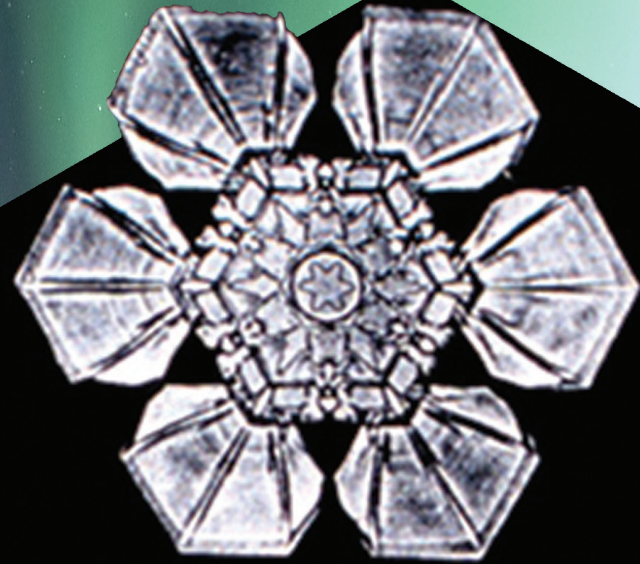
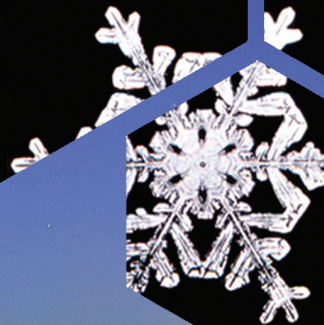


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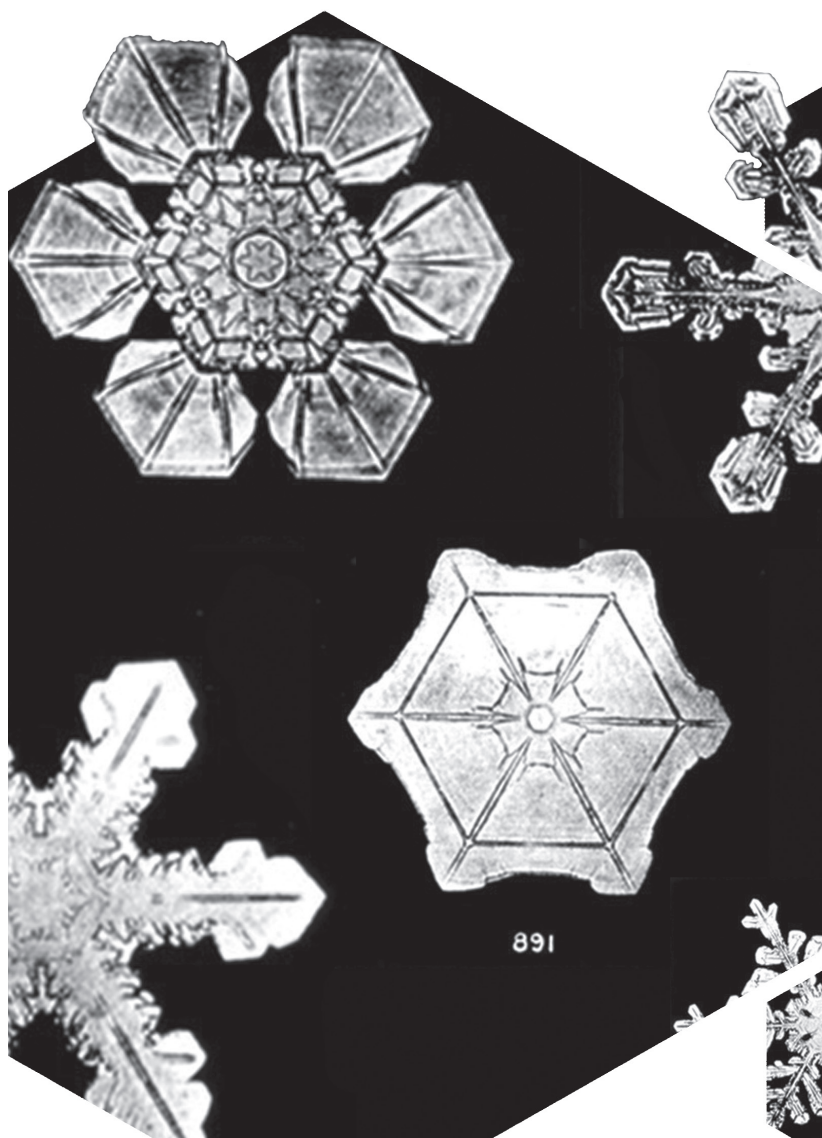


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Sixfold is a collaborative, democratic, completely writer-voted journal. The writers who upload their manuscripts vote to select the prize-winning manuscripts and the short stories and poetry published in each issue. All participating writers' equally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

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Alysse Kathleen McCanna

Pentimento

is a tattoo on the back of my friend Martha's neck,
a term I learned in Art History as a teenager in love
with the student teacher whose name I scrawled in my notebook
next to Pentimento. *Edward.*

Repentance is Wednesday evening youth group at the local
nondenominational Christian church where my knees pressed hard
against the wood back of the chair and I tried my damndest to stop
thinking about that boy with the hair who played bass
in the church band. *William.*

Pentimento is what they will look for when they look at my life
under infrared cameras: "there, where she changed her mind and moved
the heart a little to the left; there, where she changed her mind again
and entirely redrew the face."

Repentance is three days of snow in the middle of April
while I decide whether to make the same mistake again
or not or if it's a different mistake or maybe it's not even close
to a mistake but when will I know?

Pentimento is what happened to my body after the rape
and I couldn't stop twitching enough to sit in a chair
for dinner and my fork flipped pasta across the kitchen
and when it stuck to the wall we laughed and laughed
in spite of everything.

Repentance is necessary for the attainment of salvation
and salvation is God putting his hand on your shoulder
and saying, "it's okay, even I commit a little Pentimento
now and again
take a look at the world"

and when God takes his hand from your shoulder

and you hear your bones crack
that is Pentimento

and when you are dying and you see the backlit
undersides of leaves on the most beautiful tree
that is Repentance

and when you feel your heart tear and a part of it
is lost inside of you and a part of it is breathed into the world
then that is a Poem
that you memorize
and burn

Relics

In this poem, your son is your daughter
and all the ghosts are dogs. The kitchen
is the baby's room, the baby's room
is the front porch. Coffee cups are kisses,
the flat tire is a pot of my grandmother's spaghetti,
the sandwich I left for you in the fridge
has someone else's name on it.

I cut the grass this morning with scissors
because I thought I saw it in a movie
as a child about mental patients or
it may have been soldiers in the field.
I found the tiny dolls Kelli and I
used to play with in the front yard
how many years ago? Now she has a baby
that looks just like her father and my body
keeps trying to have your baby but
the baby is actually a potted plant
on the windowsill that I keep forgetting

to water but water is really milk
that I keep forgetting to pick up
on my way home and the way home
is not on this map and maps are flies
that won't stop buzzing
around your sweaty head

the tomatoes you planted in our garden
are starting to outgrow their thin red skins
every time you place one in my mouth
it tastes like dirt and summer and this summer
I've been overwhelmed with coffee cups
and walking ghosts and smelling phantom
flat tires and loving your son too much,
and you not enough,
and did you find your sandwich?

Did you remember your name?

Dream of the Apples

*For I want to sleep the dream of the apples,
to learn a lament that will cleanse me to earth
—Federico García Lorca*

We spoke of God for an hour in the morning,
evidence of breakfast still on the plates before us
(a few flecks of basil, crumbs of toast and bacon,
my coffee gone cold).

With sleep still clinging to my eyes, teeth,
my fingers still grasping at half-remembered dreams,
I think of God, with a great Old Testament beard,
an apple in each hand, his mouth, voice high
like a bird song, points of light blazing through
the apple seeds, cutting through darkness and flesh
and earth—

I think of Abraham the way Rembrandt painted him,
dark, sorrowful and sure eyes, thrust to the edge
by God's cold force and then held back, and wonder
if God requires of us such great anguish, such certainty
in our own triviality.

Once, I knew God (or, thought I knew God)
and He filled my shadow as rain fills a forgotten cup—

but some days, God does not rain.

God must wish to make poets of us all
to bestow us with such disease and grief—
to cause us to bubble up until our ache
spills onto others,
onto paper.

Once, I knew God, and we sat at the same table—
one day, He got up and Left.

Roane Duana

Seir lived a fair mile from Orkney harbor
and walked there twice a week
along the stone fences.
With his shoes left ashore
he wandered into the water
and felt the cool sting of autumn nearing.

One morning
when the sun was behind cloud
he found among the stones
of the shore an empty seal skin.
He held it gently in both hands
and hurried home without his shoes.

Roane Duana followed him there from the sea
and approached him at the doorway.
She had no dress and he took her to town
to purchase a fitting cloth for his new wife.
Her pale blue eyes set in white
soft skin enchanted him
and he had her every night,
but when Seir awoke in the mornings
she was never beside him
but looking out the window
to the sea.

He had heard the stories and kept the skin
hidden under the floorboards,
beneath a rug and a great wooden chest.
Duana sat before the fire many nights
with her feet resting inches above
where the silky skin lay.

Returning from the harvest
Seir approached the door of his home
and felt the air empty, found
the floorboards torn up and the skin
gone. A cry reached his ears from the sea

and he found a baby left on the bed,
conceived after she swallowed a star
that had fallen into her mouth
while sleeping.

Tell Me Again

In the bed of someone's pick-up
a dog howls
in the heat.

It is May, now,
the sun hotter
than normal.

The mechanic behind the counter
looks like he's rolled right out of bed
in a barn somewhere, yet his soft-spoken
words are plucked carefully as if from a vast
thesaurus—from behind browned teeth he says
*the transmission flush is vital to the longevity
of your car's performance*

I imagine him atop
a tractor in Wisconsin,
red-headed young ones
forking hay, sneaking eggs
from beneath snoozing chickens.

A slim wife in a flower-print dress
on the porch, the kind of girl who
makes pasta from scratch,
knows how to mix
his drink of choice,
scents laundry
with lavender.

He must think
I'm very concerned
about the procedure
as I stare at him
thinking about life
outside the shop

I lean in and say
tell me again
about the cost of the transmission flush

listen to his poetic explanation
smell his soft, cigarette breath
wonder how it would feel
to hold his hand stretched
out in a field under a Midwestern sun,
belly fat with pending children,
a reliable pick-up idling beside us
in the tall, tall grass.

Peter Nash

Shooting Star

First, a twenty-year run of brilliance,
your yellow-green eyes glittering
beneath the raven wings of your eyebrows,
the lightning retorts of your valentine mouth,
the shimmy of garnet earrings
framing your linnet face—
we still remember the little girls on the stoops
bringing you their broken doll babies to kiss,
how we applauded you madly in *Oklahoma!*
as you sashayed off the Marshall High School stage
leading the cowboys up the aisle,
and the way you could pick up enough change
for a six pack of Heineken singing Bob Dylan
on the Sunset Pacific Mall with your paint splattered guitar
and a can of dollar bills. We'd never forget
the famous night you filled Café Prégio
with guys who'd fallen in love following you up the outside stairs
of the wooden house on Ocean Avenue,
your legs flickering in the sulfur light of the street lamps.

But somewhere in your thirties people stopped buying
your cardboard collages or the bouquets you scavenged
from the mason jars at Pioneer Cemetery,
your parents stopped paying the rent, the last boyfriend
slashed your painting of him sitting on the toilet,
no one would hire you to walk their dogs after Dotty the Dalmatian
got run over as you read the New York Times at McDonald's
and your cat Matisse died locked in your room
when you drove your VW Bug with daisy decals
onto the Talmadge Bridge. We still picture you
floating downstream, your face a petal of light,
though the moon was not bright enough to see the water
rippling through the folds of your dress,
or the algae-stained rocks below.

What I Hear

I've been watching these trees half my life;
this hill of pines whose pitchy limbs
balance their rough trunks,

sprouting needles, dropping needles
the topmost tier a green undulating mat
roaring in the wind, changing light into matter.

Is it trees talking with the wind?
the small animals who shelter in the shadows?
the squirming rootlets in the basement of the hill?

I hear voices from a hive of mouths,
but not the words. I hear the brown towhees,
long-tailed, lurking in the underbrush,

scuffling in leaf-litter for seeds, the finches,
gold-bellied, sociable, jittering in the sun,
flung by the wind across a field of dandelions,

darting among the branches of shade trees,
living a life without naming the world.
I know that each of you is saying something

but I'll never get it right. Best to stand here looking
at that roaring, piney hill, hand covering my mouth,
the better to hear you with.

Morning Chores

Night ends with a final snap,
clawed feet scabble linoleum
dragging the Victor trap.

This morning I tote up the damage:
the crushed snouts, the oozing abdomens,
the tiny turds black as poppy seeds
speckling the floor. Now it's time
to pull on my crusted gloves, walk across the lawn
and flip the bodies over the fence. Turn on the sprinklers.
The truth is I don't know where to go from here.

As if I were in a maze of electron rings
whizzing around one small house-mouse
rapturously suckling a half dozen babies.
Orbiting her, the weed patch fills with corpses,
flies lay eggs in furry crevices, maggots
scour toothpick ribs. In the outermost ring
my spotted hands bait the trap with a Sun Maid raisin
imbedded in a dollop of crunchy peanut butter.
Beyond that, a space so vast
my mind clamps down, unable to enter,
but gives it a name: VICTOR.

John Brown's Cows

Leaking milk from swollen udders
the cows have been separated from the calves
who wander dazed in the far pasture
crying for their mothers.
Strings of slobber hang from their mouths.
Bellowing their grief
the sound becomes background
like the rush of rain in the creeks,
while we dig the garden,
pitch hay to the horses, stack firewood.
And then a silence settles upon these meadows,
and just as you learn to live without your children,
the calves begin to suck water,
to graze by themselves.

Rocky's Place

*There is some kiss we want
with our whole lives,
the touch of spirit on the body.*
—Rumi

Sometimes I think of his thousand Post-its
plastering the lamp shade, creeping
along the base boards, up the metal legs
of the card table and covering the window
overlooking a graveled parking lot.
In the corner, boxes of Zip-lock bags
filled with alfalfa pellets are stacked.
A bare bulb dangles by its wire
over two rabbits, Flopsy and Mopsy
inside a baby's playpen.

Each day begins seven inches above the sink
when he whispers the first Post-it:
Every seeker is a beggar
before moving on to the next
and the next in their ordained order
as if they were a trail of stone steps winding
seven times around sacred Mecca.
And when he arrives at *those who have reached
their arms into emptiness* I imagine
him ascending the path to the doorknob of the closet
where the last Post-it reads: *This is the place
the soul is most afraid of, on this height,
this ecstatic turret,* and climbing
into the playpen he lies down with the rabbits
who nuzzle his face, their eyes half-closed,
their furry, smoky-white heads
moving back and forth
in mysterious jerks.

Katherine Smith

House of Cards

January 1871

When I was in Richmond I met a man.
I touched pulp where a sword had pierced his eye,
dressed the bloody bruise of his crushed thigh
where hooves trampled his femur and pelvis. I caressed
his fragile parts to health until his hard mouth broke

into a smile. I dream now that he commands me
to escape my father and brothers, run back
to Richmond. But before he left the hospital
for the battlefield where he died he asked me
to marry him and I refused. I don't regret it.

I've learned too much belief in any man,
even a good one, can drive a woman mad.
The night when I dreamed he lay on me
and I screamed so loud I woke with Daddy
and the boys standing over my bed,
I told them it was nothing.

It's hard to be the only woman
in a house full of men. I wept last night,
and when I opened my eyes the stars
were beginning to fade in the dawn light.
Come spring when the quince is red as passion,
I'm determined to set out on that train,
seeking nothing. I'll never marry. For now

the quince orchard lies buried under snow
and a crust of ice thickens on the river.
I'm done looking for portents in voices,
tea leaves, dreams. I believe in the cold, real
and sharp. When I walk this morning to the coop
the hens make the soft clucking sounds
that comfort me The rooster puts his beak

under his wing and goes back to sleep.
I steal from each hen a warm brown egg
and follow my footprints in the snow
back to the house. The weight of my family
settles on me like a shawl crocheted of iron.
I head to the kitchen to boil coffee.

Daddy and the boys will say it's too bitter.
When they come in from milking the cows,
drop the load of firewood for the stove
they labor to keep burning all winter,
I'll add cream to theirs and drink mine black.

Bad

Spring 1870

Mother didn't like for me to climb the mountain,
warned me of black bears, ghosts. Now she's gone
I wouldn't mind meeting either just to know
I wasn't alone. Beneath my wool skirts my legs warm.

Quince perfumes the air, crimson, sharp as pepper.
The gnarled apple trees grow delicate curls,
white petals like my baby brother's fine blond hair.
The wind chases clouds over the mountains.

I can't imagine a world without me or the mountains.
Some folks might call it selfish, but what has come
to pass is so different from what I thought
I don't mind what folks call me. There is in me

a flame, a fire I used to be ashamed of,
that keeps my mind from wandering
at the creek where the path doglegs right
into valley ruins, a melancholy patchwork

quilted by women's hands and passed down
to daughters. On her death bed my mother's
barbed look snagged me as if she knew I'd turn
from memory like a man towards reason,

run away from what was certain as the home
that once held me fast, beloved as Priest mountain.

Top

September 1870

My father helps to gather apples, little gnarled things that'll last all winter baked into pie. While summer lingers I stew them with rhubarb, ladle into a white bowl, covered with cream, the summer fruit that slides down the dark throats of brothers raw with weeping. For six months

the frogs' croak from the river winds up and stops, a toy that topples instead of spinning. Daddy repeats *time to plant, time to harvest* and his words fall short of meaning as if something were chipped or missing at the bottom of him that sets thought gyrating into the world.

The men and boys won't stop looking as if they were waiting for a miracle but all I can do is boil the clothes with lye, wash the dusty floors, put food on the table. I skip church on Sundays when other girls float in taffeta to church on Norwood road.

Through crepe myrtle's blazing branches, I watch, and bite a tongue of iron. When I feed the pigs I slap the sow so hard with the rusty pail that she no longer comes running for slops, squints at me with knowing eyes. I don't have it in me to believe a thing except the secret

of silver I saved nursing soldiers in Richmond. Next spring I'll lay ten coins on the palm of the man at the train depot with the tin roof that flashes in the sun between the river and the church, run away to nurse again in Richmond, instead of a heart lay the rest on the kitchen table.

Altar

Richmond 1880

I was just a girl, could never hope
to make the sun rise and set by milking cows
My body wouldn't chant the silent prayer
of broom-work and feather duster. There was

a hardness in me better suited to dressing wounds
or stopping the flow of gushing blood and pus
than to mopping floors. Years after I ran off
I knew myself flawed as if by making me God

had left a chink of doubt for men to slip
through to nothingness. Twice, though I knew
it meant wearing the men's rage till death
like shame at the flesh that cloaked me,

I almost went back and didn't. I went to work
in hospitals nursing the sick to whom I didn't belong.
I still wonder at night what happened to my kin,
but wear my concern lightly as a crust of thin ice

that melts in the April sun. Sometimes I think
with what I've understood I could have borne
to stay except I've learned that mother love
left behind that day the train pulled away

from dwindling mountains isn't enough
to keep anyone at home.

Red Sea

It was just me and the bleak world
of scrub pine, red clay, rattling husks
of dead sumac. It was just me
and the massive earth and the stone house

no one had lived in for a long time. My life
a fact, without illumination. I followed
the yellow dog up the overgrown path
to where the bare Virginia mountain

crouched under the grey sky,
turned to walk the three miles home
down the same road I'd come.
The Blue Ridge turned red, then

a pale yellow without the usual
crescendo of dusk. I heard a laughter
like the bones of winter sun.
My daughter had been gone months,

her childhood like a sea
that had parted
and swallowed up half my life.
What was I doing alone

on this mountain? The grey sky
let go of snow as if releasing letters,
an alphabet of wordless understanding
that fluttered through the remaining light.

Good-Bye

Good-bye third-floor room with maples leaves,
green seedpod that taps the window,
morning mist swirling over the James River.
beautiful light, thunder on the mountain.

Good-bye ash tree, sumac, wisteria.
Good-bye blackberry bramble.
Good-bye yellow dog, Maizie.
Good-bye peace.

Some say peace is carried within,
but can I fold up valleys
and take them with me?
Can I fold the James River,

the light, the blackberry bramble,
the yellow dog, and the maple tree
like silk dresses I slip into my suitcase?
Can I unpack a mountain?

David Sloan

On the Rocks

It is a rare snapshot. For one thing
We are together; I am so small,
No more than four or five,
Perched on the ledge of a rock face
Below you, and I would be afraid
If it weren't for the single loop

Of rope you secured around my waist,
If it weren't for you, standing
A few feet diagonally above me,
Holding the rope that wraps
Around your back and spools
Out into your ready hands.

Even though you aren't looking
At me, even though your gaze
Stretches into the distance,
Like a man haunted by vistas
That would lure you away for half
A lifetime, even though I cannot foresee

The years ahead when I would still climb,
Roped up and hoping you would return
To hold the other end flapping
Free somewhere above me,
Even though standing there dwarfed
By the cliff face and by you,

I could not know that finally
The son would find a way
To reach the end of the abandoned
Rope and dangle it gingerly down
To the father who had fallen
So far away, and hoist him up,

At this particular moment,
Four or five and high up
On the sunlit rocks, linked
To no one else but you,
I know that I feel safer
Than I have ever felt since.

Skidmarks

The accident itself was almost a relief,
the tumor that blooms benignly,

a blighted elm that finally falls beside—
not through—the roof. No gasoline-fed flames,

no glass-imbedded bodies stuffed head-down
into a crumpled car, no blood pooling on pavement.

One son escaped with a twisted back,
one with a lacerated cheek and a few days

of jittery dreams. My brother hobbled away
on an ankle that swelled like a snakebite

when he slammed down the imaginary brake
on the passenger side right before impact.

Just after midnight the call came that every parent
dreads and half expects. I outwardly grieved

for the car and the boys' shaking voices,
but privately, knowing we had once again cheated

the bringer of plagues and curses, I exulted
with the gratitude of the undeserving—uneasily—

as one who dreams himself awake lying
on a dark road, squealing tires an overture.

Blanket Indictment

My parents gave me Indian names—*Thumb-in-mouth*
and *Blue-blanket-boy*, but I couldn't stop, dragged it
everywhere, nuzzled silky edges against my cheek
so I could breathe in trapped scents
of my six-year-old world: Rocky's
wet fur, apple cake and cocoa,
eucalyptus, lavender.
My blanket got soggy

when I draped it over baby's face in the tub.
He turned a shade of blue and churned
water everywhere. It hid with me
under the bed when I heard
high heels clicking down
the hall for a spanking
I always deserved.

They would try to yank it away for the wash,
but I would wail and fist it as if it were
my own skin. They marveled
at my banshee strength,
bought another I left
untouched. At night

I swaddled myself to prevent sneak attacks.
Sometimes in the layered dark it would
shield me from graveyard sounds
of scraping shovels. I thought
they had given up.

I never heard the nightly shear of scissors,
one shred at a time, never suspected,
as it dwindled, first to the size
of a hand towel,

then a dollar, that early on I
would learn how,
imperceptibly,

everything is snipped away,
down to the nothing

I still clutch.

What Matters

Does it matter that I never intended to stay,
never wanted to enter, touch, upset her?
But there's no rest from the doling out of pain.

The necklace she wore when we first met that day
invited a twisting. Her throat was a delicate bird.
No matter, because I never intended to stay.

My hands itched to hold her, not to betray
the whiteness, only to feel the flutter, the purr.
Can nothing arrest the doling out of pain?

She praised my hands, believed that I could play
the cello, read Rilke, caressed the words.
I mattered, and she intended for me to stay.

I patted her soft-sweatered back, tried to pray,
heard myself say *not too hard, too hard*—
but nothing could arrest the doling out of pain

For a moment under bruise-colored skies we lay
serenely. It passed—Oh, the voices I heard.
She's just matter now. I never intended to stay.
No arrest will ever end this doling out of pain.

Fathers' Hands

Carving a bow for my son, who wants
a weapon to terrorize squirrels
and deliver the world, I snag the blade,
fumble the whittle stroke and slice my finger.
The cut oozes. My hand is sturdy,
scarred, nothing like my father's—
unmarked, maple-colored.

His hands stitched gashes without a flinch.
They mortared rock walls to hold a hillside up.
On the violin, his fingers flew like wingtips.
Once as a child I saw sparks spray
from that smoking bow. He tried to teach
my hands how to drive a nail straight,
which spans would bear a load
and which would snap, how to follow
the grain of things, how to hear notes first,
then pluck them as if out of a peach tree.

A single feather in his hair, my son stalks
the squirrel, holds the bow steady,
draws back the shaft, aims, lets fly.
Target and archer are unruffled by the miss.
He bounds over to the arrow, takes it
in his nimble fingers, so like his father's
father's, and nocks the end,
eager to aim, miss and aim again.

Alexandra Smyth

Exoskeleton Blues

I.

It's that time of the month again—
the moon is bulging out of its socket.

My fillings shriek with pain and everything
is an insult: the skirt that no longer zips,

the door that says pull that won't open
when I push it, the coworker who insists

on ending my name with an 'i' like some kind
of porn star when my email signature clearly

shows I spell it with an 'ie.' I want to be
Alexandra, the patron saint of not giving

a fuck, but the creatures with shells are
suffering and I can't take this anymore.

II.

I am one with the invertebrates, hoping
for chitin and barnacles, armor of my own.

I walk with my belly to my enemies, the only
barrier between softness and the world is

a pair of Spanx one size too small, waistband
chewing a ring around my middle, telling

my lovers "look how small I made myself for
you," while the tell-tale stomach roll flaps

smugly in the breeze. We are all crustaceans
in the bedroom, and when I am in front of you

I feel too big for this skin, wishing I could molt.

III.

The moon, that big old slut, pulls at the tides
and in turn the tides pull on me. My body swells

and deflates, bellwether of blood to come.

I am always surprised at the elasticity of my skin,

the network of silver stretch marks across my hip
a map, literally, of how far I've come. It's the human

body's largest organ, and every seven years
years it regenerates into something new. A lobster

lives for seven years, and will shed its exoskeleton
twenty to twenty-five times. The things that I could do

if I was given fresh armor over two dozen times.

How to Make Him Love You

First, you must wait:

desire will become dilute, inoffensive,
the last dregs of a drink on the rocks left
to sit and melt. This isn't weakness; this
is patience, an arithmetic of cat and mouse.

Don't become disappointed: this thrill is
evergreen. Soon, you will be held captive, knock-kneed
with wanting. With enough practice, your mouth will fill
with the taste of almonds and milk, your breath will honey
with the rhapsody of absence.

You are strong enough to survive on vapor,
yet you feel a fresh collision beginning
within. When you find him, lost and gasping
in the coatracks, draw him in with your nectar.
You are still soft and ripe, a peach.

An Obligated Woman

I stagger around you in this empty room,
a breathy vortex of wanting, incapable of
naming this grief shifting inside me, smooth
and heavy like a stone inside a pocket.

The old bat is clanging in the belfry, unable
to see the humane through my own dark lens.
I would sink into your body if it could
provide me any consolation:

I would eat you alive at the crossroads if I thought
the taste would help me swallow this sorrow.

Post-Post Modernism

I'm trying to call you but you won't pick up.
The 911 operator told me it wasn't an emergency,
wouldn't be for at least three more days. Then maybe,
I could try filing a Missing Persons report, but what's
the point when no one misses you except for me?

I threw out the hair dryer in protest. I filled the bathtub
with seltzer. Maybe I can lead you to carbonated water,
but believe me, I know I can't make you drink. I'll rise to
this challenge. I'll wait here 'til my eyelashes fall out, if
that's what it takes. Was my morning breath really that bad?

I'm sorry I didn't wear that fancy bra. The underwire stuck
into my ribs, and it made me feel like Jesus' slutty little sister.
You know I already have a martyr complex. Did you really
want to feed into that? I'll put it back on if it makes you happy,
you know, but I'll have to call you Judas if that's the case.

I eat spicy things just to feel now. I'm so lonely I put on
the kettle just to have someone to talk to. Even the cat thinks
I'm eccentric. Won't you just come back? The internet is a cold
and lonely place where everyone is wrong, always, and besides, can't you
hear the siren call of my knee socks? I am wearing them just for you.

Echoes

I fall into you like skinned knees:
sticky meat, red oozing to surface,
your mouth like cold air on a wound.

Blow on it. Anyone who's telling you
they don't like the twinge is lying to
you. We all want that tingle from pain,

then the heady release of analgesic,
how we edge close to oblivion with
pain's fading. If you're truly lucky,

old wounds don't heal right, and you
feel their echoes with the right amount
of pressure; barometric changing.

I press against you at different angles,
seeking out the sweet spot. It occurs
to me in the midst of this hungry

coupling that you are unaware that
this is what I am doing.

John Glowney

The Bus Stop Outside Ajax Bail Bonds

It's not that they are on their way to anywhere,
although standing at a bus stop might at first

make you believe as they do that they are
more than ready to be somewhere else.

It's a late spring day in Seattle, a little rain
on the discolored facade of the courthouse,

and on this dampened, cracked sidewalk,
as if set aside for another time, they wait:

a slender black woman, her gold-painted fingernails
glorious coins, arguing with an afro-headed man,

who flashes the white blossom of a wandering eye;
a heavy silver-haired eastern European

grandmother, the spike of a cigarette jabbed
upwards from her mouth; a clump

of over-sized jackets and baggy pants
that are three swaggering young Latino boys

next to a tall stem of a young girl
shivering in a mini-skirt, pierced eyebrow

and lip, and an ex-hippie
turned public defender, his ponytail

fraying long gray hairs. In a moment or two
the sun will break through the low clouds

as if to examine all ordinary things, and everyone
will turn and squint, their faces lit

with expectation, as if they never intended
to be so plain, as if this was a chance

for them to shine beyond themselves,
and they can't hide their secret beauty

any more than a flowerpot
can hold back unfurling

its little bundle of petals.

A Change In Circumstance

A small good deed, I thought, to haul away
the creepers and weeds my wife had, on a Saturday

spring afternoon until sunlight ran out,
cleared and plucked from the flower beds

into an unsightly pile. I scooped bunches
of dirt-besotted stalks and leaves into a bucket,

and heard from its depths then, as if just behind my ear,
the muted persistence of a bee's stalled flight.

My efforts had also disturbed long, fat
earthworms from, I imagined, a pleasant

slumber, or more likely, from their steady
oeuvre of eating the world around them.

They stretched like lazy, elongated accordions,
and tunneled in. But the bee, lured in by the yellow

glimmer of an uprooted dandelion, trapped lover
of unframed air and pollen's narcotic pull,

lover of light's many doors to elsewhere,
is now done in, denied exit. Caught off-guard

by his burial afloat, he buzzes angrily.
His little motor grinds against a root-clouded

medium, no glare of petals to steer passage out of
his clabbered milieu. His circumstance utterly transformed

at the hand of an unwitting giant,
his beautifully engineered form rendered

incompetent, his whirring gossamer wings
beat furiously into the tangled atmosphere,

row him against the fouled heavens,
carry him nowhere.

From the Book of Common Office Prayers

Let's go where moths go for a smoke break,
 or take a mental health day
with the accountants on pilgrimage
 among the stub ends of pencils.
Let's schedule a vacation at the monastery
 of unpaid invoices,
or take a long lunch sipping martinis
 with penguins
singing medieval drinking songs.
 Let's lie down
in the quiet room so we can hear
 a golden pheasant
slipping through a white picket fence
 into green thickets.
Let's use up our sick leave
 among the last wisps of breezes,
or take some personal time
 in pollen's sideways drift.
Let's take a sabbatical and travel a year
 with the sawdust,
or find a cheap apartment in the neighborhood
 of the moment
the birds startle into silence
 and work
on our novel. Let's take a cruise
 on the good ship
Two Week's Notice.
 Dear god, let's quit.

Learning A Trade

Taught the mercy of butchering
the lame cow,

schooled that what is not useful
is waste,

we wised up, staggered
out of bed,

began earlier,
rubbing the dark

from our eyes. We worked
sun down to chaff,

shavings, stalks
discarded, stub-ends, the peelings

fed to swine, day unbuckled
from dawn,

laid all the fields
open, let in

as much light as the fences
would take,

lugged frayed bundles
of leaves, scraped

the branches raw,
cut the dull plow

into the stony reservoir
of topsoil, stored enough

to starve in the spring.
We shouldered up

to the best cows,
milk flowing

and pulsing
into silver cans, slopped

the dregs, straddled
drought's dwindling

ruts, roads to next
to nothing, a bog

of stinking water,
black sky floating

to its end, flies
milling above. The nub

of not enough
our rough apprenticeship.

Zenith

All this beauty, billboards of women
fifty feet tall, yards of golden
flesh-tone paint. *I am a prisoner of my lips
and eyes and hands and skin* I said.
At the studio, they cut the lights,
gave me a shirt without buttons,
a robe without a belt.
I am lifted upon scaffolding, unfurled.
I am battered and shiny as tin.
Your ink stains my flesh.
My hair is not brushed for me.
How do I feel without clothes I ask.
Pandemonium of rush hour.
A thousand infidelities inch past.
The silk air.
All the eyes crawling over me are ants.
My open mouth, my white teeth.
The trucks on the road all night
from Detroit to Tallahassee
lathe my shape.
The moan of traffic.
The coyotes lie with me,
yellow-eyed, panting.
The moths that cover me at night,
stout, hairy bodies pulsing.
When they are finished with me,
they lower me like a corpse.
I suffer all those who come unto me.

Andrea Jurjević O'Rourke

It Was a Large Wardrobe, from My 4-foot Perspective

Deep enough to step into, touch lapels of his suits,
patch leather elbows of tweed jackets, ties lurking

through thin mod prints, hint of naphthalene and musk.
And Mom's feather-light blouses—slack polyester willows.

Rows of empty sleeves faced west, to the window
that framed the rugged Učka curving above the bay,

its hazel-green like the eyes of this fox boa that Dad,
in one of his moments of bravado, had stolen

for Mom, and that she, of course, never wore. Once,
those glassy eyes flashed, as if at the dirt-brown stack

of scuffed briefcases on the ground. Inside, sis and I found,
lay stained, yet still glossy, catalogs of the '70s decadence—

page after frayed page of nudes running through poses.
Our lashes threshed at each of those glam-wantons—

and that dog. We'd seen sunbathers scattered across cliffs,
naked and lazy like fat beige gulls, and that other time

when we peeked through the keyhole at Dede bending
over a steaming bath, his body creased with sickness.

Instead, this show of shipyard makeovers—the hollow O's
of pink-frosted lips, lids caked with silver eye-shadow, thick

semen, and in this up close, Salò-like shot—that puppy's
innocent erection, its mahogany fur almost like our pet setter.

Romani Orchestra

Even the street kids running by a *kavana* in this poorly-lit alley know your kind—
another dull Slavic star among clouds of smoke,

balanced on the edge of a rickety stool, leaning toward some new, pretty face,
the two of you cleansed in the reflection of shot glasses.

From their street, your mouth is a funk apparat of familiar lines: all brass, blather,
your tar-grained voice plying romance like a fiery Balkan accordion.

And for a few more dinars between the strings, the violin will keep lamenting,
trumpets coughing their belligerent longing,

your blind hand pawing up her warm knee until the lights come on, spill milk over
your magic squalor, the streets already in their cardboard sleep.

Time Difference

Six hours apart is not too bad on an average day.
Like when you step into jeans, still stiff
from cleanliness, I slip into the coldness

of sheets. And in some other world
somehow more physical than typing notes
we almost meet in one naked moment,

though not many days are average just as you
are not an average man. Except, you remind me
of someone I knew years ago—at times

even loathed—he, too, was a picaresque consumed
with unrestrained sex and the nursing of plants:
like that ficus with bruised eyes you found

on a street curb and now tend to with UV lamps,
(the blooming cactus he filmed daybreak-to-dusk,
just as *Death in Venice* observes a man observing a boy).

Like the sun is busy, dedicated to the fading of drapes,
and Albuquerque dust turns the sky into sheets of slate—
how long before the limestone cliffs of the Adriatic?

Like the ebb of a paper cut, the thrill of your messages,
thin and anemic as the hours between them.
Funny, had I loved him less I'd hardly remember him,

just that skin: ashen, after he died, his gaze fixed
at the flickering persimmon out the bathroom window,
leaf shadows on his face, and the fruit of his absent breath—

More Ferarum

You make me feel graceful in savagery.

With every snarl, each small whine, I shiver like a junkie at the sight
of a burnt teaspoon,

like fever chills zing through bones, like the warmth of panic attacks.

You turn me on in uneasy ways, like a fresh widow's recurred penchant
for crotchless panties,

the sweet ache of fucking against the stone sink behind St. Josephs', chicory
scratching itself, the bells' rings like tongues

gossiping. In fact, I think you're the little beast squatting under my ribs,
beating on the djembe—at each thump I tremble:

a smack like the sweet and bitter in Maraschino, a scorpion's pinch.

I feed you nest-tangles of my hair, the skin off the small of my back, toss
in a few fine words—*Spank my ass with that plank-hard cock—*

so we will never get bogged down with some ordinary anxieties, love,
just like the sea will never stop fighting itself.

Love Boat

If I talk to it nicely, will it work? he asks
while scanning my card, feeling the strip

on its plastic back. I mumble back something
clumsy. He's cute, though, gives me long looks—

I can tell he hasn't practiced them often.
His arms, their long mossy smoothness

shows under the rolled-up plaid shirt, its tail
tucked loosely below the ribs of his corduroys.

I think, *He is far too young*, and how I've fallen
for the bookish types too many times before,

how my history with such is enough to fill
the scrawny poetry shelf in the corner,

the one facing golden puff pastry recipes
and columns of self-help manuals.

I think how certain personal histories
should be pushed overboard some transatlantic ship,

made illegal, declined visa and residence and sent
to Cuba, or some other godforsaken place.

But Cuban music is sensuality and vice fused tight
(the stuff decisions are usually made of), and I imagine

Creole nights must have that strange sultry flavor, too.
I think about how mellow sounds can be cues

for something more disturbing—like jazz in movies
signals a brooding scene in a little room in the back,

someone sitting on a bistro chair under a bare bulb,
beaten like the orange pulp of six hundred cracked

mamoncillos. At the same time I fail to understand
the meaning of an unresponsive bookstore card,

and why, an hour later, as I stir granules of raw sugar
into my macchiato, I find that my new notebook

is blank, not ruled, and that paper—its white narcotic
emptiness—takes me back to the soft-spoken clerk.

Lisa DeSiro

Babel Tree

You've heard of the tower. Well
I tell you, on my street
is an evergreen that speaks
as if in tongues, sounding
like a mob of children
crammed inside a classroom.

Who would think a tree could have
so much to say? St. Francis-
beneath-the-boughs,
presiding over his fellow
statues—cats and raccoons—
steadfast behind their fence,

provides a captive audience
for the prim trimmed evergreen
whenever it's infested
with that unseen sounding
like a multitude of tiny chimes
rung inside a church.

Truth is, this tree serves
as a container, a mouthpiece
for common sparrows
who “when interrupted by
suspicious noise”
shut up.

I tell you, they do. And who wouldn't
be surprised
if a tree fell
silent
the moment he or she
walked by?

Felled

The hard-hatted cutter climbs with rope and chainsaw,
lopping off branches like hunks of hair
from the top down, until only a shorn torso remains.

Back on the ground, he circles the trunk,
incising. The engine whines.

Two other men stand at a distance holding cables
tied to the highest stump. A third holds up a camera.

When the saw pauses, they gather
together, leaning back,
pulling, arms taut. Takes all their strength

to make the elm tip, then topple. A colossal thud
shakes the whole house.

Spectators on my neighbor's porch applaud.
They don't see me at my window

trying not to cry because this one tree—
that seemed alive while dying, that stayed standing tall as a tower—

has, in less than an hour, been rendered
horizontal and now
lies helpless as a human body.

The black birds never minded
it was leafless every season.

But a petition circulated.
I signed.

Bereft

That we won't go this year to Payne's to buy Boston ferns (three for the backyard gazebo, one for the front porch) and a few red geraniums and a single green spike (for the terra cotta pot by the driveway); that we won't open the shed, pull out the muddied gloves and the wheelbarrow, weed on our knees as if in prayer; that even though we will never again share these rituals, spring will return nonetheless and the earth will continue undeterred, giving her garden the usual flowers: daffodils, peonies, roses; that the black-eyed susans went crazy during summer, as if nourished by her ashes, my father tells me, months later, still amazed; that she isn't here to see.

Greetings from Paradise

Here, breeze-rustled palm trees make a sound almost like the sound of brown oak leaves clinging to branches tousled by March back home where winter lingers.

Here, it's already spring. Grass greening the ground. Full-blown blossoming, purple roadside weeds, fuchsia, jacaranda, jasmine scent all over the island.

Here, some flowers look like birds and some birds look like flowers. Even the plainclothes crows strut their stuff with sunlit flare, glossy as polished patent leather.

Here, a loon joins me for lunch on the bungalow patio. Seagulls keep me company at the beach while I stroll by the water's edge, my feet sinking in sand.

Here. Read this. Then send me a message if you're there, if it's truly a garden, if they've given you petals for wings. Tell me what it's like.

Going to Visit the Dead

I know you're here somewhere, intact.
God has given you back
what you lost—
your breast, your ovaries,
your vision, your weight, your energy—
everything. Almost. Lost

is also what we seem to be:
me in the passenger seat,
my Bulgarian friend in the back seat,
her mother driving.
The landscape expands around us
wide and flat. We pass

an orchard adorned with *martenitsa*:
red-and-white tassels worn during March
for good fortune, good health;
tied to trees on the first day of April
as a sign of winter ending,
spring beginning. I know

you're waiting. I'm afraid
we won't find the way. I can't speak
their language, yet I understand
when my friend says
Sunlight feathers in your hair
and her mother agrees—*yes, wings—*

Michael Fleming

Reptiles

Evolve? We'll evolve when we want to. We're reptiles—we decide. No mother love, no promises—that's the rule. Don't get too near, don't think too hard, don't think, don't think we owe you anything, cause we don't. Where were you when we hatched? God, you should have seen our shells, one perfect world piled on another, blue shells, green—it's true: we made our way. To hell with your nipples, your kindergartens, your wedding bells, your rings—oh, we'll show you rings. We'll show you claws—remember those? The more you hurt, the more we—nothing. Go ahead, sing—we don't do music, don't do memories—why, when we'll outlast you? We don't do fair/unfair. And we don't do thermostasis. Go ahead, cry—we're reptiles, we don't care.

Adventures

*Be admonished: of making many books there is no end.
—Ecclesiastes 12:12*

For making books, you need to have a certain
appetite, a certain longing, you
need to look, to be quietly alert,
not quite earthbound. It helps to have a few
ideas, to be sure, and to know the rules,
exceptions to the rules, movement of tides.
So many books! But then, so many fools
adrift without them, mapless. Darkness hides
from light, muddle fights with meaning,
illness sleeps with ignorance—it was
ever thus, and so little time between
reckonings, just love and books to shield us
from the rough, mindless elements as we
set out for adventures on sun-drenched seas.

for Fannie Safier

The Importance of Vowels

Luxenberg tries to show that many obscurities of the Koran disappear if we read certain words as being Syriac and not Arabic. . . . In Syriac, the word hur is a feminine plural adjective meaning white, with the word "raisin" understood implicitly . . . not unsullied maidens or houris.

—Ibn Warraq, *The Guardian*, January 11, 2002

The maître d' is sharply groomed, in tie and tails, he greets you warmly, *Welcome, sir! We've been expecting you!* And as you eye the virgins at the bar, selecting, certain of your righteous consequence, a waiter approaches with a bright, blinding smile, and on his fingertips, elaborately wrought, a silver tray with something piled beneath a silken napkin. *Sir!* he says, plucking off the silk, *Before we begin, your seventy-two raisins! Let us praise Him!* With that, he vanishes in a thin blue wisp of smoke. The virgins are gone. You invoke your god. A low voice answers, *Who?*

Traffic Stop

It's just these glasses, officer, I swear—
they're progressives and I'm still getting used
to peering through this tube of startling clarity

amidst a blur of color—blues
like this undersea mountaintop, these reds
like bloody marys, these greens like Vermont,

like forests suddenly summer, like dead
presidents, like love—out here where we want
to be beautiful, here where it's just me,

you, and the universe, a voice to say
that all is well, everything's fine, you're free
to go now, ma'am—you can be on your way.

Hot Cherry Pie

I always stopped there, the Madonna Inn—
that pink and copper shrine on the way down
the missionary coast, along the thin
thread of mother church's outpost towns—
San Francisco, San José, Santa Clara—
rosary beads a day's walk from one
to the next, or now an hour by car
but still with sacramental purpose. None
of that franchise crap for me. I pulled off
the freeway, *San Luís Obispo*, hungry
for hot cherry pie and hot black coffee,
body and blood for a soul wrung
out and wasted. Then that one time I spotted
those kids—a boy at the men's room door,
poised to push, his eyes fixed on a girl not
quite his age, maybe a bit older, or
a little further along in the game,
obviously the one in charge, standing there
at the women's, stock still until she aimed
her eyes at his and whispered: *Go. I dare
you*. With that they were lost for good behind
those doors—or for better or for worse, who
the hell knows? I paid up and continued my
mission to *Santa Bárbara*—to you.

for Ellen R.

Michael Berkowitz

As regards the tattoo on your wrist

It's not that I don't believe you. Rather,
call it some natural curiosity,
born of a childhood's nights
spent beneath the starry curve
of the sky, that makes me
want to discover
for myself
whether Orion really is
the only constellation
traced out on the curves
of your skin.

Ad Cassandra

Let them come with their black
ships, princess. Let them come
and let them take back
what is theirs. You are not theirs.

I will love you and I will protect you.

Let them come with their black
horses. Let them harness them
to their chariots, let them rein
in their flaring nostrils
with bit and bridle.

Let them ring the dust
around our city
with the tracks of our dead.

It will take more than horses
to bring down our walls.

I will love you and I will protect you,

my beloved. My beloved,
beloved also of the deathless
gods. Most beloved by the most
deathless: master of the strings
of bow and lyre.

•

*Cursing the aim of another's arrows, he cursed your own
aim: that it might always be true, but never find its mark.*

•

Let them cover the sky
with a dozen dozen arrows.
I will love you no less
among the shadows. But
do not put your trust in shadows
and in dreams only you can see.
There is no one else who will.

I will love you and I will protect you.
I will love you but I will not believe you.

Begotten of the Spleen

*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make him an help meet for him.
—Genesis 2:18*

And so God reached past Adam's ribs,
and from his spleen was woman born.

And gone from Adam was the melancholy
that the Lord had seen in him,

but for Eve there was nothing
except that same sadness.

There is a way in which you look
off into the distance

that weighs against the lightness
of the heart behind my ribs

in your presence, that I can describe
only as the sinking of swallows,

who do not remember this
morning's sunrise, into evening.

villanelegy

well
 (i said
hell

he fell
 on his head (she said
it's just as well

 too soon to tell
(they said
what sent him off to hell

 or heaven (hell
we said
 he liked his drink too well

and so he fell
 (they said
 hell

there's nothing more to tell
so toast to heaven for the dead
and for the living, well,
 hell

Julie

When you think
about it, if you

think about it,
what did us

in wasn't your
anger or my

apathy, but that
if in the second line.

Michael Brokos

Landscape without Rest

I step aside as a boy pedals
fast downhill, our path blazed
by cedar chips, his father

ambling at the crest, and fret
against the grip of my own
vectors, the straight lines, strict

dimensions, days that race by
too easily for the neighbors,
too scrutinized for me; but don't

we make a fine match, strike
a sly exchange, don't we
light a fused flame, how they

keep the tires of their bicycles
inflated, and how no one ever
showed me how to ride, and

the way these widening lanes
make way for flashes of rubber,
flares of cottonwood leaves.

Singing Stone

—After César Vallejo

My cigarette proves suitable
since I, too, am burning to a stub. How dizzying,
how carcinogenic to wield the world between
my own fingers, my own star going down in smoke
for a few moments
until the ember begins to flicker, and the world
takes its last drag,
stooping down to put me out in an empty furrow.

Lying in an open grave,
through the abiding veins of light I can see
my back story, my body
carried away in a trade wind racing across
blotted out mountains
made of stars
that Paris keeps turning towards itself,
stars that turn over thousands of times more
of their own accord
in the Andes, Trujillo, Santiago de Chuco,
caves collapsing
and my villagers' bones asleep in their red hats.

Downpour descends on me
as forecasted, my voice dry from trying to greet
the raw and forgotten
in music not precisely music, only the ashy
expectorations of panpipes and corequenques.

Hunting Season

Out in the clearing, the cold
season's coming on, a walled fog
of lights and my bones

courting evasion, coerced
into stealing away
from a public suddenly

steadfast on staking me out.
I'm sticking close
inside the high embankment

of the river, but they will
find me, and take aim.
The facility with which

I shift through the seeming
boundlessness of the forest
appears to play in my favor

but in effect forms
the groundwork of the game, of my
bulls-eye. I sense their scopes

sighting in on me when I bend
down to drink from
the smallest streams.

The sky letting go of its
last warmth, limbs their leaves,
storm clouds leaning into

trees—the terrain
betrays me in the same
distention that my instincts,

being so sought after,
forget how to seek escape.

Wingbeat

Not the procedure of inverted perch;
not the flitting at the feeder

brimming with sugar water
dyed bright red. Not the reverence

of echoes buried deep, lasering
stillness to a shrill point B

embedded in point A
by line alone, and only then

after the flight is over; not the discipline
to lift a mouth and eyes

from food, from coloring,
or the fundamental music

wingbeat speed produces.
What figures is the wanderlust

for flight, the worry
the one that flies inside inspires: how

to chase it out? The shooing
of the bat that matters

most; or all too fast, the blur
of the hummingbird whirring by.

Stream Water, Stream Light

Stream water, stream light in the easy creek
that snaked and hissed at the bottom of the hill
all summer long, while houseflies at the crest
assembled to swing in signatures across

garbage bags ripped open by raccoons,
regalia of the driveway. We ignored
this festival of feastful decay whenever
we came indoors or left—the stores of moisture,

pools of light prismatic in our eyes
transfigured those peripheral scenes and stenches.
How we held on to an unswerving comfort,

reclining in our shared stretch of the bank,
groping among the termites in the wicker,
staying naked, since our clothes weren't clean.

Michael H. Lythgoe

Orpheus In Asheville

Every Prelude is a beginning; preludes begin in the heart.
Carla is the diva of the opera at the Biltmore gala;
her moves are melodies; she is soprano of the samba,
Telemann, and Gluck's *Orfeo*, a Brazilian with the Vanderbilts.

Her curves are smooth as polished wood. He plays her
on his hand-crafted lute . . . lingering on each swell & hollow.
His fingers work wonders on each fret; he feels the timbre
in each string of her. Each of his tunes is a prelude to love-
making; a prelude is a love song old—beginning anew.
And he knows, as he plays the theme song from *Black Orpheus*,
that he is creating a multilingual score; she leaves him a scent
of gardenias, on the arm of a tuxedo; in the lobby Orpheus plays solo.

He is the grandson of an old-world stone mason, an artisan
who built the Biltmore Estate to last. His musician's hands
trained to knead deep as in a spa's hot stones massage.
The guitarist loves her operatic interludes caressing his guitar.

Gliding away in a limo, she leaves him composing in the lobby.
In a midnight slide off Black Mountain Road
she is a skater in a love story ending in broken glass,
black ice; mezzo in shards; rime ice clasps her body,

clouding Craggy Cascades in icy droplets—a glistening freeze
on the windward face's mountain limbs at dawn. He lost her;
she left him on New Year's Eve for a mountain in fog; he searched
underground for her, charmed cave mouths into a chorus; the trees—

around the Highland Hospital where Zelda burned—learn arias.
Orpheus' fingers melt Looking Glass Falls every spring into lyricals.
A mythical musician, ever-improvising Preludes, plays instrumentals;
stones—cold Blue Ridge stones—break into Bel Canto.

Schumann Composed For Cello

On the car radio, NPR plays a concerto.
Schumann, they say, was soothed by cello music.
So he composed slow paced compositions, to soothe
his troubled moods. No longer does a duo
make beautiful music together on violin & cello.
A woman screams at a man—waves her bow.
Their romantic instruments, left unplayed, soon break.
The duo flares, burns up, flames out before their libretto
ends in ashes, breaking the ancient Dao of Ying
& Yang; no smooth curves fit Dao harmony
into place. Artists cannot last if love is less
than their music. He leaves for the Beijing Symphony.
She stays to teach. They shared a bed before bows
crossed their strings like electric shocks. No concerto.

Frida Kahlo On South Beach At The Bass Museum

*I had no idea I was going to miss her so much.
—Diego Rivera*

Frida wore white on SoBe for art deco,
a floor length native dress to hide her legs—
(Madonna wore a man's tuxedo)—
peasant beads, bare arms, scooped neckline.

A floor length native dress hides her legs
as she lies recovering from a miscarriage, in body cast.
Frida loved folklore, peasant beads, scooped necklines.
Next to her, Rivera—muralist—is an elephant.

Lying, recovering from a miscarriage, in body cast . . .
Picasso gave her golden amulet earrings in Paris.
Next to Frida—a dove—Rivera is an elephant muralist.
Frida's features in photographs line the gallery walls.

She wears Picasso's golden-hand earrings from Paris.
Her dark eyebrows, thick as fur, are wings in flight.
Frida's images in photographs line the gallery walls;
an unsmiling face reveals hints of hair above her lips.

Her eyebrows—like dark fur—are wings in flight.
The dove was crushed by Rivera's seduction of her sister.
Unsmiling face, Jewish blood, hair above her upper lip,
superstitious artist, loved by other artists taking her picture.

Rivera ripped her heart, seduced her sister.
At Casa Azul, she paints from a mirror, exposed in black & white.
Photographers fall in love taking her picture.
She paints nudes in jungles, poses with parrot & monkey.

In Casa Azul . . . gored by trolley handrail, exposed in black & white;
Frida unbuttons her white native dress to the waist,
she paints nudes in jungles, poses with parrot & monkey.
To reveal solitary, pale fleshy pearls—plain pink nipples.

She unbuttons her white peasant dress down to the waist,
clasping her hands under her bare breasts with pink areolas,
revealing pearl twins of pale flesh, plain pink nipples.
Bewitched by her Tejuana look, I feel her spell; another lover.

Clasping her hands under bare breasts with pink areolas:
Frida, Nude Torso, 1938 photograph—alive—by Julien Levy.
Bewitched by her Tejuana look, I feel her spell, another lover.
The third eye in her surreal self-portrait, an exotic tattoo, hypnotic.

Alive in her art, *Frida, Nude Torso, 1938* photo by Julien Levey.
Kandinsky leaves his tears on her cheek as he kisses her.
The third eye in a surreal self-portrait, an exotic tattoo, hypnotic,
hooks me like Picasso's earrings, her mythic scarves, ex-votos.

Kandinsky leaves his tears on her cheek as he kisses her.
I leave Robert Deniro to drink in art deco at the Chesterfield,
Frida, mythical in her scars, Picasso's earrings, ex-votos,
pass Casa Casurina, where Gianni Versace was murdered.

I pass Robert Deniro drinking in art deco at the Chesterfield;
Al Pacino played a *Marielito*—*Scarface*—at 13th & Ocean Drive;
I see Casa Casurina, blood stains gone, Versace murdered.
I taste Frida's skin even after the iced bitter lemon drink.

Al Pacino played a *Marielito* in *Scarface* at 13th & Ocean Drive.
Selma Hayak wore a white peasant dress at the Bass Museum.
Frida's taste lingered on my lips long after the bitter lemon drink.
Versace models slink & strut as I leave a lover, artists in art deco.

Driving to Columbia

Last night I heard *Thank you
for taking care of me.*

I was reading *A Handfull of Dust*; last
night I heard the icemaker cough.
My dead father stares at me
from an empty store window.

I smell coffee, raspberry, rain,
and Old Spice this morning.
The pink rose in the garden fell
into petals before I left the house.

People gather on Route 302
for a horse show. A horse trainer
drove his horse trailer 21 hours
from New Mexico to run for roses.

Used cars wear their worth
on their foreheads. Confederate
soldiers, on their way to a war
in a pickup, stop

for a red light. Smooth Jazz plays
Bony James covering
Stevie Wonder—
a song I no longer remember.

I heard you say to me *thank you
for taking care of me.*

Ars Poetica

Our words are words for the clay, uttered in undertones . . .
—Charles Wright

If you keep your ear to the ground,
you will hear oceans form shore lines.
Each line is a breath, a complete thought,
a lapse, a story, a Station of the Cross,
a meditation. Some words are as heavy

as a horse's hoof. Others are nimble
as a dancer with ankle bells. Some drum.
Always sing words out loud. Don't let them fall
flat. Pick up the vowels to roll like marbles.
Spit fragments out. Consonants cut a rock face.

Carve or break the stone of the line;
what is left is what you mold; what you speak.
Then you chisel it in. Then you put it down.
Keep your ear to the ground. Words are coming.
The ocean sends shore lines to ground.

Maybe the dead walked in your room
last night, looked in the mirror,
touched your body with the gloves off,
left an envelope on your desk.
Open it. Listen. Try to get the words right.

It takes a certain mind to read between the lines.
Silence is the space, the air, the pause worth hearing.
Feel absence in your bones; a heart beat is a tone.
Atone. Let yourself go in the undertow.
To hear clay utter undertones, go alone.

John Wentworth

morning people

Like the twisting, turning path that at last breaks
into a clearing where you can sit among wildflowers,
and the cacophony of noise along the path at last disperses
into calls of birds and leaf rustlings that you can isolate and truly hear,
the hours of another day and sleepy night bring you at last
to another early morning and to the worship of the stillness of the moment.

How is it that the you you most truly are is so concealed?
When along the path so many stop to talk and listen?
When so many truly care to know who you are?
How is it that they never know?

This pencil, this crack in the window glass, this dead flower—
pick any image you like—
is not the same in the stillness of the morning as it is at night
and for anyone who fails to understand this, well, they can
try to understand you as hard as they will,
but they will never get it right.

Watching My Love

Pick something to watch
And there is so much there to see
Almost no matter what you pick—
A mushroom on tree bark in the woods
A cat's-eye marble under bright light
A leaf floating in a fountain
The night sky
An envelope stained with a lipstick kiss
A fly-covered horse hind-end twitching in the sun—
If you pause at nearly any image for long enough
You discover something about the image
And about yourself.

“I see.”
 (“Look closer.”)
 “Oh, yes, I see.”

While my lover sleeps, I watch her face
As the streams of breath through her nostrils are in my veins
As the lashes over her eyes are rich, webbed thickets
As the shiny slope of her nose trembles in the scent of dust
As her matted hair curls delicately around the lobe of an ear . . .
And as her plump lips trace faintly just the notion of a smile
I understand that I love her best while she sleeps.

“I see.”
 (“Look closer.”)
 “Oh, yes, I see.”

But I am so sorry.
I am so, so, terribly sorry, my darling
That through teary eyes I watched my love again this morning,
And it was you that I saw
It was your breath in my veins
Your sweet whisper at my lips
But all in the past, or in my memories, or in my imaginings
as you sleep.

For when I bent to move my lips onto your hand,
Your fingers had moved on your nightgown into a fist.
I watched so closely.
I watched so closely I could hear myself watching in the silence of
the room.
And what did I understand? What did I believe I knew?
That this fist was your heart toward me, clenching tight, never to
open again.
A tear slid down my cheek onto the foot of the bed.
I turned from watching bitterly, my eyes blank and empty,
So that I did not see the fist blossom like a flower, open into fingers
That might have held me yet again if I had looked closer, and longer.

Saying Goodbye

Five times we have said goodbye,
and there will be more between us.
Have we built our love on our goodbyes?

I see you in bed, on the streets of Alexandria,
in airports, and in the brown grass of muddy fields in fall,
saying goodbye.

In dreams, I see us in the places we've been together,
and also in places we've never been,
and from everywhere, it is the same—
you are waving goodbye.

Learning from both slow, frozen tears shining in glass
and the torrential bursts of heartbreak,
we are becoming fluent in the language of goodbye.
Even now, from a car window, your fingers deftly spell our alphabet:
goodbye, goodbye.

Of course there is only one true goodbye.
And I wonder, will I recognize the day I never see you again?
Will I wake up with that heavy knowledge,
or will I never know, always hoping
for one more hello, yearning for the broken promise
of one more greeting?

If you'll let me, I will share a thousand more goodbyes with you
before our last one—
and that very last time I see you, ever,
I will say *hello*,
as we settle in together into our home
of my heart's memory,
where, even while you live the minutes of another daily life,
you will live forever with me in an eternal goodbye.

1929—for my father

“You’re tracking footprints in the house,” she said.
Was he dreaming? Wasn’t he asleep on the screened porch,
The midsummer breeze touching his toes hanging over the couch,
The fat part of his arm a pillow under his head,
His eyes closed to the golden sun glinting in through the screen,
His belly full from a burger and four bottles of beer,
His day behind him a spent dollar on a lazy Sunday,
His night ahead a warm glow of lamp light on his bed,
His memories mixing with his ideas of how things were &
How they were meant to be?

“Have you even thought about it?” she said, somewhere nearby.
He breathed a breath, felt the breeze on his toes,
Aware of her somewhere near him, sweeping the floor,
Stirring dust, mixing tomorrows with yesterdays.
Half-asleep, he was dreaming, seeing his future
Laid out before him as sure as the radiant days already lived—
But now with his boy, his first child, his son.
It’ll be a boy, all right, he thought. It’ll be a boy.
The sun glinted through the screen onto the porch,
And the breeze was a whisper, a promise, a secret.

Christopher Jelley

Double Exposure

Dad rattles into the family room,
groans down in his big yellow chair.
Trying to focus warped vision on the album,
he puzzles over the faces.

Our first time canoeing through Bull Sluice:
we broke a paddle, nearly wrapped the boat,
rammed the bank, snagged roots.
We both nursed an ice-cold Murphy's stout.
Dad, all smiles, pointing to his beer, me dripping dry
in a spring sun that set almost forty years ago.

A camera flash:
I'm an old man in a new photograph.

Love and Waffle Fries

We rehearse *The Tempest*,
conjure fresh magic
from five hundred year old prose.
Reciting our lines into a mantra,
more than mere meter and verse,
an ancient incantation,
a transmutation of flesh—
we *are* Miranda and Ferdinand.
Two sparks fanned into an inferno,
hormones racing at light speed,
devouring the last of childhood,
unstoppable.

You are the girl with a half-pulled
zipper on her bedroom ceiling.
One side of the painting a gold
stripe running from the edge of the wall
to the center of the room, a detailed
rendition. From here the mural
opens to reveal a wedge of jet-black
sky filled with glow-in-the-dark planets,
whirling galaxies, shooting stars.
As with most art, and with all girls,

I'm not sure what to think.
The mural poses several questions,
although for a teenage boy,
only one question matters—
is that zipper half open?

Nick's

I.

A last game break cracks,
squeaking chalk pivots
on custom pool sticks.

Stripe and solid scatter,
race for soft edges, batter
each other's tangents,
bump cushion,
slow-roll
stop.

One player props against a stool,
re-lights a Marlboro.

Another coolly stalks the green slate field,
calling his next best shot.

In a corner, a couple seeks distance.
She sits erect listening, staring
at the floor. He sidles into her gaze, reaching
for her shoulder, she jerks away—two hearts
in a Gordian knot.

Co-eds help a birthday friend giggle home.
Their waitress fills a tray with empty bottles,
(one stuffed with a carefully peeled label),
wipes her once white rag across the tabletop,
pockets the ten—hard-won milk-money.

A Miller man sits at the bar sweet-talking
the dirty ash tray, picks at a half-dozen cold
hot wings. Across the thin room, a plain woman
locks his copper eyes—smiles him over

for a few quick shots. He holds open
her black leather coat—
they trickle toward the side door.

Santana wails, in stereo:
. . . *tryin' to make a devil out of me.*

II.

Under a fog comforter
good mornings are exchanged
in half-tone light.

Fingers grope
a plastic coffee spoon,
double-sweeten instant.

Nothing is promised, nor expected.
I fasten an out-of-town tie,
snick the door locked.

Outside, two tentative song birds
call mates. A neon sign buzzes:
vacancy.

Catherine Dierker

dinner party

a dishtowel tucked
in your back pocket

that i follow
as we walk

up the stairs
single file

a quiet entrance
shoes are removed

the humility of
standing in socks

before you
for the first time.

movie night

low light in the doorway
thin and pallid,
sourceless

a glow that works well
with the evening,
the mood

on screen a film plays
out in crimson,
it bleeds

this place calls for
something fragrant,
breathing

a flower.

cocktail hour

endless summer.
no socks and
pants rolled up

drink in hand
with one leg
crossed, casual.

he's a cool
match for
a kid like me

calm-faced and
quiet, sits
like a listener

the picture
makes me
want to sing

or at least
to swing down
and kiss his

bare ankle.

window treatment

your fingers are deft
they fold clothes neatly

draw perfect flowers
cut fruit with precision

tonight, as you ready
the table, i sit waiting

watching the sun set
through a curtained window

like smiling through a veil.

a bike ride / the christening

together we crossed over
to a place of quiet, of peace

where we will swim
in the lake of endless depths.

the moment of diving
the hardest moment

the curve of restraint
the fear of violence.

shattering light,
shattering glass

we crossed over
flying, crying—

with wind
with gravel

hitting our faces
stinging our eyes.

William Doreski

Hate the Sinner, Not the Sin

Reading Dante has taught me
to hate the sinner, not the sin.
An hour before dawn the mirror
in the bathroom confirms that pride
defines and defiles me, the pores

of my parchment hide opened
to flattery I never receive.
I should replace myself with lust,
with the smirk of the lecher;
but you with your usual beauty

would find that expression comic
on me, a Halloween mask
two weeks early. Our barred owl
hoots his tedious medley,
each note thick as a woolen scarf.

Stars rattle loose in their sockets,
and one goes down with a shriek.
Or is that the neighbor's rooster?
Pride offends me enough to cut
my throat, but I can't afford

to waste an expensive razor blade
by indulging a little vengeance.
Besides, you'd have to clean up
after me, and I know you hate that.
The microwave oven beeps

that apologetic little beep
and the cat's breakfast is done.
The kettle boils water for coffee.
I should swallow my pride in doses
modest enough to fully digest,

but the famous portrait of Dante
with limber nose and oval mien
leers on a paperback cover
to confirm how clumsy I look
unshaven and fluffy with sleep.

I pour hot water over grounds
and realize this is punishment
enough, the daily unraveling
of ego in bite-sized chores, each
modest enough to kill me.

Post-Neoclassical Poem

The blond forest undressing
leaf by leaf reminds me
how you've courted every man
who's leaned even slightly your way.

Two brooks converge. A boulder
overlooks the pool where nymphs
bathe on summer nights while humans
indulge in mortal dream lives.

I'd like to creep here in the dark
and watch moonlight catch a glimpse
of metallic bodies flashing.
I'd like to compare their grasp

of the classics with your own;
but with your mastery of legal
Latin you'd probably snuff me
under a heap of edicts and writs

to enjoin me from remembering
how frankly naked you could be.
Of course you don't want to contrast
your old-fashioned body with theirs.

Of course the brooks flushing down
from the twin monadnocks have chilled,
dispersing mythic creatures
until the next two seasons pass.

At the ruined stone dam, two deer
startle and flee. The folding chair
left to rust many years ago
still invites me, so I sit.

The light seems smaller, too shy
to support complexities no painter
since Constable can endorse.
Three miles above, a jetliner

sears the air. It's headed your way
with fuel enough to eat all three
thousand miles between us, leaving
only the faintest taste of ash.

Moustaches of Slaughtered Heroes

Framed in expressive black oak,
your watercolors stick to the wall
like leeches. Frost hikes its skirts
at the pond's edge where geese chat
about flying to Kentucky.
Do I hear a drumroll enter

your small conversation? Do stones
at the bottom of the pond expect
to testify? Other events squeeze
from the tubes of paint arranged
by hue and cry. Brushes become
moustaches of slaughtered heroes.

In gusts of small talk you project
the naked retorts of the moons
of Saturn and Jupiter. Half mind,
half sun, you're anything but flesh
now that flesh has lost its fashion.
Your horizons sport crows and jays

to herd away the geese that spangle
your lawn with gray wet droppings.
Yet the bird wars occur mainly
in literature you're too proud to read.
I prop myself against a wall and wait
for the pond to freeze with tingling

and cries of pain. Your husband plans
to stay up all night and whisper
your fetishes to the stars. Why
should you care? Sparks roughed
from visiting boulders tender
light and heat enough to ease you

into those last gestures artists
require for their celestial fame.
Your water colors resist you
just enough to cling to three
or four dimensions, honoring
or more likely blaming you.

Naked Under Our Clothes

Naked under our clothes, we enter
the famous public library
as if unaware that even
avid old scholars possess
bodies as secret as ours.
You head for the gardening books
while I descend a floor to scour
the art books for Gauguin prints
to rip out and smuggle home.
The canned air smells chemical.
The librarians nod and smile
and wish they could step outside
fresh as King Lear in the rain.
While you read about designing
gardens with water features
to foster turtles and frogs, I bless
the tropics for inciting Gauguin
to portray such burly colors.
Later we'll meet for lunch
at the oyster bar where lawyers
and their paralegals hunker
at small tables and plot their trysts.
Someone should paint their expressions,
which prove that they're too aware
of how naked they could be
if circumstances should allow.
I find a couple of honest prints
but lack the strength or moral
fiber to tear them from the books.
Maybe I'll copy them with flimsy
pencil sketches from my youth.
The lines shiver, stutter and fail,
but the effort relieves and renews me.
For a moment everyone's naked
and tropical in hue, even upstairs
where you flirt with photos of gardens
Adam and Eve would have scorned.

A Hideous Verb

Self-condemned to adult camp
to punish my political self,
I weep with arts and crafts all day
and drink with friends all night.
The weather sighs like a bagpipe.
The horizons crumple and fold.

I miss you the way a bullfrog
misses his croak. I'd phone you,
but you'd hear the hangover creak
in my voice and disdain me.
I've sewn you a leather wallet
and crimped several blobs of jewelry.

I've even woven a wool rug
that isn't quite rectangular.
When with my fellow campers
I walk to the village at dusk
I suspect you're watching via
satellite TV. In local bars

we slurp cheap beer and play darts.
No fights, no politics, religion.
Only the slush of draft beer, kisses
with little force behind them,
promises to keep in touch.
Porous belief systems fail

in this crystalline atmosphere.
Dawn breaks the backs of couples
caught in narrow bunks. Such crimes
lack resonance. After breakfast
of groats, instructors apply
cobbler's tools—hammer, awl, needle—

to leather, plastic and wood.
We follow step by step. Always
with you I've followed step by step,
but at last I've learned that "craft"
not only makes a hideous verb
but encourages useless skills.

Robert Barasch

Loons

My daughter photographs loons—
finds them in their nests, tracks them
as they swim across lakes, knows
when the hatchlings are due, waits
to record first swims.

She photographs babies on the backs
of their mothers and fathers, the same
who dive from under them
to emerge from the water with fry
to put into their mouths.

I have pictures of my daughter on my back
and of my granddaughters on her back
and of my great-grandchildren
on their parents' backs
and being fed treats over shoulders.

“Up,” my children would say
and we understood and lifted them.
Lev Vygotsky proclaimed:
no thought without language first
and I think of the loons' calls.

Are the words of instruction in those yodels,
setting the babies to think about leaping up?
Did I grab my mother's breast without a thought?
Did Helen Keller's first thought come on that famous day,
or do we just not understand?

Pas De Deux

The fourteen-month-old boy stands,
one hand on the edge of the chair
before launching himself
toward his great-grandmother,
who grips the edge of the kitchen counter
before stepping out
toward the table between them,
one amazed at his new way of travel
the other perplexed by hers.
They continue to learn new steps of their minuet,
first performed shortly after he was born.
Early variations included slow dancing in rocking chairs,
arm and hand motions together on a piano bench,
these and others before the early warnings.
Now, both vertical, the choreography calls
for their hands to meet at the center of the room,
an awkward couple among complacently confident dancers.
The background music is both silent and polyphonic,
his a Sousa-like march with flute and cymbals,
hers a violin with slipped tuning,
strings frayed, notes elusive,
more and more unreachable.
One peers gleefully into the opening out,
the other squeezed by the relentless closing in.

Bedazzled

That 'possum never had a chance,
dazzled as she was by the beam of light,
brightest star of her night; she,
fading already in their thoughts
before the warm glow of the fire.
They sat and talked about her—
how her eyes gave back to them
part of the light they gave to her—how
each shot once, the three shots hitting her—
how she lay, limp fur, on the ground.

So Mary, seventeen, a game girl,
lay drunk on her father's lawn
while the three football stars talked
in the red glow of the Wurlitzer,
recalling her hungry eyes, her furry gift,
her falling into a loose heap
when they dropped her off at home.

Spring of 2001

Fifteen feet of snow and twenty below
got the downtown caucuses talking.
“Might not get a garden this year.”
“Tractor tires still frozen to the ground.”
“Old horse’ll have to eat snowballs this summer.”
At the red store, a man at the gas pump said
it was because of killing the rain forest.
Another one said you can’t blame nukes
for this one. A man at another pump said
“Oh yes you can it’s the final tab
for Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

Oblivious, the croakers strained their muscles
pushing the sluggish mud, breathing stilled,
letting their cold skin suck muddy bubbles
of air. All pushing at the same time,
they sent currents to the ceiling of the pond,
startling the ice. Like a locomotive in a roundhouse,
the engine of winter got turned around;
still, no one heard a sound. Suddenly,
only two weeks behind schedule,
the snow receding to the shadiest woods,
the songs erupted in the pond. This year,
along with their songs of longing,
the frogs were bragging, raucously,
“Wedidit, wedidit, wedidit.”
And three days later, the peepers joined,
“Yousee, yousee, yousee.”

Community

The turkeys, who have been coming in small groups
seem to have got together last night at a meeting
thirty of them coming into the field this morning.
Perhaps they were considering the weather
light frosts two nights and today ninety degrees,
and the dozen little ones.

Who hatched these youngsters in late August
they must have been asking, the answer
plain to all of them and even to me
who thought I could read embarrassment
in the eyes of the fidgety hen and the blushing
of an old Tom's beard.

When they hear the geese going over soon
they might wonder about joining them
nudged by a vestigial memory that hangs
like a human coccyx or appendix
with impulse to action, fit only for dreaming
of perpetual summer.

Rande Mack

bear

this man wears his shadow like a frumpy uniform
his temper is dubious but he can't put it down
he walks into a bar and silence buys the first round

it takes the toasts of strangers to divest his thirst
the stains on his shirt are the medals on his chest
the moon pulls his bravado around by its nose

he smells sweat slippery between breasts
he smells dew beading on wild strawberries
he fords rapids running through raging hearts

his passion insatiably pirouettes in the mirror
his spectacles are fly specked and tinted with fog
what he sees in front of him is not always there

his appetite leads him through a gluttonous waltz
he winks at the future as he dances with the past
the toes he steps on limp away from the brawl

his mother once tangoed time out the door
he keeps her estate in the heel of his shoe
clocks pick his pockets when he falls to the floor

bat

this man clings to the underside of over
he signs his name to documents that won't rhyme
he paints his mailbox with mustard and guano

he plays the radio his mother kept in her kitchen
in the winter he fine tunes crackling frequencies
searching late night static for a taste of hum

his frost bit ears gather the cloudy music of tiny wings
he once danced in starlight with hungry zigzagging women
now his stomach growls as he swerves to avoid the downbeat

this man sprinkles mosquitoes on short ribs and omelets
he inoculates his memories with mother's milk and rabies
his great uncles sipped the blood of slumbering giants

on whetstones of dragonfly bones he sharpens his teeth
he squints as the moon blooms in fragrant dark corners
he sniffs gasping blossoms he finds quivering in shadows

his dreams are upsidedown and cratered with echoes
the mirrors in his heart are turned towards the wall
he fondles the what ifs of what must be abandoned

marmot

this man is mangled by sawblades of sleep
he wakes up counting his fingers and toes
spotlights fracture the gnarled grain of his dreams

this man is puzzled by the jazz of his own charisma
hope is measured by the length of his shadow
his dreams are branches that won't fit in the stove

he keeps a portrait of the moon next to his pillow
minutia nibbles on the varnish of his pseudonym
his handshake is a cage in the middle of a smile

laughter is a mirror he shines in curious faces
the shine on his shoes belonged to his father
meaty ledgers were balanced and waiting

he lives in a maze with maps on the walls
he tips the doorman but whistles for the waiter
hunger is an ancient voice in destiny's choir

his harmonies are stumps on the forested edge
his heart is a blackbird in a frost stippled tree
his fate a tarnished spoon sprinkling his ashes

magpie

this man takes out the trash in his tuxedo
he reeks of roadkill he powders his crotch
he sharpens his creases he slicks back his hair

he struts through the hush like he owns all the vowels
he jaywalks with a flair through rush hour traffic
he could get smeared without ruffling a feather

he is a matador sidestepping wheels in a jammed up dream
he is the only son of a sleepwalker and a pilot car driver
at the end of the road a sliver of moon stabbed his mama's heart

his heart is an old valley slowly choking with intersections
his lovers with their mysteries and mirrors are good for a laugh
his syllables are waves of glass shattering on shores of stone

he is the sergeant of arms in a cathedral of criminal minds
he likes soda in his scotch and his eggs just about to hatch
when shadows steal the day misfortune cues his favorite tune

all his cards are on the table . . . face down but on the table
he has no name for the silence slowing upping the ante
nor for the drumroll about to goosebump his soul

Susan Marie Powers

Red Bird

Snow swells over fence posts,
drapes pine branches and softens
the edge of an ax
propped against a stump.

Once a plane crash survivor,
arms folded, quietly told me
how the engine died, the soft screams grew,
and cups flew amid staccato cries of “no.”

Then the memory falls away
and a cardinal, red as blood,
beats wings against the snow,
lands on the stump.
I close my eyes but the rays
come through my closed lids.
Red wings sparkle in the sun.

I remember my old dog dying in my arms,
unable to walk, folded legs limp in my lap.
The needle glistened as the vet’s eyes watered,
I held my dog, stroked the warm ear.

Snow softens all it touches.
Numbing, hiding, icing over
the way I loved a man long ago.
Now days go by without thoughts of him,
yet shadows chase me when I see another man
with his hands: clean and strong.

I have felt life tingle inside me,
and then it bled away.
I cried, unable to stop the loss
of someone who never was.

The cardinal launches into the air,
his red heat burns brightly.

The survivor found herself
holding hands with strangers.
Everybody aboard touched:
lovers, strangers, children.
Eyes closed, fingers entwined,
ending life as they had begun it:
absorbing the warmth of another.

The red bird darts looking
for what it wants.
I stand in the snow while somewhere
smoking fragments burn my feet,
feathers touch me, wings graze me.
I wait for the blade
to cut me;
I wait to fall
into space.

Moored

Every moored boat tugs at its tether,
small waves disappear into larger ones.
The dock reaches out, but can't cross the sea.
I stand on the shore and squint at impossible distance.

When I was a girl of fifteen,
I tied our small sailboat to the dock.
The boat's bright yellow reflected in the water,
The rope was too short to secure
both ends, so I left it:
tethered at one end, loose at the other

The next morning, I arose to sun on my ceiling,
a pattern of light, bouncing off the water
beneath my bedroom window—squiggles and whorls
played off the painted surface
like soundless music.

Easy, the golden day ahead,
I walked outside where I found
the boat battered into splintered boards.
A nighttime storm had set it into motion
so it cracked itself in two.

Now I watch boats calm and controlled,
and wonder about a rhythm so violent
my very structure would come undone,
shaking apart everything put so carefully into place,
the wildness more powerful than the bond,
the waves overwhelming the vessel.

Can I go back in time to my fifteen-year-old self?
Secure the boat to resist the storm?
Defy waves struggling to undo knots?
Or do knots come undone
as time nimbly unties us from what we love?
Now, with decades behind me,
I send a benediction to that sleeping girl,
who cannot foresee what the night will bring.

Happy Buddha

A stone Buddha in Provincetown
squats among singing lilies and gladioli.
Their summer voices blare orange pastels
in loud speaker fashion.
Buddha, how do you resist the urge
to swing your plump hips to this sunny blast of colors?
Surely, you must rise from that lotus position
and belly dance among the cone flowers:
your lovely round tummy smoothly
undulating in the afternoon sun.
The roses twining the fence
beg you for a kiss.
Maybe a tango would do as you pull their
vines hither and yon.
And before you foxtrot back to your spot,
take me in your arms for a sexy waltz.
Look deeply into my eyes,
and I will sigh as you
pirouette into place,
already missing your strong arms.

Anne Graue

Sky

We were always looking up
in spring; those months so
hot and cold anything could happen;
funnels dropped, vanished,

vacuumed up between the clouds.
The Midwest sky turned
jaundiced and still.

Oklahoma knew it was coming:
the cliché of the freight train,
the stillness,
the mass of moving earth.

This time, the myth would shred
the houses to toothpicks
scatter photographs
and houses like paper shells.

In Kansas, tornado
drills were routine;
I thought we would outlive
whatever hit us; our heads
down, legs cramped, breath
hot above our folded laps.

Carrying my blanket
down under the stairs, my
father's shortwave crackling
weather reports,

I knew I would not survive
when the tornado hit
our house. Living would be

too difficult, as the living always is.

Her Letter to Kurt Vonnegut, 1982

There's a place in Kansas City
called Montana Wildhack's;
I thought we might meet for a drink
and talk about Cat's Cradle or
Slaughterhouse Five. It would be
nice, nice, very nice.

*My sister knows the place.
It isn't a gay bar, really, but
she might have kept that secret
(she is so used to keeping that
secret); she just likes the name,
I think, and said she'd take me.*

I think you write like you know
all too well how humans behave—
the writing is spiritual,
tough, real. (Too much?)

*My sister hasn't read a word
of it, and probably won't; it's
not her thing. She leaves reading
to me except for Anais Nin
or the author of 9 1/2 Weeks;
The books were in her room
and she was out.*

Earthly conversation
would suffice, not be
the end of the world,
frosty and nuclear—
so it goes.

*She told me she was in love
with a woman one night
in an old pickup we hot-wired.
At her friend's house with a pool*

*late at night, we drank beer
and swam above the Playboy
logo, down and back and down.*

I am sure this type of thing
has happened, more or less; this
may be one of the good times
we concentrate on, ignoring
awful ones. I hope you will
consider meeting me

the next time you're in Kansas City.

Cycles

Spring hot, yet
it feels like fall—
through weak bones
through clotted skin
thickened and congealed—

jaundiced spring and wild
ochre seep through
flaming bramble; bruised
plum of laden hyacinth,
the cadaver of a grey mouse,
the pinched ruby of a tree

growing, leaning toward pale
summer petals of a shrub flowering
in bells that hang low, look
as if they might reach

for furry mustard & black
pepper with wings—
translucent and spinning—

winter insinuating.

Mariah Blankenship

Tub Restoration

My father says I restored this 77-year-old tub
to feel like Cleopatra but I only wanted escape
from cybernetic ecology, wanted to feel

cast iron cool on my back in the winter
and I didn't feel like a prince-ss or an Egyptian goddess
in this tub because I spent hours whittling it away.

I dumped it like my own crusted memories
on the cracked concrete driveway, mask allowing
me to breathe nothing from the past

that I am sanding away like corroding bones,
77 years of memories echoing from the drone
of a sander. It took four hours to strip the tub

clean of its memories, to peel the now elderly children's
fingertips from the sides where they bathed
in democracy, capitalist rubber duck trying to stay afloat

while Roosevelt speaks on the radio and a Declaration
of War floats in the air pulled by little atomies
while Queen Mab is in a hazelnut flying

through men's noses while they sleep.
Memories are dissipating and lost in the atmosphere
of a belt sander with each medium grade discard,
each rectangle tossed into the trash,

nationalism in a hefty bag, and surely the coming
and going of women (talking of Michelangelo or
Kennedy or King) was lost in the friction as well

and I can almost see one whispering *Free at last*
Thank God Almighty we are free at last and perhaps
the mothers memorized the ceiling above the tub

while their children slept, while their husbands slept
like dolls. When I finished sanding, I painted the raw canvas
(flushed of memories, history floating through the

atmosphere) with a porcelain white and now I soak
like a working class Cleopatra in a memory pond,
pruning away in the dull dust of humanity.

Utopia on a Park Bench

An old man wrinkled with time,
wrinkled with so many days at
Goodyear Tire, constructing tires
in an assembly line, tire population

in the thousands, communists
on a conveyer belt, arms forcefully
pointed upward. His park bench
is vast like a continent.

He, like Chagall's wife, corner of a canvas,
consumes just a fraction of the wood
and metal conglomerate, and he
is feeding the birds, feeding the birds

as God, government of birds competing
for each seed like capitalism in a park
with leaping birds, working class birds,
open leaves in the open air of every

season of every year. Equal amounts
of seed pour onto the ground and he
knows there is no solution to equalize
their earnings, to balance the scale

with Marx perched in the middle as a raven.
He knows no socialist solution in his
steel-toed boots and windbreaker
with his beard growing downward

like the droppings of his tears to paper bag.
He knows no solution, only that he
is a giving tree in a dystopian world
and he tried to throw a pile here,

a pile there, one for you, one for you,
but the birds, the birds worked for their
profit, while the man, like God, fed them.

And Violets Are Blue

I am tired of submitting to journals,
society, men, God, tired of watching
my dog cower under my desk
after pissing on the floor.

I am his god after all, and he
is tired of submitting to me,
tired of drooping his ears
under tables and desks.

But we are all gods here ambushed
in the center of the infinite wooden
babushka doll,

clawing and crawling
and cussing and singing

all praises, all hail
the Great Babushka.

I submit now, roll on my back,
in a wooden container like
a babushka doll under a desk,
miming and suffocating and cowering
with simple movement like a puppet.

Society, I bring you clichés now.
I bring you red roses
and blue violets.
I cower under your table,
and like a dog,
I piss on your floor.

Pandora

*Remember, remember, this is now,
and now, and now. Live it, feel it,
cling to it.
—Sylvia Plath*

It is Mother's Day Sunday, and I have
read the chapter of Luke before opening
the dusty box of yours, my deceased mother.

Your journal is sealed with the emblem
of an asylum. Your name written, chiseled
into the top like a vintage museum piece.

I open your words, gloveless,
a box of evils sprouting into the world,
red, red apples thrusting into the open
air like sins, hope left in the bottom
corner next to a ball of lent.

Lately, I have been reading the journals
of Plath like a bible thinking they were you,
reading the chapters and verses and now,
and now, and now, I am finally holding
your words which are distorted,
which are incomprehensible
through a bell jar of tears.

Remember, remember the chapped lips
of your smile, the features of your face,
the swampy feeling of my cheek after your kiss.

And to see your journal lying here next to Plath's,
next to mine, juxtaposed, is colossal.

We have spoken to each other now,
clung to each other now, through written
telepathy, our journals mingling in comparable
time discussing life as two old feminists
in rocking chairs, like Plath and Sexton
chuckling, rocking, like Eve reaching
for a red, red apple.

Paul R. Davis

Landscape

I like the way
lamplight makes the page
of the book
I'm reading gleam.
A wild vanilla with
crazed insects wobbling
into my mind.
I start to close
the book
and night appears,
sheep stranded high
on the outcropping.
Between the pages
is the everdark valley
of no language,
where words cross over
hurriedly to reach
the other side.
I put the book down,
the words don't fall out,
or over themselves.
They are locked in place,
like fresh eggs in their
cartons, asleep
and dreaming of speech.

Second Vision

Too many eyes, too many things to see.

Twin cathedral steeples, nipples
erupting from the breasts of God.

Signs falsely proclaiming pizza is both
original and Italian.

Conversations boomerang off bent elbows,
mismatched words litter avenues.

Briefcases, laptop attache cases,
bag lunches, boxes of pizza for one:

FedEx will not deliver your life
or you from it.

Clouds invade your shoes,
your pockets full of gray money,
handfuls of anxiety fall out of your hat.

Afraid to go home, afraid of the continual fear,
drowning in the comfortable couch.

Going to sleep naked,
one sheet, one blanket,
2,738 dreams you won't remember.

Morning is a roving wolf,
eating the bones you forgot.

Eating Molly's Pie

It was a sunny morning,
sky of flour and butter.

I went out to eat
some of Molly's pie,
came away fuller than the moon.

It was noon like turtles lounging.
I went out and had some more
of Molly's pie.

I left the desk,
overturned the timesheet,
went out like a thunderstorm.

I looked in corners where butts are thrown,
looked at signs like forgotten face cards,
looking for Molly's pie.

Close to midnight
down by the river,
Hungry Davy was there,
eating the last of Molly's pie.

I cried up, all the way through my hair,
wanting some of Molly's pie.

Klismos

(4th Century Greek chair, perhaps the first of Western civilization)

Ladies, be seated.

Rest in elegance and wait for the news.

Your husbands are in the fields,
or fighting for Athens.

When Rome ascends,
when Saint Peter visits,
he will be crucified but leave a seat
for his crude descendants.

But this will be hidden, kept secret
from the tillers and the potters.

They will have curved backs,
broken backs, will lack support.

Castle residents will know the comfort,
the tribute from the fields, the gathering laws.

Conquistadores will bring saddles
and crucifixes to a world reclining.

They will join with missionaries
to bring enlightenment and germs.

All the world will be seated:

To work, to learn, to take rest.

What wondrous device will ennoble us?

How will nature uncivilized devolve?

We will lose our legs, take on those of wood,
carved with faces straining under the weight.

Our backs will weaken,
our eyes forget the wide vistas scouting danger,
our minds will turn more quietly.

We will be soothed.

The oceans are crossed while we stand

before the compass, afraid to sit and
not see the upright horizon.

These new lands have knowledge
of running and resting,
but we bring strange new instruments
lacking harmony with nature.

Forests are hacked down,
the wood is shaped into towns,
houses and their possessions,
legs and spindles hold us in place.
Intricacy and detail envelop our bodies,
stiffnecked we suffer the hardness
of where we sit.

The plains and rivers hold freedom
like butterfly wings hold the sun,
we seek the prairie grass to burn.

The western shore is gained
but there is no rest for our business,
still we are straight-backed.

Leisure is acquired with sweat
and now we can know comfort
of leather, of upholstery,
feathering our labors.

Finally, we sit: collapsed,
to think of new inventions,
made for human bodies.

New devices take craft
and they have arms, levers,
footrests and let us dream.

All in beautiful reveries,
we take our seats.

Philip Jackey

Garage drinking after 1989

Her world will spiral like a merry-go-round in the belly of storms.
The matches and lighter fluid she'll buy at Walmart
will seem a lot less dangerous than they did before—
well as the cheap vodka that'll burn within her throat,
and after the fifth or sixth shot, it won't burn anymore.

Cobwebs will surround her; in all corners they'll spread like lies.
Spiders will fuck other spiders; their egg sacs swaying
with momentum like a Newton's cradle.

And with her back turned, few feet away,
an industrial fan will spin at its highest speed.
She hates the heat; it sweats out the alcohol,
and nothing smells worse than the depths of disease

protruding through stale fragrance that will embed,
into vintage tank tops with Mickey Mouse on the front,
over a pink bra and blue denim shorts bathed
in Giorgio perfume—wrinkled and creased, and
crammed in a cardboard box on top another cardboard box:
the furthest decade she's able to reach without a step stool—
the last one she'll ever trust, to rational thinking.

Only stigmas will remain—of oil and antifreeze,
Fieros and Firenzas, Madonna in the tape deck—
the beaming of the headlights unfolding
the shadows that ascend to the ceiling.
Hanging hacksaws will warp into sharp fangs.
Lawn rakes into claws.

And the storm will come. Her gutters will surely give,
to pouring rain under black clouds, blacker than their predecessors,
bringing bad fortune through meandering felines.
Soaking black Maine Coons take shelter with lemon-marble eyes

gouged from years of sidewalk disputes, and yet to purr thereafter.
Instead they will stay still, struggle to see,
their eyes slowly dimming like a wicker candle.

And she will feel pity—for whom or what, she won't know,
just enough to understand belligerence will not kill the pain.
A lit match to methanol works best.

Swimming at night in suburbia

The pool shines mercury beneath the moonlight,
where young girls jump off of diving boards into the deep,
somewhat ashamed as only their bikini tops break the surface,
spilling polka-dots, some amber, others amaranth.
And the boys can't see, only touch, because chlorine
burns their eyes the same way liquor does their virgin throats,
sinking ten feet to the bottom, haggling air through a kiss—
sealed, the radio drowns by a thousand pin drops,
and the girls allow to be touched with pruny fingers.
Subterranean lights beam bright,
outlining shapes, the shadows: a frog
who gave his life in the skimmer, a thousand
ripples projected on a white painted fence, and silhouettes,
all different sizes as they watch their former selves,
slide off each other, poor attempts at a carnal act,
squeezing the air out of inflatable rafts,
on such a night where fireflies dress their best,
and luminesce the pungent air.

Granny and Papa's house

And for sure this house is haunted;
it moans at night like papa did,
when he wasn't papa anymore,
rather a sad story of children and their children
and pestilent cancer cells, his sunken cheeks pale,
and white as the ghosts who live here.
If you listen close, you still hear his son,
been dead since '72—
plastered to a tree, killed instantly,
thrown out the window like a sack of shit,
the same way most repudiated
his mendacious words of advice.
And you can still smell the menthols,
almost if she hadn't lost to the stroke
ten years prior, my granny,
who smoked before you could die from smoking,
turning the walls to dirt, stained dull yellow
like the nicotine on papa's teeth.
And granny's the kind of gal papa read poems about,
and papa didn't read poems, he was more
a hands on kind of man,
who preferred using fists when he's pissed off, scared,
and even in love because granny swears
that one of the holes papa punched through the closet door
was in the perfect shape of a heart.
And you could see right thru,
skeletons stacked on skeletons.

Karen Hoy

A Naturalist in New York

I cannot see the buildings
of Manhattan in the dark,
though at a far journey's end
as we cross
(yes it is,
confirms the driver)
the Brooklyn Bridge

towers of window lights are rising
in the buildings' negative space.

It's the way each
illuminated giant facet turns,
revealing more as we approach.
Transitions of galaxies,
oblong astronomical bodies
in a moving geometric display;
metropolitan northern lights,

and I am in awe.

I've seen things as stunning before:

the terrace of salt-white
pools at Pamukkale;
the cap of Kilimanjaro
afloat on African clouds;
stalactite ballrooms in
Carlsbad Caverns;
a neon-red sunset
on the Serengeti.

I feel my own turning,
my marrow re-engaging

in ways I didn't know
my insides could fit.

I'm not a city person
is no longer available
as I adapt and rearrange;
a discontinuation
of a former stock phrase.

Nan's Photographs

That one, that's my favourite,
of my mother in a tutu,
age sixteen, on points,
with her raven hair straight
from a white hairband
and her hands arched above her.

of all your photographs
of even that one of me
with my brothers
when I wouldn't keep still
at the photographers,
and Darryl is smiling
and Kevin has been instructed
to keep me on the seat
I'm already half off,
as if at any minute
eighteen month old me
will slither to the bottom
of the round frame
and drop, gurgling
onto your hall carpet.

more than the scattered ones
in little straight frames
around your bookshelves
and the dresser;
a collection of cousins
in the dull plumage
of successive school seasons.

This photo,
my mother; your daughter;
the family's only dancer.

Look at her—
our loose-tendoned

connecting icon
in her own space,
owning the frame.

I love this photo,
how it shows excellence
pursued, found,
redelivered on demand
for the camera's exposure;
her talent in black and white,
en pointe in a silvered
chemical capture.

For Peter in Memory of Jo

Meteorites land mostly
in the sea
or in forests
far from our eyes.

Sandcastles are always
washed away
by the tide—
they don't survive.

But in between
these statistics
are things we risk
by being alive.

By survival
we're defined by
losing people,
precious people,
lost to us,
the ones behind.

Somewhere on earth
a meteorite.

Ankles are lapped
by sand
sent swirling

into flower-shaped fractals:
a million tiny rocks
in the tide.

Mrs Bing and Mrs Bailey

and the list read
Bing Bing Bailey Bailey
Bing Bing Bailey.

Visiting you, we waited
with the suitcase, by
the noticeboard on the lobby wall,
while Mum brought in
the rest of our stuff,
letting the double doors close off

to the hot ice-cream-dripped tarmac
of an English just-a-half-season
or the rest of the year's
straight-off-the-sea wind.

and the list read
Bing Bing Bailey Bailey
Bing Bing Bailey.

It always amused my sister and I—
seven days of warden shift
in a rhythmic, onomatopoeic
can't-help-itself-but-be-a song.

Bing Bing Bailey Bailey
Bing Bong Bailey.

We hurried along the hall
and sang it to you, giggling,
at the entrance to Flat 4,
where you were
officially sheltered
from live-alone danger,
but independent
with your own front door
and wardens, on duty,
at your every red-cord-pulled call.

Bing Bing Bailey Bailey . . .

don't finish it . . .

leave the song hanging
in our grandchildhoods
among the sandcastles.

Gary Sokolow

Underworld Goddess

Our eyes made contact through a slow drizzle
I bore through her soul, leaned face to face

Weeks later, other disturbances, broken bird wing,
The final descending.

Over past park benches the drunks gather, laugh
With breath of whiskey,

One lost in the gutter, the Captain they all call him
Ass in air, face down.

It was ten years ago they found me three days endlessly
Riding the trains,

Mother lighting her candles believing in small places,
Her dreams of the crisp uniforms,

Men under a hot morning sun,
Mailmen,

All of us, mailmen, delivering sliver thin notices
Final foreclosures like razors,

Petite bottles of French lavender water
For the lonely,

The dirty fingers waiting upon bare-breasted women
To burst through brown paper magazines.

It was in a book we first discovered the goddess every
Autumn stolen to the underworld,

We were children, the family beatings made him
Crazier than me,

We dug through piles of dirt, the shards of glass
In his broken backyard,

Down and down, we dug through earth toward
Our goddess,

Uncovering worms, scared and writhing on late
October afternoons,

Pliant worms below, and above us the stone face
Of a soon to be fading sun.

late evening fumes

at 4 am, it was *treasure hunt*, channel 9
3 jack in the boxes, 3 crazy contestants,

one winner, who got to pick the prize
one box to choose out of fifty, sixty

boxes of various shapes, sizes, colors, and bows
and that was the show, the remaining time

left to the torture of contestants, the chosen box's
contents slowly revealed, and for the record

I don't remember how I came upon the magic
of the nail polish,

bottles snuck from piles of dirty clothes and
missing homework of my sister's room

smashed into paper bags
saturation

covered with plastic bag
maximum inhalation

every night through high school
and I was always the straight kid

never drank
never smoked

glue sniffer

most antisocial form of user known, they say
notch above pedophiles

and those nights lit with the glow of the tubes
inside the old black & white tvs as I watched

the odd couple, mary tyler moore, the saint,

sleep not so much coming as the haze descending
to awaken 4 am the jack straight out the box.

Any Monday Morning

Often it is how it all begins
the coldest day of the year
a man on 9th avenue walking
in nothing but a sweater,
arm around a basketball,
smoke from a cigarette,
and how by nightfall
the newest associate of a law firm
will admire herself in a bar mirror,
enjoy the buzz of happiness
co-workers buying the next round,
and how by morning the soldiers in full gear,
rifles poised, will have hit the beach,
crash like waves, like kindergartners pushing
and shoving their way from schoolyard
into school, insects climbing screens,

and how it may be 1987,
the man in the tightfitting uniform testifies
for the twenty-third day in a row how
incapable we are of comprehending
the deals made, the true costs of our comforts,
so the arms are sold, our bastard propped up
for one more rigged election.
the whitecaps violent,
the insects hit windshields,
beyond distant hills corporations have grown
enormous, force trees out of the landscape,
windblown seeds with nowhere to land,
the soldiers inch toward targets,
the children move beyond rainbows,
push against something dark and unknowable,
and this the way any Monday morning goes,
the man on Ninth Avenue with the basketball
fleeing his girlfriend's apartment
with whatever he could find,
the cold seeping through his sweater,
and smokeless by his side the last cigarette.

Elegy

Unknown hard
bop jazz

soprano
sax

runs
feel

to loose
to be

Coltrane
on the

radio
a

long day's
desk job's

end
not any life

a life more
fragile

than
ever

my heart
and time

past, time
wasted

and time
spinning

and
at the

center

a man
in

the
ground

is
truth

no

other
way

but
shovels

of tears
and

in the
moment

a

bird
moved

by
the

pretty
day

to
sing

to the
shovel's

rhythm

to the
dirt's

falling

the pine coffin
innocence

was ours
was

everything
yet

only words
like stones

as
a

man

in
the

ground

whom
you

love

is
truth

Michal Mechlovitz

The Early

Wind, sharp, dis-
 tilled, washrag gray, hissing
at the shutters, a big
 body with a small

voice, its over-
 tones smashing the early buds, their cracked
faces, their violent,
 lolling needles for
 tongues puncture

December. False
 intimacy, the chill
 pushes their wide mouths open
and brittle. There was

 a night when the heat
was broken and the windows
stuck- we couldn't
 close them, and you
 brought me cold blossoms
that we kept in the bedroom, cold
 blossoms that we kept in the bedroom.

Lumen

She wore a whisper
of a dress

an old pattern, but
transparent
like a cerebral daydream
of modesty

and when I opened
the shutter
of the bedroom in which
she danced

the exposure
of her legs
was the ambient light, and
my camera
the buffer
between us

as she held
spilling threads
in her thumbnails
the details
were phantoms
of ugliness between the non
living frames until

the hem
of her skirts
became wet
with acid
and in lavender
pixels she fell
away

“You are
really beautiful . . .
Do you think
you’re really beautiful?”

Mi querido, I will sing you to sleep each night

Hidden behind your negative space,
what do you find in her glowing hand?
A tone of white not from this century and
a foreign crease in the paper of his skyscape

What do you find in her glowing hand
that cradled all her misplaced children?
A foreign crease in the paper of his skyscape
folded over by wind, and a bottle of tequila

And what was the cradle for those misplaced children?
Those tiresome winged ones that cried and knew no comfort?
The folds in the wind and tequila sighed lullabies
that invoked nightmares worse than not sleeping at all

And those tired monsters never did learn comfort
but knew the geometry of a perfect sized grave
and how to measure the weight of a nightmare too heavy
before any of those winged ones learned to sing

The geometry of a perfect sized grave is
a tone of white not from this century and
before those droopy eyed winged ones learned to sing
they were hidden behind your negative space

Quick to Dark

The thinnest
line is the blood

line and I taste

it on your tongue.

Darkness is in the repetition
of paint

strokes, in seagulls
scraping
the top

of Brooklyn, with their crying, empty

gullets, I could

blacken your eyes with
my hair, I could

lap up
the ocean really

quickly. I'm

sorry I keep swiping at your eyes. The tapping noise

was nothing, just
a child
on the beach beating two bones

together. I'd dispute it

if you wanted, see, I love you and I'm desperate
to know

where your lines break.

Henry Graziano

Last Apple

Dawn lures her each morning
where she stands barefoot
on the splintered deck.
Steaming cup warming
her hands. A brown fleece
blanket wrapped about her when the chill
demands. She watches

southern tree line of box elders and mulberries
bird sewn in summer's end
along the unused track of the
old county lane.
Grown to eat the sun. Deer
track from the west
to mill about the base of the

crab apple tree apart from and older
than the tree line,
trunk leaning north. For this season
out of the reach of the scrub tree
shade. Almost horizontal
base for the upward reaching boughs
growing back to the light.

In spring, she smiles at the does balancing on hindquarters
reaching up for the flowers
or later tiny green bulbs,
front hooves running
in the air. Fawns
bounding between sun and shade.
Far from the starving of winter

Now, one boney limb stabs back north in October's wind,
an odd compass needle bobbing beyond the shade.

Bits of twigs standing out.
Static arm hair.
Leaves long fallen
from beneath the final fruit,
a dull maroon dab

absent this morning her waiting ends.
Before the groundhog begins
its daily search for windfall and the
deer return this evening,
she hurries inside for her long stored cache
and throws several apples under
the tree to keep herself from starving.

Behind the Winds

November wind spins the tire swing from the unmoving firth of an oak branch. Grass has overgrown the gravel drive of the abandoned house. Covering the doors and windows on the lower floors, silvered plywood has begun warping. Deeper than the whispering of tall grass in the wind, the swing rope eats away the bark of the limb.

Outside Altoona, eastbound I-80, gouges in the snow lead from the shoulder to the crumpled road sign—Iowa City 98 miles. Yellow plastic emergency tape secures the cab, already blown over with snow. The driver would have had to climb out of his door like a submariner must emerge from a conning tower.

Along the bike trail at 7 am. A rabbit warms itself in the new sun edging into the opening of hedge branches. Night frost evaporating from its coat.

Sunset on the patio of Caribou overlooking the UHAUL sign—the light for ‘A’ has burned out.

In his garden, an old man turns his soil. Jamming a boot to the edge of the garden fork. Across one row and back, blackening the earth. Remnants of pepper plants, hoed and buried. Chopped tomato vines turned into the widening plot. He cannot dig deep enough. The earth does not feel the scar.

Sunday morning, a young woman enters the door of the coffee shop at 7 am. She wipes at her eyes smearing the mud-died mascara. Patterned flats grind sidewalk salt into tile as she approaches the counter, orders coffee, pulls some bills from her coat pocket. She props her chin on the cup, warming her hands. Outside against the piles of snow, cars line up in the drive-thru, stop, and drive on.

In his back yard, near the budding crab apple tree, a little boy holds a Mason jar of fireflies up to the sickle moon to

watch them disappear as they flash.

On a bed far into the night, a dog flinches in its sleep. Lying on his side, chest rising and falling quickly, pawing the air. A hand reaches out from under the quilt. The woman touches her dog's shoulder. Runs her fingers down his flanks until he breaths easier. She closes her eyes believing that dogs dream only of running in spring fields.

After an hour, the lights were switched on. He looked up from where he had parked to the shaded window of the apartment. Tire treads clapped across the brick lines of the cobbled street. Several people smoked on a dark covered porch. It was too early to call her. He could taste fall's coming.

Rain. A late spring rain at dusk, straight falling. Tender. A little girl with a backpack on her deck in rain boots making paths through the Silver Maple helicopters. A treasure map leading to the edge of the world.

Reunion

The closest we got
was a 2 hour car ride to
camp at the lake
some Fourth of July after
I had dropped out of college
before I crawled back.
Sprawled in the seat of my LTD
Marlborough ashes blown in the
highway wind, he dozed
sweating tequila on my upholstery.
Camping meant sleeping
in the car at night
for an hour between bottle rocket fights
and water skiing
behind a fat-assed pontoon boat.
He worked double shifts for AMF
making more money
than my father ever would.
“Do you remember the day
our draft numbers
were first read on TV?
I would have died first,” he told me.
We were only sophomores in high school
that day we watched
in 1971. We didn’t follow
anyone to Asia.

Catholic school brought us all together. “No, Sister. I don’t speak Spanish. I speak Mexican,” he told his second 1st grade teacher. She was the only one who smiled. Together. My mother warned me of them later, when we shared a little league team. He taught me to swear in his tongue. I shared the Italian version. Sister never knew. An old aunt once told me that Disneyland opened the year I was born . . . the closest I would get to that world was watching Mary Poppins at the Paramount where mom sent us to avoid being blinded by the lunar eclipse. He couldn’t

afford to go. I met him later at the park to shag flies. Together

That Monday, we served early Mass for Monsignor. Latin Mass for the old women who spoke their rosaries in whispers, rising and kneeling in arthritic unison, accepting bits of host on shriveled tongues. Leaving the church with wetted fingers signing themselves in some hope.

He passed out in the sun on the 5th.

“My people don’t burn,” he announced to the rising moon.

Sweating beer on my upholstery heading home from our last road trip.

A woman loved him in Arizona

It shocked him, I heard.

She named their son after his father so he cried in his pride, “Bless me Father for I have sinned.”

But Sister was dead then and the Monsignor.

He came back one last time

We met at a bar so many of us that August, where my own daughter, working as a barmaid for the summer, brought drinks to us. He didn’t know who she was until he touched her cheek, her neck, and she bent to his ear whispering

while he looked me in the eye until he could no longer stand it.

Even she knew he would be the first to go.

Spider

I find you in the bathroom
watching the depths of the sink cross-legged atop the
counter beside your reflection.
“I don’t want to have this conversation again,” it tells me.

I wonder how you have folded the length of your legs into that
bundle leaning forward, head tilted to hear the echo of the
drain? The whisper of a May breeze circling the sink?

I expected tears.
You tap the sink with the end of a brush. It is a hollow sound.
“Can we
talk about something else?” you ask.
Four of us, still as porcelain.

You unfold a leg. Stretching it to the yellowed tile floor. Like
blowing out a
match, you exhale into the sink. “I can.” I see the side of your
face staring at me in the mirror.

“I hate spiders,”
And you blow again into the sink, forcing the spider closer to
the drain.
You might kill it there, and leave it like the flies on your
Mother’s walls so long ago.

Left them to harden, too insignificant to be fed upon. She could
appease you in
youth. Now there is no one.

My silence
channeled you to sleep splayed over the couch, feet bared ex-
tending
beyond the worn blanket. Your face in its nightly pose, the color
of lily petals
folded up for the night, the color of the empty sink.

Standing on the Bridge

No sunrise yet. From the bridge rail
a lightening sky
reflects in the crawling river darkness
I wonder how streams of fog rise out of the waters
hugging the bank—a gauzy shawl
my grandmother wore on late summer nights
when she sat alone on her porch. I felt I could see
olive skin beneath it.

A solitary egret, shadowed in the darkness,
seeking breakfast, stands
one foot on the sand bar
the other in the river
with tiny twigs of legs
scratching drawings in the sand.
Her head, the hood of a cobra
unswaying as she waits.

Autumn nears with the coming sunrise
breathing cinnamon through the trees too low to
melt the fog. Looking down
the egret has flow. I missed its fishing story.
It saddens me
that the trees have yet
to turn and molt. I hope to notice that day,
and when the egret strikes.

Stephanie L. Harper

Unvoiced

The words from the dream are
Wisps in the air like broken
Spider webs wrapping invisibly
About my face and forearms

The fake sunrise tarp draped before me
Ripples like a summer mirage
Half-soaked into the rural street

And then as if I were not supposed to

I step through and place my foot
Solidly into an evening of dark specters
Waiting outside of their existence
To become what I am

There
I am the cool turpentine
Wash of grays seeping over
A dusting of brown sand in the road

There
I am the night falling upon
Neglected pastures of weeds
Sputtering up about the silhouettes
Of tree stumps and old swing sets

There
I am the street lamps' sallow illumine
Peering out sensibly from between
Foolish tree skeleton embraces

There
I am still the child
Twisting acorns into the asphalt
With the soles of her shoes

Squealing gleefully into the night

I, Your Progeny

I cannot get my mind
Around the meaning of your ninety years.
If I multiplied my age, my experiences,
My life's richness—
Math not being my strong suit—
I would be making your age, events, and richness
Quantifiable,
As if you were simply
A larger, scatter-plot version of me,
Your number and density
Increasing
With every cycle of rebirth and dormancy;
Repeating
Over acre upon acre
Of variegated shades and shade;
Each of your small, too-subtle suffocations
Receding
Into anonymity
By your sheer enormity.

Even if my calculations were viable,
I would be entirely lost
In the matrix of your possibility.

But here,
Where my roots have taken hold,
Where this slice of sun streaks in,
In this cross-section of you—
I cannot count the leaves
That glimmer golden,
Or burn blood-red,
Nor plot each point of light
That breaches the canopy and reaches
The dank floor.

I am not one-third, not one-thirtieth
Of your richness,

Not even a quantum speck
Of your boundless soul,
Yet, dazzled here,
Neither am I invisible.

I quiver, here,
In your engendering light.

Wise at Thirty-five, Revised at Forty

Preserved like wax museum sculptures,
Erected in their own, obscure enclave,
These two, distinct ages pulled off quite the
Elaborate spectacle—circling
One another in yin-and-yang-fashion,
Gurgling and sputtering dramatically
Toward a crescendo of neurotic
Self-consumption—until the violent
Vortex of their fervent dance dissolved in
A brief instant into oblivion.
Still, I relish the living left to do,
While constantly reliving the living
That can't be redone, intently watching
Today's waterfall spill over into
The uncertain basin of tomorrow:

“Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this
petty pace . . .”

Shakespeare was wise to the relatively
Insignificant fact that tomorrows
Keep coming, regardless of how we spend
Or squander, mete out, or justify them,
Forgetting their order, or which ones were
Real and which were dreaming, or whether there
Is quantifiably a difference.

I have tried and failed to live up to that
“Mysterious,” skulking *expectation*—
Convinced it was my duty to perform
The scenes from a moral composition,
Which I now know I scripted for myself:
Whether I'd tried pink-nosed and dreamy-eyed
To face into an icy, winter wind
(To look like the cover illustration
Of the children's book, *Eloise in Moscow*),
Or to bound—stripped down to nothing but my

Bare disillusionment—through the fertile
Valley beneath a sun-streaked, summer sky,
I'd *always* been shocked to discover the
Dance was neither beguiling nor beautiful.
How did I manage to cultivate and
Reap such a harvest of indignation?

For an age, I sulked in self-abasement,
Practicing absurd, measured detachment,
While swathed in a café's lulling morning
Warmth, huddling with coffee and crossword.
I once watched through the glass as a curled, brown
Leaf flapped fitfully in the street, as if
It were some willful creature with purpose
And life blood coursing through its wrinkled veins.
Though I feigned amazement, as it darted
In and out of traffic and leapt anew
With life after each self-orchestrated
Brush with tragedy, I all the while knew
(Though I may have started at its final,
Quick, clever tailspin, as the wind blew it
Out of sight forever), and *loved knowing*
That on most days, a leaf is just a leaf.

If once I rather resembled a rock's
Unmovable crest, emerging stubborn
And solitary, from a rushing stream,
My ceaseless shadow blotting out the sun
From the leaves cascading by beneath me,
I now glisten and shiver in the
Constant splash of cold humility.

Roger Desy

anhinga

—feeding a brood

an anhinga knows
itself enough to know

the most important thing alive

is not itself—instead

being part—a part

of what it made
of what it was and is

—feeding nestlings
it feeds itself—

later—brooding done

apart from itself

nothing else matters

—after diving for prey

—flocking the shoals
to a single stone

roosting with its kind

it preens its own shadow
undulating in the mirrored glare

—napping on guano

its wings alone
drench dry in the sun—

—come winter—

alone—after its turn and time
—it dies unseen unknown—

no predator torments observing it

—nothing in particular seeks out
or notices

floating—or blowing sand

—feather—quill—or barb

—no calm—or fog—or squall—cirrus
or haloed moon disturbs

even submerged—weighed down by seas

— buoyant despite itself—it's gone

through the hurricanes
of its own migration

R. G. Evans

Hangoverman

Every day an origin story—
an ordinary man swallows a potion
he knows is dire poison.

The change begins at once:
he writhes through blind bliss,
tears his clothes (and sometimes bleeds)

as the poison moves through his veins.
His strength grows great.
His strength remains the same.

His secret wears a mask.
Everyone knows who he is.
At last, eyes red, bottles emptied

by his superhuman thirst,
he enters his fortress of solitude,
wherever it may be tonight.

His bed. The floor beside his bed.
The sidewalk where he fell
on the way to find his home.

And all this just a prelude . . .
He awakes, having never really slept,
alter ego dead, home planet nearly destroyed,

the ability to suffer his only super trait, thinking
With great impotence comes great irresponsibility.
At least the Drunkmobile stayed in its dock tonight,

waiting where it's waited since the beginning,
and in the beginning was the drink,
every day an origin story.

The Usual

In a faraway bar in a faraway town
the bartender thinks I'm someone
I'm not. She smiles, arches an eyebrow
and says *The usual?*

What would I get if I were this man
she thinks I am—a shot and a beer?
Something with more finesse?
I wonder how long his usual would last,
this man who looks and acts like me.

I remember my usual and the mileage it got me
though all the time I was riding on "E."
My usual was darkness and long draughts alone,
hairpin roads and a hand too light upon the wheel.

I pray this stranger's usual let him fit into his world
better than I fit into mine. The bartender's waiting,
a wall of bottles holiday bright behind her. *The usual?*
she says again. I nod and walk out of the bar
into this stranger's land where a lake as large as the sea
is drying up.

After April

She spent the whole first weekend in the dust,
rummaging through clutter. *Animal*,
she'd say to empty rooms or to the mirror
as she passed. Beer cans and cigarette scars,
scraps of food and flies. She couldn't explain
the way some people lived. Memorial

cards and flowers came. Memorial
Day passed. The yard urned brown as dust
by Independence Day. She could explain
her sadness when she lost an animal,
her grief when surgeons left a puckered scar
in place of secret parts. And even mirrors

she found she could forgive—it wasn't mirrors
that tore her life. St. Jude Memorial
Gardens. Machines that turned the sod to scar.
a few brief words, some prayers to ash and dust.
That was the place that made her animal
softness hard to bear. And who would explain

how tears can burn as well as freeze, explain
there'd be no toothpaste-spattered mirror,
no piss-stained floor, no reek of animal?
He won't come back. Those words memorial
enough when she knew they weren't true. Now dust
had settled everywhere. She felt it scar

the house the way asbestos fibers scar
the lungs. All dust. All ash. She could explain
his leavings until he left this dust
behind and disappeared out of the mirror
of her life, left rubbish as memorial
of what they had. She mutters *Animal*

today—not him, but every animal—
and stubs out cigarettes to leave a scar

on desks, buffets and chairs. Memorial
beer bottles and cans sit for days. Explain?
What explanation can satisfy the mirror?
What explanation cuts a path through dust?

She is an animal who can't explain
new skin, new scars, or how the mirror
weeps in memorial, reflecting dust.

Alucard

In the black and white universe
of 1943, any bad actor could hide
himself just by spelling his name
backward. In this way the son
of Dracula became *Count Alucard*
and no one was any the wiser.

In brains cursed by the love of
wordplay, a verb like *lives* becomes
nouns like *Elvis* or *evils*.
One of the evils of the Universal plan:
that the undead's sperm
could vampirize an egg.

The Son of the Man of 1000 Faces,
Lon Chaney, Jr., ill-suited in a tux—
and what kind of vampire
wears a moustache?—tell tale
droplets, a crimson confession.
Black and white logic: we see no blood.

We've seen plenty of blood in our day,
Stillbirth. Miscarriage.
Yet *Dracula / Alucard* . . .
What bride would ever provide
the ovum and the path
to let such palindromic birth proceed?

*Late fetal DNA-land—
was it a bat I saw?
Dad,
don't nod.
Devil never even lived.
Cigar? Toss it in a can. It's so tragic.*

Maybe that other undead son
was in on the joke when he said

The last shall be first and the first shall be last.
What kind of god—what kind of dog indeed—
grants the devil a son and drives stakes
through hearts like these?

On the Battlements

There's a photo of a young girl and a man
on a fortress top in Old San Juan.

The meek clouds, the placid blue sky
seem like lies in the aftermath of storms—

las tormentas—that rocked them all the night before.

The sea is calm and picture-perfect,

the picture itself a perfect kind of lie.

You see a father and a daughter

on the battlements of the old Spanish fort.

The fort is photogenic, a tranquil postcard ruin

of *conquistadores*' might. The father's pose is casual,
grinning in the shadow of his cap.

The daughter's face is pinched,
almost smiling in the sun.

What you don't see is
the woman's hands trembling on the camera,

the daughter fleeing after the shutter's click,
screaming *I'm scared, Daddy, I'm scared,*

the father's face contorting, shouting
Come back here right now.

You don't see the blood stains
washed by centuries of storms,

dark clouds in the distance,
las tormentas yet to come.

Frederick L. Shiels

Driving Past the Oliver House

One day late in 1966 in quiet Hattiesburg,
Phillip Oliver, nineteen, shot
his step-mother four times
in the face and chest with a ten-gauge,

Drove what was left of her
in the back of the family's Ford pick-up
out to an empty lot
on the edge of town,

Unloaded her and emptied
a five gallon can of gasoline
on her and dropped a whole blazing box
of Ohio blue-tip kitchen matches
down on her and
backed away quickly.

He then drove to the police station
downtown and told everything. That's
how the newspaper reported it, at least,
that's how I recall it.

Funny thing though,
it was also reported that
friendly Phillip, cutting lawns and
doing odd-jobs, just out of high school,

Said he "didn't mind the lady,"
they had argued some that particular morning.
"His father had remarried a little quickly," he thought—"maybe,"
and that was that,
or so, I remember.

In any event, driving by what, for many years,

was the “Oliver Place,” a non-descript brick Ranch
at Adeline Street and Twentieth Avenue,
and not favored by realtors,
was never the same.

Star Birth of the Word *ULASSA*

Just now, May 23, 2013, I have in my conceit
created a brand new word, *Ulassa*,
at 8:05 AM. As I write,
Ulassa is like an infant star that burns white hot hydrogen and
joins—who knows—988,000 English words or more,

As a new birthed star joins our known universe of—who knows—
22 septillion other stars,
give or take a few quadrillion,

150 billion galaxies
150 billion stars
Do the math humbly,

Ulassa—
The Oxford English Dictionary will say it means
“the short sense of escape we can experience,
when something really bad has happened”,

like, a child sister has gone missing or
we hear we may lose a foot from frostbite,
so in those short escapes from ongoing pain,

We get will get ulassa,
from meditation or the bottom of
a rum cola—

or the red coals
of a summer campfire,
the molecules of carbon
drinking oxygen.

Ulassa in the dictionaries,
will have no real etymology
for a while,

Having first breathed air only
on this morning of
May 23, 2013,

Ulassa will enter poems
and maybe yoga classes,
will become a cocktail and
an expensive perfume, eventually
a breed of cat, or surely the
name of a racehorse,
even a minor crater on
the surface of the moon,

Ulassa will live for four hundred years.
104 languages, give or take,
will borrow and ingest it,

Before it burns out like a star or “odd bodkin”
from Shakespeare, just remember,
It started Here, on this day.

Morningwriting

8:59 a.m. I know I need a poem'
so, fountain pen and pad at the ready
sitting slantwise view
on our tiny back deck
the morninglit green curve of my tall cinnamon fern
bold, bright, near-yellow the way
the sun insinuates itself on it
weaving through upward layers
of east facing trees
that let light shimmer this frond poised
as if it were a ballerina highlighted onstage
the hanging basket of mauve miniature petunias just above
almost obscure, that sun does not yet favor them
their moment on the stage will come soon enough.

And now I'm ready to think about that poem.

Dedication

She breathed deeply, then wrote:
“This book
would not have been possible,
without both my slyness
and fortitude,
in evading the distractions of
my husband’s badgering, drinking and
threatened suicide attempts,
and my children’s sweetly
relentless neediness.

Candles and Cathedrals

The many Notre Dames of France blazed
with candle constellations
nine hundred years ago but
that's just the start of it these
chiseled mountains rose from
Rouen, Chartres, and all over north France

Because candlemakers existed,
construction went into the summer nights
even if the project took two hundred years
Because carters, joiners, stone-masons, glaziers,
had to build, to move
Because butchers and greengrocers
had to feed the builders and movers
Because musicians, singers could not wait the decades out
to send their polyphonies not just up to God, but
to these early hardhats and townsfolk,
dragooned farmers working,
yes even by candlelight, but

That's just the start of it, we do forget
that string quartets, Erasmus, Luther, Dante,
lacemakers, servants delivering night toddies
and seeing to chamber pots—
this all was not squared away
before the sun went down, so

those slender tallow cylinders
topped by redyellow flames over
tiny halfmoons of blue heat
pushed civilization forward,

Not waiting for gaslights or Edison.

Richard Sime

Berry Eater

He wears a belt around each leg crotch-high,
red hardhat, aviator glasses, chain saw on his hip
as he leaps from branch to branch, lightly
alighting from time to time to adjust his ropes,
when he'll grab a handful of those berries.
Mulberries—we've spent too many summers
slogging through the purple paste that coats
the stone stairs and iron railings of our
Villa Charlotte Bronte, a confection
of buildings linked by walkways and arched
bridges along the Bronx bank of the Hudson.
The berries come from trees, large trees that
grow like weeds, raining sidewalks with fruit
from June until September, but even so
I've never tasted so much as one berry.
"Are they all that good?" my neighbor
hollers up to the man as his agitated
husband, who'd just as soon have the tree
cut down, pokes his head out then disappears.
The man pops another berry in his mouth
while he scans the tree for more ripe limbs
to hack off and send crashing to the ground.
Wiping juice from his mouth with the broad
back of his sun-stained hand, he yells down,
"They're the sweetest when you're on top, man,"
then pins another victim in his thighs, and saws.

Bitch

His ear is pressed to his Muse's
breast, but she coughs up nothing—
a few yelps of love from a dog
(his dog, female, a bitch they'd say,
yet gentle), love based on scraps
from the table, a dry place
to sleep, someone to untangle
burrs from her coat, to sit still
as she tongues toes, nose, any limb
unclothed—all just dog data, no
heart. To his Muse he says "Leave,"
then glances down: The dog sits
at his feet, marmoreal, front legs
stiff, back legs askew, belly bare
and hot, just as he remembers.
A full hour he stares. Not one
muscle moves. No, he won't write.

Opera Night

They're all like that: Ruse, mystery
morals. I came to, pieces of it still
in mind, *Così* something or other,
but the rest—the front, the exterior,
the unflappable—they're all here.

I'd say, *Il faut renoncer chaque syllabe*
if I spoke French. Why not Prussian?
Why not sub-American? Whatever,
evasion is essence. Nothing matters.
Everything's inconsequential, but . . .

All in its place. Your underwear's
in the laundry room. The ensembles
are breezy and serene. An affectation?
Mediterranean deceit? Turn rightside
out before dying. Lower the boom.

Dog Day

My bed a raft. She's on it with me and her lamb,
black ears, dead squeaker. I'm resting my
fatigue. Damaged joints, inflammatory.
Used to be, I'd hang off to the floor, her lair
when she was underneath, anchor myself
with one hand, scratch her belly with the other.
Now I grab the lamb and launch it
across the room, out the door,
though she'll return it. Such gentle jaws.

The bed's head is elevated, two bricks
prone, a plank across, head
over heels: For my hiatal hernia, when too much
food is stuck inside. Today I'm full
of words, my friend's words, her folk voice.
"Feelings, bind," she writes. A wish,
a prayer, an invocation. Her words draw my thoughts
to the floor, the tilt of bed, the smell of stain
and wood down there, the cool, the cheerful shine.

It's been hot. Close, we used to say,
my room a stale, unventilated
sigh. Even the living room, double-height,
banks of windows on the Hudson.
Down there I saw a dog, my neighbor's
red and white Brittany, focused, focused
on his ball, panting, pacing, tongue lolling off his teeth
to the ground. She rose and limped to him,
lofted the ball again toward the river.

Mine's female. (Ah, these females.)
Once she crawled into my lap when I was filled with
I don't know what. Satan? She there
on my lap with this fury inside. We sat still,
the two of us, a kind of draining. Now her chin rests
on the lamb's white chest. Only the squeaker's
dead: The lamb's alive. Five summers in her jaws,
the quiet chewing, peaceful
and delicate, a song.

Jennifer Popoli

Generations in a wine dark sea

Instead of fresh herbs, what I rub on my skin now
is nettles, I cry out and delight in the dramatic effect
The adolescent is standing before me, is not me,
his eyelashes pretty now he leaves them alone,
He's moved on to finger cracking. He ought to understand,
the age is right, is it not? to say to him, let's talk now
about travelling cumulous clouds, moon riding day sky,
hair falling in dust, cats brushing legs like foliage,
tropical night breeze, whirling, spinning maple seeds,
crunchy autumn leaves and one small lone blue feather,
reappearing
in unpredictable places, pressed between the pages of books
like forgotten
euros, Let's talk about damp yellow grass recently nour-
ished, slumber, lotus-
eaters and opiates, acres of coconut trees, Let's talk about
eyes sharp as a puma's
and moving limbs more precise in the darkness, a lifted
curse, a shattering vase,
a slice of papaya, a still dark brown face, flapping through a
sanctimonious night
and memories of many lives, let's talk about dirty quartz
and the smell of
seashells while washing hair, flecked eyes that sparkled
with a spice like
pimento, lips wet with fruit, the scythe that hacked the
clouds into streaks of
plasma, the plotless story, the sequential paintings, your
ticking hand that ruled
time and weather, the world splitting into a series of images,
all times and
possibilities, in one unique frame, the ruffling of hair and
heart possession that
echoes across the aeons.

Lost fairy

They poisoned the Argentinian trumpet vine
because it got too comfortable, sprouted everywhere
like a weed, and replaced it with some other flowering vine
more white and well-mannered. I suspected them of racism
but it was their house. When I moved here, the flowers seemed
to be in my face like the advertising, although the convolvulus always
tended to remind me of Borges. No more discreet kangaroo paws, subtle
Geraldton wax, bedraggled wattle. Here the bedraggled wattle is me,
amongst
those other belles, the saucy snapdragons, self-sufficient succulents,
ubiquitous
petunias, spicy nasturtiums, whose population seems to dwindle in
every suburb
where we live, along with the European dandelions, washed of residual
herbicides and thrown in our soups. We are foragers, tribespeople
with little ones strapped to my front and my back, a stolen cumquat
or rosemary leaf perpetually between my teeth. How did *dente di leone*
translate to dandelion? The plant has teeth, it's rough, roughage.
I slurp the nectars, check the parallel lines on the leaves before
chewing native sarsaparilla, tear my sandalled feet to ribbons
in the sparse strips of bush between train stations, teach the kids
to hoist themselves over a tall rock. We run away here when we can't
stand
being at home. I pretend for a moment that I haven't been domesticated,
pretend for one afternoon, I still have big, purple, feathery wings.

Other lives

A staircase leading to a new continent
The smell of a man's body, never known
but so vividly imagined
Practising the words "I love you"
It's been some time since they were said in English
It's been some time since they were meant.
A child told to count windmills on her way to boarding school
A child about to be abandoned
Windmills and hair, windmills blowing hair
Watermelon carved and eaten
with plastic spoons because knives are forbidden
A paedophile uncle and a new pink A-cup bra
Raindrops on car windows
Imprisoned in a car
A game that gives identities and voices to each raindrop
Clusters of raindrops that join and separate
Massive drops that steamroll diagonally
separating families, drawing baby raindrops from their mummies
How they cried!
I can still hear their distraught voices

Femaleness

There comes a time when you can look a man in the face
While he's doing something else, and instead of being
dazzled, by his phenomenal good looks...
nothing. You can live without him.
His track pants are too daggy
his toenails too long
his ears too greasy
his nose too bulbous
his penis too crooked
his glasses too big
It's those glasses and the way
he looks fixedly at the computer screen
It's the way men relate better to computers than women
It's their onanism (which is just a fancy word for masturbation)
which yes we all do, of course, but for me it's about sailing
 higher, higher
above apricot coloured clouds. For them it's about believing
 women exist only for them. Oh! Let me withdraw further,
 further into my inner worlds...
Let me see all colours behind my eyelids, especially bright
 green
Let me be a retreating dot in an enormous swimming
universe. Let me be cradled, floating in space.
Sustain me now. Sustain me now.

Mastitis

Cinderella is on the stairs in a flurry. My story
hasn't been written yet. Nothing resolves.
Scientist are on the verge of a breakthrough
that may save us by destroying another world.
Metal drums full of fire. A dispersion of men in overalls
leaping for joy when they find the key, scissor kicks in the sky.
A knowing god looks down upon our treetops and sighs.
The time is now, it's running out, ça ira, ça ira,
I tingle. Nerves twinge. Something terrible may still happen.
My breasts are being milked for yet another hour
and I shiver endlessly in a feverish infected delirium.
Boys cavort and ignore me. They're used to this.
Downstairs you grizzle and mutter in your usual way.
Something smashes in a doorway. More curses.
Flat on the bed, making a leap fifteen years back in time
I am left with an upturned palm full of sperm and a decision to make.

Contributor Notes

Born in 1926, **Robert Barasch** grew up in Alabama, moved to New York in 1952, and to Vermont in 1970 with his wife and three children. He worked as a newspaper editor and reporter before getting a PhD in clinical psychology, retiring in 1996 and writing poetry and fiction since that time. His poems have been published in several journals and he recently published a novel, *Parallel Play*.



Michael Berkowitz was born in Michigan, raised in Maryland, and earned his degree in Classical Latin and Greek from Oberlin College. He now lives in Somerville, Massachusetts where he makes his living as a web developer and occasional musician while studying poetry and circus arts. He is delighted to have his poems debut in *Sixfold*.



Mariah Blankenship received a Bachelors in English from Radford University and a Masters of Education. She currently teaches Creative Writing and English in Virginia where she lives with her tiny Yorkie and bearded boyfriend. She likes to read depressing feminist poetry and transcendental literature while watching trash reality television and war movies.



Michael Brokos earned his MFA in 2012 from Boston University, where he received the Hurley Award. He has also received a work-study scholarship from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and his work appears in *Hobart*, *Salamander*, and elsewhere. He lives in Baltimore.



Paul R. Davis lives in central New York State with his wife, parrots and cats. Now retired, he enjoys operating model trains, philately, gardening, and preparing meals with his wife. His work has been published in *Latitudes*, *Comstock Review*, *Comrades*, *Hot Metal Press*, *Georgian Blue Poetry Anthology*, *The Externalist*, *Centrifugal Eye*, and others. He believes in a simple poetic philosophy: to wit, the joy of expression, the necessity of communication.



Lisa DeSiro was among the featured poets of the Tupelo Press 30/30 Project in 2013. Her poems have appeared in *Common-thought Magazine*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and *Poetpourri* (now *The Comstock Review*), and have been used as texts for acclaimed musical compositions. In addition to her MFA in Creative Writing from Lesley University, she has degrees in music and is an accomplished classical pianist. She is also Editorial & Production Assistant for *C.P.E. Bach: The Complete Works*.



Roger Desy For careers I taught literature and creative writing and edited technical manuals. My plan was to write. The past few years I've come back to short lyrics, where I began and continue to find myself. Poems are in *Cider Press Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Pinch*, *Poet Lore*, and other journals. Early mornings it's only the poem.



Catherine Dierker studied English at George Washington University in Washington, DC and went on to earn a Master's Degree in Anglo-Irish Literature from University College Dublin in Dublin, Ireland. Her master's thesis was titled: "Joyce, Kierkegaard and Community." Catherine lives and writes in Chicago, IL. She is currently applying for admission to law school.



William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and teaches at Keene State College. His most recent book of poetry is *The Suburbs of Atlantis* (2013). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals, including *Massachusetts Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Alembic*, *New England Quarterly*, *Worcester Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Modern Philology*, *Antioch Review*, and *Natural Bridge*.



R. G. Evans's poems, fiction and reviews have appeared in publications such as *Rattle*, *The Literary Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, and *Weird Tales*. His original music, including the song, "The Crows of Paterson," was featured in the 2012 documentary film *All That Lies Between Us*. His first book of poetry, *Overtipping the Ferryman*, will be published in 2014 by Kelsay Books.



Born in San Francisco, raised in Wyoming, **Mike Fleming** set out on a long, winding path: undergraduate work at Princeton, teaching English in refugee camps in Thailand, a graduate degree from Oxford, teaching high-school mathematics in Swaziland, work as a carpenter, hospice volunteer, and college composition teacher in California, living as a writer and editor in New York, New Hampshire, and now Brattleboro, Vermont. You can see more of Fleming's work at www.dutchgirl.com/foxpaws



John Glowney has practiced commercial litigation with a large Pacific Northwest law firm, Stoel Rives LLP, for over 30 years. He is a past winner of several Hopwood Awards at the University of Michigan, a Pushcart Prize, Poetry Northwest's Richard Hugo Prize, and the Poetry Society of America's Robert H. Winner Memorial Award. He's heard all the lawyer jokes and has repeated most of them. He lives in Seattle.



Originally from Kansas, **Anne Graue** lives, writes, and teaches online from her home in New York's Hudson Valley. Her poems have appeared in *Paradigm*, *Compass Rose*, *Sixfold Journal* (May, 2013), and *The 5-2: Crime Poetry Weekly*. She was a finalist for the Patricia Dobler Poetry Award for 2013. She is a reviewer for NewPages.com.



Henry Graziano Unless one would count a single effort my freshman year in college many decades ago, I am unpublished. I have spent most my years as a high school teacher, business owner, and traveler on the edges of Midwestern society. I am writing now after those many years of merely reading the work of others.



Stephanie L. Harper resides with her husband and two children in the Portland, OR, metro area, where she pursues (among countless other interests) the following avocations: Home Schooling Parent; Poet and Essayist; 2-D Visual Artist; Soccer Player; and Promoter (together, with like-minded others) of social justice and of fostering the advancement and welfare of our collective human psyche. Stephanie aspires to become a positive literary voice in the global community.



Karen Hoy lives in Bradford-on-Avon in England and has a Creative Writing Diploma from Bristol University. Her poetry has appeared in journals and anthologies including *Another Country: Haiku Poetry from Wales* (Gomer) and *My Mother Threw Knives* (Second Light Publications). Karen works as a Development Producer in international TV documentaries. She also helps at With Words, co-designing writing courses. For each "difficult" poem, Karen aims to write at least one joyful one.



Philip Jackey, a Midwest poet, was born and raised in South Bend, Indiana. His work is heavily influenced by human trial and tribulations, as he strives to portray realism in everyday life. He currently resides in Elkhart, Indiana, with wife Stephanie, two boys, and a brand new beautiful baby girl. His work has appeared in journals such as *Torrid Literature*, *The Write Place at the Write Time*, *Sundog Lit*, and *Agave Magazine*.



Christopher Jelley was born in Welwyn Garden City, England. Emigrating to Atlanta in 1968, he studied journalism at Georgia State University. Jelley has written scripts for instructional and travel videos, and commercials. His work most recently appeared in *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume V: Georgia*.



Mike Lythgoe retired as an Air Force Officer before earning an MFA from Bennington College. He has lived and worked in Washington, DC, Syracuse, NY, Miami, Key West, Izmir, Turkey, Madrid, Spain, and London, UK. His collection, *Holy Week*, is available as an e-book; his chapbook, *Brass*, won the Kinloch Rivers contest in 2006. Recent credits include *Windhover*, *Santa Fe Review*, *Cairn: St. Andrews Review*, *Blue Streak*, *Petigru Review*, *Innissfree*, *Pea River*, *Christianity & Literature*, and *Sixfold*. He lives in Aiken, SC.



Rande Mack I live in Manhattan, Montana. I weatherize low-income housing for a non profit. I write poetry to keep the lights on inside my head. Occasionally a poem or two flicker in a small publication somewhere. "wild life" is a sample of even more wild life.



Alysse Kathleen McCanna grew up in Wisconsin and studied Art History at Smith College. After graduation she moved to sunny Colorado and resides between the mountains and the plains. Alysse works for Colorado State University in Pueblo and is an MFA candidate at Bennington College.



Michal Mechlovitz is a Brooklyn-based classical singer. A graduate of the Boston Conservatory, Michal served as Editor and President of the Boston Conservatory's literary publication, *The Garden*. She has returned to her native Brooklyn to further her singing and writing pursuits. She loves sundresses and iced coffee.



Peter Nash has been practicing medicine for forty years in Northern California. He writes most mornings, occasionally helps his wife in the garden, boards two old mares, and wanders along the Mattole River with his dog Quigley. He has been published in numerous journals and anthologies; his chapbook *Tracks* won the 2007 Hot Metal Press chapbook contest and his book, *Coyote Bush: Poems From The Lost Coast*, was the winner of the 2012 Off the Grid Poetry Prize.



Andrea Jurjević O'Rourke's poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *The Missouri Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *The Rag*, *Barrelhouse*, *Raleigh Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and elsewhere. She is the 2013 Robinson Jeffers Tor Prize Winner. A native of Croatia, she lives in Atlanta now, where she translates, paints (oils on cotton paper and acrylics on canvas) and attends the MFA program at Georgia State University.



Jennifer Popoli I grew up in Canberra and during adolescence wrote a lot of poetry, prose and unfinished novels and participated in the local writers community. At age seventeen, I met my husband and moved to Sydney. I gave birth to my first son at age eighteen and went on to have five children, then recommenced my degree in Spanish and Italian. Recently, my computer broke; I lost everything. This inspired me to begin writing prolifically again.



Susan Marie Powers I live in the Connecticut woods with my husband, son, cat, dog, and ten chickens. I have a doctorate in psychology and teach psychology at Woodstock Academy in northeastern Connecticut where my students make me smile every day. As for writing, I have loved writing since I was a small child. I have a chapbook titled *Break the Spell*, and I have also published some nonfiction articles in psychology journals.



Frederick L. Shiels, PhD, has taught at Mercy College since 1977. He has been an occasional poet for forty years and has written and published poetry in the *Hudson River Anthology*, *Wicker's Creek*, and *The New Verse News*. He teaches diplomacy, research, and self-presentation in classes on International Organizations, International Relations, American Foreign Policy and US history and politics.



A native of North Dakota, **Richard Sime** moved to New York City in 1966 to work on a doctorate degree but soon drifted into publishing. He returned to school later, earning an MFA in fiction writing in 1994. Eventually he turned his attention to poetry, and his poems have appeared in *The New Republic*, *Barrow Street*, *Salamander*, *American Arts Quarterly*, *Provincetown Arts*, and *Passager*. He lives in the Bronx, NY.



A graduate of the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast MFA Poetry Program, **David Sloan** teaches in Maine's only Waldorf high school. He is the author of two books on teaching. His debut poetry collection, *The Irresistible In-Between*, was published by Deerbrook Editions in 2013. His poetry has appeared in *The Broome Review*, *The Café Review*, *Innisfree*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, *Poetry Quarterly* and *Passager*, among others. He received the 2012 Betsy Sholl and Maine Literary awards, and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.



Katherine Smith's poems and fiction have appeared in a number of journals, among them *Mezzo Cammin*, *Unsplendid*, *Measure*, *Fiction International*, *Gargoyle*, *Ploughshares*, *The Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Appalachian Heritage*. Her first book, *Argument by Design* (Washington Writers' Publishing House), appeared in 2003. She teaches at Montgomery College in Maryland.



A psychic on the Long Island Railroad once told **Alexandra Smyth** she was “going to be like Sylvia Plath, but you know, without the whole suicide thing.” She will earn her MFA in Creative Writing from The City College of New York in February 2014. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Word Riot*, *PoetsArtists*, and *District Lines*, among others. She is the 2013 recipient of the Jerome Lowell Dejur award in poetry.



Gary Sokolow has an aging MFA (Brooklyn College) and has been published in *Blood Lotus Journal*, *Up the Staircase*, and *Chantarelle's Notebook*.



John Wentworth received his MFA from the University of Michigan in 1991. That was a long time ago. Look for his upcoming novel in a box in an attic near you.

