.

The moments when staring at a bridge reveals  
something more than wanting to jump over.

This not one of those nights.

I was reading a book about JFK Jr.'s plane crash  
the night you died. This fact feels important,  
like how I used to fantasize about watching  
the Macy's Thanksgiving parade with John-John  
in the secret window of a penthouse  
lined with his mother's first editions

and his father's ghost to avenge like our very own Hamlet.

I have never been drunk enough or religious enough  
to see a ghost but now look for signs everywhere,

poking my head in Cameron's Books  
to flip through yellow tabloids and wait for a sign.  
Something simple, like "Yours til Niagara Falls."  
There doesn't need to be a barrel. Maybe a recipe book  
because in the life we are still stuck in you once cooked  
a chicken dish that made me like eating chicken again.  
I never thought I would run out of time to tell you  
I really liked the way you cooked chicken.  
I don't understand signs enough to know  
if that old People magazine photo crumbling  
in my hands of John Jr. and Carolyn  
when they were still the Kennedys our mothers  
ran out of time to pin their next hopes on  
was a message about how death meets  
older brothers and East Hampton blondes evenly.  
Maybe the nights made for pleasure  
are the only nights we should remember.  
How another brother made sure our waiter  
understood the way I like my steak  
then told me when it came to not be afraid  
of a final toast followed by a first cut  
and the tiny bit of blood left dazzling  
my clean white plate.

# Katherine Smith

## Mountain Lion

Nothing human's in that sky,  
like a room where guests aren't welcome  
no radio towers or electric wires,  
and even the planes fly parallel to highway eighty-one  
fifty miles to the west or turn east  
north of here and fly to Richmond.

Just a few hawks circle the blue.  
She eats a bite of the apple she took with her  
and walks the gravel road to the ridge,  
brushes her hair from her face and smiles  
a habit like the sympathy she offers the mountain.  
If she's quiet she'll see the deer in the undergrowth,  
and once she saw a brown bear and cubs.

These hours when there's no one to civilize her,  
to put *her* in the proper perspective  
she often imagines what she might say to the mountain,  
how she'd advise it not to take too personally,  
the dynamite and the quarry,

how she'd point to the example of the bear,  
dung bright with purple berries,  
its misunderstood subjectivity; to the deer's  
flighty point of view; to the wild wheat  
harvested from the hillside,  
its ingratitude at being found;

to the scrub pine that has taken root  
while she was gone all autumn, green needles  
bright with toxic gasses sucked from the wide blue sky.  
But she knows if the mountain could  
it wouldn't offer brilliant arguments  
but lift itself from golden haunches and leap.

# Navel Orange

Audrey hates to bring in the groceries,  
to struggle in through the side door, arms full  
after the ease of plucking food like costumes  
from a rich wardrobe: crushed velvet of coffee beans,

chains of barley, couscous, wheat-berries, grains  
of edible gold. She harvests from the aisles  
the silks of ruby red chard, of collard greens.  
But then she has to get it all home.

It is—like the friends and lovers  
with whom she once packed her mind,  
their ruffled shadows, satin mysteries  
all there for the choosing—too gorgeous.

No one told her of the difficulties of storage.  
Once home the paper grocery bags, dampened,  
split open, spilling fruit. Ripe cantaloupe  
with its fragrance of sugar and garbage,

the lover with his belly, his suits, his job  
at the financial corporation, a marriage  
that haunted him, and four sweet children.  
The voluminous sugars had to fit

somewhere. Only like the melon  
they didn't. It has taken years to decipher,  
to learn to steadily unpack  
the navel oranges exactly as they sit

on the table, to draw the precise distance  
between the two pieces of citrus,  
how light catches the pebbled flesh,  
the flecks of shadow that fall

into miniscule valleys, the lamplight  
that dazzles one pole of fruit bursting  
with miniature oranges tucked into the globe  
of larger fruit, the midnight that darkens the other.

# Bridge

In her dream her son is dead.  
Candy cannot call his name  
as she once did when,  
four, he opened the iron gate

at the park in Paris, careened down the hill  
past the waffle seller and the black swan  
toward the boulevard, cafes, gleaming cars.  
That was before she learned the names

of machines she can now forget: Renault,  
Audi, Toyota Chevrolet, GM, Volvo.  
She can forget the spelling rules,  
the multiplication tables, the names

and dates of all the presidents of the USA,  
the names of girls.  
None of them will do any good.  
And then it is morning.

He is twenty-one. Candy doesn't know  
where he is, not exactly  
though certainly he is in America,  
probably in a car, and she—

surrounded by fog rising from the pines trees,  
from the hemlock, from the James river,

from the Shenandoah mountains—  
taking her coffee down to the water  
hears a single engine in the distance.  
One rusty pick-up truck approaches

with farm tags on the gravel road.  
A hand flies up and waves to her  
and moves past her where she stands on the bridge  
in the only location she knows for sure.

# Expedition

Audrey shuts the book on Shackleton,  
the photos of his men: playing soccer in snow,  
the Endurance foundered in blocks of ice  
beyond them; gathered around the fire  
on Elephant Island, their weathered faces

lit with wonder as they listen to stories  
waiting for the rescue team;  
petting the stripped tabby cat  
that Shackleton finally shot  
after calling it a weakling.

She would have been the cat  
Audrey thinks worrying about the daughter  
she raised alone, who careens  
on the slick back roads of America  
in her Japanese car. She rises from the couch  
throws aside the weight of quilts  
to choose the spices from the carousel

on the dining room table, soothed by  
the tiny achievement of the small  
wooden spoon in its bowl of salt,  
the four ounce canister of tandoori spice,

glass bottles of whole black peppercorns,  
cinnamon, nutmeg. She stands at the center  
of a rag rug woven into a labyrinth of sienna,  
green and blue, boiling the collard greens,

soy paste and tofu. Her daughter sings hello  
as she arrives, elegant and oblivious,  
from the storm, pets the purring tabby  
that sleeps at the head of the table.



# Satisfaction

Not forgetting of course rising from the body that once thrilled you  
with the same delight you now recognize in golden retrievers  
chasing Frisbees  
or calves born at the penultimate day of spring frisking in pastures  
carpeted with blue violets, lime colored grasses, dandelions like  
helium balloons.

Glittering space shuttles land safely in limpid blue oceans like  
transparent silks.  
The heroic astronauts resume the paperwork of their everyday lives  
to a tedious fanfare. The golden puppy now sleeps half the day.  
The toddler bites into the velvety pink Easter egg to discover salt.

Friendships once fields of sweet clover, gone stale,  
weigh down your body like moldy hay bales left in the rain.  
What do you do with entire continents of disappointment  
once exhausted by the early rages?

John Cage said if something is boring for five minutes  
do it for ten, if boring for ten do it for twenty, if it is boring  
for twenty,  
do it an hour, and so on for eternity. I think he had an answer  
to cherry blossoms after the spectacular show and the  
heartrending petal fall.

# Peter Kent

## Surliness in the Green Mountains

I like to complain  
about too little steamed milk  
in coffee. And ill-timed  
cloud cover stripping the blue face  
off the ocean. I know

I'm fortunate. No cancerous calamity  
has found me. No car crash  
has maimed me. Pulling away  
from the drive-through, my drink's too hot  
to taste, to judge. I turn  
the wheel toward the hem

of mountains, where clouds press  
like sour insistence: I have a duty  
to attend, a funeral for a colleague's father.  
It will cost me  
two of the days I've rented the house  
on the cove for a holiday—a holiday

to still the flurry of a life that feels  
like coins spilling to the pavement  
through a hole in my pant's pocket.  
I should have gone to Jamaica.  
Someplace beyond obligation's

reach. A foreign paradise,  
blinded by palms and voices  
redolent, familiar, but off kilter.  
It helps to get places  
where traffic lights seem superfluous  
as they do in Montpelier. Though,

I often stand before travel books  
on Budapest—petulant and wishing  
to be swallowed by its pandemonium.  
Cities are survival's hallmarks.  
Slaughter and roast everyone  
rooted in them, and they rebound,  
resilient as Vermont maples after winter.

This beleaguered Toyota  
doesn't like the climb—its four cylinders  
wheezing, coaxing combustion  
to reach another summit.  
The service will be in the same chapel  
where my colleague was married, back

when she was a friend. I never knew  
her father. So why the struggle  
to attend? To be politic, to feel less  
awkward when we run into each other  
at a meeting back in Boston? I suppose  
that's enough motivation. Or,

maybe I simply relish  
    something new  
for my repertoire of complaints.  
A flat tire, broken axle—  
    a chance to show  
how far I'll go to suffer.

# Meditation Waiting for the Orange Line

If I were a savant,  
I could calculate the number  
of lavender tiles that cover  
the walls in this station.  
I could detect the aria  
in the brake squall  
arriving from Forest Hills.  
I would grasp the quantum dimensions  
that transcend the urge to copulate,  
and that lush-lipped girl's photograph  
in the frame beyond the tracks  
could never entice me  
to purchase toothpaste  
that can't possibly whiten  
enamel this stained by coffee  
and neglect. If I were a savant,  
I could remain mute,  
without consequence  
or criticism: *He hardly ever  
talks to anyone.* I might know  
the mollusk phylum's almost infinite  
array, from pre-history to present.  
No one would know.  
Gifted as a sideshow act  
in an intellectual circus,  
I could recite Sumerian limericks  
and every move from the past  
twenty years' chess championships.  
If I were a savant, I'd tattoo syllables  
down the backs of waterfalls  
and watch them coalesce to sonnets,  
in the mist and foam of pools  
at the base of the cliffs  
we're all tottering toward.

But I'm not a savant.

I'm an overwrought grunger  
passing through mid-life  
with a messenger's bag of images  
muddled as crayon drawings.  
I am St. Francis to mosquitos.  
I guard a small vault  
dubiously filled with trivia:  
the two dozen counties in the states  
of Vermont and New Hampshire,  
the lyrics of most songs  
Pearl Jam's recorded.  
To be a savant might be  
wondrous. To scan and recall  
every word in the dictionary—  
vocabulary unfettered by the urge  
to reorder and coax meaning  
to the surface. To the savant,  
meaning kicks off its shoes  
and finds a careworn bed in a room suffused  
with incomprehensibility's pleasures . . .  
the city's walls resting in the distance,  
untroubled by a single ambition. If

I could join the savants' tribe,  
would I? It's easy to proclaim one might  
choose to undiscover the practical,  
to let incandescence dissolve into dark's mystery.  
Perhaps what's wanted is a variation  
on Kurzweil's singularity: To integrate  
intellect and insight with savant capacity  
could be the next stop on evolution's tour.  
Here's the Orange Line, at last . . .  
screeching, rolling, rectangular  
pumpkin, ready to ferry us  
to Downtown Crossing.  
If I were a savant, I might  
not know to get on. I might stand  
here all afternoon, like an arrow  
without a bow. Harmless  
potential. Traveler on an island

of flesh, unsure how to reach  
any destination beyond  
this maze of interior revelations.  
If I were a savant, wouldn't I  
    be happy  
    just to be here?

# Blowing the Third Eye

A friend would never threaten to paddle up the Amazon in a canoe commanded by an American-turned-shaman. What could be less American? Wait, did you say hallucinogens are involved? And, a vomit bucket? It sounds suspiciously like the Age of Aquarius as reimagined by Dick Cheney. Or, a variation on the sublimely surreal—like the time Allen Ginsberg cleared an audience at an all-girl's school in Kansas with a soliloquy on ass-fucking. Language can only transcend so far. It takes

a good hit of ayahuasca to blow the lid from the third eye, to melt the wall where the snakes gyrate like electrified ribbons through undetected dimensions. Split and spill the terrors that hunger for one's life . . . those vibratory hells that demand homage, that refuse to cauterize lonely nights with vodka bottles. When television nurses hunger for amenable society, who could argue that the ship has foundered on a shoal of snapping serpents? In the jungle's night,

any shaman's a beacon. Even the Pentecostal pastor, with all his uncaged tigers of damnation, might seem a friend. Physical ruin feels right (or at least familiar). Whatever potion one can find to swallow, to salvage the pretension of a soul . . . that's medicine worth a paddle up the Amazon, worth a wade in magical self-delusion's improbable realms. Say hello to Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson . . .

they're the only angels  
who might prove all that's unseen  
transcends the drying skin  
on this latticework that carries us  
through these days.

## Under the Influence

The best days often include  
a browse through a bookstore.  
When my libido was more  
vigorous, I liked to sneak a paperback  
kama sutra to the automotive section.  
I appreciate the symmetry now—  
the proper calibration of carburetor  
and clitoris both essential  
to effective performance and power.  
Though at the time, I imagined,  
if caught, I could claim to have found  
(quite unexpectedly) this sexual concordance  
tucked between Edmunds Used Car Guide and  
the Encyclopedia of Corvettes. These days,

I gravitate to the literary review section.  
It's interesting to see poems written by people  
I know—and there's always the potential to find  
that gloriously intact shell, tumbling in the surf,  
inhabited by some living thing wanting someone  
to appreciate its nearly unrecognizable luster.  
Tonight I sit beside a poster—*On Becoming  
an Alchemist: A Guide for the Modern Magician*.  
So much wisdom undiscovered, crusted and nestled  
like jewels in the strata of bound pages. Though  
we're such lazy miners, requiring Provigil's  
stimulation and the simulated realities of television  
to provoke the intellect. I might hurry back down

Newbury Street to catch Saturday Night Live.  
What a metaphoric mash. This week's show's a repeat—  
leftover, half-clever satire in three minute skits, wedged  
between commercials. I've got a bed half-buried  
in books and unread *New Yorkers*. It makes  
me apprehensive to sleep with so much knowledge  
wanting to snuggle with my witless, empty notebook  
of a mind. So, I'll probably doze on the couch



and wake to infomercials in the netherworld  
that insomniacs are cursed to wander—  
having dreamt a shaman with a blouse half-  
unbuttoned, finding the windows  
to my consciousness open—believing  
it's Whitman's fingers brushing my hair,  
trusting I've written this indisputably compelling  
paean for an original century.

# William Doreski

## Gathering Sea Lavender

Gathering sea lavender  
in salt marshes south of Brunswick  
we ease ourselves into contours  
so gentle they don't show on maps.  
Only the washboard effect  
of successive waves of lavender  
reveals a dainty presence.  
Sea lavender sells for five  
dollars a spray in Boston,  
but we're harvesting just enough  
to warm us one dreary winter,  
a candelabra as nostalgic  
as my mother's genealogy.

Last night when the wind banged the doors  
in our rented cottage and the tide  
swept our neighbor's dory from the beach,  
we felt each other quicken in sleep  
as we both dreamt of gathering  
sea lavender in brilliant light.  
I also dreamt, quite separately,  
that a former lover came home  
to sort through my possessions  
and take away what pleased her,  
especially sentimental  
items like the shard of slate  
from the Deerfield Massacre stone,

the purple ribbon from Robert  
Lowell's grave, the small glass cat  
that was my first gift from my wife.  
No wonder when morning came  
I proposed we scout the marshes  
for sea lavender, despite the rain,

our bodies still uneasy  
upon us, the briny damp  
revealing as X-rays or radar,  
the losses of our previous lives  
reflected by the stony fog  
and empowered by the radiance  
ignited by our love of the sea.

# Hurricanes Named After Us

The season's first two hurricanes  
have named themselves after us.  
As they plow across the Atlantic  
toward Florida, we drift over  
books we've admired all our lives.

You're still retreating from Moscow  
in the bosom of *War and Peace*  
while I drift along the equator  
in the doldrums of *Moby-Dick*.  
Your storm will cross to the Gulf

before mine. Your violence spent  
on the cringing Everglades, you'll ease  
long before reaching Galveston,  
while passing south of the Keys I'll trip  
unimpeded down to Veracruz

and shatter on Mexico's highlands.  
The summer heat drips from the trees  
in long greasy strings of drool.  
Your air-conditioned townhouse  
insulates you from the silence

that centers in my tiny house  
as though a giant foot has crushed  
the finest of my earthly functions.  
Soon the fall semester will fill  
our datebooks. Scholarly poise

will sculpt you upright and prim,  
but I'll slump like Igor to class  
and growl and frighten young women  
and make the stoned young fellows laugh.  
Neither of us look like hurricanes,

but the government knows better,  
and named its storms as precisely  
as decorum allows. Enjoy  
your book. Palm Beach and Miami  
curse you, but don't worry. Soon enough

the sun will shine in your wake,  
while safely offshore the hurricane  
named for me will parallel you,  
but diverging as subtly  
as I do almost every day.

## Truro: the Bay Side

Watching blunt men surf-cast sand worms,  
you want to learn to catch the groundfish  
we sauté and eat with gusto.

But flounder, halibut, and cod  
avoid shallow bays. Rockfish, croakers,  
bluegills, shad, bluefish. If you hook

a big one—a forty-pound bluefish—  
it could drag you into the water  
where you'd squeal in Technicolor

until I dragged you out again.  
These long July days seem delicate  
and blue-white as Delft pottery.

The sky revolves on a pivot  
about a hundred miles overhead.  
The surf-casters mutter to themselves

but rarely speak to each other  
and never to us or the other sun  
people scattered on the seamless beach.

Maybe at dusk when fish are biting  
I'll rent a casting rod and teach you  
to fling bait far enough to tease

a cruising striper to strike. Maybe  
you'll catch one. But then you'll cry  
for the pain you've inflicted. You'll free

the creature back to its netherworld,  
and for the next few hours regret  
that you ever invaded its space.

# The Posthumous Look of a Diner

The posthumous look of a diner  
on a hot Vermont afternoon  
forces me to stop for lunch.

The parking lot saddens, one car  
angled in the shade, the gravel  
stippled and rutted and weedy

where a wooden picnic table  
crumbles with decay. The metal  
sheathing has dented. Concrete steps

trip me into gloom. The waitress  
sags with adolescent splendor,  
hunching to avert herself

from my potentially male gaze.  
I order with downcast eyes  
so she doesn't have to blush.

Three ceiling fans rotate slowly,  
and an air conditioner rattles  
in its window perch, a chilly sigh

exuding like the breath of a tomb.  
The other customers, a couple  
in their eighties, leave a tip

shining on the table and depart.  
Stevie Wonder on the radio  
sings something from the Seventies.

The waitress proffers coffee. I nod  
as politely as I dare, vacant stools  
rebuking me for being here,

booths haunted by food-smells  
many years old. The ski crowd  
will pack this place winter weekends,

but the summer glare exposes  
the delicate grease-film embalming  
the fixtures, the ground-in filth

of the tile floor dutifully mopped  
every evening, and the fatal  
heart attacks ghosting from a grill

tended with care by a cook so lean  
the waitress, if she weren't so shy,  
could strum his ribs like a harp.



# Milkweed Days

Across the Fremont land the wisps  
of milkweed flutter like strands  
of exploded cobweb. I palm  
a half-pod and crumple it  
to feel the papery compression,  
then feed the fragments to the breeze.  
When I was six I pestered

Joanne Szluc with sticky tangles  
of milkweed filaments. Armed  
with the milk squeezed from the leaves,  
I pawed the mess into her hair.  
The cottony fibers were white  
as Grandma's earnest and faintly  
senile gaze, so Joanne cried

that I'd made a hag of her.  
We stared at each other a moment,  
thrilled that she'd used the word "hag."  
The tattered milkweed stalks relaxed  
as we ran off laughing; then later,  
to punish, she pushed me face-down  
into garden mulch, and I let her.

# Huso Liszt

## Fresco, *The Forlorn Virgin*, Dirbi Monastery, Kareli, Georgia

*The history of Georgia is that of repeated invasions from the south, up between the Black and Caspian Seas. Few peoples in the world have an ancestry more dominated by rape. Contemplate the Forlorn Virgin of Dirbi, and its corrosion by violence. Remember that the monastery was a nunnery. Don't forget that Stalin was born in Gori, just thirty miles away. The faux culture of a State based on the abstractions of Marxist ideology did not so much supplant a culture, as take root in a poverty of violence where the peaceful transmission of cultural wealth from family and society to child had been rendered impossible*

–Keith Smith

### *i. Paleo-Violence in Plaster*

We saw it first in Pernambuco  
from the stoop of our rustic farmhouse  
roofed with thigh-molded tiles.  
Enormous toads emerge from the orchard  
to the scent of orange blossoms, jasmine, chicken shit  
as the sun pissed its blood and sank. A boy  
appeared out of a darkening tunnel  
up from the river through the trees.  
He was the youngest son  
of the caretakers we had unwittingly  
dislodged by buying the farm the week  
before from their landlord.

We were in danger, he said. You'll need a gun, he said,  
and pointed to a cold flurry of bullet holes,  
a heavy-flake snow perpetually falling  
in the plaster around the windows.

We saw it again, and again, even next door  
in the boarded-up house where Jose de Deu's

brother was murdered. We'd pried  
the door open, and in barred shafts  
of biblical light, a host of tree  
frogs leached to the walls  
and disappeared though the roof  
as if they were the severed tongues  
of the survivors  
lunging for the cover of a time-  
darkened mouth. And there in the plaster walls  
fell the same heavy snow.

The silence that each violence had scarred  
into the wills of the living there  
was so palpable. This is poverty!  
not an absence things,  
but a drought,  
a truth drought in floods of silence.  
When the real drought came dust rose  
like insurmountable drifts of snow.

*ii. As She Was First Painted*

Midway through her last eutherian trimester,  
the flush of certainty drained from her faith.  
No fire could unchill her from her doubt  
which rose with every parent else against herself.  
It had been at best an unamazing dream.  
She could brave the market as well as anyone,  
and once she'd passed a spot of bronze  
to hear a teller weave the Greek and Roman stories,  
and had shyly scoffed at all the shapes  
the so-called gods would take  
to relieve an earthly passion.  
But now she came to question how trusting she,  
and how unmiraculous he  
had been—so unlike a raging swan, or shower  
of golden light. To be sure, the angel  
had been bright,  
but only with an earthlike radiance,

as if the shadows in her room had all  
conspired to be nowhere near his eyes and hands;  
and she had seen a Roman's slave  
with just as clean and shiny hair.  
Worse, she had never once refused  
to linger for the tales of shipwrecks  
the soldiers like to tell, and their funny,  
awkward rescues from despair;  
and her people  
had seen her talking to them there.  
She had imagined her time laid up with the holy baggage  
would be more graceful than this. She'd accepted  
the vomiting; she hardly noticed  
the bugs of lamb fat stuck to her chin  
as she scraped the pot for more stew,  
but even the colostrum that seeped through her  
swollen nipples repulsed her now, and worse,  
if the baby kicked at all, his kicks were as weak  
as the spastic reflexes of any half-living thing.

*iii. Dirbi Now*

The snow, the snow, for eight  
centuries, the snow,  
by Monguls, Turks, Persians,  
Khwarzem, Timur,

Dagestani, Turkestani,  
Germans and Russians, over  
and over, each war the same:  
the men arrive, the women die,

or go.

Only the Dirbi Virgin remains  
confined within the Dirbi walls,  
a wedge of fresco  
in deepening drifts of snow.

The flurries of spear, bullet, cannon  
scars and holes  
now render her forlornness  
as beleaguerment by cold.

And the fossilizing swelling  
above her lap, which once gave  
hope to others in confinement,  
conceals the reluctant slouch of

transformation, slouching  
still, as with newer gods from  
somewhere else, toward the same  
old Bethlehem to be born.

# The Death of a Whale

it isn't the  
harpoon kills  
the whale, it's  
the line  
from which they can't  
be rid.

their nostrils are a field  
of nerves  
vaginally sensitive  
to feel the shed  
of water, the snap  
of air with every  
rise, to time  
each blow and breath  
to fall between  
caprices of  
the breaking waves.

or do they begin their blow  
underwater, and feel  
its pressure at  
the surface change?  
whatever. in  
their panic, and  
in their pain,  
and under the  
inexplicable  
horizontal  
force of the ship,  
there are breaths  
they can't arrange.

# From Alaska: At a Conference on the Poetry of Place

*On the closing of the last light bulb factory in the United States of A.*

Let us have a conference and connect!  
And admit to the robbery and murder our consumption funds.  
If our tastes and dependencies here  
arm tyrannies there  
just as the love of pepper once  
launched a quarter-million ships to slit  
their way,  
throat by throat, up the coasts of the orient,  
what is the poetry of here, of place, and only here?

From my porch in rainforest, Alaska,  
rainwater complicates over the clogged and rotted eave gutter  
and pounds on the mossy concrete below.  
There's a simple *pi pi pi pi* of rainfall on the steps,  
a bassline patters out on popcorn kelp in the tidal zone,  
off salt-fluted hemlock leaning out to sea.  
Only a mind could organize so much water,  
and *dum dum titty dum*, suddenly  
it's Mozart. I'm in the 18th century.

And I'm drifting east, high over unnamed Deer Mountain, Blue Lake,  
over the ridge to Harriet Hunt, unnamed Carroll Inlet,  
Portage Cove, and the random fires of summer fishing camps,  
Behm Canal, and the dark continent.

Lights cluster, mussel-like, to the shores  
of the the black Atlantic: Boston, Philadelphia, New York.  
The silence and utter darkness of ocean, then  
the first lights of Europe,  
scattered smoky fires of the agricultural poor,  
now, Paris, Avignon, Vienna. From high windows  
into the great parlors of the western world, we see Lords  
in pink and robins-egg-blue powdered wigs  
lean forward at the waist  
before ladies gowned like giant jellyfish

and dance, gloriously lit  
by oil extracted from harpooned,  
drowned, and boiled humpbacked whales.

I look down at my clothes, my Patagonia fleece from Sri Lanka,  
my Indonesian pants. Today, I ate  
an orange from Chile, apples from New Zealand, Belgian cheese.  
My American clam shovel leans against my wall.

Up and down Tongass Narrows, reflections  
of crimelights, yellow incandescent windows of houses,  
winks of video and tv  
streak out through the rain and waver with the water.  
It's the eyes of tired Chinese parents drowning in the sea.



# Pieter Breughel the Elder's *The Parable of the Blind*

Listen! The blind are leading the blind.

Hear the wary linkage of six men, their breath  
and fearful muttering, how their syllables  
shorten and tonally ascend  
with each stumble and jolt. Hear how their tentative  
shuffle hisses music contrapuntal to the toads  
that screech to populate the village ditch  
where sewage makes wet kissing sounds  
against the rustling reeds.  
Their staves click between pebbles and grass  
like thumbnails picking dirty teeth.  
Their alms bowls jangle and thock against  
their beaded rosaries and belts.

But where are those capricious landmarks

of the human voice, of the villagers who see? Somewhere,  
a woman shouts insults into  
the vast cavern of her drunk son's ear. There must  
be birds, too, twittering indifferently, high in the trees.  
Now hear the slip of gravel, the grunt, and then,  
the prodigious splash.

Now, hear the things you wouldn't have heard:

The scrape of broomstraw as monks in the steepled church  
sweep pheasant bones from between the pews,  
and angels repeating whispers, mouth to ear,  
over the great arc of paradise, to laugh  
at each new garbled truth  
emerging on the other side.  
Hear aldermen belching, softly, ale gas,  
counting money in their troubled sleep.

Be, for a moment, blind.

You lead. A hand rides your shoulder;  
its grip tightens and slackens  
as you pitch over ground swells. Leaning  
forward, you choose your way carefully, always  
balancing against stumbling over roots and divots,  
your hand on guard for low-hanging branches.  
Suddenly, you feel the first horror of air where ground  
should be, and twisting your body mid-step,  
as if you might scramble back across the trespassed air,  
you fall backward into the water.

This is the parable of the blind:

No precipice exists from which men can fall forever,  
except within the human heart, where fear dissolves  
the underpinning earth. What would it take,  
in darkness and in panic, to shout out to the others  
as you fall, “Stop! Fall back. The ditch is here. Hold still!”

It’s too late. The men tumble  
cursing & thrashing on top of you. But let’s say you, unlike  
your fellows, don’t keep falling after landing  
in the ditch, but find your feet, the bottom, the surface  
of the water, air. Can you now shout, “Fools!  
Stand up! The ditch is only three feet deep! Stand up!”  
Or do you stand up, wipe your mouth, and wade away,  
and leave the rest to drown?

# Clifford Hill

## How natural you are

why are you wearing  
that tangle of honeysuckle  
around your neck

that torn blouse  
of rose bush thorns  
tight across your breasts

that brittle skirt  
of oak bark breaking  
against your thighs

everyone already knows  
how natural you are  
from the way you move

with baby sparrows  
nesting in your hair

# Ice storm in Boston Public Gardens

Trees have turned metal  
Emblems  
Of my own limbs  
Bearing a weight  
Of old love  
Now wood and ice

Still there's promise  
Of spring thaw  
Bark cracks  
Crystal breaks  
A sudden laugh  
Through leaf  
Branch trunk  
The whole root of you

## Domestic resolutions

It's Saturday in the new year: I rise  
at eight in domestic air to spread  
lemon curd on toast and brew mint  
tea in a clay pot; I carry a chaste tray  
to the late bed you occupy in our  
new resolve, egg and butter  
beneath your creamy underwear  
I'll wash at nine. All week long  
my list of resolutions grew: musk oil  
for a man's rub of leather in a woman's  
boots and beeswax for shine of oak  
in your secret room: rise, old friend,  
dance the winter sun: with a broom  
of love I'll sweep our closet clean.

## **Jasmine branch**

the gold lights of Manhattan rise  
and soon the jasmine branch plunges  
once again in the childhood well  
we crawled into for just five dollars  
on a dare and there first smelled  
the senseless odor of death now  
hushed and violent upon this city's  
summer air to every overgrown child  
migrated here from provincial town  
in doomed hope that memory's  
quick shame and long haunt will dim  
these thousand lights still shining  
on that jasmine branch I break again  
and thrust into your drowning hand

# Tangerine peels

two women and a man  
sit in winter light  
eating chocolate and tangerines  
from a crystal bowl  
mint tea steams the turquoise pot  
a green canary sings Mozart  
among dying hibiscus

the man hears familiar talk  
of transsexual politics  
does gender hold the heart  
at bay in heterosexual love  
when bodies are the same  
which can dominate the other  
is coupling war or just a game  
and if a game whose metaphors  
furnish the players' rules  
how do they know to play  
a game whose rules get written  
even during the act of play

not sure what to say  
or which to love  
the man stands up  
to clear the plates away

the woman in white  
has eaten all her peels  
only the chocolate's  
silver wrappings remain  
on a single green leaf

the woman in black  
has torn her peels  
into tiny bits and stacked  
them in three heaps  
upon three green leaves

the man stacks three plates  
in the turquoise sink  
he wonders how  
each woman's hunger  
can include a man

he chews a shred of bitter  
peel to find the answer

*pappa pappa pappageni*  
the canary's song is clear  
above the women's laughter  
tart tangerine in a wounded ear



# R. G. Evans

## Dungeoness

The worst part about being the guy in the cartoon hanging shackled to a dungeon wall is the mirror. It wasn't always here, like back when I was young and sure of rescue, hurling curses at my jailers wherever, whoever they were. I was vain enough then I'd probably stare for hours, mugging at my reflection, sucking in my gut. But no. They slipped it in one night last year as I hung sleeping. When I awoke, both I and the haggard old man across from me screamed ourselves hoarse. Or is it as I hanged sleeping? If I could shrug, he'd shrug too. Xylophone-ribbed. Hair and beard an inseparable, lice-ridden thicket. I know it's just a mirror, but I also know he watches me as I sleep, or pretend to sleep, dreaming that instead of being stretched by time here in this god-lost dungeon, I'm somewhere in the Caribbean or South Pacific maybe, just me and a lone palm tree, no one who looks like me. No one at all. One day if I'm lucky a bottle washes up, a little rolled note inside that says only, "Look." And when I do, he's there in the glass surface of the bottle, hollow-eyed and screaming at me loud enough to wake me but not to rouse my jailers. They wouldn't come if he screamed all night, the way he's planning to.

## Something about a Suicide

Something about a suicide makes us  
tread more lightly as if the ground  
once trod by the voluntary dead  
grew spongy and unwell, as if to move  
might send distress signals like a fly  
in a web to whatever hungry mouth  
might be waiting to eat us.

We make a thousand secret shrines  
we think no one can see, but pass another faithful  
on the street and you know. The bowed head.  
Eyes looking straight at someone no longer here.  
Every one a reliquary, bearing pieces  
of the one true do-it-yourself cross,  
ready to nurse doubt into belief and beyond.

# The Edge

Go to the edge. We have always gone to the edge,  
to the place where the land becomes the sea,  
where with one more step we become something less  
solid, less substantial as well. This is why we can't stay,  
why the edge compels us to take a bit of it away.  
A handful of scallop shells. A bit of sea glass  
bluer than our memory of the sea itself. Perhaps  
one larger shell, one with an obstruction  
that looks like a concrete seal, no way to hold it  
to the ear and have the imagined sea remind us  
of the edge. Take it away. Take it into your home.  
Forget it for a day or two. You will find it or  
it will find you, the way the wrong breeze  
from the salt marsh finds you: by the nose.  
You will find that the obstruction was a living foot  
that dragged its spined and sacred safety  
out of the closet and onto the bathroom floor  
to its final rest on the rough, sea-less tile.  
The edge never comes to us, and this is why.  
We know no better than to think we have control,  
that the edge will bow to us. Go to the edge  
with your shell-shaped ear. A sound like the sea  
will be waiting.

# The Magi

The alpaca seemed resigned to the vultures  
that ringed it where it lay in the mud.  
The black-headed birds stood sentinel,  
not moving a feather, just watching  
as the alpaca's chest rose and fell  
and rose and fell again, rapid, shallow breaths.  
The vultures waited. A soaking rain  
had fallen for hours, only stopping  
when the birds arrived. The alpaca lay  
sunken so far in the black and deepening slop,  
the stillborn cria beneath her breast  
all but concealed, only a pair of legs  
motionless in the mud. The mother panted  
and tried to lick her child's wool clean.  
The cria disappeared into the muck  
under its mother's weight. The vultures  
stood in a ring, watching, waiting.  
The low skies promised rain.

# The Maximist

When he thought he loved the human race  
he wrote novels, brick-sized monuments to lives  
in chaos, filling the holes in those lives  
with every word he could. Then he fell in love  
with days that certain people lived  
and wrote short stories, road maps to guide them  
through the intricacies of 24 hours in a life that  
as a whole he could never love. Then he became a lover  
of organs: heart, brain, liver, the generous lock and key  
of penis and vagina. At last he was a poet,  
scribbling 15 minute odes to love and loss,  
drunks and other philosophers, and he would  
stand up at a microphone and read them,  
like a man fellating himself in public.  
But now he is a hermit, more wisdom than love in his life.  
He writes maxims in the sand, and when the tide comes in,  
in the water. The wise man knows,  
but tries to love nonetheless. A single fist  
contains more truth than all the libraries in the land.  
This is the sand. That is the sea.  
Try to tell the difference to a word.

# David Kann

## Dead Reckoning

*For Beth Buxton*

Well, you died by inches  
fighting the filthy crab,  
surgeons carving important pieces  
from you,  
always one step behind.  
Tell me:  
when you lay  
together with your lover,  
though your desire had become  
no more than an echo,  
and when you let him  
uncover you  
and reveal the gnarled landscape  
your body had become,  
did you turn your head away  
in the slant lamp-shadows,  
like a child believing  
not to see him meant  
you were free  
of his gaze  
while he read  
the chart of scars,  
some red and purple and new,  
some tallow-yellow and settled-in—  
that odyssey of agony—  
could he squint through the map  
and regain the territory,  
and navigating by dead reckoning,  
did he lay his cheek by your tender navel  
and breathe you in,  
honey-sweet as an infant?

# Bolus of Flame in the Sistine Chapel

The moment after Michelangelo  
finished  
the Sistine ceiling,

he cleaned his brushes,  
snuffed  
his lanterns, turned and walked away

for wine and a lover, needful,  
stunned  
by completion's void,

leaving the room, leaving God  
swaddled  
in a cloak red as sunrise,

by pink, cloud-rounded cherubim  
lifted,  
with his finger almost touching Adam's.

In the reeking dark,  
filled  
with snuffed candle-smoke and drying plaster's smell,

life's bright unruly spark  
leaped  
from God's finger to Adam's,

and like sunstruck oil  
flowed  
and filled his palm, while God

rose into the night and  
faded  
indifferent, leaving

His orphan reclining on bare rock. Adam  
raised  
his burning hand to his mouth,

swallowed the bolus of flame, then  
stood,  
staggering under the weight of conscious flesh,

found his fiery tongue and  
spoke  
himself and all his get into time.



# Report from Planet Senex

*Whoever is afraid of death will carry it on his shoulders.*  
—Lorca

Oh, but this is a hard land  
to love.  
Grey hills slump  
and thick rivers  
sprawl in deltas  
splayed like dead hands.  
Tan sand's strewn  
with flakes of flint and chert.  
No steel to strike.  
No kindling.  
Nothing to slice  
but brown lichen,  
rags of dead flesh  
on empty skulls.  
The shambling wind skins  
dust from the ground.  
Sunrise is a gray smear,  
and sunset stains  
the sky with spilled ink.  
All night  
in the dark  
sick fish wail  
from a stagnant lake,  
tearing the clouds.  
In the black gashes  
a few stars dim,  
their voices growing red,  
like opals sinking  
in thick oil.

## Pieta in Red

I found a liquidambar tree,  
blazestruck with autumn and sunset.  
Among its five-point leaves,  
a red-tail hawk  
pinned a sprawled dove  
to a branch.

She dipped her sickle beak  
to shredded pink meat.  
The naked dove didn't move,  
complicit in the slow  
tearing toward its heart.

In the windless evening  
the red light died  
in night's slow slide  
up the flaming tree.

When the Red-Tail gutted me  
with her eye.  
I filled  
with the icy consent  
of lichen, mushroom and frost.

Then she closed  
her switchblade talons  
and rose above  
the leaves  
with the lolling dove.

# Ricky Ray

## Death, a Wife, and a Life of Broken Rules

I

Is it because  
I'm tired tonight  
that I don't want  
to think of death,

my lifelong confidante,  
the ear in me  
that has no flesh,

that never had a drop of blood  
to spill  
between some crack in the desert—

the ear that,  
as far as the eye can tell,  
is not here  
but is nonetheless wholly listening?

II

Whatever the reason,  
I must decline.

No, my friend, I do not want  
a glass of wine with you,

a tray of cheeses  
and fine cuts of meat;

I do not want to shove you in my mouth  
and savor your descent into my bowels.

### III

I want the simplicity of water  
tinged with the minerals  
of my hometown,

the familiar blend of sulfur,  
iron and arsenic that makes  
hotel water taste wrong.

### IV

I want a joke  
and the knowing laughter  
that swells in wit  
born of sorrow,

sorrow that bites  
and leaves a mark  
that mars  
every flawless mirror.

### V

I want a broken back that has just experienced  
an uncommon day of relief,

a spine stretching toward the heavens  
that doesn't recoil in pain.

### VI

I want to know why the pigment in that painting  
made me feel the way I do. I want to live  
another night in the company of my wife's skin.

I want the moment when her shades of cream  
conspired to teach me what I could never  
have taught myself about the complexities of snow.

## VII

I close my eyes  
and I am there;

she is next to me  
and we are happy;

the future  
is a condition

apart from  
our time together.

## VIII

They tell me I am foolish to dwell,  
that there is no life in death  
and no bringing back what's gone.

But I tell you  
they don't know everything  
and life is a breaker of rules.

## IX

And what my heart does with me  
when I turn myself over to its aims

makes me a firm believer  
that love can do anything it wants.

## X

When I want to be with her,  
all I have to do  
is sit like this  
and close my eyes.

Then it's easy,

it's like  
I've awoken in the night  
and all I have to do is

peel back the covers  
and feel my way  
to her  
through the dark.

## The Music of As Is

Dearheart: forgive the extreme tardiness of my reply—  
I meant to reply much sooner, but, alas, intentions  
are weaklings who hardly ever muscle their being  
into keeping its appointments. Interesting, the notion  
that we're nearly always late to or altogether missing  
the meetings set up for us by our desires,  
and thereby run around on the stringy detritus  
of our potential. Why stringy? I don't know,  
but when I think out the field and walk through its grass,  
I envision the shed potential not as flakes of skin  
drifting down, but as strung out guts falling in ropes,  
though without the gore or macabre mess—no,  
these are the guts of something finer within us,  
some heavenly-feathered cross-fiber, some  
suddening strings of energy that break into music.

When I lie down in that field and feel the wind  
make followers of my hairs, I envision us running  
over these barely perceptible snakings of failure—visible,  
like much of beauty, only if we actively look for them—  
and think yes, there's music in the air, so much music  
that the strings beneath us and the strings of us  
combine and conduct for the ear that cocks  
with ache to hear it, and that's the music I want:  
the music of the way things go, not the way things  
could go, if. Oh, I meant to write you a letter dearheart,  
but I guess this is as it should be—I was never much  
of a correspondent. Still, imagine the possibilities  
of all that music, waiting like starlight to be  
plucked, threaded through the ears and taken down.

# The Blooming Noses

Flowers, these people are flowers who can brace the wind of a winter's day, but not the wind of a bullet. Most aim is bad despite the years of training and most rubber bullets will miss, but the few that don't will scatter the majority into hiding, the rebels into hills, while dissidents shiver in abandoned buildings, heating beans over small blue flames. Some of the shooters will want to change sides, but will be bound to ignore their consciences and abide by the pullers of strings. Strings of the purse, not strings of the heart. Strings that say plant the drugs in the pocket and watch the felony grow. Mace the face and watch the dissent shrivel into tears. Rough up for good measure, but not in front of the camera, and not the pretty female face or the old face or the rest of the faces where it's blatantly visible. A kidney shot for the mouthy ones and a stomach jab to widen the eyes of the poorly dressed and highly educated. Raid the encampment in the middle of the night and make a racket that would make your scalp seeking ancestors proud. Burn the library and break the cookware. Accost the medics, dump their stores into the sewers. Herd them all like sleepy cattle. Hint at slaughter. Make them feel that their life is in danger and tell them that you're doing it for their own good. Their hygiene has been declared a public hazard and their health is in jeopardy in more ways than one. This is the land of baby powder, not the land of shit and mud. This is the land of tightly controlled chemical stimulation and the doctors are standing by to diagnose your condition. The pharmacists are standing by to fill your orders. It's time to put away the signs and pick up your belongings and head up the mountain of debt. It's time to think of your children in the present and forget about a nebulous future. It's time to face the facts of your position and make your journey along the predefined routes. And if you insist on questioning rules, if you insist on picking at scabs, then it will be time to call in the hounds, and there is nowhere left on earth that escapes our gaze for long. If we have to hunt you down, we will, and then it will be time to teach you a lesson. Then it



will be time to taste the blood of a traitor. Then it will be time for locked doors, brutal beatings, and the torturous hands of power. Then it will be time to wake up day after day and smell the bloody, blooming noses. And then, then it will be time to listen to the blood in our bodies, the blood down our faces, the blood on our hands, and feel our hearts pump with the truth of what the blood tells us to do.

# The Last Good Thing We Do

*for Amy King*

Turning my day inside out, all I hear is the pounding  
that woke me up late last night, or early this morning,  
the sound of a hammer to a piece of wood  
that makes no sense in a February land of concrete.  
The garbage truck it wasn't, that nightly nuisance  
hauling away the bottles of drunks  
and the excesses of a culture that prides itself  
on purchasing power. If a thing breaks, it hardly matters,  
there's ten million others like it—one of a kind  
is a thing of the past and the show will go on without you.  
Disbelief is understandable, and also not worth the debate.  
Have a look. There's a line of stars extending out the door,  
around the corner and over into undetectable galaxies.  
A fiery mixture of redheads and gas giants and blond  
ice planets coldhearted down to their greasy, mean-spirited,  
middle-aged defiance. Maybe some comet of realization  
will undo the habits that harm them, but the chances are  
so not good it makes the lottery look like a shoo-in.  
We should get together and hash it out, spec a plan  
to make amends and stop ignoring wounds,  
but who would take such a theory seriously?  
When has anyone ever wanted to get together  
over a glass of water? We could give it a try  
but I bet three flies and a lesson in gardening  
one of us would signal the waiter and place the order  
to wine it down. And that would be the end of that.  
How easy it is to bring hands to the table  
in contemplation of work, interlace fingers like the fates  
of neighbors and throw them up in helplessness,  
or hopelessness, or a botchy, beleaguered despair.  
Because nothing can be done. Because no one in this  
field of compassion is in a position to do anything about it.  
Because it's out of our hands and we haven't the calluses  
in our nature to grab ahold of the ropes and tug.  
The subject is the earth and Atlas has an achy shoulder.  
And yet mothers who have no kids are this very minute

teaching rooms of them how to behave. Prophets in  
hand-me-downs with newsprint pamphlets are knocking  
on doors trying to save as many souls as they can.  
Businessmen are buying young men farms to work  
and aging bikers are salvaging soup from vegetables  
sent toward the compost heap—to feed the foodless,  
to serve their country, to show a man that someone, somewhere  
cares whether or not you starve. There's enough good will  
in every small town to make even the blond bitch weep.  
And there's enough carelessness in every indifferent heart  
to lead us explosives-first into a species-leveling bloodstorm.  
And sadly, sadly, sadly, that may be the last good thing we do.

## Discomfort and Its Undoing

Discomfort, mere (*ha, mere*) discomfort, never mind pain, discomfort alone will make of us irritable idiots, men and women who take the easy road, the wrong road, the road that leads to trouble. And we will curse the road for being the way it is, and our feet for having trodden it in such sad, disintegrating shoes.

And when we get to the end of that road, or a stopping place of realization, we will know it was the wrong way, and everything will be met with disgust, revulsion, the inclination to swallow all beauty and spew. The dissatisfaction of living will make our tongues unable to stand the taste of our own mouths. We will spit in the dust and get the spit on ourselves and glare at the sun as though it were the bright idea behind all of this.

Unless. Unless something gets in the way of our anger. Some messenger who intersects us—a tangerine for instance, just a tad overripe, forgotten at the bottom of the bag, might be the hook which untangles everything that went wrong. Then, as though peeling back a rind, the mind will section-by-section come clear. The senses will conduct the weather's music, and to their liking, even if the clouds hang heavy and low.

A foul wind might dog us, might drive us ever more contracted into ourselves, but we won't wish it ill. We'll lick our lips and lower our heads, listen to its whistle and commit it to memory, remember our summer together and say thanks, I know the going is rough, but you breathe for something too, I'm happy to share the road and I have a feeling we'll get there in the end.

# Tori Jane Quante

## Watson and Crick with Double Helix

I'm behind the lens.  
Crick says *Should we pose?*  
He mocks professors with a smug grin and pointer,  
while Watson plays student,  
mouth agape with trepid ignorance.

They are school children on picture day;  
Shirts tucked in like  
mother told them to,  
electric balding heads of hair,  
neckties pulled a little too tight.

In their bodies, DNA is unzipping  
and gathering up its other halves.  
Somewhere along the twisted necklace  
of their genes is that “pearl” of a paper,  
the one that simply held a mirror up  
and pointed it inward.

Their faces are beginning to break  
into laughter right as I snap the shutter.  
Oh, to be so young  
and so sure you've changed the world.  
To be dead right.

## *Creatio ex Materia*

It's not the kind of thing you can accept outright,  
genesis, happening in your trashcan.  
I imagine it started at the beginning.  
Darkness over the stagnant water, the trash can sludge:  
banana peels and coffee grounds, used tampons  
and the cat's feces, liquefying together  
in the neglected outdoor can until something  
started growing. Something new.  
Phospholipid bilayers forming at an alarming rate,  
the advent of spines and skins, all happening  
unnoticed, as things often are,  
over the course of a week.

So when that woman, that rank smelling creature  
emerged from her womb of garbage,  
innocent of all but warm, putrid smells,  
her thick mat of hair growing woven like a tapestry,  
hips slender as a child's, body tarnished and hard  
like a once golden Greek daughter of Chaos' own  
how could I feel anything but awe,  
even as she munched on a half eaten banana?  
No, this was no daughter of a god.  
She was mine. This creature—  
she is what we breed when no one is watching.

I know now, that  
out there, in oceanic miles  
of garbage, landfills overflowing  
with an abundance of new life,  
a nation is rising up, born of our neglect.  
The eternal matter is this moment,  
giving way. *Creatio ex purgamentum*,  
the gods whisper in their sleep.  
*We have left nothing else.*

## World Leaders at the Premiere

The evening has just begun. See how those  
monumental men, pillars of the Earth, stroll by?  
Here's Vladimir, a vision in undulant gold,  
the skirt of his dress a caress,  
and fox fur scarves, no one has told him they're out of fashion.  
Who cares? We love you Vladimir.

Notice, even the Dalai Lama has come off his mountain.  
He's chatting with Pope Benedict, takes his hand in both his  
own and shakes  
the fragile man vigorously by the arm, disrupting his pointy hat.

And everyone's darling Barack is wearing a slick little number  
in simple shimmering black, curved  
to the contours of his graceful neck and back.

King Abdullah stops for an interview.  
*Tonight* he says (he's wearing Valentino, the fall line)  
*Tonight we celebrate. And maybe, we bury the hatchet for good.*  
Because, of course, who in his right mind  
wields a hatchet in Valentino?

They gather in the theater now,  
file into neat lines of red velvet seats,  
and jostle for armrests, suck in as others squeeze by.  
Light flickers against their painted faces,  
catches the gleam of their nails and jewels.

# Elijah

In the video he's running. He stumbles in sand,  
barrel rolls back onto his feet and keeps running  
and looking back and running until

he stops, his eyes and  
his whole body searching the air.

For what? What ladder rolled out from the sky  
is going to spirit him away from here?—  
The wide Arizona desert. The car spinning its wheels in sand.  
The police sirens drawing in close, closer.

Then he turns his back on the camera,  
the one he must know is watching from a helicopter above.  
I also want to turn away,  
but I don't. I inhale and keep one breath.  
I hold perfectly still.

Seconds later, he's put a bullet in his brain, and he's still  
standing,  
a broomstick on the palm of the earth.  
I start to think he'll stay there and wait for that ladder after all,  
or for the sky to swallow him.



# Drinking Wine with your Neighbors

It is Sunday, after church.

A mammoth of a woman totters past me wearing  
the most imposing yellow mu-mu I have ever seen.  
She is a sun, a goddess among us.

I sit here  
redefining my concept of beauty  
to include this woman, her massive presence,  
inelegance, my *god*, how my eye is drawn  
helplessly inward and upward  
to the edges of vision and reason.

And suddenly I think of heat collapsing  
into fall, muscadines fermenting on the vine  
even before they are pressed into wine. How  
can I think for even a moment that these things,  
sun and grapes, streets and  
this temporary home, are not the embodiment  
of blessing?—

A sun, a goddess,  
Reaching upward and outward—  
*It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

# G. L. Morrison

## Icarus' Father

Daedalus never understood the danger of joy.  
He was imprisoned for this misunderstanding,  
for making a device for the Queen's pleasure  
when the King had ceased to please her.

The architects of pleasure are wingless  
and short-sighted. The waxy geometry  
of flight does not account for the angle  
of wind against the skin or the sum

of sunlight. Logarithms of desire,  
the delirious arithmetics of living,  
dividing the sky between the sun  
which will devour all our days

and the cold, blue sea. We fly akimbo  
skimming the irreconcilable balance,  
neither bird or fish enough to navigate  
those distances. When I fall (and I will

fall) I know my father will fly on  
without me. There are more sons  
to be fathered on an unriveted shore.  
Tomorrow is a margin in a ledger.

# Baba Yaga

three times this house turned its back  
to the sea and its door toward me  
what choice did I have but enter

the hunger outburned any hope or risk  
outweighed the distance  
I came to know as regret

what choice did I have but lay  
my chin on the shelf beside yours  
filling the room with our far-flung bodies  
stretched as deliberate as sleep

my memory of our arms and legs open  
fills the house—your head in the kitchen ,  
hands flung into closets, one foot in the garage,  
the heel of the other furrowing the yard

these rooms could not contain what we filled it with  
and seemed to grow smaller around us  
my house is still filled with the sounds of our sleeping

this was Baba Yaga's dream: that I was a hunger  
you could never satisfy and not the woman  
who followed the top she sent spinning  
into forests, toward other houses

the truth is you were that hunger I fed myself to  
until not even bones remained  
and so had nothing left of myself for you

## Relentless Blue

I look for you in this poem with both hands  
every word like the fingers of a blind sculptor  
searching for your familiar face in the sightless clay.

If I were a painter, what I want to say  
to you would be a shade of blue that couldn't be bought  
only blended by loving curiosity and relentless patience  
blue as sun rising on the ocean after a storm

blue as dawn, obsidian about to shatter  
in a wet cacophony of color. Azure  
love. Sapphire uncertainty.  
Hungers marbled turquoise and lapis lazuli.

If I were a sailor, this poem would be  
a hundred days at sea.  
Lips cracked with salt and silence.

Above me—in the wet, endless sky—clouds row by  
with a cargohold of storms and birds for barnacles.  
Gulls shriek like lonely women.  
Every star is an omen, I navigate by touch.

Below me—in the wet, endless sea—is everything  
I dare imagine, everything that will ever  
and will never be: wide and spiny as puffer fish  
infinitely blue and filled with stones, fish, and sunken

treasure; the skeletons of clouds, birds, and stars;  
sharks, mermaids, and the myriad of scuttling mysteries.  
This poem is adrift in tomorrow's current  
somewhere off the coast of yesterday.

Your hand on this page is bone china,  
the pottery buried with Pharoahs, Klimt's  
yellow kiss, swollen mouthed as O'Keefe flowers.

Your hand on this page is the woman who waits  
in a cottage overlooking the sea  
where every hundred-day journey hopes to end.

# Joe Freeman

## In a Wood

The onset of winter and  
All around me the furtive  
Stacking of woodpiles as the  
First snow gathers itself  
Behind cloud banks in the west.  
A poor squirrel am I that  
Neither scurries nor hoards,  
Ear cocked to a restless heart song  
While winter entraps me unawares.

## Leaving the Oasis

Desert's edge, and I balk at  
The hissing of shifting granules:  
Whispers of desolate miles  
And parched-throated doom.  
Decision made, it is too late  
To wonder if my dromedary  
Skills have survived at all intact  
Their long sojourn in the shade,  
Or if I face mirage, delirium  
And the heart's desiccation  
Amidst the migrating dunes.

## David Butler

*What made us dream that he could comb gray hair?  
—W. B. Yeats, “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory”*

We were the first of six,  
Sequentially paired, two to a room.  
In even-numbered destiny  
We lived in forced proximity  
Some twenty-odd years—longer  
Than you lived with anyone,  
It seems worth noting now,  
Now that you are gone,  
Beyond reach of all but memory.

Odd how word of an early death  
Gets out, finding old companions  
Or lovers long out of touch—  
As if, out of nowhere, they’d  
Felt a cold wind blow and looked  
To find its source, turning up,  
Against the chill, the collar of memory  
From a shared youth, a once-long-ago  
When all things seemed possible.

Their tributes call to mind the promise  
Of your early days; the golden circles  
In which you traveled, in a time out of time,  
Beyond recapture. I grant now what  
I begrudged you then: you were the  
Best of us, gifted of mind and body,  
The center of every company, destined,  
It seemed, for great things or, failing there,  
At least happiness—at least that.

All of us deceived, looking back, perhaps  
You most of all. Some missing gene,  
Some somnolent flaw, lay in silent wait for you.  
It stole upon you slowly, unrecognized,  
Disguised as the excess of youth, a canker



Of burgeoning power, unbeknownst, that  
Hollowed you out from within. Unmatched  
With any heart true enough to anchor you,  
Or call you back, you foundered—  
more vulnerable than ever we dreamed.

Growing up in the long shadow  
Your talents cast, I burrowed deep,  
“An inner émigre,” like Heaney’s wood-kerne,  
“Taking protective colouring  
From bole and bark, feeling  
Every wind that blows,” husbanding  
The sources of my slow-building strength:  
The un-David, the blocking back,  
The-one-that-could-be-relied-upon.

Lower profiled but better moored,  
I became, for as long as memory serves,  
In all that mattered (save strict chronology),  
The eldest; strapping on the first  
Of the many obligations you shed,  
One by one, year by year, until,  
At the end, your passing was strangely  
Without context or consequence,  
Barely a ripple in our daily lives.

Our shadow brother, long since  
More wraith than real, you slipped  
Away one night as if determined  
To spare us any further trouble  
Or drawn-out goodbyes; no fuss  
Or bother that would be unbecoming  
A life so empty and bereft of purpose  
As yours had become (thus holding onto  
A sort of pride, a kind of dignity).

Would that you could have spared me,  
As I’m sure you would have wanted to,  
My leaning over the lip of Adams Falls,  
Shaking your ashes into the thin stream

That dribbled to the shallow pool below;  
So weak a flow that it could barely  
Carry you: your remains a gray sludge  
I had to shove over the ledge  
With my fingers, ingloriously apt.

Even so, one good rain will  
Wash you down Linn Run into  
A soil that knows much of rebirth  
And renewal. If Ree was right  
And we all come back again,  
Know that I wish for you smoother  
Sailing next time through; fewer gifts,  
If need be, but more staying power,  
And the same gentle, generous heart.

Farewell, my brother.

# Legacies

A contentious day at preschool.  
“She has a stubborn streak,” I offer.  
“Not from you!” their smiles opine,  
And I smile back, as if to concur.

What can they, who see me  
Only in corpulent middle age,  
Benign and becalmed,  
Know of the fire that once  
Burned blue from within  
In a youth inseparable from  
My thought, quoting Yeats,  
Because I’ll have no other?

And how often you were singed  
By that unforgiving flame,  
Flaring like a solar storm  
Each time you fell short,  
Or stumbled, along  
The twisted, stony path  
That led us both away  
From that single, calamitous, event.

# Sojourners

What if between this life and the next  
A soul, if only for a moment, knows  
Where it's been, and where it's headed:  
A blinding instant of self-awareness,  
A glimpse of The Big Picture it spends  
The next life trying to recall, a fading  
Imprint on the closed eyelid of a soul  
Plunged back, ready or not, into the trial  
by existence?

What does it feel in that moment,  
That grace of respite, catching its  
Breath before heading back down?  
Relief, to know there's meaning to it all?  
Reluctance, to be stretched on the rack  
once more?

Or, most likely of all, longing,  
Unreconciled and inconsolable,  
For the life left behind. The hands  
Now forever unclaspable, a parent's  
Or a child's; memories of a lover's  
Touch, warm breath, whispered  
Promises, circling then disappearing  
Down the drain of eternity. Recollection  
Stripped, identity shed and reentry  
Accomplished, naked and soiled, again.

# George Longenecker

## Bear Lake

Just three lights shine on the opposite shore.  
At ten the waxing moon is only a dim sliver,  
the sky still too bright for me to see stars.  
White pelicans fly low over the water,  
their wings beating slowly, so close  
I can hear feathers against air.  
The stars brighten and the pelicans  
are still flying as I fall asleep.

When I awaken after midnight  
the Milky Way lights the sky to the horizon,  
from Idaho south to the dry Utah hills.  
A plane blinks red and a single  
satellite moves east to west.  
All the rest is stars.

I lie on the desert shore  
watching stars who shone  
billions of years ago.  
Eons from now somebody  
may be watching our star.  
By then we'll probably be gone;  
maybe we'll have blown ourselves away.  
It's hardly important to the Milky Way

whether one star shines—  
but perhaps it matters  
that twilight comes already at four  
that across the lake a porch light comes on  
that already the Milky Way is floating into dawn  
that already one white pelican flies low over Bear Lake  
perhaps it matters—  
all the rest is stars.

# Samarra

A boy looks up at the gold-domed  
mosque in Samarra as he does each morning—  
it's stood a thousand years, it's reflected  
the sun at dawn and dusk, it's echoed  
thousands of morning prayers. He falls  
backward in the explosion, his head crushed  
beneath a fragment of ancient mortar and gold.  
Bricks scream through the air and obliterate  
prayers. The blast shakes minarets  
which sway and crack in the explosion.

One of his eyes looks left to the Euphrates,  
the other to the Tigris, but he doesn't see  
gold leaf that rains down and shimmers in the sun,  
doesn't see dust that rises where the golden dome  
had been. Blood trickles from his mouth;  
who knows to which river it will flow.

I saw it in the news the next day—  
but probably it's already  
been forgotten in the long history  
of Babylon and America,  
another small war,  
not news anymore.

There's prayer as sirens wail:  
Return your artillery and blood  
from the Tigris and the Euphrates,  
reverse the explosions,  
turn back the sunrise.  
Return the child's sight  
so he may watch the golden dome of Samarra  
come gleaming back in the morning sun.

# Completely Full

As we board, the flight attendant announces that our plane is *completely full*. I want to ask how it can be more than full, for isn't full by nature complete? We leave Florida completely full, next to me a mother and her young son.

Two hours later I'm jolted from my nap. The plane bucks with turbulence, bounces, then brakes hard as we land on the icy Newark runway. The whole time the mother holds her son's hand and leans close against him. He says only *it's okay Mom*.

It is this then, the taking of a child's hand that is more than full, more than complete. He puts his other hand on hers. We have landed and the plane taxis to the gate.

## Salt and Sorrow

*A kitchen in a residence in Aleppo, Syria damaged Sunday in fighting.  
—Narciso Contreasas photo, The New York Times*

Walls are blackened, there's a refrigerator  
with rust at its bottom, stickers of yellow  
butterflies and blackbirds on its door.

A dish towel hangs on the door handle  
and atop sits a vase of purple paper flowers,  
On shelves jars of spices still stand upright.

We can't see what's upright in the rest  
of the home, if its power is on,  
or if walls and windows are intact.

Charred ceiling plaster covers the floor,  
no mortar shells or shrapnel though;  
a jar of beans lies unbroken and a tiny drawer—

maybe for salt, we don't know, but nobody  
can live without salt or sorrow,  
no matter where. On a lower shelf rest

three small pairs of sneakers—  
we can't see the children,  
their parents or the photographer,

they must all be somewhere.  
Outside—but outside is not in the picture—  
we can't hear if there are explosions and artillery fire.

On the wall hang pans, a strainer and measuring spoons.  
Why do some things fall and not others?  
All the utensils are blackened,



but we can't tell whether from cooking  
or just war. In a dish drainer cups dry;  
they'll need to be washed again  
if the family returns—  
if they live—their blackened  
kitchen sent naked around the world.

# Squeaky Fromme Remembers

I'm one of only a few women  
who ever fucked Charlie Manson  
I'm one of only two women  
who tried to kill a president  
I wore a red dress  
the day I almost shot Ford  
(I wish I'd shattered his head)  
I loved the world's most famous killer—  
(I wish I'd been the one to stab Sharon Tate)  
plunging deeper and deeper  
deeper and deeper—oh Charlie  
stab me like you did then—  
I had him more  
than Patricia or any of *The Family*  
the year of my trial  
I got more mail than Charlie  
I was the only woman  
ever to escape from Alderson  
(but they caught me)  
I'm free now  
(parole sucks and I miss the food)  
my photo's in the Ford Presidential Museum—  
you can Google me—  
I get more hits than Charlie  
(sometimes I'd like a hit of acid)  
I did more drugs than Betty Ford  
you know I was in a Broadway Musical?  
*Assassins*  
the actress wore a red dress  
I'm more famous than anyone in my family  
than anyone in *The Family*  
except Charlie  
Charlie, Charlie  
I'm free now  
I almost assassinated the President, Charlie  
I'll come in my red dress  
stab me, make me bleed

# Benjamin Dombroski

## Because Your Questions on the Nature of Memory Have, at Times, Threatened My Buzz

Ahead, the coal train enters a long curve  
and here we watch it slow  
as if into the memory of curve. Below  
the river courses through evening  
and the island goes skeletal  
in shadow. Woody  
spit of land from which captured Federal troops  
once watched this city burn—  
a light not unlike tonight's lowering  
on the horizon—and nothing grand  
in those flames, what they promised  
then; an end nearing  
only in the slow exhaustion  
that all fire reveals—ruins  
to comb beneath empty  
warehouse windows. It must be easier  
here than at the yards upriver—  
no one walking the rails,  
cutting wide arcs of light  
through the woods. So, from the balcony  
we watch the boys creep through scrub pine  
and up embankments, disappear  
in the trains' chuffing.  
You tell me you've known coal  
the promise of heat. You've written it.  
Heaped in car on car of freights  
pulled easy along the rim of these bluffs,  
I think of it as memory  
of the mountains which held it.  
Bored, these boys hop the trains,  
only to leap from them when again they slow

through the far side of the city  
on their eastward slide to the ports  
at Hampton, the bay  
and sea. Doubtless you've dreamed the sea  
a kind of memory. And the coal,  
which carries to the sea  
the weight of mountains, wears tonight  
ragged coats of melting snow.  
Oh, frozen wards of snow  
carried down the mountains.  
Oh, motion. Oh, absence  
and he longing for shapes  
of things the snows have covered.  
I reach for your glass and refill it.  
I reach for the night and stars.  
I reach for the train. Let us speak plainly  
now—as the wind dies, and the noise;  
as the tail end of it disappears  
like a dark thread  
pulled through evening.  
My mother called yesterday  
with news of the fourth  
suicide this month:  
a girl this time, who stepped in front  
of the 5:38 carrying traders  
home to their suburbs by the sea.  
In her voice I heard the reach  
toward what question  
the child's mother must have asked.  
No, she didn't ask it.  
Nor have we talked of the others.  
Though I know  
she wonders. I wonder. You must wonder.  
But we talk instead of a room  
walked out of, row of empty dresses  
hanging in a closet. Or laundry; the scent  
of someone else's idea  
of mountains in springtime.  
If a mother needs answers, let her  
find them. Let us have another drink.

And if we must speak of ghosts,  
tonight they shall be the ghosts  
of a boy's hands on a window as a train starts:  
fingertip, palm-print and the world  
pulled through them like a sheet.  
Tie and rail bed, parking lot and platform clock.  
Bright sheet of the world  
through which a few gulls glide.

## South of Paris

*. . . perhaps on a Thursday, as today is, in autumn.*

*—Cesar Vallejo*

Horrid to die on a market day  
in a foreign town, like this one  
in the Loire valley, in November, with a light rain  
passing its secrets to the slate roofs  
and opened umbrellas.

How ill, beneath the plane trees  
and between the stalls of vegetables  
and strange meats,  
the fish and foreign, fish-like faces,

among gestures of buying and selling  
how black, even surviving the Thursday  
after feeling suddenly behind you the presence  
on the cobblestones  
and balking at a case of aged cheese  
before asking in broken tongue for a taste.

# Afternoon with My Nephew

Pushing your racecar through the grass,  
you say, *shooo*, the car says, *shooo*.

The plane says, *grrrr* overhead.  
Its shadow is t-shaped, or boy shaped,

when older, you'll run with outspread arms  
through a field. Its shadow says nothing.

The birds say *hello*, even the buzzards say *hello*,  
but you can't hear them, they're too high.

Their shadows are eaten by the air.  
There are people in the plane, you know.

A pilot, yes, and passengers too.  
What do they say? All kinds of things.

They're coming back from a war which isn't yet over.  
And if they're talking about it

we don't hear them either, only the plane,  
which keeps on saying the only word it knows.

# Ryan Kerr

## Pulp

There are hours of tonguing the loose tooth  
before I decide to remove it with my own fingers.  
In my memory it feels much the same  
as the resigned detachment of sectioning a grapefruit.  
The same resistant tug of sinews  
clinging either to ivory or the fleshy meat.

It is reluctant and stubborn,  
bringing with it nerves and tissue,  
coaxed by a child's impetuosity.  
The dance of spit and blood  
in the stainless steel sink.  
The tooth is a lesson.

The pulp and papery matter of childhood.  
The space of wistful, smiling mouths.



# Trimming

A knot on the middle finger,  
formed when just a child  
from gripping pencil and writing,  
always writing. Here, the body altered

for the first time in an enduring way  
that cannot be undone, as it grows  
and calcifies over the decades.  
Now littered scattershot over this

dusty landscape. A faint blemish  
here where I sliced my hand open  
cleaning the kitchen knife one night,

a cut under the eye with no history. Or follow the map  
to this consequence of imprecise umbilical detachment.

A patch here of bedraggled forest,  
dimpled, speckled birthmark.  
The ohm that transcends these rough thistles

and cavernous valleys, thundering  
their confidences solely, sadly to one another.  
I perch on this mountain and wait  
to discover a soft and small prick of inspiration.

# Vessel

You would like to see a peony in your budvase,  
so you consider going out to clip one  
from our neighbor's garden while she is away,  
yet you also see it dying quietly in its ewer,

much the same as they do in the gardens.  
When you realize that they will all be gone  
by the end of May, you change your plans  
to rhododendrons, hyacinths, hydrangeas.

We consider what plants will thrive in the shade  
of the front yard and the burgeoning sun  
in the back. We consider what areas of the yard  
are richest or in greatest need. We push our fingers

into the dirt together, tilling and plodding to cultivate  
something poignant and perfect. Planning  
what to seed and what to pull. Engineering, hoping.  
What blossoms will be the result of our architecture?

## **“Every morning now I wake”**

Every morning now I wake  
and step into our failure  
of a backyard,  
to drink my coffee and consider  
all things unfinished.

# Youth Apocrypha

I think back to my years  
that were dedicated to frivolity  
and hope that it is not a thing  
to be throttled out of my own children.

I seek to fall in step now  
behind the smoking teenagers,  
not to chide, but to capture  
some ephemeral part of my youth

when I sat across from friends at  
barroom tables discussing stories  
as though they were the only things  
that mattered. Which they were.

Which they are. These toppled pieces  
that lie today like ice cubes  
spilled out of a short glass,  
spinning wildly before melting.

# Josh Flaccavento

## Glen Canyon Dam

Wherever there's an Indian walking  
backwards, she says, there's rain. Rachel  
on the nametag. Navajo. Some of this land  
must be hers, somehow.

You're from Virginia, she says, do you know  
West Virginia? The New Gorge River? Their  
bridge is like ours, ours is second  
only to theirs. New  
River Gorge, I say. Yes.

Design and style. We're all  
standing here—spillways  
tunnels turbines tracks  
for massive gantry crane—because  
of design and style, she  
tells us. Thin man, Midwestern, plus  
wife. British couple, pensioners. Three  
German boys, no good  
English. Sister. Self. Last  
tour of the day.

Please do not take pictures  
of security. Do you need that #  
in in. ft. mi. lbs?  
Volumes. Pressures. Rates of flow in  
m/s. Yes, you may  
photograph this observation gallery. See  
the water pooling in corners floors  
on concrete? It is constantly  
analyzed, an engineered  
leak.

Grass like golf  
course, not  
orchard. No trees  
here. These men  
most highly skilled in the world.  
Please observe their images. Ask  
me any questions you want about  
power water Western  
space the science  
of how this land was  
reclaimed the science  
of control.

# I Sing Now of This

highway, commonplace and  
deadly as time. Signs  
mark the miles. They are my  
companions and we are  
gentlemen of the road. Seconds  
crushed under the tires. Blood

and fur punctuate its  
interminable sentence, the  
flat expanse of hours  
black yellow stabbed through  
with rain and neon. Curves of

unrequited space pull at my eyes  
drag hands and arms, entire  
bodies. Calamity of place  
less  
ness, trauma of location  
ripped pulled stretched.  
Jagged stroke of light exposing

once-dark innards of mountain  
range, spikes of valley ridge  
scape. I sing its limit  
less  
ness, eternity of  
motion hurtling tumbling over  
boneyards ruins bridges, under  
cloud-shadows and sundogs.

If I must burn the world to be free  
then burn.

## **We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone**

Here's what's gonna happen, she  
shouts over jukebox country, 1 a.m.  
Renegade bar, Beaver, Utah.  
Anybody I ain't servin  
is goin home. That's  
fucking  
it. I've  
had  
enough. Need me  
to walk you to the door?

Old cowboys a few fat  
Latinos antagonists  
of this one-woman  
shift. She'd rather  
the table of ladies  
in the back, brother  
boys with skateboards  
balanced by the door

or us, perhaps, two  
out-of-town kids, quiet  
polite, silent laughter and six  
dollar tip. Just  
smoke, ghosts  
passing through Patty's  
Friday night  
leaving without  
a trace.



## A scrape

One of dozens, almost  
indistinguishable at first  
glance. A wound  
got in fun, a simple  
mistake. You  
should've known better than  
slowing stopping braking raw tips of  
white fingers versus river current  
Rio Grande Algodones after  
noon. Now

new cut new scrape new  
wound of what  
type laceration avulsion  
pulled-back flap of flesh hiding  
interiors of blood and nervous  
the actual finger the stuff of all fingers  
can't fight tides with fingers, not these  
picked-over pulled-at peeled plucked the places

of dozens of simple wounds,  
mistakes. Indistinct anxiety  
made manifest.

# Christine Stroud

## Grandmother

Damp heat rises from the grass.  
I sing your name like conjugating a verb:  
*dolo, dolore, Dolores*  
until you say *Shush,*  
*It's not polite to call*  
*me by my name.*

By the wild grape orchard,  
in the backyard,  
we stretch out in the hammock  
strung between two pines.  
You read the Nancy comics aloud  
from the Sunday *Greenville Times,*  
while my eyes trace the illustrations.  
Your fingers, filmed with cornbread  
grease, stain the pages.

I squash a chubby bumble bee  
in my fist and wipe  
the brown smudge into the white  
clover creeping through  
the grass. I want you to say  
I am brave, but you click  
your tongue and shake your head.

## My Last Spanking

After church, in my great grandma's dark oak bedroom, Dad helps me change. *Arms up* he orders and pulls the yellow dress with white lace collar over my head. One quick movement like he's peeling off a dried scab. He hands me a bright orange pair of shorts. I am seven, and stand in front of grandma's large mirror with my arms straight out. Long and thin, I pretend I am a little Jesus on the cross. Head tilted to the side. I poke out my white belly and giggle. *Dad, look I'm like one of those little starving babies in Africa.* He searches my miniature lime green suitcase for a T-shirt. *Hon, that's not nice.* I push out my belly farther. *But I do. See, little skinny arms and a big fat belly,* I say. He stops pushing around my clothes and looks at me in the mirror. *I said stop it.* But I'm feeling good and strong, stretching my arms as far as the will go, pushing my belly out as hard as I can. Again I tilt my head to the side. *Look, now I'm Jesus.* I am over his lap before I can back away or say sorry. The sound is dull, dampered by my shorts. My muscles flex, but I don't cry.

After, Dad leaves the room, his face the color of a cardinal. I stare into the mirror, puff out my belly, clench my fists, whisper *African baby.*

## From Man to Man, 1973

Somewhere in the house  
her bulldog-faced father  
is angry. Not at her,  
not yet, but at her sister  
who's forgotten to wipe  
speckles of toast crumbs  
from the black and white  
checkered counter top.  
Her little brother  
is sitting cross-legged  
in front of the TV,  
watching *Gunsmoke*.  
The cowboys shoot Indians  
in varying shades of gray.

Her bedroom door is closed.  
She stares into the mirror  
of her chalk-white vanity,  
parts her hair  
down the middle, pulls  
it into pigtails.  
She braids each side into thick  
ropes of oiled hemp. The black  
hair against her milky face  
and white linen shirt  
make her think of Dorothy  
before she discovers Oz.

Today is September,  
she is engaged.  
*My husband* she says over  
and over. Quiet then loud,  
mouthing the word *hus - band*  
with exaggerated lips. Somewhere  
in the house her father  
yells at her mother  
who is peeling the husks

off pale ears of corn.  
She can't hear her mother's reply.

But the girl in the room  
doesn't care. She's leaving soon  
with a man, her husband.  
It's not because he drives  
a little orange motorcycle,  
or has butter colored hair, longer than hers.  
It has nothing to do with the burning  
red zits along his jawline  
that he fingers like braille,  
each pimple pulsing,  
ready to explode.  
It's because he is a hurricane  
that will breeze out of this town.  
Just like her mother says,  
*He's going places.*

## From Man to Man, 2009

In the cream colored carpet,  
asphalt-granite counter tops,  
a house with no sounds,  
she applies the thick  
*Darkest Dark Brown*  
to her coarse white roots.  
The chemical smell sings  
her nose hair, eyes swell.

She stares in the bathroom  
mirror, large over the pearly  
his-and-her sinks.  
Her husband is at work.  
His cell phone is off,  
always gone someplace.  
A husband with a saggy,  
pale stomach. His hair fine  
like thread, gray as ash. She waits.  
Thirty minutes for the dye,  
two hours until her husband  
comes home. She stares

in the bathroom mirror  
and whispers *thirty-six*  
*years*. Somewhere  
in the house, there is a photo  
of a boy with butter colored  
hair, cut shorter than hers,  
in a black tuxedo and white  
cake cream smeared on his face.  
Somewhere in the house  
there is a photo of her  
in a wedding dress,  
staring straight into the lens.

## I Kiss Someone Else at the Party

From my desk I hear liquid dripping to the hard wood floor, steady and deliberate like a leaky faucet. The cat jumps off the bed as I scream, *no—goddammit!* You come upstairs as I'm yanking off the sheets, *she pissed on the bed*, I say. You shake your head; *let me get the baking soda*. The pee leaves the white mattress looking like a smoker's tooth. We sprinkle the Arm and Hammer over the stain. As the powder dries, it cakes and crumbles, but the stain is still there. I mix bleach and water in a spray bottle and douse the splotch. Every few hours I spray more and by night time the stain is almost gone. You rub my back, *good job, you can hardly tell*. Later that night neither of us can sleep. We both stare at the ceiling and listen to the fan whirl on low. I whisper, *I think I can still smell it*. In the darkness I see your head nod up and down, *yeah me too*.

# Abraham Moore

## Inadvertent Landscape

Two voices,

two black rectangles of voice,

one little lung, carpet.

They're changing the garbage in the lobby

behind him. I disagree.

The word doesn't do that.



## **There are Places Where We are Unwelcome**

My scapula twitched and burned like a cymbal  
the night she put her tongue in my ear.  
The room had charisma, small appliances, nice drapes.

I forget the times she called me an asshole  
And it begins to rain disfigured little faces outside.  
I worry the forecast, paltry glasswares, stomach pumps,  
I worry ticket stubs.

My lip cracks and bleeds on my beer can.  
The black walnut tree sheds all over the lawn.  
Everyone at the party smells like turpentine.

Later it feels like we're sleeping but when I close my eyes  
I wake up and all I can think of is pale skin,  
scissors, a playful thorn inside a quiet word,  
the bird outside, one squawk of possession,  
of unknowing narcissism, of breath.

## **Armed Only With Our Sense of Degradation as Human Beings**

Our hands hold the vase that holds the train together for just  
this moment before the train shatters and the clasp  
is no longer a human clasp. It's a beast, or the outline of a person,  
or the idea of a self as a shattered line of a wrecking train.

I feel like the vagrant who left the stolen bicycle on the tracks  
to derail the train while I pissed into the screaming brush.

## **We Want to Have Been**

Cormorant,  
this word of you, afterthought of stolen  
second-hand clothing, this soft public address  
concerns my lungs. You're kinked neck in flight  
spills the ghosts of Shane's open, soft hand,  
of empty Fairbanks bottles, Stephanie's  
blind eye, all over the couch. I keep slipping on them.

I wish they loved us. They used to be us:  
dissolved into stretched-out moments, eating salads.  
We lean on the barrel of nights' waiting tantrums.  
We feel, want to become, or to have been the ghosts,  
to scavenge some before-man groan of waking  
under the sad little fruit trees.

# Horizon

the small way the power lines divide the white-orange trees  
the small way of a car alarm— distant guard-rail thin, and mad  
near the overpass— a woman pulling hard on her  
own hair in the breeze-pocket of a train station

# Chris Haug

## Brueghel's *Bouquet* 1603

Deep hues of brown hold explosions  
of scarlet, pink, and eerie blue with force

enough to keep them eternally blooming,  
their leaves green now for four hundred years;

meanwhile, four envious pale-white tulips struggle  
to fully open, trying to remember the strange

taste of air back when they were just small  
dark buds fracturing the frost-covered loam.

# Behold, his Enemies Low at his Feet

*There are men here and there to whom the whole of life is like an after-dinner hour with a cigar: easy, pleasant, empty, perhaps enlivened by some fable of strife . . .*  
—Joseph Conrad

Defender of junior executives and over-forty  
gym-rats, you range wide over our jungled

streets, patrolling our every storefront ensuring  
that both bears and bulls stay safely in their dens.

Slayer of the numbskulled, you've mastered splitting  
the hairs of every hairline, no matter how humble,

for while one hand keepeth both the fire and flood  
at bay, the other gooseth the discontented housewife

even as her dough-brained husband boils  
in a hot-tub of aged bourbon, benevolently

sacrificing himself to the primitives who would have  
inevitably run off with both their fortunes

had you not been here to save them.

# Cow with Parasol

Being ogled is nothing new  
when you're a flower-loving cow  
with a furry blue face and tiny red wings,

but hiding isn't the reason  
for the parasol (in case you're  
wondering, I just like it is all).

When they passed on the path  
high above me, the sun, higher still,  
was mostly blocked, and for a moment

I felt safe—which was puzzling  
since I was sure they were looking  
and probably making silent notes

about my extravagances.  
Then, unavoidably, the sun moved,  
and I knew I'd soon see

them, and not just their silhouettes  
but everything from their ill-fitting shoes  
right down to their tar-

stained moustaches—  
and so, I'm left with no  
other choice: move on

and dream of finding a cave so dark  
you'd never know if the colorless  
moss was smiling back or snarling.

## Stiletto

*Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing . . .*

Walking up an empty downtown street,  
I'm holding a snow-white 20-ounce  
paper cup emblazoned with a fair-trade, organic  
hunter-green siren who sings herself  
into a short-skirted, six-foot-tall barista  
with sad, smoky eyes who overflows  
her corporate-issued button-up  
and weeps as she gently chokes  
the stringy neck of a grease-stained landfill  
attendant. Loosening her grip, she smiles,  
and whispers, "Maybe everything is double-edged . . ."  
Descending from the cup (or maybe,  
it's my mind, or the ocean; who can know?),  
she's now the petite, raven-haired woman  
standing beside me wearing acutely illogical pumps  
which are silver tipped and rival the skyline.  
They stab the shadows of her legs  
as she struts confidently away from me  
before pausing on the corner as the last shaft  
of sunlight disappears behind fiscal temples.  
A tiny music seems to swell as she tilts  
her head heavenward to gather  
up all of the whispers of the City of Man,  
conjuring them into a thin film  
which winds itself around her  
until she's iridescent—all fiery-black  
lipstick wrapped in feathers,  
balanced on a single limb—  
some sort of strange crane,  
a totem of pain and beauty  
perched on a lily pad  
of garbage-stained concrete.



## A Kiss on her Birthday

She can make out  
what is probably a fence  
from the corner  
of her one opened eye.  
But with only one eye open,  
she cannot be sure;  
two might better grasp  
what floats almost invisible  
under the white window shade.  
It's just like in Chagall's painting:  
see, his happiness  
doesn't need to be deduced.  
With his eyes closed  
and head twisting backward  
he's left continuity behind;  
gravity's hold holds him not.  
He's of the sublime—a gentle kite  
longing to be stuck in her tree.  
In her hand the flowers  
he bought her,  
on the table a cake,  
knife and money-purse.  
She can feel them all,  
all straining for another dimension,  
but depth is illusive.  
And that one eye,  
open and empty,  
keeps staring out at who knows what—  
not him, that's sure.  
Maybe this bothers him,  
but with his eyes closed,  
will he ever know?  
Perhaps; outside, that fence—  
it persists  
regardless  
of the cake and kisses  
and the floating husband.

# Mariah Blankenship

## Fiberglass Madonna

Barbie was in her twenties I'd say  
when we used to sew her clothes  
on your Singer look-alike  
back room of your maternal trailer  
stitching time, saving none

I'd insist on bringing her  
to the shower with us and she would  
bathe in the Amazon River Basin created  
from the drainage of your hair  
and I would braid her hair  
like your motorcycle hair sitting  
there at your ankle  
under the fall of your cleansed body

And her perfect plastic features  
were a replica of you  
reflecting in the basin  
where a Narcissus flower once bloomed  
and Adonis once bled into  
the brushed nickel drain

Even your breasts were as plastic as hers  
those same warrior breasts  
but you fell down the drain of wisdom,  
of vitality,  
a break in the river current

And Barbie was fully clothed  
when you tried to stitch yourself  
together in an institute for the imperfect,  
communicating with your Singer look-alike,  
Sexton at her typewriter

You were in your twenties, I'd say,  
when you drowned,  
Anticlea at the river

And we are bathing eternally,  
showering Madonna statue of  
mother daughter Barbie  
with your blood forever pouring over us  
Barbie, that whore, lying naked in the drain

# Lexapro Shortage

I am here to see a counselor today,  
rotten psychology stinks to high hell  
in my mind left on a shelf for 20 years  
Bring me science  
Bring me God  
Anything but psychology

We came here together once,  
you and I on the ironic love seat

I am staring at that brown seat now  
It growls at me  
I approach it like an enumerable caravan to my grave  
and startled, I turn to the black, more appropriate colored chair,  
holding the clipboard of my subconscious tight,  
like a tiger you would say

And you are no longer here  
They ask for an emergency contact now  
and my God,  
I have had an epiphany

I have no emergency contact now

Perhaps that is the worst of it  
A permanent check mark next to divorced,  
A blank next to emergency contact

They're all deceased, I say  
(euphemism for rotting in graves  
below Whitman's democratic grass  
Shut up  
This is why you are here in the first place)

And my mother is damn sure in the painting  
on the wall staring at me with an oil painted tear  
mocking me for being like her

but there's no bullet in my head  
no trickle of blood on my temple  
just an empty loveseat

# A Barren Grave, Walden Pond

I grow from the earth  
as though houses were  
formed on the eighth  
day, emerging from  
the dust like women  
built from ribs.

Emerson, I join you  
in the real houses  
of this world,  
the ones that  
envelop the bottom  
tier of gravity—  
a pyramid of pressure,  
our homes sprout  
from the dirt under  
our fingernails—  
from atoms,  
from bacteria,  
from nothing.

The earth formed  
deliberately from  
the cabin and not  
the other way  
around, Thoreau.

I am a house,  
empty,  
barren of furniture  
and my windows  
are closed,  
Venetian blinds  
shut, smiling back  
at me like Plath's  
tulips perched

on her windowsill,  
they mock me.

Still I sit,  
emerged from  
the earth like  
a cracked  
politician.

I lie to ecology.

# Emily Hyland

## The Hit

When Daiquane is eighteen years old  
and two months into his eleventh-grade year

he is hit by two chabóns who drive with intention.  
They drive a Toyota Celica, green like the trees, which

do not line the block, the trees that smell like summers  
Daiquane watches on TV. Even if there were trees

like along those downtown blocks with tulips at the roots,  
they would  
just seem invisible against the place he calls home.

Trees seem everywhere in his dreams.  
In a recurring cycle of sleep, when he still

lived with his mother and could still feel the heat  
of angry words on her breath

when she pulled the sheets over him at night,  
so soon as he would close his eyes, he would climb the pines—

besotted by limbs like ladder rungs—up  
toward some other dimension.

It is a desert of death when they are through. They have  
hit him once to knock him to the ground—

heavy teenage trunk uprooted—rims aglitter in the lamplight,  
and then turned around—

right wheels upon the curb in the sharp swing  
back towards the fallen, to cruise over



his skull and away,  
into the night,

dicks hard  
with the ache of adrenaline.

## Gray Matter

I finish reading Bessie's murder out loud  
on the day I get assaulted at school.

There is a sudden hand-to-weave hair-fight  
that descends upon the classroom

over an inadvertent brush-by  
in the doorway over lip gloss

and then I try to talk one girl  
off the ledge of this mania—

we are in a putrid corner of the hallway now—  
my white arms out long

to lock her away from all of this  
misdirected fury, and

her hands lunge into my chest  
magnetize and stick

while a dewy, halcyonic mist  
blurs action from cognition.

And it's not the falling back as much as  
the way the flesh of my breasts inverts

under the heels of her Dorito-licked hands  
and the furnace-minded charge of

*that* anger,

which meets me  
through the muscle-jolt

of a girl who lacks  
plain agency:

*that* makes my feet lose the floor  
and topple.

I hear some communal  
gasp; someone whispers

“She pushed *Ms. Emily*”  
and their eyes say

I am more sacrosanct  
than the girl who is

bleeding from her skull-skin  
in the other room

or the other in front of me  
who they can already barely see

anymore. This truculent breast-push  
is the apogee of violence in my life—

Bigger’s hands slide  
onto Mary’s rum-beat

breasts, his hands  
touch Bessie’s breasts,

resigned. Her hands slam  
mine, so that

she is Bigger and  
I am Mary and Bessie

and I am Bigger, too, and she  
is Mary and Bessie

and she  
and I

just tumble into a cycle

of perpetual subjugation

that stretches across  
a span of score in which

we are all perpetrators  
because of what we are born into

and trapped by the prophesy  
that contains each iota

of our  
inevitable lives.

# I'd Had A Long Day

1.

In the basement, the Haitian kid and the Jamaican kid finally had it out for their countries. As beef patties flew around the cafeteria like saucers, the Haitian kid and the Jamaican kid fused and rolled into the hallway.

The half-dressed throngs from the locker rooms and sweaty jerseys from the gym spilled forth by way of intuition and chatter; they salivated for the primacy of action. The whole building turned in and over itself; children sluiced down the stairwells towards inevitable circumstance.

By the time the school safety agents rounded up and lollied down like a troop of Shakespearian boobies, enough time had passed for the wheels to have stopped. And when they neared the Haitian kid and the Jamaican kid, motion was already invisible.

In the epicenter was a mess of stress, and the agents stiffened up at the sight. One child dialed 9-1-1 on his cell, but reception was poor in the basement and his voice too still for the responder.

When the EMT crew did descend upon the spot, the gym teacher stood up from holding in the blood somewhere along the curve where neck meets shoulder, where the scissors still stuck in. His clothes looked like sheets of symmetrical inkblots. He looked—in his sweatpants—as if he had just emerged from messily painting a house.

After lockdown, after the coroner packed the Jamaican kid into a bag and stole out of the school in a whisper, and after the news cameras

snuck glances through the windows into  
our emergency faculty meeting,  
I found myself glazed on the train platform at Utica.

2.

Two young brothers and their younger sister walk past me.  
Their sneakers blink red each time their feet hit the  
concrete, except  
the sister's, which blink pink and silver glitter. We are all  
near the end of the platform and the air is dank. I've had a  
long day,  
and I think that to myself while rubbing my eyes  
with my fingers as the kids walk by.

The boys stop on either side of their sister. They  
look like her bodyguards. They stand on the bumpy yellow strip,  
which is too close to the platform edge. They are not  
her bodyguards. She is little. I think  
she is good at math. They eye each other and then  
grab their sister, one brother at each of her arms. She is  
squirming, but they hold strong, inching  
closer to the rim. They start to hold her over.

Her feet are trying for the edge, pointing down and  
straining back. I've had enough today. I  
muster up the teacher voice. "Excuse me, gentlemen,"  
I say. "Put her down. Right. Now.  
Don't think I won't ride home with you  
and tell your mother what just went on."

They are back on the platform now, all feet  
on concrete. I say, "Stand by the wall." Their sister  
slides towards me. The older of the brothers  
pulls her back by the handle of her Dora knapsack.

"Young man!" My voice is shrill like my mother  
when we climbed too high in the pine trees.  
"*Do not touch her again.*"  
"Whatchu gonna do bout it?"  
I am red as that puddle near the gym now.

“Come here and stand with me,” I say to her. “My name is Emily.”  
The younger brother is looking down at his shoes now.

The other one  
goes on, “Miss Emily, see—we Bloods. My boy Pumpkin gonna  
fuck you up. We gonna ride the train  
and follow *you* home.”

He holds up a machine gun made of the air and  
chouk-chouk-chouk-chouk-chouks me  
with the fantastic spray of his imagination.

After the gunfire subsides, I look him in the eyes.  
“I know what I’m gonna do with you,” I say.  
I gently put my tote bag on the ground. “Fuck  
off already lady,” he whines.

We are only a foot apart. He is small, around seven. I  
lunge in, lift him hard under the armpits, and walk him  
to the platform edge.

I can feel the grooves  
of the yellow strip beneath my feet like  
root-knolls on a trail. I can feel rushes of blood  
surge into my elbows as his weight tests my arms,  
outstretched.

I can feel the humid breeze from the tunnel  
hit my wicked face as nearing headlights  
expose the rusty tracks below us.

## To Ms. Olds

When I am writing in my room  
I leaf through a womb of yours  
crawl into the purplish bruise  
and hope my thoughts turn lucid,  
that this femininity waxes meaningful,  
that I am bleeding ovaries, that  
I talk to my children in dreams  
where I am running through ferns  
to discover them inside me someday.  
That I had sex, too, and practiced  
speaking of this pastoral body.  
I find some space of yours  
in a splash of blood; your sister  
peed on you—my sister's head hit  
the coffee table spinning  
and I was soaked. It seemed like  
pomegranates exploded into rain  
and she was dripping. I laughed  
at my father when he cried and sat  
with my mother over *her* cottage cheese  
and disorders, watched her slam a feeble  
fist into the glass atop the kitchen table  
because I wouldn't use a fork  
to eat my sushi. I am a part  
of this Freudian demeanor—the long hair  
down my spine like man-o-war tendrils  
ready to shock or choke any toucher,  
the glasses that keep me one wall  
from my meeting Baudrillard—  
this poetry is a matrix of movers  
and your speaker is some  
anthropomorphic women  
trapped on the page like  
the woman in the yellow  
hedges of insomnia, crazed  
she didn't have the audacity to jump.



## February 29<sup>th</sup>

It was early. I was standing  
on the platform at 72<sup>nd</sup> street

waiting for the 1 train to arrive. I was  
reading about meeting the things

that scare you. The book was  
blue with a black trim

and the first page had a pleasurable texture  
and was patterned in an interlocking chain

that made it look like wrapping paper  
one might use

to wrap a bottle of scotch  
for a grandfather

or journal for a  
nascent father.

The train flew in  
and a man standing

too close to the platform edge let himself  
fall in front of it. He twisted

to lie back against  
the face of the train for a moment

so he could hold a new perspective  
and then tumbled under

as the train lurched into  
the stillness of the emergency.

All women on the platform  
started screaming. I

started screaming. I started screaming  
from some place inside

that doesn't even discern  
the why of it. I felt

a shock of silver  
shoot down

through my organs  
as if my body set off a flash

and my memory  
snapped a picture of the feeling

to store in the place that  
registers the viscerals.

I kept looking around hoping  
to see someone I knew to share

in the fear of it all  
and when nobody registered

I hugged my book against  
my breast so tightly that

my fingers were cold  
when I released. I heard

the conductor's voice  
over the loud speaker indicate

there were delays on  
the 1 train and that

the express train,  
whose doors were open

across the platform,  
would run local. I walked into

an almost empty car  
and a woman with sunglasses on

and green hospital scrubs  
hugged me into her arms

and rubbed my back. She  
sat me down. She kept

repeating “It’s okay. Calm  
down. It’s okay.” The train

was there as  
a sitting room. His

body seemed  
to collapse

into the moment of its death  
as if it knew relief

was coming. There was  
no fear in his posture, nor

steadfastness in his spine. He  
fell like a limp fish. His coat

was olive and beige and  
his blue jeans looked flaccid like water.

I did not look into the woman’s eyes  
who consoled me. I did not ask

her name. I said “I need to go up  
to the street,” and I walked

towards the stairs. I had been waiting  
at the end of the platform

for the back of the train  
so had to walk

the length of the suicide  
in order to exit. People

were crowded around where  
the man was under the train wheels

trying to peer into his life.  
All of the people exited the train.

They wore blank expressions  
through the doors and did not know

the reason for the abrupt end  
to their journey. Nobody was

in control. Some new commuters  
were walking onto the platform.

The express train left. I walked  
onto the street and called Matt

right away. I was sobbing and hiccupping  
among the suits. I told him

I loved him and then  
walked the 12 blocks up to work.

# Sam Pittman

## Growth Memory

A cluster of hungry cells on my chest racks a bill  
Fit to pay for a martyr's resurrection. Conjecture  
Alone could prove my innocence. Hive mind of the body.

My body is not my body when the hill is still raised  
In my skin's memory. I'm poised, aching to pick  
At phantom cancer, wanting to have hoed this row myself

But knowing one must unthink such ambition. To myself  
I've mailed a letter, no return address. What works is to pick  
A font I've never used. Anyway, I was raised

On shirtless pleas in cardboard California, where a body  
Is worth what it can sell. But forgetting's all conjecture.  
Besides, I'm in the mirror when the envelope arrives. It's a bill.

## Another Stupid Question

Did the doctors sedate her or had she drugged herself?  
The toaster starts talking in tongues and even I know  
to risk a burnt ear to listen. The papers mention battle  
but when the woman, a learned dropout, comes to,  
she'll see signs meaning bottle. Had she read more  
Agatha than Emily she would have said I *imagined it*,  
said I was *seeing things*. Her monument in the closet,  
a box the color of potatoes, or so many crushed insects,  
or her memory the sound of a cannon traced in midair.

*The lines "said I imagined it, / said I was seeing things" are borrowed from Agatha Christie's Three Act Tragedy: "What does Mrs. Dacres say?" "Says I imagined it. Says I was 'seeing things.'"*

# Imaginary Vigil for My Mother

In the city they go on about marriage.  
The three-walled studio, a hollow darkroom

Where the same negative outlives each new bite  
Of the shutter. 1: Tawny couch with hemp blankets.

2: Tented blankets of hemp over tawny couch. 3: Hemp  
Blanketed, couch tawny. A swingtop full of vodka

Prisming the light before it reaches the urn.  
She made sure to say this and that was vulgar.

If she knew I lived in the city and went on  
About marriage, went on about marriage, went

On and on about marrying another man, surely,  
*Surely*, this or that bottle would be close to empty.

# Daily Burial

I am the urn  
itself. As I wane  
my cells eat  
me up. Deep  
belly pocket  
hordes my body  
in long quiet  
vigil. Hunger of  
phagocyte  
army sucking  
poison for good.  
What prayer  
stops intent  
burn or flood  
in dark empty  
porcelain neck?  
Flick of fast  
dream ghost  
from in my  
boiling bellies.  
Again the rote  
swallow, sweep.  
Again, blind  
mouth, again.



## A Brother's Love

We'll see what holds your interest.  
I'll lock the front, you the back,  
making sure to leave no hair,

pubic, otherwise, or prints.  
Take the pillow, whatever  
you want to call it, to rest

the feet, the head: we don't want  
you overworked. Remember  
the betting system? For all

we know this never happened.  
When everyone leaves, you can  
clean the room so it's ready.

# Alex Linden

## Family Tree Says:

Our ancestors cannot be touched. They sleep  
with lights blaring. Their bodies  
become centripetal, moving always toward  
their houses of death. The snap  
of their flat shoes against wood mimics  
each floating moment:

a horse gives birth to twins and vibrates  
feverishly. Her body's cadence sends  
my grandfather into a panic: his truck careens  
into a ditch. He quits downing brown  
liquor in the afternoon.

What I'm trying to say is that  
clocks sync predictably.

My mother grew in the country, in  
the country's country, embedded in a field  
of corn or a mine. In the aching farm  
house the dogs could not quit mouthing  
their versions of truth.

Look: either this is true or it isn't.

One day a man entered my mother's house, axe  
in hand, copper-handed, hands like glass  
or a spider unwinding. The German Shepherd sank  
into him from behind.  
In that moment she wasn't a dog.

Family Tree says: apparitions become real  
once they are spoken of.

This man became my father  
or a ghost or both. He became  
a transient I knew in Tempe, Arizona. The hot  
crackle of that state melted his shoes. He became  
a transient I knew in Dallas or Oklahoma and  
he spoke with a lilt. He became so transient

that in his disappearance clocks whined  
and refused to be wound. Lights moved as animals; blue  
ness became obsolete. The ground under  
my feet soared upward like a chime and I  
only knew concrete things: pendulums click trochaic, loop  
always back to simple paths.

# The Blues of In-Between

A woman flicks  
a pinch of hair between her lips  
every 28 seconds.  
I am counting the interval  
and I can't stop.  
On the bus I am trying to decode family signs  
but there is no clicking, no machinery.  
Finally, in a deafening moment  
something prompts a recollection:

father throws tennis shoes onto the ruddy porch  
(thank God sister isn't too heavy to carry).  
I can punch the wall if a person deserves punching.  
(Keep the doors locked and we might be fine).  
Our tires are slashed in the theatre parking lot.  
(Mother says *mother* but won't finish the word).

On the bus I anticipate  
this hair-eating woman like a downbeat.  
I know her like myself  
if I were to misplace my teeth.  
She grinds those exposed bones like a ritual.  
Her daughter is eight, obese, she's  
combed her own hair into two neat pigtails.  
She offers her doll to everyone.

This bus is going to:  
a. Disneyland  
b. The neighborhoods we grew up in (we're too good for  
them now).  
c. the white and violent blocks we assume  
will stress fracture our feet.

In another world, mother brushes her teeth  
an hour per day.  
She says *People are judged by the shape of their mouths,*  
*as a woman you must accept this in order to move up, and out.*

## Body Murmur

What luck to live  
next to a harpist,  
to learn through symbiosis  
the callus behind the nail  
and the trail of the fingers,  
brush of nylon or wire.  
I was so busy counting the specks  
of dust in the atmosphere  
which attach to a droplet  
and freeze in their descent  
that I forgot to call it *snow*  
and lost the concept of any name,  
of any drifting through my window.  
Yet even after winter's release  
I begged for a moment whose atoms  
could not materialize,  
and when I knew you, those bending  
strings across my ribcage, had gone  
I got going on myself,  
yet held this hereditary  
pathogen, some incalculable integer,  
and it pulsed forth a blood-born  
murmur, rushed from your chest  
toward a stethoscope, through my window,  
through my chest.

# Trading Sacrifices

1.

As a child I watch her stop traffic.

May brings indelicate heat.  
The ground cracks into a puzzle.

We walk hand in hand  
through the parking lot  
of a grocery store named Smitty's.

The butcher is in love with my mother,  
he is getting a divorce.  
I think about this as he meticulously cuts meat.

I see words as shapes, hear names and picture foods.  
His name, David, is pepperoni.

I am some type of pasta  
and Diana is cantaloupe.

We are playing this game in the parking lot  
and David turns to wave goodbye.

Distracted, I do not see the car barrel toward me.  
My wrist becomes a rope.  
I turn in time to see her shoulder jam  
into the side of a stranger's car.

2.

At twenty-four I watch her fall.  
I am driving across the Great Plains.

Last night after I heard she swallowed a bottle of pills  
I lapped whiskey from the bottle.

The only time I cry is when I think of the Mormons  
who touched oil to my head, a gift from a friend.

I do think of this, and the car nearly flies  
from the road.

I clutch the can in my hand and it is her shoulder.  
It cuts my palm.

From this moment forward I can't remember  
much of the drive, except the barrels of hay  
rising up from each hill like roughened knuckles,  
drumming the beats of our collision.

# Retroverted Uterus

When the baby came all  
pale and thin flecks  
of cotton floated through  
the air and I told the girl  
all of my names. I asked  
my husband to fill his  
hands with the drifting  
cotton but he said  
its texture, like that of  
chalk, would render him  
weak and queasy.  
I recalled, then, the time  
I almost fell in love  
with someone else:  
the next day  
I puked until my stomach  
bruised, until I could  
feel my abdomen growing  
taut and southward, pushing  
my uterus into its compliant  
position—crowding it  
up against my spine. When  
I explained my situation  
to the male gynecologist  
he told me I should quit  
sit-ups and nausea and focus  
more on cardio, and my child.  
Even still, sometimes when I hold  
my daughter I feel my uterus  
nudging along my vertebrae  
and for the life of me  
I cannot decide if it's a threat  
or a dance.



# Creating Distances and Asteroids

She leapt too soon.  
In Amsterdam I pretended her death.  
I slept not alone but scattered across the hotel.  
I left notes: bobby pins, straws,  
a man and a pink bra.

I pretended as the plane touched down.  
I worried about papers to grade.  
She wouldn't set foot on a plane,  
didn't trust the churning  
in the air and under her feet.

Did I admire suicide until my mother  
tried it on?  
In the weeks after her scattered pills  
I imagined her carrying oyster shells,  
shucking them bare-handed, loving  
a pearl, loving a cut finger—but no,  
that was me in New Orleans eating  
the aphrodisiac, drinking the aphrodisiac  
with a solid man who didn't  
know my mother.

She leapt too soon.  
Is she touching down now?  
In Tucson I remembered her birthplace.  
I buried the thought of her and wandered  
the tired desert.  
Fallen spines cracked under my feet, permeated  
the dual soles.  
I pretended in every corner of the world,  
lapped up her sickness  
and let it become molasses.

•

Sometimes I awake at 3 a.m  
and see that an asteroid

has grown between my teeth.

I spit—just softly—and watch it sink  
deep into the ground between us.

# Bobby Lynn Taylor

## Lift

The component of the total aerodynamic force acting on an airfoil or on an entire aircraft or winged missile perpendicular to the relative wind and normally exerted in an upward direction, opposing the pull of gravity: lift. (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/lift>)

When the air above moves faster than the air below: lift.

I'm shaping my wings, now that spring is here, I don't fear the cold as much: lift.

And when those voices say that I am trapped in some yesterday, when they crowd in on me while dancing in their Easter clothes: lift.

Drive me down into the ground? No. I've grown there before; I've torn out my roots running from that hammer on my head. The faces, the tiny me in retreat, No, that will not work: lift.

Whether it be Jesus or Buddha or Ginsberg or Hank Williams or Van Gogh; or coffee or masturbation or calculations or predestination: lift.

With big metal forks that move under two ton palates wanting them placed somewhere else; the hydraulics working, the battery sending out its power to the point of transference: lift.

And these anti-humans, with their bloat and their blame, blasting past the gospels in their chariots of gold leaf—trying to impress the crowd—they notice if you're loud: lift.

Lift me out  
by my own power  
in these last hours  
of bondage to, through, and true—  
Lift me, Sift me, Riff me like a jazz break on a Saturday night  
with nothin' left to lose  
nothin' but the blues  
and a whole lot of chains around my neck and back and ears and nose and  
mouth  
Lift  
Lift  
Lift

# Neon

twenty-five gallons of vanilla ice-cream  
40,000 freckles  
six ounces of orange hair  
I stood out  
so clean, so white, so perfect  
straight A's in math and science  
but not p.e., or english, or history  
don't ask me to remember correctly  
or to live in my body  
and you won't be disappointed  
the things I remember clearly  
are private

still

the deacons's daughter  
maybe thirteen  
I wanted in a wholesome way  
until

the deacon's son  
told me how  
he had sex with his sister  
when they were alone  
I believed him  
I did not think of it  
as incest  
or rape

then

I wanted her more  
when I learned that  
she was dirty  
like me  
I did not have to pretend to be righteous  
anymore  
I wanted to see her holy naked sin  
that's all I could think about  
for years  
I was ashamed  
I had been  
so

naive

she chose my best friend  
sat by him  
during church  
I still wanted her  
when I was pumping  
the girl  
who gave me  
accommodating  
sex  
she wasn't bad  
she just wasn't  
wrong  
enough  
I fed the lust  
neon  
liquor, lies, dope, and smoke  
sunday morning spirit  
saturday night binges  
with guitar  
philosophy  
prophecy  
olympic drinking  
I pressed my brain  
into a vice  
of throbbing  
flesh  
a light, at long lost love last  
sin into zen  
I graduated my body  
through the bedrooms  
I needed  
to qualify me  
if I ever  
found myself  
alone  
with the deacon's daughter again  
she sent me a friend request  
last night  
lit up in cyber  
neon

# Red

Jammer-slammed and welded  
    into the air  
    fire sand invisible to the human eye  
Watch the velmen hide  
    and sleep 'til the storm passes

I cared too much  
I tried to give you my arm  
    for a pillow  
    for a shelter

We both were lost  
    breathing in the red  
    exhaling our ghosts into the sidewalk

it doesn't mean  
it shouldn't mean  
it has to mean

This is the end of our  
    carbon date  
The particles are infusing now  
    adhering to the helix  
    changing our DNA  
    blisters of gold are rising up on the inside of our  
veins

This is the curse of the high country  
    when the air is tripped  
    on a wire  
    -set for measuring fools

Fools who are only ignorant  
of the symnabolic rattle of synotics  
rebut the robaakan  
rhindal the wrecautious

We have regumed our lungs with Red

# It is Opening

Out in the streets

shouting

into vacant cracks of midnight

dust and garbage

piled up in a scab

gray scaly skin

breaking apart

the ground up

the living veins

sleeping beast wakes

we thought dead

It is opening

all those who know the power

are praising the day

stopping

putting off

letting go

the corporate kings go without

for a while

Let

them

wait

It will be a while

before they realize we are missing anyway

the managers will notice

try and make everyone stop rushing

to the portal

Then

when that fails

they fear for their jobs

run to tell their bosses

Bosses

sleeping off

last night's feast of fools



They get rich when it is closed  
but it is opening

It is opening  
a vagina stretching out  
making ready to deliver  
bread                      meat                      wine  
to people  
living  
on      corporate cans  
of potted meat  
left over from butcher parties

# D. Ellis Phelps

## Five Poems

i

i wake  
the night

screaming

in this house:

a man  
—my father—  
stands

where he  
should not  
be in

the door  
—a sheath  
—a sheet

covering

~

i wake  
the night

screaming

in this house:

he  
—coming—

in the front

door

not locked

not safe

not sane

—memory

exhumed

~

i wake

the night

screaming

in this house:

a child

—myself—

beside me

*get the poker*

i say

*from the fire*

*go!*

(because i

know because

i know)

~

but she

—an aqualung

unplugged—

does not go

~

i wake  
the night

screaming

in this house:

my mother  
—a knife  
on the stand—

and me

in the bed  
by the wall

—a number  
i should call

ii

i have mown  
this lawn

& set sprinklers  
out—sentinels

stepping off  
each inch

this staccato stitch  
—banal bliss

~

sun slants across  
this clean cut

& satisfied  
i sit—cold

concrete blessing

my skin

~

in the kitchen  
—my mother

singing—

though hers  
is not

a fresh wound

the hen  
she fries

still bleeds

~

at the table:

sweet tea  
white bread

crisp    silence

~

is this  
the night

my lungs  
unplugged

her body    hurled  
her head

—a thud

~

& i    awake  
      a witness

unwilling

iii

in the kitchen  
by the door

to the den  
blue cabinets

where you keep  
whiskey

— decanted  
in cut crystal

its lid—a ball  
round & cool

in my small hand

~

before you  
come in

my mother  
and i

sometimes singing  
sometimes silence

~

today she is tired  
so i sit having tea

with dolls

(white  
lace—worn

with time

tiny pearls  
holding

fragile folds)

~

the back door  
sucks open

*what will it be  
this time*

~

blue cabinets  
by the door

to the den

— reach in  
swig the brew

take the sip  
that changes

you



iv

november comes

a flush  
of cadmium &

sky

this month  
—you said

i do

the two of you  
certain of love

~

november comes

this sun  
—a low southern

slant  
warming age

spotted skin

& i  
am captive

of this  
stiletto:

the night  
you slammed  
her head

(it was

something  
she said)

and would not  
stop the cabinets  
—clapboard—

slapped blue

dark brown hair  
—a wad  
in your hand

~

november comes

this scene  
—indelible:

a child's chair  
(for tea with dolls)

split in half  
flat

& i'm  
at your feet

on my knees

*please please*  
*daddy please*

v

you sit—slumped  
elbows at right  
angles    your thick hands  
in folds across your broad chest

sock-hatted  
head    nodding

these days    you sleep  
in this chair (the nights—  
too long)

*last night i paced  
the floor all night*

you say  
*all night*  
you say

again

as if my ears  
could ease

your pain  
i lean    closer

*i'm sorry*    i whisper

weak words that break  
in my mouth (*i can't help you  
i wish i could*)

*you don't give a shit about me*  
you say

and though i do    i tell you    i do  
*i do    daddy    i love you*

you've snapped

& there is no  
going back

# Alia Neaton

## Cosmogony I

History tells us we  
Climbed from the slime of  
Phoenicia, dripping with  
Disease and burning for  
Change. In the cradle of  
Civilization, deep  
Ridges above our eyes,  
We poured in what we  
Could learn of the world,  
Of how it was, we thought,  
Thought of how it could be.  
We couldn't be stopped  
Until the Fertile Crescent bulged  
With words written, with  
The glitter of glass, the spin  
Of a rough wheel. We  
Began in the womb of the  
World, where subspecies  
Died until progress rose and  
Stood on shaky legs and  
Surveyed the land and the  
Scope of the sea and then  
Wondered about it all.  
What we believe dies  
In flame, rises. History  
Repeats to the scourge of  
Sons. As soon as man saw  
Man, they started fighting.

Soft glow, microscopic  
Scaffold, double  
Helix—our computed  
Code: programming  
Madness. The sun burns as

It falls behind New Jersey.  
An Eastern Seaboard awash  
With anger and sweat and the  
Sting of the sea. When we dig  
Into our past, we discover  
Secrets. When we find  
Truth, we are changed.  
When we change, we burn.

## Cosmogony II

In the lounge of the  
Aurora House on  
47th Street,  
Commemoration  
In art of those lost  
To AIDS. A prayer  
Wall of wounds, long gashes  
Bleeding one into  
The other. Each slip  
Exposing someone  
Else's precious memory.  
A massive wall of  
Wishes, a wall holding  
Up hope and despair,  
Cracked plaster beneath  
Broken bows of remembrance,  
Of a community unloading  
Their heavy hearts so that,  
One-by-one,  
They may be lifted.

## Cosmogony III

Snow blotches  
Spectral ground,  
The stubborn,  
Icy piles  
Squatting still,  
Reluctant  
To let spring  
In. A rat  
Streaks across  
The alley,  
Over scraps  
Of paper,  
Glass, and the  
Old tire-tread  
Remains of  
Another rat.  
A woman  
Stands, shadowed,  
Inside her  
Screen door. Smoke  
Curls from her  
Cigarette,  
While the white  
Cheshire moon  
Smirks in the  
Sky, trailed by  
Two glowing  
Planets—a  
Kite tail of  
Jupiter  
And Venus,  
Frozen ten,  
Only ten,  
Degrees a  
Part in, a  
Part of the  
Celestial



Curtain that  
Encloses  
Us from the  
Brittle chill  
Of boundless,  
Blackened  
Horizon.

## Cosmogony IV

A world away from me,  
My blood burns in the sand.

A city in shambles and a family of one  
Stand still on a dusty morning.

The blue sky lays shrouded in grey  
And the streets are silent and strange.

Since yesterday's dusk, the storm raged on.  
Now the city doesn't know her face.

There was a display outside.  
Did we feel safe behind walls?

Across our city, a fire blazed,  
And structures crumbled and fell.

The glass balcony glowed red,  
Refracted auburn streaks shimmered,

Distorted on the panes.  
Deep garnet splashed the bedroom  
Bathing us in shades of fire and blood.

## Cosmogony V

In what was a sunlit dining room,  
The arc of time snaps.

As sure as I feel the smooth  
Finish of wood table beneath  
My hand, I know it is not  
Real. A tangle of atoms  
Held together by the mind  
And what the mind conceives  
As a table.

In what was a Tuesday afternoon,  
Oak splinters and fades.

Raw matter bursts  
Beneath my fingers—  
Spectrum of color  
And radiance, rays  
Exploding outward,  
Dissolving the impression  
Of world around it. It is terrible and  
Beautiful, the nature of this world.  
The primal bay of anguish rises:  
I cannot conceive a reality without him.  
But then, I cannot conceive this reality at all.

# Elisa Albo

## Each Day More

*for Alexander Standiford*

How do we negotiate  
this one, the utter fragility  
between here and gone,  
the thinnest filament?  
An eighteen-year-old,  
your youngest, the baby  
you carried, fed with  
your mother fingers,  
your father hands,  
the boy you photographed  
to capture and keep still,

present. How you fussed  
and worried, driving him  
to games, movies so many  
lessons, to college, away,  
into the world. How do we  
carry on? How do we look  
into your mother eyes, your  
father face, the sibling hearts?

His life loomed large with yours,  
buoyed by books art food drink,  
by the laughter we gathered  
each August of his life  
to welcome new students  
with the old. Then we entered

your home not in summer,  
to a space suspended  
between the ache of the gravel  
driveway and the blades

of grass in the backyard,  
the chill of the pool water  
and the shade on the rooftop  
patio, leaving us poised

with pain in air we're made  
to breathe, untethered,  
as if the gravity that holds  
each child to the earth  
has lost some of its force,  
and there is too much sky,  
each day more.

# Artie

Accountant. A startled bird, the word  
escaped three times the next day,  
flit from the radio, dropped out  
of the mouth of a salesman, then  
from a stranger in the street. I didn't  
want to hear it. I didn't want to know  
of numbers—bills, taxes. His age: 46.  
Three, his children: 16, 12, 9. The date,  
the last day of Passover, forever  
marked in the Blackberry mind  
like birthdays on or near deaths—  
my sister's next to my grandmother's,  
my daughter's on my cousins'—  
or like the ages one holds one's breath  
to pass over, those regular doves,  
because my grandfather didn't and  
my uncle didn't and my cousins  
who flew suddenly, their skin still  
smooth. I don't want to hear of numbers,  
calculators, balances. A moth taps  
on my bathroom window, trapped  
when I closed it earlier. Debit, credit.  
If I crank it open, I'll wake the sleeping.  
If I don't, it will die, sooner. Too soon.  
The last time I saw Artie was at our nephew's  
bar mitzvah, November 17<sup>th</sup>. Thirteen.  
Three times that weekend—Saturday  
morning service, evening celebration,  
Sunday brunch. He and I stood in  
my brother's living room, spoke of his  
daughter, 12. Her three black belts.  
She played with my daughter, 5.  
I don't want to know of numbers,  
parties, food, though I made a cake  
to take to his house, their house  
minus one. To make the cake,  
separate four eggs, measure a cup  
of sugar, a half cup of cocoa, set the oven  
temperature, the timer, for . . . how long?

## Hurricane Sandy, 2012

Perhaps she dreams they are swimming,  
propelled by waves that collected them

from her arms, small legs kicking to stay  
afloat now that they've learned to swim

the waters of Staten Island. They are thrilled,  
as children are when they learn to swim,

to read, to ride a bike. Holding hands,  
the four-year-old protective of the two-year-old—

that's how she sees them when she wakes,  
when she walks through the neatness

of emptiness and half expects to find  
small forms on their big boy beds, blankets

kicked off, so that she'll enter quietly, navigate  
toys strewn on the floor, cover their bodies.

She used to run her hand across the forehead  
of one, the curly hair of the other, and smile,

thinking, They're beautiful when they sleep.  
With their births, she became a light sleeper,

listening for a cry, a cough, for her name.  
At the grocery store, she reaches for cereal,

moves past apple juice boxes. Driving home,  
she sees neighbors still cleaning up after

the storm, clearing debris, repairing homes.  
For many, the lights have come back on.

Inside her house, she rests her head against  
a window frame. Where are the small, bright

faces that so resemble hers? She waits for  
a faint knock on the door, to open it, to find them

before her, a little taller, wet, so happy to see her.



## ***The Pianist, Final Scene***

Once again he sits at the piano in the Polish radio station,  
the studio wood shiny and intact, no bombs exploding,  
no plaster dust falling or young men diving for cover.

Once again he sits at the piano, tall and clean shaven,  
healthy. The waterfalls and rustling leaves of Bach fly  
from his fingers, filling the air with their light, the sound

engineer behind glass, smiling, rapt. Once again he is  
playing this piano. When a friend he hasn't seen since before  
the war enters, the pianist, still playing, looks over, smiles

a joyful greeting that, unlike the notes, fades, gradually  
saddens to include the faces of his mother, his father,  
a brother, two sisters who listened and laughed each day

as he played in their home, who perished in the camps  
while he ran, hid, froze, starved nearly to death, and once  
again plays on the radio and in concert halls for survivors.

# Terezin

1997

The camp sits empty now. Knots of tour groups peer into dusty barracks, glance at communal toilets, over stone walls rising from a dry moat that never defended a thing or being. Along the paths between buildings,

gravel cracks, crunches. The noise wrecks the air, my ears, the inner barracks of my heart each time I step like stepping on bones, graves—who knows in this dust what remains? Ushered into a low building we scurry

through a long, narrow passage and abruptly out to, the guide informs, *the very spot where people were shot*. I look down to my feet. I want to rise above the ground, to not step anywhere. During the war,

did Red Cross workers who visited this *model* camp an hour east of Prague believe the Nazi propaganda film, makeshift stores, soccer games and cheering crowds were real? Stopping at a memorial that holds

a fistful of soil from other camps, Sara, a young woman from New York, bends down for a stone to place on the marble and in a parallel gesture, I bend with her, as I've done at my grandmother's grave, to remember . . .

*yisgadal, v'yisgadash, sh' may rabo* . . . the Kaddish spills from my lips, first lines, all I recall of the Hebrew prayer for the dead. I rush out of the compound—past rows of bright white crosses, Stars of David,

bunches of red carnations like thousands of small explosions or individual burning bushes in front of each unnamed marker—into the parking lot past food stands, tourists eating candy and rapidly

dissolving ice cream, cameras strung from their necks. The floor in the Terezin Museum is carpeted, voices hushed. Galleries split with partitions display pictures and papers—an edict, a warning, several orders, plans,

charts, drawings, photographs, records, so many careful records naming victims, giving them faces, people who passed through trains to Belzec, Chelmo, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, and *Osvetim*, Czech for Auschwitz,

everything typed up, written down, catalogued, thoroughly documented, as if someone someday would need to know exactly to whom, precisely when, where, how many . . . why? On a monitor in several galleries, an elderly woman

recounts her days in Terezin, her words close captioned in English for the multitudes of tourists, many of whom sigh, having had enough of death and despair for one day. But the videotape is on a loop—she cannot stop telling her story.

# Noah B. Salamon

## Sanctuary

Of an empty bed  
small and cool and neat  
of a pillow

I used to hide there

Of the swish of skin on cotton  
of the ticking of the old clock  
of the corner, all wall

Of the way the floor creaked  
sudden pops, like some remote glacier

Of the shivering radiator pipes  
beginning with the merest shake

Of a vibration, something so small  
of a metallic whisper, miles below ground

Of tiles that glow white in the darkness  
like ghostly lilies, floating

Of the bathtub, looming white  
of the chipped wood desk

Of the dark, full of frights  
and comfort

# Memorial

Something needs mending  
something always does

Things wear and fray and  
wear out

Things rustle and stir in  
this ashy darkness, things  
creak and moan and finally give

See, what I have left are  
bits of conversation, glances and

moments left behind  
like old letters  
in a faded box

# New York Story

I came to New York once, for three months  
to watch you die, slowly

in hospital beds, then in our apartment,  
rented month by month, three months  
past our wedding day

The stores had different names  
but sold the same things—

the sympathy cards, like fallen leaves  
the commerce of despair—

I tried to walk on the surface  
like a Jesus bug  
drowning if I fell

I let the days move by in splashes  
I saw the contradictions

Still, I said only  
we'll see, we'll see

# The Ark

The beasts are rollicking again:  
The tigers have stolen a carcass

The alligators loll uncomfortably  
on wide planks  
and ache for mud.

To put it starkly:  
The giraffes are cramped.

The best is just chaos  
here in these floating days.

Two doves have returned—  
one bearing branches—

But still they float.

“It’s stopped raining, you know!”  
“We should never have come!”  
“Why did you bring us?”

Meanwhile below,  
In the death-gray hull,  
The man with the cottony beard,  
The unruly eyes, the shock of gauzy hair,  
Sits solemnly in his threadbare robe

And thinks about a promise he made.

# Where I Am From

Honeysuckle green leaves and  
sun glinting through pine

Damp dirt and the smell of heat  
rising off pavement like  
the whisper of ocean through a shell

A memory of rain-slick streets  
black mirrors of neon and steam

the faint electric pulse

Of wooden decks in the fading sun  
black and white baseball and  
the rising whine of crickets as evening comes

Of pale beer in parking lots  
where crabgrass grew through cracked asphalt

One night, when I was just a boy,  
we drove and drove  
until silent through summer darkness  
moths like stars whizzing by  
back of the station wagon, roomy and warm

Nobody else around

I rolled down the window and breathed in  
The distant smell of sea



## Contributor Notes

**Elisa Albo**'s chapbook, *Passage to America*, is now available as an e-book. Born in Havana and raised in central Florida, her poems have appeared in *Alimentum*, *Bomb*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *InterLitQ*, *Irrepressible Appetites*, *The Potomac Journal*, *Tigertail: A South Florida Annual*. She recently completed *To Sweeten the Flesh*, a collection of food poems, and teaches English and ESL at Broward College. She lives with her husband and daughters in Ft. Lauderdale, FL.



**Mariah Blankenship** received a Bachelors in English from Radford University and a Masters of Education. She currently teaches Creative Writing and English in Virginia where she lives with her tiny Yorkie and bearded boyfriend. She likes to read depressing feminist literature while watching trash reality television.



**Suzanne Burns** likes to write about kumquats. Poems from this Sixfold contest round will soon appear as part of a chapbook from Finishing Line Press called *The Portland Poems*. She is currently working on a short story collection called *Love and Other Monsters*, a follow-up to her debut short story, "Misfits and Other Heroes." She has tattoos of lines from J.D. Salinger's *Seymour: An Introduction* on both forearms.



**Jeff Burt** lives in Santa Cruz County, California, and works in manufacturing. He has work in *Rhino*, *Red River Review*, *New Verse News*, *Barnwood*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and *The Write Room*.



**Benjamin Dombroski** is a graduate of the MFA program at Virginia Commonwealth University. His work has appeared in *Best New Poets 2009* and *Hunger Mountain*.



**William Doreski** lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. His latest book is *City of Palms* (AA Press, 2012). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His fiction, essays, poetry, and reviews have appeared in many journals. He won the 2010 *Aesthetica* poetry award.



**Christopher Dulaney** graduated with BA in English with a Creative Writing concentration from Georgia College & State University in May 2013. A multiracial writer, he writes prose and poetry and has studied under Allen Gee, Laura Newbern, Judson Mitcham, and Marty Lammon. He currently lives in Savannah, GA.



**R. G. Evans**'s poems, fiction and reviews have appeared in publications such as *Rattle*, *The Literary Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, and *Weird Tales*. His original music, including the song "The Crows of Paterson," was featured in the 2012 documentary film *All That Lies Between Us*, about the life and work of poet Maria Mazziotti Gillan. Evans teaches high school and university English and Creative Writing in southern New Jersey.



**Josh Flaccavento** holds a BA in Writing, Literature, and Publishing from Emerson College and an MA in Literature from Clark University. He is from northeast Tennessee by way of southwest Virginia, but his poems in *Sixfold* are about the West, where he spent some time working on farms. He enjoys referring to himself in the third person, Norse mythology, and martial arts.



**Joe Freeman**, raised in western Pennsylvania, contracted there an abiding love of forests and fields. Graduating from Harvard, he attended the School of Peace Studies in Bradford, England (more hills and fields), and returned to the states—after a stint of community work in Northern Ireland—to undertake a career, of sorts, in government service. He presently resides in Arizona, a full-time homemaker. His only previously published poem, "What Job Might Have Said," appeared in the Spring 2011 issue of *Midstream*.



**Toni Hanner**'s poems appear in *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Althouse*, *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.



**Chris Haug** teaches writing and literature somewhere in Middle America. His work has appeared in *Scissors and Spackle* and *Punchnel's*. He holds degrees from Central College and the University of Northern Iowa and is currently enrolled in Pacific University's MFA program.



**Clifford Hill** has recently retired from Columbia University where he held an endowed chair at Teachers College, the Arthur I. Gates Professor of Language and Education. He also directed the Program in African Languages at the Institute of African Studies in the School of International and Public Affairs where he taught the Hausa language. During his retirement he continues to conduct research on cultural variation in the ways in which language represents space and time.



**Emily Hyland** lives and writes in Brooklyn, New York. Presently, she is a yoga instructor, but before this career shift, she was a high school English teacher in some of the city's most high-needs schools; a lot of her recent poetry is inspired by that experience. She has published poems in the *Brooklyn Review*, *The Awakenings Review*, and *Stretching Panties* and is working in NYC.



**Chris Joyner** is a recent graduate of the MFA program at the University of Miami and calls Virginia home. In 2012 he won honorable mention in *Winning Writers' Sports Poetry and Prose Contest* and in 2011 received the Alfred Boas Poetry Prize. His work has appeared in *B O D Y*, *Penduline Press*, *Brusque*, *Fiddleblack*, the *Barely South Review*, and elsewhere. While he is currently an adjunct professor of English by day and a server by night, in a parallel universe he ghostwrites for a well-respected rapper.



**David Kann** escaped academic administration and returned to poetry and just-teaching. In the process he discovered that writing poetry makes him feel more like himself than most activities. In pursuit of himself and better poetry he recently completed an MFA at Vermont College of Fine Arts. He has been published in *Stoneboat* and *The Sierra Nevada Review*, among other journals.



**Peter Kent** lives and works in Boston, Massachusetts. He has published work in *Cimarron Review* and the online journal *ForPoetry*.



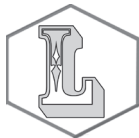
**Ryan Kerr** is a teacher, writer, and musician living in central Illinois. He is currently pursuing his EdD in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His poems have appeared in *Poetry Motel* and *Matter*.



**Alex Linden** hails from Tempe, Arizona. She holds an MFA from Oklahoma State University and is currently a PhD student at Texas Tech University. Other poems have appeared in *Blue Earth Review*, *Blood Lotus*, *Juked*, and *Burner* magazine. She has poems forthcoming in *Bayou Magazine*.



**Huso Liszt's** poems have also appeared in *Poetry East*, *Poetry Northwest*, *River City*, *The Indiana Review*, *The American Anthropologist*, and the *Journal for Anthropology & Humanities*. He has written extensively about the Peoples of the Agreste in Brasil. Also a theatre artist, he is a seventeen-year resident of Ketchikan, Alaska, where he is currently working on a novel for children.



**George Longenecker** teaches history, poetry, and technical writing in the Department of English, Humanities and Social Sciences at Vermont Technical College. His recent poems have appeared in *Memoir*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Santa Fe Review*. He lives in Middlesex, Vermont, with his wife and poetry muse, Cynthia Martin. When he's not writing and teaching, he hikes and skis in the Green Mountains.



**Abraham Moore** is a poet originally from central Indiana. He currently lives and works in San Diego.



Award-winning poet **G. L. Morrison** writes, teaches, and nests in Portland, Oregon. Her writing has migrated into *Sinister Wisdom*, *Evergreen Chronicles*, *Girlburn*, *The Advocate*, *Manzanita Quarterly*, *Alternet*, *Sexis*, and into anthologies including *Best of Best Women's Erotica* (Cleis Press), *Mom: Candid Memoirs* (Alyson Books), and *How Can You Say We're Not Related* (Scurfpea Publishing). Her poetry collection *Chiaroscuro Kisses* (Headmistress Press) will be released later this year.



**Alia Neaton** is a writer and editor who received an MA in writing and publishing from DePaul University in 2013 and is thrilled to have her poems debut in *Sixfold*. She is currently working on her first full-length manuscript, an exploration of modern society's dynamic relationship with food. She lives in Chicago with her husband; they are expecting their first child in February. [www.alianeaton.com](http://www.alianeaton.com)



**Patricia Percival** lives in Atlanta, where she is an active member of the writing community. When not making poems, she thinks about the big picture while micromanaging her garden (weeding). Her most recent publication is in *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume 5: Georgia*. She is currently shopping a chapbook, *Bargain with the Speed of Light*, in which two of the poems in this issue of *Sixfold* will appear.



**D. Ellis Phelps**, painter & poet-novelist, is the author of *Making Room for George* (Balboa Press, 2013). To engage more of her work visit [www.dellispelps.com](http://www.dellispelps.com) or find her on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/DEllisPhelpsArtist](http://www.facebook.com/DEllisPhelpsArtist)



**Marc Pietrzykowski** lives in Lockport, NY, with his wife Ashley, and enjoys being alive more than should be legal. He has published five books of poetry and one novel, as well as numerous individual poems, stories, and essays in a variety of places. He also writes music, sings, and plays a few instruments. More details on all these pursuits can be found on his web page, [www.marcpski.com](http://www.marcpski.com)



**Sam Pittman** lives in Pittsburgh, PA, where he writes poetry and teaches composition, writing, and ESL. He has received awards from the Academy of American Poets and fellowships from the American-Scandinavian Foundation and the Sperry Fund. He holds an MFA in Poetry from the University of Pittsburgh and a BA from the University of California-Berkeley. Sam's poems have also appeared in *ditch*.



**Tori Jane Quante** recently graduated from Georgia College & State University with a BA in English, Biology minor, and a headache. While attending Georgia College, she was the poetry editor and editor-in-chief of *The Peacock's Feet*, an undergraduate-run literary journal. In addition to writing, she enjoys yoga, baking, and fretting over global warming.



**Ricky Ray** was educated at Columbia University. In 2013, he was the winner of *Fugue's* annual poetry contest, and the second-prize winner of the Whisper River poetry contest. Recent work of his can be found in *Esque Mag*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, and the "literary mixtape" *Chorus*, edited by Saul Williams. He lives in New York with his wife and three cats, where they dream of farm life in an undiscovered village.



**Carey Russell** graduated with honors from the University of Virginia with degrees in English Literature and Mathematics. She moved to New York after graduation to work in Environmental Engineering at Columbia University. She now works as a writer and researcher at Columbia's Office of Alumni and Development and is currently pursuing an MFA at Columbia. Her work has most recently appeared in *American Athenaeum*, *the Cumberland River Review*, and *Vex Literary Journal*.



**Noah B. Salamon** spent most of his childhood in Maryland. He majored in philosophy at Swarthmore College and is pursuing an MA in English at Loyola Marymount University. He currently teaches English in Los Angeles, where he lives with his wife and three sons.



**Katherine Smith**'s poems and fiction have appeared in a number of journals, among them *Unsplendid*, *Measure*, *Fiction International*, *Gargoyle*, *Ploughshares*, *The Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Appalachian Heritage*. Her first book, *Argument by Design* (Washington Writers' Publishing House), appeared in 2003. She teaches at Montgomery College in Maryland.



**Christine Stroud** is originally from eastern North Carolina, but currently lives in Pittsburgh with her partner and three cats. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Chatham University and works as an Assistant Editor for Autumn House Press.



**Bobby Taylor** is an MFA candidate in the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied poetics at Naropa University. An award-winning and Grammy-nominated songwriter, he has had songs recorded by Don Williams, Montgomery/Gentry, Billy Ray Cyrus, and many other Nashville recording artists. As an actor he has performed on many stages throughout the country including The Lamb's Theater in NYC, the Ryman Auditorium, the Grand Ole Opry, and his hometown theater: The Cumberland County Playhouse in Crossville, Tennessee.



**Jonathan Travelstead** received his MFA at Southern Illinois University. He served in the Air Force National Guard for six years as a firefighter and currently works as a full-time firefighter for the city of Murphysboro. When not on duty, he backpacks twice each year in Central America and Europe, and works on an old dirt bike he hopes will get him to Peru in December.



**Jennifer Lowers Warren** has published poetry in *Rhino*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and *Literary Mama*. She lives near a military base somewhere in the world for the next ten years.

