

# SIXFOLD

POETRY SUMMER 2016



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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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# Sarah Sansolo

## Bedtime Stories

I.

I imagine my father  
carrying boxes upstairs  
in his too-skinny arms  
and my mother, suitably  
impressed. I don't ask  
for details, just the dog  
he gave her for Valentine's Day.  
My mother wouldn't give it up but she told me  
about the breakup long enough  
for her to love a man who was not  
my father. It didn't change the ending  
I know by heart: gazebo, dress,  
wedding.

II.

I can't sanitize my stories for child  
consumption, can't have the stuffed  
Valentine's dog without the sex.  
There was no true love in my dorm room  
but on my twin bed Nicole found my G-spot,  
loudly. In our future, I wanted  
rings and flowers but my story is more  
the original Grimm, wolves  
under covers and blood in my shoes.

## At the AA Meeting

You won't believe I love you until I walk  
from Thomas Circle down to Dupont;  
up carpeted stairs, past walls  
flagged with inspiration and lists of hours;  
I enter close on your heels,  
take a back-corner seat,  
surrounded by girls who share the same secret  
again and again and never,  
never guess my secret,  
that I don't belong.

Every other word I write is a confession.  
But here I can't keep pace,  
my tongue can't form the words  
"Hi Jessica" so fast.  
I offer no memories here;  
no blackouts or mommy issues.  
I don't repent, I don't believe, I don't  
even like the feel of booze. I like the taste  
of you. After prayers you show me  
to your friends, buy me honey in a box.

# Clytemnestra After the Murder

*John Collier, 1882*

I will never be a constellation. At night  
I trace the stars into gods, heroes, men  
who take—and women, victims all. I brush  
Gemini, thumb caressing the brothers  
who never once looked back.  
I blot out Cygnus. I have no stomach  
for swans. But I can stomach more  
than these female forms reduced  
to pinpoints, maidens dead for love,  
daughters sacrificed—Andromeda,  
Ariadne, Helle, Semele, Cassiopeia—  
I will outshine every one. I am a woman  
who takes back. There is bloody cloth  
in the closet, a lover in the bed.  
Better a murderess than a star.

## On the First Morning After He Marries Another

*"I languish for you . . . my sentiments for you are those of a woman."  
—Hans Christian Andersen to Edvard Collin*

Lie to me—  
I have learned to love untruths  
when they're all I have.  
I learn to call them stories.  
I write you in the margins:  
prince and scoundrel.  
Let me be the bride.  
I dream of metamorphosis,  
a shape to fit to yours,  
legs to part and curves that give  
beneath your hands—  
soft as seafoam,  
harsh as nettles.  
Give me your ring,  
be selfless just this once.  
At sunrise, cut my fingers  
at the knuckle,  
take my tongue,  
marry your girl in silence,  
safety. Cut between my legs,  
let me bleed out  
red as this morning.  
Remember this is nothing,  
this is fiction, fantasy.  
Remember that I'm lying.  
Close the book.  
Begin again.

# Wanderer

I leave doors unlocked tonight  
wanderer I open windows  
wind in my curtains making  
nightmare shapes I put on  
the good sheets I put on  
my best nightgown I brush out  
my hair I lie down wanderer  
I don't sleep I don't hide  
don't bunker myself tonight  
to ward away bad men  
because you wanderer are not  
man what you are I can't say  
pixie or spirit nymph or maybe  
just girl all I know wanderer  
are your words your letters  
your promises in the creases  
for me your word wanderer  
is enough come into my room  
into me stay I left wine  
on the sill mint on the pillow

# Miranda Cowley Heller

## Salvage

After our basement flooded  
I waded through cardboard boxes,  
their sodden, drooping bottoms  
coming apart in my hands,  
and wished I had put them up on cinder blocks.  
Boxes of memories, electric cords,  
hair-pins, curves;  
cassettes, tangled and unwound:  
wisp-thin seaweeds of magnetic tape  
filled with lost songs.  
Baby clothes, rust-soaked and rotting,  
each tiny sock, shirt, desiccated-elastic waistband,  
a familiar note.  
And endless tax receipts that I kept  
just in case they came  
asking for proof of the past.  
I threw out a Sega, a shredder,  
three Styrofoam gravestones stamped  
Rest in Pieces.  
And a king-sized mattress, plush and coil,  
that had sponged up the first of the flood.  
It took four of us to drag its  
bloated corpse out to the street.  
Silverfish scattered into city drains.

In the afternoon, I unzipped  
a black and green tartan suitcase  
I'd salvaged—wedged between an  
etching of *Columbus in Chains*  
and a rabbit-eared TV.  
Somewhere, there's a photograph  
of my mother boarding a train,  
her graceful ankles bare,  
in steep stilettos.  
She's smiling at someone.

A porter stands behind her  
holding the plaid suitcase in one hand,  
a round hat-box under his arm.

Inside the case were all the photos  
I thought I'd lost when we moved, years ago.  
Many were ruined—water-blurred and tacky,  
stuck together in chunky mille-feuilles rectangles,  
their faces and moments washed away,  
bled together forever—  
left to rot under the floorboards,  
the damp, flooding, rat shit,  
sad dark unearthednesses.

I laid out my past on the kitchen counter.  
Sorted years into piles,  
sifted through the ingredients of my life:  
the exact minute my first son was born.  
He is squalling in a doctor's arms,  
his umbilical nub dressed like a wound.  
Then, he is in my arms in a hospital bed  
latching onto my breast, suckling, pig-perfect.  
A phone line runs across me, uncoiled,  
stretching as far as it can.  
I was talking to my mother—  
telling her I had just given birth to a son.

And the day I fell in love with my husband.  
He is standing next to a white Vespa  
in a chambray shirt, hair still damp  
from a plunge into the Sargasso Sea.  
In the photo he took of *me*, I am naked,  
full-frontal, Polykleitan, goddess thighs. Lush.  
Wading knee-deep in Bloody Bay.  
Afterwards, we had sex in the turquoise water  
and he didn't tell me when he saw the shark.

Around dinner-time, I picked up the phone  
and called my eldest son.  
He likes to tell me he has always been unhappy,



that life isn't worth the living,  
that he's voting for Trump.  
But I remember him running  
across flaxen fields, wind-lapped,  
diving into the tumbling stream,  
swimming in the deep end.  
Eyes bright. Loving me back.  
I wanted to tell him I'd found a decade of proof  
that he was wrong, that I was right.  
In photo after photo he laughs,  
splashing through light.

His phone rang a few times  
before going to voicemail.  
And I felt the emptiness of boxed air.  
But I knew what he would have said,  
if I'd reached him:  
"How do you know I'm not crying  
in all the photos that got destroyed?"  
And I would have said: I promise you  
I remember. I remember everything.  
And you have to believe me  
when I tell you it's worth it in the end  
so please stay the course.  
A thousand moments, some lost, some found,  
and joy and sorrow,  
and Oh Fucking Christ it just passes,  
day after day after day.  
And you ask:  
How can so much have happened?  
How can so little have happened?  
How is it possible to stay afloat?  
But we do. We sail, spinnakers full,  
and look back at dry land  
from the blue horizon.

# Linden Stories

In another world, eggs come home to roost  
chickens hang from the rafters like  
fat, auburn-feathered bats  
and my husband is in a good mood every morning.

In another world my mother sings me to sleep.

In another world I do not furnish rooms  
with no one in them but the dream of a future self.  
I sit in my chair every day  
and write something good. Or bad.

In another world, a boat sinks too close to shore.  
Villagers row out in their stub-wooden boats,  
collect a cargo of linden saplings and sacks of millet,  
plant a tree that grows to be a hundred stories high,  
whose branches stretch to touch the moon  
making a bridge for us.

## More

Hours later, I can still smell  
his sweet-sour sweat, his traces,  
sleep-wrinkled into the pillow,  
feel the watered grit, gruel-thin trail  
drying on my thigh,  
and picture how wordlessly he crept around our room,  
stabbing for things in the semi-dark,  
trying not to wake me.  
I could hear the Town Car lurking,  
impatient, outside our house  
in the quiet gloam—  
that cusp of night and day beyond the window pane.  
A few stars struggled to stay alive  
in the hushed eggplant sky.  
He kissed my forehead, muttered goodbye.  
I listened to his footsteps leaving,  
his roller-bag strumming our cindery walk,  
rattle-plastic ball-bearings on cement.

Watched him from the window.  
He stopped, mid-step, his back to me,  
picked up his bag,  
so careful not to disturb the neighbors  
whispering dreamed things in their lingering r.e.m.  
Lifted it three inches off the ground,  
extended handle wedged in his armpit,  
awkward, shoulder shrugged to ear.  
And I thought of the way he would  
swing our son when he was young,  
and we walked him in the park,  
and he begged for more, for more,  
for more height, more levity.

I watched as the black car rounded the corner,  
away from me.  
Watched as the streetlights dimmed,  
one by one, in the grey quiet.

# Things the Tide Has Discarded

I stand in bare feet at the break,  
icy water soaks my cuffs,  
a scoop of pelicans dives on bait fish—relentless, cruel.  
Kelp fronds mourn in the glassy deep.  
A hermit crab creeps onto shore,  
skittles its way across the sand.  
In the blue, soot tern wings loop the loops.  
And I lift my face into the wind.

Away from me, sea lice bite and itch  
at damp piles of jetsam—a butter clam rotting in its shell  
a plastic tampon applicator, sea-glassed pink,  
crisp hollow straws and green-black weeds—  
things the tide has discarded from its tumbling nest,  
and then reaches for, stretching its wide arms in yearning,  
in regret, before turning away. I wonder about the sea.  
Does she miss the things she leaves behind, abandons, in her wake?

My mother is holding the new baby. She offers it  
her thick, ripe breast, her puckered nipple,  
warm bechamel milk. I watch her soothe and sway,  
whisper secrets not meant for me.  
At night I wait for her to come, pull the yellow blanket  
over my head, hide from the hollow longing.

A streetlight casts tree-shadows on my ceiling.  
Black lace branches dance in the wind.  
My room is filled with the breath of ghosts.  
I listen to the house—a body turning in a sighing bed,  
the long, dark hallway agape,  
the silence of floorboards.  
I pluck at the black-glass eye of my rabbit. Rip it off.  
Thin threads protrude from a star-shaped hole.  
They wave at me, begging for remorse.

I clasp the cold eye in my hand, a talisman to mute the dread:  
the killer waiting in the closet,  
blazing fire, my mother dying.

Fear is a pebbled shore of tiny glass eyes.  
Think of a white shirt instead.

My mother does not fear death—all life is ebb and flow:  
earth worms and maggots will feed on her flesh,  
a pear tree will grow from her rich soil,  
flowers will bloom on a hillside, she says.  
She must not know the picture she paints in my head—  
she must not know the things she leaves behind.

When I wake in the morning, the tiny black eye lies on my pillow.  
In the kitchen, my mother is making pancakes.  
There's bacon cooking. The baby is asleep in its cot.  
She looks up when I come in.

# Alexa Poteet

## Carnivores

*I would be good for eating*, I said as we ate barbeque on the deck. The cooking smoke thick in my hair, as mosquitoes too close to the fire, singed to ash.

I imagined my tri-tip fried over fennel. The fingernail you'd use to work my white gristle from your teeth, pearlescent as silver skin strung

between ribs. *Don't be silly*, you said, holding my wrist to lick my sauce-salty palm, then smiling, turning away to suck on a buttery bone.

## **The House Fire, a Year after Moving in**

In my dreams, still, I remember the smoke alarms,  
wailing into the night like a far off arcade.  
There in the gray room of sleep, I feel embers  
where my storybook slippers should lie.  
I heard once about hot-coal walkers. Thrill-seekers  
who toe the line between  
this world and the next.

But I was not made for fire. A chair, aflame  
at the end of the hall, agreed. It's white vinyl melting  
into a face, aghast.

Together, we'd assembled it our first month in the house.  
You knelt on a towel and I, on the dog's bed,  
sorting screws, which allowed a joke in those days.  
The L of the Allen wrench an unfinished question mark.

In my waking moments, I cannot feel  
the wall of heat. Only your hand cupped  
around mine as you pass me a small clink of nails.  
*These are sharp.*  
*Be careful.*

# Chicago

This is not a poem for the 115th street Harold's  
and the men with low-slung JNCOs. Chicken in hand—strips,  
sandwiches, legs. White flight. Their Chicago

is older than mine. Nor is this a poem for the crooners

that caress microphone stands like spines. The aurora-glow  
and melting jazz of the Green Mill where Capone wall-eyed  
both doors for the fuzz. Who respond only to the violent

calls on the weekend, now. No. This is a poem for the red womb

of the California Clipper. The icy Pago Pagos with black  
cherries in the last booth back. The gang who is really  
a salsa band that lives on our street. The secret Puerto Rican *asocio*

with one red balloon on the door, where I broke my wrist  
dancing with the middle-aged *boricuas* on Valentines day.  
Their tiny pot bellies swaying in front of the yellowing jukebox.

The city of big shoulders, but no husker. Hog butcher

tattoos. The burn of a thousand right angles against the fizzing  
sodium lamps. A subway that can't bear to be underground. A subway  
that dreams. Thunders overhead and makes

my heart *thalak thalak thalak*.



# Aurora Borealis in Tennessee

Like an egg I left in the pan too long,  
my memory of you  
scorched on one side.  
Only certain parts are still soft,  
can be bled open.

I see your lipstick, terrorist maroon,  
on a bagel in Nashville.  
Drunk and topless,  
hand washing a silk shirt  
in the ceramic blue of my bathroom.

I've filed you under  
Things Only For The Mind  
next to tube tops in Tehran,  
a clean subway,  
the Aurora Borealis in Tennessee.

# Escobar's Hacienda Napoles

When it was still something of this world,  
there were fields of Cadillacs, Mercedes  
all maroon. As if they had once been Gringo Red  
but since baked to a color more appropriate  
for the fourth parallel north of the equator.

Napoles was his woman,  
the jewel resting on Colombia's breastbone  
between Bogotá and Medellín.  
*El Patron's* other *mujeres* only a skein, squawking  
and fluttering from doorway to doorway

in the hot, vastness of the house. They sweated.  
Cut slug-fat lines of gum-curling *cocaina*  
with the iridescent B sides of CDs. Each  
mound its own legend, the slight smell  
and electric white of new chalk.

The best blow tastes like nails just painted.  
He knew firsthand—sucked the small, glossy squares  
of their fingertips between sips of Aguardiente  
at the breakfast table. The *pirujas* didn't stay for free, *cabrón*.  
Everyone knew that.

Opulence is 15 hippopotami with purpling skin  
in Colombia's bone-crumbling campo;  
Escobar had 300.

African ocelots lazed in windowsill wells  
like overgrown housecats. The bullring,  
a private airstrip—the land's bad Brazilian wax—  
the decadences bore each other. Each not to be outdone  
by the last.

*Don Pablo* raised cast-iron dinosaurs  
out of the ground one October.  
Moses with money. In 1993, the federal debt

in Colombia was 17 billion U. S. dollars. Pablo Escobar could've created a surplus and still been worth eight.

Though, he wouldn't have, friend.  
And yet—

to have this history told in secondhand words  
makes it fiction, not fact, for the living.  
Stories aren't too good to be true,  
they're too good to be walking.

And just so, the cars' blast-out skeletons  
with their heat-chewed rocker panels  
become testament. A graveyard of iron prehistorics  
that remain frozen among the breathing.  
Five hippos thrive, even now;  
they have children of their own.

His are still alive. They sang, not read, at his mass  
because F minor is the saddest key.

Today, the muse is his own mausoleum. His empire,  
a *museo*. If you arrive,  
you will be handed a perforated,  
purple admissions ticket in the empty doorway.  
Keep This Coupon  
It will say in Webster's English, as you thumb  
its small stiffness in your pocket.

# Cynthia Robinson Young

## Triple Dare

When I was four I was a stripper.  
I guess I started early. The boy next door  
DARED me, he said  
I wasn't born from my momma because  
I didn't have a belly button.  
I had to prove him wrong.

My grandma told it was time to go  
and get my own whuppin' switch  
from the thorniest bush in the backyard  
because it "was time for you to learn  
who you should take your clothes off for,  
and who you shouldn't."

When I was five I was too short to hang  
clothes on the rope line outside,  
but not too young to identify  
whose underwear was whose.  
That same boy dared me,  
and that same grandma spanked me,  
but with a different switch that  
she picked out herself,  
claiming I wasn't hard enough on myself to  
pick a good one that sang in the wind  
before it hit my legs.

That boy grew up to be a man who  
kept daring women to do all sorts of things  
they shouldn'ta  
been doing,  
but I married him,  
because he dared me.

Grandma wasn't able to  
teach me a dog gone thing.

# Nancy Beal, 1820

*(grandmother, 4 times removed)*

I found you, Grandma,  
hidden among the Archives  
in a census. Did they even let you  
give your name? Who asked  
the questions, and who  
gave the answers that would define  
your life  
two centuries later,  
giving me so little  
to understand  
who you really were?

Nancy,  
you have a granddaughter now  
who carries your name  
into a generation  
where there are no slaves  
such as you were.  
She dances to tribal rhythms  
embedded  
in Hip Hop, in Jazz, in  
melodic refrains  
you might have hummed  
unconsciously  
as you toiled  
in a hot North Carolina  
field,  
or baked bread in a humid southern  
kitchen,  
careful not to be overheard,  
determined to remain silent  
when the overseer passed,  
lest it be mistaken  
for contentment.

# Cornered

I have stood on corners,  
shaking with fear and cold, waiting  
with my sister on a northeastern November  
night, neon blinking “Budweiser”  
in a ghoulish light  
on  
our young Black faces.  
My sister wasn’t old enough  
to protect herself,  
so how could she  
protect me?

The boys who could be men  
were coming  
toward us. The street lamp  
lit up the mischief  
in their eyes. I wished  
the light would hypnotize and hold them  
in that halo until  
our mother could come out of the bar  
to rescue us.  
But the bar windows were tinted dark.  
No one is meant to see through  
them, dark enough to protect  
the ones inside who start their drinking  
early in the day  
and stop  
early the next.  
Our mother did not do that, she was not like that.  
She was the mother who says,  
“I’ll only be a minute/  
just wait right here on the corner/  
by the door/ you’ll be safe/ I’ll be right back out.”  
We had to believe her.  
She was our mother.  
We had no choice.

The men who could be boys  
were saying things  
our mother would have never  
allowed her daughters to hear.  
She would have shut them up. She would  
have washed their mouths out  
with Pure Ivory Soap,  
and if they tried to  
spit it out on the dirty street,  
she would not have let them,  
not until she thought their mouths would  
not allow those words to live there.  
But the damage was done.  
I won't forget  
their words,  
the sound of their laugh,  
and the lie  
that my sister gave to me, that  
    "this did not happen/ we will not tell Mommy/ she  
    feels bad enough all the time  
with her troubles/ don't let her hear any more from us."

So she wrapped her protection  
Around our mother instead of me.  
And an hour later we caught  
the last bus running in the city,  
staring out at our reflections against the darkness,  
riding past so many corners,  
some healthy and happy,  
some not so much,  
until our mother reached up  
and pulled the cord.

# Nicole Lachat

## Your Throat Is Gripped with Love's Pain

No avenue wet with salt  
No white sails anchored between blues  
Nothing but the line to evoke them  
It is ten o'clock in the morning  
I am uptown and nowhere near myself  
Outside flakes drape the pavement  
The city lives through another white burial

You smoked Dunhill blues  
One leg over the sheets  
And my legs wrapped around your torso  
Learned the many ways to pray  
With the body

Down Broadway the afternoon ploughs  
Someone shouts about Jesus  
From a milk carton hill  
We live under the burden of scarves  
Someone steps onto the platform  
Emerges from the underground

A moment we do not photograph  
A warming dark  
A thing becoming clearer  
The grip of sunlight over a naked body

I have returned up the six flights  
The voices in the hallway vanish  
You are not next to me  
I'm in another country  
Your bougainvillea will darken without witness  
The sheets are cold  
On the roof the neighbors are smoking



## Of Infidelities

there were only a handful.  
A natural decline, or be it progress,  
we've learned more than two ways of splitting

a deck. As if every morning were not another death  
they rose to the charade again, to the rehearsed  
kindnesses. She, resuming the position

of footstool and porter. He, a roof,  
a silk blouse. And because he couldn't bring himself  
to make a clean cut, he hacked away

at the bird on Thanksgiving, until, claiming  
he could no longer muster cruelty,  
let the creature squirm until it'd all bled out.

# Amy Nawrocki

## Waiting for the Plowman

In the morning: Rousseau's *Confessions*. Breakfast:  
something forgettable and unfulfilling, toast,  
the white of an egg circling a shiny yolk.

By midday, the desert of chalk buries the laurel  
and watching juncos burrow under the feeder  
suffices for motion. Blank under its plastic face

the kitchen dial signals two o'clock with sleek  
anemic hands. Within the hour, sugar held  
in the spoon's mouth is let go into black liquid,

and boots, scuffed and sheltered alert the tangled  
knit scarf to concoct itself. At four, shovel in hand  
I depart to do the job myself. The man

and his truck are nowhere to be found  
even though the blizzard's end is new  
and he promised and there is a lot of it.

Lighter than a pile of proverbial feathers  
but sticky and heaping, the first bundle I take  
begins to build a dune around the driveway

but there is nowhere else to go and no rest  
and nothing to do to lessen the white  
except to bend at the knees and let it fly.

# Literally

She says without irony or modesty  
*I'm literally so irritated*, as if irritation  
could be anything other than literal, forget  
the aching hyperbole of *so* and the blankness  
of those other loosely placed modifiers that fill  
space left empty by the dysfunction of sound,  
the way fireflies pulse unevenly in the summer air.

She literally calls herself Mary C  
on her cellphone when she asked for Saturday  
night off to attend a “family gathering.”  
*I literally was like making fun of him,*  
*and I told him: I was, like, I never would do*  
*that and I like can't even imagine you*  
*trying to handle a girl like me, you literally*  
*have been doing a shitty job lately.* This was before  
she told her brackishly tanned friend, who  
sporting a shiny ankle bracelet and had  
her hair pinned back literally with a binder clip,  
that she had thrown up in the parking lot  
sometime after the office party. You can tell  
this was the type of parking lot where  
white lines had to be repainted and underneath  
some faded ones still gloomed like  
bad eye shadow on a clown. A very sad clown.  
Literally, the clown is sad.

Mary C has dark auburn hair, like soil  
found beneath piles of wet and decomposing  
oak leaves that like the stasis underneath  
the layers of newly dead foliage, storm-tossed  
and musty. *I guess he has, like, a superiority complex,*  
*so like I would pick him up and take him on a date,*  
*so he, like, would feel like he's accomplishing*  
*something.* It's very long hair, like long, literally  
past her shoulders, which isn't that long, not like  
polygamy wife long or whatever, but long enough  
for you to know she has never, in 30 some-odd years,

ever been confused with someone clownish, or even someone with a superiority complex, not with those pouty eyes and tailored eyebrows. Clowns, literally, do not speak with such elegance or authority, like not ever. Clowns are known to stumble and wear cherry wigs and awkward shoes and bow ties, for crying out loud. So funny, though, like literally, so funny. It's true, few of them mind picking up people and chauffeuring them around especially in very small cars. Mary C drives a Nissan Sentra, so you can understand about trying to handle a girl like that. Fireflies, you know, filling a really humid night with sparkles, so irritating, if you, like, aren't paying attention.

## Instead of Poems

Instead of poems, I weed the sidewalk  
and empty crevices of intruders.  
I find it helpful to harvest  
their relentlessness. Maybe dirt,  
maybe blood sacrifices, maybe  
a shovel.

The words I wished would come  
unprompted, stick like pollen  
to my nose. But the heat has broken  
enough for me to breathe.

Despite the scarlet beetle  
that has scoured their stalks  
to skeletal canes, the lilies' perfume  
layers into me like embroidered  
handkerchiefs pocketed once,  
then rediscovered in a pair  
of comfortable pants.

Instead of poems, I savor  
scents sung by saffron tongues  
and listen to the striated pink  
of unbeatable blooms.

# Bad Girls

The boy at the pub had blonding hair  
and a round face  
and we were cruel to him.

If I sat under hypnosis with a police sketch artist,  
I could recall exactly what he looked like, down to the earlobes  
and cheek bones, down to the insignia on the shirt pocket,  
the ironing board and the decision against a tie,  
down to the comb, even the television show he watched  
while he pressed that pale green shirt, reruns and  
laugh tracks, the best anyone has to fill the time  
preparing for a broken heart.

But everybody knows that eye witnesses mistake  
what they see for what their mind conjures  
out of conglomerates and jigsaw memories.

The pub had dark wood paneling and pockets  
of light. Lily and Kate were there, talking  
quickly and coyly, sometimes slipping into Serbian  
through the privacy of a giggle or nod.  
Maybe there were other reasons  
to close the world out. We were often bad.

He never got past hello and we never  
even bothered with ordinary niceties.  
As far as brush-offs go, this might have been one  
of the most perfectly written. Turn of shoulders,  
the huddle, then the pantomime: *you do not matter to us  
because this is where we take our punishment  
and you are not allowed to make us feel worthwhile.*

What did the boy in was that he could not hide  
the authenticity of his hopefulness.  
We know how to preen thin skin  
and screen smiles through bloody teeth.

# Field Guide to North American Birds

In my dream, the call  
came from a rose breasted  
grosbeak, but I have seen  
none, only recognize  
sparrows and catbirds  
and hummingbirds

whom I have heard  
chittering in a blur,  
tickled at their luck  
at being born  
with the ability  
to fly backwards.

Discovering  
that hummingbirds sing  
shouldn't have surprised me,  
but it did. While they aim  
toward silence  
and an almost  
sightless blur,  
one could imagine  
their quickness  
as breaking some  
inaudible sound barrier  
that only hummingbirds  
can break. Without looking  
I can tell one  
just passed by.

Between afternoons  
I wander into  
the forest just past  
peach trees and raspberry  
bushes, completely  
oblivious

to the blueberries  
ripening in a thick grove  
in the center of the lawn.

Seeking the nest  
of red-tails  
whom I hear but  
cannot see, I catch  
something  
between a screech  
and a squeal, a plea  
and a declaration:  
*I am not anonymous,  
you know who I am.*

After dreaming  
I hear what can  
only be called  
laughter,

and on the table,  
my breakfast bowl  
is full of ripe,  
misshapen blueberries.  
A song sparrow  
left them, though  
I know she was not  
the one laughing.  
*Listen*, she said,  
*sing.*



# Lawrence Hayes

## Searching for God in Vietnam

—after *Laura Palmer*

1.

He was not in the jar of charlie ears,  
not in the napalm dropped by the ton.

Not in the eyes of the forest or in the killing fields,  
not in the land mines looking for limbs.

Not on the hills taken and then given back,  
not in the poker game bet with young blood.

Not in the colonel's body counts,  
not in the journalists' six o'clock scotch.

2.

Instead surely God was huddled  
with all the young nurses in Chu Lai,  
receiving the broken bodies

one by one, earth's staunch  
stunned angels taking in  
the endless train  
of stretchered flesh,  
the incessant incoming dread,

their soft firm hands and quivering  
hearts tending to the blasted  
beautiful ones  
who would never be whole  
or nineteen again.

The nurses worked daily  
caked in blood and disbelief,  
sometimes prayed out loud  
for the bleeding to stop,  
or for the dying to live.

And there were the times  
they rushed quickly to the scarest ones,  
boys become broken men become  
boys again in the end  
begging for their mommies,  
looking for a last hand to hold.

3.

And at night, off shift, exhausted  
and finally surrendering to sleep,  
some of the nurses dreamed  
of their hearts as lone candles,

then as fast-melting wax,  
then the molten wax morphing  
into the disfigurement of flesh  
they handled each and every day,

then the dream suddenly shifting  
to a fire outside  
on a busy street in downtown Saigon,

the Buddhist monk a human torch  
as he sits in his orange robe  
in full lotus a few feet from the gas can

impossibly still inside his prayer  
as his body burns  
and his eyes stare cold

and the world looks on  
in full daylight  
astonished,

the monk's final gift  
a silent song of God's rage  
at what men do to men  
every day in an ordinary war.

# Newtown

1.

At dusk we come  
to the small dark pond

at the edge  
of these winter woods

to pour our cups  
of tears and rage

into the very face  
of God,

that cold black  
mirror  
that remains

still  
and dark  
and waiting.

2.

Tell me  
how do you parse  
pure evil,

twenty little children  
cut down  
like so much fodder,

all our sweet ones  
who won't ever  
rise again

to greet us  
laughing,  
dancing

on tip toes,  
so glad  
when we come home?

3.

Will our hooded eyes  
ever see beyond this muddied  
veil, believe again in the sweetness  
of gospel or grace,

feel anything again  
outside this black granite fossilizing  
one cold layer of the heart?

And can we ever hope  
to empty ourselves enough to receive  
the lost benediction of silence,

this quiet necklace of tears  
we will touch and trouble  
like a dark rosary the rest of our days?

Will our spirits someday return  
to the ancient healing forest  
that dreamt us once  
in a place outside of time,

before we were born  
into this fetal scabbled light  
as something human,

before memory,  
before sorrow,  
before breath?

Will the soul finally wake somewhere  
brighter one day in time to join  
the lit wing of the egret

banking at daybreak  
just above the swamp,  
white bird lifting  
through a sky so blue it hurts.

# Winter Climb

This day  
a clear blue ship  
I climb the fresh  
powdered mountain,

stand after stand  
of virgin white birch,  
some with their hair  
pinned to the ground,  
bent as if in weeping.

Halfway up,  
in a small striped maple,  
sewn to a lower branch  
a little snow-peaked nest,  
twig-weave of field hay and moss.

Inside I find  
two tiny white scrolls,  
curled parchments  
of thin paper birch.

Gloves off,  
I anxiously  
unroll them,  
half-expecting  
hieroglyphics.

Rolled out in my palm  
of course there is  
nothing, just  
the rich stain  
of inner orange bark.

I'd still like to believe  
in that kind  
of miracle, mysterious  
messages left by

dark-throated birds,  
secrets sent in code  
from the other side.

Hardest to hear sometimes  
are the clear notes of the given,  
how in an empty nest  
a cup of snow shines.



# Questions On The Cross

*(They say they hung Christ on a dogwood cross.  
I have some questions about this)*

Did the builders first strip  
the knuckled bark, plane  
the crooked limbs true,  
or was it a rough and rustic construction,  
the wood still green and bleeding,  
the old flower petals plastered  
brown and rotting on the misbegotten bark?

And what was the joinery  
that connected the horizontal  
to the vertical, the sullen earth  
with the broken sky?

Were the timbers tied  
by the gut of some  
unrisen animal,  
or in the end simply pegged  
by a single piece of wrought iron,  
one thin pin of doubt?

Did some idiot savant  
sing his cracked hymn of healing  
in your darkest hour,  
and could you hear it  
through the jeers of the soldiers?

In those last minutes  
of utter despair did you  
lose yourself in dreams  
of Magdalene,

how she once washed your feet  
so gently, her long black hair  
damp with tears  
in the temple doorway?

And where oh where  
was your Father,  
and who cut you down  
at the end?

Finally, what became  
of the cross itself,  
was it left leaning  
caked in blood  
in the mud on the mount

or in the end simply  
dragged away by the  
poor sorry faithful  
to be sacrificed  
into smaller pieces,

your final gift  
a few hours of heat  
and light to pierce  
the all enveloping cold,

the dying coals  
become risen ashes  
the wind would scatter by morning?

# Bowie Passing

1.

Mere coincidence  
the earth served up  
that unbelievable double rainbow

over New York skies  
the day of the night  
Bowie died?

I doubt it.

The Thin White Duke  
went out just  
as he came in,

in mystery, music,  
style and grace,  
patiently curating  
his own last act,

courageously choreographing  
his end days  
of trembling and fear—  
Lazarus, Blackstar—

meditations on time  
past and time passing,  
the finity of all that is flesh,

his life a performance piece  
to the very end, sweet rainbow  
arcing into the blue abyss.

2.

Every once in a while  
the ineffable  
gives us a clue.

You were one of them  
and will always be by far  
the coolest dude in the room,  
the ultimate class act,

that guy up on the catwalk  
in blue shoes  
looking for one more dance,  
one more track to lay down,

the jeweled cat collar in the sky  
your final costume change, outrageous  
astonishing beauty only you could pull off.

# AJ Powell

## Mother and Son, Morning Meditation

Silence such as it is  
And the occasional riff of jazz-like anger—  
Caught and carried by a neighborhood breeze  
From anonymous lips  
In the apartment complex across the way,  
Obscenity-laced—  
Or at times the sweeter song of bluesy infant-cries

Silence such as it is  
With the bee-hive hum of traffic  
The flotsam-and-jetsam sounds of compact cars and hemi trucks  
The ebb and flow of engines  
The stall and honk calling to a carpool's congregants  
While next door's dogs bark "Intruder" at the morning sun

Silence such as it is  
Threaded under by the watersong  
Of our drainage-ditch creek,  
A song of utility, a quiet canticle  
Gurgling to stillness in an algae-skinned, peridot-green pond

In this accompanying cacophony we find our silence  
Such as it is  
For five minutes,  
My ten-year-old son and I set a timer and forget it  
While we settle into a chosen stillness,  
Brief as it is,  
Together in it as companions  
With nothing to notice but a chattering squirrel  
Or the faucet as Dad starts his coffee—  
No homework or chore, no nag or complaint  
Permitted trespass

We have the silence while the silence has us  
And with it a camaraderie

He sits in imperfect silence  
His electric-charged body slowing to a lower voltage  
His bucktooth grin slackening to rest  
For him, for me, temporarily there is  
No pleasing or easing or expectations-meeting  
For a blessed change

He listens I think to the symphony of accidental noises  
His mind maybe drifts, and his limbs loosen  
We are there alone together  
Mutually side-setting the world away awhile  
Letting the silence  
Sing us awake to each other

## Bifurcated Heart

There is a bifurcated heart  
Beating in my chest,  
A dual heart:  
Loyal and wishful, grateful and grabbing  
Wanting what it doesn't have.

Still the moon is full tonight  
Hanging in the sky absolute and entire,  
An orbed womb haloed by silvered mist  
Birthing tides.

Whole she hangs,  
Cratered by Space's every hurled attempt  
To break her. She did not break.  
Her strength—she is round with it.

Tonight she shows us how wrong is  
Our assessment of her changeable nature.  
Shadows merely cycle across her face;  
Only our perception of her is ever slivered.  
She is unchanging.

So also my heart.  
It drums a rhythm as tight as a time table  
As regular as tides  
Steady while it houses  
Its manifold desires and devotions.

# A Poet's Triptych

I.

I cannot capture Shakespeare's lilting song,  
The rocking sway of five iambs in a line.  
Each slant and crooked rhyme reveals how long  
The distance lies between his ear and mine.  
For each syllabic strike that lands amiss  
Upon my heart another strike does fall.  
The urge and grip within me now does list;  
Each nearly capsized thought I'll keel and haul,  
Then toss it on my beach of wants repressed,  
And like so many words I've lost before,  
And many other hopes I've not expressed,  
Another grain of sand falls on my shore.  
To turn my hand to poems is a wound  
I cut upon myself—relief unfound.

II.

A poet is an obnoxious thing to try to be.  
Smug.  
Artful arrogance metering out my meaning  
with a rhyming suggestion of universality—  
oh please.  
We are each of us alone,  
and none of us is normative.  
Perhaps our shared humanity is our most  
carefully composed illusion.  
Delusional is the attempt to write  
a poem.

III.

There is no iron in me.  
I am bone and flesh and compromise.  
I am capitulation.

Water seeps into crevices  
And soil-softness that will receive it.  
Call me Puddle.



I wish I could find my mettle,  
My metal-minded, mercury-fired power  
To unbend the bending compliance  
In my voice.

I want to speak like a prophet tonight,  
A terrible light to burn behind my eyes,  
A chorus of seraphim to add its vibrations to my timbre.  
I want truth to blaze, tinged with sulphur.

# God the Baker

I can hold both in my head,  
Can't you?  
The possibility I am right and  
The possibility I am wrong.  
It seems the weather should've taught us by now:  
We're in this together and better be.  
    Better be.

Life happens to us proleptically,  
Falling out of the future toward us,  
Like ribbons of sunrays or (God knows)  
Asteroids. Because:  
Tsunamis.  
Earthquakes.  
    Flood, fire, and pestilence.

We take refuge in cities.  
Mine is a mile high and sheltered,  
A bulwark of mountains to the west  
And vast prairies east  
Holding the ocean at bay  
With its sharks and hurricanes and  
    Undertow currents.

Because we have known Nature as a bitch  
Not a Mother—  
Tooth and claw, flesh for scavenging,  
Bone and blood ready to be mashed into pies and eaten  
By fate and  
    Unexpected calamities.

North of my city is a caldera that could  
Swallow us whole,  
Explode my entire world with a  
Shrug of its shoulders  
And a pyroclastic wave  
    We'd see coming.

So all the lines of punditry seem so silly,  
The drawn lines of us's and them's—  
A fool's effort.

We should huddle close, harness each other,  
In case we only have time for one last  
Spasm of love before we die.

Reading scripture with the news is harrowing.  
The words work us over like dough,  
Punch and roll, punch and roll.  
God takes a breath and lets us rise,  
Then punches down again.

At some point God the Baker will  
Put us in an oven till our crust cracks.  
But we will be made consumable to the world  
For its nourishment.

# Frost on Fields

Frost on fields, the day begins before dawn.  
Stars fade, replaced overhead by starlings;  
The little birds wing from their hidden nesting places  
To speed to the oncoming arc of the sun's rays.

I stand beside a knot-hearted old tree,  
Its arteries sending skyward soil salts and water  
To join transmuted light in leaves  
Budded, greened, past green, now falling,  
To land upon the ground like scattered gold medallions.

Morning's cold hangs heavy in the air  
Making every inhale a sip.

In the river, rock-filled water rolls wild and on.  
Moss-covered granite stones, boulder behemoths,  
Stand sentinel along the trail in stillness,  
As they will be—still standing—  
The day after our hotly anticipated days,  
Come what may.

We are the dust. Not the ground.  
Our selves and our societies are so many scattered granules.  
The earth is serene, steady and lasting,  
While our troubles heave then retreat,  
Flare then fade faster than days.  
The land we inhabit holds,  
And nature nods farewell at our departures.

There is a refuge in Nature's abiding,  
And a release in our passing.  
May what comes bring the solutions we seek,  
But may our wisdom outlast such things.  
May our salvation stand like stones  
And fly like starlings.

# Gisle Skeie

## Paraphrasis

### *i. Rewording*

And when we spoke about love,  
we did not speak about love.

Instead we spoke about hands.  
Some of them would be warm.

Some of them would be violent.  
We did not speak about violence.

Instead we spoke about clouds.  
It did not rain at all that day.

It did not rain much that year.  
It was the most arid decade ever.

We gave in to internal liquids.  
We did not speak about love.

Instead we spoke about history.  
A hundred years since the flood.

*See that building?* we would say.  
*Everyone who lived there drowned.*

ii. *Relocating*

We met a pilgrim in Santiago de Compostela,  
and we were not surprised.

Later, in St. Petersburg, we found ourselves  
eating tasteless tex mex.

But the rare steaks near to the Winter Palace,  
they made us want each other.

Home again. Someone had stirred up a political  
debate while we were away.

We made new plans to cross the Arctic Circle  
to watch the midnight sun.

There are two more questions that need to be  
answered, but spring is here.

I'm too fascinated by the migrant birds, at least  
the ones who don't return.

iii. *Intermezzo*

We shared the bread without  
asking where it came from.

Strong winds all day.  
Some believed in ghosts.

In the innermost rooms  
there were no guests left.

We shared the wine without  
knowing its country of origin.

Forecasts of heavy clouds,  
but the rain never came.

Some woke up and felt compelled  
to change their names or faces.

Some fell asleep while aching to  
have their bodies replaced with air.

A tiger took shelter in the moss,  
scaring up a flock of seagulls.

Then there was a series of events  
that may or may not be of significance.

There is a lot more to add to this.  
We are figuring out how to say it.

*iv. Transference*

In October I realized that  
we were late for November.

When December came,  
everything else was late, too.

I think I was planning to tell you  
that I had been missing you, but

instead I told you how much  
I wanted to sleep with you.

Christmas. Did we watch that movie?  
I quit smoking, but it was a mistake.

New year. It was meant to be  
someone else who quit smoking,

but they quit  
something else instead.

I saw them.  
They were trying so hard.

We, too, should try harder.  
January. Snow, whiteness.

We can see the North Pole from here,  
time is such a frozen little thing.

We could crush it, I guess.  
If that would change anything.



v. *Rearranging*

Recall the vastness of indomitable youth and  
the spirited hubris of juvenile lovemaking:

Next there were funeral drums in town, and  
her sweater lost its scent of rain and wood.

We never went back in there, not after she  
gave birth to a tiny creature in Suburbia East.

Next there was a silvery train arriving from  
the last of the sieged cities. It was rumored

that the war prisoners had been left behind  
to die. They all wore one-colored sweaters.

*What color?* We whispered in busy city streets,  
we did not know what else to ask: *What color?*

Next we were summoned for questioning,  
lining up in front of the home department,

where my one last question was dismissed:  
'Your honor, may I rephrase my entire life?'

Next there was an acid rain, and it flooded  
the country, disfiguring everything except

for a few things, including a little boy on the  
beach, lying face down in the ignorant sand.

It did not look a lot like love. Maybe it was  
after all, but we did not speak about love.

# Bruce Taylor

## Men Fishing with Wives

Who runs the motor who steers the boat  
knows what's biting on what and where  
who handles the anchor who ships the oars  
who's too quiet or never quiet enough?

Who wears the silly hat who forgot the beer  
or the bait or sunscreen or bug spray  
who remembers what the other forgets  
who is always right at least half the time?

Who wants to catch the big one, who doesn't  
care if they ever catch anything at all?  
Over the years they've learned things  
upon which they've learned to agree.

Never let the fish get in the way of fishing.  
Never let the holes in your net get bigger  
than the fish you hope to catch.  
Be patient. Keep your bait in the water.

## Handsome Man in a Fancy Boat

His outfits, all Eddie Bauer,  
top of the line, his gear I'd guess  
the latest and best, his beard coiffed  
and silvered, his eyes, barbed and grey.

Mostly it's old farts in bucket hats,  
your usual worm and bobber crowd,  
or the occasional husband and wife,  
one ships the oars, one sets the anchor

or a kid in a canoe, toking a joint  
or three shirtless buddies cursing  
in a pontoon too big for this lake,  
or a couple in kayaks with cameras.

He's here almost everyday day to fish  
these shallows, weed-choked, pocked  
by algae, all dragonflies and stunted  
sunnies he tosses back barely hooked

and the undersized bass he stoops  
to release without even checking.  
But mostly he catches nothing.  
Mostly we all almost always do.

# Learn Ice Fishing at Home

Lately I've been trying since  
it goes on right outside my window  
sometimes so close to our bedroom

the sound of the auger wakes us,  
you can tell how deep the ice is  
by how long they have to drill.

They set their tip-ups and sit  
on buckets and smoke and stare  
down into the unseeable dark.

Nothing left to do now but wait.  
I breakfast in my sunny kitchen,  
the coffee bold, the toast golden.

There are lessons to be learned.  
So far I haven't learned them all.  
I know why they sit alone but

where in the ice to drill the hole,  
how deep into the dark you have to go,  
how long is how long it is to wait?

# Always Expect a Train

says the new sign at the tracks near my house  
I've crossed three or four times a day for years  
on my way to wherever to get whatever  
I need or want or think I have to have

but I've never seen one coming or going  
nor even, as I've imagined, been stuck there  
watching car after car rumble by full of whatever  
going wherever or rumbling empty back.

I've not even seen a speck of one at a distance,  
future engine speeding my way or red caboose  
at last trailing away, vanishing into the past.  
But some nights when the stutter in my heart

wakes me before dawn, or one of my old regrets  
sits on the edge of the bed smoking and sighs,  
the moan of a not so distant whistle haunts me  
and rumbles in the dark I always am expecting.

# Tracking in Snow

Most mornings we know  
the tracks outside our door,  
bunny and Bambi, Rocky  
the raccoon we recognize  
even without his mask.

Sometimes we can't and don't.  
Something feline the books say  
though we've never seen a cat.  
Something canine but dogs don't  
run loose this time of year.

Once from our shore somebody  
stepped off, walked straight  
across the frozen lake  
alone, in the dark, in the cold,  
at least as far as we can see.

Fresh snow covers everything,  
scratch of squirrel or crow,  
even our own familiar trails  
which took us somewhere and  
brought us, this time, back.

# Ricky Ray

## Proximity

The rabbit parts, taken out of the context of the rabbit,  
will sit on the counter in their juices, hinting at stew,  
and they will look good and hale and nutritious to him,  
and they will look like awful, bloody murder to her.

And the differences will hang between them,  
not as something to be fought over,  
but as something there and real and true.

Something that binds if it does not break apart,  
for they will not resolve their differences;  
the resolution will come in the way  
their differences lie up against one another in the night.

# They Used to Be Things

In the book were pages  
and on the pages was ink  
and in the ink were words

that were once ideas  
we made of things, like  
wool is made of a goat

and a sweater is made  
of wool, warmth  
is made of wool's

trappings and favorite  
is made of our time  
in the warmth.

The story goes  
that the ideas  
went away and formed

their own tribe. Then,  
they forgot to come back  
and visit; they forgot

the way home. Over time,  
they even forgot  
where they came from,

and the more distant  
the words grew  
from their origin,

the more the words  
tried to become things  
themselves. But words



are not even the pale  
shimmerings on  
the butterfly's wings,

let alone the thin  
translucence  
flapping itself up.

When the wolfwind howls  
and the ground  
whispers crystals of ice,

if I wrap my feet  
in ideas—lots and lots  
of them—they still freeze.

Even newspaper tucked  
into old brown boots  
leaves them stiff

and shivering  
through the night.  
But then I chant

my confessions  
to the moon,  
and the rendezvous

of word and blood  
lights ten little  
fires in my toes.

# Songs Early and Late

## I

On earth there was  
a voice that sang:

we are on the earth  
and we are  
the earth  
itself  
standing up,

in the world  
and of it,

of  
what  
the world's of,  
too.

## II

Oh, earth, as we in our flailing  
snag each strand of species  
and pull until it comes  
out of your head by the root—

as we stopper and scar the follicles—

as we make of your forest  
a farm fit for the mills  
but not for the panthers,

is it true that you become  
less beautiful?

## Life After Electricity?

On the beach, another species,  
half human or something like it,  
periodically watches the sun go down.

They don't gather every night.  
When they do, after sunset, they empty  
what they have seen into the sand.

It accepts everything that bothers them.  
Leaves them turning to one another  
as if wrongs were pains of growth.

They have learned to wash in saltwater  
and see clearly. They have learned  
to walk home by the moon.

One of their young has a flashlight  
buried where he sleeps. He dreams  
of power. He is afraid to use it.

# Late Night Possibilities

I

You could close your eyes,  
your neck dripping with sweat  
in the late September heat.

II

You could begin to dream  
of going somewhere,  
quickly,

of horns and flashing lights  
trying to guide you  
safely toward your destination.

III

You could waver between  
the dream state and waking state  
where sparks shower your face

from the side of the car  
shearing the guard rail,  
the guard rail shearing the car.

IV

Your foot could become  
heavy with sleep

and your hands could fall  
away from the wheel

and your body could plow  
into the night

with no concern  
for laws or lanes

or the deer trying to herd her young  
safely to the other side.

V

You could be seduced  
by 75 mph winds  
whistling something dangerous in your ear

and you could reach for the wheel  
like the belly of a lover who's leaving you too soon  
and you could pull her back to you

only to spin around three times  
and flip over twice—  
earth-sky, earth-sky.

VI

You could wake your friend  
in the passenger seat  
to tell him what happened.

VII

You could pull your other friend  
from the screaming hole  
in the broken back window

with blood  
and glass in flesh  
and no one to blame but yourself

for listening to your mind  
when it said *it's time*  
*you're tired*

*let's go.*

# S. E. Ingraham

## An Unkindness of Ravens

The sound drawing them  
into the rarefied space  
is her undoing.  
Expecting *Ave Maria* or  
maybe *Amazing Grace*  
to breach the gap  
between her,  
and the wretch laid out—  
novitiate, near-perfect—  
in the plainest casket available,  
save for the Order's ideogram,  
carved—or is it stamped—on the lid  
instead, it's Albinoni's *Adagio*  
that clings to her senses,  
invades her every pore;  
each note a leech, a remora  
eclipsing her promise to God,  
to herself, to create a calmness  
no matter how difficult  
it proves to be.

Ah, here come the rest—  
such an obsolete group,  
she cannot help thinking—  
habit-clad figure after  
figure flutters  
down the aisles looking  
like crows or, faces framed  
wimple-white, perhaps magpies.  
No—ignore the white, she  
decides—so stern looking,  
ravens surely.  
She tries to reel her mind  
back to the matter  
at hand, as the others

perch on pews.  
The music ends,  
the priest intones a prayer,  
beseeches all to consider  
the virtue of the deceased.

She feels light-headed,  
wonders at the man's  
audacity then remembers:  
it is her time of the month  
and ponders anew  
God's cruelty.  
Why continue the cycle  
yet insist on celibacy?  
Did it lessen the suffering  
of the deceased?  
She crosses herself, says  
a quick sincere "Hail Mary."  
Tries to forget the choice  
that led to the poor thing  
landing in the box.  
She cannot, however,  
keep from regarding  
her Savior on the cross,  
finds herself begging  
him silently,  
"Why *this* Lord?"  
*Her* child was *your*  
child *also*, was it not?"  
As always, the reply:  
silence.

# Said the Kettle of Hawks

The night you were fading, the doctor said, no,  
it was your age, you would be fine by morning,  
but there was something so casual in his voice—  
I didn't trust his voice, but I did still trust him.

So, I set off for a walk by the lake, solid ice right then.  
As I arrived, a great number of birds—hawks—  
startled from the low shore bushes, began to wheel around  
in the air. I'd never seen such a thing.

Hawks don't flock, as far as I know. They pair, but flock? No.  
These were at least a dozen or more—and silent—at first.  
They dove, then took the sky, then back, coming close to where  
I stood—staring at me in that sideways fashion birds have.

I couldn't move, just stood there watching them even as they began  
to shriek at me, and I was sure they *were* addressing me.  
The birds were agitated; if it had been any other time of year,  
not winter, I might have thought they were protecting a nest.

Their swirling got faster and the noise louder. Then, as suddenly  
as they had started, they swooped straight up and were gone.  
I didn't see where they went; they were just gone. In the aftermath,  
I felt gooseflesh on my arms, and *knew*, I needed to go to you.

I went back home, got in my car, and drove straight to the hospital.  
I realized as I drove, I was surrendering to the birds, giving over  
all rational thought. I got to you in time to hold your hand,  
whisper love and reassurance, be there until you stopped breathing.



## Storm Angels

Out of the soup that is refinery row's gift to the dish called sunrise,  
Edmonton's skyline wavers—a pulsing mirage.

A dressing—equal parts pollution and prairie air—bathes the Tarmac,  
as flocks of silver birds grab the sky, one after the other

hoisting the citizenry and visitors alike—too many to count—  
miles above the earth, ferrying them to points undisclosed.

There's a charm to these thunderous angels,  
these miracles that defy gravity and spit in God's eye.

Like homing pigeons or peace doves, they carry messages of hope,  
remind souls there's more to life than storms.

# Roadside Fallen Angel

Discovered defrocked and desperate by the side of a little-used road, she was barely breathing and had she not been trying to spread them—her tattered, torn wings; those appendages so battered they no longer appeared to be what they once were, and operated not a bit—

He might not have noticed her at all, might have taken her for rags thrown like trash to litter the road, but he saw the scrabbling, awkward motions her scrawny wings were making, they brought him out of his trance; made him slow down, take a closer look.

“Oh my word,” he breathed. “What have we here?” He got out, went to stare at the not-quite-human creature, but no heavenly one, not this poor thing. He squatted beside her, reached to touch her head. She shrank from him, eyes full of fear, her wing-things trembling.

Mumbling reassurances, he wrapped his coat around her gently, scooped her, ignored her mewling sounds of pain. He knew what to do. He would take her to join the others; he had wings back at his place. He told her everything would be fine; she would be put together again.

He kept his promise. When she awoke, she was fresh and luminous, her new wings spread so wide she could scarcely believe it. Her saviour had placed a mirror where she could see all her beauty. It took her breath away; there was, however, the matter of her body.

Her wings and face were quite remarkable—lovelier than ever in fact. But her body: she couldn't see or feel it, and she couldn't move at all. Now that she thought—nor her head or her wings, no movement. Then she noticed the others in the room—birds, butterflies.

The man whistled as he left; she couldn't find the words to ask him what she knew instinctively; her wings were exquisite, but clipped. She was an angel who would fly no more. She suspected tears were falling down her cheeks, but she felt nothing.

# Descent of a Phoenix

Below our tiny basket,  
the Nile serpentines, a ribbon  
of gold beneath another day birthing  
as Ra, round as a pregnant-woman's  
belly, slips slowly into a perfect sky,  
as if into a calm sea.

Although we are many  
in the basket, we are hushed.  
Made dumb no doubt  
by such sacred sights:  
Luxor's Valley of the Kings,  
tombs as old as time.

The only sound we hear: an occasional  
roar when the pilot blasts a jet of propane  
to warm the air in the massive balloon  
above us. A balloon with a ruby phoenix  
stenciled on both sides keeps us  
aloft as we take this god's eye trip.

Too soon we near the end of our journey.  
The pilot reminds us: the landing will  
likely be a bumpy one but not to worry;  
he and the ground-crew know the routine.  
All we need to do is hold on.

One of the last things I remember  
thinking as we begin our descent:  
"This is so perfect, so beautiful,  
and I am in awe. If I were to die right  
now, I would be utterly happy, content."

*"Glory paid to our ashes comes too late."*

*—Marcus Valerius Martialis*

*(In memory of those who perished. Luxor, Egypt—13.02.26)*

# Laura Gamache

## Before We Call the Bellevue Police Bomb Squad

*“Oh yeah, it’s definitely live.”  
—Joint Base Lewis-McChord Bomb Unit*

My sister pulls a white silk wad  
from the box she seemed to conjure  
from behind the shabby resin bench.  
Under that his Marine Corps cap.

So this is where Dad kept the war  
folded flat as a #10 envelope,  
USMC buckle, inlaid boxes fallen  
open, apart, handwriting on envelopes

that must have been his mother’s.  
These boxes must have been  
his mother’s. A wine-red watch box  
with a fancy women’s watch inside.

Red sun Japanese flag with bullet hole,  
yellow hand grenade, very small gun.  
I reach my hand towards a book spine,  
flinch from a second small gun.

“Let’s put this away,” Lyn panics,  
stuffs back ripped shroud or parachute,  
disintegrating boxes, letters from home.  
I’ll tell our brother, he’ll want the guns.

# Glove

*For handling dry ice; for glass cutting, sheet metal work, etc.  
—from Dictionary of Discards*

I try on a right-hand leather glove.  
It is buttery and barely too big,  
pull on the left, but can't. I'm confused,  
stare at it like a stubborn child.

The left glove has a thumb, and  
three fingers, like my mother's dad,  
who chopped off his pointer  
with an axe, not careful enough  
steading wood on the stump.

He wagged that knob with the skin  
stitched white-knuckle tight in our faces,  
cautioned us cousins with his tale,  
left behind this unwearable glove.

# Carpe Diem

*for my sister Lyn*

At my kitchen counter  
with tablespoons and Sharpies,  
we divided our parents' ashes  
into labelled Ziploc bags.  
I couldn't do that alone,  
seeing those bits of bone.

I laid out my father's sand dollars  
beside my Japanese ash-fired bowl.  
They are smaller than I imagined.  
Some are broken. Have I broken them?  
I want more and bigger beach tender.  
I want another chance.

Our parents are gone from the big rooms  
of their enclosed lives,  
their bitter squabbles,  
their small and large sorrows and regrets.  
Their shoes do not need them anymore.

Dad's Carpe Diem sweatshirt remains  
on its hanger on his open bathroom door.  
I drove his bathrobe through the tunnel  
and down the chute into the finality  
of the Children's Hospital donation bin.

No message echoes back  
from the planet the dead flutter towards,  
as they abandon us  
to our pettiness and postcards,  
the boxes neat beneath a rubble  
of sticky dust and dread.

Do not ask for whom the wood curls  
have been left across the work bench.  
They are not mine, nor are the workings

of my brother's thoughts, the voices  
above and either side of him that lead him  
into the caves of their improbable conclusions.  
Blood stains the indent where skin curls  
to nail on my thumb. I tear at myself  
in this quiet way to not cry out,

my mother no longer complaining,  
my father not walking away from me down the hall.

# Outing

*Within these covers, you may  
find some use for your discard  
far removed from its original purpose.  
—from Dictionary of Discards*

My brother, sister and I station ourselves  
in front of the bunker slits on the faces  
of the recycling dumpsters in Houghton.

Steve from the Boeing Wine Club  
already took empty wine bottle cases,  
but here we are with two cars-full more.

“I’m Zeus,” I say, after Dave Letterman  
who flung fluorescent tubes  
off a tall building in New York City.

I’m aiming for humorous, for light,  
but the bottle misses and shatters.  
Shards skitter across our feet.



# Notre Dame

*for Virginia Sullivan Gamache Quinn*

We rode the RER to Saint Michel-Notre Dame—  
same stop Bill surfaced from the first time he'd come,  
American GI, World War II, a Catholic.

That view across the Seine to Notre Dame  
was the same, walk across the bridge to Ile de la Cité,  
this time with cane. After he stumbled, fell,

I held Virginia's hand, our own grande-dame,  
Bill her ten-year's spouse, après-omelets  
and croissant at the corner café near our apartment,  
Rue St. Charles, Arrondissement Quinze, our first  
full day in Paris. Après rose windows and candles  
lit for loved ones gone, Navigo Decouverte passes  
useful even for the funicular up to Sacré-Coeur.

Three mornings we boarded the Metro to Musée  
D'Orsay to find it closed due to strike, Virginia  
And Bill game for seat-of-pants plans. At Musée  
Marmottan Monet beside the Bois de Boulogne  
I led Virginia to what water lilies were there. Bill,  
spent, leaned against a wall, but here he came.

Jim and I explored: Musée Cluny, Foucault's pendulum,  
Paul Klee at the Musée de la Musique. Rue de Mozart  
chocolate shop compact as a sonatina. Macaron at Maison  
Ladurée. Falafel pita at the Israeli deli opposite  
the Palestinian deli in Le Marais, where a man  
pulled me back from a car careening around the corner.

Every evening, Bill and Virginia took the elevator  
to the alley beside the apartment to watch la Tour Eiffel's  
9 pm display. Every decade, Virginia tells me,  
"You'll love being fifty, seventy, ninety, . . ." a feather dance  
where in the end no pretense is what we display.  
Some year and soon I won't have her, but for now  
she's here, and as she stoops, more dear.

# Keighan Speer

## People Are Like Storms

Because when I was younger my father would  
speak soft words or none at all  
and leave marks on my toddler skin  
before I could count one-one-thousand  
between strikes of lightning.

Because when I was a little older but not much  
girls who didn't speak to me would  
whisper thoughts of me into  
eager ears and laughter would erupt  
within school hallways and it sounded  
like dark clouds and my father's hand.

Because when I thought I was much older  
I let boys with pretty eyes wreak havoc  
and tear down my walls with their gale winds  
before they evaporated and left me  
in the rubble with what sounded like  
my father's hand and elementary laughter.

So

People are like storms.  
Because they destroy us they  
ravage our hearts and minds and  
disappear.

People are like storms because  
we watch them and dance with them  
and thank the sky and the earth  
for giving us thunder and darkness  
and angry hands and elementary laughter and deceitful eyes.

People are like storms because  
they cause damage and anger

and hate and yet  
and yet  
we kiss lips and raindrops  
we hold hands beneath dark skies  
we gaze into pretty eyes and bolts of lightning.

Because people are like storms  
and we love them.

## **It Rained Today**

It rained today.  
We woke to dark skies  
moons beneath our eyes.

It rained today.  
We gathered in too-bright hallways and  
made little attempt to remove fallen droplets.

It rained today.  
Our eyes glued to boards and sheets of paper  
hands clutching vast containers of caffeinated salvation.

It rained today.  
We forgot it did.

It rained today.  
We were released and  
shuffled through heavy doors with closed eyes and  
felt droplets upon knitted brows.

It rained today.  
We didn't pause  
didn't glance at the sky or seek protection.

It rained today.  
We trudged on.

# Dolls

Because we can paint smiles  
on porcelain faces and  
blink our jewel eyes and  
hold our china heads high and  
you'll never realize

You'll never see the  
cracks that  
etch spiderwebs across  
glass bones and  
you'll never see  
we're hollow inside.

Because we can't  
speak through painted smiles or  
let tears fall from jewel eyes or  
lower china heads and  
you'll never notice

You'll never know  
tiny cracks form invisible wounds and  
you'll never know  
we're broken inside.

# And Who Was I

And music was in my bones  
smoke in my hair  
burning liquid  
at the back of my throat  
and she turned to me and whispered  
“Isn’t this fun?”  
I smiled  
and nodded  
because I had never been to a party  
before.

And when his hands were on me  
tearing fabric from my skin  
and his nameless voice murmured  
“Isn’t this fun?”  
I told him yes  
because he said I was beautiful.

And when friends I didn’t remember meeting  
were burning sour herbs and  
forcing powders up nasal cavities and  
finding new ways to fly  
and they showed me how and sang  
“Isn’t this fun?”  
I sang, too  
because I wanted to fly.

And when day and night  
blurred together  
when strangers showed me new ways  
to forget  
and when they gazed at me  
between slitted eyes and foggy minds and  
rasped in trembling voices  
“Isn’t this fun?”  
I answered yes  
because I couldn’t remember why I would say no.

# Emma Atkinson

## So Loved the World

Maybe  
only God loves the world.

I'll admit that I have made  
small sacrifices for my small life.

Here is a beige square  
on my shoulder  
distorted and discolored  
by a nicotine patch.

Such furtive appetites  
only disguise themselves  
as connections to the world.

And it's true  
I didn't leave my apartment today.

But my twin bed  
is pressed by the window  
so I can hear the rain at night,  
and my two cats chase each other  
from room to room.

Maybe  
there are many ways to love the world.

# Grocery stores make me feel mentally ill

It's partly the space itself, white and cold  
and endless and hollow at the center. It's like Hell  
masquerading as Heaven, you know, those thousands  
of treats laced with poison. Everything is screaming for attention.

It's partly the eyes. A dozen cameras, a dozen employees  
stationed, a thousand glances. It's the politics of movement,  
and the two-dimensional gazes reflected in plastic screens.  
It's the staring, the observation.

It's mostly my hands, my basket or cart, wide  
and grasping at colors. It's seeing my life take form  
in solid objects, bleeding meat, warm cans,  
PopTarts and beer. It's seeing what I am  
spelled out in a shopping list, it's the thought of home  
and what I bring there, what it lacks and what I choose.

It's identities laid bare.

On the way home, I speed through every turn.



## Séances

My mother was considered wild  
(by 1960s small town standards.)  
At the age of twelve she caused a scandal  
by hosting a séance in the basement  
of the Lutheran church. We shared this connection:  
a love of ghost stories. I once asked her, “What is  
a ghost?” She said, “Someone who can’t move on,  
someone with unfinished business.”

For weeks after she died, every time a car  
pulled into our driveway, I expected her  
to climb out of it. My father said he felt  
the same way. No one ever dies  
without unfinished business.

The spirits who come back get all the attention,  
but someone has to wonder about the ones  
who never do, about what they found instead  
and where they found it.

# Erin Lehrmann

## Block

*"To make beauty out of pain, it damns the eyes—  
No, dams the eyes."—Dan Beachy-Quick*

Wincing under the weight of the dinosaur  
Six months could pass without  
Issue.

No word, not even a letter.  
Is it dammed to hell somewhere?

Or  
Did global warming stick a straw in me,  
Take it up through the puckering ozone?

Check:

1. My tongue is parched and list-less
2. My index has gone printless

Three  
Nights in a row my depths have been  
Too arid to plumb.

The perpetual pinch kept  
my eyes rolling in waking  
but still in sleep.

Wincing under the weight of the dinosaur  
Again, despite my best intentions.

I had that recurring nightmare  
Again, I was making the bed and  
despite my best interventions  
I couldn't smooth the sheet

Don't catch what ails your house, they say  
Studies suggest so much these days.

And so I creep up the street with a dent in my tail  
Dreading the thorough woman and the zoom lens

I run in circles  
I run off the page

I took that pill  
I bound the way we were with the way we remember we  
were.

---

Why did they beige the building  
once the color of sky?

And the hawk dives low, scattering the gulls  
And the hawk dives low to whisper in my ear  
*Honey, what do you know of sky?*

# Fear

We wait for the ball to drop,  
No, we wait like figurines  
in a clay animation waiting for the ball to be lowered to us  
by a hand in the sky  
on a piece of orange thread.

We wait for another year to bring change  
We make offerings to the calendar

And while we wait, the waves of the ocean are being drawn for us  
by a diligent child scooting along on hands and knees  
connecting point to the next with shaky graphite.

It occurs to me, to name it  
but I dare not speak the name.

I wash my hair twice,  
Lather rinse repeat  
Lather rinse repeat—

Is that four times?  
Is that me, reflected in the flesh of a prickly pear?  
Do I escape one cactus snare just to reach for another?

It is amazing, the propensity we have to see ourselves in non-  
reflective surfaces.

## Site

I entered the house on a drill bit.

I entered the house and installed semi-permanent fixtures.

I entered the house to pull a drawstring close around my small life. The world puckered around it. I centered the kitchen table on an antagonistic rug and awaited chairs.

I picked this house from a list but it picked me first. There were three eyes embedded in the walls when I entered. Three out of five eyes in the room blinked expectantly, the other two gaped. I picked up my belongings and carried myself across the threshold.

I look different to myself but the house sees me. It sees my lipstick and my shame. I pretend that it's just the wrong color lipstick but the eyes of the house raise their brows.

Two of the eyes are gray and the third is blue. The gray eyes have mile-long lashes. When I leave the house, two additional yellow eyes guard the door and the darkness.

You might feel strange in a house with eyes. You might wonder if the eyes record information about you as you drink day-old coffee. You might become aware that you neglected to clean the crack between the stove and the countertop.

But I have seen many houses. This house sees me.

*“Learning to smile a certain way to disarm without appearing vulnerable is drag. Learning to see how you are seen . . .”*  
—Mindy Nettifee

## **This too, you must own**

Today I bought a dress covered in chameleons  
Like Pablo, I, too, was tired of being a man  
I had wandered the post-festive, already consumed  
Already devoured aisles  
And having plucked the drooping,  
Crepe-paper-after-the-party from the wall  
It swelled like a second-wind balloon, it  
Transformed on me playing dress-up  
I traded up for chromatophores  
I see how I am seen and raise the world \$29.98-plus-tax  
Of forest green chiffon

Now feel drops coming:  
Turn slick water-beaded yellow.  
Feel psychology buzzwords fletched and flung:  
Turn porcelain-white shoulder-to-shoulder front line,  
    curving upward.  
Feel scope zeroing in:  
Turn red-ringed electric stove burner.  
Feel pierced, distanced to the point of fringe, glossed-over:  
Turn sequin-studded, catered-to queen.  
See silver platter:  
Turn flashing-in-the-hands-of-Judith.  
See severed head:  
Turn hydra,  
Turn madman butterfly,  
Turn reptile-clad iron woman.

Own the ways that you shift under gaze;  
Shift gaze back with 137 scaly hooded eyes.

# D. H. Turtel

## On Margaret Filled with Smoke

Don't you know? Hero grows in broken home,  
Swollen cheeks and eyes are fine, just hide and  
count minutes on her wrist, give mom a kiss.  
Margaret did. Light and violence birthed a kid,  
name him child, name him boy, name him girl.  
name him anything. Better—name it nothing.

Airplane bottles, tiny cocktails, make a mobile,  
set in motion metronomes overhead,  
both before and after bed, tucking in,  
set the thermostat to cold. Shiver you!  
shiver boy! Uncertainty is velvet,  
it is sure to keep you warm. Winter's warm,  
when winter comes at all, spring and fall and  
No. We are not children of the sun.  
when darkness came, when darkness comes,  
do greet him warmly (with uncertainty)  
welcome him across the threshold that keeps  
out the dirty forest. Frost covered earth.

the open doorway, you could just make out  
quick flash of right eye cataract, follow  
boy, he's grown up now, has buried things,  
has killed things too. Stands waiting in the room,  
Margaret rocks her rocking chair, air compressed,  
Her perfume dense. She waves you in. Accepts  
your pendulum of nothing, of nothing,  
you of nothing, of nothing, of nothing,  
Of light and violence. Of shallow silence,  
Shallow, yet still deep enough to drown in,  
I have seen men drowned in puddles. So do  
call home. Scream through the screen of swinging doors,  
where your voice carries the same frequency,  
swallowed by lights. Ceiling's circular bulbs,

of lamps in the street, of sky on the lake,  
of cloud covered moon. You'll talk again soon.

You'll talk of light and violence. Of shadows  
Come to haunt you, come to kiss you, kill you,  
They come disguised as infant poltergeist,  
And promise already to grow old.  
And you've grown old.  
You're still as stone and sad,  
A sorrow common in things without hearts,  
A patience reserved for lawless winter.  
We were minerals. We knew nothing of  
Breath. But we breathed nonetheless, our denim  
Matchbox pockets filled, our heavy guilt, our  
Gasoline. Sing something sweet, and scream the wind,  
We watched your words curl up like smoke. They rose  
They fell, they froze in cold November air,  
Some arsonists, some anywhere. We watched  
Your words curl up like smoke. They rose, they fell,  
Like passing phantoms in the night. Tidal,  
Fleeting, running, repeating, 'it's alright  
It's alright, it's alright.' Those seeds are sown.  
And don't you know? You breathed, you didn't, no.



## stand we there

stand we there  
smoke sting eyes  
whirlwind dream  
alibies  
rocket star  
broke moon dark  
distant drum  
clicking heart  
you—me—here?  
why not now?  
pulling hair  
sky fall down  
violent grass  
red stripe skin  
wind collapse  
stop begin

siren call  
screaming—now  
trembling neck  
hears no sound  
pinkwhite eyes  
why so still?  
margaret—breathe  
lungs or gills  
margaret—speak  
night commands!  
pulse on wrist?  
warm on hands?  
violent grass  
cover sin  
spade move earth  
stop begin

## To a Bride Growing Thin

The clock in the kitchen, it didn't count seconds  
His idiot tongue knew no words,  
The hour hand moved on the hour, we reckoned,  
And screamed with a clay cuckoo bird  
Minutes said summer and doors grew in frames  
Agoraphobe Margaret, going insane

The clock in the kitchen it slept all through June,  
The cuckoo bird missed all the sun,  
The hours had promised to wake Maggie soon,  
But the comatose minutes unspun,  
The calendar laughed but did not eat a thing  
And July was as thin as she ever had been.

A red-stitched white ball flew back through the window  
The shards of glass mended themselves  
The kids ran away and Jack called them pussies,  
And screamed them to all go to hell,  
The cuckoo's green tears fell and pooled on the ground,  
And awoke in September, red, yellow and brown.

The hour hand looked at the closed and cracked window,  
And saw himself for the first time,  
The clock in the kitchen, it froze in December,  
The Seconds they shivered and died,  
The calendar's name, nobody remembered,  
Margaret asked, but winter unanswered,  
And both just a twelfth of their size.  
The cuckoo bird called to come out every hour,  
But the minute hand hung, fifty-five.

The clock in the kitchen, it melts in the spring,  
And the wall it looks empty and white,  
The hour hand's broken, pneumonic, asleep,  
In a puddle of sad, phantom time,  
The Calendars wasted away to a bone,  
She hasn't died yet, but already a ghost,  
Grey cardboard square with a mannequin's soul.

And the west facing windows, they never see sun,  
They dreamt of pink settings that never did come.

## Margaret, again

When you asked about a soul,  
I laughed, 'You mean the brain,  
And the way the veins can take the shape,  
Of something shapeless in your head  
And be invincibly invisible but not at all concrete.  
But when mother grew her headstone,  
We watched the moving clouds,  
Kept our heads out of the ground,  
Left my thoughts unspoken,  
Hidden,  
Like the tattooed wall behind the school,  
Where you asked me about love,  
I laughed, 'The heart just forces blood,  
To heads and hands and places  
It might not really want to go,  
those girls off chasing bottles,  
golden Johnny Walker Red,  
To be whisked by boys to bed,  
The same way they once knew,  
Cranes dropped children on front porches,  
Like the one that held your yellow house,  
An empty picture frame,  
We'd disregard the inside scenes,  
Your mother's swollen wrists and eyes were fine,  
As long as that old wooden chair,  
Kept swinging we'd keep sitting,  
And you'd keep asking about fate,  
Like it was something that existed  
Outside the pages of some book,  
(star-crossed lovers who died at the same time,  
You said that there was love in poison,  
That there was love in suicide)  
Then when Margaret left we asked,  
Why not a single celebration,  
Bright flowers and congratulations.  
So we burned up all your Shakespeare,  
And that fire forged a ring you let me slip around your finger,  
we dressed your youth in white and put a veil over its eyes,

Fattened like a slaughter cow, at some fancy ball reception,  
To cut its throat while you were sleeping.

When you woke you were a piece of art,  
And asked if you were beautiful,  
I laughed, 'you're just a storybook,  
With wrinkles, scars and beauty marks'  
And some curled up like smoke above  
That goddamn yellow house,  
And some ran off in straight fast lines,  
Like the way we ran away,  
Our denim matchbox pockets filled,  
With heavy guilt and gasoline,  
And there was happiness like Velcro,  
That stuck my face to yours,  
And when we died as one, a piece of art,  
I knew of poison,  
And the cancer of a wedding,  
And the hot knives in the cake,  
The cyanide in white champagne.

# Chris Haug

## Bovine Paranoia

I'm sure it's different for everyone,  
but for me, it began like this: You're scared,  
but you tell the Angus beside you  
anyway, and he just snorts dismissively  
says that in profile  
faces only *look* like they're winking.  
But you're unconvinced,  
and you don't *want* to bring  
it up again, but it keeps happening.  
The sheep start doing it, and pigs  
do it, too; then a farmer does it, then a tractor,  
and the worries you feel about what  
*others* will think are eventually outweighed  
by what all of this means for *you*  
if what you think you're seeing  
is *actually happening*. Your four stomachs  
churn each time you catch someone's eye,  
until you finally can't take it anymore,  
and you dare to speak about this phenomena  
with others, but of course, that psychotic  
Guernsey pipes up and says  
*you're* the one who's way off base.  
And everyone laughs, but  
no one knows what to do,  
and you think, *What else can you do,*  
*but speak up?* See, whether or not  
you've accurately remembered  
the moment last week when you saw  
the wheat field winking at you  
just before it began to rain . . .  
you're sure there was a flash  
and then finally, definitively—  
thunder. Yes, it now occurs to you  
that the only thing that's really true  
is that you're soggy and uneasy,

and that there is no way  
you're going to be able to spend  
every single moment  
of a lifetime of afternoons  
like this.

# Loss

It's never how we imagine:  
a daughter can, perhaps,  
see her father returning  
home from a long year  
in a dusty place, his beard  
matted with black blood,  
his eyelids locked tight.

Though she knows  
this won't be how she will  
actually see him when he returns,  
it's a way  
to prepare herself.

But loss sneaks out  
from the dark corners  
of a Thursday morning  
when her mother  
doesn't wake her  
for school, and her hero  
father comes back early  
with his hair neatly trimmed  
and his oaky legs unscarred.

Months pass in silence,  
and she finds that the only things  
her father can bring himself to touch  
for more than just a moment  
are the creamy shells of eggs  
sleeping peacefully  
as the dull kitchen lights  
buzz somewhere overhead.

## In Havelock's Pub— Nairn, Scotland

I'm pretty sure it's English  
he's speaking, but I can't make out  
a word, so I'm nodding  
and drinking, trying to hide this fact.  
His words are a deluge  
and his eyebrows arc into caterpillars  
as his leathered hand points  
like a gun: forefinger at my empty  
glass, thumb at the ceiling.  
I nod, and a smile burrows out  
from beneath his gray mustache.  
He laughs as he bangs my pint glass  
on the bar three times.  
The bartender nods.  
Apparently, I've just ordered  
another drink.

I don't know what he saying,  
but I want to believe he's telling me  
how he survived the war  
and how he learned to talk about it  
once it was over, that he's speaking  
about how hard the rain fell  
the day he met his wife, about how soft  
her hands were the first time  
she touched his shipwrecked face,  
and that he's confiding in me  
that sometimes the sea  
seems to unfold itself  
only to him.



# I Learn Prince Harry's Junk is Going To Be in the Newspaper

—after Frank O'Hara

Apparently, he was gyrating away  
and then suddenly he stopped singing  
and dancing to flip off the camera  
and you said there was thunder  
from across the sea, the Queen's anger  
you said. And I said  
but thunder pounds you in the chest  
hard, so it was not really thunder  
and there was no lightning,  
but I was in such a panic about "news"  
like this permeating the air  
about how "society" was acting  
precisely like the sea  
churning and foaming  
that I saw a newsman  
levitating, mid-air  
on a forty-foot television screen say,  
"Prince Harry is naked in Vegas!"  
And look, I know I haven't been  
to *that* many casinos,  
but even *I* know saints aren't canonized  
at Caesar's, and I know there are no comets  
seen in the Bellagio's bathroom.

I *have*, however, had my picture in the paper.  
O Prince Harry, we love you  
please put your clothes on.

# Kimberly M. Russo

## The Home Depot

Even the inclined plane  
we walk,  
mirrors our journey.  
Together . . . but worlds apart.

You've found a replacement,  
Iron Man.  
I am isolated,  
Recluse.

You speak of new opportunities,  
options.  
The lump in my throat,  
Nostalgia.

Automatic doors offer  
solutions,  
An immense warehouse of  
answers.

Materials promise repair,  
neglected.  
Tools for the taking,  
untouched.

You say, it's my chance to  
start over.  
I can re-introduce myself,  
sever ties.

(Like some defective product  
made-over . . .  
manufactured and marketed to a  
top-drawer buyer.)

I am looking back, refusing to  
let go.  
You are looking forward, choosing  
your future.

In a wall of stacked boxes, an empty niche,  
Sylvia's oven.  
I pour myself inside and cover  
my face.

My last visit to this "House of  
Improvement"  
left me on a short  
rope

Tethered to "experts" of  
the mind  
and memories of the child  
within.

With their shelves of  
tools  
and crates of  
drugs,  
what did they really  
fix?

Sobbing in the presence of the  
Hydrangeas,  
I exit through the door we entered  
together.  
You pay for the filter to clear our  
water  
and leave by the alternate route.

# Wreckage

My house survived the storm.  
Damaged, undoubtedly . . .  
but still upright.

Tearing through our home,  
collecting seemingly random items,  
an escort to oblivion.

Debris left behind . . . stacks of books  
and their hopeful characters,  
unshelved, displaced.

With force enough to eject furnishings,  
and thorough enough  
to pack your toothbrush,

You've left me  
with the wreckage  
and empty spaces.

## Joint-Custody

Rolling suitcases and repurposed gift bags,  
stuffed with clothes and memories.  
How did we get here?  
Four kids and two homes and six bruised souls.  
The numbers don't make sense to the heart.

Noted mistakes, tally marks in your mind,  
engraved on my conscience  
strike-over the ink of promises.  
Years of shared dreams and intimate moments,  
have you fled so discreetly?

I see you bleeding through the parchment  
refusing to give up.  
Don't you realize, it's too late?  
The suitcases and their innocent handlers  
are gone.

# Definitive Definition

Keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss;  
sharp sorrow; painful regret . . .

So reads the definition of  
Grief.

Mental suffering.

Steady weight presses my mind against the confines of my  
skull from the moment I wake until the moment I wake,  
punctuated throughout the day by a hammer that yields  
ruthless force.

Sharp sorrow.

It found me below my ribcage today.  
Staring at the lumps of packaged chicken, I inhaled through  
my teeth  
and knew I could not side-step its arrival.

Painful regret.

Cooking for one is a parody of normalcy.  
And not bitter, nor sharp, nothing tastes so bland  
As grief.

## An Unsubtle Metaphor

The pages turned, and I hadn't tended to them ... at all ... just like the garden in the backyard. Neither of us spent a portion of our time clearing out the dried up messes, or planting new seeds, or even watering the life that existed despite our neglect. Now, the hour is late, the brittle leaves are the foundation of the plot, any recent growth withered beneath the truth of daylight, and neither of us seems able to produce a seed of hope.

Darling, Dearest,  
quite neglectful,  
How does your garden grow?  
It doesn't.  
End of chapter.

•

I weeded the “garden” today — If you call a few strawberry plants fighting for space amid a jungle of tree-sized weeds a garden. It was hot. I wore gloves to protect me from the thorns, but some of them pierced deep enough to bring blood. I had to bend and squat and assume a variety of uncomfortable positions. Sweat kept finding its way to sting my eyes, and my hands were dirty, and several times, I wanted to quit. I thought about rushing through it, kind of half-assed ... you know? ... just focusing on the enormous stalks that even the neighbors recognize. Instead, meticulously, I plucked the tiniest sprouts, one at a time, until their remains formed a sizeable pile. Even as I pulled the last clinging root from the earth, I knew that tomorrow new stems would break through the dirt. The labor was long and detailed, and no one was around to notice what I had done. Standing upright, I admired the boxed plot of overturned soil and the cleared stone pathway. I'd forgotten how lovely it was.

# Holly Walrath

## Elegy for a Body

I take up ashes  
like taking up space.  
I am dis-embodimenting my body  
or what I once called skin,  
its remnants rounding out,  
the insides of a blue funeral urn  
whose curves make sense.

Inside here with me  
the afreet's ghost  
and the memory of feeling thin  
like a butterfly's wing  
like water in a glass pitcher  
like telephone wires  
filled with energy  
of the me I remember only  
in the soft nail beds  
and crane's neck  
and boy's chest  
of yesterday.



## Two-Hundred-Fifty Seven

I have eaten 942 sunflower seeds  
(roasted, unsalted, in-shell)  
and written 257 words today, today  
I have told the character in the science  
fiction novel that he will die, and  
he has responded with the  
casual and unbroken flick of a middle  
finger between his teeth. Today  
I imagined several haikus that could  
not really be defined as such but  
at least they looked pretty, in a nice  
little block shape like literary wood  
engravings on sheepskin or the desperate  
secret note of a fugitive, squeezed  
onto the back of a postage stamp. Today  
I revisited the scene in the back  
of the black pick-up with the blood  
on the floorboards, concealed by the  
litter of cigarette butts, coins and receipts  
and reckless cell phones that will  
not stop ringing hip hop ring tones. Today  
the pregnant girl, wooed by the stack  
of gold rings upon the older man's  
fingers, will not escape into the thick  
crowd of New York bodies and mist  
that lies at their feet like death's  
odor, she will not deface her  
rapist, branding him for the bastard  
he is with the hush of the gun. Today  
instead of beginning anew I instead  
made honey lemon herbal tea, which  
was so hot that I had to drop a tiny  
ice cube into its surface, which refused  
to melt away anyway, but at least today  
I managed to recreate the sound  
between my teeth when my pursed lips  
hit my tongue and the cat comes running  
besides which the noise of perfect  
silence.

# I Think My Taste is Questionable

In my childhood, I ate one ninety-nine cent candy bar a day.  
Walking home from the gas station,  
a cold Dr. Pepper between my legs as I jumped  
the fence behind the woods. I had a panache  
for Smarties, hoarded at Halloween,  
and I would slowly bite their white rims  
until a hard heart remained.

In my teens, ahead of my time, I drank Jello shots  
that gulped down, formed a strange pile  
like gummy bears at the bottom of my self-respect.  
At the movies I ordered tubs of popcorn  
and sour patch kids, and sat in the back row with my friends,  
dreaming about the projectionist, and his freckles.

In my twenties I smoked clove cigarettes,  
coiled in brown paper, little love letters  
chased them with orange sour Altoids,  
which at first glittered with a layer of diamond white dust  
but later, in the hot car on a Texas day  
coagulated into sticky sweet oblivion.

In my thirties I developed a taste for pickles  
and sunflower seeds, the latter's shrouds littering  
my desk, in the cracks of the couch and my bra,  
the former folded in white paper, saved for later,  
always in secret, to avoid uncomfortable questions.

Will I take up pig's feet in my forties? Perhaps  
kimchee and caviar? Will I finally mature a taste  
for Grape Nuts, like my father? Or will I swill  
a diet coke with brunch like my mother?  
Or perhaps, the tawny suicide  
of a whisky bottle  
kept close at hand,  
under my pillow  
like a tooth for my  
guardian fairy?  
Like my brother?

# The Ghost of a Living Man

Sometimes, I see a man who looks like my brother, in the parking lot of a Wal-Mart, or a grocery store.

Mostly seedy places.

He's got a shaved head—his ears poke out and there's a gray shadow of once thick, richly dark hair. He wears an oversized tee shirt, always black, usually a band or a video game. His beer gut hangs out beneath it—like a bee hive on a skinny oak tree.

He wears faded jean shorts. There's a skunk ring in the back pocket, or a pack of cigarettes. His legs poke out beneath like little bird stalks. He wears combat boots or torn-up sneakers and clean white socks. Sometimes he has a tattoo. His hands shake.

I think—there goes the ghost of a living man. Estranged brothers can haunt you that way.

## A Tourist of Sorts

I am rediscovering you, in pieces.  
In black and tan voices behind  
gray partitions, tongue on tongue.  
Syllables made American, New England.

In the retelling of Joyce on sky lit stairwells  
Irish men and women, pride in the morning,  
    “Think you’re escaping and run into yourself.  
    Longest way round is the shortest way home.”

In the quiet hum of  
rows and rows and rows  
of white screens,  
their light simulated  
in faces, eyes, glasses of the hoi polloi.

And also in the smell of you,  
amongst the rows an intoxicating  
scent of dust, memory,  
earthly and incompletely human—  
the contribution of the heavyset homeless  
who bring the street with them.

Today I found the back hallway, unaccountably  
leading into the front hallway, like a Penrose  
staircase in a painting, and I began to wonder  
is this art? No, it is just a vacant vestibule,  
but it is mine, and I begin to wonder if it exists at all.

White on blue arrows demarcating, nonfiction,  
archives below, further down, inexplicably, magazines.  
Where the newspapers are, nobody knows.

Above me, in the atrium, I am struck anew by the  
daylight through the panes of the skylight, four-sided  
and devastating, as if I have never seen the sun before.

You are almost too much, as I slowly uncover you,  
mapping you, until I know you, just as I am.

# Angel C. Dye

## Her

this poem is for her  
stitching up wounds from twelve years ago  
out of her teens and still unsure if she goes  
both ways  
hating birthdays cuz they're reminders that  
she's closer to death  
at one point she wanted that  
cut/purged/hurt herself in an effort to forget  
she was herself

this poem is for her  
in a clinic for the third time with a womb  
he suggested she turn into a burial ground  
but the real tomb is her heart every time  
he knocks her down cuz she don't understand  
why she still loves him

this poem is for her  
married/divorced/remarried/single/alone/  
reclusive/elusive/polyandrous/straight/gay/queer  
here

this poem is for her  
too narrowly defined and more than meets the eye  
too easily denied and more often dismantled and untied  
than uplifted and inspired

this poem is for her  
wherever it finds her  
and i hope she writes her own version of it  
when it feels right for her

# Tapestry

There are dangling threads and strands  
frayed and loose hanging around the hems  
of my skin.

Two knotted a long time ago then ripped to  
shreds and were never able to mend.  
And I am their tapestry, their crooked  
cloth, their patch on ripped knee jeans  
and snagged shirts.

Sometimes we all tangle into each other,  
and I feel one's blue-black eyes the same  
way I feel the other's doped veins and venom.  
They are separate ends of the same bolt of  
fabric, and I am all that joins them now.

Sometimes I want to be my own, not theirs.

I am them even when I hate it.  
Hate hanging on to what I think is their  
regard for me by a thread.  
Hate safety pinning the pieces they've left  
me with just to make something wearable.  
I am wearing too big and too small skin that  
they draped and stretched over me when  
they felt like it, and now I am old enough to  
tailor myself into whatever I want to be.

Of course I will have to washboard bathe the  
rags I have been for twenty years,  
but once I am wrung out and hung to drip dry  
I will soak up sun like it is all that can revive  
the colors of my cloth that have faded.  
And I will wear the two ends of my newly  
stitched garment, and their knots and  
tangles will not strangle me  
but they will make me whole.

# Inquiries on the Meeting of Birth and Burial Ground

*—for Sybrina Fulton, Lesley McSpadden, Gloria Darden,  
Geneva Reed-Veal, and every mother who has buried a stolen child*

Have you ever asked her what it's like  
carrying stillborns in her womb?  
To know her seeds are flowering  
only to be snatched up like weeds?  
Have you tried to look past her eyes  
and into the empty space carved out in her soul  
for ruptured membrane and crushed bones?

If she told you would you understand  
how bathing babies feels like readying to  
wring out bloodied clothes?  
How nursing her children foreshadows  
breathing resuscitation into their bodies?  
If she said she expects the doctor to hand her  
birth and death certificates on the same day  
would that mean anything to you?

Does it make her heroic or insane  
to birth children who might never  
reach adulthood?  
Is her heart home or hearse to her lineage?  
Can she hear hope rumbling in her belly  
over the sound of barrels and bullets  
midwifing her fear?

Will she hug and kiss  
or eulogize and bury her future today?  
Will her motherhood always be marked  
by questions and memory?

# Symphony in D

When darkness enters you  
there is no way to push back its hands,  
groping and grabbing at yet undeveloped chords,  
stroking and stealing the naïveté of prepubescent melodies

Darkness has a familiar face,  
gentle, welcoming, reassuring, childlike—  
friendly

Your insides clink and clatter  
like maracas, tambourines, high hat cymbals  
but your music is crashing to a crescendo  
you cannot control

You have never broken a bone before,  
still you are certain that darkness has  
fondled fortissimo fractures all over you

And by the time your notes and clefs  
rearrange to sound beautiful again  
nothing is fine-tuned enough to undo  
darkness's cacophony



## Beauty in Her Marrow

Inhaling paradise feels like kissing  
the glass partitioning forever and the end.

Amethyst rain pirouettes through begging vessels,  
and she is fifteen minutes freer than five seconds ago

shrouded in superhuman flight.

She hovers  
over thirteen-year-old yesterday;  
flashes of women who look too much like she  
entwine their trembling fingers with hers  
teaching her how to b r e a t h e .

And the air up here is glorious—

white, shining, sparkling ‘til it glares, ‘til it blinds,  
bounteous and aromatic enough to choke  
her into unconsciousness.

Breath is heavy, heavy  
when it is a relevé and plié gasping through her pulse and  
ribcage,  
somersaulting to a sudden scream,  
when it is the soundtrack to her priceless transaction.

Selling and buying she knows.  
Colliding and collapsing she knows.  
Shatters and splinters she knows.  
Even redemption and renewal she knows.

But does she know that there is air yet more divine than  
this?  
The clouds gathering for torrent and storm around her  
cyclone  
can grand jeté too.

Though she is looking through lenses  
fogged and blurred by ragged breathing now,  
once she is ready to collect the cracked and calcified frame  
meant to hold her upright,  
she will again see the beauty in her marrow.

# Contributor Notes

**Emma Atkinson** lives in Houston, TX. Her hobbies include making chapbooks, reading about demonic possession, and taking too many photos of her cats. Some of her writing can be found on themighty.com and the 2015 Pooled Ink anthology.



**Angel C. Dye** is a poet and spoken word artist from Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas by way of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Currently she is a senior at Howard University studying English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She is passionate about using poetry as a medium through which she questions, explores, and makes sense of the disparities in the communities that she represents as well as to approach liberation and communal healing.



Poet and Arts Educator **Laura Gamache** earned an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Washington in 1993, and directed the UW Writers in the Schools program from 1993 to 2003. She was a Jack Straw Writers Program fellow in 1999 and 2002. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook, *nothing to hold onto*. Her poems and teaching essays have appeared in many print and on-line journals. Her band, Feeble Prom Date, is imaginary.



**Chris Haug** is a father, husband, and teacher. His poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming in places like *Silk Road*, *North American Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Punchnel's*, and *Potomac Review*.



**Lawrence Hayes** is a writer, arborist, and deer fencer living in Pawling, NY. He studied with the poets Charles Simic and Mekeel McBride at the University of New Hampshire, where he received a Masters Degree in Poetry Writing in 1981. He has had his work published in *The New York Times*, *Water Street Review*, *Aegis*, and other small magazines.



**Miranda Cowley Heller** grew up in a family of artists and writers. She worked as a magazine editor and book doctor in New York before moving to California. She was head of Drama Series at HBO for a decade, developing such shows as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, and *Deadwood*. Miranda is on the Board of PEN-USA, and is a member of the Los Angeles Poets & Writers Collective. She is currently finishing her first novel.



**S. E. Ingraham** writes from the lip of the Arctic Circle, the 53rd parallel, where she and the love of her life share space with two Pugly dogs. Among the topics Ingraham feels compelled to write about: quitting mental health consumerism, endorsing peace, and witnessing unspeakable social injustices. She gets published...some...she wins awards...some. She has to write. She does. More of her writing can be found at [soundofthewordnight.blogspot.ca](http://soundofthewordnight.blogspot.ca)



**Nicole Lachat** is a Canadian poet of Peruvian and Swiss descent. Beyond borders, she is a Bunburyist at heart, and a recent MFA graduate of New York University.



**Erin Lehrmann**, knocked out by wisdom teeth painkillers, snoozed all the way from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Baltimore, Maryland. Although she does not remember unpacking her belongings (or dropping her dresser on her mother's foot), she very consciously chose to attend the Maryland Institute College of Art and to remain in Baltimore, where she works as a poet, painter, and art educator.



**Amy Nawrocki** is the poetry editor for *The Wayfarer* and the author of five poetry collections, including *Four Blue Eggs* and *Reconnaissance*, released by Homebound Publications. She is the recipient of numerous awards including honors from The Connecticut Poetry Society, New Millennium Writings and Phi Kappa Phi. She teaches literature, composition, and creative writing at the University of Bridgeport and lives Hamden, Connecticut with her husband and their two cats.



**Alexa Poteet** is a poet and freelance writer from Washington, DC, with a master's degree in poetry from Johns Hopkins University. Her poetry has appeared in *Reed Magazine*, *Lines + Stars*, *PennUnion* and *NewVerseNews*, among others. She was also a semifinalist for the 2015 Paumanok Poetry Award and a 2012 Pushcart Prize nominee. She has enjoyed staff positions at the *Washington Post*, the *Atlantic* and the *National Interest*.



**AJ Powell** is a once and future teacher who raises her children, serves on a school board, and attempts to write in the wee hours of the morning with varied success.



**Ricky Ray** was born in Florida and educated at Columbia University. His recent work can be found in *Fugue, Esque, Sixfold*, and *Chorus: A Literary Mixtape*. His awards include the Ron McFarland Poetry Prize, a Whisper River Poetry Prize, and *Katexic's* Cormac McCarthy prize. He lives in Manhattan with his wife, three cats and a dog. The bed is frequently overcrowded.



**Kimberly Russo** is an English teacher in Aurora, Colorado where she resides with her husband, Tony, and her four children (Nick, Audrey, Grace, & Maritza.) Kimberly spends her free time gardening & bird watching. Much of her writing is dedicated to Marriage/Family, social issues, including the perpetuating inequality among genders/race, and the stigma associated with mental illness. Her poetry has appeared in *River Poets Journal, Open Minds Quarterly*, and *PDXX Collective*.



**Sarah Sansolo** is a graduate of the American University MFA program. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Adanna, Big Lucks*, and *VIATOR*, and will appear in an upcoming issue of *District Lit*. Her fiction has appeared in *Flaunt Magazine* and her nonfiction in *The Rumpus*. She was a finalist in the 2015 Bethesda Poetry Contest. Photo credit: Anna Carson DeWitt.



**Gisle Skeie** (born 1974) lives in Norway. Theology, Literature, and Philosophy studies at the University of Oslo. Works in a non-profit organization concerned with international Human Rights issues. A handful of his poems have been featured in *Little River* and *The Writing Garden* (both US). Some of his poems and song lyrics in Norwegian (as well as music) have been published/recorded/broadcasted nationally.



**Keighan Speer** recently received a silver key and an honorable mention in the annual Scholastic Writing Competition. A favorite quote by the poet Charles Bukowski: He was asked what makes a man a writer? "Well," he said, "it's simple. You either get it down on paper, or jump off a bridge."



**Bruce Taylor** is the author of eight collections of poetry which has appeared in such places as *Able Muse, The Chicago Review, The Cortland Review, The Nation, The New York Quarterly, Poetry, Rattle*, and on the *Writer's Almanac*. He is the recipient of awards from Fulbright-Hayes, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Bush Artist Foundation. He lives in Lake Hallie, Wisconsin with his wife, the writer, Patti See.



**D. H. Turtel** lives in New York City.



**Holly Walrath** is an author, freelance editor, and the Associate Director of Writespace, a nonprofit literary center in Houston, Texas. Her short fiction and poetry has appeared in *Pulp Literature*, *Abyss & Apex*, *Silver Blade*, and *Literary Orphans*, among others. Holly currently resides in Seabrook, Texas. Find her online @hollylynwalrath or hlwalrath.com



**Cynthia Robinson Young** currently lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where she teaches in the Education department at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. She recently moved to the South with her husband and eight children after living in the San Francisco Bay Area for over thirty years. She has been published in journals over the years, including *Radix*, a 1970s Berkeley street paper. She is currently working on a genealogical book of prose poems.

