

SIXFOLD

POETRY SUMMER 2021



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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.

Each issue is free to read online, to download as PDF and as an e-book for iPhone, Android, Kindle, Nook, and others. Paperback book is available at production cost including shipping.

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Monique Jonath

For the Eulogy

When writing your eulogy
for the desecrated world,
remember the healthy flesh
around the wound.

Record how at the end of the greyest day,
the sun does not go quietly,
bursting against each cloud,
then mention the moon tracing
her arc through darkness,
coming to rest at an easy angle
over the hill's shoulder.

And yes, cement has flattened grasses
and held its hands over Earth's mouth,
but you learned to read using street signs
you followed to a peak, then watched
someone turn their light on 6 miles away.
You saw the Bay spread out in front of you
and for a moment, thought
all this, for me?

And though you can see the stacks
rising from the refinery
and there is broken glass embedded in the dirt around you,
do not let this swell in your throat;
so when you drive home through fog so
thick you can barely see,
marvel at how all around you,
it has made light corporeal.

I Don't Know What to Do with My Hands

I keep seeing the hummingbird
just beyond my window.

I keep spending long nights
fumbling my way along the wall
in search of the switch that will
restore the color in my cheeks.

I keep protecting myself against
the viscous air, my own breath
hot against my face.

I keep knitting a rectangle
only to unravel it
though I keep knitting it again
and I keep burning my hands
with hot oil splashing from the stove
and I keep placing glasses on the table
and trusting them not to fall or shatter
but somehow

I keep pulling shards out of my feet
and I keep apologizing without meaning it
or meaning it without apologizing
and I keep wondering if I opened my mouth
would I be able to speak?
and I'm getting lost in all of this space
and will someone please
tell me what to do with my hands.

Sleeping in a New Place

For a week now,
I've been sleeping in a bed that is not yet mine,
my limbs still arranged
as though you are there beside me.

I am paralyzed,
your absence an icicle
inserted between my ribs
and melting away,
leaving my body opened.

Viscosity

We sat outside, skin blazing with mid-July. I watched my grandfather squeeze sunscreen into his hands. “Do you know what viscosity means?” he asked. I, being about six, did not know. “Viscosity is how thick or thin a liquid is, how easily it flows. If something is very viscous, it is hard to stir.” I pondered this as he set the bottle in the sun. He later picked it up and poured some into my hands, covering them easily with slick white warmth. “Does the sunscreen have more or less viscosity than before?” I paused awhile then answered “yes?” His eyes twinkled and creased in response. For the rest of the week he asked me about viscosity—of juice, of honey, of glue. I’ve learned a lot about thickness; that tears are more viscous than laughter, that the sky grows thicker after nightdrop, the moon a stray eyelash on its bruised cheek. I know that goodbye will always be more viscous than hello, that lonely feels thicker than together. Some things just must be left in the sun to warm a while, though not all things will thaw. This, I know.

For a Little While

after "You Can't Have it All" by Barbara Ras

You can have many things,
but not all at once and
just for a little while.

You can have movement, the pull of muscles
against bones, against the inward crush of gravity,
you can run until you breathe fire
and drive until the road is marked by your acceleration.

You can have infatuation, desire for oneness
leaping hot into your throat,
eyes wide against night, skin tingling where touched.

You can have heartbreak, each half expanding
in your chest, tears paving roads
away from your eyes.

You can have sunsets, but never the same one twice.

You can peel an orange and imagine for a second
that you are also telling your body "open."

You can have a child, teach them everything you know
with their chubby hand clutching your finger, but know that
they will likely forget half of it and go away one day.

You can have bluebirds in the garden but seldom on your shoulders,
you can have flowers but I promise each one will wilt.

You can be alive, you can glow, you can strain,
but know that someday you will lessen.

Death, in many ways, is just
reaching equilibrium
between having and losing.

Alix Christofides Lowenthal

22 Karat

In 1968, when French students hurled bricks
in Paris streets and Dr. King was shot,
when Black athletes raised their fists
at the Olympics and Apollo 8 orbited the moon,
my pious Greek grandmother gave me
two Egyptian gold bangles
symbol of my new womanhood
soft bracelets now dented and rippled.

In Alexandria the muezzin
in the tiny neighborhood mosque
would make the call to prayer
across the street so narrow
it seemed like he was in the apartment
personally inviting us:
hayya ‘ala s salah hayya ‘ala s salah
ةالصلوا ولىع َّي ح َّي ح َّي ح َّي ح َّي ح
my grandmother would sing along
humming as she chopped onions and parsley.

“Female assist! Female assist!”
Now whenever I go through airport security
TSA agents touch me from crotch to fingernails,
bracelets on my wrist for generations:
“You should get these cut off—”
as I stand on the small humiliation of bare feet.
“Should I get the bolt cutters, hah hah?”
The bracelets set off the metal detector every time.
”Would you like to be searched in a private room?”
No! I want everyone in the airport to see me being patted and poked
by latex clad hands with the bonus explosive residue swipe.
Ornament becomes flashpoint post-9/11.

The tiny chime of two gold cymbals
on my right wrist bone was my theme song.

Come to salvation, come to salvation—
they rang true. hayya ‘ala l-falah hayya ‘ala l-falah
حالفلا ىلع ىح حالفلا ىلع ىح
Sometimes what you love too much can be a shackle.

Chiaroscuro

Crickets tuning and re-tuning
Rooster finally quiet, hens subdued
Fireflies off-ing and on-ing at the window
Synagogue down the hill empty,
Family asleep downstairs
Toddler among toothy monsters
Baby swimming amniotic laps
Peepers in the ravine intoning moon and muck
Darkest tree laden with scintillations.
In my heart, all the sin and betrayal one could hope for.
Tender skeleton across my shoulders, bones twinkling.
Regret so deep, so bleak,
it might just become the lantern I require.

Before and After

(For My Mother)

(A trio of duplexes * form invented by poet Jericho Brown)*

I. They Came for You

My brother told me you spoke as you were dying: “Our options are limited.”

“They came to me, they finally came to me—that’s a good thing, right?” you asked.

Visions come to those who concentrate. I remember when I was nine, telling you

I had felt God as I played my recorder outside. I remember your face

when I told you my melody drew our neighbor out of her house to listen.

Now I know you felt pity, not disbelief. You wished it to be true for me.

I believe it was pity. Or wistfulness. Because you had tasted sacrifice.

Time came for the return. Hardest of all was washing your diminishing body,

Tending you like you were my child, skin transformed into leathery perfection,

surrendered to tender truth of waiting. You had chosen to trade your gift,

ransoming one long dream for another. Your very bones bent to the task.

I knew you loved my hands on you and shrank from the hands of the caretaker.

I sponged what was left of love and despair. You yearned to glimpse them as dread dissolved.

“They have finally come,” you whispered. “I have no complaint about the warmth.”

II. Deception

I remember blue-legged crabs and palettes of sea stars from
the Salish Sea.

You loved to take us to Rosario Beach and the bridge over
Deception Pass.

Now in salty fog we walk the bridge over the Pass, high
above the strait
leading to Skagit Bay. Captains used to think it went
through to the other side.

Explorers thought they could reach the other side of the
world through that narrow neck.
Not a surprise then, that we choose that spot to scatter your
glittering ashes.

We choose this place to dance your ashes on a bridge
between two islands. This seems right.
It is dusk. Salt breezes carry them past our tears and off
through the strait

into the dark other-world. We squint straight through salt
into the glowering clouds and blink, as far below, two
otters raise their heads out of the swell to find you.

You would have thrilled to see otters toss in waves, glints
sprinkling their heads.
Dipping in tide pools as children, all icy fingers and briny
kelp, we couldn't

imagine, ignorant of death's tide and ashes in icy straits.
Life persists with
blue crabs, waving anemones, pastel sea stars, and you a
beacon lost at sea.

III. Red Wallet

What I regret about your death is that you couldn't know
what happened after,
As when the pair of bald eagles flew right over us, heading
out to fish.

They tore so close we heard their wings in perfect control
gashing the air to ribbons.
When you lay preparing, you advised sweetly, “Don’t think
about me too much.”

Like an oracle speaking the secret, you cautioned, “Don’t
think about me too much.”
We found your red wallet bulging with cash you insisted you
might need

for the nurses. We blew all that cash on a giddy meal in
your honor.
You would have relished the feast: crab and oysters, hot
bread melting the butter.

Clouds purpled the night sky as we supped on crab and
oysters. I tried not to think
about you. Green tea arrived with a brewing timer; we
laughed incredulously,

thinking only you had ever timed tea. Timer ticking. Wallet
emptied out.
We walked the rain-garnished street, marveling at hunting
eagles rapt in flight.

Memory swirls and brews. It provides for us; it spends on
us endlessly.
What I mourn most is the unknowing before grief. How
much is too much?

Accident on Route 80 after the Dodge Poetry Festival

A man lies atop the barrier dividing east from west
on the cold cement slab between towards and away.
Traffic backs up to the Delaware Water Gap
where currents still echo Lenape lyrics.
Waiting cars and trucks idle in lines between lines
like words arranged improperly on a long scroll.
Our heads buzz . . . *chained to the heart of the Angel* . . .
with . . . *I thought the soul an airy thing* . . . poems.

Poetry can go anywhere—past the enjambed
traffic through the ear to appease the man's body
as he vibrates with a tremendous humming.

What if all people trapped in their cars,
all heartsick people who have collided
could heal others by composing poems on the spot?

We could blast from our pale land into a lush one.
We could become singing winged creatures
chant closed all wounds
bring water and turn back desolation
resolve questions with the dead
dissolve our own foul habits
just like that.

There would be no more accidents.
All would be watered, fed, sheltered, composted by
poetry, black ink publishing vast page after page.

We cram for death in the gap between now and when.
Where to place the exclamation mark,
the human dot lingering at the line?

Jury Selection

*Here he is—what all women know and fear.
Low breaths and rustles cloud the courtroom
as the judge reads the charges.*

*Sexual assault. Battery. Abduction.
“Is there any experience that would bias you in this case?
If so please approach the bench.”
Memory and sweat flash at the words.*

Lindsay had left her bathroom window open for air;
After the rape, he took all scanty bills and change
from the Film Society cash box. She never talked about it again.
Afterwards she started dating and wearing make-up
for the first time. I didn't understand why.

The Frenchman in the Cinematheque permitted his clammy hand
to creep over and over into my lap during “Les Enfants du Paradis”
—me furious, silently pushing away over and over—
he smirked as the lights came up and left from the far aisle
elegantly disguised in his pin-striped blue suit.

The man in the car stopped in the middle of the intersection
fly unzipped watching middle school children cross
like a cat stalking sparrows
and thirteen-year-old me hurried across
trying not to stare at what pulsed in his hand.

*Women are excused one by one as they whisper
to the judge and stream from the courtroom.*

He broke down Peggy's door.
She gave him more or less what he wanted
in exchange for not being beaten.
She said, “He was a big man
and could easily have hurt me.” I didn't understand
how she felt she had controlled the situation,
why she didn't appear distressed
how one offense could be traded for another.

*I asked to be excused because two friends had been raped
and I was dismissed. I wanted to be excused
for not having thought of them in years.
I want to be excused for being an object, not objecting.*

Rebbekah Vega-Romero

Look at My Skin

Look at my skin

in the sun:

My limbs are stretched & strong & aching
in the good way
with each pounding step.

The shadow of a ripening green branch bobs on the wind
crossing dark stripes over
cinnamon dusted warm milk.

In the bright patches,
the light catches tiny hairs
and the freckles glow gold
like a map of my secrets.

Look at my skin

in the night:

Stiff & drenched in sweat,
awakened by the twisting in the deepest part of me.

The hand I place on my soft home
seems to glow in the dark,
marking me like the alien-freakshow-notright-geneticmutant
I was am will be can only be,
the ghost of his long dead *abuela*
come to visit shame on my brown father.

Look at my skin

in the mirror:

Under my eyes, so thin
almost blue.

My features are draped in a cloth
that was not cut for them,
and it is beginning to unravel at the seams.

Green Velvet

There is a trunk—

Well, it's a plastic tub these days
—*Pero* let's pretend it's still the cedar trunk
my parents sold when they divorced:

A trunk in my mother's bedroom closet,
filled with custom, handmade cupcake dresses,
every texture & pattern more exuberant than the last.

The hands that made them are long gone
the girls that filled them are all grown.

They look like miniature vintage gowns
for *princesas mas pequenas*
circa 1957

Pero they are really from the '90s:
You see the woman that made them
crossed an ocean & survived Communism

Who were we to demand
she also update her taste?

Looking through this trunk of my birthdays

Y los cumpleaños de mi hermanita

it's like holding her brave & steadfast heart in my hands,
el corazón de mi abuela,
my sweet & vulgar Bubba
(As a baby I couldn't say *abuela* & it stuck)

The woman from whom I get:

Afro curls & curves—a shape that passed directly from her
to *mi tia* & then somehow blossomed on my hips at age twelve;

A seamstress's hands—long & nimble fingers
that are already knotting up at the joints
though my knobs are from typing rather than stitching

and the thin skin over the knuckles is milky blue
where hers was the warmest nutmeg;

An immutable heart—the sort of loyalty
that can bear operative wrongdoings
and still, improbably burn with laughing, luminous love.

My favorite piece is the one we made together
for my sister's sixth birthday,
she took a drawing of mine & with her inimitable *brujería*
breathed into reality, stitch by patient stitch:

A dress.

I don't remember most of my childhood
Pero yo me recuerdo la tienda
filled with fabrics & the smell,
old with dust & new with unmade stories,
and the way the green bolt of velvet felt
to *mis manos* like the grass under my feet in Prospect Park.

Velvet, green velvet:
I remember sitting at her feet
stitching pearls on the puffed sleeves
while she hummed melodies I can no longer trace.

Velvet, still soft in my arms:
I remember her measuring tape
against my shoulders & down my back
flicking feathers of light
where the dress would embrace me.

Velvet, heavy despite its cool silk underbelly:
I remember her hand,
grabbing my crotch to say
"Cuidate eso"
and then resting on my heart to add
"Cuidate eso."

When I hold *este terciopelo verde*
I pretend I am holding her hand
and we're halfway to a world where I remember her tongue
and she hears the songs I am singing with mine:

A world where she can still give me
inappropriate advice, for this unimaginable heartbreak
and I can show her how the fashions have changed
but velvet is always in style.

La Persona Que Quiero Ser*

I've been so many people
some days I wake up & I'm not quite sure who I am anymore.
I shuffle step by aching step from the bed
(god I sound as ancient as the redwoods
—more like a grandfather than a maiden by the day)
to the bathroom, to sit & piss away
the nightmares still clinging to *mi culo*,
to put off that moment when I stand to wash *mis manos*
and am confronted with *mi cara*:

Who is she?
Ruby Reb, where did you go?

Esa cara is one I don't know
y sus ojos, yes, they are dark like mine
pero que vieja, tan triste, como una bruja!
Where is the sexy *mamacita*
whose nickname was *puta*?

What an oxymoron to call a child a whore!
Y por que? What was my crime?
My crime was being born
of a love so electric it was illegal
in several states until I was a teenager.

How can I mean to be any one person
when I am born by definition
a liminal being?

I do not & have never belonged:

Not to one person, not to one home,
Not to one race, not to one nation,
No, not even to one God.

I was born out of many & so I am many
like old Walt, if you put an electrode to my temple
and tried to trace the fault lines of my being, you would find
a contradiction in terms
si, se puede, go ahead & try it:

I am large, I contain multitudes
y la persona que quiero ser
es una mujer que no conozco.

Sometimes I wonder if I broke the mirror
and used the shards to peel away this pale white lie
I was born into,

Would I step through a portal?

Like Alice, would I find something more
on the other side of the fun house mirror of *mi piel*?

When I splash *mi cara con un poquito de agua*,
and place the plastic slivers of focus into *mis ojos*
I recognize *la cara* staring back at me:

The person I meant to be when I was twenty-three
(she always was a tardy little *puta*)
She frowns at my distress & blows me *un besito*.

I take it in *mi boca* to chew like gum
throughout the day:

The person I mean to be, *siempre*, so far away
from the person I have here & now

and the person who brought me here from there:

We all exist in the space between
and there is no breaking the glass without
drawing *sangre*
to mark the change:

La cicatriz is the place where once
a threshold wound bloomed.

**A play en español on Dolly Chugh's The Person You Mean To Be, an
evolutionary homage to Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself."*

The Light-Born Daughters*

The light-born daughters of black fathers
(who never knew their fathers
except to sit on their laps
when they visited once or twice)
go to the back of the closet to trace
the brilliant & vulgar sketches
their white mothers kept
even years after they both found other lovers.

The white-passing daughters of black fathers
born of the late, trophy-collecting marriages
(who watched their mothers' eyes fill with tears
when they were asked about their fathers)
download the DNA-inspecting cell phone apps,
spit in a tube, send it out,
wait interminable weeks for permission
to learn the code of their missing fathers.

The well-spoken white-presenting daughters
of black immigrant fathers
(who long since changed their foreign names
and pressed their Afro-curls straight to match
the ivory & roses of their skin)
collect the lives of their fathers,
their radical, Black fathers
in stories told by aunties & ex-lovers
and ancient newspaper clippings & legal judgements.

The aging, white-assumed, childless daughters
(who spend the best years of their lives
hiding from & chasing their resentful dark-skinned fathers)
trade chess strategies & song lyrics with their lonely fathers
asking always for absolution from the great sin
of being born in the reverse of their image,
a reminder of how this country
might have kept their secrets sacred, if only
the DNA coin flipped the other way.

**(After Liesl Mueller's The Late-Born Daughters)*

The Unborn, *el Sueño*

Mija

Tu eres el sueño que me inspira

When I want to despair
You breathe for me

Mi corazón

Tu eres el sueño que me inspira

You infuse with light
The spaces between my ribs

Mi vida

Tu eres el sueño que me inspira

In my mind's eye
You make my vision new

My child

You are the dream that inspires me

Cuando el camino es duro

Y mi corazón está solo

My love

You are the dream that inspires me

A volver al centro del escenario

Cuando sería más fácil sentarme al margen

My world

You are the dream that inspires me

A seguir luchando

A seguir escribiendo

A seguir respirando

Tu eres el nuevo sueño que vivo para ver

And I promise to keep moving on
Until we meet

Oak Morse

Incandescent Light That Peeks Through Secrets

There's a whore waiting on me, tucked under a duvet.
My headlights pierce a night's sky, my shadow
bounces around brown leaves when I walk to her doorway.
I become dynasty. My car always honors me—gleaming
in the background, exhausted but nevertheless elated.
The journeys are always far-off from city lights, sometimes through
dirt roads where the woods swallow me whole; I want to thank
my car for its devotion. There's a whore waiting on me,
a cacophony underneath my rib cage when I weave
around roadkill, wipe the moon's tears with my windshield,
pray there're no nails on my path, no police predators pulling me
over out of boredom—questioning until I curl up and become
shame. I've been stranded a time or two, but never on the way
to sin. Tire tread reliable as rubbers, oil tank full as an ocean.
*Car, do you want a shower, with strawberry soap suds and a wax
that rubs you in all the right places?* I give thanks, for the heat
you blow on arctic nights helping my cologne settle in my skin,
as the D.J. rambles, playing his midnight mix and regret tries
to cruise with me. There's a whore waiting on me, looking out
her window like it's an aquarium, anticipating my pull-up under
hotel lights, my bounty hunted-bandit walk, Listerine strips
in my pocket, body wipes in the other, soul noise left in the car.
Praising my engine for never coughing up *hell no* or collapsing
on its bones, leaving me cold on the curb, unhandy, heart
racing like it does when we're panting, after.

George Kramer

The Last Aspen Stand

Aspen share a common root system, resulting in stands that are genetically a single tree. One such aspen stand in Utah is 80,000 years old—the largest and oldest living organism.

The best of us
is at the root,
away from light,
probing for good
in dark. We are
a single tree,
divided
above and below,
every part devotion
to a whole.

In each breath
live a hundred generations
of mastadons,
elk and nuthatch.
Out of what heart wood
do we worship the wind
with leaves like shimmering hands?
How many winters
have strengthened our fiber?
How many fires do we bear,
or saplings strangle in our shadow?

We feel our killers' footsteps
fall among us,
and we weep:
for our likeness;
our mutual need;
our sense of selves;
our awe
of the other's strangeness;

your weak grasp on what you saw;
your blind visions and divisions
both within and without.

Even

as we die, you forget
that the core of all of us
is a heart woven of two fibers:

- one to heal,
- and one to harm.

The Hole in the Poem

It was termites, I think,
that bored out the heart
of this poem. Yet
the poem still asks: why
is the hole in the poem
its heart? Less is more

for a poem, but imagine
if a magician's sleeve eclipsed the center of
the moon: a lacuna cratering out the lunar
heart, a coreless moon would now climb
the black leaves of trees—
only a peephole to

Cygnus,
Cat's Eye
Nebula, Lyra
and Vega
C.

No memory, no feeling, no minding
its leave, just our sadness watching the heart
of the moon fall in the wordless sea. Less is less

for the moon. More or less.
Or let me put it like this:
When the hole fell
from this poem
I stuffed it lumpy
with words for grief and love
until, luminous
with grief and love,
it sank in that sea
like a moonstone.
Pull it
up by the stuffing
and the hole returns.
In the center

waves the argentine flaglet
of something new.

Honeysuckle and Flaming Creeper

On reading Terrance Hayes

As you said, there never was a black male hysteria.
It is a wonder to ponder the spent lifetimes
Stacked under a lineage of goons
In Money Mississippi. Or lying scattered
Like bone bits in other not much better places
And still not mirror the madness in the faces.
Imagine instead planting your good feet in dirt
And letting the sprouts spread out for miles.
Many may be pulled up, or frisked down,
But still they tendrils, lancing hearts,
Doubling back on themselves, entwining,
Alive but speaking for the weary dead.
You should see them, all these strong green ropes,
Wrapping a restless house in fiery hopes.

Different Kinds of Mud

More mud than man,
I am made of spit
and dirt, descended
from a bog,

now dried and cracked.
When the rain departed
I shone for an hour
under a high sun.

My minds are many
heaps of fallen rose petals
in different shades of brown.
My one heart, disguised
coal black,
pumps mud-thick blood

as I read forgotten poets
whose bones degraded
to the grit and gradations of mud,
what it thinks it knows
and how it hides
from itself.

I would settle in lowness
and let the swamp grass root in me.
But there is nowhere
for me to root myself—
even the dying grass
has magnificent chemistries
that lift up and even me.

I've become old mud,
so caked like blood on these boots
that mud and boots are one.

I trample in mud,
and the mud cries out.
It has a question for you.

Elizabeth Sutterlin

Maize

It might be getting bad again.
I find myself preoccupied with corn:
Spending hours paring kernels from the core
over the kitchen table.

They look like tiny golden eggs, like honeycomb,
each yellow chamber straining, full of fluid,
shelter for the seed of life within.
How many kernels on the ear
how many ears on the stalk
how many acres of American soil
look just like this,
rolling fields of nothing but
the plant that I pick apart
with eyes, with teeth, with kitchen poetry?

How often do unruly seeds challenge the neat rows of the ear
how often do unruly birds challenge the neat rows of the tractor?
surely American ingenuity has answered their call
has engineered the birds, the roots, the kernels
to lay neatly ordered: every hill and plain
must be structured squarely, Manhattan blocks.

Under the kitchen lamp, I stand with knife and cob
like a whittler, as if the blade
could shape it into something new,
could pry out the secrets of what lies
beneath the sweetness of the seed,
as if I could make sense of the porous center
and its unyielding white flesh.

I think about Marilyn Monroe
begging the reservation women for naloxone
in her darkest hour—
I, too, am the daughter of murderers and thieves

unable to make sense of a world
made and unmade for me.
Somewhere the last crow
still pecking golden kernels from Monsanto's ears
laughs at this great joke
before he goes squawking to the gallows.

Parting Words

“When the assault on a maternity clinic in Kabul on Tuesday was over, 18 newborn babies were left behind, many covered in blood, and most now motherless. The youngest, whose mother survived, was delivered in a safe room after the attack had begun.”

—The New York Times, May 14, 2020.

Baby, this world is an onion:
layers of carnage partitioned only
by a few thin, purple walls.
My eyes itched when doctors
cut into the woman beside me
to haul out twins.
My eyes watered when men
cut into the roof
to bring it down around us.

Baby, I felt the world shake within me
as you moved, your head against
the door to the world
like a battering ram
until I opened and gave way.
I felt the world shake around me
as men moved against the doors,
forcing the clinic to give way.

Baby, I watched someone
birth a tiny mewling son
moments before the shelling.
A freshly cleaned child, blood-spattered once more.
A new mother dead before the sweat cooled her brow.

Baby, was there time
for me to deliver the placenta
that slippery lunch box,
your sidecar?
I did not have much to send with you.
But I wish there had been time to give
what I had:
a name,
a kiss,
a few months' milk.

Obituary

I think the type of man I like
is the man I'd like to be.

when my shoulders grow broad,
I try a swagger in the silver of my mirror
to impress my reflection;
(s)he is not convinced, but still
the strangest desire stirs
not to touch as much as to become.

couched somewhere deep within my mind
is a baby boy who neither lived nor died,
only lay down for a warm afternoon nap once
in his favorite grass-stained overalls.

I chop off my hair. I spit in the street.
I plead with my jawbone. I refuse to shave.

someone faked his death,
printed an obituary in the local paper's runny ink:
(he was curious, he loved trains, he wanted to be like his father)
and pulled whatever it is that I am
from his empty coffin

perhaps the men I take to bed are recompense
for the life that sleeping child was denied.
when I seek out unyielding lovers
in the places where I bend,
is it for them at all? maybe I am merely
searching for the body of the boy I never was.

Self-Soothing

i.

There is a loneliness—there is an emptiness there.
No, don't feel it. Don't linger.
Trust me, you don't want to feel it.
Here, a drink will help you drown it out.

Here, I have just the thing.
If you micro-dose this slow-acting poison
you won't feel it anymore.
If you pump yourself full with plastic glitter
you won't feel it anymore.
Take in the halogen light, the radio static,
the endless buzzing of electric wasps.
You cannot feel emptiness if you are full of sound and fury.

I have just the 8-bit garbage for your ears,
just the flashing pictures for your eyes,
just the sickening sugars for your lips.
Feel arteries clog, neurons fizzle out,
eardrums rupture, eyes go blind.

It makes you feel like a person, no?
People do these things.
People experience these sensations.
People gorge themselves on glitter and neon and booze,
people are eternally chasing the next high,
the next three-minute sequence of static,
because it must mean *something*, right?

ii.

We prayed for answers and the gods on high told us to consume,
that taking in creation would save us.
We have made ourselves arks for more than two of every kind.
Walk to the grocery store while having a breakdown.
It's nothing but wall to wall
color slogan purchase consume this will feed you this will fill you
this will save you.
Dinner so easy you will have more time.

Time for nothing. Time for what?

Please avoid the wet floor sign; it doesn't mean anything.
Don't look at the slick sheen of water on the floors; it is a mirror.
Don't look at yourself in the mirror.
In the mirror are your eyes and in your eyes is your soul
and if you look you will remember that there is an emptiness—
that you are a beast alone in this world
that these sugars and statics and lights are not saving you they
are rotting you in an ill-fated effort to save your soul, and what
soul? What could there be left to save? You let yourself be
dazzled by the lights and colors and glitter and static and act
like it means something, like you are less alone—
you are alone, dreaming
your own static to produce.
What would you do but give more garbage
for more to consume? Nails on chalkboards, bouquets of carrion
flowers,
strangled sea turtles beached by thousands,
anything to avoid the fact that
you will always feel alone—

iii.

Oh, I told you not to feel it. Here, take my hand, please, it's okay,
we don't have to answer these big questions now,
look, I've got just the thing:
it won't ask you what you want to become,
but it will sit with you for a little while.
We're mopping up the spill on aisle seven.
Please, take a swig,
turn on the TV,
put on some music
until you fall asleep again.

Meditations on Mars

Mars, red planet, drove men mad.
stare at red dirt long enough
your eyes go blind.
travel far enough from home
your heart forgets the way.

Mars, scarlet lining of a matador's
coat made men like bulls,
and women like bears emerging from
dens like women emerging from spacecraft.

they strung themselves out to find water on Mars.
in their eyes, dry hills ran bloody.
they were looking for the path
of the liquid in the dust
for proof the vision had been real
proof they were more than mad scientists.

they last saw Sally in the airlock,
scrubbing at her skin
until her flesh matched the beaten landscape
obsessed with her fingertips, her
palms *out, damned spot, out I say.*

Mars made man beast
not moon-bayers, made anew:
red dust red dirt red desert
there must be water (always after the water)
somewhere, somehow, there must have been water
returners thirst for splashdown sensation
blessed water blue planet blue sea
under the red light of a lifeless planet calling them.

they last saw Yuri stepping out with water rations
desperate to wet the soil,
a diplomatic gesture from the red representative.
pouring amniotic on a dead planet,
waiting for life to spring forth, he said:

no God up here, so space
for man to reign creation.
if there are impressions in the dust, then necessarily
there must have been water.

Mars made man made bot made beast:
our inorganic child sent to locate life
in the dust bowl, mass grave of human hope
to feel less alone in the universe.
blue home world Houston beamed up human lullabies;
in return the Rover beamed back a likeness of ourselves.

we last saw Rover singing its funeral dirge
dust-choked in red storms
as if to say, death is not decay of flesh;
death as offline status, death as proof-of-concept.

if the Rover died on Mars, then necessarily
there must have been life.

we were searching for others on Mars
we were searching for ourselves on Mars
we were searching for ourselves in others
we were searching for ourselves in our creation.

dry-mouthed engineers watch Yuri crash,
watch Sally cover herself in the sea.
they take off their headsets when Rover stops singing.
they rise all at once,
staring at palms caked in red
each of them desperate
for a glass of water.

Holly Marie Roland

Womanhood: An Education

Fear, like a falsehood, hooded burlap, jute jostling against ears;
and when I can't hear my escape from this old world to new,
draped rough around winter shoulders, I call to you.

A whoop or roar of quietness I snub out completely.
Dear self, don't disentangle this nest I've been working—
the cattail fluff and dry leaves, whatever I could get my nails on:

The elevator closing while my child knee bled,
flights of stairs clamored and climbed;
 we are not yet divine:
 shaking plane wings and drunk pilot
I couldn't see; my mother wheezing in another late
night room of waiting rainbows; strange vegetables;
 sabulous lies, sinking into fossilized shorelines;
 a fogged breath against a window, the only one
not picked up on snow days; my father thumbing a match;
the legacy of lunacy; loose dogs, snarling;
 brain parasites; warnings: tornados; a stranger at my door;
 tabby kittens lost; I am alone; a teacher frowning;
 a friend in a tulle dress crying; a memory melting,
 ice beneath weak feet;
 youth fading like the stories
 I used to write in pencil, those too, floppy,
disappearing;
 my words, written
or not; realizing I am not held by any other and cannot hold any thing.
 And death, surely.

Fear, like a truth, pitters and patters in this ravine of shoulders;
a track for the train to thunder down, shuddering, while my sore
 mouth tries muttering,
I have just one light and it flickers.

Take me as I am, take me as I come,
I will love you long,
 my fear digging in beside yours, waves whet with the curious
moon, rising
and setting, again.

Clearfelling

The loggers start when the stars collapse
back into their canopy;
a bruised sky spins daybreak out in colored notches
as axels round the hairpin below my cabin.
Aloft, I pretend to sleep.

They say the harvest is healthy for men
and their lunch pails—
men who tug at the airhorn
because a woman shares the road
and in her morning smallness moves aside—
men who throw bones out an unseen window
watching if my dog salivates.

She hides rawhide in her rueful mouth
not knowing that for which she hungers.

Remember that fleshy vulnerability?
Seeded some moonstung
hour, howled in by a cutting wind, heedless and headless?
It is sprawled now naked in the clearcut.
Time and the turning of megrim days,
too many midnights caught up in my mind's shrubbery,
idolatry of flesh, of one happiness licking another
in the mudmoist soil,
free in the forest, our once homeland,
free to flee,
free to call destruction regeneration—
all these named and unnamed swings
brought it to pieces.

Strangers see its skeletal shadows
from the opposite shore,
wildcats pounce upon the innards
and stalk what remains of its splintered ghost.

This poem is yet another sapling
aging too quickly,

just a junk tree in the end,
there one moment then gone,
replaced and repressed. I strain to see what's left growing hillside,
stripped soil that's supposed to look natural
to the untrained eye, that's supposed
to spurt biodiversity from a barren floor.

I thought I made a new friend
with a young lumberjack.
He yesterday confessed a dream.
“A good one?” my words ventured.
“More than good,” he said. A woodshed
for his pleasure, as if that's the natural order
of our small knowing: the inevitability
of our machinery, as if the scarred slopes
don't remember a thing.

Across the Lake

The first ring of trees—
cottonwood, skinny trunked,
leaves spotted like the underside of a dying monarch,
watch clouds creep over a lonely lake.

The fire is tumbling tonight as the light dips down in strips
then dives and drowns, strangely.
If I said this elbow of woods was unholy
would you believe me?
If owls start tumbling from high branches
and carp stomachs leak lily pads,
would you then begin to believe me?

The fire is churning tonight,
spitting faces onto the soot-black glass,
but none yours, none mine.
My eyes scale the second ring of trees, unchanged
emerald, the tallest testaments, far from our dusty window,
and I imagine that sinking rowboat full of pieces,
my body:

 like every fallen leaf within me,
at rest in all its parts, so beautifully crumpled:
 my eyelids
 to nostrils
 to teeth to collarbone,
 my nipples
 to trunk
 to pelvis to knees
 to long leg hair
 to hallux
not being held but seen by another.

It's inevitable—the way the sky slinks back into itself, until slate,
until haloed by watermarks;
 who we used to be.

Swamp Queen Deluxe

The pocket of Cajuns dancing
in Louisiana backwater, stewing fish heads, are the sons
of sons of daughters of Acadians who were run out of their wild-
woods because they chose not to fight.

Sharpen gator bones,
'cause that man calls me catawampus. I'm a mermaid,
swamp queen deluxe, chasing back with these clapperclaws
as you steer my sisters and me into the cypresses,

but we cannot seek cool refuge,
or rest, breasts up, under a cathedral of mosses. There is no reprieve
from sunstroke; woman, you're an outsider, but I'm an outsider too:
admire us, as you sometimes do—

float our way and in the same day fear and revere
Her. Our guttural growls put that gris gris down deep,
lacing black danger. That pin has been in my mouth since
momma's waterwomb. Survival is

stitching an arm before they can bite out the thread.
Come sundown, we make camp. The pot froths over
and eyeballs spill and stain marching, shiny shoes.
Do not paddle here again

to make love to miry shadows. A choir of gowned ghosts,
we now swing. *Pauvre ti bête* how many times
can creatures drown and be resurrected?
Clutch my molar-marked hand.

Revolver

Newly cut grass kisses tops of feet, itches the inches.

Twenty-one weeks hasn't seen your body so squarely
across from mine, that body next to this other,
like an inevitability, like the way night dips

her golden breasts into the mouth of day—twenty-one
weeks since you had stayed, lingered long in the doorway
before lounging on a faded futon, timer readied.

Ten tiny minutes: waved over,
pulled atop animal apex,
curls falling, tempting cheekbones;
eager breath exchanging,
belonging to no one, lips ascending
to their gathering place—meadow
of lupine and paintbrush,
where pure purple and red, rapt,
blended into brushfire haze.
That first time, true instead of teasing,
I like your touch. Then those other words,
long rooted, easily exposed—
a scoop away from the surface.

Here, I shoot a look at your shoes. *For running away*, I joke
clumsily. You stare down the legs of this overgrown season,
even after our small patch has barbed ugly and wild,

even now, when the struggle to share this verboten space
searches for the smoothest tip of conversation.

Let's talk guns, why not?

Tell me about your rifle, its recoil,
the gravel lot where you could put a pistol
in my starved, shaking hand, the hand
that swirled between thighs,
careful not to touch the betrayal.

A shotgun would be too much punch,
kickback, bloody my unlocked mouth,
once whining for air as you slithered
down fragrant folds. We whisper
to that moment, now aged fantasy, and O'
how I think of it and a lifted
lemon dress fluttering against a fencepost,
long torso pressed into my back,
the bullets in your pocket indenting
stippled skin. I feel everything, dear,
before I feel nothing.

Once, you chased after a face pink and peaked,
but we've come to a standstill, straight, small speak,
knowing the buzzer has blared *times up* over and again.

Take me to grass grown from gunpowder, flailing tin cans,
an echo that comes back only to sever the silence,
half-cocked sorrys, wet toothed smiles glittering,
a steady touch, a peace offering,
sulfurous and dusty,
eyes rolled shut, then open—
all things dangerous if not deadly.

Devon Bohm

Bukowski Tavern

Remember that bar
we used to go to, when you
lived in Boston?

On Boylston maybe, near
where it crosses Mass Ave—
Bukowski Tavern
in yellow letters on the red lintel,
decades of beer sticking your shoes to the floor,
fried food swimming in cheese, gravy,
the feeling of being completely and contentedly
lost.

They had dark red booths
lining the narrow space,
a jaded bartender with a hat,
and a wheel to spin when you
couldn't decide on a drink.

I told you
I didn't think
Bukowski
would like it here
and we were laughing and kissing and drunk and traveling
from nowhere to nowhere
but suddenly and faithfully
arriving nowhere together.

My belief in you then wasn't
bravery,
but I pretended it was for a while,
pretended
my love for you wasn't already
incurable, inexhaustible, gruesomely certain.

I liked to eavesdrop
on people on bad dates
because
we were always having a better one
and then we
walked back to your apartment on Comm Ave
and climbed
onto the roof to see Boston's rusty lights
flying across our eyeline.

I always knew
that people were idiots, musicians, poets,
but
I never knew
how real it was,
that your heart could feel like

flying, dancing, burning,

until we went to the bar,
that roof,
your bedroom,
with such strange, imperfect steps.

My shoes were still sticking
when I drove back to Connecticut
in the morning,
nowhere
to go but
to wait
for you
to come back to me,
to come back to our
future,
to come back
home.

Foster's Cove

The difference between
an estuary and a cove?
More ways out.

The dog is in the boat as ballast
and I am drifting my brine-stung
fingers through the weeds,
scattering minnows through
the water's dappled halls.

We have come to this place
as supplicants, penitents, pilgrims,
this bathing suit my surplice,
salt on my lips in prayer.

I am trying to remember
how to pray.

I am trying to forget
the anathema my own
heart called out,
believing me
undeserving of peace.

It is almost June,
but the mornings here
are still fog-leeched,
cold sunshine unseen,
dew-drenched
and closed shut as a fist.

When the wind picks up,
I remember the cuckoo,
think what it would be
to be lifted out and thrown
away.

There is a hammering against
my eardrum, a haunting,
a violation: *you are not here*
to resolve yourself to die.

Cardinal, robin, blue jay—
if we planted a yew tree
they'd all be here
and we'd be protected.

When I swallow water
all is salt, basalt, brimstone.

When I look at you,
I see me.

I see a way out.

Forgiveness, the wind's susurrus.
Bear witness, the bee's throaty buzz.
Kindness, the cove's heartsong.

Imagine,
I tell myself,
I make myself,
I create myself:

Imagine not needing a way out.

Ghost Story

I don't blame you for not believing me. I'm unsure, in the light, if I believe me, too. But I can't be the only one who's heard them, the voices in the house when I'm home alone. Not the radio, not some kind of mimic, no nightmares explain the voice that says my name—clear and bright as moonlight and right behind my ear, but only on nights the house is empty and silent. The dog turns his head, his ears prick. I've seen it, my heart throbbing in my throat. This house was built in 1922 and that's it, that's all I know of it, nothing personal or damned. I guess the question isn't if it's real, but if I want it to be. What I really want is a story: letters pried up from beneath floorboards, doomed love, thieves and warriors, the transfiguration of my life from a quiet house into a story worth writing about. People will, writers will find meaning in anything, even if they have to make it up, even if their own heads do it for them. Dawn comes in. That romantic, pastel light doesn't belong in a ghost story and it's easy now to believe in the sun and luck and requited love when I know you'll be home before the heat of the day cages the town in its teeth. I make coffee, make this into a different story, maybe boring, maybe unnoticed by the annals of history, maybe true. I wait for you on the porch and when you arrive and say my name I think: isn't it strange, what being seen can do to us? You don't believe my story, I can tell and I don't blame you. But you see

me telling a story, you hear me, and you
listen. For now, it is enough to believe
in that.

A Bouquet of Cherry Blossoms

As Ovid wrote of absent lovers,
I write these words to you, today:
even when you're beside me in bed
I dream of you, defying all
dreamly logic, waking me
only to help me go back
to sleep. What reveries
are these? It's all too real—
the coarse touch of your
hand on my naked back,
your voice a low-toned
bell in the seashell
of my ear—echoing,
echoing—your breath
a softness, a bouquet
of sleep. If we were
planets, we'd be orbiting
each other only for
the pull of the attraction,
the gravity of the situation
invisible and too powerful
to fight. Why wouldn't
we hold close what makes
the void not only livable
but beautiful again? Why
not love, even if it
leads to destruction?
For all the lullabies
the dream-you provides,
I always wake first,
the robins sweetly warbling
a punch of reality.
The cherry blossoms
have all fallen from
their branches. But
you know what that means,
love? We'll have cherries,
soon enough.

High Winds

Our dog is scared of the wind,
but only when he's inside
where it can't touch him.

I find this a reasonable fear.
Who wouldn't be scared of
unseen noise outside a third story

window? Two years ago, a robin
made a nest under the eaves
of our covered porch. It hurts

me to see what was left behind—
an abandoned home attached
to the one I'm trying to build.

My engagement ring catches
the light out here in a dappling,
like trees are involved, like

stars' cold but luminous fire
burns here, here. That's how
natural it feels to be marrying

you. Even the dog feels this
revelation—turns his head
to pant as the wind kicks up,

the way it is wont to do
in late spring, but he doesn't
cower. No matter how hard,

or violent, or excessive, as long
as he can feel it he isn't anything
but a dog on a shaded porch

watching for squirrels. It's been
two years since the robin and her
jakes bolted from their daub

and waddle home, but this deepening
morning we came out to find
eggs smashed on the peeling,

splintering planks of the porch.
The colors of sky and sun and bone,
the dog tried to roll through

the destruction, could smell
the magnetic pull of that which
was never fully realized. You

left a beer can out here last
night, a paper towels as crumpled
as the shell, a light. Moths

spent all evening alighting to their
deaths as we laughed and touched
and pretended we were more than

mortal, for a moment. The light
of day isn't stark, but forgiving.
Whatever detritus we leave

behind, let me hammer
one last bit in: the dog is
right to be afraid, and we

are right to keep going
anyway, keep falling anyway,
keep loving when there's no

proof we won't be
taken out by a high
wind.

Ana Reisens

At first I thought I wanted to be a poet

I yearned for paper birds,
for words that echoed

from the deep cathedrals of the earth,
words that gave birth

to the stories of bark
and wove into the evening

like starlings.
I wanted to open a space

for the dappled strands of day,
to trace the reaching veins

of the leaves and transcribe
the ancient language

of the waterlilies.
I longed to understand

the alchemy of sand,
the great silence of stones,

to paint the edges between
the river and the minnow.

But words are elusive birds
and I am still learning to sing.

So I offer my fledgling voice
to the sky to rejoice

in the wild symphony
of all things—

to be a note in this brief
and holy melody,

an ocean,
a firefly,

a poem.

In praise of an everyday object

Can you see it?

Just there, resting on the wood,
the morning light draped over it
like a wool quilt.

Color was invented
for the ballet of pigments,
this simple secret
begging to be witnessed.

Take it in your hand.

Can you sense
the spinning
imagination
of atoms?

How can something be so quiet
yet so alive?

Quickly, now,
before the mind decides
to cry out its bad advice—

hold this dazzling moment
in your open palm and answer:

Is there anything life could give you
more beautiful than this?

Quietude

There's a place
where the ache
of the city
fades
like a blurred screen
and the cypresses
rehearse their symphonies.

In the evenings,
the crickets visit
to weave their memories
into the air
as the whippoorwill
holds vigil
over the clearing.

Meet me there.

We can sit back
as the lines of day fade
and listen to the melody
our cells have not yet forgotten.

Maxi Wardcantori

That Summer, My Neighbor

slipped and fell in the bathtub,
was taken away in a gurney
while I watched with a bruised blue thumb,
and the sight poked holes in me.
I learned kickflips in his driveway
that was somehow blacker than my own,
and children chalked the sidewalk with
scraped knees and knuckles,
asphalt-dimpled soles
and a gashed palm pressed skyward that said *look*,
dripped a blood that mesmerized,
some strange secret pulled from within
that caught the sun, jeweled the skin,
the sky, the eyes of all who watched—
let's call it witnessing.
Let's call it mid-July,
and the wet coats us in its blanket,
licks the face of a small child
who does not know herself
to be verging on something.
Splashing in circles at night,
she watches the way her father leans a beer bottle
against the wall of his rubber float,
lets the cool glass kiss the water.
She pockets the gesture unknowingly.
In the years between then and now,
she finds herself accidentally recalling
all that she had forgotten to remember.
She takes inventory like a child
looking to spot the new:
a chess set cut from frosted glass,
a pale-yellow paperback.
Phantom objects visit at random
to remind her what she'd first learned of dying.

Bloodspots

I began to bleed and I could not stop,
trapped by the perimeter of time
and resigned, unfairly, to forgetting.

In the windowless room, all us girls stripped
from scratchy kilts and stood in stained underwear,
bodies bowing inward

like our predecessors: whipped women
showing bloodspots through hand-sewn liveries.
How even the strongest, shorn and strapped, would bleed,

and how that thing pulsing within her seeped
through tattered bindings
to bring about a disconcerting tenderness,

seedlike matter retched up from bile
and swallowed again with the contempt
of a half-digested pill.

My blood affronts me in bandages,
tissues and toilet paper, plumes of red
softening into near invisibility.

We dissipate together,
trace the perimeter of long-forgotten lives,
take nothing, break nothing,

and time is only some holy decoupage
but I'm wearing it every way I know how—
smeared on my face, stitched into the shape of valor.

Joni

From the far side of the hill she speaks
down to you from above.
You'll always ramble when you tell this story—
how she borrows the moon's voice to share her thoughts
and all her peace enters you.

You are new now.
You think of her in midsummer,
and when you need the courage to behave badly,
out of your own body, being bold and magnetic.
It makes you get your work done, too,

and it always makes you want
the mouth that is open.
You'll forever feel the sour stomach of apology,
but you do not let it plague you anymore.
You are new,

and all that remained unsaid
is coming up fresh. You grow obsessed with
what you need to know and then,
teach yourself to ask.
You will know.

Joni is on your voicemail. She visits you in hallucinogenic
stages, sits beside you like you sat with her. Joni is
a protective eidolon, maternal gossip sentient in
flickering candles. Joni crawled under your skin
while you were not looking.

The Understory

Lately, I've grown obsessed
with all the ways a heart can be heard beating,
through water or glass, amplified by suffocating,
suffering quiet, or the insulative skin of a lover.

It's a sin to throw out old to-do lists,
so I pray to them instead, my divine,
that today I might plant a fern
pulled up from the understory, frail roots

still humming with just-barely-alive.
That today I might capture on film
the light of an old house, coax a bee
somehow into my palm.

I am always gathering objects for one thing
or another, stringing words into a half-
remembered path to follow home
to all the beds I've shared,

and the littles ones burrowed
into blankets screech their love
and protest—won't go to sleep
and wake to another one.

This Year

I never lost anything.
I shed my clothes now when the heat's too high / my
hair bigger than before / I move
in vertical loops / through to the ceiling / I speak
through the veil / speak through the red
flushing my cheeks / I laugh with a full face / I forgot
I was a daughter / of the North Star / it cuts
through the tar-black river / I can play the drums
if I say I can / the same song a dozen times
hits sharp / and my head is a pendulum
to bring me home / when I forget

I walked through so many doors
as a child / an attempt to contend
with the bitter air / I stung my tongue
with cold / breathed myself into a delusion
that looked like clarity / a clarity
mimicking the delusion that I now know
sitting on the bathroom counter slick
with condensation / discarded shirts and underpants
on the tile / that I'll be stepping over for days.

I run the shower early
to watch time move without me
and I'm shrouded in it.

William A. Greenfield

The Apology

I am not like you. I am not the way you were.
I tell myself this as if I am pure,
as if I am immune to your
disease.

I am not like you. The way you were weakens
my heart, makes my fingers turn white.
I erased your footprints with thorns
and alcohol.

I am a byproduct, a victim of your lavishing,
getting my shirts pressed and writing
poems about your rubber checks
and old cars.

It is not right that I compare you to what
I have become, a self-seeking centerpiece
that nitpicks about cigarette ashes
and broken windows.

It is not right that I should censure the
tree from which I fell, that I should
compare thee to some perfect
specimens.

I have none of your favorite coffee mugs,
no faded bowling shirts, no framed nostalgia
propped beside the phone that
never rings.

I am not like you. You were a soldier.
You believed in God and did good deeds
for the needy. You worked double shifts
to cover bad checks.

I am not like you. You raised four children.
You candled chicken eggs to pay for
Christmas presents. You sang to me when
Grandma passed away.

I am not like you. But sometimes I blame you

for what I've become. Sometimes I write not
about what you were, but what you weren't.
For this, I am sorry.

Mania

I don't want sleep or meds to slow down my rapid-fire thoughts.
This is gonna sound weird, but knowing how the world was made
and how it will end is such a high.

It makes me frantic about earth falling out of line so I slam my foot
through the sheetrock because no one understands that there isn't
a fucking thing we can do about it.

I hear the music of the Sirens wailing in the back of my head at
three a.m.
trying to lure me like a shipwrecked sailor, trying to seduce me into
studying auto parts or organ transplants.

But I can block out that drone with my own song of truth.
I have discovered the *Truth* from within and I put it to music
that caters to my insatiable spirit.

Doctors and so called wise people don't know how to meditate.
If they did they would know that soon there will be no cars,
soon we will need no hearts or lungs.

Books of learning will crumble like old scrolls. Our brains
will open any doorway, any portal, because all we really need to do
is think at the speed of life.

You could fill me up with Lithium just before I get to The Third Eye.
The world with all of its simple people and these holes in the wall
make me so tired.

You tell me about the brilliant people living in cardboard boxes simply
because they can't sync the lyrics to the melody.
They can't tell a priest from a whore.

You tell me my mother will be gone someday. You tell me tales until
the day she dies but none of it calls me back, like the Sirens on a
distant shore
who sing and anoint me with a memory of this euphoria.

I will recall the unmistakable thrum of this manic beat
and I'm going to want it back.

The Settling

I exchanged the milk for one with a later date. You asked what difference a day could make. You should worry about the dust on the chair legs and I'll worry about the age of milk.

It's the way the light shines that gives things away, the floating of dust in the stillness until it settles on old wine glasses and window sills.

When you hold souvenirs up to the light, you can see where the dust settled into the Lake George coffee mug or the crack in the Orlando shot glass.

Whether it's soil lifted by the wind or the thinning of tissue, it just keeps changing form like energy that moves from the body to the flower.

It is my detritus with a memory of what I once was and what I will become as it travels from a flake of skin to the maw of a hungry mite.

In the abandoned railway depot a generation of commuters and ticket agents settle onto the wide planks and into the bottle caps.

Gather it up like amber from a fossil. Discard the wings and skeletons and see who stood in the hot sun before their last long train ride.

Sometimes

Sometimes when you speak I can't comprehend what you're saying. The words are lost in the noise, the hum of yesterday's laughter and the emanations that clang and clatter.

You could be asking me if the roads are icy or telling me that Phoebe ate my lottery ticket. All could be drowned out because an aroma makes noise. I could hear the beef stew.

Sometimes when I speak I can't comprehend what I'm saying. I spew some gibberish because you're wearing flip-flops and your feet are still of interest to me.

You could be wearing chain mail and I could still find something of interest, your answer to why the squirrels must be fed, your voice pleading, "oh please, oh please scratch my back."

Sometimes the white noise from the Brookstone box is the distant rumble of the IRT express as we huddle in the bowels under Lexington. You breathe softly while I sip the Bali Hai.

You might tell me it's time to move along, to find some new underground hideaway. Then I wake to the morning sun and the bouquet of violins playing in the folds you left behind.

The First and Last

The first time you saw your father fall it was funny.
He fell off a horse at his brother's farm.

The last time you saw him fall it was a tragedy.
He didn't know he was going to fall,

like not knowing if the ice is slippery or if there
are six or seven steps to the basement.

The first time he was a cartoon character
and the last time he was much too proud.

Sometimes fathers are forsaken and sometimes
lovers live in abandoned schoolyards.

They both appear near the bedside at dawn,
fragile and faint with just a hint of understanding.

The first time you saw your mother cry she was
watching Gary Cooper.

The last time you saw her cry she was throwing
dirt on your father's coffin.

She knew she was going to cry, like knowing the
Syncopated Clock of The Early Show.

The first time she was a soap opera character
and the last time she was a tragedy.

Sometimes mothers are forsaken and sometimes
lovers live in your imagination.

They both appear at bedtime, punching the time
clock for the endless midnight shift.

Karen L Kilcup

The Sky Is Just About to Fall

Clean of ash for months, the fireplace's breathless mouth
awaits a match. The storms have pivoted, south
to north. Black birds disturbed

by shifts in light, in magnetism, whirl as one body
in carnival arcs; landing, they clatter
in shagbarks. In the quirk

of autumn thunderstorms, their cries merge with leaf-
speckled wind. The cat scatters carcasses
about the yard: rabbit's foot

amid asters, mouse hindquarters beneath rugosas'
orange hips. The garden feeds the eyes
alone: a single cherry tomato bush bears

green stones that never ripen. In these elongating
months, the ones with an "r," a growl, I wake
to find you gone to dig for oysters,

as if we're going to starve. Mornings on the marsh
teams of hunters in camouflage slog
through fog, lugging guns,

decoys, blinds, to return at nightfall dangling
ragged pairs of geese with smoky eyes.
You navigate the shallows,

raking muck, mired in certainty. At home you slide
the curved knife into cracks and shuck,
lustrous flesh exposed.

One night, I'm drifting rudderless, alone, along a muddy
river full of snags. Your cry shipwrecks me:
The sky is just about to fall

inside the stairs! We wake between seasons, dizzy
in thinning light. These days, we compost
leaves and leavings.

Warm in our shells, at dusk we walk into darkness.
Holding hands through gloves, we kiss,
lips thick with balm.

Restoration

His father, a giant man,
made him learn
the art of restoration.
The workshop boasted
racks and racks of screwdrivers,
slotted and torx, Phillips and hex,
and blades for crosscutting
and ripping pine and oak.
Between sips of Scotch
his father measured
his child against
a blunt-edged board,
then switched the screaming
power saw on high—
every cut the perfect length.

The son's job was to watch and wait.
He absorbed the moods
and vagaries of wood, the way
a table leg could double
as a baseball bat or club
in practiced hands.

And now on weekends he mends engines.
In an antique, perfect world
pistons slip in oiled cylinders
spark plugs fire in order
and wires are never broken.
He crouches in the tiny cavity.
Expertly, he makes himself small
above a bloom of coil and steel,
grasping scraps of crimson flannel
torn in nine-inch squares
to mop up drops of grease or beer.
He believes nothing
can't be fixed
in time.

The Drinker's Wife

The red-tailed hawk circles wide,
never lands.

Yet she's seen its nest lodged
in the crooked maple, a haven
beyond squirrels or human voices.
And who would dare
disturb the eggs?

The bird spirals up,
down, finding drafts
even in breathless
air, making wind visible.
On the days she sees
them both, she wonders
if, like many birds,
hawks pair for life.

How long can the hawk stay
aloft? The twisted maple lifts
the nest. At its base,
rusty barbed wire bites deep
inside its thickening girth.

“As the Sea Develops Pearl, and Weed”

*But only to Himself be known/ The Fathoms they abide—
—Emily Dickinson*

Erect at the end
of the bed, he stares,
demanding: *Who are you?*
Who are you?
Another night he shouts,
his face floats and flames,
she’s pressed against the wall,
sucking air. His fist thrusts
beside her ear and opens
a hole in the plaster,
blind black eye.

Her tongue grows thick
from biting it, drowning
his cargo fathoms
deep: *nigger, spic,*
and *jigaboo*, faceless names
that anchor her in muck.

By day, his face abrades
her cheek with every kiss.
She hoards the unmentioned
as a thunderhead holds lightning,
as the child’s tongue
seeks her missing tooth,
as the amputee projects
her lopped-off limb, the hand
that cannot grasp.

Still Life: Divorce

A swollen cirrus veil
trails north. For better
or worse, the season's
turned. It's the driest fall
in years. The garden leaves
a stunted seedless cantaloupe
split by frost.

In autumn's bitter changes
I put the flower beds
to rest, and groom
the gravel drive,
imagine setting bulbs
in a broad ring
fattening for May,
daffodils blooming
in a spring shower.
From an arid sky,
snow falls like rice.

Pamela Wax

He dreams of birds

that resemble you.
He resembles you. He is not a bird,
though when he jumps to dunk a ball,
he is suspended, like you dancing, a Chagall,
everything floating, houses and cows.
You visit when he sleeps. You are crow,
bluebird, cardinal, canary—you choose
the color, and he supplies the plumage,
shows me a single feather
left on his pillow in the morning,
lets me stroke it against my cheek.

Nuit et brouillard, Resnais, 1956

I was only ten when I first saw *Night and Fog*, incriminated by all that nakedness—
jumbled bodies littered in camps,
ribs poking through threadbare flesh.

At twelve, at sleepaway camp,
I dressed under cover of night
or in the bathroom to not expose my nakedness,
too hairy, too guilty-fleshy,

or later, too timid to divulge
the nighttime stirrings that encamped
in my kindling flesh—
to be wholly naked

even to my budding sense of self. Flesh
now saggy, scarred, a mind guilt-full
of qualms, but bold as night
as I approach my sixties, I'm willfully naked

to the world. I prance without a stitch
before open windows at night,
backlit, when my guilt takes a form
other than flesh. I mix it with naked rage

because *never again* is pitched capriciously
in the ominous night tent of the world,
where I bite almost guiltless on sunny days
into the waiting flesh of a peach.

Mary Jane Panke

Apophysis

There are no rosary beads in my soul. No pumpernickel bread.
No oysters on the half shell.

There is no scratch ticket, used or unused, in its pocket,
or an extra pack of matches.

My soul seems opaque but if you shine a light from behind you can see
there are no paperclips, no broken shells, no

loose threads pulled from the hem of a skirt. No ice picks. No babies.
No dreams left half or whole undone.

There are no windows in my soul, but there are doors out back
and in the front and they swing

wide in the wind and sometimes chickadees get caught
on their way to the birdfeeder.

I bat my eyes for their tiny hearts, small puffs offering a way
out, no laments for the ones who stay trapped inside.

No snow is falling in my soul. Still the ground is white,
untouched, inviting me to find

my mittens, put on my winter boots, go outside to make angels
before the darkness shines.

Raising a Son

He has a serious resistance to feeling his feelings.
You'll have to push him first

with kindness, then a little meanness,
a soft shove off the seesaw

so he loses his grip and falls back into the high grass,
bottom down, red sneakers flying up in the air.

He'll feel the sting of unfairness,
of soured play.

His eyebrows will twist and bend—
the arched shock of betrayal, the slant determination

to hide his always fear,
the unbreakable bridge to not-strike-back.

All the huff and heat will drain from his cheeks
before he steadies to his feet

and when you hold out your hand
his watering eyes will tell you—

No, never! *and* What took you so long? *and* How come?

Transmission of Power

Amanda Gorman, the Poet Laureate who shines
sunbeam and pomegranate at Biden's Inauguration suggests
We, each one of us, Be the Light in the World.

The young woman who could not enunciate
Right or WRong four years ago now plays with sounds
like a child with bright plastic cups in a bathtub,

uninhibited, unafraid to splash puddles on the old
tile floors. She inculcates and orchestrates
with talking fingertips—and I float and fall

to her drumming beats in the brilliant frozen air.
This twenty-two-year-old wrote this poem to recite
before King and Kingdom, proclaims Every Thing

“... just is — Justice.” And I laugh inside, I cry.
I lose my breath and find it. Break loose. I did not expect
to be swept to the foot of this patriotic hill, to be pointed

in this upward direction. Amanda Gorman is the indelible
ink, she is the undeniable Call to the empty page.
The Poem in her wakes up the Poem in me.

Mu·si·cal·i·ty

Notes live in his limbs,
seem never ending,

rush out in repeating patterns,
gutsy echoes pushed through

a broken hole. He exhales with exertion,
approximating song.

Not tamed by lips or tongue,
it comes from his blood,

this pulse of joy, this tickle of fate.
And he knows he cannot whistle

or tie his shoes. He knows
he will never drive cars, fly

airplanes. But it doesn't scare him
from climbing staircases,

from shout-singing in the shower,
from welcoming this morning's sun

with the full force of his breath,
untuned, unstoppable.

a mykl herdklotz

Quandaries on the West Coast

“San Francisco Bay: Midnight”

i'm sitting on the frontage road
Front Row

I. Overture. The Grand Drape is being drawn open.
its gentle sashay sway
breathes across my face, my neck
like the breath of one loved

Sounds!
hear the horns on the westbound freeway 80
behind me
the waves of applause coming off
The Bay
fluid—polished—prepared

starlight—spotlight—moonlit stage
in this violet-blue auditorium
the ground row curtain Dark,
getting darker as the lights dim

the refineries produce charcoal gray capes while the
waterfront fashions satin evening dresses
and sequined gowns
each performer takes their place

II. Entrée. The tugboat conductors, Corps de ballet
pirouette,
contretemps
chassé

the passing lights and shadows are jesters
jumping about,

doing ronds de jambe
stage left, stage right

up the Bay Bridge,
the lights are dancers
on a trampoline

the foghorns 'ooh' and 'ahhh' their delight

III. Coda. The quietude allays
solitudes chill

i sit in the audience of
night creatures' whose blinking eyes
observe the City's skyline lights
the gala's nimbus

my senses satiated
i exit this theater,
slowly travel the frontage road home
in heightened wonder
of this performance.

“Mouettes et Mastodontes”

(On Seagulls and Elephants)

the ocean seems, a lifetime of poems
a university library’s overflowing
stacks and shelves, stacks and shelves

kelp tubes the sea’s daily flotsams
and shells and shells of creatures
within the waves and tides reassurances

my friend tells me the ocean is not
a lover or mentor; surreal illustration;
merely ionizing specialties of the ocean’s air

still, i hear the seagulls interjections
i hear, hear, hear them call above, adjudicating
the sea’s crashing protestations

my friend sees a world of physics, of
explanations, ‘empyrics’, definitions
calendars and planner’s days and months

this ionized air brings back to my mind
metaphorical mastodons of swelling sentiments
creating visceral in-body re-creations

his native language, his first tongue,
misses the foreign expressions in these underworld
speak-easies, their currents and currencies

and i come to a north star recognition of
a language spoken by gray mammoths in *vers libre*
to an alien resident on a familiar planet

and the colony of white and gray Herring gulls
keow, keow, and ha-ha-ha-ha-ha their banquet days
and voice their condescension to the third heaven,

and by some surreal illustration,
J'ai été aimé et encadré .
(i am loved and mentored)

“This Park, that Spring”

This park, this spring
hidden in the Berkeley hills
speaks to me
as we view, from this vista,
the San Francisco Bay

the confetti of sailboats sprinkled
on the late afternoon table cloth bay
on this goose bump baby blue day
metallic sprinkles between the cornbread hills
catch the Maxfield Parrish colors of the dusk

this park, this spring where
hidden we were from this day
two plum trees in blossom remind me
of the blushing, the bleached white sails
filling your open-air smiles

embracing you from behind
my arms around your waist
looking out into the now
a day floating away like clouds
a day with a silk thread horizon

the sun setting into our blood
leaving warm the slow setting evening
our souls begging this embrace
to never end
in this park, that spring.

“Alcuni Contano le Stelle, Alcuni Grani della Sabbia”

*(Some Count the Stars,
Some the Grains of Sand.)*

Talk to me,

while i finish counting the grains
of salt on the brim
of a margarita glass,

or after counting the grains
of sand on the rim
of the pacific,

speak to me please,
about the credible explanation
of the vast, expansive, accelerated
beginning of this Universe—
a commentary on the stars.

Somewhere in the Pacific Northwest
on an ocean shore
where i have often walked,

i would like to vision,
a triumphant ‘ahah!’ vision,
above a languishing earth,

beyond the counted stars,
those markers defining time,
recording time indefinite,

help me, as i walk the dunes of Mendocino,
(Voce sussurrato)

*“Alcuni Contano le Stelle,
Alcuni Grani della Sabbia”*
(some contemplate the stars,
some the grains of sand)

to simply perceive their perfect possibilities,
as gifts.

“In a little breeze”

You are somewhere in California
i'm under the rumble of jet engines
as planes and jets roll in, fly out
of Colorado
it is the holidays
not my holidays
you are a thousand miles away
distant from me
 separated, hidden from you

and i wish you would find me
in a little breeze on the coast
 outside of Bodega Bay

i would fill your nostrils
were you to find me there
make your face moist.
It shines, i love the shine
you are unblemished, backlit
as the sun sets behind you
if you found me in the breeze.

If you could find me
 in the drawer
you might find me in the
scraps
 of paper
 in your desk
 in the drawer with your cards
 and stamps and notes
 a scrap
with the words
or a phrase
that would make you smile
or would flush red
your face embarrassed
if you found me there
my blood being ink

my soul a phrase
a memory
in which you would find me.

Or you might find me on the floor
in the morning
in the clothes being picked up
and added to sheets from
the bed, and towels, socks
T-shirts
there finding me as
day old cologne
patterns of silk
a single sock
(behind the headboard)
that in a fragrance
or texture
or fabric
you might find me there.

You might find me there
in a measure
a tempo or stanza
in the shuffle of life
and dissonant tones,
erratic staccato
of our lives rhythms
and a song
in the shower
over the radio
would find me there
finding no borders
between
Colorado and California
from a time past
where there were no
borders
long ago
in days we pioneered
you would find me.

i wish you would find me
at breakfast, early Saturday
espresso grounds soaked
saturated broth
 over ice
chocolate and croissants
the breakfast your mother
never told you about,
next to an oak framed
window open

ivy hanging down
in your cotton
sleepy eyes
soft, stirring sounds
of neighbors lives
 reviving
and there
you would find me
in your quiet prelude
to a lazy day.

i would have you find me
 inside
coursing through your veins
pulsing in your ears
electric swelling emotion
feeling the
 tympani
vvvvvibrrrrratting
booommming within

a muffled resonance
a bells striker
padded with flesh
i wish you would
find me there,

find me there.

Claudia Maurino

Double Body Baptism

it is a baptism.

performer myself a double body:
the baptizer and performed upon
both God and the blessed
 and woman

cold water crashes over my face
 and slips down my body
touching the dark places like fingers in the night
 it lights them up to magnificence
resplendence,
 even

steam rises from the bath as from a pit
to the hell
 I (self-flagellating arsonist phoenix)
rise from

I dare not look myself in the mirror;
 there is something too sinful and holy in that:
eye contact with the divine as she descends
 to mortal flesh

my head pounds; I may pass out
 of this body
and into something greater

already my hearing is leaving me
 and I need to sit down:
I kneel on the grimy bath mat
 supplicate myself to whatever is holier

than the vision I see in the mirror when my eyes come back
to my body:

flesh and bone and sockets that bleed
blue and grey; my womanhood slipping
out of me like divine tears

as I crumple further within what now is
(and only ever was)
my wet and naked body
curled on the floor of the bathroom
dust motes and dank air rising around me
up to heaven

(even these particulates reach higher
go further
than I
)

Note:

the idea of disaster
seems like it ought to be a
(n unfortunate) by-product of chaos
of the unruly cynic god who rules us all
by way of doing nothing

but our etymological foremothers

(or perhaps four mothers?
what is it again that conceives and births us?
chaos (1)
hope (2)
love (3)
and spirit (4)

Note: *spirit*:

see: *spir* see: respiration

see: breath see: invisible sustenance

see: God see: 'holy spirit'

see: '*blow blow thou winter wind*'

see: blow

(us—away)

)

tell us a *disaster*

is (Note:) the “unlucky placement of an ill star”

see: *dis*: pejorative, *mis*—

see: *aster*: star

(consider the astronaut: star-sailor

hopelessly lost little man making himself small by
proximity to bigness.

loss is our one (1) fore father)

etymology suggests you can blame the stars for your misfortune

but I would not lean in to that notion

if I were you

(and atomically, genetically, I very nearly am. what are you but
nitrogen?)

my last note to you:

chaos.

see: gaping see: yawning see: abyss.
see the star-sailor floating through all that black nothing
see him gasp, all alone. see him yawn and blow
through so much empty space

see the nearest star pull him in
(Note: love is only ever hot and cruel.)
see the final disaster: the astronaut dissolving, every atom resonant
and pre-determined
(we hope)

Good Pilgrim

Do your thoughts wander?
Is your mind, like mine, an empty church
hollow and cavernous, carved from ancient stone
with a great stained-glass window at its front—
a heavenly host of blue and gold, green and red
in a haunting, hollow medley?

Do the great wooden doors in the church of your mind
swing open and bang on their hinges
allowing every gust of vagrant, lusty wind
to touch and tickle all the nooks and crannies
every desolate pew—does it rustle the pages
of ancient books, teasing their covers open to allow
disconsolately lonely words to lift from their pages
and fly heaven-wards, lazily and vibrantly
to bounce and echo on the imperturbably heavy stone?

Does the grand and holy temple of your thoughts
ever stand so naked, so shorn of fancy and illusion—
a simple building in a simple world, echoing out
the tune of a choir long since gone?

Are you, like I am, so desperately hungry
to let your every godly atom stand so open
and so vulnerable? Do you ever ache and echo
trembling with desire for reverberation, for resonance?

And do you ever play the pilgrim, walking empty-handed
into the home of the Lord your mind, to sit and stare, to pray
without words at the foot of a shrine dedicated to a missing god?

Do your footsteps echo as you take communion from a ghost
smelling nothing but time itself and the memory
of a candle someone extinguished in a moment in a time long gone?

Do you ever throw your patient palms up
and feel the roof lifting off, a banquet
of delicate and dangerous stars descending, shedding

their ancient silvery light into the little lonely church
you have made yourself?

Are you ever deliciously empty?
Do you want more than anything someday to be full?

A Promise

Someday I will have a potluck and I will invite you
it will be in a home I don't live in yet, on a porch I have yet to see
there will be hours and hours of soft afternoon light
the kind that stains everybody gold and glittery

I will say tender and gentle things like "I made pasta"
and "you don't have to bring anything, but you can
because I know how much you like to cook."
And you will bring a rhubarb pie. And I will smile.

We will drink wine and talk about art and share
the things that make our hearts excited
and there will be music playing in the background
and it will be called laughter, called joy.

We will be surrounded by friends we have yet to meet
who will bring gifts like recipes from their time abroad
and new ways of doing everything from folding napkins
to building a community of activists and artists.

My potluck might be in a city, but there will be plants.
I will have learned how not to kill them by then.
I will have learned all sorts of tender and gentle things.
Like how to cook. How not to worry.

By this time, I will have collected so much joy
from so many different humans and places, old and new
and my little home will be so full of it
that you will smile without thinking when you walk in.

On the walls there will be poetry I wrote in high school.
And photos from the river and the fields and the mountains.
There will be paintings and pictures and maybe a collage
from cities and countries and towns I've haven't even seen yet.

When you walk in, I will greet you with a hug
and your favorite drink. I will take your pie

and put it next to my pasta. I will take your hand
and bring you into the sun. I will exclaim, loudly—

“look at all this light! I have so many things to show you.”

Road Map

“It makes a lot more sense to me than the bible.”
he says of his favorite book
as we burrow deeper into the unknown terrain, climbing
steadily upwards till the air is so thin
the truth just slips out

This bus has been moving
for an uncountable number of hours—my whole life
maybe. The lines that usually govern us
fade into the dirt that coats our shoes, our clothes
our throats.

He has been staring out the window for miles
not moving or commenting, but watching
with a hunger and an earnestness I can't help but love.
While he watches the terrain, I watch other people watch it.
This is a sport I could spend days at.

Their eyes light in conjunction with hills and valleys
the delicate and rugged contours of the earth
and I am overwhelmed by how much I love
the intricacies of every human being I have ever met.
Sometimes it's almost too much to bear.

Days later, we drive deep into a valley
the dark walls of barren Earth, the great behemoth mountains
circling us on all sides—acting neither
as a threat nor a comfort.

“It was my road map,” he adds, “to love. To being a person”

In less than two months, I am leaving for college.
Every semblance of normality, every ritual
robbed from me, in favor of an exploration
I am too trepidatious to look forward to.
What I wouldn't give for a road map right now.

Every emotion all at once lives in me somewhere
pushing up like tectonic plates—I am well on my way

to becoming a mountain, so close
to bursting I'm surprised you can't see the Earth move.
But you can't.

None of this comes in the form of words, so I listen:
to him talk about his book, to the bus jolt over rocks,
to my heart: little and big at the same time
and so full, as it whispers
that to love people is the greatest pleasure of being alive.
So I do.
I do.

Mary Pacifico Curtis

One Mystical Day

“What do you want? Why are you here?”

I said to the deer that lay in my lawn
a mottle of brown on grass like straw.
He gazed at me I waited ‘til answered
by a rustling breeze blowing golden
bay leaves from branches through trees,
flakes gusting the yard between the buck
and me. Then he rose six points
to the sky ambled uphill

into the trees into the shade away.

“What do you want? Why are you here?”

I say as a young deer rests at lawn’s edge
two craggy horns angle ears twitch and turn
to new sounds on the breeze.
Haze and pine dust
barely conceal six points behind him
the big blinking buck.

The two bring back another day when we learned
our time would be short We knew when deer after deer
appeared and stayed.

White Wings

—June 2011, *Endeavor's final flight*

The thrust, the dare
to dive and penetrate
a hadal realm of eyes
that don't know light

Sticks rubbed together,
ice made into lens,
flint against steel,
the spark

Endeavor hurtling
above continents
no longer.
She lumbers,

a vessel atop a cylinder
crossing borders
invisible
from the firmament

white wings under cumuli
clear to cornea upward
turned

the steady climb
to cirro clouds,
vaulted into
a Gods-eye view.

Ubi caritas est vera, est vera. Deus ibi est.

Easter 2019

I.

A thick wood ridge runs the length of the sanctuary. Between its downward sloping beams, wood rectangles frame 28 ornamental tiles. Multiply that by seven sections & by two sides of the church. My oldest daughter confessed she calculated the number of ceiling tiles for 8 years during weekly masses. We baptized our girls here, memorialized their dad when he succumbed to cancer. “He didn’t want to die,” said the priest. † Holy doorways sheltered Joanie who sat upright in her bed of tatters shouting, “Leave me alone, get outta here, fuck you, leave me alone.” † The Spanish teacher taught that homosexuality is a sin. Bullying began in the primary grades. Parking lot chatter broke marriages & provoked the occasional restraining order. Moms met up for kickboxing & shared wisdom on sizing implants for perfect tits. “We are the body of Christ. We have to be God’s hands, feet, voice.” † One Christmas Eve, the priest asked who had come to earth. In an echoing moment of silence, a 3 year-old answered, “Santa Claus!” † Christmas yet again. I snarl under a mask of smiles in the sanctuary. Year after year.

II.

Notre Dame de Paris burned at the beginning of Holy Week.

Our Lady of Paris.

Mother of continents and genocides.

Mother to immigrant boats tossed in high waves.

Mother church to fathers and mothers

torn from little children.

Our Lady’s steeple falls.

Votive memorials persist.

flame against flame.

Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble . . .

Tess Cooper

Strawberry Roses

Blind stripes of morning sun; coral roses in my bedroom are
the sweetest domestication—

Though red and white columbine grows at my windowsill
and this is my heart's bitter favorite.

It is naked-on-the-beach weather and my popsicle and lips
are mango flavored, glossed with sugar.

Bright orange matches my ocean hair and reminds me of
juice bursting from flesh with a sweet spice from the
islands

Where I am not allowed to visit abuelita

Tillamook

I awake and my mouth tastes like the sea
I remember a little cabin by the water
Where pheasants come in the spring and we eat them in the summer
Where there are reeds by the bank and the river runs red and
 yellow with speckled bellies
We wore plaid and denim, sandals and bare feet
Met the cows who gave us our ice cream-
Invasive blackberry just as I am
Thorny and thick, but sweet under the august sun
You are saltwater taffy, sticking to my teeth long after I've had you
Filling my mouth with that ocean sweetness I haven't had since I
 was a teenager
I awake and my mouth tastes like the sea.

My Own Name is Bitter in my Mouth

The first thing I am aware of in the morning is the long growl of
my stomach, and yet;
I will not feed it until evening.
I hunger for flesh in the reddest sense;
Sex and roasted chicken are my safe foods
Nicotine and caffeine do me one better
I carve away five pounds of myself every week,
As if less of my body means more of me
This is not the most beautiful I will ever be
I am cheekbones and jawline, lips and eyes
My collarbones are the thin branched perches of sparrows
And for this I eat once a day
For dainty white cotton dresses and slender braceleted wrists,
I dream of bread that will never pass my lips

Airport Poem

You are the owner of all my organs and I am gutted
Crying again in the airport as we part because I am allowed
 less than persephone's lot;
We part and I again I am penelope, my patience no virtue
 but a forced hand
I fold this turn into my airplane seat, knees to chest and
 eyes fevered and wet.
There is a layer of wool over Dallas,
a weeping blanket of cloud and I wish dearly for gin,
Though I cannot afford the hangover, for—
As my flight takes off I am already heart sick.

What walks

Brother, do you believe?
I stand at the pulpit and preach— Oh Lord above
Do you believe in what lives in the cornfield
And why we don't go there after dark?
Brother do you believe?
I stand in the waters and preach
Dark waters where alligator turtles live
And catfish mermaids lurk
They get bigger than you think.
Oh brother, I say, do you believe?
Do you know why we say not to leave the safety of the porch light
when you hear your name from the dark?
Brother I tell you that church has been abandoned for good reason
No souls can be saved there anymore
No joyous shouts can be heard in the rafters, only birds
Kudzu now owns the doorway and half the pews
And the devil walks with his white hat, asking
Brother, oh Brother, do you *believe*?

Peter Kent

Congress of Ravens

Flock of crooked bones, pasted
in feather, thrown into a wind
filled with knives, they rise

against dwindling day's darker blue,
an armada in black, wings trimming
light from the air. And, now, convened

on bare branches like a corruption
of foliage, they debate with staccato
strains in a land bereft of melody.

Orphan Tale

Millions of miles away a cosmic-pinprick furnace
belches an acid flare that threatens to tear apart
a small, blue planet's electromagnetic veil.

Fragile marble, spinning in this great dark room,
has someone left the quantum deadbolt open?
Offer your prayers to whatever dealer

turns over the cards that define one's fate.
May your mindless waltz continue unimpeded
during our brief tenure of consciousness.

Masons Mend the Custom House Tower

A pair of peregrines
who've colonized the tower's heights
dive at these intruders emerging

from granite pores, wrapped in rope
and harness to defy gravity's insistence.
They work the afternoon in singular focus

with mortar and trowel, to craft a practical
artistry. Where the great stone blocks intersect,
the worms of climate will find their passage

repulsed. The falcons finally settle
upon the tower's pinnacle, recognizing
that those who build such monuments

rarely choose to approach its apogee.
In such small acts of balance rests
the security that every creature seeks.

Spring

The exuberant waving of flags
and tree branches signals the shift
in wind from polar to equatorial.

Heaven-starved faces lift toward
radiant cumulus blossoming against
cerulean. Days brightened by a prophecy

of unrestrained bounty. Optimism's
raw wonder restored. Nature's
subtle hallelujahs tempt spirits

sealed in skyscrapers to wonder
if even their tombs might be inverted
by light's irrepressible ascension.

Winter

I worry for the swans outside Swampscott.
Ice must be a foot thick now in the reeds
and narrow stretches of water that

they made their home. Have they gone
from this white desolation? Or,
do they endure with stoic acceptance

what follows the days of contentment
allotted for drift and nonchalance. Is this
where the sublime's crown comes to rest?

Kimberly Sailor

I Asked for a Hooker for Mother's Day

to liven things up:
a flexible tartlet, STD scares

thrifty, considering
the purchase will never charge.

My six-year-old daughter:
old times make me sad

while buttered crumbs fall
from the raspberry cake tin.

I start thinking
about writhing, historical depression

panting, generational trauma that beats anew:
did my veins infuse her with platelet grief?

Does determined DNA override
pastel egg hunts, whirring bubble guns, bursting

Easter snow in April
with a rented, real bunny from a cabbage farm?

To our wise Hypothetical Hooker,
held to the highest of hygiene
and intellectual standards,
whose well-earned rates command
more much than borrowed livestock:

Did my daughter watch
her mother's kindergarten abuse?
Ovum-swallowed those old, morose memories

before she met me?

You Never Saw the Harvest Moon

Scorning August's departure was overkill
proper pleasures: your aunt's speedboat, flaxseed striped, bees
over-pollinating our spiritual philosophizing,
messianic and vexed at the state campground;
fussily selected dried wood and a few Playboys
for kindling of course, of course.

A waning solstice
between a cancelled graduation and college,
or the military, or your dad's carpentry business
or your uncle's unlicensed roof hustle
au fait
with keen, teen urgency:
a September goodbye.

Your swim trunks
in my Santa Fe
when the sheriff documented your death
my nephew
an only son
never a daughter;

a press conference
on my crabgrass yard
and here we mused
overdose news
was manufactured from homeless vets.

High school friends, covid-ly regathered again
ceremoniously paraded by your sacred Silverado
rubbed your peeling parking pass through the glass
grabbed the current issue's cover model from your bed
when the reporter, with honey-colored hive hair, went live.

Local Paranoia

home alone? / peek behind the fabric blinds / pointy indentations
from pulling / a sharp horse hoe galloped over the top / my
beautiful vintage window, framed on both sides, all mine. //
scan the roads, roofs / wonder: has everyone gone to town without
me? / the weekly park music /
the half-priced wine / the whimsical and serious events / now with
spray-painted grass circles, six feet apart / they don't think to /
or wish to / invite me / even with calculated distance / I am
too much. //

you, too? / excluded by outsiders / untrusting of insiders / running
the new-age domestic farm: two-story tudors / kids have saddle
sores / the long ride of mom versus dad. //

the fabric blinds return / to the spot they remember / an offseason
ladybug lands on my ear /
loose from the window pane / where the blinds pinned her down /
by the dots / museum-grade archival paper / freedom for her, a
tastefully appointed penitentiary for me. //

my friends, I think / suggest: I am tormented. // slather the
lavender /
massage the mint / chop the whole anxiety crop / perform a
controlled burn
with or without a permit / take back your brain / hold it firm /
until you are well, again.

But I / live next to others, alone. But I /
simply lock the front door.

Reaching for Andromeda

were you in front of me
at the custard stand?
do you know the cookie dough
is fresh on tuesdays? that the peach cobbler,
is baked behind the counter?

The fourth, a damned fine holiday:
no one stresses about fireworks,
wrong gifts, meat assignments, or in-law estrangement.
Just watch: boom-boom-boom. Just sip: craft beer, enchanting
sparkler children.

or maybe you like merlot?
perhaps, you are not from here at all,
and live somewhere decidedly more exotic.
maybe you are from new zealand
practicing your cello in grape vineyards, cuddling heirloom
milking sheep
and, not knowing any better,
endearingly think my midwest accent
sounds like hollywood
even though
nasal noises are grating to national ears

and if you're usually at the bottom of the earth
then my celebration means nothing to you:
i remain a forever-stranger
now wondering about a billion other
un-mets, perhaps friends of yours
who also buy dairy while overthinking the limits of space
one or two paces ahead of me
while we all walk
curiously lonely
down our shared milky streets.

White Women Running

We meet where we do.
Corner of 8th and Change Street,
with beet juice, Bluetooth, and filibuster-pink sneaks.

Our music, important for rhythm and force,
synced to the smack of our feet:
The Arches of The Angry.

tension-building tempo
message-driven anthem::

click, Play Radiohead. Worn, but blindingly artistic. Ardent. Essential.
your skin makes me cry
Her mouth moves, but hush, I am thinking in the past now.

My black foreign exchange student cherishes my slips,
studies my lips when I say *African-American*. Why, that's halfway
to erasing Nigerian poverty.

He'd barter his cinder block hovel for any American cop
'cept the kneelers,
'cause they ain't prayerful and Christian like he bows to be.

We meet where we do. A sign-bearing protest
electrifies our route,
arc-resists down High Street;

even a town of a few thousand
has something to say. But I ain't hearin' nothin' today::
click, Play AM news, listen to gun violence stats and a flower shop ad.

My partner nods us north. We cross
streets and chests

running feet in cadence: hit, hit, hit.
Here, a county tax-man
spent his budget on a retired Black Hawk and tank,

lest we forget
something that never ends.

Someone's son swings a leg over the iron barrel,
blowing up bad guys in the park
like the youth in Iraq,

riding that black metal without a saddle.
An awfully expensive playground
for a perturbed hinterland::

click, Play shopping app. The boy reminds me of my own,
and we ain't havin' summer squirt guns that look like real glocks;
let's make those permanently out of stock.

Add to cart: squirty dolphin counterpart.
So what if he's ten? What happened to forever young?::

click, Play safety of nerdy public radio, dull it all down.
Here, a monthly donation buys you a reusable tote bag
in arresting beige

assurance that you're doing something,
even if I don't hear nothin', or feel it, neither:
lachrymator agents can't seep through my speakers.

At room temperature, tear gas is solid,
and crystalline white.
Are war relics the next statues to lasso and drag?

Two-toned insects
running without a hive
outrunning the day's pesticide.

My friend, with chipped nail polish in the shape of fire-busted Australia,
pulls out her ear buds
proclaims: *We have to do better*. Yes, I hear it this time.

Maybe she's got a sudden case of cultural empathy,
dosed in a sonic syringe
from the voltage march a few roads back,

or, she heard the news
of a gutted rainbow teen in a gentrification grove.
Whatever she's pushing out, I'm buying in.

We meet where we do.

We stop, too. Pull down my face mask
of neutral leaf-beetle stripes;
hers, a not-so-passive black and white

sure is hard to breathe when running
sure is hard to breathe when you just can't.

Three miles, every day, every season.
Not sure when
running women was normalized

but the extraordinary miles logged between us
and our sisters who couldn't
and those who still can't

because they don't live in sleepy hamlets
but are writhing, moaning, riot-shaking oppidans,
get counted, too::

click, Play goodbye.

At home, goosebumps in a hot shower
for running past centuries of grief
that history condensed into just one sentence:

Black Lives Matter.
No Justice, No Peace.

Defund the Police.
Make Love, Not War, you

Nasty Woman.
Nevertheless, She Persisted

even when her family tree
infested with insects

even when her shrinking galaxy
spun on without her

And so will I.
And so will I.

Bill Cushing

Creating a Corpse

the body didn't decay from the inside
but from the amassed and mindless
parasites that festered
to kill a nation

they invaded collectively
permeated the soul of a society
and did
what no congress could
until a shroud of suspicion
of "the other"
descended to mask the land
with either fear
or justification
or rationalization

the inner rot came from outside
with a destruction
brought on one by one

like oncogenes
tens became thousands
to destroy the body politic
with infected thoughts justified
by clinging to affirmed beliefs
poisoned by the certitude
of conviction of those
who
held the approved thoughts
who
carried the right signs
who
wore the appropriate hat
or the most fitting outfit

subversion doesn't need spies
just a marauding cult of zealots
taking action
like the innumerable insects
that can fell an elephant
with a parade of slight
but poisonous bites

Parting Pictures

A spotlight shines, center stage,
over a dozen white folding chairs
arranged in symmetry, waiting
for mourners to gather.

Front of house, facing a screen
between the seats, is the silhouette
of a wheel chair where an old man sits
bent from the weight of 98 years.

He has already buried a wife,
Rose of his life, and now faces
the visage of his namesake,
the young man framed on the screen upstage.

The face looks out, peers through the tight
shaft of light, a Playbill facsimile,
previewing a life of accomplishments,
now another casualty of cancer.

Even four decades of difference
residing between them cannot obscure
the similarities that fasten these two:
the pyramidal nose, the tapered chin.

Two Toms, frozen in time, framed
in someone's lens: the one who remains strains
against age, defying gravity to lift
a weary arm to wave a final farewell
to his son.

Souvenirs

Waiting on the promised end times,
the erosion of age absorbs
but does not erase all remains.
They are out there all around us:

Skulls piled high by centurions;
blackened bodies, impressions
scorched into earth by flame throwers
of the Great War. Then,

glazed eyes gaze at the world from men
draped in aprons of skin and thrown
in wooden wagons like human
debris by soldiers of the Reich;

and wretched blood retched on sand
from biological weapons.
Feeling feral charm, men with clenched
fists and clenched minds descend

into woeful revenge, and passion
waxes as we join the westering sun,
and the heat of living flashes
and fades into desolation.

Spelling the Name

All-consuming
Indefatigable source of
Destruction of
Someone, somewhere

All the time; an
Insidious
Dragonnade
Summoning

All other
Illnesses to
Destroy its host.
Since its start,

Almost inevitably,
It has become our age's
Disease: our cancer, our polio, our
Scarlet fever.

As
It
Dives into an immune
System,

A feeling of absolute and terrifying
Impotence
Demands
Satisfaction,

And
Its greatest ally may well be the
Diminutive minds of
Some who,

As
If
Deaf,
Shush those who speak.

Anyone
Is vulnerable; to assume safety,
Dependent upon hope, is entirely un-
Safe.

The Prodigal Father

Somebody told me
how you had grown
as a man worthy
of honor on your own.

I wasn't there,
avoiding the weight
of giving you due care
forcing you to live enate

as I surrendered
to another life
that was false and rendered
me to live like one who died.

Now I come to you
to be absolved,
hoping to mask or subdue
a lifetime uninvolved.

Everett Roberts

Calypso

She who conceals things, Have you started to become me?
My name is laden with many Meanings that escape understanding,
unspoken but aching desires. I sense in your expression
The unraveling of things I weave: The wavering heart
whose hands have done the work of the ocean,
here, building my love to withstand A seven-year storm. I know
the cold I feel as you brood, Far away from me, years later,
back turned, staring out to sea I know you will still be thinking of me.

Try, and fail to leave me behind.

Persephone

My mother's voice carries far The goddess weeps all winter
As she searches, though I am gone. She bargained with hell;
I could not cry out. I fight Through the betrayal, her weakness,
With everything I have. I am lost. My captor drapes me in jewels.
To be released seems impossible; Taken below where it's warm, I'm unsure,
I am fighting Death each day, Crowned and unable to enjoy myself
Even though I am only a girl, and I once dreamt of gems like these,
Dreamt of wide blue skies To see how they'd gleam beneath the sun.

Freedom is brief, and a pomegranate sweeter.

Hagar

It's not often, but sometimes
 When I'm by the river
Washing my mistress' clothes,
 I dream I might glide away
On swift currents, away from here,
 Escape from this desert;
 To where my womb is mine,
I determine to whom I'm given.
 One day I might escape, but
Today and tomorrow demand so much.

I curse God with each breath.
My arms are tired and my back aches,
Woman is barely human, even to God.
Totally alone, is there a place I may go,
Where I pray for shelter, and maybe
Another angel to guide me
Somewhere safer?
Yet I must return, this angel says,
My reward is in the next life; he warns
Cruelty may look like love in a desert.

The angel comes. I don't stop searching for water.

Dido

Nymphs sang at our wedding And in the dark
do you remember the cave I held you at my
 entrance, with trembling heart hesitating,
 voice and hands, heavy-limbed, falling
eyes and promises blazing into sleep. The dream
 like lightning: this love you dare, the dream
you give could build cities you still might lose.

No walls will ever contain you.

Andromache

My windows open onto the sea. A thousand bonfires dot the night.
There's always sunlight Flaming on shields arrayed, the tide of men
That floods in, or moon Hidden by a giant, hollow horse.
And the armor in the corner A dubious prize coveted,
Glimmers and gleams, Rings loud when struck with a spear.
When I remember to dust it off The altar I prepare is heavy with offerings.

Must I also fight a man's war?

Susan Marie Powers

Stones

Stones in my pocket pity me,
I who stand in awe of the world.

In the woods, pine trees welcome me,
invite me to touch rough bark.
Smooth stones in my hands leer
or smile depending on the light.

Ahead, the dogs trot not knowing
they are perfect, bidding me hurry,
they move with grace and bliss
as I stumble through barberry.

At home, I savor wine in a glass,
lamb's ear glows in the garden.
Breezes gust through open windows,
the Whip-poor-will softly trills.

There are warm stones in my pocket
fitted against my palm. I hold on.

Imagine

your students line up in rows, answer questions,
laugh at your jokes, hold the door,
bless you when you sneeze.

Imagine how it feels to wonder, “Who has a gun?”
The thought comes unbidden as we play word games,
brows furrowed, determined to succeed.
The question, “What is a baby swan called?”
I love them, yet this warmth is tainted with fear.
A shelf falls in the next room,
and as one we startle—then they fix
their eyes on me, looking for safety.

Swans tuck their young under wings,
but even if I had them, my wings
could not fend off bullets.
When predators approach, the Kildeer flails
its wing, limps, calls loudly, “Follow me.”
The chicks hide, soft down blends with grass.

My students play the game—the answer is cygnet.
I imagine a gun in my desk nestled among pencils, stickers,
and gum:
I squeeze the trigger, blood explodes, papers scatter,
children scream.
My students sit in a row, obedient, compliant,
trusting me, not knowing I do not trust this world.
I have no gun, only my steady heart gripping its fear.

The White Hen

Atilt, a white sailboat tipped askew
the hen propels her bulk.
Claws tear dry leaves, wings raised,
she imagines flight and trundles toward her coop.
The hawk's shadow circles, reptilian eyes
target the soft curve of her neck:
the place where talons sever heads.
She hurries, my hen, July sun on her feathers,
nothing more important than the nesting bin
where there are no predators, only
lovely moon-shaped eggs waiting for her warmth.
I hold my breath, will her to hurry,
and she reaches the coop. I know,
without looking, she has planted herself atop eggs
head first, tail feathers protruding—a bouquet.
The hawk circles in the sky.
One less death in a world that wears us out,
this hen's victory a small joy to relish.
I return to the house, my own nesting bin.
Somewhere there are lovely moon-shaped eggs.

Embrace

Water embraced me as a child.
Summers I toppled backward off the
pier and into the warm lake
submerged in shallow depths
where seaweed floated over my face.
Small fish nosed my legs
as I invaded their territory.
My feet pressed into soft sand
ridged by the waves, and
the smell of fish floated above
lily pads floating lazily under a high sun.

Now, I am landlocked,
perch on chairs, tap out words,
tend to my restless dog,
spark kindling in the stove,
hold my hands to the heat and sigh.

Still, somewhere, a girl splashes in a lake,
water sparkles, bullfrogs croak,
coots dive, and she listens—there—
at the foot of an apple tree,
the mourning dove croons, sweet and slow.

Canada Geese

Canada geese call across a frozen sky.
Black forms traverse the moon's wide face,
clouds float mindlessly across a silver sheen.
I look up from my snow-covered garden—
these cries open my heart.
How would it be to glide in their midst,
flow on currents, be shielded by wings?
To sing in a minor key, alert
my mate, warn my family?

Geese track stars across great lakes,
mountains, farmlands, cities blink away darkness.
They return to nest sites warmed
by spring air, fragrant blossoms, long days.
The honking fades and birds wing away.
I weigh the loss of wild song become memory.
Inside my house a fire burns, a sulky cat prowls.
I balance on ice, take the lead, buffer birds
behind me, eddying, dipping, following the moon.

Contributor Notes

Devon Bohm received her BA from Smith College and earned her MFA with a dual concentration in Poetry and Fiction from Fairfield University. She was awarded the 2011 Hatfield Prize for Best Short Story, received an honorable mention in the 2020 L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future Contest, and was long-listed for *Wigleaf's* Best Very Short Fiction of 2021. Her work has also been featured in publications such as *Labrys*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Spry* and previously in *Sixfold*. Follow her on Instagram @devonbohm or visit her website at www.devonbohm.com.



Tess Cooper is a writer, artist, and sometimes bear currently living in the woods in Alabama. She has lived in six different states and has been eager to get into fist fights since age seven.



Mary Pacifico Curtis is the author of *Between Rooms* and *The White Tree Quartet*, both chapbooks published by WordTech's Turning Point imprint, as well as poetry and prose that has appeared in *The Crab Orchard Review*, *The Rumpus*, *The Tupelo Quarterly*, *LOST Magazine*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, and *Narrative Magazine*. Her work is also included in numerous anthologies. She was a 2012 Joy Harjo Poetry Finalist (Cutthroat Journal), 2019 Poetry Finalist in *The Tiferet Journal*, a non-fiction finalist in The 48th *New Millenium Writings* contest, and a 2021 finalist in the *Tupelo Quarterly* non-fiction open.



Bill Cushing has lived in numerous states, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Returning to college at 37 after serving in the Navy and working on ships, classmates at the University of Central Florida called him the "blue collar poet." Earning an MFA in writing from Goddard College, he now resides in Glendale, California. Bill has three poetry collections: *A Former Life*, *Music Speaks*, and his most recent, . . .*this just in*. . . .



William A. Greenfield's poems have appeared in *The Westchester Review*, *Carve Magazine*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Carve Magazine* and other journals. His chapbook, "Momma's Boy Gone Bad," was published in 2016 (Finishing Line Press). His chapbook, "I Should have Asked the Blind Girl to Dance," was published in 2019 (Flutter Press). His full length collection, "The Circadian Fallacy," was published this year by Kelsay Books. He lives in Liberty, New York with his wife, son, and a dog, always a dog.



a mykl herdklotz is retired from UC Davis and living on the West Coast. i tutor and teach English (TESOL) and other subjects to foreign language students. See my profile at LinkedIn.com www.linkedin.com/in/mykl-麦可-herdklotz-和-bab4a877 Along with my passion for teaching, writing has always been part of my life. i always hope a poem of mine will slow someone down and make them feel like the poem has given them something.



Monique Jonath I'm 18 years old and was born and raised Oakland, California, by my Jewish father and Congolese mother. I started writing poetry my freshman year of high school and this is my second Sixfold publication. I was a finalist for the title of Oakland Youth Poet Laureate in 2018 and 2019. My work was featured in the YouthSpeaks Anthology, "Between My Body and the Air" (2020). I study at Brown University. Contact me! moniquejonath@gmail.com



Peter Kent's poems have appeared in *Cagibi*, *Cimarron Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, *The Opiate*, *Subprimal Poetry Art* and other journals. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts.



Karen L Kilcup I've been teaching for over forty years, writing poetry for over thirty. I'm the Elizabeth Rosenthal Professor of American Literature, Environmental & Sustainability Studies, and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at UNC Greensboro. My students, who are diverse, generous, inclusive, and imaginative, astonish and educate me. Getting older has its benefits, which include being able to see the (sometimes very painful) past honestly, even ruthlessly.



George Kramer grew up in Canada, Kenya and the U.S., the child of refugees from fascism and communism. A lawyer by vocation, he has become increasingly focused on writing poetry in late middle-age, and has published in several dozen literary journals over the past few years. His poetry website is at <https://blueguitar58.wixsite.com/website-1>.



Alix Christofides Lowenthal has loved reading and writing for as long as she can remember. She worked as a designer before becoming a teacher of English, drama, and art history at a Waldorf school in suburban New York. She has taken many poetry workshops and written poems and prose over the years. Now retired, she has more time to devote to her writing.



Claudia Maurino is a twenty-year-old writer from Western Massachusetts. She spent the last year traveling the country assisting natural disaster relief and vaccine distribution as part of a term of service with AmeriCorps NCCC. In the fall, she will be returning to the Honors College at the University of Massachusetts, where she studies English, social thought & political economy, and theater.



Oak Morse lives in Houston, Texas, where he teaches creative writing and performance. He was the winner of the 2017 Magpie Award for Poetry in Pulp Literature. Currently a Warren Wilson MFA candidate, Oak has received a Pushcart Prize nomination, fellowships from Brooklyn Poets and Twelve Literary Arts as well as a Stars in the Classroom honor from the Houston Texans. Recently a recipient of the 2021 Cave Canem's Starshine and Clay Fellowship, his work appears in *EcoTheo*, *PANK*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Nimrod*, *Cosmonaut Avenue*, *Solstice*, among others.



Mary Jane Panke is a past Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee with poetry appearing in various publications, including *Poetry City*, *River River Journal*, *Word Fountain*, *The Ekphrastic Review* and *Fredericksburg Literary and Art Review*. She is a member of Monday Poets, lives near Hartford, Connecticut and can be contacted at mjbpanke@gmail.com



Susan Marie Powers I have enjoyed writing creatively since I was a small child, but reading is more important to me than writing. Great literature consistently enriches my life. I obtained graduate degrees in English and Psychology and have taught at high schools and colleges. My poems are published in previous issues of *Sixfold* (Winter 2014, Summer 2020), *Tiferet* (2010), and *Teacher-Writer* (Fall 2013). In 2010, The New London Librarium published my chapbook, *Break the Spell*.



Ana Reizens is an emerging poet and writer with a background in translation. She was the recipient of the 2020 Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Award and you can find her poetry in *Subterranean Blue* and forthcoming in the *Belmont Story Review*, *Sunlight Press*, and *Inkwell Journal*, among others. She lives in Spain, where she enjoys spending time in nature and is perpetually in search of a good meal.



Everett Roberts, 33, is a polyglot technical writer and freelance editor who lives in Washington, DC. He has had poetry published in two queer anthologies and a short story with *The Write Launch* in 2020. When not reading, Everett can usually be found rowing, watching Wang Kar Wai movies, or editing screenplays/books/whatever else comes his way.



Holly Marie Roland writes poems and short stories that speak to rural America, the complexity, joys and griefs of human relationships, and womanhood. She works as a therapist who specializes in expressive writing therapy. Holly is the recipient of the Kratz Fellowship for Creative Writing Abroad and most recently, a winner of the 2020 Atlanta International Poetry Contest. Originally from Appalachia, she now lives off grid in the foothills of the Olympic Peninsula.



Kimberly Sailor, from Mount Horeb, WI, is a 2020 poetry fellowship recipient from the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing. Sailor, a 2019 Hal Prize poetry finalist, is also the editor-in-chief of the Recorded A Cappella Review Board. Her poetry has appeared in the *Peninsula Pulse*, *Silver Birch Press*, and the *Eunoia Review*. She is the author of the novel *The Clarinet Whale*, and serves on her local Board of Education.



Elizabeth Sutterlin is a poet from New York's Hudson Valley. Her poetry won a national silver medal from the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards in 2014. Elizabeth holds a B.A. in international relations from William & Mary and works at a nonprofit in Washington D.C.



Rebbekah Vega-Romero is a triracial Latina bruja, who resides in her native NYC with her familiar, a black cat named Artie. A YoungArts award-winning writer, she graduated from Boston University with a Bachelor's in English and Theatre. Rebbekah has performed at theatres across America from Boston (*A Civil War Christmas*/Huntington) to Seattle (*Maria/West Side Story*/5th Avenue). She is the producer, writer, and star of the forthcoming short film "*The Question*." Rebbekah hopes her work will inspire other mixed-race girls to realize that "there's a place for us." Visit her virtually at www.RebbekahVegaRomero.com or @RebbekahVR.



Maxi Wardcantori is a writer and multimedia artist from Baltimore. She is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at Rutgers University, where she teaches creative writing. She holds a B.A. in English from UMBC, where she received the Malcolm C. Braly creative writing award for her poem "Treasure." Maxi's current project, *Sound Catalogue* (soundcatalogue.com), is an interactive virtual installation that documents and interprets the sounds of daily life. Her written work has appeared in *Bartleby*.



A rabbi and poet, **Pamela Wax**'s essays on Judaism, spirituality, and women's issues have been published broadly, and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Pensive Journal*, *Heron Tree*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *Pangyrus*, *Dewdrop*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *Paterson Literary Review*. Pam's first volume of poetry, *Walking the Labyrinth*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag in 2022. She lives in the Bronx, NY and the Northern Berkshires of Massachusetts.

