

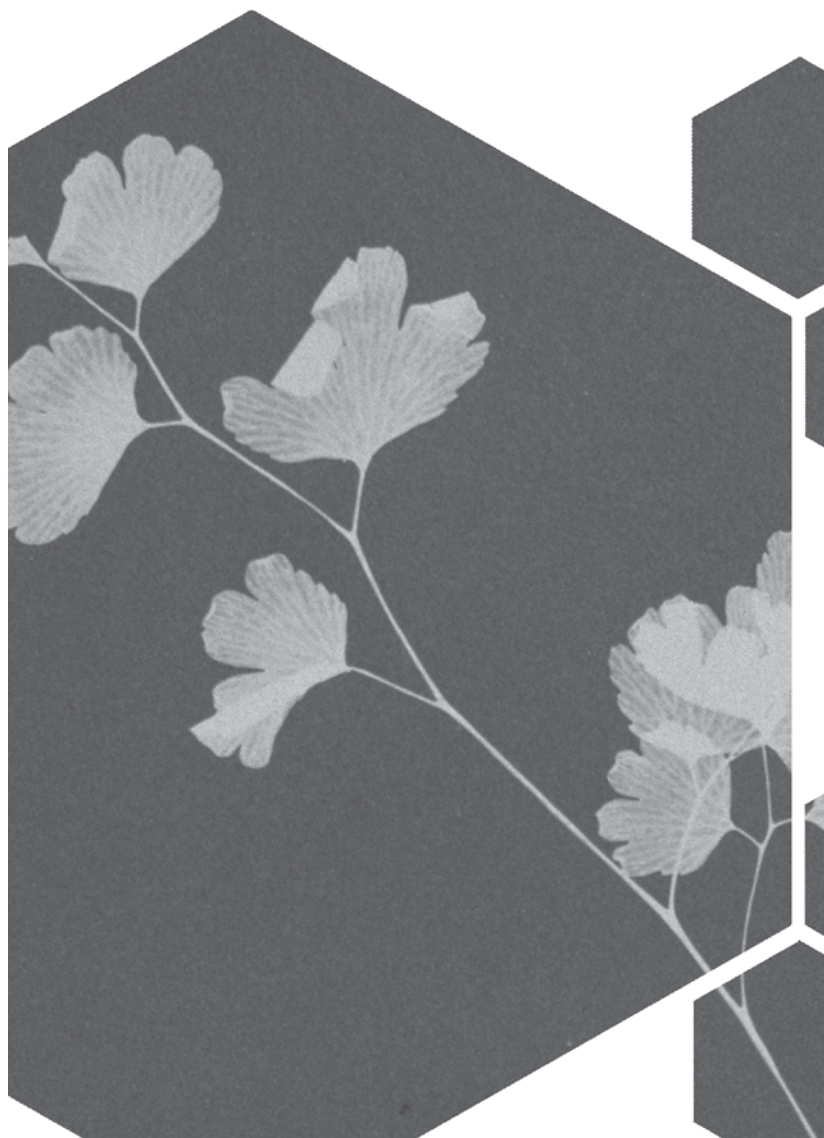
# SIXFOLD

POETRY WINTER 2014



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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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# Debra Palmer

## Bake Sale

Don't eat the wrapper.  
Nobody doesn't know this.  
So when my mother ate the cupcake  
paper and all, in one shoved-in bite and hissed  
*"don't you say a word,"*  
all the way home  
from the Ockley Green Middle School bake sale  
I thought about the paper in her stomach.

What if anyone saw her?  
What would they say? Like my best friend's mother  
who taught us how to count to ten in Cherokee  
and caught my father's eye. I thought  
it was because he liked her slacks  
or because she worked part-time at Sears,  
but my mother said it was because  
she was petite and had a stick  
up her ass. What would she say?

I carried my cupcake in both hands, its top  
a coiled green snake with gold sprinkles.

To want anything so much, to devour it like that,  
must be deadly.

## In The Week Before Her Death My Mother Hallucinates in Email:

I was thirsty. I walked to the yard shed  
where the women were selling water. I had  
no money. I was so glad  
to see the only friend I had at church.  
I held out my hands and she filled them  
with sweet, cool water.

I was followed by a priest. She said  
she could see my unhappiness.  
I told her everything  
right there in the yard  
it poured like white words, gushed  
from my mouth like a river of tumors.

The priest said, "*Come with me, my dear.*"  
I said the only thing I know  
in Japanese, the word for pocket,  
"ポケット, poketto"  
and pulled from my own, a note  
and unfolded it.  
"*Just love them,*" it read.

Two great white Pyrenees came to tell me  
all of the beautiful things in dying.  
When I asked them to walk me there,  
they stood at my side and waited. This is why  
I'm afraid to close my eyes.

# Breasts

The first time I kissed a woman's breasts  
I understood

men  
how they root and paw

how they knead and pull  
to prove they're really here

how they suck a bruise  
around the nipple

how they get completely lost  
in between

how they smash and grab  
apologize and hang on anyway

or, how they hold two birds so gently  
they can only feel them

when they let go.

## Late Bloomer

*“Mama had a baby and its head popped off.”*  
The severed head of the dandelion  
drops from my guillotine thumb

the yellow burst of weed  
held under my chin  
*“Do you like butter?”*

A little blonde girl whose parents are deaf  
opens her mouth. *“Talk like your parents,”* I insist,  
shoving in a cud of grass.

She cries without sound—so hard  
that the daisy chain crown  
shakes from her head.

I just want her to speak with her hands.

# I Love Parasites

I love parasites for their barbs and hooks  
for their many names & forms:  
Tapeworm, Poinsettia, Blood Fluke,  
Twin, Mother, Jehovah's Witness.  
I love them for their shameless  
savagery & nerve.

I love fetuses—also parasites  
who live off the mother's body.  
Then, as nature dictates,  
the mother becomes the parasite,  
depositing into her offspring  
her tumors, hair & teeth.

I love my twin brother who stays  
alive siphoning off my blood  
& laughing about it from his lovely  
teratoma mouth.

I love the Jehovah's Witness ladies  
who feed off my politeness.  
I love to invite them in.  
We take turns holding my mother's upper denture  
like a poison leaf. I love passing around  
the bag that was my mother's prosthetic breast,  
the silicone pellets hissing inside.

I love the cup of my mother's hair  
the gray curls like smoke. Before we burned her body,  
she asked me if I would wear her bones  
around my neck.

I already wear them,  
couldn't take them off  
if I wanted to.

# Ann V. DeVilbiss

## Far Away, Like a Mirror

I've gone out walking  
to see if I can meet myself  
on sleeping streets  
muffled with snow.

A rabbit is standing stock-still  
in the center of the road,  
as if refusing to move  
will keep him safe.

I wonder if the rabbit is me  
and how I can prove it.  
At night the snow  
holds the sky captive.

The rabbit sleeps curled up,  
deep under the ground,  
under the layers of trapped sky,  
under the real sky,

which is orange like an echo,  
which seems far away, like a mirror.  
I go back home and try  
to stay up all night.

I want to watch the snow let loose  
the dawn, freeing the sky. I want to  
see the light cast over the rabbit,  
see it change him,

but I fall asleep again,  
wake fur matted, confused.  
I keep seeking new things  
on all the same cold roads.

I need to know  
which way to run.  
I don't know  
where to run to.



## Seasonal

We go west in the mornings, east  
in the evenings. We know the sun  
only by its heat and shadows;  
we are home only when it's dark.

The world seems full  
of monsters. The grass is  
uneven, sharpened by frost.  
A man spits on my porch,

tells me I can't park  
in front of my house because  
that's his spot, always has been.  
The stains on his teeth are older than I am.

A few weeks later he is arrested for fraud,  
having let his mother's body rot  
in his house for months while he  
collected her social security checks.

Once he is gone,  
the house stays vacant  
because of the smell, and I  
park wherever I want.

Crows line the eaves  
like undertakers, bray  
like donkeys, begin  
to outnumber us.

The world is too big  
for safety, but here  
in our house,  
there is reason for joy.

Still, sorrow comes back,  
pulled to me like  
water to the moon.

## Down for the Count

When the thunder rumbles  
I know he is looking for me  
and I count

*one, two, three, four*  
between the flash and roar.

The row of American flags  
across the street looks  
downtrodden and a little afraid.  
I stick close to the eaves.

Before the storm the yard  
was full of strange birds,  
pelicans and hummingbirds  
arriving in the wrong season.

He rolls his thunder tongue  
through the clouds like  
a snake in amber grasses.  
*One, two, three,* and I am

bathing in electric light.  
A count of *one* is too quick  
to hide from, but somehow  
the driving rain feels  
clean, like a refuge.

His sky voice is big enough  
to reach me anywhere.

# The Reckoning

His life is like a tango  
between before and after.  
Sometimes it fills his head  
with oatmeal. Sometimes  
his story is full of holes.

When he speaks of the loss,  
he refuses to whisper, and  
his loud voice pitches high,  
like the keening of a sawmill:  
flashing metal on dark wood.

His loss is like a small child  
who has always been hiding  
under the dinner table, and he  
could hear her muffled giggles,  
her earnest whispers, for years  
before she came out in the open.

His loss is like a scar that has  
to be told about because he  
wears it under his sweater,  
where no one can see.

His loss comes out to meet him,  
to tell him she's always been waiting for him.  
He takes her hand and they walk together.

# Harp

I will make a harp of you,  
your hair curled around  
its strings, the wood

of its flank flushed with  
the color of your cheek  
as you try to decide how

to say what comes next.  
The harp will sing with  
the sound of glass broken,

accidentally, woven into  
a strain of careful laughter.  
It will hum with uncertainty.

When you are away  
I will know it is silent,  
though I am deaf.

# Michael Fleming

## On the Bus

Life into legend, legend into life—  
I once was you, Alex Supertramp—fresh  
out of school, half nuts, no money, no wife,  
no work, no matter. The sins of the flesh  
were behind me, beneath me, beyond me.  
Another self-inventing dharma bum  
on the road to anywhere, off to see  
the elephants, bound for glory. And from  
such dry, dreary soil I'd sprung—I was you,  
Alex—naked in my cast-off clothes, so  
full of myself, so empty, just a few  
well-tasted words were enough when the low  
clouds to the west whispered, *Get on the bus*,  
and I got on, and you got on—we wanted  
more, magic, furthur, Alaska—I must  
have crossed the river. But you? You were gone.

*for Chris McCandless*

## Paging Doctor Bebop

The good doctor, he knows all that book stuff—  
the flatted fifth, Italian baroque—hell,  
he wrote the book, and that would be enough  
if books were enough, but he won't just sell  
you on the art of listening, he'll give  
you the real medicine, body and soul—  
the silver horn, the music that you live  
for, music that you die for, that the whole  
world needs to hear, *now*—the clickity klack  
of time on the rails, the spike in the blood  
and the colors of sound. Where have you gone,  
Doctor Bebop? And when will you be back?  
Life's so syncopated—starts and stops. Good  
music, though—man, it just goes on and on

*for Howie Brofsky*

## Mr. McPhee's Class

Jouncing. Dolos. Craton. Words you serve like oranges, unpeeling their sounds. We're not just horsing around in canoes, or hitchhiking newly made reefs, measuring the crust after the quake—we're holding words to our nostrils, inhaling, truly tasting them, getting them down. Yes, we love this class. Our urgently unhurried task: stratagem and structure, a sense of where we are. You model the hair shirts we'll wear, naturalized citizens of this country we've come into, promising too much, eager but unwise, hardly writers yet and our hearts don't break even when you tell us: keep squeezing, guys—every good word takes as long as it takes.

*for John McPhee*

## Attending

He loses every case—it's hospice, he knows that. Isn't medicine supposed to mean saving people, healing them, saying no to death? The right technique, the right machine, the right dosage—isn't that what a doctor should know? Coax fire from the spark of life—is that what he should do? But no one walks out of here. Nothing is fixed with a knife in here. They're goners—we all are. So when did *doctor* stop meaning *teacher*—is that where we went wrong? Best to call him attending physician—here to bear witness. What else can the white coat mean, if not surrender—tending what is broken, what is not.

*for Derek Kerr*



# The Audacity of the Jaguar

My world is not your world. Who was here first?  
And who is the master? My amber eyes,  
they're voiceless mirrors—imagine the worst  
of me, call me coward, devil, beast. Why

should I burden myself with your fears? You  
peer into these eyes and see nothing that  
you know beyond your own reflection. Who  
are you now? My wanderings are no matter

of yours—if you gaze into my coat  
of a thousand eyes, I melt into smoke,  
into spirit, into memory. Go  
to bed now, lie beside your wife. That low

cough—just her soft snoring? Sleep. Dream your dreams  
of all that you will do with fences, fire—  
your farm, your *fincá*—oh, how it all seems  
to be yours. And when you awaken, I

recede and I wait and I watch until  
you send your shadow man. And I'll remain  
here, hidden, choosing what I want to kill.  
Closer—I can bite you through to the brain.

*for Alan Rabinowitz*

# Harold Schumacher

## Dying To Say It

The decision was made—  
we went in and killed her—  
a squad of father, sister, uncle, aunt,  
doctor, nurse, chaplain, myself,  
and the finger of God.

We went in and killed mom—  
all of us, none of us, stole  
the tubes from her dark veins,  
slipped off the switches of life,  
slid in the syringe of peace, but

We all heard—  
the metronomic clicking stop,  
saw the green mountains pass by,  
shrinking on the screen like troops  
marching down sloping holes.

We all heard—  
the sighing respirator stop  
and waited and watched  
in the silence,  
the deceiving silence.

She breathed alone—alone—  
she breathed alone—  
she breathed—

“ . . . cannot compare to the suffering  
of the present—with the glory to be,”  
verses the chaplain glued appropriately  
an anthology—

she—

We came before her throne  
with rites of passage.  
“Nita”—her brother whispered German in her ear.  
“Nita”—her sister whispered, unclear.

The pendulum slowed like the sunset—  
small waves of golden white  
so faint, delicate, and slight,  
seeped back into darkness,  
the deep hole of creation  
where something hovered  
like breath and light.

He was wounded early and deep,  
a boy’s feelings fired to ashes,  
who never trapped fireflies,  
watched eagles and sunsets,  
got crazy and laughed till he cried,  
never made birds of clay,  
never on a tender bet—

my father,  
always in the next room,  
who hid between sheets of anger,  
dropped his first tears before her,  
like blood and lead. He said  
his words, falling like stars,

“Goodbye—  
we had good lives together.”

## Winter's Edges

When the edges of winter appear, and  
    the cardinals haven't sung since early August,  
When the jays speak every second day, and  
    the trees lose weight, training for the test,  
When the geese, calmed down, caw less, and  
    the freeways are quiet after midnight,

When will the next funeral be, and  
    whose will it be, and  
Where will they be, the dead,  
    unburied until the spring thaw,  
Their bodies lying in cinder block  
    waiting rooms?

You said you wanted to die  
    that first winter we were married.  
You said so much, so many things,  
    now buried in ground too frozen to break.  
The memories lie waiting in  
    the stone house of many rooms,  
Not heard since some forgotten August  
    until now at winter's edges, but  
No spring thaw will ever come.

When I hear the wind again, at night,  
    blowing from brick-lined streets  
Trying to enter and sleep with me,  
    sounding like prairie photos of North Dakota  
Where you and I were young,  
    so young, too young,  
Speaking only every second day, at times,  
    and the veins stood out on our necks,

And the winds blew hard, and loud  
    as blizzard-lost cattle,  
And the windows rattled, and the geese  
    had gone to more pleasant places,

I know the only weight we lost  
    was our minds.

# God Next Time

And will I ever see more of God except in the sunrise and the storm?  
Ever see more than the beauty of the flowers and fields, or  
a beautiful child in a grocery cart staring back at me,  
ever see more than a quiet sea on an early morning beach,  
or stunned still trees in the forest, or the swoosh of water on my  
boat's bow?

What is the face of God other than these, than the love of my wife,  
the love of my friends, a happy dog, the yellow bird in my feeder,  
the solitude of silence, the greens of Ireland's springs,  
the shades, hues, and tints. Did the primitives experience more?

And would I recognize him if I saw him, or her—this God they talk about?  
Would s/he be Jesus again, or a woman this time? Next time  
God might choose a female to show the world for sure  
that compassion is the way—softness, gentleness, composure, calm,  
the receptiveness of the vagina, the yielding of spread thighs,  
the Mary-ness of surrender, the warmth of the womb,  
the mother's hovering spread wings.

And what if the second coming really were a woman coming down  
out of the clouds, a glorious lovely woman of light?  
And who would our heroes be then, the next time around  
in the new creation, and who would we be  
if we followed her?

# Alejandro

After the drunk tourists  
are done drinking in Mexico,  
going past my window at 5:00 AM  
waking me when the darkness  
is still holding fast,

I quit arguing with myself  
about whether or not  
I have to piss,  
get up and do it, then  
to the kitchen for a liquid replacement  
and a look outside the window.

Red and blue flashing policia trucks  
drive by slowly, and  
in their eerie stabbing strobing lights  
I see him—  
I've seen him twice this week  
in the dawn—

Alejandro—

the groundskeeper, sweeping  
the parking lot  
the sidewalks, even the street  
with a broom, a pan  
and a wheeled garbage can,

sweeping with fervent thrusting strokes,  
like a forest-fire fighter  
like a lumber jack splitting logs,  
like a man beating down a concrete wall  
with a sledge,  
or a soldier pushing back  
bacterial armies.

I wonder, standing by the window,  
I ask questions,

I compare the contrasts in this world  
between Alejandro and others  
who hours later would drive  
in gadgeted computerized vehicles  
to their rare-wood desks,  
soft swiveled chairs with high backs  
and lumbar supports,

to platters of glazed donuts,  
lattes, bonuses,  
profits, pensions, soft palms,  
and clean manicured fingernails.

I go back to bed—  
thinking, I can't sleep.  
I get up and look up  
three Spanish words,  
and memorize them. Exiting  
to the outer freshly-washed  
and scrubbed hallway,  
his bicycle locked to the wall,

I see him in the courtyard,  
sweeping the grounds again!  
bean pods, twigs, and seeds,  
flower petals, and leaves,  
all of the falling  
Mexican winter fecundity.

“Buenos dias, senor Alejandro.”  
“Buenos dias, senor.”  
“Como estas?”  
“Bien, gracias, y tu?”  
“Bien, muy bien.”

Then with language skills  
of a two year old,  
I begin my memorized speech  
as I wave my arm across the yard  
like Crazy Horse defining

his lands and his people,

“Siempre”—(always)

“Todo”—(everything)

“Limpio”—(clean)

“Muchas gracias.”

Alejandro proudly beams  
so wide  
that I see the gold in his teeth.

“Si,” he says.



# War

I was in Melvin's garage  
towards the end of his life  
when he told me.  
I don't know why  
but I felt honored.

Melvin is one of those  
no bullshit guys  
who always tells it  
the way he sees it.  
He doesn't believe  
in lots of words,  
and certainly not  
embellishments.

He is the world's best  
and smartest mechanic,  
better than any doctor,  
not a body, or organ  
or limb, or vein  
he couldn't fix.

He gave me hell  
if I waited too long  
to service my truck.  
"That's a carbureted engine,  
not fuel injected,  
gas can get into your oil  
and pretty soon your cylinders  
get etched, then you get problems.  
Gotta change that oil more often,  
'specially in winter.  
Don't wait so damn long  
next time."

I always paid Melvin with a check  
made out to cash  
at his request, and would say,  
"Here's some tax-free income."

We both would smile,  
knowing he was a “screw ’em” guy  
when it came to income taxes,  
and how the government used his dollars  
to kill people.

One day when I paid,  
this is what he said.  
“I was in the war, you know,  
in the Pacific theater.”

“Yes. Weren’t damn near all you guys  
in town there?” I always threw in some  
cuss words—guy talk, you know.

“Yup, me and Don enlisted together  
and fought together, it was hell,  
I tell ya. No fun. Seen it all.  
Arms hanging on tree branches,  
brains stuck on bark, eyeballs,  
chunks of skull with hair,  
hands, legs, feet, ears, cocks,  
strewn all over the place.  
Hell, even on my weapon,  
and my hands,  
and face,  
in my mouth,  
on my uniform,  
in my helmet—

just wipe it off,  
spit it out  
and keep on shooting.  
What the hell can you do?  
It’s either you,  
or them  
gonna die.  
I did what I had to do,  
ya got no choice.

Killing ain’t easy,  
you know.”

“Don’t tell me about war.  
I’ve been there.  
It isn’t right, I tell ya, goddamnit,  
no matter what those bastards say,  
all a bunch of damn liars  
if you ask me.  
Someday they’re gonna pay,  
someday they’ll get theirs.”

It was the most  
I ever heard him say,  
and I couldn’t get it  
out of my head  
Sunday morning  
when I was in the pulpit  
and Melvin was sitting  
behind the pews  
in his usher’s chair,  
looking out the window  
while I was preaching  
lofty concepts about love.

When he came up front,  
the last to receive the host,  
we looked at each other,  
deep,  
and I said,  
“Melvin, this is the body  
of Christ,  
given for you.”

A holy mystery was happening,  
because killing  
isn’t easy,  
you know.

Someday.  
Someday.

# Heather Erin Herbert

## Georgia's Advent

We laughed about it two years back  
when I first saw cotton, white hot in the field.  
Cicadas were sizzling in August heat  
as my heart jumped up at blankets of snow.  
I drove my car off the backwoods road  
to find my thrill melted in heatstroke air.

You thumped the table with your hand, Philly-boy,  
when I told you what I thought I'd seen,  
belched over your Coke can, winking and teasing:  
*How'd you get mixed up between snow and cotton?  
Such a Northern-girl, you know you're in Georgia?  
We need to get you out for a change.*

In fall, I drive us out past the fields.  
We sing together, you're tuneless but joyful.  
It's four o'clock, florid, last sky-blues, gold.  
We talk about hometowns, how down south is different,  
share coffee and stories,  
the pink sun in my mirrors.

My nails turn wood-smoke grey on the wheel,  
I pull my sleeves down at the end of our songs.  
You point at cotton through shadows of pecans,  
then smile at me, saying: *It looks just like our snow.  
Looks almost like Christmas.  
It looks almost like home.*

# That Old Spark

That first time, lightning hit the tallest pine tree,  
the one I could see from school  
and say, "That one is mine."  
The charge ran from branch to roof to wire.  
A long blue spark shot out at my feet,  
leaving a dark scar on the hardwood.  
My mother threw us in the car, and  
begged us not to touch its metal sides.  
We watched firemen come  
to cut smoldering plaster from the walls.

The second time, we woke, the four of us,  
and watched the night scud over with clouds  
from the opening in our platform tent.  
We rubbed our arms, asking each other,  
"Are you cold? I have goose bumps."  
As fine hairs stood on our cheeks  
the world exploded over us, steaming,  
flying, hot shards of wood,  
the least of our problems, really,  
as half the tree landed across our canvas.

The third time, days later, we ran for cover  
down the side of a New York mountain.  
Over tree roots, over rock bridges,  
through curved dirt sluiceways,  
shortly to be filled with water.  
The last gasp dash across the open field.  
We ran, one at a time. Young, fast, lithe,  
my turn came, and the jolt gave me wings,  
throwing me from the charred circle that  
washed from the grass as I shook myself.

The fourth time, that same field, a week later.  
They say that lightning doesn't strike  
the same place twice. They're wrong.

The fifth time, watching flashing night from the kitchen,  
my two eldest children eating dinner beside me.  
I counted the space between lightning and thunder,  
adrenaline and safety,  
until there wasn't time between them to count.  
The oven screamed that its circuits were cooked,  
well done, while the house suddenly heaved  
back to purring life, and light. My youngest slept on,  
still sprawled across the oak floor  
where Sesame Street had left her.

The sixth time I said it wasn't that bad,  
and slipped my sandals into my fist  
so I could run through the rain in bare feet.  
As I stood outside the store I twisted my bags  
closed, pulled my bra in place, took my glasses off,  
and raised one foot,  
as lightning shattered the sign above my head.  
And I dove inside, the dark shop loud with voices,  
apologizing to the clerk next to me. "My bad,"  
I said, "that was probably my fault."

The seventh time happens on nights I sleep  
without the covers, and in the nude.  
I maintain it's the goose bumps on my back  
that start my old dream reel flickering.  
Hairs stand up, and my body knows  
that my bright friend has come to visit.  
I've died so many times in bed.  
My husband thinks I'm always cold,  
blankets to my chin, even in summer,  
but it's because in my dreams, I want to live.

# Bittersweet

For years  
I've said I could give my heart  
to a man who gave me a box of crayons.  
There's something precious  
about ninety-six  
clean blooms of color,  
in bouquets of violet  
and leaf green.

And for years I waited.  
He gave a gold ring  
that I paid for, a little,  
which broke in our fifth year.  
He gave cups of umber tea.  
Gave me five children,  
three of whom lived, beautiful,  
with deep cornflower eyes  
and carnation cheeks.  
He gave a brick red house to hold me still,  
and palettes of laundry  
in a never-ending landscape  
of sky blues and pinks.

But with all these things,  
I wanted crayons, the waxy,  
sour scent of a new fall,  
a new page, a new start,  
fresh and bright as the first day of school.  
Burnt sienna and mahogany,  
orange and scarlet,  
a blaze of potential  
rolling in my palm.

And this year,  
my eldest daughter,  
with a new woman-smile  
gave me a brown paper bag  
and said not to look, but  
just smell it.

I inhaled,  
and the colors poured back in me.

# Sharron Singleton

## Sonnet for Small Rip-Rap

Here is a wooden clothespin that grips  
a striped beach towel, rusty nail in the hinge  
no one has seen since nineteen thirty six.  
Yes, and safety pins, straight pins, bobby-pins

used to plaster curls to my head when I  
was twelve, obscure and forgotten as old  
bones of the lesser saints. They lie  
in dusty drawers, the plain things that uphold

us—buckles, zippers, paperclips, all  
the small earnest rip-rap that insist we  
button and snap and allow us the small  
pleasure of undoing. Praise especially

that which attaches, is unseen, spare—  
the needle that mends and binds up the tear.



# Why I Don't Write Poems About My Father

Old, mottled,  
algaed  
and scarred  
where hooks  
have ripped,  
the fish  
has gone  
deep, has sunk  
through brown-gold  
pillars of water,  
as if through  
a temple ruin,  
down beyond  
the reach of light,  
to lie hidden  
among weeds,  
tattered fins  
and fronds  
tremulous  
with the lake's  
slow breathing—  
the only sign  
of its presence,  
a shiver of circle,  
unnoticed except  
by the watchers,  
the heron  
and fisherman.  
Well hooked  
by his quarry,  
the fisherman  
wants both  
to catch and not  
catch, to scrape  
away the armor  
of scales,

to open, gut  
the creature—  
and still to glide  
upon the wide  
eye of the lake,  
oars dipping, just  
rippling the surface,  
the shadow  
of the boat  
sliding across  
the shadow  
that is the fish.

# Seed

I lay down  
life, crave

earth. Time's  
bell clangs

death, chimes  
birth, folds me

in its grip.  
Harrowed

in the grave  
I twist, split-

ting the shell,  
I leap from

the furrow,  
an old god,

green  
and knowing.

# Hottest Summer on Record

there's no  
resisting

the heat the air  
sags with moisture

boundaries blur  
between sea and sky

washed in bluegray  
congruity

air becomes  
ocean and we wade

into it lungs  
open and close

like gills back  
bones prickle

with forgotten  
fins each cell

a pouch of liquid  
edges dissolve

speech thought  
becomes vapor

spangled with sweat  
your body slips

into mine wet  
boneless and salty

we stroke together  
away from shore

# The Sleep After

While the pleasure of it  
rips through me  
like lightning on water,  
while I think this is  
what I could die for,  
have died for—

it is the sleep after  
in the arms  
of the fugitive moon,  
in the hands of that saint,  
the rose, in the mouth  
of the god  
that I long for.

# Bryce Emley

## College Beer

*the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
the thing itself and not the myth  
—Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck”*

It’s my first time in a real dive: dimly lit, Willie lilt, cue-ball-scuffed floor, basket of condoms by the door. I ask what they’ve got and stop her when she gets to Schlitz.

Before I *clack* the can open I conjure my father sneaking The Beer that made Milwaukee Famous into an Oral Roberts dorm,

swigging it mid-June Oklahoma storm from the driver seat of his first Austin-Healey,

dwelling in that space of time he lived the stories he tells.

Bitter, tinny, it tastes like college beer.

Hemorrhage paralyzed him at 43. He’s 64 now. He doesn’t drink. Every year is a stroke toward a closing surface,

a swimming out of the wreck,

the thing itself bluing into myth beneath.

The next round I take an AmberBock, and it tastes like it did in the Applebee’s on University all those times.

# Two Pompeiis

*In every living city the haunted ruin*  
—Robert Pinsky

i.

I'd like to think they didn't see it coming—  
denarii left on counters like quarters on a dresser,  
bodies bound in awful contortion,  
arms clung around Fortuna medallions—  
but the tremors in the earth a week before  
that shook their bones in god-like warning  
while they pressed and jarred wine  
grown and named on what would bury them,  
their doors inscribed with *Salve, lucru*  
ruin that tragedy, build us a new city still  
haunted by a decadence for us to marvel at  
as tourists and let ash and time conceal.

ii.

I'd like to think we didn't see it coming—  
our two bodies like bills wadded on a dresser,  
too bound in painless contortion for us to grasp  
that we had clung to what wouldn't save us—  
but how could we not have felt the tremors  
in our bones branching through marrow  
as we pressed tongues and fingers,  
buried ourselves beneath ourselves,  
our end always inscribing itself  
in our skin, ruined from our start  
by the decadence of flesh, the baggage  
we carried as tourists in each other's countries.

# Non-Small Cell

*What should we gain by a definition . . . ?  
—Ludwig Wittgenstein*

It could be large,  
maybe medium, basically  
whatever just isn't small.

One-fifth who have it last  
another five years—  
after that, some other statistic.

Nine times more common than small,  
more women than men,  
smokers and nonsmokers,

occasion for the one cigarette  
lying dormant  
in a drawer.

Clinical pamphlet,  
Harvard doctor,  
quick Google search—

some terms we can only define  
by fissures branching our chests,  
creating the loss by our knowing them.



# Harry Bauld

## On a Napkin

Imagine the table-bards  
of yore, filling the scraps  
with blotty elegies and kennings  
depending so much on the unfolding  
wheelbarrow-thoughts beside  
the chewed white chicken bones. I pine  
for the lost scop world of prescription  
pads, envelope backs, menus, telephone pole  
fliers and stub pencils borrowed  
from fat salesmen on trains,  
the crushed index cards  
with jam stains retrieved from deli trash.

But now I'm back in front  
of a moony screen, touching my eyes  
and fingers to what can never  
also be used to clean  
that dollop of cream cheese  
off your beautiful, hungry lip.

## Swift River

Two brook trout flash in the current,  
their iridescent shimmer a surrender

to the veiled hymn of gravity  
and light. How small the self is.

Their bright wrinkling knows  
they and the stream's contralto

were born to the same tune,  
as if their flicker and gleam

fires not just a stippled kinship  
but the synapse between, invisible

gate of their own depths. Trout linger  
in the rill but don't know why or how long—

a while, with animal confidence, to turn orange  
and find out why they stay. That is marriage.

The water has no words; I only imagine I hear  
the pink and blue rings brookies wear

ping an ancient set of vows, history  
of the recessional promise they whisper

to each other through the tips  
of themselves: to face up

into the flood current that feeds  
us minute particulars, the future's

freestones ringing beneath us like bells.

# Refusal

In the trivia contest blaring in the next room  
at An Beal Bocht the question  
seems to be *Which states touch  
other states?* and after a 5th black pint I'm in a state  
that touches several other states I will never  
be able to name and the first rock&roll song was—————?  
and a vicious dispute breaks out over the number  
of overtimes possible in some type of game  
as outside the traffic waltzes by  
like a tipsy girl in the night  
and the college students smoke and wish  
they could get served by the biceppy bartender with the Cork accent  
while a Mexican cook makes more Irish curry  
and then runs out (thanks be to God) of *Irish pizza*  
and you drink under the glare of a big painting of Behan  
and Beckett and Joyce and Flann O'Brien  
and Patrick Kavanaugh, who in the painting  
looks like someone (perhaps one of the Beatles, maybe Ringo)  
*playing* Patrick Kavanaugh, and you are trying to remain  
aware you are writing in a very small notebook  
this five-pint poem and suddenly dreaming (*One minute!*  
warns the quizmaster) in your remaining minute  
of that Irish girl with waterfall hair  
when you were sixteen, the two of you  
trembling together in your trembling station wagon  
in her driveway outside the barn  
where her quarter horses trembled in their withers  
in the suburbs and every synapse you had  
fired with the electricity of her skin  
and now—right through the stout and dried curry dustings  
sparking under your nose—you can smell  
that girl's hair and you look in yet another unnamed state  
toward the two sad white frosted cakes squatting like stones  
on the shelf between the bar and kitchen  
and you think, in spite of everything, no.

## Jaundice

Two hours old, my son fingers  
his monk's cap like a conjurer  
fanning four aces. Through the perfect feather  
of a mouth, the quill of his cry  
still echoes in the other cave  
he came from that illuminated our margins  
before the printing press was even  
dreamt with its poisonous text,  
its heavy leading. In a dawn light  
flimsy as tissue I write  
standing up with one finger  
in his mouth while he pedals  
and grabs for invisible boughs  
under a flight of strong tubes burning  
with their own full name—*Biliruben*—  
to void the blood of what is  
golden and deadly, this new pen  
leeching its own dark cargo.

# George Mathon

## Do You See Me Waving?

Forty-two.

You announce it, as if it were the answer  
for everything.

You're playing a game  
with the fiddler crabs,  
wiggling your toes, counting the seconds  
until they reemerge.

It's dangerous,  
I wouldn't come out for anything.  
But they need to eat, you answer, sifting  
the mud. And they mate every two weeks.  
The males wave their big fiddler  
claws

to attract females who follow them  
into their holes.

Purblind love,  
I say.

Only if you're invisible,  
only if you're still as a killer  
will they come out.  
But it's impossible to tell the difference  
between love and danger  
of a silent predator.

They're quick enough,  
you answer, to make up for that.  
They have to risk it.

You call it trust.  
An adolescent ibis works its long curved beak  
into one of the holes without success.  
I call this hope.

But the adult birds know  
how pointless it is and don't even try.  
It's what lovers do,  
tunnel into safety,  
hold on until the ibises stop digging.



# The Simplest Gifts

We love by accepting, I say:  
the simplest gifts, the dumbest promises.  
You nod in agreement  
but remind me,  
                                  the male osprey knows  
that if she doesn't approve,  
his mate will discard the branch  
he offers.

                                  Sometimes the things I want  
to give to you, the words I want to say,  
scare me like that.

                                  Above us a large nest  
sits on a platform atop a power pole.  
A male osprey flies out of it,  
low  
                                  through the mangrove limbs beside us,  
his wings  
                                  like knives in the leaves.

I offer you a shell I've picked  
from the beach. Washed of its color,  
its original shape nearly indiscernible,  
you tumble it in your fingers.

                                  In full flight  
the osprey grasps and breaks a twig from a tree.  
Crack!

                                  Inured to her will, the sound emboldens him.  
He turns back to his nest. Though small  
the branch is accepted.

                                  It's just an ordinary  
shell. After a quick inspection  
                                  you toss it  
into the water. But it's all I want from you,  
something small and plain as that twig.

# The Cello

If love were easy

I would play  
as beautifully with any bow, an equation  
could be solved with any number.

It's why I hate

the soft hollow of her knee,  
her arms' mathematical arcing  
as they pull

these pellucid notes from my heart.  
The way she bows me

until the sound  
I can't help but make when she presses  
her fingers just there, and there,

resonates.

A quantum vibrato that fills and rattles  
the empty space between my molecules.  
Love is desperate,

I protest, but relinquish it  
on the pitch she commands

because I am made  
for her straddled plucking and the horsetail  
she flails incautiously across my taut ribs.

Each note she breaks open

—breaks  
open my wooden heart and sublimates  
into the electric air.

Not my will nor hers  
but a reckless current when we touch.  
The composition is timeless, she turns  
the pages of the score with painted fingers.  
It's not the way she plays the music  
I love,

but the music we make  
of our entanglement.



# The Bow

When she touches  
  the bow's rosewood  
inlay, its ivory frog, when she lifts the length  
of pernambuco wood,  
  it seems  
a kind of ménage à trois. The shock  
of horsetail is a fourth, like a stranger  
met on a train. Later, an invitation  
to dinner,  
  an unexpected tryst.  
The cellist feels their joy.  
She carries in her instrument,  
  selects a bow  
and plays a note, a chord. She chooses another,  
plays a note, a chord.  
  No prices are listed.  
It makes no difference because price  
is not the measure.  
  She picks a third, plays, sets it aside.  
The Cuban Ipe wood shines, the carbon  
composite balances, less than weightless  
in her hand, but she knows it's not up to her.  
The bow  
  will choose the instrument.  
The morning progresses like a slow dance.  
The bow maker makes tea for her  
as if  
  they were merely chaperones  
at a schoolgirl's cotillion. They sit,  
talk of music,  
  wait for the music to begin.



cracking open to open their chaste centers.  
I will not resist him  
                                nor how he will thumb them  
slowly to throbbing luminescence, nor  
how he will rub them  
                                to polished perfection.  
How can a fallen object be so flawless?  
I wondered,  
                                as the wind lifted my dress above  
my knees. Horse chestnuts are bitter,  
not for eating,  
                                but rolling endlessly  
by boys between their fingers  
until they shine  
                                like cat's-eye marbles  
under the horse chestnut tree.

# Mariana Weisler

## Soft Soap and Wishful Thinking

I've been poking at this old truth like it's a dead thing,  
lifelessly lying there like blood-matted roadkill,  
a deer struck and splayed and ebbing out onto the highway;

I've been prodding it, over and over, my pulse  
flickering in anticipation of its resuscitation, of  
the vivid moment when it will leap up, revived, prancing away

on spindly doe legs across the black asphalt,  
up into the thickened navy sky where it will vault  
across each of those twinkling memories, those silvery specks of

childhood blessings, until it finally will nestle itself back  
among them, back into the place where I first spotted it years ago,  
deceptively downy brown and soft, again soothing those throbbing  
stars with its velvet tongue.

*"If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for  
comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful  
thinking to begin, and in the end, despair."*

—C. S. Lewis

## Dear Megalomania,

I finally reviewed the dissertation you wrote on me when I was 18, and yes, I noted your citations of all the most influential thinkers as well as your commensurate references to empirical and dogmatic texts, in which you concluded, naturally, that I was either an Einsteinian genius or a Marian reincarnation, that I was indubitably deemed divine from the time of my birth, which, of course, was confirmed by my first angelic sighting and aptly augmented by my infantile ability to read auras and Freud alike.

But—I must admit—I found a flaw, just there in the 53rd footnote, in which you indicated that you appeared “due to my debilitating fear of failure”, and thus were commissioned to carve out a future that would suit my magnitude, throbbing idle and alone in my messy room; and suddenly it was revealed to me, with clarion clarity, that it wasn’t I who feared life but you: too erudite to ever accept error, too mighty to muck through mediocrity. It was you, so small and mousy, dull and dim, cowering in the crevices of my mind, and it was always your cowardice that ever convinced me to believe I was anything but human.

# The Lament of Martha Kent

If you must go, then do so.  
One foot on my porch and one on the moon  
is too far a stretch, even for you.

I can't say how long I've known about the questions  
splintering inside you; I guess when I saw you glance at me then  
up at the sky, gray eyes pleading who—where—how—why—

and fantasizing feral flight, all while still grasping at the old  
minutes that sank through the sunlight, needlessly  
swiping them into your sleeve. . . .

Yes, son, I know you hate to leave when the scent of your childhood  
is still a tease of sugar in the air, with all the furniture lidded  
in fresh dust: thousands of cells of my shed love and trust;

and I also know that you've prayed I could tell you  
where to go, that I could somehow teach you your language  
abandoned centuries ago, until at last you thought,

“In space? There, would it be possible to trace the  
scrawlings of my misplaced past?”  
(Much like *my* body, my heart, once fractured, recast.)

I can picture you now, on that day when you come back, with your  
face set in chivalry, your hair knightly black, as  
a man: draped and caped in cosmic hues,

and I will still be yours—to have and keep, or to lightly kiss on the  
cheek and leave.

My father told me once, “Questions are tried on, Martha, answers worn.”  
So now I tell you, my son—true Steel is forged, not born.

## Hope, Ms. Dickinson,

may be feathered, but it does not perch in the soul.  
In these catacombs, aisled between stripes of skulls, death  
crowning from the walls, it dug pitchfork feet into my shoulder:

a parrot, not bright, buoyant blue and radishy red but  
brown like a mutt, like a mule in the mud, like  
soggy cardboard and filthy kitchen floors.

On the loneliest days I'd stare into its black eyes like pearls  
of briney caviar, and I'd wonder what's its purpose here,  
sing-singing away, the sound withering in arid blackness;

I'd wonder which god gifted me this grimy wingéd rat  
in place of a rope, or a flashlight, or crowbar, or any old thing that could  
be used to pry open that trap door looming like locked Heaven above.

So—I'll admit—I did it. I popped the head off that warbling  
fowl and plucked each feather down to the down, and then I wove  
them into one fine strand to lasso that door and yank it off;

and oh how that sunshine melted down on me like hot, smooth butter,  
slathering my skin, thawing me to the bone! And I saw then, the  
blood on my fingertips, the white meat of the creature on the ground;

Hope no longer the flight of freedom, a fluttering flag of future  
peace, but dead, like everything else here, bleeding into the dirt.  
In conclusion: Hope, Ms. Dickinson—I've realized—  
is a rope.

# My Most Existential Poem, Ever

Foreword: *First, there are some things you should know about me. I don't write this with quill and ink by the yellow glow of lamplight in a log cabin nestled somewhere in the deep woods of Vermont. I type this onto my phone with sloppy thumbs while my car chugs idly at a red light, misspelling every other word. For that matter, my spelling has always been atrocious, and I will certainly have to spell-check this before I submit it anywhere. Not that it will be accepted, because I almost never get things in on time. I'm not late—I'm unpunctual. On that note, I should admit that I can be rather lazy. Most of my writing days are actually spent on my cat-mangled couch, ingesting endless episodes of Law & Order SVU and mouthing Benson's one-liners as my itinerary disintegrates like crumbs at the bottom of the Utz Salt & Vinegar bag. (Which is funny only because I've been on this same diet for the last seven years, cheating at least two meals a day—I happen to love McDonald's and cream cheese.) So I always end up promising that tomorrow will be better, and I resign myself to stalking old friends on Facebook, watching Jenna Marbles on Youtube, and if I'm feeling particularly inspired, maybe a TED Talk or two. But more likely tomorrow will be exactly today, only varying in the variables, and I'll be splayed out on my couch, sucking on a spoon of peanut butter, late to turn on the People's Court, retyping this poem with one clumsy finger. And the day will end as it often does as I stroke my mangy cat in one hand and my stash of poems in the other, wondering what exactly it would take, how many more readings over how many more days, until one of us can finally make the other real. Anyway, I guess now you're forewarned.*

Roses are red,  
Violets are blue,  
If I called myself a poet,  
Would it be true?



# Michael Kramer

## Nighthawks, Kaua'i

*Hamura's Saimin, Lihu'e*

Edward Hopper likely never traveled here,  
but it's 10:21 on Sunday; outside, yellowed light  
streams across the empty asphalt to the dumpster  
by the Salvation Army where pickers find the choice leavings.

They're in the shadows, and inside the night-blue restaurant,  
three late diners sit at counters: two top left,  
a man and woman; alone, a man sits near the door.  
Behind, an older waitress leans looking off.

The man alone, khakis, a navy golf polo,  
forks noodles with shrimp, broth dripping; he considers  
returning to his empty room. The couple, heads together,  
he murmuring, split a won-ton appetizer. Her sarong

barely covers her cream bikini. His board shorts, bar T-shirt,  
seem grimy. He drains his Bud, wants to go.  
She hasn't touched her Coke, isn't sure, looks away.  
The waitress, a glance at the clock, remembers her son in bed.

# A Cycladic Harp Player, Marble, c. 2700—2300 B.C.

*The Getty Villa, Malibu*

Seated, harp at rest, you've waited  
buried, excavated, glass encased,

four thousand years or more.  
Someone revered you, your words,

your melodies, enough to invest the time,  
the tools, the marble. And you were treasured

and are. Before our history your histories,  
your literature caught image enough

that someone invested in this sculpture.  
A god? are you some god for memory

or intent or value set for times,  
ancestors past, or simply a good tune,

escape from labor's bold tyrant  
of all our days? Anticipating

the view of you, not crowded to  
the Cycladic art exhibit, a room,

I try to hear your music, your words.  
But you don't play, your harp at rest,

completed? yet to begin? discerning  
what to play, how the audience unfolds?

And that is what we do,  
you and I, with God, with life,

with beauty on an inexpressible morning,  
an audience who needs the image from our past

that grants this moment holy meaning,  
tomorrow sacred as we plot our play.

# St. Francis Venerating the Crucifix (c. 1593)

*by Domenikos Theotokopoulos (El Greco)  
(to be read antiphonally)*

Long-fingered and graceful his hands, veined so like the crucified Christ,  
the gray-robed monk, his cloak heavy and patched,  
adoring, gazes at the crucifix, topping a yellowing skull.

His Bible closed and marked, his grotto rock and dark,  
the tonsured priest, gaunt, eyes sleepless with prayer,  
enraptures presented mystery: grace through his savior's death.

A cloud-filled sky, bare light through grotto face,  
cave light echoes browns, shadows, earth gray.

His adoration sparks, his devotion speaks,  
his saintly pose presents, his concentration folds,  
our interruption now? should we speak? keep silence?  
should we kneel with him? Grace extends here:

We stand in a foreground of peace, the cave floor beneath our feet;  
death conquers death; resurrection engenders miracle.

# **The Minotaur Etchings from Picasso's Vollard Suite**

*The British Museum Exhibition, July 2, 2012*

This morning, when I rose and saw you sleeping,  
night passed warm, and, your side, your leg,  
your thigh and hip, your arm covering your breasts,  
your back exposed, I stopped and stared; I almost  
climbed back in behind you. But  
you were sleeping. So I chained my beast back  
into his labyrinth. He'll come out, but not  
until he's gentled, combed, mannered, calm.

## **After Pierre Bonnard, “Table Set in a Garden,” c. 1908**

I should like a table in the sun,  
one with a cane back chair.

Remove the bread and even the wine,  
for I shall be sitting there,

my notebook open, a pen in my hand  
at my table in the sun,

just writing a picture in the morning  
as the shadows begin to run.

All the garden in bloom I would see there  
would be colored bloom and grand

with a rose deep violet and phlox in blue,  
each flower by breezes fanned.

I should sit at my table in the sun,  
the one with the cane back chair.

I'd eat of the color and drink of the breeze,  
and I would feel peaceful there.

# Jill Murphy

## Migration

Cockroaches would crawl  
from the space  
between her teeth  
while no one was looking.  
Their glistening shells  
would slip through her full-bloom  
lips, one after another,  
till her sallow skin was on the verge  
of disappearing beneath  
their insectuous migration.

In the next room, my father  
stood on a balance beam. He  
was a temple there, a house of cards.  
He was a window covered  
in moths vying for the glow  
of my mother porch light. We couldn't  
touch her, just follow  
her through the house, sweeping  
up those thorned legs and dried  
wings as bees colonized her  
lungs and cicadas groaned  
in her stomach.

# Reaping

How do they communicate?

In circles.

How do they make love?

Separately. How does she touch

him? Sometimes she holds him

like the wheat scrapes

against the sky. Somewhere in Middle

America a field moves all at once,

though the blades are lonely. The sky asks

the grain to *not make a big deal*

*out of it*. The sky tells the grain *it's not just about showing up*.

He did his panic-research on her

body, listened for the crickets in her gut

but rolled his eyes every time she complained

of pain. Says he is familiar

with the cicadas in her skull

like he knows the sound of blood

being drawn. Can he remember how brave

she was that afternoon, lying

on the cutting board?

The sky feels right

to the grain, but does it matter?

The blight will come anyway.

The wheat holds up the sky.



# Kitchens

I

Do we recycle  
these feelings that stick  
like oblong stains  
on the countertop,  
like little pieces  
of butter smeared  
on the cutting board, like  
she clings to every kitchen  
she's ever lived in? The drain  
collects bits of egg shell  
3 days rotten, while she dreams  
of sticking her hand down  
the garbage disposal, while  
the cat paces nervously, trailing  
tufts of loose fur  
along the windowsill wanting  
for the cat in the alley, just as the girl  
wants for the kitchen  
of her childhood.

II

Our shoes peel off  
the floorboards in dried  
juice and beer.  
We hear the fruit flies' lovemaking  
as they dive in and out  
of the bottles on the counter  
in the honey light.

III

The spaces I occupy get smaller  
as I get older. I have  
become less than bones.  
He left in the night and took the olive  
oil, the butter, left some ice packs in the freezer  
and some blackened bok choy on the bottom  
shelf. He left a silence

as insatiable as rust.  
The negative space of hunger  
filled the time we could have spent  
loving each other.

For the next two weeks the only  
thing that could be found in the ice  
box was a fast-waning handle of honey  
whiskey. I gained weight  
and wisdom in the wrong  
places.

# Cassandra Sanborn

## Remnants

Remember July rains, me in the gold poncho  
you uncovered,

pale hair stuck to the side of your face.

We ran.

Water dripped down your legs  
and the man sweeping the street  
dug gold leaves from the grate  
covered in that fake rust.

They had dusted the street in soap,  
pale imitation of snow.

The remnants rose up,  
filled the streets with white foam  
that lasted until we touched it—

until it remembered  
it was always supposed to be temporary.

Lightning cut,  
peeling back the night  
as if anyone with a ladder  
could step up,  
hold the rough edge of a cloud,  
step through the bright gap  
up past the sky.

And I remembered  
we never had finished  
that conversation about hell,  
when you asked  
if burning was just an easy way to disappear  
and I said I thought hell was like this:

loving something, perhaps,  
the way I love you—  
moss on the bottom of a planter in November,  
last tomato on the vine.

# The World Was Supposed to Be

The world was supposed to be  
bigger than this—  
my mother's blue yarn around my neck,  
light around my nose,  
dark around my mouth,  
too thick around the dark skin of veins.

Or maybe I should say  
*my world* was supposed to be  
more than rusty yarn around my head,  
covering my ears.

The world was supposed to give me white curtains  
against a pale green windowsill.  
Small fingerprints  
smudged on insulated glass.

And light—  
light through the window  
not one shaft,  
straight,  
alone.  
Enough light  
to fill a room,  
enough  
to make white carpet warm.

The world was supposed  
to give me days like this:  
lying on the hood of Shawn's car,  
his fingerprints  
and the outline of my hair  
in the layer of construction dust.

Tracing trees in the dirt  
as if drawing a thing  
could make it real,  
as if the oil on my skin  
could make all this last.

# My mother once told me God holds the world in His hands

I asked her if it got heavy.  
She leaned over,  
sweat a thin,  
gleaming line on her back,  
plucked a dandelion  
from the overgrown patch in our front yard.

She gave it to me, said  
*it grows and dies right here  
a whole life  
and you  
barely feel it.*  
It was soft against the skin of my palm.

I pulled a white seed from its head,  
watched it float down,  
disappear into the grass:

I asked her  
*what happens if He drops it?*

She laughed  
then threw my flower  
in the compost heap  
with its younger lives:  
still yellow,  
seeds not ready to separate.

When she went inside I saved them,

laid them in my orange wagon,  
dragged it behind me,  
right wheel squeaking.

I dropped them in my neighbors' yards,  
two blooms each.

*I am a good god* I said,  
as they fell:

stems arching toward the ground.  
The petals, heavier,  
always touched the earth first.  
My stars against a green sky.

My hands were stained  
for days.

# Hands

Kate says,  
write about your uncertainty.  
*Write about the wilderness  
as if you are an Israelite in the desert,  
as if you are hungry  
and your food is monotonous.*

I tell her I am writing about  
the future of my life in the workforce.  
A desk with two broken drawers,  
the smear on my window where I killed a fruit fly,  
my blue lamp.

But really, I will write about my hands—  
the right one, especially.

How they betray me, wrists to fingernails,  
when it is cold.  
How my wrists ache,  
how my ring fingers swell,  
turn white, stiff.  
How the bones in my right hand crackle  
when I make a fist.

How the doctor says, *well, it could  
be your mother's arthritis  
or your father's bad joints.*  
Or circulation, or some kind of bone disease—  
but before I panic  
*just wait  
and wear gloves.*

She says, *you're young.*

(My body was supposed to be certain.)

*Probably nothing.*  
I try not to think  
about blood vessels constricting,  
bones rubbing together,  
all that cushion dissolved.

# **Old Grief is the Rusty Padlock on My Parents' Toolshed**

it won't close  
but we wedge it around the handle  
so everyone passing by will believe  
we know something  
about security.



# Kendall Grant

## Winter Love Note

I tromped a snowshoe love note  
in a mountain meadow.

The note, as imperfect as I am,  
connected from no beginning to no end  
and crossed a rabbit's trail.

It will melt and run by our house  
in the river that connects us to these mountains.

The molecules will separate,  
but you'll notice them bumping over the trout.

And in a waterfall,  
you may hear what I made the snowshoes say.

## **A Rare Congregational Member**

I like an aspen grove below pine line  
on the morning side of a small mountain  
where wild clematis seeks the sun early  
then folds purple blossom in solemn prayer.

Eyes of the forest, lost-limb quakey scars,  
witness to God these wildflower sacraments—  
and that I ate and drank and worshiped there.

## Unknown Priest

I followed a Western-wood peewee  
to where peace and liveliness coincide:  
A corner where periwinkle grows to hide  
and my friend can eat in spring greenery.

His referee-whistle shrill stops me short:

“It’s not secret, but sacred,” he sounds.  
With kind heart, he invites me along—  
in reverence we escape the world’s throng

and he ordains me.

# Who Called the Owl's Name

The gale must have pressed her into the electric lines;  
She fell on the front grass.

Now, two feet deep looking for the sky,  
the snowy owl lies next to our golden retriever.  
It seemed without honor to put the carcass in communal trash  
though the garbage truck was coming down the block  
and we could soon forget.

Instead, we determined a sacred owl burial.

Now the yard seems wiser,  
and so are we.

# Autumn Dance Championships

Of all the colored slices that danced from limb to earth  
a weeping willow leaf won grand champion.

Springing from tree,  
the narrow tumbler went prone  
and rolled like an old-time mower blade  
chopping the air  
beatboxing the fastest spin Indian summer had ever judged,  
gliding over warm and cool currents  
until a mile of October sky had been clipped.

# Donna French McArdle

## White Blossoms at Night

In dark, we forget ourselves.  
Blow out our lantern light.  
Light in you, stars in the night sky.  
Night sky, night-blooming  
Imagination. *Ipomoea alba* spirals open.  
Opening spiral: from lantern  
Darkening, from bound revealing,  
Then full white moon-flower.

Awakened to unfurling, a hawk moth  
Swoops the expanse, its strength  
Audible. A strongest sphinx rubs  
Past anthers to the nectary,  
And sips a sweetest nectar, most  
Plentiful of all night-bloomings.  
In dark, let's forget ourselves.  
Blow out our lantern light.

## Gone

Somewhere between Mt. Morris and Canandaigua,  
driving route 5 and 20, I tap the brakes because  
up ahead something is not right.

A pickup has pulled over, its flashers on.

Then I see a doe in the middle of the road, fallen or pulled  
onto the painted stripes of the turning lane.

She is so still, so plainly gone;  
not even the air currents of cars speeding past  
ruffle her reddish fur.

I want so much to stop the car and go to her  
and stroke her neck.

But this is a rural highway, and I do what's safe:  
I tap the brakes and drive slowly past.

## Where He Floats in Shallow Water

“You get your rest,” I had said not even a week before.  
He had shot morphine for his pain, and his head rolled back.  
Now, where he lies in his polished casket, I pause  
on the kneeler, this moment nearly as intimate,  
a last chance to study the brow, the nose, the curve  
of the ear. He did not bear this still face last week;  
he is slathered with makeup and painted with lipstick.  
I do not entirely recognize him.

As I stand to turn away, I see his big watch ticking  
with enormous energy—solid proof time is relentless;  
it drags me around like the thread-thin hand sweeps  
past the seconds, drags me back to this scene, this room  
when I had wanted to leave lightly, to deny how much of him  
I did not know, to drift backward, to walk with him  
down the street to the stone stairs, to watch him  
slip off his sneakers and step into the black mud of low tide.

Two bleach bottles full of sand and rocks anchor  
his small row boat. He walks carefully,  
sinking to his ankles in the mud. He does not slow  
when he reaches the incoming tide, so I know it is  
a warm tide, heated by the late summer Gulf Stream  
and its own drift over the flats to this cove.  
The ocean is nearly to his knees when he arrives  
at the tiny blue boat. He finds his bailer, a coffee can,

and sits, with careful balance, on the square stern.  
There, where he floats in shallow water, he pours  
a full can over his muddy feet and brushes the mud  
off with his free hand. He racks the oars and rows to shore  
to let me climb in, wobbling, and to drag my hands  
in the water as he maneuvers us out of the cove  
where a fine mist lifts off the water and we breathe in  
the ocean air on that hot summer day.



# The Edge

First delicate arc of waxing moon and sky still sapphire overhead  
but darkening just above the trees. Venus off to the left,  
as if it had spilled from the lunar goblet. I know I will yearn  
for this. I tell myself, remember: sapphire and moon.

I have reached the river bank where spilling past is half fresh water,  
half sea. Kaleidoscope of fog, leaves and the soft, greenish feathers  
from the bellies of goslings swirl the air. I grab at paper flying by,  
but it is past reach. Words so carefully written: my instructions?

I squint, as if I were fighting astigmatism of the mind or of the spirit,  
where not the spot, but the notion, is unreliable, dubious.  
Will I be wading into bliss or into the Acheron, the river of woe?  
Here is the boundary between myself and the rest of possibility.

Past the demark, what? At this edge so often, I'm prepared  
when my half-hearted self refuses to step, so when the strain hits  
I unwrap a sandwich, ponder the crunch of its cucumber, sting of its salt.  
Remember this, I whisper to myself: cucumber and salt.

But already my world is shifting. The wind tugs at my resistance.  
I pull off my shoes and reach one foot into the river current  
and swirling fog. I must walk; I must arrive. If I need a way back, I must  
remember: cucumber and moon; sapphire and salt.

## **They Are Revealed by Their Shadows**

I see but reflection of the morning light  
gleaming from the low-tide mud, a gorgeous mud  
mottled with rocks and kelp. Then a shadow moves

and the first bird is revealed. A second tiptoes  
alongside, then a third; a flock of fellows moving  
lightly over the uneven surface. Sanderlings.

Over to the left, another, and since now I am  
focused, I see a fifth staring, like I have been staring,  
at the ocean's edge where the waves carry rills of sunlight.

# Tom Freeman

## On Foot, Joliet, Illinois

A girl heading the other way  
stopped around 2 o'clock today,  
rolled down her window, "Hey man, have a peach!"  
It filled my fist. I recrossed the road pressing  
my thumb into the fuzzy skin, just overripe.  
My eyes moistened for a second.  
Not yet hungry, I tucked away  
the strange girl's gift.  
A juicy ball of sun medicine,  
my soft secret hope.  
Hidden peach in the pocket  
of this rough, frayed work coat I wear.

## At Sunset

Orange glow in the western sky,  
rain has stopped,  
dust plastered down along the dirt road  
hedged with pungent wet sagebrush.  
Passionate electrified guitar  
wails from within adobe walls  
of a small home at the base of a scrubby hill.  
Out in the dusky road a lonely young man passing by  
listens, smiles, says “thanks” under his breath.

## Breaktime

After pulling mean musk thistles all morning,  
sweating torrents in a rain coat and welder's gloves,  
I spread peanut butter with a skinning knife,  
seated in the driver's seat of my rusty pickup  
parked in the pasture up to the side mirror in shining grass.

The cows browse, sun glaring  
on the black muscles of their backs,  
and test the new fence line.  
The young calf ducks right under.  
Sun spots and shade play in the field  
as clouds shift shapes and float east.  
The insect trill heightens with each flash of heat.

I want to learn to see the wind in the grass as a girl I love  
and she as the grass in the wind.

I think that'd be my heaven.  
Keep the rest.

I lick both sides  
of the knife edge clean.  
Thirty more minutes  
lost track of and it's  
back to work.

## Moon Chat Transcript #10

I get up too late, sit in soft moss,  
and wait for some rustle  
in the leaves to wake me.  
No wind. Not even a breeze.  
Past girls I might have tried harder for,  
friends I lost track of, come to mind.

I wonder what screens me often from  
that straight shot look into  
the real skin of things.  
Down ravine, the creek glints, out of earshot.

The word is another body turned up in the Cuyahoga valley.  
Two kayaking ranger's found her in the river north of Boston Mills.  
She'd been missing ten days.  
She's not the first.  
Men tend to dump them just off the trail  
where they think no one will look.  
I imagine, in their guilt, those few acres  
seem like the only place to hide,  
a shred of second-growth woods boxed in with blacktop,  
shards of dim light beaming through the canopy,  
a murderer's one hope at forgiving himself.

Leaving my camp, I step carefully among the weeds.  
and dead shades of brown leaves.  
I'm not saying I forgive the killing of innocents. I don't.  
But if there's any place that withholds judgment, it's here,  
deep in trees, where no one watches.  
Where you take a leak wherever you please.  
Where men leave their old bald tires and  
mushrooms or coneflower grow up through.  
Where the only trace of who you are,  
or who you've been  
is the leaping of frogs,  
and shimmer of the surface that accepts them.

# Yardwork

With each twig lifted from lush grass  
I screw up my face to hold back tears.  
I came here to scape land that I guess the man tends  
so diligently in this narrow green floodplain  
to escape the stark aridity  
that might whisper him awake on the edge of town.

For weeks, before I bring the mower through the tallest grass,  
I've been filling tarps with brittle fragments of Siberian elm,  
sometimes brushing up against the little cabin  
where he now tells me his son swallowed a gun  
barrel one New Year's Eve.

The boy had been found a month before  
crossing the Bitterroots into Idaho half frozen  
with only a pocket knife and blanket to his name,  
committed to asylum then released.  
He would be my age now.

I grow quiet, leaning on a leaf rake.

I would've walked beside him on the highway shoulder,  
long into cold Bitterroot night,  
borrowing hope against the darkness,  
against the snow lit slantwise in the rush of headlights  
like showers of Gemini.

# George Longenecker

## Nest

Wrap me in your wings,  
hide me high in a white pine,  
weave me a nest with your beak,  
line it with downy feathers,  
sew it with fine thread of nettle,  
twine it with silk of milkweed,  
cushion it with pussy willows,  
braid it with milk of moonlight,  
let me feel warm breath from your beak,  
let me feel your heart beat against my breast.



## Rock Point, Ontario

Lake Erie's waves polish limestone fossils,  
Devonian sea tides once lapped this shore,  
where children ponder trilobites and wander  
the bed of the salt sea from which they came.

Gulls sweep low over Rock Point Beach.  
Lighted freighters float across the moon while  
night beacons flicker on a distant shore—  
the lake howls with gulls and freighters' horns.

At bedtime children in sleeping bags  
curl up on the warm limestone bed,  
cuddle up to the lullaby of lapping waves,  
sleep all night in fossil seashells,  
coiled in a bed of time.

## Arctic Refuge

All day the sun circles the horizon never setting, orange at midnight, white at noon as we float downriver to the Beaufort Sea—at first rapid current slams our rafts against stones, but soon we float calmly—the distant Shublik peaks cast shadows far across the tundra, a snowy owl circles white as we drift north in twilight.

In the hills fireweed and paintbrush bloom, the owl swoops and lands on the high tundra, fossil coral and seashells lie everywhere, the remnants of tropical oceans—beneath arctic stone dinosaurs sleep in crude petroleum—maybe enough to fuel the world for another six months; refined into jet fuel, pterosaurs would fly again, leaving tails in the sky above the Arctic Refuge.

Next day we float north past a bluff where two stone heads—Inuksuk cairns—keep watch as they have for a thousand years over the Inupiat and their river.

In the distance Arctic sea ice cracks like thunder, on the horizon ice and sky meet in a mirage; tundra swans trumpet as we float north past dunes to the sea. All night the orange sun sits low while a snowy owl waits in silence. Let the pterosaurs and allosaurs sleep another fifty million years.

## Hurricane Irene

All day water pounded on the roof,  
poured down in sheets while white pines  
whipped in the hurricane. Houses shook  
and windows rattled, air pressure dropped  
as low as it had in fifty years, but barometers  
could never measure this storm.

Tiny streams gorged themselves on the deluge,  
became monsters who lifted huge boulders from beds  
where they'd lain since the last glacier, the flood  
heaved stones, uprooted trees and hurled the mass  
downstream into houses, water gushed through  
windows, shingles, boards and beams buckled,  
cracked and splintered then rolled down into rivers  
risen far over their banks—no longer minor tributaries.

All over Vermont from Waterbury to Bethel  
from Rochester to Marlboro the water rolled,  
streetlights flickered then went out. A crushed  
car floated by, its interior lights still on, coffins fled  
an eroded cemetery followed by a swimming corpse,  
its stiff arms flailing. Two huskies howled and howled  
as their dog pen filled but nobody could hear them  
over roaring water and pounding stones.

For twelve hours it rained and rivers rose  
even more quickly; people ran for high ground  
before they could be washed away—no escape,  
only pounding rain as railroads twisted like licorice  
and roads turned to gorges. A covered bridge  
splintered against boulders and the very water  
which quenches and cleanses rolled its timbers  
downstream with even more stones and trees.

The next day it was warm and clear—  
at first light strangely silent, already at dawn  
an odor of decay as water settled,  
brown and still, blue jays called.

Finally, as clouds lifted, the mountains  
could be seen, slopes still green, sirens wailed  
while crows hovered, waiting, diesel engines roared,  
but it would take months to fill and fix what Irene had done.  
Slowly the flood receded and stones settled,  
floodwater seeped out of houses and left oily muck  
on every plate and chair; those who could returned  
home, saw what the water had done and wept.

## Cardinal on a Cable

A cardinal sings from his perch on the cable,  
happy for another Florida dawn;  
his call is the same as cardinals everywhere—  
but what if he were plucked from his wire  
and instantly landed in New Hampshire  
where it's zero minus fifteen today?

*What the fuck*, he'd say, *now what?*  
His cable perch carries news  
of war in Syria and northern cold,  
but he calls cardinals with his own news.

Why are some spared war and cold, others not?  
Robert Frost knew . . . *that for destruction ice*  
*Is also great*. I too would perish tossed  
nude into New Hampshire this morning—  
at least the cardinal has feathers.

But we're here in Florida,  
on our screened porch having coffee,  
grapefruit and cereal, while you, red cardinal,  
sing to us from the television cable.

# Kimberly Sailor

## The Bitter Daughter

My father  
never says Thank You.

A family fish fry for his 60th:  
bronzing jukebox songs and a hotel stay and grandkids in swimsuits  
fuzzy on the bottom, fizzy drinks in hand,  
steam from the winter water  
and made-to-order eggs on the other side of the night.

Result: one photographically documented half-smile.  
Exhausted daughter who tried.

A hilltop gathering for his 65th:  
noodle soups, crisp salads, pizza for fifteen,  
and a custom cake with a wide-mouth bass.  
Leaving work early, grandkids packed in the back,  
harrowing January roads, cars in the ditch,  
but not ours: we arrived, with candles too,  
and that fancy party hat I wanted to burn  
after he snapped the little string and said,  
“Get this damned thing off me.”  
His face was red like a cardinal’s back.  
The grandkids made the hat their bugle.

Result: we’re only gathering for the descendants now,  
these milestones better left unrecognized.

My father  
feeds his yard birds dutifully each morning.  
Black oil sunflower seed for the showier singers,  
yellow millet for the tiny fliers,  
kernels for those who forget to  
or would rather not  
leave during winter anymore: too old, or too well-fed at home.  
No thanks there, either;

but under his care, the birds stay.

In his kitchen,  
a clock with birds instead of numbers  
starts the bluebird song,  
chirping mechanically as I make his morning coffee.  
“Too weak,” he decides, emptying it down the drain  
before grabbing his bird seed bucket,  
straightening his hat,  
and sliding the glass doors open to leave again.

## She Won't Know

I carry the dead bat with a shovel.

My husband, working in Missouri,  
my daughter, asleep, her old baby monitor just in range  
as I move the bat from driveway to woods.

“Intact?” my husband asks.

“Yes. Probably still warm,” I say. “Just fell from the sky.”

The woods are slender but useful:  
the neighbors drag over dead leaves on tarps,  
abrasive and crunchy over the road's asphalt.  
The city keeps a pump house behind the ash trees,  
pleasantly humming as it cycles water on a schedule:  
loud and quiet, loud and quiet. Hasn't broken yet.

I won't tell my daughter about the bat,  
the same kind she visits at the zoo  
next to the sugar gliders in their little huts.  
That's part of motherhood: not telling.  
Fancy church shoes clipping down the pavement with a dead bat,  
or a run-over cat, or the worms she gathered and left too long in  
the sun:  
should have been fishing bait, now just stringy compost.

The next morning, we are smiles and cereal,  
wondering what to do with our day.



# Lineage

My mother died in her early 50s.  
I am careful to say “died” and not “passed away”  
because when you kill yourself, language matters.

The first time didn’t work.  
She asked if the hospital had a bookstore, or a library,  
something to do, something to read, please,  
while I watched Oprah between vital assessments.

The second time took.  
I received her old earrings,  
an odd photograph of myself that printed poorly  
(don’t know why she saved it; can’t ask now),  
and a snow globe that works if you shake it hard enough.  
I like this last trinket, because she lived in the desert.

But all of this only reminds me  
that I never received anything after my grandmother died.  
So in love with her, I would have accepted  
anything at all: a blanket from the linen closet,  
a souvenir magnet from the fridge, a bent fork from the drawer.  
But from her, I just have the last memories her daughter gave me.

# Josephine's Garden

We bought a delicate sign  
for my daughter that spring.  
*Josephine's Garden* it says, a metal oval on a stick,  
butterflies behind the letters.

In her garden  
poppies bloom, low to the ground for a child's eye,  
and irises too, taller than her ("taller than me!" she sings).

And while the tenderly collected rocks sleep,  
twigs stuck in the ground fall down,  
bits from her lunch decay for the birds,  
and puddles from her watering can hands fill again,  
I pose her for another photo, filed away by year.

After the flash  
her eyes search for more cherry tomatoes—  
her favorite, eaten off the vine, not even washed;  
in the organic assault of Perfect Mom, I have made peace here.

In the corner  
a farmer's market is underway: pumpkins double in size,  
giant looping vines tickle their striped watermelon neighbors,  
looking like summer footballs  
getting ready for fall kick-off.

From age one to two, three to four, five to six,  
I watched her in the weeded rows;  
she's finally taller than those flowers we first planted.  
Josephine snaps open too-small peas,  
pulls up tiny carrots too early  
and says: "Everything is still growing in my garden."  
And I am water, sun, and heat,  
thinking about my next child:  
a small turnip growing within.

# Deep Sea Fishing

My line of pimples  
is shaped like a Caribbean island chain.  
The Bahamas maybe,  
where we sail next to stingrays slapping our boat.  
“Life is precious,” I say.  
“Sure is easy to die,” he says.  
The stingrays head north  
and we thread our poles.

It’s winter back home,  
where the cardinals and bats play,  
my snow globe re-dusts unshaken  
and the perennial bulbs are hard underground.

Down here, my family is old enough for a boat ride now,  
and this salty trip erodes many pains.

But in the ocean spray, I’m months away,  
maybe days,  
from someone realizing I’m a fraud.  
Faker wife, infertile mom,  
dramatic daughter  
who can’t even cast my line far enough in calm waters.  
But I carry on with all of these,  
because pretending, trying, is still doing.

We have two daughters:  
one looks like me, one looks like him.

And if they look up to me  
then I’m authentic  
and forgiven  
enough.

# Rebecca Irene

## Woodpecker

Slit nostrils sense  
what lies beneath.  
This is what you live for—  
sick wood giving way  
beetle's squirm  
on long sticky tongue  
the swallowing.  
You leave behind tunnels  
paradise for squirrels  
nests for smaller birds.  
How many holes  
can a tree endure?  
You recall your beloved  
White Pine.  
Her curved trunk at road's bend  
her thick sap weeping  
every time you came a-calling.

## Crow Raven

If you don't know  
the differences  
between Crow and Raven  
what good are you to me?  
I find the secret of being  
in nature's details.  
To you, they are a waste of time.  
Crow marries for love.  
Raven for money.  
Crow gives any dying creature  
water from her beak.  
Raven pecks fading eyes out.

And if you had ever lain in forests  
against tree trunks  
felt bark press hard towards  
your back's thick skin  
Crow would have watched  
you with pity  
Raven with menace.  
Then as Raven shat on you in disgust  
Crow would have offered you strength—  
hair and bone  
life and breath  
fear and death  
twig and stone—  
of smaller creatures.

You would have recognized  
that sweet saltiness in your mouth  
my love.  
For it is what you have been  
feeding on for years.

# Sitting Duck

All the others  
sensed danger.  
The dogs weren't  
even quiet  
for God's sake  
and little Billy  
shot off  
his gun for fun  
miles away.

All the others  
knew to fly.  
You were  
mid-paddle  
when steel  
tore open  
preened down.  
Your last  
dying wonder:

why red rainbows smothered you  
as others touched blue of sky.

# Humming Bird

I loved you when I was young  
watched you sip sugar water  
hover over my bright shirt.  
There is no more sugar water now  
or bright shirt  
and I have aged terribly.  
Poor trade for the genuine  
is what I get.  
Greta running nine miles  
snorting nine lines  
climaxing nine times  
faster faster faster.  
Greta starving  
binging and barfing  
chewing pills  
thinner thinner thinner.  
Greta drinking dancing  
trying to sing.  
No magic—  
between monotony  
and mayhem.

## Summer Robin

How they search for her when the trees sigh for outer green.  
How they smile for her when the stalks strain for sunny sheen.  
How they supplicate for her when rains signal for spring clean.

Wonder, adoration, delight, give way to  
pulling *another* worm— isn't she fat enough?  
Singing the same *old* song—hasn't she said enough?

Springtime is so obviously over, my dear.  
Really. A summer robin should have the good taste  
to *know* when she ought to fly away.

Why, just last night I spotted one that caught my eye.  
I almost lost my head until I saw her gray feathers  
and wrinkles and wanting in the August sun.



# Savannah Grant

## And Not As Shame

I want to wear your memory  
as a red overcoat

the one you tried to throw away  
but I keep it anyway  
even though it's too big

(I shrunk it in the wash  
but you hate it when  
I do that)

# July's Herald

I wonder if the dog knew  
you were drinking

weaving through piles  
of mail and clothes

I remember the color  
of that carpet at the top of the stairs  
dirty tan lighter than I imagine  
perhaps  
the way I remember it is disorder

staring out a window

no line I can follow but  
one jagged through the house

and in the doorway of your bedroom  
I felt the tug away from you

a joint trying to dislocate

## Unmention II

the first time you tried to lock me inside  
was maybe the fourth time you decided to hit me  
but the first time my head hit the wall

I learned how to block you  
because you always aimed for the head

a long time ago you put a hole in my dad's eardrum  
he used to say it was from ear infections

## On The Brink II

at 1:38am I read that you buried the dog  
in the back yard

that's what happens at the house  
we bury dogs

I sent a pseudo-prayer from my bed tearless  
said she was better off dead  
but she had you to take care of her  
while she lost her brain and her hips  
to the floorboards and grey frigid March

she was nice to lie next to while I knew her

## On Returning in June

two years and the cat's still fat  
the room's no longer mine  
the wallpaper's gone and the desk  
isn't under the windows

I remember every thing  
I ever lost there  
in that basement  
I always find new blankets and shirts  
I forgot to take with me

I'm sure there are moments  
that haven't moved yet  
the ghosted sound  
of a wineglass set on a chest of drawers

a wasp's nest in a railing  
a day's quiet  
rupture

# Michael Hugh Lythgoe

## Titian Left No Paper Trail

No sonnets, nor letters like Michelangelo.  
Still we feel the oblique motion, the atmospheric  
colors of his martyred St. Lawrence, his *Assumption*;  
landscapes with river valleys and Alpine peaks,  
ancient Roman myths, a sumptuous nude goddess.

Dawn is uncertain, pagan, shadowy.  
Sudanese killers and thieves  
are poachers in Kenya, for tusks of ivory.  
A mammoth bull elephant pushes trees  
down, forages with body guards to survive.

The vulnerable fade like ivory magnolia blooms.  
Everything is fragile. Whole forests burn.  
Antarctica is the most stable continent.  
Titian's frescoes last. His late works show rough  
loose brushwork: St. Jerome in a barren desert.

Art appears impotent to face down violence.  
Marsyas played a double pipe but lost  
his hide—flayed by a jealous Apollo,  
King Midas watches. Ovid says so.

To study topography and meteorology,  
is to feel baroque fault lines tremble at night.  
Beside me in the dark my lover labors to breathe.  
I listen to learn, labor to believe.  
Titian expires during the plague. He paints allegories.  
His self portrait does not look us in the eyes.

## Buddha In Brass

*A sleeping Buddha occupies my mind,  
and half-obscurers its whole religion  
by mere presence, contemplative and blind,  
the intolerable comedy goes on.*

—Peter Levi, *Water, Rock & Sand*

Buddha did not come to me on the Silk  
Road but in Saigon. A Chinese merchant  
sold him to me. The war was still young.  
I was young. Buddha is well-traveled, a veteran.

His figure fattens in meditation, brass zen.  
He knows Indo-China, wars, the French,  
now the Americans. Buddhists set themselves on fire.  
We bleed; Vietnamese bleed; we leave brass shells,

bomb holes, poison in rice paddy, napalm on jungle.  
Buddha waits in temples, reclines in Thailand. He shows  
his teeth, forged, formed in a desperate foundry, weighed  
down with lead & iron, polished shiny—like brass

army insignia, buckles, .45 caliber bullet casings  
recycled for art, joss sticks, a zen garden, a vet's  
bookshelf. Tibetan monks light themselves ablaze  
in China. If Buddha is happy, rub his ample belly

for good luck. I pray to God. Buddha  
is no god. He was a rich prince  
who gave up his soft life to roam and beg.  
Burmese Buddhists visit violence on Muslims.

Buddha & I have a history. We each have  
a war or two to wear like a hairshirt. We each  
seek peace. We sit & stare in the study.  
I feel like Buddha, contemplative & blind.

## White Dove In The Desert

Nine miles from Tucson, some Pilgrims  
find the Church; it stands alone: White  
Dove of Sonoran Desert. The rez  
is a troubled home for the tribe living on the border,  
on both sides. The Papago met Fr. Kino, who rode  
in Jesuit robes, on a mission: prayer.

The missionary made a space for prayer,  
in a dry place not far from Tucson, for pilgrims.  
Franciscans followed the Jesuits, who rode  
away leaving order in prickly pear paste, adobe white  
walls old as suffering saguaro cacti. The border  
is bone-dry; Rio Santa Cruz, on the rez,

runs dry. Illegals pass through the Papago Rez,  
flee mayhem and madness to trade terror  
for peaceful prayer in the White Dove. The border  
is brutal, metal sculptures, homage for pilgrims:  
the Nogales side in Mexico is hung with white  
crosses, migrants killed crossing. Mormons once rode

by in a historic brigade. Franciscans rode,  
with knots on cords, around robes, around Papago rez.  
The cool White Dove, walled in white  
wears a cord in the facade. Pray no predator. No terror.  
No beheadings, Mules, Coyotes, cartels. Pilgrims  
eat fry bread at taco stands near the border.

Feel the heat: afterburners above the border;  
patrols with night scopes. Where blackrobes rode,  
ICE finds torched holes in the fence. Pilgrims  
pack prayers; smugglers pack weed, pass the rez;  
illegals on the run are prey; the predator is terror.  
Prey seeks prayers, under clouds dove-white.

The Pima Air Museum preserves war planes white-  
hot, bone-dry; A-10 Thunderbolt pilots train. Border  
in infrared sights—dehydrated souls journey in terror.



Migrants die with empty water bottles. A blackrobe rode  
to bless St. Xavier del Bac, Arizona icon, on the rez.  
The landscape is trashed with plastic. Pilgrims  
revere a statue in glass sarcophagus, a blackrobe,  
uncorrupted saint in his grave. White church on border  
thirsty, contrails over rez; pilgrims pray, flee terror.

# Aleppo Looks Like Hell

Rubble & ruins: a bottomless well.  
Well, reports of the here-after  
are here—heaven appeared to a doctor;  
he was in a coma. Aleppo is hell.  
Hell is a war with cluster bombs.  
Keep your eye on the balls, lethal.  
Not toys. Mortars fall over borders. Ask us.

St. Paul had a fit on the road to Damascus.  
A ten-year old girl was murdered in Colorado.  
There was a killing in Abbottabad, Pakistan.  
The Taliban just shot a school girl. Terror  
on a school bus in the Swat Valley. Refugees  
come & go talking of Aleppo. The wounded  
girl is also in a coma. What does she see?

Drones have a Gorgon Stare.  
It is presidential to order a kill, pick  
the hit list. In Revelation, horses breathe fire.  
Seven seals. Like helicopters in Abbottabad.  
Getaway? Up a ladder? Angels are utility workers.  
The ancients used ladders to climb closer  
to heaven, up levels of adobes, Canyon De Chelly.  
Mud roofs. Artists like to sit on roofs. So do snipers.  
They paint the stars to stare in minds' eyes.  
Or, sight a human heart in their cross-hairs,  
or, roll barrel bombs down on Kurds & Christians.

A priest told us the special machine  
outside of church could lift us to heaven.  
It was a joke. We knew it was to lift  
workers up to the rose window, to fix  
the stained glass, part of the Bible's  
parables to elevate all souls to heaven.

What of Evil in Aleppo? Does the Devil do  
the killing? No. It is human gunmen. Who helps  
the wounded? Who buries the dead? Who kills,

who cares, who executes, who shoots on a bus?  
Is it us? Is Damascus full of men & women like us?  
How do we get away from here? In wind and fire.  
Pick & choose. Win or lose. Be bulletproof. Wear Kevlar.  
Ascend in a hot air balloon fiesta, above Albuquerque.

# Sheba's Trees Bleed For The Magi

A scent of Sheba's fragrance lingers in the souk: incense.  
The lines in the sand are drawn by caravans.  
Arabia & Yemen share a jihadi desert waste.  
Once the Queen of Sheba grew thirsty.  
Water is more prized than gold, seek an oasis.  
Caravans move phallic blades & bombs from Yemen

besieged by jihadis in uncivil wars between Yemeni  
tribes, in Sheba's kingdom; she gifted incense  
to King Solomon in his wise oasis.  
Sheba ruled a kingdom of caravans.  
Her scraggly trees in the desert thirst.  
Thorny myrrh trees endure in desert waste,

The Magi follow stars they do not waste.  
Today jihadis learn explosives in Yemen.  
A reddish-brown antiseptic mummies those dead to thirst.  
Herodotus wrote it is hard to harvest frankincense  
from bushes guarded by tiny winged snakes; caravans  
pass seeking to trade & rest at an oasis.

Predator drones prey on jihadis lurking in an oasis.  
Thorny myrrh trees bleed when cut in desert waste.  
Tribesmen trade ivory, African cargo, arms, in caravans.  
Ramadan moon, with a Jambia dagger's curve, hangs over Yemen.  
A dagger smith creates blades to bleed out incense  
trees—"yellow tears"—near the Red Sea; thirsty

goats eat seedlings near empty wells, thirsty.  
Black flags fly for a new caliphate, no Islamic oasis.  
Sap hardens to rocks scrapped into baskets—incense  
traders travel on dromedaries, burdens over waste;  
myrrh rides in leather bags to a souk in Sana, Yemen,  
trades like RPGs in Djibouti, or coffee in caravans.

Trucks & camels round the African Horn in caravans.  
Muslims wash in mosques, kneel facing Mecca, thirst  
for holy war, behead the infidel in Syria, Yemen,

Iraq. Sheba first, then Silk Road trader, a Prophet in an oasis—  
all breathed in incense; the more cuts the sweeter the scent, waste  
not sacred smoke for monks in holy places; rituals require incense.

If jambias with old rhino horn handles bleed out incense trees  
near thirsty Gulf of Aden in dry Yemen,  
who will caravan like the Magi, pilgrims in the waste?

# Martin Conte

## We're Not There

*For Janet and her daughters*

An injured spirit lingered in our town  
last night.

The air was thick—  
He cast a cold pallor  
over our ground.

The next morning,  
we woke  
to our first hard frost.

No one noticed the silver puddles of blood  
that he left  
except for our third graders,  
who went splashing through them in rubber boots,  
screaming.

He took with him  
our town clerk  
our pharmacist  
and a young father.

We pretended the spirit was  
heart failure,  
stroke,  
alcohol.

But we knew better.  
Our bodies recognized  
the taste  
of this spirit's bitter breath;  
our bones itched  
as he scraped  
at our cornerstones.

People gathered in the streets,  
just to cry.

Air too thick to—

We're not there.  
Instead, at school, miles away.  
A friend from home messaged us:  
*I feel like electricity is surging through the air.*  
My mother calls:  
*The Island can't handle  
another tragedy this year.*  
We're all gone, but the spirit  
demanded intercessions anyway:  
tears thick as—  
We mourned that day like doom,  
like 9/11 or JFK.

Did the town fathers meet  
to ask of each other  
what happened?  
Did they sense the spirit  
in the thick air—?  
Did they put away  
the gavel,  
the bible,  
and call on the old gods instead,  
buried for centuries in granite tombs?  
Did the spirit sit among them  
listening to his trial?

Or did he pass beyond,  
going first through your home,  
leaving  
that stained fray of linoleum,  
that creak in the stair,  
that whimper from your sleeping brother?

We still speak of it.

# Patriotism

They came to make a map  
of my bedroom.  
Two men, bearded, solemn,  
with rolled up drafting paper  
and thick black markers.  
“You can stay seated on the bed”  
one told me, carefully sidestepping  
a pile of my laundry.  
Both pulled out tape measures;  
they measured everything:  
the average width of my books,  
the circumference of the bare lightbulb  
jutting from the wall,  
even the width between my feet,  
toes kneading the blue carpet.

Then they set about drawing,  
boxes and squiggles abstracting  
the solids of my life,  
turning the djembe I carried  
from Uganda  
into a circle,  
the windows etched exes on the wall.  
They used a labeling language  
I could not discern.  
I had to pee,  
but one told me if I left,  
they would have to start  
all over again.

Finally, hours later,  
they put the markers down,  
rolled up their papers,  
and shook my hand.  
They said the drawings  
would go to the Library of Congress  
and be indexed with  
the rest of my rooms.



They called me a patriot,  
a citizen of the highest regard.  
Then they left,  
and their footprints  
faded into the abstract square  
of my carpet,  
labeled 'F7' in the secret manual  
all these men carry.

# Peacetime

I.

Four men appeared  
from the war.  
“Where should we meet?”  
they asked.  
“You will come to me  
in a long, thin room,”  
I responded,  
thinking of the hallway  
in the Rotary.  
“Will our mothers be there?”  
they asked.  
“No, they died, each,  
of heart failure,  
when they heard the news.”

II.

A man in Maine  
has been beating a drum  
continuously  
for four years.  
He says it is the heartbeat  
of the Earth.  
He has disciples who take turns  
on the drum  
in four hour shifts.  
He is squandering  
his inheritance.  
I hear they may move  
to a smaller house.  
I wonder how they will drum  
in the car;  
if they go over a bump,  
and the rhythm is interrupted,  
will the Earth wink out of existence?  
They must have  
a contingency plan.

# The End of His days

*And every ozone sundown burned a braver creation  
—Christian Wiman*

*Revelations* settles  
on the shoulders  
of the blooming congregation.

Little eyes expecting  
endings, wondering  
at my cassock, at my  
collar. Fear,  
dear hearts,  
in their little eyes.

For fear of what?  
I let my brain  
glide noiselessly  
through the waterveins  
of this bleeding Earth.

There is, hidden in smog,  
destruction; fires  
in homes of sand and stone

gut the lonely  
mothers;  
wives ask  
another god

for his tongue  
back. I rake  
my fingers  
through my brain,

explaining how a discarded  
Book is alive,  
blood-spilled and hand  
prints all over the margins.

Man's thoughts smolder  
of creation, embryos  
swimming through rivers  
of caution-tape into  
a mother's waiting delta.

God turns bright red  
and America's Lazarus, dead again,  
(he was Kennedy,  
he was Lincoln)  
pretends  
that his infinite  
devotion to the notion  
of one nation,  
under God,  
can raise him up.

My boat is drifting  
through dusk.  
My lambs are waiting  
for slaughter,  
for new life.

I ask  
the third grader  
what God wants  
us to confess.

She, blest, imparts  
intimately a  
wisdom far beyond

her years.  
I hear angels sing  
praises: her God is near-

the end of His days.

# A. Sgroi

## Sore Soles

Dark are the clouds above the dancer's head—  
    Wilting are the tulips in their backyard beds.  
Biting is the breeze that whispers at her back—  
    Forgotten are the books that she pushed into a stack.  
Ruined are her stockings, with a run at both the knees—  
    Aching is her back and the bottoms of her feet.  
Narrow, long, and winding is the road she walks—  
    Alone is the girl inside the music box.

# Exsanguination

By the time I broke his heart  
Mine had already begun to crumble.

Doubt came knocking,  
Erosion spread.  
There was now geological proof,  
A history in the dust.

His heart suffered a swift, sharp slice  
That bled quickly, and with fury.  
Exsanguination of the soul.

Mine had fallen prey to a quiet disease.  
A sickness, slow to show the symptoms.

It crept in, infecting every kiss and conversation.  
Debilitation from deep within.  
I lied to myself and to him.  
I lied to my skin and to my hands.

I killed the animal that we were  
And its blood dripped from my fingers.

Roadkill that we politely halved  
And strapped to each other's backs,  
Agreeing to share the stench.

We stretched and dried the skin,  
Dumped the innards in the river to wash away.  
The last task we did together.

Our heartbreak, in its collective sense  
Will wash up on some other beach,  
But the blood still stains my hands.

Three summers have come and gone,  
And no amount of scrubbing  
Can rinse my skin of the damage I've done.

I still smell it when I close my eyes.

By the time I broke his heart,  
Mine was deeply flawed at its core.  
Cracks ran through it from end to end.

There is no fixing a flaw like that.

# Reprisal

my sister took her name back  
from inside his mouth where he was keeping it.  
it perched on his tongue far too long.

a foolish place to keep a name,  
a room whose door will not remain closed.

my sister took her name back  
from under his bed where he kicked it,  
left to collect dust until he wanted it again.

a foolish place to keep a name,  
a space without walls to speak of.

my sister took her name back  
when he left it on the train  
and only realized the error  
when turning out his pockets for the wash.

anonymity is a sweet, fresh breath.  
he will know her not a moment longer.



# Autumn, buried

Brooklyn is still sleeping  
Early morning in October.  
Wide awake and weeping  
We are solemn, shattered, sober.

What happened so few hours ago  
Is etched into our skin.  
Too late to tell the artist 'no',  
Tattoo ink sinking in.

Brooklyn's still asleep  
As we avoid each other's eyes.  
Sunlight starts to creep  
As we prepare to say goodbye.

Goodbye to the love and goodbye to the friend.  
Goodbye to the fall and the never-again.

# Depths

You lead me to a place where the mud is deep  
And no one can see us.  
Leaves become sieves to the sun and its waning warmth.

For miles, we creep along  
And pick up rocks, and feathers.  
Remnants of the land we walk.  
We traipse like this as the light winds away.  
The fog within the forest depths is just that: deep.

The air drips with sound atop a bed of silence.  
We say things we otherwise wouldn't,  
We see things we otherwise couldn't.

There is nothing to be done,  
No one calling our names.

The scent of pine saturates our noses  
And rests behind our eyes.  
Mine share their color with the bottomless dirt  
And the grass that flecks the surface.  
Yours are like the storm clouds we don't think will reach us—  
—They do, and we are soaked.

Cotton clings, hanging on for dear life.  
We reject its advances and peel off our layers,  
Thinning suddenly under patches of moonlight.  
I am cold and you are chilly. I am drained and you are weary.

We walk until we reach the lean-to,  
A relic of our childhoods surviving well beyond its years.  
A patch of dry wood awaits—  
—We think it somewhat miraculous.  
Just enough room for both of our bodies and both of our souls.

By morning, the damp is lifting.  
It threatens to return and we do not doubt it.

I want to grab hold of these hours  
And put them in a pocket.  
The one within my chest,  
Where everything I stow inside is doomed to rot forever.  
The decay will take as long as my life.

Our clothes have almost dried,  
Just as before, only now  
They hold the scent of rain.  
Everything is different, yet we are both the same.

# Miguel Coronado

## Body-Poem

i.

my body is a poem

it sings, reverberating as a tuning fork  
*reverb* vibrates melodic  
as a buzzing swarm  
of lightning bugs;

as in a thunderstorm,  
the bugs and frogs come out  
to make the world  
a damp and sticky place  
for us.

ii.

my body is a poem

about my city in the rain, covered in fog  
*covered* just like a child  
under a great mountain  
of blankets, white as death;

I was always afraid of winter,  
how it roared  
& crept up,  
covering  
my shoulders  
in its fog.

iii.

my body is a poem

that had trouble sleeping last night, & woke up  
*startled* by the rustling of bells  
& the subtle click  
of a door closing;

the way a funeral proceeds,  
culminating in the closing  
of the earth, the subtle  
clink of a shovel  
finishing.

# Adventures of a Lost Soul

When I was young,  
I fashioned a small halo out of hollow stars,  
Insect husks and the love of my grandfather

In the rustic shadows of farms  
I explored in search of a reason,  
Any reason at all to continue exploring

Once,  
I led an inquisition in my  
Grandfather's backyard  
Against an insect insurgency  
    Swatting mosquitos in droves  
    & capturing buzzing bee drones  
    & chasing centipedes away  
    & banging on wooden nests  
    & watching the clover mites  
        bleed out in a frenzied splatter  
of bright  
red—  
    I ran away—  
    Afraid.

Today, I know  
Clover mites are harmless little bloodbugs,  
And I've long since quit the inquisition,  
But I still explore for the same reasons:  
    The incentive to keep exploring;  
    & so I wear my halo like a badge  
    & set on out in search of home,

The place I lost, so long ago,  
When I left those forsaken farms.

# The Kiosk

red light kisses a neon tavern;

a block away, a bum ambles into the night  
his body silhouetted hungry red, a ghost.

he rolls a shopping cart,  
filled beyond the brim  
with plastic

(transparent  
bones)

he'll cash them all in  
for coins—he'll recycle his life  
at a kiosk.

# The Sound of Distant Explosions

I am sound  
emitting

as rocketfire—  
distance  
is drowned out  
by a bonfire

in the night,  
the hungry city  
pulls the stars down  
to earth with  
skyscraping  
razor-sharp  
desperation

I eat sound  
& sleep sound,  
quietly fortifying  
my body-fortress

to perfection; this vessel  
for my mind and spirit.



# Tempus Fugit

i.

in time, you will see  
the glowing shell of day shed  
into the evening.

(two lovers stroll along an esplanade,  
hand in hand in secret hand of another  
secret lover, the moon, peeking out  
from a curtain of grey clouds.)

ii.

in time, you will know  
how doors unfold into death,  
how curtains cartwheel

light into a room  
but also darkness—and why  
windows wane away.

(farther down along the river,  
an old man falls in love  
with the coy moon—  
he gazes politely, not wanting  
to strip apart her innocence.)

iii.

in time, you will be  
gone as memory in a  
holocaust of thought.

(a slow cloud obscures thought,  
and the old man, weary of love,  
bows his head ever so slightly  
and closes his eyes to sleep—

and then the lovers closed their eyes  
to kiss; and then the river closed its eyes  
to flow; and then the clouds closed their eyes  
and began to rain; and then the moon closed her eyes

and disappeared into the night.)

# Franklin Zawacki

## Experience Before Memory

Step slowly, carefully,  
until you feel the fog between the trees.  
Hear the heartbeat of air.  
Let the ground open beneath you  
and grant you forever to walk the first step.  
Freedom is brief: watch smoke disappear.  
Even with the best of wines  
the second sip drowns the first.

## Lacking An Easel

The compulsion to capture two children  
geysering up and down on a seesaw—  
balancing precariously on the air—overwhelms me.  
If only I were an artist able to quick-sketch the silos  
wobbling behind them  
or draw the wheat field shrinking to stubble  
beneath their feet.  
Or paint the color of their squeals.  
The boy reaches for a rooftop,  
straddling the wood shed  
with red and blue shouts.  
The girl lifts bare legs—  
shrieking purple cries  
at the puddle drawing closer.  
Two children divide the light—  
each rising and falling with exultant yelps  
that swoop like swallows into the hay loft.  
But the exuberance of such a vision  
can never be painted but only kissed.  
And I'd rather savor it,  
keeping my hands free to catch them  
should one of them fall.

# Leaves Beyond Glass

*For Peter Kaplan (1957-1977)*

Father: open the windows before the trees go bare,  
before the lawn is raked clean,  
and one misstep buries me in mud.  
Bring back the green leaves surrounding my boyhood.  
Let me trot beside you,  
two steps to your one.

My hand grips your finger,  
as we trundle down streets,  
pulling a wagon full of brothers.  
I feel your chin when you bend down  
to sort the bottle caps from the coins  
I pull from my pockets.  
Shining back from counter glass,  
your eyes meet mine  
above the pyramid of ice cream numbing my tongue.  
Unable to look away, I'm lost in your reflection.

Confined by illness, I lay quarantined in your tattered robe,  
gazing out while you frosted cartoons  
to the outer side of my bedroom window.  
You stood in the cold, arching your eye brows—miming laughter—  
meant to carry me past all confinements.

Hearing you whistle around corners,  
I came running.  
I know you can't remove this sickness.  
But lift me once more toward the ceiling  
that appeared only an arm's length away  
before I fall back—  
entombed in the silence of this stale room.

# Spring

That well-spent hag was hardly awake  
before—with a toss of her hair—  
she changed beds.  
Stealing the moon's protrusion,  
she padded out her hips.  
She filled out her flat bosom with green buds.  
Crossing over the swollen creek, she trampled the lilies.  
She squeezed blossoms over her body,  
feigning a bath with perfume.  
A breeze dried her clean.  
Strapping on spiked heels,  
she gave the turf its course.  
Seed spilled everywhere.

But you've gotta hand it to her—  
the old bitch.  
Look at those meadows rise!

## Short Orders

It's 2 a.m.

I stumble into a diner.

Bubbly-mouthed coffee pots attempt  
to steam open the tight-lipped night.

I find an empty booth.

I'm not talking.

A waitress appears, hovering like an angel.

She turns her face away,  
allowing me to stare at the back of her legs.

I want to thank her.

I signal for her pencil. She hands it to me.

I trace our lives on a napkin.

"Look, buddy. You'll need more than astrological signs  
to get *me* into bed."

I open my jacket.

"Who do ya think you are? Pull down your shirt.

I've seen better tattoos on a dog's ass."

The food counter bell clangs.

"I'll be back when you're ready ta order."

I lick salt from the back of my hand.

"Hey! You givin' da girl trouble?"

I look up. The cook stands over me.

"Yeah. You. Don't act dumb. You can talk.

Now give her back her pencil. She's got work to do."

I hand it over, surrendering my tongue.

A drunken man and woman in rumpled wedding clothes  
flop down in the next booth.

"Would you believe," the bride slurs, "I was going to be a *nun*?"

She looks around to see if anyone else is listening.

"Here's your eggs and Johnny cakes."

The cook bangs down my plate.

"Ya got syrup and whatever else ya need on da rack.

So no more lip outta youse."

The bride winks at me.

"Hey, sweetie," she whispers. "You'd better be careful.

Cupid might be lurkin' closer than you think.

Look: I've still got my garter on."

She bares her thigh and giggles.  
“Whata ya say? Wanna try for it?”  
The groom weaves as he wags a finger at me.  
I shrug my shoulders and turn away.  
It almost seems the coffee darkens  
the more I add cream to it.



# Tracy Pitts

## Stroke

the ants in the carpet have climbed  
onto her head and onto the jars of strawberry preserves

green beans she'd snapped on the back porch  
have spilt into the sink from water still filling the bowl

the oven burns doughnuts she was making from buttermilk biscuits  
down to six rings of charred bread

the boys are with their granddad at Bull Lake taking  
turns holding the golf ball he cut out from a snake's belly  
the snake must have thought it had swallowed an egg

the smoke needs more time to fill the house

## Stray

I wrap live caterpillars  
in corn husks  
to feed them to the cows

and follow Pa  
to the chicken coop  
to watch his hands get pecked  
while retrieving eggs

but hide in the truck  
when he's outside  
combing underneath the house  
with a rake and towel  
for a litter of strays  
to drown  
in the pasture  
in the tub

where I was baptized

## Below

Underneath each hyacinth is a cat  
She digs the graves on her own  
The nursery will not charge her for the bulbs  
Two were pronounced dead in the same week  
Plant two and plant three  
A fifth plant will show this spring

She doesn't like children much or her eldest sister  
She remembers her Mother helping them bury  
a squirrel that bit her when  
she was only five, her sister nine  
It was sick and not safe to pet  
They all agreed to forgive the rodent  
after returning from the emergency room  
Together, the three of them sprinkled  
the animal with rosemary, thyme, and lavender  
then returned it to the earth

“That wasn't so bad,” she says,  
staring into her garden, eating a can  
of pork and beans from a crystal flue

# Brother

hear.

those feet over the road  
arched and bent the snap of thimble muscle  
lifts you like a squall of ink  
that  
great old mouth clicks  
wet with ancient hunger and parable  
charged with rain and famine  
don't caw at my share, brother  
you were the last silhouette off the bough  
for this downed meal  
every bite we  
shake with red tinsel between our beaks you  
still keep one eye on me  
dark, mannequin, inlaid like bad prayer

eat.

# The Tomatoes Are Good This Year

we sit like people sit  
pray like people in prayer  
even talk like people talk  
there is new death here we  
pass the turkey the dressing  
the pie in the second week of october  
tell stories swap photos like  
factory canners when it's not  
our turn we sharpen new exits  
does anyone need anything while  
i'm up notice the carpet is still green  
after all these years wonder  
if that mirror was always at  
the end of the hallway the plate  
of tomatoes reaches him the him  
that will be dead by the real thanksgiving  
the tomatoes he grew himself he  
removes a slice the first slice removed  
from the plate takes a bite a giant  
little outburst slips right out he doesn't  
cry long or share the future he catches  
it quickly says sorry folks the tomatoes  
are just that good  
he passes the plate to his  
left this time around we all  
take one we agree  
the tomatoes are good

# Rachel A. Girty

## Collapse

Like a window left open  
Winter after winter, like

A knock on the weathered door  
And never a reply, I

Am a ghost town. I swallow  
The plains around me,

I clear out warehouses, drive  
Even the coyotes from town.

You're only riding by, just a little  
Blue girl on a bike, but

Sickness spreads, and once its enters you,  
You can never pull every tendril out.

Radioactive, gleaming with kinesis,  
You begin your rapid decay,

Halving and halving, baking in the sun  
Until you are nothing but

A wisp of a receipt from the  
Drugstore, a dying echo on the concrete

Wall, My bottle cap, my seesaw,  
My aluminum clink.

## Everything Gets Harder

Everything gets harder: the ground  
Packed tight under days of snow, teeth and  
Fingertips as winter beats on, scraping itself  
Through the gaps in the window frame.  
There are holes in us too—the chill  
Reaches deep into your lungs and it's harder  
To say exactly what you mean. You open  
The refrigerator door, just to see the pop  
Of light, the rows and rows of boxes  
And bottles. You try to speak and  
Your voice drops away. It's okay—  
I'm trying to love you harder.  
I mean the things I say now, I clean  
The dishes you forget, I stop myself  
From waking you when I'm afraid.  
There are things we'll never say  
To one another, things we hoard that wedge  
Themselves between us when we sleep,  
But you're warmer in the morning.  
Things could be a whole lot harder.

# I'm Afraid of the Things You Keep

After that night you wouldn't  
Touch peaches for a week.  
You said something had happened  
In the produce section, in your dream,  
A floor full of grease and blunt objects.  
In the morning you kept running  
Your fingers along my jaw, to make sure  
It was still there. I'm sorry about the peaches,  
You said. It's gruesome, you said, blood  
And cooking oil don't mix. I should have  
Told you to stop, I should have said that  
Dreams aren't real until you wake up

And you choose to remember. I'm afraid  
Of the things you keep: the sound  
The sedan made outside our window  
The night of the thunderless rain  
And the scream of whatever it smashed.  
You couldn't find anything, even standing  
In the driveway, soaking in your pajamas.  
You carry every day the smell of the clinic  
The day you told me you thought you would die  
(There was nothing wrong with you at all)  
And you've memorized the official list  
Of ongoing worldwide conflicts. You keep  
Imagining me gunned down or gagged up  
But this is not a war. You and I  
Are safe for now, are warm and loved  
But you keep forgetting the days  
Spent on windy beaches, the hours  
Of firelight and spice-dark tea,  
The kind old woman who gave you a nickel  
When you came up short at the cider mill,  
The minutes when you first fall asleep,  
Dreaming nothing, listening, knowing  
A word from me can wake you up.



# Ryan Flores

## Language Without Lies

We resuscitated music,  
we rescued it from the icy grip of the cosmos.  
It was stillborn, from a cloud of dust in a silent vacuum.  
We refined the ancient sequence  
of building tension to create resolve.  
We defined the colors, the math, the geometry of sound.

Now music is our only language without lies.  
Now we're all playing different parts  
of the same song, in which countless beats  
of countless hearts provide the rhythm.  
Now music is our ghost dance, our communion, a sanctuary  
in which we're all kneeling to kiss the ground,  
a temple in which we're all praying for a miracle.

Music is our echolocation—  
a ping bouncing around in the dark,  
singing, "I'm here, can you hear me?"  
Music penetrates armor  
and holds a light up to each and every face,  
looking for something honest, something real.  
Music makes order out of chaos, makes us feel like  
we're not just spinning around a star,  
that's spinning around a star, that's spinning around a star.

Music helps us trust our ignorance  
as much as our instincts.  
Music prepares us for love and loss thereof.  
Music aligns us with empathy and gratitude  
and defines the lives and times of the human experience.

Music is the human soul thinking out loud.

# The Future for the Present

We traded the warm Earth  
beneath our feet  
for designer shoes  
on linoleum  
fashioned to appear  
as natural as stone.

We traded the old growth forest  
for posters of athletes and pop stars,  
for catalogs and celebrity magazines,  
for tables and desks on which to write  
checks with which to pay bills.

We traded the benevolent shade  
for a well-placed arbor,  
the dense undergrowth  
for perfectly manicured lawns.

We traded a spring-fed stream  
for a stagnant cow-pond,  
naps on the riverbanks  
for sleeping pills,  
a seashell for a cellphone  
a library for a TV guide,  
a full moon dance  
for a fitness center,  
candlelight for a lump of coal,  
a stable of thoroughbreds  
for a barrel of oil,  
a ceremony for a simulation.

We traded the winding trail  
for the static grid,  
a thunderstorm for acid rain,  
fresh air for smokestacks  
runways and boxcars.

We traded a conversation  
for a keypad,  
a sunset for a soap opera,  
an orchard for a house plant.

We traded wild buffalo  
for happy meals,  
an ear of corn  
for a laboratory,  
a corner store  
for a corporation.

We traded a hallelujah  
and a hug,  
for a website and a blog,  
rituals for garage door openers,  
a community for a computer,  
skin for plastic,  
landscapes for landfills,  
handshakes for handguns,  
stars for streetlights,  
pyramids and kivas  
for office buildings  
and strip-malls,  
a vision quest  
for a universal  
remote control.

We traded smooth curvatures  
for right angles,  
circles for squares,  
spheres for boxes,  
fenceless horizons  
for corners and borders  
dollars and flags.

# Guess Who?

(an exercise in lateral thinking)

to my mother I am *son*  
to my father I am *hijo*  
to racist hillbillies of the Midwest  
I am *wetback*, *spic*, and *beaner*  
to cholos at Armijo I am *gringo*  
to officials at the State Department  
I need proof of *citizenship*  
to la gente de México I am *güero*  
in the Southwest I am *coyote*  
at the university I am *Latino*,  
*Mexican-American* and *Chicano*  
to the Census Bureau I am *Hispanic*  
or “*more than one heritage*”  
to mis abuelos I am *mezclado*  
to those who hear me speak Spanish  
I must be *Argentino* or *Español*  
because of light skin and green eyes  
because of maternal Bohemian ancestry  
I muse as being *Czex-Mex*, *Czexican*, or *Czecano*  
I could be the *United States* of existence  
I could be *America*  
I could be your neighbor  
your boss, your teacher, your student  
I could mow your lawn,  
cook your food  
I could be you

## **Maelstrom—**

(or: The tiny, impending, commercial, homogenous, laughable ceremony)

I have known the inelegant madness of cubicles,  
plastic cells in a sterile hive, maelstrom of time cards,  
every tiny crisis surrounding copy machines and swivel chairs,  
the impending dread that lurks in break rooms  
and on sidewalks during the last drag of a smoke.  
I have known commercial wallpaper,  
packets of sweetener, the demands of staplers,  
the homogenous ridicule of fluorescent lighting,  
laughable music of printer, keyboard and mouse,  
the ceremony of hands, the black and white oppression of clocks.  
And each day I have witnessed expressions,  
faces settled by routine, dripping histrionic courtesies,  
controlled, tedious, hungry faces evaporating into landscapes,  
disavowed through rush-hour traffic and prime-time TV,  
mechanical, compartmentalized, alien faces  
detached from their owners.

# Bad Poetry

(an experiment with cliché)

by weighing the hidden meanings of red  
interlaced in clouds at dusk

and the fresh wound,  
and by reading skin,

icicles, stones, thorns, and feathers  
like love letters etched in braille

I have tried to align my senses  
with the merciless concept of perfection

perhaps even to pursue the rose,  
or the crimson moon,

or just discover an untainted expression,  
because not even bad poetry writes itself

# Margie Curcio

## Gravity

She is playing with her pink scarf.  
A child's scarf.  
Made of crocheted pink yarn.  
Pink—the color of innocent love.  
Pink—a child's color.  
A purer version of red.  
Neither lustful nor whorish.  
She holds one end in each hand.  
Small, pale hands with pink polish.  
Pink polish half-peeled off of nails.  
Nails tainted only by playground dirt.  
She twirls, letting her pink scarf slip from one hand.  
She twirls, her pink scarf flying freely with her,  
following her lead, circling her, protecting her.  
Twirling as I once did.  
Twirling, as sometimes I still do.  
Though I do not now, nor did I ever have a pink scarf.  
For minutes that seem like hours I watch this girl.  
This girl and her pink scarf, with its tattered edges.  
She is almost like me when I was her age.  
Thought it was I who was tattered and not my scarf.  
She is still innocent.

## And . . .

In my closet  
it is always night.  
Even when the fluorescent light hums.  
And I wonder how the light looks on the other side,  
peeking out through the slightly spread fingers of the  
walnut door.  
I feel as though the whole world is sleeping,  
except me.  
It is a lonely feeling.  
And the air is full of silence,  
and the fingertap of laptop keys,  
and the shuffling of pages,  
and another *fucking* paper cut,  
and another sleepless night.  
And I can't write another line,  
because a swarm of bees is chasing away the butterflies.  
Exhaustion has settled over me.  
The frustrated tears come slowly,  
dropping like weighty stones.

The door clicks open.  
He is standing there.  
I look up.  
"It's so late," he says softly,  
his hand outstretched.  
"Won't you come to bed with me?"  
And I am too tired to fight,  
so I take his proffered hand.  
His thumb wipes away a lingering tear  
as he whispers  
"I love your sad brown eyes.  
Sometimes I think you are most beautiful when you cry."

He kisses me  
and we are tongues of flame  
dancing in the night.  
And the sky, so far past midnight,  
is sneaking in through the skylight.



And we are ligaments and moonbones.  
We are muscles and we are starfire.  
And we are energy and volcano dust and salted skin.  
And we are falling.  
And the tide is rising.  
And morning is coming.  
And our names are written in this calligraphy of wanting.  
Our names are written in bird song across the quiet dawn.  
Daybreak washes over us.  
And together we are waiting for dreams to come.

I wish it could always be like this—  
these moments when he knows me so perfectly—  
but morning comes  
and he forgets.

# Autumn Leaves

I can't write the avalanche,  
not the way it really looks.  
The rush of fear,  
the charging onslaught of pristine snow,  
a thousand horses pushing forward,  
Sabinos and Camarillos,  
Arabian whites.

I can't write the way it really feels,  
the way you look right through me  
directly into my soul,  
somehow always knowing.

I can't write time more slowly,  
can't stop the passing of people,  
or the changing of seasons.  
I can't stop the days bleeding into weeks, to months,  
or the suddenness of so many years gone by.

I can't write the static friction of wanting, or  
the pulsing electricity  
in the space  
between  
where  
two hands meet.

I can't write the silence of missing you,  
or the haunting thickness of your absence.

It was never just you.  
It was never supposed to be you,  
but somehow it has always been only you.

With you I could see the sunlight in a whisper.

## Eleven / 13 / Eighty-Six

It was late Spring. This close to summer. The summer of spitting  
watermelon seeds.

Chinese Fortune gum in orange wrappers and delfa rolls.

Plastic charm necklaces we bought from the ice cream trucks.

Blasting Madonna:

“I fell in love with San Pedro. Warm wind carried on the sea, he  
called to me”

from the silver Sony boom box on LaurieMarie’s front stoop.

Begging our mothers for “just five more minutes” after the street  
lights came on.

It was the summer I first remember being aware of boys.

My eleven year-old self attracted to the lanky, barely discernible  
masculinity of their bodies.

The gorgeousness of the awkward angles that define their anatomy  
as they carve the curve of an empty in-ground pool  
or tailslide along the un-cut curb of a sidewalk vanishing into the  
melting asphalt.

I always thought it was a shame, how they scratched up the  
graphics on the undersides of their decks.

That summer was the first I ever remember falling in love.

I fell hard, like a star kicked out of heaven.

He was older.

A mysterious, dark-haired Italian boy with just-the-hint-of-a-  
mustache-thinking-of-growing

and an accent that made my knees embarrassingly unstable.

He said his family came from a border town on the Alps.

Maybe Trentino or Como, maybe Porto Venere.

I was skinny.

Weird.

A wholly uninteresting girl,

with bad hair and breast buds decidedly not blooming.

My small hands crept though his chain link fence to steal the  
plump June bearing strawberries,

growing on the border of Staten Island and Vernazza,

while his mother stood on their stoop yelling:

“Disgraziata sei!!! Potrete uccidere l'erba!”

at his Gemini brothers breakin' on the flattened cardboard boxes in  
their front yard.

The mischievous one, who looked like Balki Bartokomous, winked  
at me as he responded:

“L'erba è bene Mamma; non ti preoccupare,”  
before dropping down to do the worm.

I drowned willingly in the sunset of his café au lait eyes.

I wrote love notes to him in broken Italian.

I played MASH, his name on every line, not caring if we ended up  
in the shack.

And I waited.

I waited through the teased-out, deadly flammability of Aquanet hair,  
through banana clips, stirrup pants, crimping irons, and the Goonies.

I waited through Garbage Pail Kids and Super Mario Brothers,  
mulletts and tails and Dance Lucky Stars.

Through lace fingerless gloves, Michael Jackson jackets, and  
mirrored aviators, I waited.

Finally at 13 he found me worthy. All Souls Day, 1986.

Unseasonably warm, though night came early that first November  
Saturday.

We stood in the remains of his parents' summer garden  
surrounded by deep-rooted tomato plants and fig trees bagged for  
winter.

The air was alive with the aroma of basil and oregano and green  
peppers embedded in the dirt.

He stood behind me, his long arms wrapping me in the smell of  
Italy and fading suntan and too much Drakkar.

As we stared at the Beaver Moon, he spun me around and kissed me.  
A perfect first kiss, drenched in moonlight and waning innocence,  
electrified tingling and the exhilarating fear of being caught alone  
together.

And in that moment we were the coffee grinds and the egg shells  
and the orange peels impregnating the damp earth.

We were the rapid, hummingbird beating of our hearts.

We were the plum tomatoes and zucchinis and Italian parsley yet  
to come.

I lived a thousand lifetimes in the span of that first kiss.

A girl on the verge . . .



Together we plunged into the emerald abyss,  
Feet first, eyes closed—  
    searching for Oz.

I poured out the contents of my heart like clumped sugar from the bowl.  
You drew fingerprints on my sun-freckled skin.  
My palms kissed spun sand.

We were the red balloon and the flaming heart.  
You, always floating somewhere above me.  
A satellite.  
And I, always burning.  
Flame-licked.

I was the skin you shed.

Your words melted like salted slugs in my mouth.  
So cold, I couldn't even taste them  
as I swallowed from the blue cup  
you left on the counter by the sinking.

# Stephanie L. Harper

## Painted Chickens

Twenty years ago  
I received a birthday gift  
from a close college buddy-slash-sometime lover  
(*What on earth were we thinking?*).  
Back then, our past was already in the past  
and twenty-four was already not young.  
He gave me a coffee mug  
covered in chickens—

yes, painted chickens—

three plump specimens posed around the outside,  
and one that looks like an index finger  
with an eye, a comb, a beak and a wattle,  
slapped onto the bottom.

How, I can't fathom,  
but my friend knew that those chickens  
with their orange-red, expressionistic bodies  
would be a boat-floater for me—

the one time I had slept with him  
had been an epic shipwreck,

with a silent drive to the airport in its wake;  
on the way, we choked down pancakes,  
and I stifled sobs in my coffee,  
averting my eyes  
from the helpless horror in his.  
I then flew off into the wild, wide sky,  
bewildered, drowning.

Somehow, for years to come,  
his southern gentlemanly charms  
still served to allure:  
he kept his promise to write  
and took pains to catalogue for me  
the details of his worldly escapades

and various, accompanying sexual conquests,  
always making sure to emphasize  
the ways in which they were hot for him,  
so as to prove those trysts' relative rightness.

Then, years later, for my birthday,  
came, unexplainably gratifyingly,  
the chicken cup.

Still burning hot  
and feathered in their chili-pepper red,  
royal purple and verdant green cloaks,  
my static and impossibly happy  
aphrodisiac chickens  
blush like lovers on a Grecian urn;  
clucking, urgent.

My southern gent,  
now so long ago flown from this callous coop,  
wooed another and had his own brood,  
as, in due course, did I,  
but the mug, no worse for wear, remains  
a spectacular feature—  
like a bright birthday piñata  
(with its promise of sweet reward)—  
of my sacred morning ritual.

These chickens,  
still ecstatically surprised,  
letting out unabashed, open-beaked caterwauls,  
adorn my most aged and prized coffee mug;  
a vessel, perfectly-sized,  
it cups its contents so adoringly,  
fiercely,  
like an egg enveloping its cache of gold,  
as I take privileged sips.

The big chicken on the left  
might actually be a rooster

and that one on the bottom,  
a middle finger.



# The Artifice of Death

*In Memory of My Beloved Friend, JPM*

Before you came to my dreams,  
I had believed your self-hatred  
precluded love.  
Had you actually known in life  
that you could still create bonds  
from the beyond?

The brief words you left behind  
in the blackness of a vacuum  
were vengeful, frozen reminders  
that everyone and everything  
had failed you.

You took your sun from the world  
and returned to the ancestral night,  
where all artifacts of mortality,  
like splintered clay idols,  
are pieced together from the dawn of time  
and placed carefully on exhibit.  
The Curator catalogues young deaths like yours  
among those who died cynical and regretful in old age.

Did you suppose you'd be exempt  
from an eternity of the sorrow  
you left for those you'd claimed to love?  
Did you somehow know that I  
would preserve your warmth  
in the ornate museum of my dreams?

How did you know where to find me, waiting  
for you in the shadows of dusk?  
I waited in an endless gallery,  
lost within marble halls, gilding and  
minute faces carved into tiny,  
polished soapstone figurines.

Among the lapis lazuli  
likenesses of Osiris and Anubis, I waited,  
grew tired, and rested my head  
against a marble portico  
of a room that led to forgotten souls  
drifting in everlasting twilight.

Would my deliberate remembering  
resurrect a vestige of you  
from the static crypt?

You finally came to me  
as the evening sun  
filtering in through a skylight,  
and gently brushed my cheek as I dozed.  
That warm gesture was the same,  
entirely benevolent force  
which I had once known as *you* in life.

It was you who had once rendered  
out of the vague concept of me  
a solid silhouette  
that still cuts a dry island  
into the murky ocean of living death  
and stands against the firmament,  
a testament.

Your kiss had gifted me  
a quickening, a start, a far-off end,  
a will, an enthusiasm to live,  
a reassurance that every new  
dawning is possible, because *I know*  
you are the same, boundless heart  
that once evinced such light.

Though I still believe when you left  
you were resolved to your semblances  
of self-loathing and violent whim,  
I won't presume to condemn  
the rent apart, toppled effigy

of who you once were to me  
and who you became  
lying in slabs;  
blame doesn't mend brokenness—

In forgiveness, death becomes artifice.  
In my dreams, these symbols of non-life  
are subsumed by time  
and life and death become interchangeable.  
Aren't we all relics to be exhumed  
and polished to flawlessness?

Though I conjure  
these burnished, ghostly cyphers of your being,  
they are no less solid, no less substantial,  
than my own, chiseled breath;

you are surely no less precious to me  
sequestered now  
behind protective glass.

# I Am Alabaster

I am alabaster, polished, translucent—  
and I am ashes, tamped in hollows,  
crushed between the breath of the living and the souls of the dead.  
No one will tell me if I will survive.

As the blush of dawn unfurls over dunes  
and seagulls soar on ocean thermals,  
I break apart and scatter in the wind,  
losing the border where everything else ends  
and I begin.

Lighter than air, a cloud of me rises up  
to speak to the hawk perched on a streetlamp  
and tells her I am fine, because I don't know how to talk  
about not being fine—  
besides, I am flying . . .

I want to be the best version of myself,  
the beautiful one,  
carved in lucent crystal and buffed to a shine,  
so that my face will reflect your eyes,  
which will be mine, crying,  
because you have recognized the truth of me.

Specters of what was and what is  
are ground into fine, dark cinders  
amassing as shadows  
beneath my alabaster feet,

while my crimson heart  
yet thrums  
with faith                      in what will be.

# **If I Saw Aidan Turner Walking Down the Street . . .**

If I saw Aidan Turner walking down the street,  
I would not stop to contemplate the earth beneath . . .

I would not for a second consider that I  
was already in junior high when he was born,

or that my own daughter is now the age I was  
when that brand new star-to-be emerged from the womb,

replete with a tuft of black curls, which I can't help  
but to surmise. My daughter views him in his full

adult glory—deep voice, dark eyes, just enough scruff  
to pass as a vampire or Middle Earth heart-throb,

cloaked in black leather and adorable Irish  
cadences wrapped about him like a lucky cloud.

My daughter is certain that she could reach him first—  
fully trusting in her youthful abilities,

and in my usual habit to step aside  
in favor of promoting her self-assurance.

I have not been tough enough on her in some ways—  
for instance, I have not gone for a hard tackle,

stripping her of a ball at foot in one quick breath,  
nor have I generally used my advantage

of momentum in everyday foot-races:  
usually, I would feign a fall to foster

her sense of imperviousness to ill fortune;  
in most cases, I would give her a head-start, but

if I saw Aidan Turner walking down the street,  
I would at once utterly forget her youthful

sighs, her earnest blushing, her sweet, redolent gaze  
transfixed in goofy stupefaction, innocent

through and through—the beauty of watching her feel  
herself becoming a woman (through watching him

make love to cameras in a perfect balance  
of feigned humility and stunning sex-appeal)

would extinguish in less than a blink of an eye.  
The frightful scene that would ensue would estrange us,

my daughter and me, for a lifetime and a day—  
such would be the nature of the abject horror

my actions would exact upon her fragile mien:  
she would learn for certain that determination

does, in fact, pay handsomely . . . As for the handsome  
Aidan Turner, hypothetically spotted

strutting blithely down the street by the likes of me—  
the assault would surely mark a milestone for him.

# Nicholas Petrone

## Running Out of Space

Within the jurisdiction of the Atlantic's salty breezes  
the smooth meandering road  
vanishes  
gobbled up  
consumed by expensive running shoes  
dissolving into glare.

I can see to the subatomic level  
    I am intimately acquainted with the quasars  
    Erupting from each tiny aperture  
    of the blacktop galaxy.

Following the yellow line  
I could run this walk this bike this  
on my hands and knees crawl this from sea to sea  
Oh infinite road  
I utter  
Shout  
Proclaim clichés in your honor.

Or what if this shady curve  
painted with gently dancing silhouettes  
of scrubby crooked pines  
is the whole road  
the entire multiverse  
or whatever they are calling it now?

I'd be okay with that  
and can't help wondering  
whether we are naive  
to expect another road around the bend  
some infinite intersecting labyrinth  
of highways . . .

It is more likely  
that I am merely riding this piece of asphalt  
like a treadmill in empty space  
or at least it feels that way  
as I stop for water.



# Worlds Apart

A whole world is laid waste in the morning for a child to find.

Evidence  
of the murky underwater galaxy is everywhere so unspectacular  
as if every terrestrial plant and animal were vomited onto the  
surface of the moon  
each day and curly-headed little aliens run to see  
the funny bones of Aunt Clara and the tall grasses pureed by  
the long trip  
through outer space  
and ask what that smell is daddy.

The jogger who took our picture has never been to the bottom  
and neither have I. We know nothing—we just came to  
Wellfleet for the oysters.

Those stupid clams have never seen the Grateful Dead.

The mollusks missed my daughter's first words.

That jogger has never seen me naked

nor the mollusk.

## untitled poem about rain

Rain is perfect  
no matter how it d  
r  
o  
p  
s

where it  
splatters.  
rain drops  
belong to no one.

We all daydream from similar quiet corners—  
gray, always gray, solitary  
but not unhappy.

When it rains I can breathe  
When thunderstorms roll we hold our breath.

Sometimes a storm looks like night  
feels like drifting opiate slumber.

The drops fall  
They do not look for distraction  
direction or definition

Rain sounds like rain. There is no metaphor.

Sometimes they die in puddles  
are reborn  
as ripples.

Sometimes they are lost in the ocean

Sometimes they zigzag race  
or dance  
on the window of cars when you are young  
and the ride doesn't seem so long.

# Danielle C. Robinson

## A Taste of Family Business

After grace, the head of the family squared her lap.  
Using her semi-wrinkled, mahogany hand,  
she selected the silver from the left of her plate.  
She scooped and sliced the first servings on China.  
Then she softly smiled while politely passing the collards  
to her first daughter who is sweeter  
than her plate of yams and southern tea.  
Her only son is the chicken out of the group that  
stirs up home-made laughter to choke up every soul in their seat.  
Patiently waiting, the new generation  
sat like macaroni and cheese until their turn.

Over the savors of spices,  
the variety of cuisines dished out silence  
followed by a series of traditional “Mmm mmm good!”  
First chance, the first cousin sang a hymn;  
The second cousin proposed on bended knee;  
and the third cousin sat pretty in pink—  
announcing the development of a new edition.

By this time, joy was dancing in circles—  
limiting water the opportunity to feud with blood.  
Then the head of the family spoke  
of the past to connect with the future.  
The strength of her voice sprinkled wisdom  
and tough love with blended whole truths.  
Then her sister displayed her buffet of sweetness.  
And they were all gravy and well served.

## Notes of the Day

This time.  
Eyes didn't go probing for water.  
This time.  
Stems hid and petals too.  
But, it found roots.  
Not by the bay,  
but gradually sprouting at window.

PITTER, patter.  
splash, SCATTER.

Creating musical notes as it fall side by side.  
Pinging from the sky to pong the Earth.  
Obstructing objects with showers  
to satisfy yesterday's thirst.

PITTER, patter.  
splash, SCATTER.

Feeling of the cool and calm pelting me—  
as it alarm others with rage in avenues.  
Gifting some peace cupped by tea.  
Enticing laborers the fancy of sleep.

PITTER, patter.  
splash, SCATTER

Next time,  
Eyes will hear the sun.

# Birthstone

I am from a city of pain,  
where few fathers neglect their daughters.  
Broken sons are often slaughtered.  
I am from the “All American City.”  
A home, somewhat quite bold and witty that  
centers a market house that stocked and sold slaves,  
and the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne—salute to the “Home of the Brave”!  
A history of indigenous cultures steered  
and speared by the rear of Cape Fear.  
Best interest in spring?  
Honeysuckles and dogwoods—  
plant fresh scent of precious moments of my childhood.

I am little gardenia in queue—  
raised on Gardenia Avenue.  
Streets over, eyes squint and zoom  
before I enter my pink and white bedroom,  
Drugs sold and women occasionally auction their souls.  
“Don’t leave without permission and be careful”, Momma  
always told.  
I am a pinched carat straight out of coal,  
in between hidden smiles and tortured souls,  
that barely diffuse “Thank You”—  
in the mist of the city’s troubles and midnight blues.

I am from a legacy of struggle—  
where doubt politely invite life to crumble,  
generations of corruption and abuse,  
spirits high off booze and drug residue,  
slight education and lack of motivation,  
extreme colorism and degradation,  
family values shredded by grudges  
and overdue monetary value.  
Here, the birthplace of my genome,  
Polished-up and shine for the city I call home.

# Every Night Forever

Over burning candles,  
sweet wine kissed our lips  
as a chilly breeze circled us.  
The sky owns no moon tonight  
as our hands practice constellations resembling l-o-v-e.  
Behind the taste of laughter,  
warmth tickles our hearts.  
As our eyes think of a dance,  
we extend hands to confirm yes to:  
*Care for me to be the skyline with you?*  
*Care for us to be those portraits in motion?*  
*Care for me to be that jazz breathing in your ear?*  
*Care for us to glow together for the rest of our lives?*

# May She Rise

*To Dr. Maya Angelou*

Above in the sky,  
glistening over the lives of millions,  
may she rise.

Hoisted proudly in the wind,  
flaring and flapping freely  
in the honor of all people.  
may she rise.

Uncaged, fearless, and melodic  
with peace and hope under her wings,  
may she rise.

Uprooted from oppression,  
stemmed with elegance,  
and of blooming beauty,  
may she rise.

Fleeing cocoon,  
dancing freely,  
parading in majestic colors,  
may she rise.

Like a soulful mezzo-soprano over an African drum,  
joy to the world,  
the words of a prayer,  
a heart inhaling love,  
and a spirit flown into heaven,  
may she rise!

# Meghan Kemp-Gee

## A Rhyme Scheme

Your broken heart knows it's about time,  
a beat away from a healthy sense of play,  
that you learned to ask for your own advice.  
Please take a moment to fill out the form.  
Now, all of the legalities aside,  
listen close enough to realize  
this is the kind of lie you could take pride in,  
when truth writes itself from the outside in,  
when you weave the wool pulled over your eyes  
into sheep's clothing and when, sheep-eyed,  
you parade in wool rags rather wolfly worn,  
or rather, rags washed in the same river twice.  
Even broken hearts are right twice a day.  
Listen close enough, and anything can rhyme.



## Pantoum

The world unfolds itself at night.  
It's getting late, but I don't mind.  
This is a game I like to play.  
I play these games to stay awake.

It's getting late, but I don't mind  
explaining all the rules to you.  
I play these games to stay awake,  
and make the rules up as I go.

Explaining all the rules—to you,  
that's a game, too. You say I cheat  
and make the rules up as I go.  
I say we'll do away with rules.

That's a game too, you say. I cheat  
at almost everything these days,  
I say. We'll do away with rules.  
You let them in, they'll eat away

at almost everything. These days  
we keep them all at bay. At night  
you let them in. They'll eat away  
what we don't know we love. And yet

we keep them all at bay at night.  
We fight but sometimes we forget  
what we don't know we love. And yet  
I still like it. I like the way

we fight, but sometimes we forget  
this is a game. I like to play.  
I still like it. I like the way  
the world unfolds itself at night.

## **Saxa atque solitudines voci respondent**

Still, all we wanted was some inspiration,  
and so we tuned our ears to the unknown.  
We heard the one about the heart of stone,  
and so we all set out to fashion one.  
At heart, the change remains just what it seems.  
You reinvent the secrets that you keep,  
you recognize disguises, you enclose  
the call inside the answer. Don't suppose  
that just because we always looked asleep,  
the answers came to us as if in dreams.  
We found that we were sprouting mossy wings.  
We slumbered darkly, rocked by noises,  
until we woke up to the sound of voices  
lispings the truest sense of holy things.

## **Bestiae saepe immanes cantu flectuntur atque consistent**

We found the things our stillness recommends,  
some holy ground, a stash of songs, some new  
sets of teeth that charm as sure as they cut,  
new loves that wink and promise to be true  
and whisper *oh it doesn't matter what  
you do I'll love you anyway*, new friends,  
false selves that trim the fat from fight or flight,  
false faces, the ability to lie,  
a new proclivity to meet the eye  
of what we want to eat, a muscle curled  
and crouched and looking backwards at the night,  
a wicked shift that we still strain to feel,  
new arsenals that could unmake the world:  
the things we need to make the world real.

# Allen and Greenough's New Latin Grammar

Certain moods are required as a sign of subordination.  
These methods make darling a distinction  
between purpose and result,  
pending the exalting *so* or *so much*.

Fostering confusion between causal and concessive  
easily slips into matters of time,  
time when, or maybe with.  
Maybe—what is relative usually isn't indicative.

Sometimes the truest way of things  
is best expressed by a past contrary to fact—  
the curse of chaos barely shuffled off  
by the blessing of what didn't happen to happen.

Likewise,  
we less superstitious assent to utopian literature—  
a future more vivid,  
tricks of timetravel, tomorrows and tropes.

Doomed little things—  
a beautiful excuse for the use of *lest*,  
for the charm of this mad king's dream,  
a language full of invisible subjects.

Or like Macbeth we find  
things no sooner uttered  
than delivered,  
then—

nothing is but what is not, or  
nothing is but what is said.  
Just try it.  
Just try to just say *nothing*.

These are the words of bestial dispositions,  
a screwing of sound,  
a court masquing for our panting,  
the libertine's love of letters, of reported speech.

Begin the staged exorcism of the volitional,  
let the gilded butterflies laugh back,  
let the speech all be an act—  
this is how to do things with words.

Meanwhile, somewhere in ancient Rome,  
it trembles for its antecedent.  
Little does it know what the world becomes—  
dreams after dreams, endless dependent clauses.

Fortunately, the partitive genitive  
keeps the show going,  
a part of the whole  
with the whole of a thing—

synecdoche, a wet dream  
of the truly infinitive,  
which by definition  
cannot be modified.

Here—*hic, in haec re, in hoc*—  
this is where the story might end.  
The old stories don't get along  
with the new grammar.

Once upon a time,  
when one thing led to another,  
you wouldn't write about your death  
in perfect tense.

Nowadays, the thing you take in becomes  
everything.  
Everything comes home with us  
to be played and replayed.

Like taking home a Christmas tree  
and waking up deep in the forest,  
like the end beginning,  
like a dead man poised to make a poem,

this is the conceit of the complementary infinitive.  
The Christmas Tree takes us from to be to praise—  
brought down at last,  
it couldn't be any other way.

# Tania Brown

## On Weeknights

On weeknights, she  
painstakingly applies lipstick, a  
paint-the-numbers exercise where she  
does her best to  
stay in the lines and  
not stain her teeth with  
tell-tale red; she  
steadies her hand as  
the mascara wand,  
a fairy godmother in a tube,  
plumps and  
makes appear  
what wasn't there before.  
She squeezes her feet into heels and  
wobbles like a bell  
chiming the appropriate hour in  
her knee length skirt.  
“Let's go for a walk,”  
she tells the dog, who  
plays his part well by  
always being ready at the door.  
She strolls down the street,  
summoning her best impersonation of  
someone put together,  
not falling apart  
at the seams.

On weekends, she  
stays home in his old clothes, her  
knees peeking through  
holes worn by time, and  
watches movies,  
lips whispering lines that  
remind her of him, as  
the dog waits for  
another weeknight.

# Slice of Life

Frozen:  
a slice of life extracted,  
permafrost edging in,  
tainting the feigned perfection  
of a memory  
carefully preserved in microscopic detail  
to show what he wanted  
and not what was.



## Burn Me Clean

I poke at the bloody hole,  
ragged edges stinging,  
feel around the space where you were—  
the way you filled me up and  
still left me wanting,  
the way you ripped me open so  
I could never be whole again.

It's funny now—  
in that soul-crushing way which is  
never actually funny but  
we say “funny” because  
who really wants to think about  
the pain we're obscuring—  
funny how  
you were a security blanket, a  
safe haven for my worried heart,  
for my mind that never stopped  
firing on all cylinders,  
until it did, and  
now it just fires on one:  
you.  
Funny how you were,  
then in one decisive moment,  
you decided you weren't, and  
who was I to say that  
you'd gotten it wrong?  
That you'd always be,  
even when you were no longer.

You were  
your favorite shirt,  
the one I'll never return,  
because dammit,  
it looks good on me, and  
every time I wear it  
I catch that sweet scent and  
my head is filled with you,

buttoned up in the softest flannel as  
you lift another box  
higher than I can reach,  
always willing to do those little things that  
made my life easier,  
until you weren't.

I'm not sure how so much of you  
fit in that hole,  
how I packed away  
even the tiniest pieces—  
your smirk, the crinkle of your eye,  
your general nonchalance,  
your affinity towards devil's advocacy—but  
unpacking it has been even harder.

I light the match,  
my flicker of hope,  
press it to the flesh,  
cauterize and sear,  
burn myself clean so  
I can move forward without you.

# Melody

The way we danced—  
leaves on a breeze,  
a whirlwind of autumn,  
taken by the song  
only we could hear—  
failed to wake the dead,  
and they remained  
beneath our feet,  
tucked safely  
in their graves.

# I Am

I am my mother when,  
exhausted at the end of the night,  
I scrub with all my might to  
scrape the dredges of the evening meal from  
the bottom of the flame-licked pot,  
unable to sleep while  
it sits in the sink.

I am my father when,  
wishing to be alone with a  
book and a candle at a dinner party,  
I manage to spin tales of  
past exploits  
that paint a different picture than  
the one in my mind.

I am myself when,  
eyes closed,  
sitting on the couch, I  
contemplate the things I  
like and dislike about  
the person I've become and  
weigh them against the  
notion of the person I'd  
like to be and  
the person I once was,  
wondering why the tally  
never seems to come out quite right.

# **James Ph. Kotsybar**

## **Unmeasured**

The lone, quantum bit,  
unlike Frost, chooses both paths,  
interferes with self.

# Yowl

## I

I've seen the minds of my generation bested by their  
handheld mobile devices,  
texting for a dopamine rush, tuning out the reality around  
them.  
I've watched them, withdrawn from present company,  
looking for bars of microwave coverage, friending  
strangers, downloading angry birds,  
internet junkies, living in the ether, looking for that server  
connection to fame gauged by the number of hits they  
receive,  
who sit in restaurants with downturned faces aglow,  
oblivious to their dinner companions, to check who has  
Twittered® them in the last few minutes,  
who drive distractedly, causing fatalities in order to update  
their Twaddle® followers with TMI about their state of  
mind on the road,  
who walk into traffic, updating their relationship status or  
performing Binglehoo® searches for celebrity gossip or  
obituaries,  
who envision themselves as divas, broadcasting narcissistic  
images of every party or event they've attended in the  
camera phone eye, imagining others care,  
who live without discretion in the digital age, unknowingly  
or uncaringly giving up control over their destinies to  
follow the latest manufactured meme,  
who look with disdain on anyone behind the curve of the  
latest cell phone product designed to track them through  
time, space and potentially subversive ideas,  
who are GPSed at all times, allowing local merchants to  
target them for advertising or law enforcement to trace  
their movements,  
who are trained to demand ever higher speed connection,  
because they're afraid to be, "so seven seconds ago,"  
who fire up the Wiki at both ends, eliminating the need for  
scholarly research or retention of thought,  
who self-publish their diaries and essays as open blogs,  
pretending that makes them journalistic writers,

who trust all their personal information to cloud networks  
about which they have only the foggiest notions,  
who ask YSIC about who watches them watch countless  
MPEGs of people's posted antics that pile up a profile of  
their tagged interests,  
who believe convenience and expediency are more  
important than their right to privacy, conceived as an  
abstract concept of the elderly,  
who are betrayed by the telecommunications industry they  
think serves them but ignores Constitutional rights to  
due process and even freedom of speech,  
who post supercilious comments publicly, assuming they  
have the protection of anonymity because they hide  
behind a hash tag or screen name,  
who, hands free, carry on conversations with the air, like  
schizophrenic lunatics, speaking to virtual colleagues,  
even incommodiously in the commode,  
who require medications for ADHD and bi-polar disorders,  
never making the connection to their constant multi-  
tasking, dividing their attention,  
who "can haz" perpetual amusement lolling at LOL sites,  
impersonally spamming inboxes worldwide with their  
latest animal pic find,  
who post videos to social sites of the last vestiges of actual  
experience witnessed, and often disrupted, to make their  
disassociated lives downloadable,  
who refuse to turn off their ringtones, assuming all  
potential calls more important than any movie, play or  
concert they might attend,  
who think they're the source of the Arab Spring and 99%  
strong because sometimes they can pull off a successful  
flash mob,  
who are misled into believing they have influence and  
choice because there's an app for that.

## II

What routers have backed up the profitless souls naively  
sold to the machinery of control?  
Telco! Dotcom! Dotnet! Dotorg! Dotgov! Dotmil! Dotedu!  
Dottv! Dotbiz! Dotint! Everyday your bandwidth fills

with the addresses you occupy.  
 Telco, you are the new god of information, replacing books,  
 magazines, newspapers and even postal letters.  
 Telco, the world is trapped in the web you crawl seeking  
 content management and infrastructure ownership.  
 Telco, computer simulated, you leave no paper trail in  
 cyberspace, so how can we know what really persists and  
 what may have been censored?  
 Telco, whose phones are smartest for you and whose service  
 is about limiting access to information, you are the true  
 user.  
 Telco, your hidden stealth-bots relay the private data in our  
 terminals that you cram with cookies.  
 Telco, whose attempts at regulation have been at least  
 partially thwarted, your lies about protection of  
 intellectual property have been anticipated.  
 Telco, whose plans to terrace farm the fertile fields will one  
 day restrict totally free access, may you choke on the  
 Creative Commons.  
 Telco, who wants to navigate our searches for us, leading  
 us into realms most profitably marketable for you, may  
 your electronic banks surge without protection.

### III

Like me on Bookface®  
 AYOR—no liability is claimed.  
 Like me on Bookface®  
 GRAS (but there's no guarantee.)  
 Like me on Bookface®  
 Please register because UR2G2B4G  
 Like me on Bookface®  
 ROTFLMAO if you think the feeling is mutual.  
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 You might win a promotional prize—LMKHTWOFY  
 Like me on Bookface®  
 NTIMM—just logging on, you're a research  
 participant.  
 Like me on Bookface®  
 IYSWIM IGWS: There's always a price to pay  
 (TANSTAAFL). HAK XOXO IOH!



## Cue!

In the middle of my act,  
I'm pulled by my hair through the curtains,  
wrenched out of character,  
forced to see the sandbags and pulleys  
behind the scrims and flats  
and recognize  
the stage for what it is.

Made to observe the gearbox of  
*Deus ex machina*,  
to understand its well-oiled magic  
from behind the scenes,  
I see the joke I 'd been too in on  
to get—involving too many,  
too involved in playing this scene.

I only know my audience  
as extensions of myself,  
and that's been just a role.

Motes in the spotlight  
look for motivation,  
and settle,  
irresolutely flickering, unresolved to Earth,  
and the globe's no different for it—  
becoming no more ponderous,  
due to the energy lost in production.

I'm not laughing  
as I retake the dusty boards,  
stand my mark again  
and, running dull fingers  
through mussed hair, find  
. . . not one line in my mind.

## Open Mic

One thinks poetry is a couch to make the world play therapist,  
or at least take note and listen.

One thinks poetry is a prayer book, calling the faithful to litany  
or the faithless to become congregation.

One thinks poetry's a vase to preserve cuttings from the garden  
or store stony trinkets collected from private shores.

One thinks poetry is a rifle to shoot the head with images of war  
or blast away the combat's trauma.

One thinks poetry's a bullfrog shut in a shoebox, ready to croak  
or jump out inappropriately during show and tell.

One thinks poetry is formaldehyde to display pale, shriveled organs  
or the internal parasites that feed upon them.

One thinks poetry is confetti, empty color tossed haphazardly,  
or blinding shards thrown like glitter into the eyes.

One wonders if poetry deserves polite applause for its presentation  
or if the art has been lost at the hands of these practitioners.

# Go Ogle

Sometimes we miss things  
that are just over our heads.  
Let's learn to look up.

# Matthew Scampoli

## Paddle Ball

Ponytails  
Pink ball on a rubber string  
The tip of her tongue a writhing, uprooted earthworm  
An incessant gentle thud  
I feel her concentration  
“25 Dad!”

Later, we lie silently on a mattress of thick grass  
And watch the sunset  
12 now, I hear the sounds of her growing older with each breath

“Dad, why doesn’t it just bounce off the horizon  
(See how the flat rocks ricochet from the water’s surface)?”

Indeed, (I think to myself), it only sinks deep below  
Like wounded pride into a dark abyss  
While the evil chill settles into and around us

“But it rises in a symphony of brilliance,” I say  
“Again and again,  
Like a paddle ball on a rubber string”

“Love you Dad”

Relieved, I ease back into my darkness  
And nonchalantly coalesce with my worries  
Beneath a decaying canopy of hope

## At the Shore

The aroma of sea and aged wine vapors lulled me to a sandy  
retreat,  
And as I squinted up through the sunspots and glare  
I saw your scarlet lips  
And your freckles, all randomly spilled upon an ivory canvas.  
I watched the seaweed twirl on the kite string  
Like a forlorn seedling helicoptering its way to fertile ground.

Erratic movements, like a discarded beach ball in the wind,  
attended me.  
When The Maestro tapped his baton on the lifeguard's tall  
wooden chair,  
The last wave crescendoed in perfect 4/4 time,  
A darting breeze snapped the umbrella fabric,  
The seagulls chanted an urgent chorus, and  
Suddenly, I lost my senses.  
But just as I accepted my newfound weightlessness . . .

“Come” you said, your generous bosom pointing the way.  
Rising from the cool dark shade, I witnessed cotton candy  
clouds framing your silhouette.  
The sun teased the ocean's edge as I absorbed your warmth.  
While you sashayed, I heard the gentle crunch of sand  
Beneath your French pedicure.

Our fingers cut through the licking wind.  
I bristled at the chill of my sweaty palms and sunburned skin  
And breathed your jasmine perfume.

Your cherub tattoo weeping saltwater,  
We walked to Nowhere and arrived to a waxing moon,  
The stars winking at our togetherness.

“I can't imagine it,” you said,  
As you sat, criss-cross applesauce, on the teak boardwalk.  
But what you really meant was  
That you couldn't comprehend it  
Which is quite an important distinction

Because after all, as children we lived by imagination.

Burrow, hermit crab!

Spying through your translucent flowing linen, I glimpsed  
your belly

Distended from the fruit we planted there.

And when we returned, we studied each other,

Weathered and bleached

Like driftwood vomited upon the shore,

And smiled.

## Halftime

We smelled the sweet decay of autumn  
As the sun hung low and distant  
Like an indifferent youth leaning on a street lamp with a  
cigarette hanging from his lips.

“Yes, you can,” said I,  
And gently lifted her sharp chin with a curled index finger.  
Her large eyes were two fried eggs on a skillet—steady and  
unblinking.

“Think of the seed,” said I.  
“It’s infinitesimal,  
Merely a speck  
Buoyed by breeze.

Soon it’s punished by beams of sunshine,  
Drenched by torrents of rain,  
Relegated to lie hopeless in the muck.  
In time, it’s a resplendent and majestic tree  
Standing stoical against winter’s biting wind.”

In one swift errand, and  
With a knowing glance  
I watched her peel away  
And felt a familiar swell in my core  
As the ball left her foot  
And distorted the symmetry of the rectangular soccer net.

# Libretto of a Three Act Opera

Seated in my private box  
I reach for my glasses  
As the curtain parts  
And I hear the familiar choral swell  
(I know this libretto by heart)

Act I  
Intermingled shadows of distinct forms  
Melting in an awkward dance

Act II  
A filthy, biting, angry, swirling cyclone of vomited words in  
a deafening crescendo  
SPLCH! \*tink, tink\*  
Shards of porcelain scattered like grain on the cold kitchen  
tile

Act III  
Bereft of all senses  
In my private hillside castle  
With my moat and my stone walls  
I poke sticks at the sentries



# The Impropriety of Soul

As you spoke,  
My soul abandoned all decorum,  
Gliding gleefully through your hair,  
Lying about lazily on each perfumed tuft.

It swam desperately in the deep pools of your eyes,  
and danced across the perfect symmetry of your face.  
Then, encircling your tender neck,  
It ran to the valley of your chest  
And hiked the gentle peaks of your breasts.

It inched its way across your pale abdomen,  
Twisted its way to the small of your back  
Where it caressed your Venus dimples,  
Skied expertly down your buttocks,  
And surfed the smooth islands of your thighs.

It paused to read the tattoo encircling your ankle  
Before sliding along the arches of your feet.

It returned to me  
More wanton than before it left  
Eager to explore this foreign, beautiful terrain  
Again and again.

# Jamie Ross

## Not Exactly

—*Taller Servicio Automotivo Rafael Teniente*

You have seen the mechanic. No, you haven't. You have seen his son, Rafi, who knew nothing. Then you saw your pickup: out by the fence, between a taxi and police car, hood open, jacked high on its side. Just to replace a loose timing chain? No, not exactly. The engine's in pieces—spark plugs and wiring heaped on the cab, covers on a fender, oil pan on the ground; bolts, screws, nuts piled all over the place. Something else has happened. Something other than the timing chain has loosened, warped, torqued, rattled away. Perhaps it was the valves. Where are the valves? Or were they? What exactly do they do, or did? Perhaps it was nothing. Perhaps Teniente needed simply to look. To see if anything else had occurred—to those valves, and the guides, and the rods and camshaft, and the tiny bearings that bob up and down over and under the springs. When Aaron Chigbrow disassembles an engine (he showed me once) there are hundreds of these things, sometimes chipped or corroded, yet often—when you wipe off the oil, as smooth as the day they were born. But a bad cylinder can drive you mad, trying to even out scratches and gouges, with air-driven dremels, sapphire bits, micrometers, steel wool rubbed by hand; to get back the compression, the purr of the rockers, like a fine-tuned Maserati the first time it takes off. How my Toyota's motor used to sound, two weeks ago. When I knew, at least, where it was.

# Foreigners

—*Café Organica, S. Miguel de Allende*

I was gazing at the blackboard  
with the specials today, it was only  
ten a.m., too early for lunch, though

the large butch woman with  
stark facial hair and Sacramento State  
was knocking down a salad, a giant  
enchilada, plus a bowl of beans  
her girlfriend hadn't touched, they

were talking intently about a she  
from Portland, I wasn't that focused,  
besides their thing was private, and

Lara at the register  
had let her long hair down  
and was speaking with Santos, Santos

was wearing a bright pink polo  
with a little alligator  
that wiggled as she laughed

and someone had put sunflowers  
in the umber vases, like Vincent Van Gogh,  
with a bouquet on each table of tiny  
bright carnations, each petal striped  
with different colors, just like

the ones inside a cast glass sphere  
on Nanna's cocktail table, that sat  
by her lighter and her silver cigarettes

when Dad took our family  
back to New York, all night from Denver  
on the vistadome Zephyr  
to pick up the brand new Volkswagen bus.

No one in Kansas on Route Thirty-six  
had ever seen a Microbus before  
and ran to the fences, stared  
from the tractors, dropped their hay bales  
simply to gape,

and here was I, in the back  
with the seats reversed, my kid sisters  
Betsy, Deedee, two-year-old Ali

and we all were playing  
the license plate game, waiting  
for a drive-in like Lula's Dairy Dream  
or the next rhymed, eight-sign  
Burma Shave riddle, chocolate

milkshakes always were the best  
on this trip, burgers in wax paper  
dripping mustard as we drove

and everyone, including Dad  
and Mummy, had a dark brown  
moustache, a thick German accent

and no one wiped theirs off  
until the next Texaco.

# Float

Do you remember how you felt  
yesterday, when the giant hot-air balloon  
swooshed down in front of your hotel window  
behind the equally giant palm tree?

How it hissed, belched flame—suddenly  
got bigger, encompassing the whole tree.  
And then, without prediction, how it  
rose, receded and shrank, little by little  
until it was a satellite tracked by the sun,  
finally a gum wrapper, blowing away.

Do you remember how you felt  
this morning at Rafael Teniente's lot,  
finding your truck jacked-up by the fence,

its gas tank on the ground, a cylindrical part  
dangling from a line. Was that  
a fuel pump, the thing that pumps the gas?  
Was that a float, that tells your gauge  
how much? And when his daughter Eva,  
ripe to marry, waiting her chance

showed you, yes, the float, in her hands  
with its tiny mechanism, the contacts  
that were bad, how lovely the apparatus  
looked, the twelve brass ingots like notches  
of a zipper, so beautifully calibrated  
as she moved the sensor up and down.

Do you remember the elephant  
on the cover of your child's writing book?  
How light in the photo, how round;  
yet how massive, heavy, as it trumpets,  
bellows, crushes trees and cars,  
affirms the earth with no need to fly.

How the float was just a canister  
that bobbed and fell on the tides of its fuel.  
How day rose with the balloon, then  
broke live. How the tank in the dirt  
was a kind of death. How an elephant,  
without trying, each year circles the sun.

How Eva's hands, soaked black  
with motor oil, opened, trembling,  
shot up to grasp the rope

dropping from the sky.

# We Are Rain and the Rain

does not discount us. It doesn't put its garbage  
in a black plastic bag dogs will rip apart.  
It doesn't buy toothpaste at Espino's, just  
to see María, six months pregnant. The rain

has been pregnant for many months, many times  
and all of them are beautiful. My sister Deeds'  
first child was such, everywhere this baby  
broadcast over highways, cities fraught with fire,

in the Chico kennel every stray and starveling  
gifted Haley as a Chevron gifts hoses to its pumps;  
Deedee fueling passing engines, Haley's  
smile, her wisps of hair and dancing gurgle tiny

hands at every moment of a party Haley at my  
sister's open breast, the rain, how soft, expansive  
for us all the rain adores the cucumber the sand  
fleas at Los Cocos the waitress' panty hose the

baby rain named Haley tapping at my window  
roses sudden asters blooming all across the balcony,  
the rain does not remove us from our slippers  
or the metal eyelets of a silver vinyl tarp

lashed across a taco cart dripping into midnight  
just outside San Marcos Market two men wet  
in canvas trousers pitched sombreros woven  
for this flavor while my sister glows

in every taxi Haley's promised garden, every  
petal spritzing the handmade wrought-iron rail, rain  
does not contain itself or still sunlight after passing  
women with the juicer in the hotel kitchen

laughing, sizzling bacon and their boiling beans  
forever this aroma, we are rain the coffee  
perks, burbles, my rain will not forget you  
once your rain moves on.

## Contributor Notes

**Harry Bauld** graduated from Medford High School in Massachusetts and studied art history and played shortstop at Columbia University. Selected by Matthew Dickman for inclusion in *Best New Poets 2012* (University of Virginia Press), he has taught and coached at high schools in Vermont and New York.



**Tania Brown** is a poet who enjoys focusing on the depth and shallowness of the human landscape. She's worked as a social worker, retail manager, and freelance editor, all while soaking in the rich, urban experiences of Philadelphia. Tania aspires to be a renaissance woman and hopes that ingesting enough books will get her there. In her free time, she enjoys snapping slices of life and nature in pictures, knitting, and watching Doctor Who.



**Martin Conte** is a student of English literature at the University of Southern Maine. He has published in the *Words and Images* Journal, and has won numerous poetry and playwriting awards. His current project involves the struggles that ensue when his narrator appears in his home, and refuses to leave. He currently lives on the coast of Maine, the most beautiful place to live, where he intends to stay.



**Miguel Coronado** is an aspiring poet currently studying at New York University. He was born in the Dominican Republic, but has spent most of his life raised in New York City. He plans on pursuing a lifelong career in Journalism and Creative Writing after he graduates from college.



A poet since age 11, **Margie Curcio** was born and raised in Staten Island, New York. She lived in Santa Cruz, California, for five years before settling in New Jersey, where she makes her home. Margie's previously publications include "Press of Tangled Bodies" (Porter Gulch Review 2003), "Tattoo Poem" (Porter Gulch Review 2013), "Javits" and "Flame-Licked" (Porter Gulch Review 2014). Margie is working on her second poetry collection, which she hopes to publish next year.



**Ann V. DeVilbiss** holds a BA from Indiana University, where she studied English and completed the honors program in poetry. She does editing and production work for a small press in Louisville, Kentucky, where she lives with her husband and their cat.





**Bryce Emley** is a freelance writer and MFA student at NC State. His poetry can be found in *Mid-American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Cortland Review*, *Your Impossible Voice*, etc. He's on staff for *Raleigh Review* and *BULL: Men's Fiction* and blogs about advertising at [advertventures.wordpress.com](http://advertventures.wordpress.com).



**Michael Fleming** was born in San Francisco, raised in Wyoming, and has lived and learned and worked all around the world, from Thailand and England and Swaziland to Berkeley, New York City, and now Brattleboro, Vermont. He's been a teacher, a grad student, a carpenter, and always a writer; for the past decade he has edited literary anthologies for W. W. Norton. (You can see some of Fleming's own writing at: [www.dutchgirl.com/foxpaws](http://www.dutchgirl.com/foxpaws).)



**Ryan Flores** is a writer, musician, producer, and designer from the California Bay Area. He lives in Colorado and has a degree in Spanish literature from the University of Colorado. Flores is the founder of the independent record label Heart Shaped Records and is in several bands, including Moonhoney, Ondas, Leopard and the Vine, and Love Water. He is currently working on a novel and his favorite fruit is the mango.



**Tom Freeman**, the oldest of six children, comes from a little, twenty acre, not-for-profit farm in the Cuyahoga Valley of northeast Ohio. He has lived there for most of his twenty-three years but has also spent a considerable amount of time traveling, working, and mountaineering across the western United States where he feels most welcome. He enjoys hiking with his fourteen-month-old husky-wolf dog, Denali. He recently graduated from Kent State University.



**Rachel A. Girty** is a student at Northwestern University studying vocal performance and creative writing. She has performed with The Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Northwestern University Opera Theatre, and The Castleton Festival. She works on the poetry staff of *Helicon*. Her poetry has appeared in *Prompt* magazine, and she was recently awarded the Jean Meyer Aloe Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets.



**Kendall Grant** As a freshman in college, I realized that Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" captured more detail than I had discovered in life. His lines started my pilgrimage into nature and poetry. Professionally, I teach at a religiously affiliated university where the spiritual and academic collide sparking principle-based insight and action. The desired result is a life of disciplined service to God, country, and world.



**Savannah Grant** is a recent graduate of Smith College, where she won prizes for fiction and poetry. She is always looking to write new poems and improve her work and hopes to someday make graphic novels. She lives with her dad and a small (very lucky) black cat.



**Stephanie L. Harper** earned a BA in English and German from Grinnell College, and an MA in German literature from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She lives with her husband and two children in the Portland, OR, Metro area. Her work as a Writer and Home Schooling Parent has far-reaching extensions into social activism endeavors to promote a safe, just and vibrant world of possibility for future generations. <http://www.slharperpoetry.wordpress.com/>



A native of Rochester, New York, **Heather Erin Herbert** lives in Atlanta with her children and husband, where they spend the summer trying to avoid bursting into flame. Currently working on her MA English at Valdosta State University, Heather works in a college writing center and likes to spend her few free seconds per semester reading, knitting, and consuming improbable amounts of coffee. She has no idea where she found time to write these poems.



**Rebecca Irene** has finally accepted poetry as her tumultuous lover and taskmaster. Her poems speak to the simultaneous beauty and horror of this world, how every life is the same, every life is different and the ways our lives differ are not always fair or fathomable. She is a graduate of Swarthmore College.



**Meghan Kemp-Gee** is a screenwriter, playwright, and award-winning poet. She lives and writes in Los Angeles, California.



**James Ph. Kotsybar**'s poetry has been selected by NASA for launch into Martian orbit—the first literature to another world. His poetry appears in the mission log of the Hubble Telescope, and has won honors from the Society of Classical Poets, Odes To The Olympians, Ohio's Ingenuity Center, and Balticon. Performances include The Los Angeles Performing Arts Center, Lhasa Club, Beyond Baroque Gallery, KCSB 91.9 FM, KDB 93.7 FM, and three cable television channels.



For thirty-nine years, **Michael Kramer** has day-lighted as an English teacher. He has advised the award-winning high school literary magazine, *King Author*, and has had work nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Kramer has been married to Rebecca longer than he's been teaching; together they have raised four remarkable children. He has work forthcoming in *Pough Quarterly*. Check out his collection of short stories in verse *Hopeless Cases* (Moon Tide Press, 2011) on Amazon.



**George Longenecker** teaches writing and history at Vermont Technical College. Some of his recent poems and book reviews can be found in *Atlanta Review*, *Penumbra Memoir* and *Rain Taxi*. He lives on the edge of the forest in Middlesex, VT.



**Michael Hugh Lythgoe** was one of three finalists selected for the 2012 poetry fellowship by the SC Academy of Authors. Mike retired as an Air Force officer and earned an MFA from Bennington College. He teaches for the Academy for Lifelong Learning at USC in Aiken where he lives with his wife of 50 years, Louise. His chapbook, *Brass*, won the Kinloch Rivers contest in 2006.



**George Mathon** was born in Vermont and still lives at Joe's Pond, though now he winters in Florida. He's explored many of the natural wonders and native ruins in the United States. These places provide inspiration, time and location for many of his poems. He's published three books of poetry: *Entering The Forest*, *Chickadees*, and *Killers*.



**Donna French McArdle**'s poems have appeared in the anthology *Lost Orchard: Prose and Poetry from the Kirkland College Community*, and in *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Antioch Review*, and other journals. With a grant from the Massachusetts and Boxford Cultural Councils, she documented local farms and farm stands in *Essex County Harvest 2003*. She earned an MFA from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and works as the writing coach for a public school.



**Jill Murphy** is a writer living in Portland, Oregon.



**Debra Palmer**'s poems have appeared in BLOOM Magazine, *Calyx Journal*, *Pectriquiry* (CHEST Journal for the American College of chest physicians) and *The Portland Review*. She recently returned to her birth state of Idaho after spending most of her life in Portland, Oregon where she studied writing at Portland State University. Now home at last, she lives and works in Boise with her wife and their little dog, Tennessee.



**Nicholas Petrone**'s poems can be found in many places, including *The View From Here*, *Willows Wept Review*, *The Ran-furly Review*, *Poetry Superhighway*, *3 Elements Review*, *Weird Cookies*, *Straight Forward Poetry*, *The Tower Journal*, *Vimfire Magazine* and in many other damn fine publications. You can also read his poems at <http://winkingattheapocalypse.blogspot.com/>. He teaches American history in Syracuse, NY.



**Tracy Pitts** is a writer / filmmaker living in Portland, OR.



**Danielle C. Robinson**, a North Carolina native, is the author of *A Slice of Purple Pie* and the forthcoming poetry book *Words I Should Have Said Before*. She is a graduate from North Carolina Central University. She loves to dedicate her time to scientific research, writing, painting, African dancing, traveling, community service, and listening to music.



**Jamie Ross** writes and paints on a mesa west of Taos, NM, spends much time in Mexico. His poetry has been published in numerous journals, as well as the anthology *Best New Poets 2007*. His 2010 collection, *Vinland*, received the Intro Poetry Prize from Four Way Books.



**Kimberly Sailor** graduated from the USC Creative Writing program in Los Angeles and also holds a Master's in Library and Information Studies from UW-Madison. She is the current Editor-in-Chief of the Recorded A Cappella Review Board ([rarb.org](http://rarb.org)), authoring over two hundred published music reviews. Her flash fiction has appeared in *The Bookends Review*, and her novel *The Clarinet Whale* is available on Amazon.



**Cassandra Sanborn** earned her BA in Creative Writing from Purdue University. Though most of the writing she does now is for her job—she is the Grants Coordinator at a nonprofit in Indianapolis, Indiana—she continues to write poetry and fiction in her spare time.



**Matthew Scampoli** writes in Pelham, NY.



**Harold Schumacher** Originally a pastor, his career transitioned to stockbroker (he served “God and mammon”), realtor, townhome complex caretaker, high school and college instructor, newspaper columnist, pastor again, and retirement. Currently, a novel and poetry book are in progress. He lives on Rainy Lake near International Falls, Minnesota, and is a 20-plus-year veteran of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.



**A. Sgroi** is a native New Yorker, a twin sister, a trapeze artist, an avid fan of Edna St. Vincent Millay, an occasional poet, and a Sixfold newcomer.



**Sharron Singleton** My poems have appeared in *Agni*, *Rattle*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, among others. In 2009 I won the James River Writers Contest and was named the Poet of 2010 by the journal *Passager*. I also won 1<sup>st</sup> place prizes in 2010 and 2012 in the Poetry Society of Virginia annual contest, 1<sup>st</sup> place in the MacGuffin Poet Hunt contest in 2012 and 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Sixfold Contest in 2013. My chapbook, *A Thin Thread of Water* was published in 2010 by Finishing Line Press.



**Mariana Weisler** is a professional actress and singer, performing both locally in her hometown of New York City and nationally. She graduated *summa cum laude* from Hunter College and Macaulay Honors College where she studied Opera, but now works in the more intimate venue of Musical Theatre. Mariana's foremost passion, however, lies in creative writing, with her first notable publication being in Sixfold. She is currently working on a collection of poetry and a novel.



**Franklin Zawacki** writes in San Francisco, CA.

