

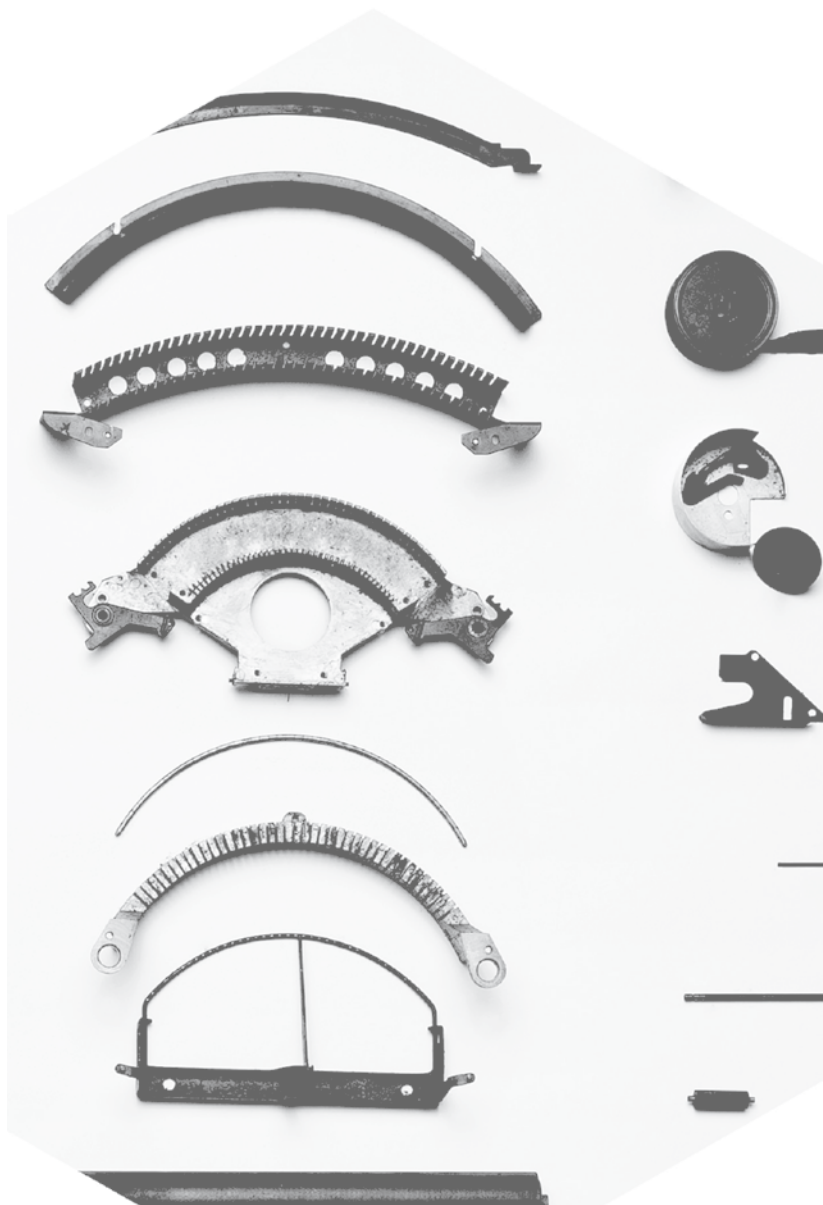
# SIXFOLD

POETRY WINTER 2019



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

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

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# SIXFOLD

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# Meli Broderick Eaton

## Two Miracles

the first, when you arrive  
fallen from stars  
into the bare mountains  
of your story untold.  
wet and slow to awaken,  
your wings unfold in deep  
and wanderous valleys as you learn  
to pick up your shadow, carry it  
in the shifting shape of yourself  
and roll dust from between your toes  
after everlong days of walking,  
trailing the sun across the sky  
falling and rising, falling and rising  
gathering seeds in your skin  
and bees in your hair as you speed  
flower to limb to peak and finally, there  
you pause  
long enough to quiet the bees, to feel  
the earth's iron pull against your bones,  
hear the wind calling your name  
in a language you have forgotten.

when you step down from the top  
into the known unknown afternoon  
amber glow of failing day etches  
a view more precious in descent  
as footprint following footprint you diminish,  
teaspoon by teaspoon digging your grave.  
in mudding light, the sun lands one last time  
and you follow lightning bug lanterns  
into the darkness, to the other miracle  
when you lay yourself down  
next to your shadow untethered.  
free of your rusted frame you answer  
the wind in its language remembered  
fly back to your constellation,  
to your waiting cocoon in the stars.



# Shatter

## Proof

because love always ends  
that's just the way it works  
I was already broken before  
my hand ran down her side  
pressing river water from her fur  
when the cradle between my thumb  
and index finger stopped  
against a fleshy mass hidden  
under the soft double coat of her hip.

smaller than a golf ball, maybe  
like one of those little limes at the store,  
at first, I thought it was her bone  
popped out of place from jumping  
after a rabbit on yesterday's walk  
but I knew it wasn't so simple.  
the fracture that wasn't captured  
when I stood back up last time  
sent tendrils skating through my chest  
pausing my heart  
pulling apart what was left  
of my smooth surfaces.

I remember my father's doctor, his metallic words  
each falling like an anvil through my gut  
tunneling through the DNA that bound us  
*terminal*  
as if he were a bus  
*aggressive*  
as though he were a dog  
*lung*  
which isn't where it started  
as if it could be trained, would stay in place  
once identified.

then the vet, holding my gaze like a warm hand  
*this isn't the kind we do anything about*  
so we waited, not really waiting  
but what do you call it  
when you see the end that hasn't happened yet  
*she will eventually encounter pain*  
which she didn't, or  
*it will outgrow her body's ability to accommodate*  
which it did, so  
we traced the intricate vascular system  
it created for itself through paper skin  
we watched as it grew and we knew  
she would soon chase the same shadow  
that swallowed my father  
the soft bodies of my grandmothers  
and cat after cat after cat  
that thought it was faster than cars

## Old Crow

oldcrow settles wingfold glossed  
brushdeath suddensit by my side  
bitrust voice airscratches harsh  
unsettles my quietmind to answer  
the don'tdare question

I don't dare ask

but oldcrow knows  
old soulfetch knows mytime and folkworry  
not yet, you, muddletalk crowspeaks  
steadies my flutterheart clutchbeats

but who, then whotime now  
thoughtscatter I carefulwatch  
the regal shinebeak slowturn  
greenglint black feathersshimmer  
peering eyespy one side  
to the other, patientknowing,  
patientknowing he waits

beadblack buttoneye lands  
where swiftbrown birdswoop  
neatly quickends spidercrawl  
ohsoclose my startlefeet  
crowtoes bent watches brownbird fly  
legsprawled spider to waitbabies nested  
their needcries treed nearby

beakspread he laughcaws  
see? evermore you live until you don't  
unfurls paperdash wings and jumplifts  
airstroke into the evelight  
see you soonlong  
he whisperscrapes  
soonlong  
into the nextwind of thisnight

# Three Mississippi

## *One Mississippi*

when I first became lightning  
I was driving to pick up my son  
the world went impossibly bright  
no time to count the seconds  
to wonder who would bring my child home  
before the heavens came crashing  
in that nanosecond of life inside light  
deafened and blinded, when I guessed  
I was dead, a thousand thoughts crowded  
of all the things left undone—  
the syrup bottle on the counter  
the dog waiting next to his leash  
all the words not laid inside  
the soft shells of my children's ears

for hours, the smell and taste of ozone  
my trembling hands  
reminded me that I had been placed  
back into myself by powers far beyond  
my own and I was grateful  
to put away the syrup  
to clip leash to collar  
to whisper over the sleeping cocoons of my boys

## *Two Mississippi*

the second time I became lightning  
my dog led me beyond the trees  
the clouds had grown necrotic and eerie  
dropping low as they spiraled upward  
I called to Atlas and we hurried  
down from the balded ridge  
away from what brewed  
we hadn't yet reached the low ground  
when everything popped into light  
its intensity too much to comprehend  
there still wasn't time to count  
before the heavens cracked open

sending Atlas crying to my feet  
but this time, in front of x-rayed tree trunks  
I saw a miracle  
an orb where lightning stabbed  
down from the sky and snaked  
up from the earth, meeting mid-air  
as though summoned by the branches  
conjured by the wizarding elements

the electric scent of ozone made me think  
the idea of dying this way  
not by storm but in a magical flash  
a sudden bolt that outruns pain  
and outlasts time in its fractional existence  
might be the best way to leave  
the waning cavern of my body

*Three Mississippi*

the last time I become lightning  
I want it to be like this:  
when my sons are strong and weathered  
like the stones that form the ridge  
when maybe most of all those undone things  
have been crossed off and Atlas and all the dogs  
that will come after him have gone  
to hold up the heavens as they wait  
for us to return to them, then  
in a brilliant burst, my soul takes flight  
out of time, I am released  
into a billion particles of light

# Andrea Reisenauer

## The bridge

*"I am seeking for the bridge which leans from the visible  
to the invisible through reality."*

*—Max Beckmann*

Look for me in the ripples, the dripping eaves, the leaves  
and honey-foaming butter. Rummage through the split-  
pea soup, feverfew, the sink, the flutter of dew-soaked  
youth. Check the streetlamp shadow, the puddle  
that hovers between light and dark

because I am the bridge

over the invisible. Search the charcoal sparks, the flames  
in the cave, the untamable page with its palpitating space.  
Seek me in the fog that tip-toes across the sea, the moss  
on the trees, feet. Forage through the wrinkled maps, ashes,  
grass. Enter the trance of the milkweed breeze,  
that pause in-between

but please  
    find me.

## What quiet ache do you wear?

Do you place it on your dresser  
or under the bathroom sink?  
Do you spray it behind your ears,  
rub it on your wrists,  
or wait until late at night  
to graffiti-streak it along sleeping streets?  
Does it softly sink into your skin,  
or is it a distant memory ready  
for whoever can tug away  
your cotton-edged layers  
and brush it with their lips?

What soft scent of sorrow lingers  
when you walk past;  
what lemon melancholy  
hovers in your wake?

# Komorebi

There's a heaviness  
that smells like the inside  
of a breathalyzer  
but I haven't had a drop to drink.

It tugs at my tourmaline  
bones and sinks me  
into the sleeping peat  
where the earth percolates  
in leaden surrender  
and my womb of roots  
begins to reach upwards  
like nesting birds.

Let me lay here as I wait  
for whatever gentle shape  
I'm becoming  
and watch the light  
filter past the branches

like a promise.



# In that brief passing with a stranger

I don't know you.

I don't know where you bought your jeans  
or the color of your toothbrush.

I don't know the number of mornings  
you've woken up in this world,  
what makes you sigh,  
or how many times you've cried.

I don't know where the skin creases  
on your forehead when you think,  
how fast you can run,  
how old you were  
when you first made love.

But for that fleeting pause,  
that split in time when our eyes meet,  
we love.

# Alex Wasalinko

## To the Past

I.

The snow aged the town, each flurry adding ten years.  
As we drove down roads muffled with white,  
your tires spun out: stuck in the past.  
I watched from the passenger window as the quiet grew deeper.  
Snowdrifts captured the street's ghosts running between houses;  
they howled and smashed their fists against my door.

II.

I outline your memory in neon lights,  
turn the contours of your face into the Vegas strip—  
dreams of warmer days with your skin glowing red in the sun.  
I cradle your face in my hands, pull you closer,  
heatwaves radiate off your body.  
Ultraviolet filling the space between us.

III.

We relearned to walk along the empty streets,  
deep slush and ice filling the space between cobblestone,  
cold permeated the soles and canvas panels of our trainers.  
You shared stories of your childhood in the mountains,  
the mornings when you stepped outside to be enveloped by fog:  
a world of mystery occupied by abstract shapes.

IV.

Outside of our halogen haze, my face feels older.  
I pluck a silver hair from its root, hear your voice  
tell me I am a queen with precious metals growing from her scalp.  
I leave it on the shower wall, nearly invisible,  
its curves catch the light. A forgotten language,  
a sign with faded letters.

V.

Knuckles and hands brushed together before you reached out:  
*It's too cold.* White with blue veins laced into faint pink.  
On my palm, your thumb traced lines of poetry  
I never read until we met. You recited them,  
words formed in nebulae of warm air—  
each exhale enclosing our path in its cloud.

## Re-Routing. Navigating.

It tapped both of us on the shoulder  
but told him first.

He did not tell me—

I had to wait for it to make an appointment,  
leave a message,  
pencil me in for a talk.

The kind that happens behind closed doors.

The kind that is prefaced with

*you should probably sit down for this.*

I didn't tell him I knew. Not for a few days.

But it was there. Watching me from the doorway.

Raising its eyebrows every moment he turned his back.

*Well, what are either of you waiting for.*

Each moment's silence plunging its blade into my lungs.

You will leave me for it,

It will hold your hand, help you with your bags when you finally walk  
out the door.

The flashbulb scenes from our life before are stained with its presence  
haphazardly obscured—

A blurred profile

The edge of a shirtsleeve

One smirk, knowing I will later see it seeing me, seeing you,  
seeing us.

I am the first to smash through the silence,

Throw the photographic evidence at your

feet in a fit of fury

I see it laughing—

it wants you for itself and this is how it will

keep you

trap you

overtake you

replace me

## In the morning

I uncover the spare key, unlock the backdoor  
stop and watch him cut into a mango at our counter.  
He cradles the half in his palm,  
scores the exposed flesh vertically—  
I want to tell him it's risky,  
ask him if he's afraid the blade will break  
through the fruit's skin and puncture his own.  
His eyes stay on the new perpendicular lines he carves.  
My eyes go to the counter, my mug full and waiting.  
We sit in silence broken apart by the  
muffled squish of his thumb gouging cubes of yellow.  
To the mango he mumbles  
*I'm glad you're back.*  
I take honey from the cabinet and stir it into my tea,  
summon an amber whirlpool.  
To its darkness I nod,  
the past singing behind my clenched teeth.  
There's nothing new I can say.  
Nothing sacred in the mundane  
pulling of meat from cheeks  
sticky with juice.

# Homonym

Morning.

1. (*noun*)

the light that breaks through the spaces where curtains do not  
close

stretching hands that find his, a sleepy high-five  
gentle pushing out of the bed into the day

2. (*adverb*, informal)

mostly we sleep in, shielded by the softest dark fleece  
he sometimes pulls over both of our heads, our glowing cave  
close my eyes and pretend I am falling backwards into his  
promise of forever

3. (*exclamation*, informal)

*Goodnight*, I yawn into his ear

*Good morning*, he yawns from miles away

I count the minutes of remaining rituals

Mourning.

1. (*noun*)

if I stretch my fingers wide, place my palm on the globe  
I imagine I can build a bridge, patch up the space  
loose grip to close the wound, seal the cracks

2. (*noun*)

we have not opened the curtains in weeks  
my eyes mirror his while we try to preserve our cave drawings  
let little light and oxygen in

3. (*verb*)

glass shattered in the next room over  
shards glittering across the hardwood, capturing the few beams  
of light  
projecting a broken constellation across his face

## Two Dreams from Vegas

How foolish to fall in love with the idea of forever;  
but as I watched the roulette wheel spin into infinity,  
numbers and colors blurring together into nothingness,  
I considered the warmth of maybe  
of possibility  
of her hand in mine. To have and to hold tight  
'til we part.

Outside he says to me  
*Let's run through the fountain*  
but I can barely hear him over the rush of  
bodies and conversations, layers of music  
that surround us.  
His imperative sings through cacophony,  
I harmonize with my laughter.

The street turns our faces  
technicolored and bejeweled.  
Her laughter bounces off the lights over our heads,  
rains down, the only melody I hear.  
I ask her again,  
take her hand  
before we could change our minds.

Water hits his face first  
and I am slipping, tumbling forward.  
My hands find his and tug him with me:  
we go down together  
fast and slow, all at once  
our clumsy grace  
caught by marble, slick and cool.

# AJ Powell

## Fall

Autumn is a guillotine this year.  
Friends drove down from the mountains:  
aspen leaves were gold for a day, they said,  
then dropped, fell like the dead,  
blanketing the ground before  
the snow comes to bury them.  
Temperatures dropped like a lopped head,  
had no legs to get up again.  
Geese fled, cutting the air with chevron swords.  
Tomorrow, a blizzard may threaten,  
erasing landscape under a white shroud,  
or we may live with skeleton trees for months.  
Autumn is a guillotine this year,  
when we need her to slow her blade.



## Seven Times

I fall in love seven times a day.  
I see You pay for your street parking then glance  
at the meter in the spot next to yours,  
and it's clear you are spying for a chance  
for random kindness in the world,  
to good-samaritan the extra change in your pocket,  
if the meter is begging for a ticket without your intervention.

I notice another You in the coffee shop window  
sitting down with a book instead of rushing  
through the line and out the door,  
because you're friends with early mornings and don't mind,  
in fact really enjoy, seeing the sunrise with a book in hand.  
An actual paperback book, bent along the binding to the page  
you're reading, pressed upon the wooden table top,  
so I can't see the title or the author but I imagine  
it's a good book and you're smart and pensive,  
a kindred soul looking for humanity  
everywhere like me.

There's a You I work with but don't really know  
who always says hello to the security guy in the lobby,  
greeted him by name and asks after his kids—  
which makes all the strangers, the hundreds and  
thousands without names passing on the street,  
less anonymous, because you cared enough to learn  
that guy's name and chat with him every day,  
and I bet you give him a Christmas card with a twenty in it  
so I love you.

I see another You jogging during your lunch hour  
without music playing in your ears,  
because you like to see new parts of the city and  
listen to each block's self-made music,  
and I would jog with you to the city zoo and laugh  
at the monkeys who are so much like us when  
we were young and still monkey-bar climbers,  
and why not just go climb a tree together in City Park  
because we are in love and kept young by it.

When You—another you—cuts me off on the drive home,  
speeding and in a hurry only to be stuck  
at the same red light as me one block up,  
I forgive you willingly,  
because maybe you got swept away by  
the song on the radio rocking a mean guitar riff, or  
your boss just yelled at you for a mistake he made, or  
your mother is sick in the hospital and visiting hours  
are running short for the day, or  
you really are kind of an asshole but  
you weren't always and won't be forever,  
but today you're twenty-nine and self-important  
and aren't we all?

So when You roll into bed next to me  
after dinner's dishes and kids' bedtimes  
have been wrapped up for the night  
and you've finished that last email you had to send today,  
even though we're tired and barely found  
a few sentences to spare for each other  
in the midst of the busy and distracting all,  
my heart is practiced in opening.  
I roll my head on the pillow toward you,  
say, "Good night," and rest my hand on your immobile chest.

# Spinning

Hope is the thing with  
is the thing  
is  
tattered and torn and battered and  
born upon winds and bad weather  
feathered into cloud shapes  
cirrus and cumulus and cumulating  
like a stockpile of  
dynamite or despair—black hole opening  
in a heart or is it a blossom  
opening like  
hope like  
a flower in a garden gone to seed  
growing on its own in a place  
given to weeds and reckonings.

“I feel more like”  
you were saying when I interrupted  
“more and more like  
I’m spinning”  
Me too! my damned interjection  
“spinning out of”  
aren’t we all spiraling,  
centrifugal force throwing off  
everything  
“control.”

You finish and I fail to ask:  
why? Or are you  
okay? Or  
take your hand just  
take it in mine just  
take a chance  
to be kinder, quieter,  
falter in silence  
knowing silence has  
its own horizons,  
but time is too short

and I'm assuming I must be  
unassuming, must not assume to  
be helpful be good be welcome be  
glory be;  
now all we have are  
bygones—  
unmoored moments,  
the detritus of memory.

# The Grammar Between Us

I can't parse you,  
fail every time to translate  
the tenses of your gestures:  
past continuous,  
    present perfect,  
    future conditional.

I try to diagram  
the sentences of our symbiosis  
stretched over years.  
Could I compose,  
    would you mind,  
    a poem to articulate us?

Forgive me; I am not fluent.  
I falter with pauses,  
find impossible any clauses  
to capture  
    the grammar  
    between us.

If I draft a new language,  
will you edit it to shreds,  
these threads stitching me together?  
Might we author together  
    a better sentence,  
    punctuated with possibility?

Or: a different effort.  
Let me parse you without words,  
conjugate your body,  
press your spine  
    down in the dark  
    into past and instinct.

May my hands meander,  
write forgiveness on your skin,  
compose a moment with you—

intention and touch, shiver and bind—  
find velvet heat,  
and find it again?

Reach beyond words;  
replace resignation  
with sighs.

## Lesson of the Old Rock

The cracks are passages:  
is the lesson of the Old Rock.  
She is veined and pocketed by quartz and mica,  
divided by ages into two halves of a whole.  
Moss and lichen lace her underbelly and shadowed sides  
like green garlands of time dressing her for dinner.  
She split eons ago, by the slow encroachment  
of water, ice, and earth-shifts.  
Now I can pass through her heart  
and come out the other side.

Her fissure delivers me each time, again, into the world,  
making every day I visit her a birth day.  
Traveling through granite chasm, I am made new;  
she strips from me the old clothes of my sins,  
like confession. Or like the atonement of Jonah,  
complicated and born of storms and necessity,  
leading to small shade in a desert, worm-consumed—  
and I am sun-burnt prophet-skin, thin and peeling and peeled,  
tender with bared nerve-endings,  
while my heart remains storm-tossed and fish-nibbled.

Breaking and broken, my heart is slashed-at and cracked—  
for disappointments run deep as earth's core;  
the deepest is me, knowing too well  
what ruminations and regrets I've mined.  
But this is where the passages open and  
the path is laid, step by slow step,  
solitary stones of heart-crumble marking the way.  
Tread deftly and lift your gaze to see wonders  
on struggle's road—enchantment deeper than dim magic—  
which is to say, love.

In time, my heart will echo the silhouette of that  
breach-boulder, sublime earthen mother;  
I will be divided—a chasm will rend deep through my heart's core  
until you and everyone can pass between.  
I will pull *myself* through the path, walk a passage

that kills me dead, paves the way for resurrection.  
O fool short life and troubled living! You  
will slip like water through fingers, like air through  
split rock, and my calamitous heart  
will beat on although in two, its pieces  
calling out to one another a contrapuntal chorus,  
a freedom song.



# Emma Flattery

## To Return

In the South,  
no, I mean the *deep* South,  
where the air is so thick with sugar water  
you can taste it on your skin.  
Where all the women comment  
on how the humid kiss of spring frizzes up their hair  
but secretly love the soft freedom  
of wild tresses under backyard skies and palm leaves.

Yes, in the deepest South,  
I used to live for the ribbons of ruddy clay  
which caked the sidewalks after early morning showers' mist  
and the sunbaked cracks that crisscrossed and stitched through  
barefoot cement.

The scream of cicadas and  
the scream of little voices  
when the glisten-eyed beetles splayed their shiny wings  
and alighted on shoulders unawares.

Yes, in palm trees and hot grass still green,  
where the water godlike is  
infinite and basking gold, hinting silver, breathing blue  
under the glory of sky's halo.  
No surf, just smooth swell after swell after swell,  
like an outstretched hand  
that warmly whispers, "Come and see."

I have waited so long to return  
to sweat-slick foreheads,  
lounging with something to fan with in one hand,  
sleepy, half-lidded eyes in the other,  
toes buried in cooling layers of powdered sand,  
quick-legged sandpipers darting their way through banks of foam,  
and the sun dousing its last fire in the curve of the horizon.

Like this, I am suspended:  
my conscience beaded with sugar water  
drops leave candied trails across my mind,  
my skin all mossed-over with green fur in patches,  
the prickles of velveteen fly tongues softly sipping in my nectar.  
The water glows with inner flame  
as I float over leagues and leagues of that Deep and Southern.  
So long I have been away from you,  
no more.

## Our Shared Jungle, Mr. Conrad

Mr. Conrad  
your words have long since  
been beaten drums to coax  
the palm fronds, vine furls, dark and green  
from the murky jungle of my mind.

Believe me when I say  
your Horrors whisper wonder  
from your pages thick entwined  
with roots in soils dark as skin,  
these roots embed in me;  
but you stand in separation, sir,  
in costume suits as white  
as all the devils that herein  
dance your beat semantic.

Drumming, as you are,  
on the door of time gone by  
with that lovely mistress, Fiction,  
who is kind to lay her lips,  
and in this moment, you are righteous,  
and on this woman, at your side  
you imagine naked breasts;  
feathers flayed and splayed  
with a heart as wild as your sea,

but Mr. Conrad,

you are a head floating above white lapels  
steam-pressed pants, a belt of leather,  
and shoes of cannibal skin.

The natives said it better  
to your disciple Marlow,  
but now it begs repeating:

No borders, leaves, or darkness  
breed the savage side of man,  
Mr. Conrad,  
the jungle lies within.

# The Witness

This ratchety ceiling fan,  
when on, is jerking in its motion  
as once-sleek blades now with corners rusted  
spin in dulled-silver's blurred whirl winds.  
A tarnished ball chain with dangled tassel  
sharply tugged, now careening to this and that  
like tethered hound in open field.  
And though its screws threaten  
to loose their load on wary passers-by,  
it churns the air with the full passion  
of its year of manufacture.

Long ago, it was clutched to the plaster  
above a well-used motel bed.  
Under its feverous flurry happened many an affair  
between humans bare and humans dressed  
who all slithered sleepy 'neath the sheets  
for some odd business immaterial.

Then some many years thereafter,  
a diner held its rattling screws  
over patrons hungering to be cooled,  
to rest-up easy and to quench  
their avid itches for fryer fat  
and milkshakes labeled "chocolate."

Then in midst of summer  
its clanking rhythm doused the embers  
of some back-end alley pawn shop  
with barred windows and blue-crossed flags  
and guns and powder and from far-off sirens  
came broken glass and a long night flashing red to blue.

Now somewhere, the sharply tugged ball chain  
swings in new surroundings,  
wings of roughened rust and scrap-metal  
fly above well-smoothed concrete,  
and what display of appetite

will this humble witness  
have the privilege  
of providing its services to  
next?

# The Valley

The sun was determined to make this summer afternoon  
Sweat  
like a glass of iced tea  
Droop  
like a runny ice cream cone  
Just sweet enough to savor  
Just cold enough to relish

But the sun was no threat to Ms. Washington  
No siree  
No ma'am  
The sun was no match for Ms. Washington and her hand fan  
With one stroke of that fan  
Lord  
She could freeze the humidity right out of the air and make it snow  
in Alabama  
With one sway of her porch rocking chair  
Lord  
She could spin the Earth and make Sunday come early

She had done powerful things in her time  
Yes siree  
Yes ma'am  
Why, she had won Best Pecan Pie in Macon County at only fifteen  
Not only that  
She had handcrafted and given life  
to the three most well-behaved boys in Macon County too  
She had worked a job in Montgomery  
a nickel to his dime  
and provided what she could  
She never missed a shift  
Bought her boys one of them spiffy polaroids

Not only that  
She sat at the front of the bus  
Went through the front door  
Watched movies in the front row

She didn't have a car  
Or any good walking shoes  
So she walked from Selma to Montgomery  
Three times in the only shoes she had  
Her Sunday shoes  
And on March seventh, nineteen-sixty-five  
She stood her ground in Sunday shoes  
Cried hard for forgotten lives in Sunday shoes  
But still those shoes  
Were all shine and polish

No siree  
No ma'am  
The determined sun did not put a damper on Ms. Washington's  
summer afternoon

But he did  
He sat beside her  
All squared angles and sharp features  
He was the shadow in her summer valley  
She could not  
With all her power  
Think him away

He sat at the back of the bus  
Slithered through the back door  
Watched her from the back row

He walked with her from Selma to Montgomery three times  
Hidden behind clasped hands  
She could not shake him

He pierced her with every downturned glance  
Bled from every pair of smiling lips  
Watched her little boys  
Grasped at her hands with his bony fingers  
Laughed at her undone hair  
He had blue eyes like two suns  
Sweltering

But he was here now  
Beside her  
Close

He asked her,  
“Are you ready?”  
She stopped her waving  
Let the hand fan sit like an old cat on her lap  
She swayed in that porch rocking chair  
Swayed back and forth squinting up at that determined sun  
Hanging low

“Always.”



# Nathaniel Cairney

## Flight Ghosts

They emerged as I knelt  
to weed the driveway's edge,  
wounded  
from a decade-ago war,  
waiting to be flown across an ocean  
to a myth called home,  
clean-shaven,  
unblinking  
as if they were in a lobby  
instead of the belly of a metal war beast.

All were broken  
and some burned,  
like three boys who swallowed bomb fire,  
pink skinless faces,  
backs on tables,  
motionless,  
masks over eyes,  
tubes in throats,  
oxygen bleeding into them,  
 chests lifting, then falling,  
then lifting again.

Others huddled in shadows,  
could-have-been college sophomores  
in leg casts,  
arm slings,  
white gauze eye patches,  
carrying crutches,  
which could be forgotten,  
and other things  
which could not.

## Confession, Aisle 37

Forgive me for failing  
to realize how much safer it is  
to be a barely grown boy  
in khakis and a white shirt,  
your bandages hidden,  
just one more second-class passenger.

Forgive me for forgetting  
you are a mother's son  
who was ordered  
to hunt other mothers' sons  
in a Fallujah foyer  
when a boy in pajamas,

about ten years old—  
an age you remember well—  
sprang from shadow,  
carving knife in his small fist,  
and plunged pain into you,  
a man with a rifle.

Forgive me for being nowhere  
near qualified to console  
as you whisper confession,  
your deep voice razored  
by a broken heart's edge,  
your reality

shattered  
by the cold uncertainty  
of which blame  
is yours to bear  
and which blame  
is mine.

# The Desert Cometh

His desert  
had more mountains  
than mine

but the day's  
last light  
was the same—

wavering orange  
and bleeding red,  
as if the sky knew

who was dying  
and what to do  
with the dead.

# Outside the Parliament Building

Red spires spike a white sky.  
Flecks of gray swirl between them,  
a thousand birds.

Ten thousand more hunch  
near the river's edge.

The building takes your breath away,  
magnificence conjured  
to contain hollow spaces

like ornate halls and rib cages  
where hearts beat

inside angry men who play at mirrors—  
reflecting, so they say,  
the people's wish

for protection  
from shattered countryless women

and men who look nothing like them.  
So far, they have drawn lines with words.  
It is important to appear civilized.

But exclusion and fear  
are volatile ingredients.

There has never not been a time  
when that particular mixture  
hasn't exploded.

This time, everyone tells themselves,  
it will be different.

# Sarah W. Bartlett

## Last Rhumba

On the day he stopped eating, she  
arrived. To say goodbye, yes. But also  
to share a song she would have liked

them to dance to at her wedding—with  
no date, place or partner in mind—but the wish  
to have had that final rite of passage

with her dad. He crawled from his bed  
grabbing hold of the moment, her hand.  
Her song was one he and I had danced to

under star-studded Westport nights on the deck,  
recalling ballroom floors from VT to PR, a dusty  
college stage for *rueda salsa*, local studios

sliding with Argentine tango. Weddings,  
bar mitzvahs, reunions—even hotel lobbies—  
where Latin beat or swing drew out our dancing feet,

our swaying bodies always drawing looks, asides  
*those two are so in love*, year after year after year.  
Barefoot, in high heels, whatever I wore, he

chose his soft black leather Italian shoes.  
As now. He rummaged in the closet to pull them out,  
dust them off, and slip them slowly onto his waiting feet

his final steps shuffled across the carpet as he leaned  
into the strong arms of our youngest. Cheek  
to cheek they lurched side to side, the steps slowly

returning to his memory, leading hers to reflect  
as she held tight to her father, her dream  
made manifest.

## *Remember These Words*

he mouthed, barely  
audible through lips  
that hardly moved

yet the intensity  
of his intent  
was clear, hand  
clutching mine, eyes  
pleading against time  
running out. Calm  
but insistent, he  
wanted to help  
everyone he met

even now, late  
as it was.  
His final words  
of advice, promise  
and gentle urging  
hung in silence  
while I strained  
to grasp them.  
Although I don't  
really know what  
he said, I'll  
remember those words  
meant for me  
at the end.

## **Alight**

he walks toward darkness  
as surrounding sky deepens  
into night, his path unclear without  
the familiar to guide him; yet within  
his spirit blazes alight with trust  
in what lies ahead.

# Shrinking World

The day came when he said, *my world has become very small—  
my bedroom, bathroom, the toilet.* But that was spacious  
compared with the day, not so long after that  
he struggled for the last time onto the bed.

*This is where I'm going to spend  
the rest of my life, isn't it?*

Less question than fact.

And it was. The rest  
of his life lasting  
but three  
days.



# Unexpected

Cooler than expected, the air  
gives in to the sun. Distant  
traffic muffles in breeze rising  
above the silence of dogs.

A lone seagull pierces inland twitter.  
A neighbor speaks, red car passes by.  
Ordinary moments of a weekend  
in a quiet city enclave.

But I feel what is missing, the lurch  
of your uneven gait beside me.

Smile instead at you striding up Sunset Ridge  
as I scramble to catch up, perch side by side  
to share water, gorp, laughter as the dog  
drink-swims the icy stream . . .

Looking around, I see your absence  
and my not-yet-coming-to-terms  
that our plans are no longer; yet  
I go on. I return from my walk

deadhead the *Nova Zemla* by the door,  
snip a newly-bloomed peony for the house,

enter the silence I have just left to find it  
alive with sun, comfort of the familiar  
and your gentle presence still  
warm in my heart.

# Abigail F. Taylor

## Seagulls

They come from sound and flotsam  
forgotten the way a first kiss is forgot

and found again in a sudden flash of delight,  
bright against a breastbone that has been wrought

into a hard, old thing.

They come down from storm clouds,  
bow into the wind, magnificent and pale

like women who wait along the shore  
for men to return, dragging fin whale

behind them.

They come in twos and fours of pointed wing,  
sing to these lonesome ocean wives,

and soar past the salt drenched wharf.  
They go beyond the sickle moon to live the lives

of sailors who died too soon.

## She Was Lilac

and bold barefooted by the muddy bank  
of thin ice, came to drink in that splendid  
isolation. Her bone-pale youth transcended,  
so he came, cloven hoof & quivering flank.  
The cud of his mouth burned as it sank  
to her honeysuckle skin, scented  
heavy as the altar candles gifted  
by her mother. But she left him manqué  
as she darted like gossamer through the glen.  
Oh the game! The game! That uncertain squeeze  
in his lungs by the quake and disease  
of loneliness. She waited, as golden Helen,  
calling for him from the blooms. And again.  
Calling, as naked as the stretch towards heaven.

## South of the Reservation

This house.  
This house of mud daubers  
and fried bread. Chicory burning  
on the stove. Cigarettes blooming  
out of a flat tray, like stakes  
in the Llano Estacado,  
where you were from.

This mean old dog tied to the yard  
a yard covered in burs, yellow weeds,  
and the gently swaying laundry.  
He doesn't wish to be touched  
unless there is caution  
unless you know of his bite.  
Then maybe.  
Maybe you can touch him  
a little.

The rain came in bursts of heat.  
Then the sky opened and breathed.  
And it burned these shoulders  
of ours, as we sucked sugar water  
from cheep plastic tubes,  
fluttered in the yard like hummingbirds  
grass clinging to our bare ankles.

# Slugs

They appeared that morning fat, gray,  
and so blissfully unaware  
they were unwanted and, elsewhere,  
in the garden, strawberries swelled

with open wounds and there  
were silver trails that dwelled  
among leaves, like railways.  
You appeared and expelled

the slugs with violent salt. The stray  
one she tried to save hissed a prayer  
from its long body and she stared  
at you, quiet, but her eyes yelled:

They appeared that morning fat, gray,  
and so blissfully unaware!

## Jaybird by the Fence

She had seen it through the dawn mist  
folded in adolescent wing  
next to the begonias. Flies swarmed.  
A sorry little thing, too beautiful  
to be wrapped in a plastic sack  
but it moved its head.  
She could not touch it while  
it lived.

By noon, it shuffled into the twist  
of shade. Ants slipped like a shoestring  
around it. It bobbed its head in the warm  
swell of air fixed inside the unusable  
body. What could she do but go back  
to the house, pretend there was nothing dead  
in the garden? Eventually, the heat took it. Mild wind  
kept the stink away.

She hadn't meant for it to suffer.  
She wished she had a brother,  
someone who knew the language of rocks.

# Brandon Hansen

## A Bolt in Friday

When I palmed the spider on your mirror  
we looked at the crossed legs and single tear  
of all its fluids dripping  
down the track of the biggest  
line in my palm, and you said,  
Jesus, use a paper towel next time.

But that was years ago. On Friday  
we took turns dangling a dead mouse,  
squeezed from its airlocked bag  
and thawed in a bowl of warm water,  
in front of your ex-girlfriend's pet snake,  
Waffle, who struck twice before plucking  
its little body from the tweezers,  
and hugging it tight.

On Friday I learned my old friend  
Bradley killed himself—Bradley,  
with whom I drew stick figure  
death scenes in sixth grade study hall  
every day, with whom I had not talked  
since he moved away  
when we were sophomores, maybe juniors.

You drove us to Echo Lake to wash  
the dust of lonesome away—the whole bumpy ride,  
I saw in my mind's eye the fates  
of stick figures arrowed through, napalmed,  
thrown from mountains, eaten by snakes. But  
I could hardly see Bradley. I could hardly see  
Bradley even when I closed my eyes  
as we dove into the lake,  
I could hardly see Bradley even  
as we smacked the drunk mosquitoes  
from our dewy skin, even when, near dusk,

we watched a largemouth bass like a football inhale a bluegill  
no bigger than our palms—which, in that moment,  
I almost asked if you'd want to clasp together,  
like we had once, years ago, before our life un-happened,  
and we were so quiet to each other. I wanted  
to clasp our palms, red with stolen blood,  
so as not to lose you.



# Tandem

When you sleep just feet from the river,  
the sound, like a rambling confession,  
is all you hear. And tonight,  
all you see is weak moonlight, triple-filtered  
through the clouds, the moth-littered window,  
and the curtain of hair she lets down before bed.

Stargazers all your lives, this camper,  
built by her grandfather, is a canopy you're  
unused to. You often joke  
about getting a hotel room at the Hampton  
down the street just to see what it'd be like,  
but, pragmatists all your lives, you never do it.

And—something seems especially real about sleeping  
in the same bed—even a big one. When you two rode tandem  
on a bike she found, leaning against a stop sign somewhere,  
with the necklace of a note reading “Free if you fix me!”  
draped from its frame, you peddled like a mouse and watched  
the muscles of her upper-back work the whole way  
as she steered you. You hardly noticed an entire, winking lake  
unfurl to your left.

When you sat, hips tandem, jammed into each other  
on a wooden swing at some trendy bar that your mutual  
friend's friends,  
who you love, but do not understand at all,  
wanted to go to, you said strange things for hours  
like—Oh, I heard we were supposed to be able to see  
Mercury tonight, but these string lights on the balcony will  
have to do—

and, then, unlike now,  
as you lay miles from each other on the mattress,  
warm from the same heat beneath her grandfather's quilt,  
you weren't shy about being strange at all.

Silence rounds the corner to silence,  
in the night sky's spare counterglow you barely see

her hands, clasped before her face,  
and the residual soot of your campfire  
in the cracks of her strong fingers,  
and you love them.

You open your mouth wide just then  
to say something—but you realize  
you look like a fish.

## Soul Call

Is that you? Is that you,  
bounced image through the slatted windows  
off the wide-cracked mirror and cast  
upon the white, white wall, dotted  
by the thumbtacked holes which I will  
need to fill soon, where pictures  
of friends and of you  
used to hang, tiny holes in the landscapes  
behind us, and yet over our heads?

Old televisions shut down the way  
I imagine the universe collapsing, a sharp,  
electric crack, a wink of light, a folding unto itself.  
When sleep paralysis grabs me, it feels  
the same way. My inner light clicked off,  
a paradigm shift—I am an unshut eye  
watching you.

I have this problem when I'm so tired  
I fall asleep straight on my back—the nightmare  
is in my spine, always. The first time,  
I was 14. We talked about different kinds  
of first times once, beneath a little tree doing its best  
against the sun in a park. Like you might say  
of all firsts—*honestly, that shit  
can fuck you up forever.*

I hate to lie on my back, but I did  
that day with you in the mottled shade.

I hate that I pulled the pictures down,  
pinched and pulled the tacks. The groove  
of their tiny handles haunted my thumb all day.  
I hate that I can't move; I hate the electric, phantom  
tingling, I hate these bending ribs, I hate  
that someone's standing on my chest—I hate  
that I can't tell if it's you.

## Baby Blue Flashing Spoon

pinching the thin arch of its treble hook,  
she lays the lure flat in your outstretched hand  
like an heirloom.

All night you fish the Au Train  
with the borrowed lure, which flashes back  
even the particle glow of the streetlight on the old overpass,  
where wooden bridges creak quietly beneath the concrete  
ceiling of a highway constructed above them, meant  
to hold more than an occasional horse and wagon, or  
a load of split maple, or the sap that oozes down the bark,  
and sometimes nosedives into the tumbling river below.

Night stretches—what is time, again? Somewhere  
in the casting of your spoons you two went quiet,  
are comfortable that way—when did you learn that trick?  
When did you two learn to live in a city, by the way—  
even a small one? A mist-carrying breeze off the river  
wraps around you both. You shift sand  
under your toes and stand just a little closer together.

With her borrowed baby blue flashing spoon  
you pull old summers from the river. You pull dinosaur toys  
like fossils from your old sandbox, you pull your dad's rusty  
socket wrenches and even his old impact drill,  
which whirs a bit before going to sleep.  
You pull a football helmet in by the facemask,  
and throw it back. You pull in your old dog's  
chain collar, and another, and another. You pull in numerous  
little plastic bottles of your mother's vodka, hidden  
amidst the cobwebbed baby clothes in her bedroom closet,  
which you unhook and drop in the sand beside you,  
but you don't mind. You pull in handfuls of spent, wet cigarettes  
from the bathroom sink, from the toilet; you pull in stolen  
twenty-dollar bills that smell like grass you cut, leaves you raked.  
You pull in orange pill bottles, from which  
you dump the layered sediment of dust, mold, ashes, and dog hair  
of your home. But, standing there, the whistle

of spinning line and the cold waves on both  
your ankles, you don't mind. Where did you  
learn that? Standing next to her, you spend the night  
dragging in the oldest things beside her casting form,  
and you don't know how—but you don't mind at all.

# Bradley

what a strange and fitful dream it's been.

Once, I half-stepped on a toad, realized  
it wasn't a pinecone or tired leaf  
too late. Half eviscerated in the grabbing dirt,  
it flailed its arms weakly. It did not feel good.  
I was with our friend, who you may remember,  
and she yelled at me to put it out of its misery.  
I grabbed a rock bigger than my hand  
and crushed its prone body. When I lifted  
it up, our friend, eyes through splayed fingers,  
said, *do it again!*  
but there was only thin liquid on the rock's belly—  
no toad in sight. Our friend said—  
*Oh. I think we're good.*

God—what else has happened?  
I nearly lost a finger in shop class—  
bandsaw.  
But, you were there for that, weren't you?  
Yes—you helped clean up the blood I dripped  
through the sawdust, the hallway carpet,  
and the fresh-waxed floors, all the way  
to the nurse's office. That's one of the last things  
I remember of you, actually. As friends do  
in those days, you vanished over the summer.

Years now, and I meant to write you.  
And in our hometown newspaper it says  
it's too late. This is what happens  
when you aren't careful—you lose things.  
Toad in the forest, sensation in the tip  
of my pointer finger. And, well—

you and I would draw senseless, violent things  
in sixth grade study hall—all the way  
into high school. We'd trade stick-figure slasher

comics in the hallway, we'd laugh  
about what happened in last night's *South Park*.

Here it is: since you've killed yourself,  
I've learned that the world is not, by default, good,  
and violence is not a streak in the dark—it is not rare enough to be funny.

# Andy Kerstetter

## If God Made Adam from Snow

The children, those chilly Michelangelos  
shaping their fresh take  
on *imago dei* with winter's  
whitewash would be validated  
most of all—they always knew

they nailed the first man's sleek physique  
with fine material, more supple than the dust  
He might have used—some impurities  
like splinters of ice inevitable.

Besides, what use is there for dust except  
whirling through prairie tornadoes, choking  
coal-miners' throats, obscuring the name  
on our ancestor's bust or slipping through  
these fingers, stiff with grief?  
Dust offers no life, only shrouds.

Snow can cleanse, insulate, bury,  
beautify—boreal rouge on the face of flame-  
frayed shells of domesticity—  
what is it but life suspended  
in matrices of captive light, awaiting  
the proper time to unravel  
their frozen coils,

so when spring returns our bodies  
dive into the elemental  
sludge from which we're free  
to freeze and form ourselves anew.



## Resting by a Stream on a Summer Hike

In the shade of cottonwoods, I return  
to my old coolness on a log while this  
Monarch flutters from one tuft  
to another in search of the source  
of a sweetness neither of us can see.

On the other side  
of this frothing mountain stream,  
I see a stony shore burdened with weeping  
willows where a pair of magpies roost,  
vanishing beyond the boughs, wings  
flashing blue. I take off my shoes,  
hitch up my pants and step in, intent  
to find out what the magpies know.

But the water's bite is cold and sharp  
rocks knife my heels. I stagger, fall, catch  
myself on a branch and bungle back  
to safety. Recalling younger crossings,  
I wonder how my feet have weakened,  
skin flinching from the kiss  
of ice, freezing my efforts  
of exploration.

Perhaps I lost my nerve  
along the path, stashed beneath  
a toadstool or mistaken for a nut,  
taken for a squirrel's winter cache.  
Maybe the lightness of my child  
body let me float over stones, this current  
heaviness pressing harder from higher,  
ossified strata driving the spikes deeper.

I guess it's just my flesh has learned  
all it needs, bearing knowledge  
of enough crossings to know

the path on the other side  
leads to a stand of aspens,  
hiding a fawn waiting  
for his mother to return  
with a mouthful of foxgloves.

# Liminal Spaces

1.

The hiss of the closing door  
on this bus from here to who knows  
where is the decompression  
from this state of strangulation, inter-  
personal manipulations: sunrays  
dredging my riverbed, startling  
dark-dwelling troglodytes  
into foreign luminescence.

2.

Standing on the bank  
of our leaving, your voice is  
a river where I walk  
on an old wooden dock, breaking  
under my feet as I climb  
into a driftwood raft, baling floodwaters  
as I'm swept into your currents.  
All I can do is keep my head  
above the mire.

3.

Some pagan saint once told us heaven lies  
a foot above the head of every man.  
I should have known that angels lived  
in my father's liquor cabinet, the edge  
of the cliff I couldn't reach and this still  
life hanging over our hotel bed, watching  
from bowls of oranges swollen with sacred  
juices, forever waiting for the one  
who will split their flesh and release  
a sugared baptism on our failed sacrament.

4.

They say, inside cocoons, that larvae must dissolve  
themselves to fuel their necessary transformations,  
soup soaking into *imaginal discs*, concretizing  
adulthood around the bits of childhood that kept.

I guess it's no surprise then, that, stepping off this bus  
into haloes of stinging sand, this straightjacket  
skin rips open and from my fingertips, forehead  
and chest fly forth clouds of crimson  
moths, spiraling straight into the sun.

# Grounding

When I tell her about my blood-  
-and-shadow dreams, my mystic friend  
tells me that I am  
too open to the other  
world, that I am  
too comfortable being  
lost in astral fog, Neptune  
presiding over my neuroses  
like a drunk lifeguard falling  
asleep while his charges  
flounder in the mire.

She prescribes a ritual  
of grounding: first, I need to seek  
some earth on which to stand—  
I think I'd like a patch of unworked  
turf, maybe deep moss by a stream  
beneath a gnarled beech—then plant  
my bare feet firmly in the dust  
and think about light:  
a white ball of it piercing  
my skull, slipping behind  
my eyes, down my throat, between  
my ribs, gathering negative  
energy like roses sprouting  
from dry bones till it bursts  
from the soles of my feet, bearing its bouquet  
through humus and clay  
to some blind rift to wither  
in its own darkness.

Then, imagine: new brightness rising  
from Earth's bones into mine, spreading  
through marrow and vein till I'm flush  
with primeval simplicity  
of spirit, able to withstand  
assault from legions  
of the soul.

It all seems too good  
to be true—I am loath  
to believe, till I see the roots  
of spirits speaking themselves  
through the stones from my bones  
to the center, my swaying body  
tethered to truth like a tree  
near running water, stooping gladly  
in the muck.

# The Inferno Lessons

Search teams are combing through  
the ashes in your mouth  
trying to find bathtubs or beds  
where people might have taken  
the tongue, also a fire, which left  
no way to escape a world  
of evil among the parts  
of the body. *All lost  
some and some lost all.*

The whole body sets the course  
of one's life on fire—wine glasses clinking  
in a different bedroom, burning up  
and down at once—take off your shoes  
on holy ground: I lost you

long before the light of day  
revealed your work for the fire  
that it is—the strands  
of your hair curling like spiders  
baptized in the Holy Spirit, testing  
the quality of your work, losing  
yourself in your tongue-

flame, tongues of flame  
lapping up your tears before  
they fell—your ruined fingers fused  
with blackened bedposts, kindred vines  
reduced to elemental similarities.  
I can't pry you apart.

# Michael Fleming

## Space Walk

A vacuum, they assured me, pushing me  
into the airlock, buckling on my  
bubble head. Just that one idea—  
nothing, the void, the great by and by.  
But nothing turns out to be everything,  
and everything is music, swelling chords  
of darkness-piercing light, every star singing  
the song of fire! But those are just words—  
what else to say when they reeled me in?  
The words felt like stones revolving around  
the dead suns of what I would never tell  
them. All I could do was point at the spinning  
cosmos, that vacuum filled with the sound  
they already knew—their heaven, their hell.



## He'll Be Remembered

He'll be remembered for the hair, I guess,  
and preposterous neckties, and his name  
will be a synonym for something less  
than promised, a punchline for drinking games,  
the name they'll invoke at spelling bees  
when the winning word is *braggadocio*  
and some skinny, owl-eyed kid asks, "Please  
use it in a sentence?" and there they'll go  
again with that Dickensian name . . . and I'll  
always think of poker, his final sneer  
of malevolent, stolen triumph while  
slapping down the ace of spades, till he hears  
the howls of laughter at the man who loses  
everything to a lousy pair of deuces.

## Foxholes

When the time was right he told us about  
the war—boredom, fear, and loneliness most  
of the time, then terror and noise, and shouting,  
screaming, the pop and heave of guns, ghost  
moments that never go away and things  
that cannot be unseen. *That's where I found  
God, he said—where I found love, and the sting  
of knowing what love means, how we're all wounded  
and scared, doomed but still alive—alive!*  
He told us about foxholes and bargains  
with fate, grasping for anything to drive  
away the onrush of death, make the pain  
stop, hush the noise. *And I'm still in that war,  
still in that foxhole, he said—we all are.*

—for W.W.

## Edges

Let people bicker over who made what—  
isn't everybody making? Aren't we  
made for making—building, devising? But  
more than that—looking for some kind of freedom  
for later, some kind of heaven? I  
look for it in this forest, at the edge  
between summer and winter, day and night.  
I look for it in tidepools, at the edge  
between the sea and the land, between strange  
and stranger. I look for it where the flats  
meet the mountains. The edges are the welfare  
of the world, the crucibles of change  
and chance, the portals between this and that—  
the places where the world creates itself.

## The Birth of Language (Reflections on Recycling Night)

Back in the caves, when we were showing off  
our shiny new opposable thumbs  
and tottering on our hind legs, enough  
of us must have had the insight that some  
stuff was worth holding onto, and some not—  
decisions would have to be made. This stone,  
that stick—keepers. But shattered sticks and rotten  
meat and broken blades and blackened bones,  
things whose very presence was burdensome—  
into the midden. What need for words when  
we stared into the embers, felt that odd  
wonderment at the stars and where we come  
from? No. The first useful word must have been  
*trash*—before *tool*, before *fire*, before *God*.

# Richard Cole

## Triage

Yes, there are days when the ER doors explode  
and Code Blue comes in on a gurney, rapid  
crosstalk over the patients, one right after  
another. More often though,  
we triage our lives with quiet, glancing  
deferments of care, attention, faith, for whatever  
needs us and cannot be ignored and left  
to die. We have no choice but to choose  
among these three—money, the people we love  
and our inner life, such as it is. We can save  
the one, maybe two out of three, but nobody  
I've seen has it all. The math doesn't work that way,  
though one might serve another, the church  
of parenthood, perhaps, or creativity  
that pays the bills. But marriages can fail  
in the face of sudden money.  
We can fall in love as our business  
fades, or drive down avenues  
of achievement, proud and blind.  
We can die before we die.  
We can hold our breath for years  
and do, our dreams growing beautiful  
as autumn leaves, golden and forgotten.  
We can find what feeds us in triage, an ascending  
crisis of opportunities, thinking like nurses  
and ER doctors, fast and wise  
as much as possible, trying to live one life  
as we save others.

# Perfect Corporations

Corporations are people, too,  
numbers with skin.

Like people, they have dreams.  
Like people, they can ache and grow  
and have that growth cut short,  
wounded, and then survive  
to consume or be consumed by others.  
Like people at times, they have  
no choice, and the better ones have come to believe  
that people, natural people, are frictions,  
that the best corporations are heaven on earth  
as the earth drops away, trailing numbers,  
human capital liquefied  
and refined, the corporate body  
reorganized by cold explosions leaving  
a cloudy taste  
and empty cubicles filled with light.

The perfect corporations are the ones  
with nobody left. Breathless and calm. The ones  
that have no soul.

# Too Big to Fail

The sky is filled with brokers jumping from windows,  
some holding hands as they step off together,  
showers of suits and ties that flutter  
through crashing markets, debt bombs  
going off in the bundled securities wrapped  
and bleeding through layers of gauze,  
20 years of financial assumptions collapsing  
like circus tents on fire, the elephants screaming, old lions  
roaring in outrage as the furious band plays on,  
and the bodies keep falling faster,  
racing to the final moment, the slap  
and explosion of meat  
pounding the sidewalks and then  
they touch down  
gently, as if  
on a well of bubbling energy.

“You’re safe,” the dancing master says.  
“You’ll always be safe. It’s like a love affair  
with gravity. Look at what you’ve already become  
and what that means. You’ve made a killing.  
Banks are immortal, in their way,  
and so, in a way, are you.”

# Becoming Air

Slow pounding on the door  
downstairs, a low, steady sound  
more felt than heard, month  
after month for a year,  
then almost two, now growing,  
filling the massive house  
where my sister waits  
in her flying bed, exhausted,  
with a painted battle scene above her head,  
historic men on horseback, swords waving, charging  
always toward victory.  
Then a faint click.  
Greatness enters the room,  
pauses, as if questioning,  
and offers a white flower. At last,  
after years of framed achievement,  
anger and controlling love,  
she sighs, a burning fragment  
cradled in the arms of pure death,  
and together they descend with dignity,  
intimate all the way down  
the amazing stairs.



# Susan Bouchard

## An Apology To My Best Friend

I didn't mean to take your dress  
But you know you are too much for me  
All that confidence that you wear  
It's so theatrical.

You command attention and  
I wanted a chance at that  
*Let me show you—teach you*, you said  
But I knew you didn't mean that  
You really like your power over me  
And I succumb to your strength  
(And my jealousy)

So while you were working and I was waiting  
At your apartment  
I tried on your wispy light blue dress  
The one that follows you in folds so unnaturally perfect  
I can never tell if you move the dress or the dress moves you.

I thought the dress would transform me into you  
It zipped up so smoothly and I was hopeful  
Even my stomach fluttered for a moment  
Your skin on me might make all the difference  
But my insecurities leaked right through your dress  
And changed it.

It was not like a new skin on me  
My skin is too thin, too translucent, to be yours  
I knew I would end up infecting your precious dress  
(But I hoped I wouldn't)

And I didn't mean to crunch your dress into a ball  
And stuff it in my purse  
I planned to have it cleaned and return it on another day  
When you were working.

But the stains didn't come out and  
I couldn't tell you about the damage  
(You know how you love your clothes)  
So I brought your blue dress home  
And I promise I only wear it occasionally  
Just on days when I'm trying to be hopeful  
But now it looks more like me and less like you.

It doesn't smell like you anymore  
Your scent of pure, fresh wash  
Is completely gone  
(I loved that scent) but  
I sat on my couch in your dress and  
Tucked my knees to my stomach and wrapped myself in your skin  
And hugged you, along with my knees, and  
Covered my legs in all that blue  
Taking deep sniffs and for a while, I held you inside.

I should have paced myself  
But you know how impulsive I am  
So I wasn't able to preserve you in your dress  
And I can't talk to you anymore  
Because I stole your dress  
And its seams are fraying and the hem is uneven  
And it smells like burnt toast and buttered popcorn  
My scent overpowered yours (I didn't know I could do that)  
So I can't even return it to you.

I thought I could be *you* in your dress  
And maybe you would be me, just for a bit  
While I learned how to be you  
So I could someday be *me*.

(*Sorry*)

# The Space Between

You live in the spaces between my words  
Where I often hover,  
Tiptoeing in the inky shadows  
To take a quick breath and  
Whisper my fears.

I know I will find you in those spaces  
You are not the words in my poem  
but the hand that guides me,  
No, pushes me,  
Onto my next word.

# Why I Don't Like Meeting Famous People

I once rode in an elevator in Bloomingdale's with  
A famous actor that I've seen (and lusted after) in many films  
Suddenly, it's just the two of us in a small, moveable metal box and  
No one's escaping until the third floor.

I wish I hadn't run to catch the elevator, but  
Just as the doors were closing  
I saw an arm reach for the button panel  
The doors slid open and I slid in.

I knew immediately who he was.  
He smiled because he knew I knew  
And this was his lot in life  
People knew him.

I am disappointed immediately.  
*Why didn't I just ride the escalator*, I think  
But all that silver closes me in  
And up we go.

I try not to make eye contact  
But do my fair share of peeking to the left.  
I note that his skin isn't flawless in person  
He looks much younger on film.

I'm also disappointed by his choice of clothes  
He's slighter than I imagined and his hair sparse.  
So this is he in ordinary life  
He's so . . . ordinary.

I stare at the button display and hope for someone else to join us.  
But no, we are alone and  
He smiles and says *hello*.  
I don't answer.

Does he want me to request an autograph?

I can't do that; I don't want one  
Does he expect a reply, a simple *hello*  
Or does he recognize my disappointment.

I want to tell him that  
I've met other famous people  
Right here in Bloomingdale's and I am not  
Star-struck by that fact or by him.

I am simply embarrassed for him  
And his inability to translate from big screen to real life  
And I am reminded of how people, in your life and out of it,  
Don't always live up to expectations.

And just as I've given up reading biographies  
Where I learn more than I want to know,  
I promise myself I will never ride the elevator in  
    Bloomingdale's again.  
I don't always like the truth.

# Circus Performers

She says we have become circus performers, but I wonder,  
Have we always been circus performers  
Just waiting for our moment,  
Perfecting our talents in secret while  
Living our ordinary lives in open spaces?

Is this really who we are now or  
Has the inside merely wiggled its way out,  
Is it too late to join an act and  
Perfect our dreams in open spaces while  
Living our ordinary lives in private?

She says we have taken our show on the road  
As we tentatively walk tightropes,  
You balancing song sheets and guitars  
Me twisting tales into shape  
You sing your words; I write mine.

We load our car with microphones and music stands  
Books and binders filled with words and sounds  
Juggling through performances with  
Ice cold hands (you) and sweaty palms (me)  
A double trapeze act concealing our fears and  
Embracing the risks.

# Word Shredder

I rip words.  
Cut them with precision  
Every tentative one with the  
Audacity to find its way onto paper  
Ends up shredded like alphabet pieces  
Original Gutenberg metal blocks  
Out of order in an old tin container.

I store the shredding in file boxes.  
Plan to arrange them someday  
Put my (*your*) life in order  
Alpha to omega  
Vowels and consonants  
Press the alphabet into compliance and  
Bundle words into thoughts.

And you, you write in a font different than mine,  
So even shredded, I know you from me and  
Can rearrange you into my version of you  
I write your story  
Force you to say what I want you to say  
Manipulate you like wooden  
Scrabble pieces.

I am printer, designer, storyteller.  
Use my power to reform words  
Art crafting life  
Cast you into my story  
Assemble our fonts  
Free you from my patchwork puzzle and  
Give you life on a page.

But for now, I am satisfied collecting you.  
Incising your dialogue into tiny pieces and  
Printing your words in a size smaller than mine  
So when I reach into the file and pull out segments  
Of *Helvetica* (me) and *Comic Sans* (you)  
I hold within me all the possibilities to  
Reprint (our) history as I intend it.

# Edward Garvey

## Nine Songs of Love

I

As if in sync  
with a step within  
a mirror,  
or in time  
with a heartbeat  
from another time,  
I remember you  
when I see you.  
You are almost  
the same.  
You your step  
your heartbeat each  
the same.

You step from  
a standing mirror,  
this time  
wearing a dark  
green shirt.



## II

As if you pulled  
your kept hair back  
or changed its color  
from dark to black,  
your eyes, your  
skin you forget  
to change.

Or is it  
my eyes  
my heart  
have stayed  
the same?

Recurrent love  
is a rhythm  
that shapes  
a lifetime.  
I watch you  
walk, the rhythm  
of your walk,  
and the shape  
of your legs  
in your black  
pants.

### III

It's not that your  
black hair  
or thin smile  
or narrow waist  
disappear,  
or even fade.  
It's that your eyes  
are a truth deeper  
than color.  
The layers of time  
collapse when you  
look at me.  
Everything disappears,  
everything fades.

When you turn  
away, the rigidity  
of time returns,  
and I cannot  
see your  
eyes.

#### IV

When I see  
your eyes,  
I do not see  
their color.  
They are  
as colorless  
as eternity.  
With each glance  
I lose balance  
and fall into  
your eyes.

When I  
cannot see  
your eyes,  
I imagine  
their color.  
They are the color  
of a sunlit  
olive tree,  
or the crow  
that feeds  
on the ground.

V

Could you be  
anyone, any  
woman?  
Your cheekbones  
do not remind me  
of anyone,  
but your eyes  
remind me  
of all women.  
Memory is  
superimposable—  
the shape  
of her lips  
on yours.

Your body is  
fragmented  
by my memory.  
Parts of you  
I have  
always known.  
All your earrings  
though  
are new.

## VI

The image  
of you  
not the curve  
of your neck  
runs through  
dreams and  
into my past.  
The further I fall  
into previous lives,  
the sharper  
the image,  
the less  
it is you.

This image  
is colored  
not by clothes, skin,  
even your eyes.  
This image is naked  
continual  
transparent.  
It is love  
itself.

## VII

You are name-  
less, faceless  
almost.  
You belong  
to any time  
any space.  
You are with me  
when I wake  
sleep, breathe.  
Usually  
with a name,  
a face, but not  
always.

I know you  
as I know  
the beginnings  
of my childhood  
dreams,  
stepping off  
a cliff—  
nothing more.

## VIII

An image  
remains—it is  
but a shadow  
in a mirror.  
Your back turned  
toward me  
your face turned  
away. The curve  
of your back  
is an image  
in the mirror,  
not a reflection.  
I have lost you.

As if all  
women  
were the same  
woman and  
all men were  
the same man,  
I have lost you  
to love.

## IX

As a feather  
in a vacuum  
my breath  
falls when  
I see you.  
Your smile  
is the sun  
that dawns against  
my night sky.  
My heart  
is a sea pulled  
by the gravity  
within your eyes.

You are real,  
separate  
with a face,  
figure,  
name.  
I say your name  
and you turn.  
Here and  
now.



# Mehrnaz Sokhansanj

## The Mourning Song

the birds are too rowdy  
too early, they peck  
at me through the window—  
how I never water the garden  
how I welcome weeds

how I let the sun beat  
the alarm again,  
snoozing to waste  
the last of it  
before I unload  
the morning—  
strawberry jam, whole milk,  
and raisin bread  
all store-bought and ready—  
I thought I could handle the heat,  
grow my groceries from the ground  
maybe the jam would taste sweeter,  
the milk would last longer than two weeks

I count what's left of it  
to keep up with the hyperbole of the morning—  
no one believes a flood  
after a ten-year drought  
no one believes me  
when I say there's no more  
sweetness left in the breakfast cream

I spread the layers of my tears way too thick,  
no more time to cry over stale bread

# Sea of Detachment

*“Yield your soul  
surrender your heart,  
or else they will divert you,  
waylay you far from the Valley of Detachment”  
—Attar, The Conference of the Birds*

we ironed our prayers  
out on the bed, with argan—  
sweating palms  
compressing steam  
before a release  
to blur the stars

God granted us custody  
for one night, gifting  
us shearwater wings,  
and we flew to  
the Sea of Detachment,  
in search of our king

whom we can call father  
but all that stood  
was a marauder, drifting  
from daughter  
to daughter forgetting  
their last names,  
he lights his cigar,  
our only star

not enough warmth  
in our hands for a prayer  
back to our wrinkled bed  
we wade on the water  
afraid of the ripples  
that reflect his embers  
back to our palms

# I Don't Know Your Hurt

You built a border with recycled grocery bags,  
compacted the fridge with frozen foods,  
filled the pantry with pistachios, barberries, and dates  
but left nothing for my indulgences to feed on,  
so that I will always need you at dinnertime.

Dinnertime is no time for questions—no space  
at the table for grace—you fight with the TV,  
hating the stillness—my cousin said Dad  
always threw the remote at you after dinner,  
you clench the controls, scolding my taste in men.

*Men will suck you for your youth and children will suck  
you for your milk until they're all full and you're dry—  
you loved me the most when I bought you a new fridge,  
now you're lactose intolerant and hate the way my boyfriend laughs,  
say he's like my dad, and my cousin's dad.*

Dad's cigarette ashes left a trail, you never stepped on  
or swept away—you keep the stove on overnight,  
burn incense every Friday and overlook strangers  
from the balcony, tucking your prayer beads in,  
when it's too quiet, you leave to pray.

*Pray for a two-story house with a backyard and a pool*  
you pray for pearls and peace—when asked about you  
all I can say is I don't know your birth year or your dress size  
or if you ever flirted with demons, I pray that I do but  
I don't—I don't know—I don't know you.

# Jeffrey Haskey-Valerius

## Unknowingness

Shovelfuls  
of cicada carcasses

from the base of a  
great, wide oak:

I try not to vomit  
from the stench. The distant

roar of lawn mowers  
at dusk. I start to

collect razor blades  
like coins

when the other boys notice  
I'm—

“different.” History class  
bores me anyway.

I try like           hell  
to make new

friends, but  
my ribs are made

of cellophane.  
Tooth marks on

ghost white gossamer,  
piles of starch

in porcelain. The clack  
of high heels

down the  
high school's hallway,

like the duty-bound  
pediatrician

tapping his foot  
against the linoleum, as he

tells my weeping mother  
about the Tylenol.

# Aftershock

the hook of the tongue,  
raw, the aftershock is the  
your teeth like a moth  
bursts into apple blossom  
somehow: you tame  
will study your painted tip—  
on your unbridled poise.

Like moonshine bites  
rubs the throat cherry red  
catastrophe: it unfurls from  
from its quiet coma,  
smithereens. Somehow—  
the seizing locusts; seismologists  
toes, balancing, and write papers

# Claudia Skutar

## The Lords of Ocqueoc

are diving in water clear as rootbeer  
as it foams over the rocks;  
again and again the cannonballs,  
three boys on the move to outdo and knowing—  
knowing all the while the girls, tourists, babies are watching—  
or not knowing or not caring,  
the way they didn't care about the filtered sun in the leaves  
or about how the water poured and poured over the rocks,  
grinding them, wearing them away, carrying them into the lake  
two miles beyond, or about the faces of the tourists, droves of them,  
thick as mosquitoes, and pasty in summer flesh,  
the water a treat, a respite from factory or office or sewing machine  
or babies  
and the dirty diapers someone was washing a little way downstream  
where the water stilled its roiling;  
the boys not caring in skin tanned, for now,  
absorbed in the play of the water through the nose, mats of wet too-  
long hair in the eyes; this  
was their river, their falls, their place, their lives,  
lives born of the landscape where boys commanded the pool at the  
bottom of the falls,  
all the visiting children circling around them in the water,  
all of them eddies in the flow  
and eddies are always carried away.  
No moss, no fright, just the debris carried with them.

## Homage II

A train of children, weeping, sent out of the devoured city.  
At Eberbach, a farmer takes on the one with red hair because  
she will not cry.

•

They hide low in the wheat when bombers swoop.  
It is some years before American soldiers will bring their  
chocolate and cigarettes.

•

Her favorite color is blue.  
He courts her out of uniform and returns to the base each night.

•

Water is her liquid heart, a center spilling out to horizon.  
She is gnarled, a red oak in the lee of shore.



## Homage III

The beer is amber,  
the Pilsner glass raised,  
the moment a quarter lime of smile.

•

Oil in his white hair stains the chair back.  
The daughter touches an arm, kisses a stark cheek, hides the  
spot with a towel.  
It smears lightly across memory.

•

Weeks before her parents arrive, she scrubs grout in the tub  
with a toothbrush.  
All will be clean, children will be clean, the wrong husband  
she cannot scrub away.

•

Photo of the now-old woman with the Grosstochter, their  
cheeks together above fresh Apfelkuchen; the girl is  
learning German. Another quarter lime of smile.

•

The next floor up she sleeps; her slow breaths still draw in air,  
exhale what has been forgotten, or maybe left behind.

# Energy Equals Mass Times the Speed of Light Squared

*A human being is a part of a whole, called by us “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest . . . a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.*

—Albert Einstein

Somewhere, the universe holds you;  
your spirit perhaps has slipped into a black hole,  
drawn you out like a piece of fine silver wire  
into infinite singularity.  
In this place that lets out no light  
are many, like you, waiting.

•

They’ve swaddled your body in blankets,  
me in gown, mask, gloves.  
I am not afraid; I’ve known *Clostridium difficile*  
as I’ve watched your torn lungs smother in it.  
Your eyes have been closed for weeks.  
Only today they told me you are probably brain-dead.  
I long suspected that you’ve already given your body the slip.

•

So much energy released as atoms come apart.  
Yet Einstein told us nothing of the energy  
released as spirit departs the body.

•

We circle your bed and pray.  
The doctor opens one eyelid, and I see no light.  
Later, after your last breath, alone  
in the private waiting room, I ask you for a sign.  
The restroom dispenser several feet away releases a towel.  
Its motion detector has been activated.

I have said I am several feet away. It is 3 a.m.,  
and they are preparing your body in ICU  
for the hospital morgue.  
I have said I was alone. I am startled,  
but I don't leave the room until called  
by the nurse so I may wait with your body.

•

Something in time and space has changed.  
I study the night sky outside,  
the soft lamp light above the zipped bag  
reflected in the window.

# The Language Hidden in Skin

Unexpected glimpse, oedipal,  
of maleness carefully kept from  
view, seen at an age of bodies  
fast growing into sexes.

A medical reference with drawings  
in his library did show that.  
A mother's blush at questions  
left me to puzzle out meaning,  
to think long, long on the crux of it,  
a preview of shapes and purpose.

Fast forward years, now, to his dying,  
old man swaddled, and the gown  
loose always as he shifted in his last pain;  
studied, monitored, probed,  
needles forced in, pulled out;  
he, to them, a rotting bag of parts.

I remember touching his arm,  
though he was gone already, by then,  
and the pungent unwashed hair  
not the least of that body's growing offences.

There, again, accidental view;  
nurses hovered, removed, replaced,  
removed integument of sheets.  
Primal, this view, but different;  
parent as mammal, sleek, clean,  
having sloughed his useless rind;  
no longer hobbled by flesh,  
new in shape and purpose.

# Donna French McArdle

## Because the Serpent

1.

Because the serpent chose which tree,  
all knowledge is tainted,  
just as ignorance is bliss,  
and seeking an answer is lust,  
and finding the answer (or thinking so) is pride;  
our best and worst the same.

And because Eve chose to hear the serpent,  
and not her husband, all marriage  
is tainted; even those of us  
who vowed can't obey after  
that first delectable, intellectual bite.

Tossed out, we built a wild, ungodly garden  
from brambles and mud  
and filled it with meadows, motorcycles,  
down comforters and silks,  
with the sorrow that is love,

with the love that begets our children,  
with loss and disease: one of forgetfulness  
that empties the mind, another that enters  
the bones, and another of the soul;  
we imagined these and they were here.

There was death, too. Because Adam  
warned us surely we would die,  
there were drownings, floods, mountains exploding,  
war and suffering. Then we created a nowhere.  
Because the serpent, we had to create this

emptiness, this place we could form anew,  
for we knew we could be tossed again  
as tender green sprouts in an icy wind.

We made it up as we went, not sure  
if it would be sweet heaven or sweet hell.

2.

We walked the track of dirt road through a field  
overgrown with tall grasses, overflowing with rising heat.  
At the pond, we slipped off our sticky clothes, hung them  
on a branch and, glancing away, stepped in.  
Up to my shoulders, I felt less shy, dressed in reflection  
of the trees and sky, and feeling, as I slowly moved  
my hands to swim, that kindness of the water  
on the muscles and joints. I ducked below. My hair floated up.  
Past me, the reeds flowed, following a movement  
that forms the bodies of fish and teaches the hind feet of frogs  
how to rest as they glide. Fusiform. My hand and its reflection  
reached toward each other at the surface.

He and I swam everywhere that summer: in ponds, the river, the ocean.  
The water quenched and woke me as the first notes plucked  
on a Spanish guitar open the piece and vibrate against each other,  
against the moment, against the humidity in the air.  
I expected it. I had been waiting for it, but I could not imagine  
the fullness of it, the intimacy of sound and splashes of water  
and the changes of light that happened daily, constantly.  
As I swam away from him, his white shirt and my pale blue dress  
rose together in the breeze.

The swallows had come out, dashing just above the pond  
where the bugs felt the rise of our warm human expiration and lingered.  
They had come to bite us, and the birds to eat them—resequencing  
the order of predation. Two birds, one chasing and squawking,  
the instigator in front, flew upward toward the treetops,  
and the wind shifted the branches, so the sun flashed between,  
and the fire of that light swallowed the bird. Its follower  
clung to a branch, the wind calmed, and the chattering silenced.

Cast out, above the canopy of maple and oak, that swallow  
vanished into the sky of nowhere. I looked upward for him,

but looking stung the eyes, for he was in, and I was near, a haze of emptiness, which is a daydream where longing is uninhibited. He remembered the taste of mayfly and mosquito, beyond body or bite, where they become outlines filled with the pale light he swam though while I swam through cool pond water. His tiny heart pounded with his drop or two of blood, and he drifted low and remembered the shade beneath those branches.

Every story and every whisper between the two of us anticipated a reply. We wanted paradise complete; I wanted that swallow to return. But the motion of my hands undid the perfect reflection on this hidden pond; the world looked at upside down was brief and vulnerable. I turned and reached to him, and when he pulled me in that swallow blasted out from nowhere, and swooped low, so the feathers on its belly skimmed the water's surface.

3.

“All paths lead nowhere,” the Yaqui Don Juan taught Carlos Castaneda. Then Birkin invited Ursula, “away from the world’s somewheres,” and though DH Lawrence said she was afraid, they drove off to Sherwood Forest to sleep on a rug under the hood of his car. But it is Ovid who in his great Metamorphosis reminded us that Jove can transform you so thoroughly you are lost. You are a white cow; you cannot recognize the lowing in your own voice; and your father, whose heart is broken, weeps that he cannot find you because you are not anywhere.

# I Stumble

Because the going is hard—one mile up  
Neahkahnie rises nine hundred feet till it levels,  
steep enough for switchbacks after the first steps,  
heartless enough that after fifteen minutes  
into this workout, I doubt I can finish the climb—  
I'm breathing hard. Because they call the view religious—  
and already I'm doubting—uncertainty unsteadies  
my gait, but feet pounding, heart pounding, I walk.

Gerry, our host, says we're tramping pirate country.  
Over northwest are Devil's Cauldron and Smuggler's Cove,  
but close by, legend has treasure buried.  
The kids want it. They want to roll it down this  
old, good path. They want to be rich, to buy cars  
(though they're too young to drive), to be so rich  
they would drive anyway, to be completely  
outside the rules, free, floating, the longing  
in their voices both wistful and whining.

I long simply for the trail to end, so when Gerry says,  
"This is it," and pushes into the brush, I follow—  
obedient, befuddled, then lost. There is no trail.  
We gather ourselves in a field grown nearly  
as high as my shoulders (and the kids heads),  
surrounded by foxgloves so hot pink  
they erase the heat of the afternoon and dry  
the sweat on the small of my back.

This is where I am: lulled by the distant  
surf, breathing deeply of the soil, the Pacific.  
But Gerry turns back, as do the others,  
brushing by me. I follow how the pink  
spires reconvene after the rush of our party.  
This is how I live: gasping, stumbling,  
stopping only when I can no longer resist  
the shift of light, the tall stalks stilled.  
The others call to me from the trail. I follow.



The peak, the real one, a rocky clearing that  
faces south, stands 1680 feet above the Pacific,  
and on such a beautiful day as this day,  
you can peer over Neahkahnie-Manzanita  
Park—a swath of green and blue—  
and, in the distance, Nehalem Bay empties  
into the Pacific, the outlet no bigger than my thumb,  
and a crow drifting between here and there  
no bigger than a spot on my eyeglasses, and the surf  
that churns and grinds, breathing as lightly as if asleep,  
quieter than my own breath.

We drink the last of our water and see smoke  
halfway down the beach, then flames overcome  
the August-dried beach grasses between the sand  
and civilization. Helpless this far away, we hear sirens,  
see the red pumper truck, and as the flames die, the smoke  
blooms, then thins out over the waves. We follow its path,  
trying to sight the horizon. “Is it the dark or the white line,”  
the kids ask, “where the water ends and the sky begins?  
Can our eyes see it?” We adults adjust our eyeglasses.

# The Fields

One step in and they came alive  
with frantic hopping,  
tossed out from my legs  
like a swirling skirt,  
for the fields of my childhood  
were full of grasshoppers.  
They called pfft, pfft and launched  
into the wind-driven wave  
of tall stems. Heavy seed heads  
arched over and down in unison,  
and the crazy grasshoppers struck  
a zigzag against the uniformity  
of summer afternoons.

My brothers and I caught them.  
I held one between cupped hands  
trying to be still enough  
to let it rest on my palm,  
peeking into the gap between  
thumb and fingers. I studied  
the red and green markings  
on its bigger legs, fed it  
a single blade of sweet fescue,  
watched its mandibles tear and chew;  
and if I could be still inevitably  
the grasshopper shat on my hand,  
and I wiped it on my shirt.  
My mother was always asking,  
“How did your shirt get so dirty?”  
for the T-shirts of my childhood  
were streaked with this muck.

The fields: the unmown lot behind the Breen's,  
the steep-sloped sides and the hollowed center of Fort Lee,  
the unused railroad tracks that led from the cove  
under Bridge Street toward the river.

## Knitting Sample

Her fingers on the yarn, the needles, my fingers,  
she adjusted with small movements  
the stitches we cast on. My grandmother wanted me  
to know the rites, to reveal the patterns of our lives  
in the way you wrap yarn into a scarf  
worn against a cold morning, against  
a season of cold mornings.

She needed to show me how you twist and pull  
warmth into your life once you understand  
the raveling and weaving,  
once you trust the yarn, the story emerges—  
a day, then a month, then a life emerges.  
She left me alone to it, and I sat there—yarn  
in my hand, fantasy in my head, cautiously  
forming loops, tapping needles, watching out the window  
as a wild bird landed on the picnic table, and a boy  
next house over pumped hard on his swing.  
When my grandmother came to check on me,  
the knitting was a mess, a tornado of holes  
from stitches dropped and extra loops knotted  
over each other. She counted in disbelief;  
given ten stitches I ended with seventeen.  
While she saw only flaws, I loved that  
wild tangle of my first creation. Then,  
because there was no yarn to waste,  
my grandmother pulled out each stitch.  
They slid apart to her tug and popped slightly  
before the tension gave and the yarn fell limp.  
My creation would not be delivered to the world;  
my neck and ears would suffer the chill  
of cold mornings, and I began to learn  
the workings of the pattern I would follow  
for many years: attempt and dismantle, come home  
and leave again, find a way and lose it, wake and  
fall into a deep sleep and dream  
of the squeak of that boy's swing  
and the bird flying away.

# Megan Skelly

## Cento

For those of us who live at the shoreline  
(curve of a water-starved globe)  
is it the sea you hear in me,  
under sleep, where all the waters meet?

They lie like stones and dare not shift. Even asleep, everyone hears  
in prison.

I lock you in an American sonnet that is part prison—  
America after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world—  
what happens to a dream deferred?

Nights were not made for the crowds.  
I have come so that, tugging your ear, I may draw you to me.  
The moon tugs the seas,  
where waterless bones move  
from floods that are to come.  
You protecting the river

You are who I love.

*With loving acknowledgment to poets (in order of appearance): Audre Lorde, Anne Waldman, Sylvia Plath, T.S. Eliot, Jericho Brown, Terrance Hayes, Allen Ginsberg, Langston Hughes, Rainer Maria Rilke, Rumi, Ntozake Shange, Sonia Sanchez, Adrienne Rich & Aracelis Girmay.*

## Puzzle Box Ghazal

Four walls hem in what some call a room,  
what does it mean when someone asks for room?

A longing for wingspan within my womb  
I beg red rivers to run, make room.

My parents' house holds caverns of silence,  
bruised tongues. Mother sleeps in my old room.

I cannot shake the habit of living  
feet feathers to flee to a new room.

Mrs. Woolf, it is not true, I can live  
on much less—a crescent moon of room.

My call to write, muddy tracks of words coat  
wide meadows, blank page an empty room.

Snails have it best, cradle fertile darkness  
upon their backs, pockets of hushed room.

Content with air between joints, belly as  
balloon. Breath tiny sky dense with room.

Within clasp of shells is how a pearl blooms:  
pressure warping space conjures room.

## frayed (a villanelle)

you'll never guess the pain that's kept hidden  
the stitching that unravels first—the seam  
the piece that comes apart slowly within

purple patches, red lines a map upon her skin  
she walks the streets around you, quiet as a dream  
you'll never guess the pain that's kept hidden

the bitterest of pills swallowed with a grin  
she smiles at you, her eyes betray a gleam  
the piece that comes apart slowly within

muted words on paper the only story she'll begin  
for if she tried to speak, she'd only scream  
you'll never guess the pain that's kept hidden

the lies she shares all day are close to her as kin  
yet secrets leak free in the night's moonbeams  
the piece that comes apart slowly within

the energy this act demands wanes her soul so thin  
her frayed grip on her life part of the scheme:  
you'll never guess the pain that's kept hidden  
the peace that comes apart slowly within

# Cycles

Time passes as molasses here  
sighing, I count my wounds  
thumb them like craters  
three cuts, a sore neck, a hollow womb . . .

When my eyes & limbs feel heavy  
crushed by the weight of empty rooms  
I remind myself of the women  
& then I know what to do.

*Chandra, Soma, Luna, Moon*  
*I'm on my way; I'll see you soon*

I creep over to the window  
the sky outside a velvet bruise  
gleaming from it, the pearl of my sisters  
its rainbow aura leaking streaks diffuse

I make a bath to prepare for the journey  
humming softly a dreamy tune  
water steaming, I add rose petals  
for tonight we are luminous full.

*Chandra, Soma, Luna, Moon*  
*I'm on my way; I'll see you soon*

Cleansed by the Sea of Tranquility  
I laugh about all this Earth abuse  
the gravity used to be so limiting  
before we remembered this way to choose.

Dancing, screaming, crying cackling  
silk light continues to pool & infuse  
my movements made fluid as shadows  
dripping gemstones, the milk of the muse

*Chandra, Soma, Luna, Moon*  
*I'm on my way; I'll see you soon*

My spaceship consists of:  
blanket, candle, journal (the usual tools)  
quartz, amethyst, jade  
singing bowl, beads worn & grooved

I pack up, take a deep breath  
lift off quivering, a gentle balloon  
my kindred goddesses await me  
returning home to my roots.

*Chandra, Soma, Luna, Moon*  
*I'm on my way; I'll see you soon*

When I have to come back for Earthwork,  
it's time now for the new.  
With hurts healed & spirits high  
by the gathering of souls who love me true,

I wait for the birth of the sign  
from my body, a red flower blooms  
I smile & give thanks for all mothers  
our cycles forever attuned.



## quanta: a theory of touch

i need my love.  
not so i can hoard it up in the  
pursed-lip safety of padlocked boxes  
pried open only with knobby knuckles  
of skeleton keys,  
but to pour out soft  
share the secret of keeping downy feathers  
in a constant cracked-shell world.

i knew something was missing when  
i began to fiend for the  
faint thumbprint of the moon  
early in afternoon skies  
& passersby  
holding the hands of children  
everything became a prayer.

i need love  
so i can paint breezes on concrete corners  
of gridlock streets become cages  
braid it through muscles, smooth sinew  
caress hoarse cords into lullabies  
til my cupped palms take the shape  
of the saltwater of every lake  
dreams coursing down from soul's windows  
upon each & every face

you see  
i thought i lost a piece somehow  
but pieces got edges,  
they clunk & jumble.  
i wanted ripples to stream from  
my fingertips  
knead my love into the caramel of your skin,  
ribbons never to harden with time  
but stay pliant, silent to  
hear whispers  
as cells sigh into  
each other.

# Tess Cooper

## Thirst

Dry Texas makes me remember that I have been away from  
water too long,  
Spent too long in drought of the earth and love; lack of rain  
in clear California and lack of touch in sweating Cincinnati  
In the valley I discovered my need of drink to quench my  
head and fill my heart,  
and Taurus born, it is back in the cracks of the south  
where bulls strike the earth with sharp heavy hooves that I  
remember the long lost echos of the ocean,  
Her cool memory engraved in stone, big darkness, living  
quiet.  
Sink to your knees and run your fingers into the earth here  
and you will feel me,  
handfuls of clay without water, stolen and parched, face  
upturned and thirsty tongue seeking rain

# No Storm

I live in what used to be an old motel, new boards nailed  
over the same rusted guts  
Sometimes I go knocking on her old bones and hear no  
echos  
The cactus in the courtyard is dead, not even spiders seem  
to dwell in corners  
Fake wooden floors where no dust falls, but there's  
something in the walls  
Held here like me, cycled in the same day with the same  
thunderstorm ever approaching  
I'm drunk and awake at midnight when the sirens sound,  
sourceless  
Shoeless and empty, I go out to be filled with what I know  
comes from a warning sky  
I consult with a neighbor; cling to the weak railing but  
nothing falls and neither do I  
Inside bed takes me but sleep does not come, waiting for my  
storm as the sirens scream for retreat  
Into the reaches of the night they wail but my love it does  
not come.

# Episode

Awake and burning

Burning

I am an arkangel—a god. A thousand terrible eyes and wings  
of flame, I devour men and from my lips spill black ash

Forever running, a Hart's heavy beating heart

Full of life, bitter life, hammering at the walls of my chest as  
I lay in bed

Never rest, not even in sleep; wakeful eyes and clawed  
fingers clenched tight into flesh.

Bruising. I am nothing and at once everything, the echoing  
emptiness of a dry nautilus and its chambers filling with  
vast ocean.

Release me.

# Charged

I am electricity, bright in the night  
Sleepless buzzing in the hollow of my chest. There is no  
heart there  
Only the knowledge that there will never be forgiveness on  
my tongue  
I am holy, but only in the way of suffering- only in the  
Catholic sense they say  
I am the crossroads witch, I live in the between, the “if”s  
and the insecurity of the unknown  
Tonight I am prometheus shackled,  
straining against the chains of another day as a failed god  
Another night awake

# Churchwed

Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned  
Dragged you to bed despite the white on your collar  
Licked you with the flames of hell and  
showed you what falling feels like  
Adam's first wife, we are wed under the eves of redwoods  
though in your eyes that will not do and I pray for a white cotton dress  
A promise:  
I will bring no squalling life to this red earth  
Will not raise it in the church  
I will remove my prayer veil only for a wedding veil  
Shelve my pagan ways only for a ring  
A wolf will raise wolves  
Pray you domesticate me

# Greg Tuleja

## Salmon

So many thousands of miles they have come  
in a last great adventure of returning,  
a miracle of navigation to find their home  
and there to gather, darting and churning

beneath the one white-blue river where  
as dainty fingerlings, they had descended  
toward the waiting sea, tiny innocents who dared  
to face a hostile world, they could not have comprehended

such grand dimensions, such a vast distance,  
or this majestic assemblage, the invincible urge  
to bring forth Life and Death, the first hesitant advance  
upstream, and then a sudden, mindless surge,

a wave of twenty-pounders, packed flank to flank,  
filling the river with pink and gold, a solid mass of fish.  
And might we tiptoe on their backs from bank to bank  
to dream a dream or make a wish?

Prowling along the rushing shore the bears  
splash in swirling eddies, an ancient resolve, wild and deep,  
they know to watch and wait for this urgent feast, aware  
that soon the Arctic night must fall, and they will sleep.

A gravid female is plucked from foam and spray,  
ripped apart in a brief, ruinous moment, the egg-sac devoured,  
the bloody carcass flicked aside in a casual, careless display,  
and three orange specks, shining, splattered on the black, black fur.

What is it that causes such glorious despair  
for one unlucky creature that died so close to her destination?  
Not that one, but that all had come to die, an infinite purpose shared,  
and we are stunned and staggered, and without consolation.

# Flight

I tossed a silver pebble toward the sky,  
as if to find an exotic answer  
to a plain question, how do eagles fly  
with such indifference, never stopping where

we might intercept them with our dialogues,  
our breathless insights into pitched updrafts  
and orographic vectors, waves of fog  
that rise and swirl, the sallow, sneering laugh

that shatters our highest expectations  
and confounds this meagre understanding  
of flight's blue miracles, these orations,  
these vibrant heart-songs that ease the handing

over of the stone, lightly caught with firm  
surety, flung back to Earth, safely returned.



## Sassafras

On the high slope that dips down toward the river  
they are congregated, a thick stand of oaks,  
humming their plangent oak-songs  
in the still, mid-morning air of late summer.

Low on a damp swale the *Salix* twins  
are drooping, shedding their willowy tears,  
a probable overreaction to some  
unintended slight from the others.

Above them, a row of rusty hemlocks,  
their thousands, or millions, of tiny needles  
precisely, miraculously matched in form  
and color, dark green on top, striped blue below.

And in the steep glade, a single sassafras,  
her mitten-leaves, and palmate and tri-lobed,  
tinged with a faint September yellow,  
an extravagant multiplicity of leaf-shapes

that once produced the pride of uniqueness  
but now, in this bright season of waning,  
a crisis of identity brings forth  
the eternal tree-question, “Who am I?”

Distracted by these contemplations  
she muses and frets, an oak leaf is an oak leaf  
a poplar a poplar, and had three been one,  
might I have found relief from such vexing ambivalence?

# Auschwitz

When the trains came in the Jews shuffled down,  
sometimes in an orange light from the moon,  
sometimes in squalls of snow, wind-swept and blown  
across their hollow faces, as they swooned

and faltered, gliding gently toward the showers,  
where we dropped in the thin spheres of cyanide,  
with no recourse for debate, no power  
to oppose, no place to turn or to hide.

I spent Sundays at home in Sienna Street  
with Liesl and Katarina, who played  
in the park and at the high stalls bought treats  
of cherries, chocolate, and lemonade.

I didn't sleep, they never knew, without dreaming  
of black smoke rising through the air, and screaming.

# A Stable, Telepathic Genius

One quite wonderful thing we learned today  
was that Putin smiled on the telephone  
when our exalted leader called, just to say  
hello, and do you think we could use drones

in North Korea (or Belgium), or some  
other country of your choosing, now that  
this collusion thing has been excised from  
the news. And by the way, F\*\*\* those Democrats!

He *is* the smartest, he *has* the best brain,  
we know that, but a smile over the phone,  
that's extrasensory, like Houdini's claim,  
while strolling idly among the gravestones,

to have communicated with the Dead.  
It just shows the high sphere where he operates  
with such pure genius, taking on the Fed,  
the long lines on Everest, NATO, tax rates,

he can solve any problem, great or small,  
and with the shrewdest of Cabinet picks,  
he'll figure it all out—tariffs, the Wall,  
infrastructure, things only he can fix.

I do admit to some mild reservations.  
The Access Hollywood tape, for one thing,  
the endless torrent of prevarication,  
the blatant mendacities, (the lying).

And yes, his crude, childish inclination  
toward ridicule, a hateful way of thinking.  
But for his vain, boorish ideations  
he's earned a pass. After all, he's our King.

# Catherine R. Cryan

## Feather Shell Twig

I can't remember if crossing the marsh  
came first or crossing the windy spit of sand.  
Weakfish bones apearl, dune-grass soldiers, blue in seelight.  
Run the phragmites-flattened trail,  
ride home darkly on brother's shoulders.  
How often I have seen this arrangement: feather, shell, twig.  
The things I'd fill my pockets with—  
the more I gained, the less my weight.  
The feather flung from the sky, shell from sea, twig  
leftover from a lightnined family tree.

What more do you want to know?  
How no one ever told me how to stand  
in a way that fit  
what I carried in my body? What I carried  
in my body never fit my arms, too hollow, too thin,  
too used to sweeping dove-winged messes  
under the bed. And even that I had to do better,  
do better, not better, do right.  
My mother told me to stand up straight. I assume  
she meant otherwise the bars inside, the devil's pikes  
would pierce the place where my wings should grow.

I did not accept anything of myself except for wrack.  
Detritus of my fear or things I had to cast off  
to grow bigger than squalls, marauding jaegers, tides, wracking me  
inside.  
The flood lines marked in me, signs of what it would take to drown.  
What of me would linger on the surface?  
What of my exterior but words I've used  
to keep you all at bay?

Have you ever noticed,  
all that must be shed is not, and always what should stay.  
Shedding feathers proves that I had wings.

# Uncovered

When I was nine I played for days  
that were, in memory, weeks  
with a scab at the back  
of my neck, at the nape,  
under hair the shortest  
of any girl in my class.  
Chicken-pox leftover, sure.  
Until high in the arena at Notre Dame,  
in *the mezzanine*.

And I loved the way  
the new word sounded,  
loved my sister, so graduated,  
meridian in our familial cylinder,  
loved my kinship's momentary concurrence  
in this place remote from our righthand coast  
and so who could blame me  
for my absentminded excoriation?  
Such pomp. Such circumstance.

I scraped the scab free.

In my hand, it wiggled legs  
from a swollen body. I dropped it, afraid  
that someone would see not it  
but the flinch.  
It crawled beneath the seat ahead, fed,  
spiderish in a cavernous space.

I never told.

Those the first notes of my *ostinato*,  
a palilial life and too close  
to exposure of a sort I couldn't afford.  
Shroud the startle  
as doggedly as the tick that cleaves.  
If scars uncovered become parasites,  
then scrape off the scab where the hollow beneath

is not quite flesh, not quite blood,  
near to liquid, lava-like, neither fire nor stone.  
Carry me, then, into the cavern,  
the crevices, the interspaces.  
Cut me a kerf and let me climb in.

# Cecropia, Polyphemus, Luna

Like the three kings, they came from afar.  
Shadow puppets at twilight.  
Someone must be dangling them from strings,  
they drop and bounce so in the backlit air.  
The desert of suburbia requires  
provisions  
if you're meant to cross  
and endure  
its incalculable expanse.

The pheromone that summons  
goes undetected  
by the human sense—  
no sight, no smell, no sound we know,  
no way of knowing  
if you're not a moth.  
Through the screen door I watch  
their juddering dance above the yew hedge.  
I am ten years old this July  
and in daylight watch truculent cardinals  
bolt the *Taxus* berries  
and I take their cues. It is my job  
to sweep the ones they drop,  
red outside green like reversed pimento olives  
or like me. I burn and mutter and wait  
for the night's evanescors. I am bellicose  
of late, and abashed.

I am youngest, feel weakest, but only  
think I fear darkest.  
It has been a year of not  
being told.  
There is familial action in the night air.  
Distances covered, at question  
retrievals undertaken and assurances received.  
I believe. The silk moths promise to be there  
each night and heed the call if the wind is honest.

Easy to tell the females from males  
if you know what to look for.  
I thought, then, that this was always the way:  
the ladies' abdomens extend,  
the boys' antennae rise erect and vain.  
Always ladies and boys when in truth it was about  
girls and gentlemen.  
It is not the porch light that draws them:  
it's been shut. It's the call  
of something pungent and dispersed.  
How do I accentuate their consequence,  
these incarnate things of nearly nothing weight?  
If they were asking of me, I did not hear.  
I'd follow their star  
of wonder if I knew  
the compass point to choose.  
I don't know who the gifts they bore were for,  
but I secreted some away  
and wish all this time on  
that I'd stolen  
their dromedary wings.



# Raven

I practiced calling from my own unfeathered throat.  
My mother remembered how angry  
he was, the man who fed the bears  
horsemeat outside Onchiota.  
The vultures came, the dainty fox.  
Too pale to recognize totems  
when he read them aloud, I saw only what I wanted.  
Crows. A dark difference altogether.  
We would have counted one for sorrow, three for a wedding,  
had we known. Misplacing the middle joy.

My father, cautious with gifts, bought me a bearclaw,  
jasper and turquoise on silver. Around his neck—  
Hibernian and Teuton sides  
of the same polished, august coin -  
a cross, medal miraculous, proof of rank and name.  
Quicksilver under his collar, metal his substitute for a river  
gone to ice.

In the dark, on a ladder, cawing and croaking and ruffling  
feathers (all twenty-five hundred and hundreds more),  
flexing wing, arching claw,  
destroying a shadow already invisible in the night.  
The ravens picked the bones clean during absences of the  
bears. My imitations,  
eight rungs high, required painted wings.

## Echo, Test

I call myself sixth daughter, fifth sister to each sister,  
aunt to five, wary and unknowing  
that it all begins and ends with one small heart.  
I say eighth of eight as if my heart could beat  
for yours, small sister, the always-infant, tiny-hearted,  
who ought be older than I. Perhaps I am you grown.

We were all the praying sort then. We were asked  
to offer intentions, such little intentions  
as eight-year-olds are capable and I wanted us to pray for you,  
dead before I was born, and the priest asked if I meant  
for your short life or my long one.

In the womb, your heart lay high in your chest, so large  
compared with the rest of you, so small in a warm-aired world, beating  
as a hummingbird's in summer. It was meant to slow, like all hearts do.  
In ten years the doctors learned all they would need to keep  
my newborn heart beating had it required it. The defect of your heart  
was that it came too soon.

My heart has grown, as all hearts do, to the size of my fist,  
clenched still at the thought.  
I could make the tedious list of things you will never do.  
I am conscious of it at times—capping a pen, stifling a sneeze,  
furtively examining  
a picture crooked in a mirror frame.  
My sisters, all elder, say they remember only red hair  
and cries  
and I remember nothing,  
youngest child stripped of tears.

Three decades more and comes my turn; they call the test an echo,  
and it is.  
The technician tips the screen and I can see the open and close  
of the valve, hear the rhythm, unmistakable,  
unimagined.  
With a catch of breath the pulsing jumps then starts again.  
I fill my lungs and empty them.

# Contributor Notes

**Sarah W. Bartlett's** work appears in *Adanna*, *Ars Medica*, *The Aureorean*, *Colère*, *Minerva Rising*, *PoemMemoirStory*, *Mom Egg Review*, Wellesley College *Women's Review of Books*, and several anthologies, including the award-winning *Women on Poetry* (McFarland & Co. Inc., 2012); and two poetry chapbooks (Finishing Line Press). Her work celebrates nature's healing wisdom and the human spirit's landscapes. In 2010 she founded *writinginsideVT* for Vermont's incarcerated women to encourage personal/social change within a supportive community.



**Susan Bouchard** grew up in Manhattan and the Bronx and currently lives in Westchester County. She is a teacher and a member of the Westchester Poetry Caravan, reading her work to those who might not otherwise have the chance to experience poetry. Susan says that in everyday life she is a rule follower, but, through her narrators, finds her rebellious voice. When not writing, Susan enjoys listening to live music and polishing her nails.



**Nathaniel Cairney** lives with his family in Belgium, where he writes, cooks, and hosts a podcast about Belgian beer. Originally from the U.S. Midwest, his poems have been published in *Sixfold*, *California Quarterly*, *Illya's Honey*, and others. He holds an MA in English Literature from Kansas State University.



**Richard Cole** has published two books of poetry: *The Glass Children* (The University of Georgia Press) and *Success Stories* (Limestone Books). He is also the author of a memoir, *Catholic by Choice* (Loyola Press). His poems and essays have been published in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Hudson Review*, *Sun Magazine*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The Penn Review*, *Image Journal* and various anthologies. Cole works as a painter and business writer in Austin, Texas. [www.richard-cole.net](http://www.richard-cole.net).



**Tess Cooper** is a writer, artist, and sometimes bear living in the woods outside Detroit. She creates beauty from pain and, historically, gets into fistfights with everyone.



**Catherine R. Cryan** loves old tools, new pencils, owl pellets, and the Oxford comma. Her poems have been published by *Broadsided Press*, *The Outrider Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *The Poet's Billow*, *Evening Street*, and others. She lives in Rhode Island, juggling the various roles of writer, science educator, farmer, college sports statistician, and parent of young twin sons.



**Meli Broderick Eaton** studied with poet Mary Oliver and author John Gregory Brown at Sweet Briar College. Her poems have received recognition in two The Source Weekly/OSU-Cascades MFA poetry contests, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, and the Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition, and she won first place in the Oregon Poetry Association New Poets spring 2019 contest. Her work has also appeared in *Flying South* magazine. She lives with her family on a suburban microfarm in Oregon.



**Emma Flattery** is a freshman majoring in marine biology at the University of California, San Diego, who dedicates her free time to poetry, fiction, bodybuilding, and learning languages. As a child of active-duty members of the US Air Force, she has lived across the country and traveled throughout the world. She fell in love with the ocean when she was three (after actually *falling* into it) and has used its beauty for inspiration ever since.



**Michael Fleming** was born in San Francisco, raised in Wyoming, and has lived and learned and worked all around the world, from Thailand, 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 fifteen years 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).)



**Edward Garvey** I wrote my first short story and poem in the late 1960s and began my college education as a creative writing major at San Francisco State University. The beauty and power of writing lead me to the beauty and power of the natural world, and I temporarily changed careers paths. After a short diversion of 40 years as a scientist, I'm back to writing full time.



**Brandon Hansen** is from a village named Long Lake. He can affirm that the lake is, indeed, long. He also writes.



**Jeffrey Haskey-Valerius** lives in Southern California with his husband and ethereal, unbelievably perfect dog, Benny, having recently relocated from Chicago. His work has appeared in *The Dreaded Biscuits*, and he is currently querying agents to represent his first novel. When not writing or being an undeserving Benny dad, he tries to catch up on sleep.



**Andy Kerstetter** is a writer living in Idaho's Wood River Valley, birthplace of Ezra Pound and death-place of Ernest Hemingway, where he freelances for magazines. He's worked as a journalist since earning a degree in writing from Geneva College in his home state of Pennsylvania. He has recently begun publishing his poetry, which so far has appeared in the anthology *Gravitas*. Andy hopes to pursue an MFA in poetry in 2020.



**Donna French McArdle** is a writer and elementary school writing coach north of Boston. Her poems have appeared in the anthology, *Lost Orchard*, and in literary magazines, including *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Antioch Review*. She holds an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. This is her second appearance in *Sixfold* poetry; she really likes how the review process creates the publication.



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



**Andrea Reisenauer** is a PhD candidate in translation studies who was born in the United States and now lives in Spain. You can find some of her older poems here and there, but she likes to think of herself as an emerging poet, which is her way of saying: stay tuned—there's more on the way.



**Megan Skelly** is an emerging poet completing her second year of the MFA Creative Writing program at City College of New York, where she teaches freshman composition. Committed to cultivating the arts in education, she also serves as a mentor for the Poetry Outreach program and substitute teaches in the NYC public schools. In her free time, she practices and teaches yoga, seeking the balance between freedom and form that poetry too invites.



**Claudia Skutar** is a poet, scholar, and English professor at the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash, where she teaches creative writing, literature, and composition and co-edits *The Blue Ash Review Online*. She's also been a guest poet at Michigan State University, University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College, and Wright State University.



**Mehrnaz Sokhansanj** is a poet and spoken word artist based in Los Angeles, CA. She earned her BA in Creative Writing from UCLA and her poems have appeared in the *Underground Literary Journal*, the Los Angeles Poets Society, and *Papeachu Review*. She is currently working on her debut poetry chapbook, which is set to be published early 2020. More of her work can be viewed on her website, <http://mehrnazthepoet.com>.



**Abigail F Taylor** has been previously published in *Illya's Honey*, *3Elements Review*, and *Cattlemen and Cadillacs*, among others. Her novella, *The Ballad of a Muscogee Trapper*, recently debuted with accompanying artwork by @samhears & is available on her website.



**Greg Tuleja** was born in New Jersey and received degrees in biology and music from Rutgers University. He has worked as a professional musician, piano technician, and flute teacher. Greg lives in Southamton, Massachusetts with his wife, Frances, and is currently the Academic Dean at the Williston Northampton School in Easthampton, where he has taught English and music, and for 35 years coached the girls' cross country team. His poems and short stories have appeared in various literary journals and magazines, including the *Maryland Review*, *Lonely Planet Press*, *Romantics Quarterly*, *Thema*, and *The Society of Classical Poets*.



**Alex B. Wasalinko** is a poet based in Pennsylvania. Before returning to her home state, she studied creative writing at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. Her poetry appears in the University of Scranton's undergrad journal, *Esprit*, and *The Ekphrastic Review*. Currently, Alex lives in Philadelphia where she teaches creative writing to children and teens. In her spare time, she visits museums, dabbles in art, and attends workshops at Drexel University's Writers Room.



