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The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

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DAVID TOMAS MARTINEZ
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DAVID TOMAS MARTINEZ: *photograph by Rachel Eliza Griffiths*

New Poems by

KYLE DARGAN
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PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2018 VOL. 47/NO. 1

David Bonanno

March 8, 1949–December 8, 2017

We are grieved to announce the passing of our editor, David Bonanno.

David Bonanno had been an editor of *The American Poetry Review* since 1973. Among his many roles in service to literature, he served on the literary advisory panel of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and on the Board of Directors of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs. His dedication to the *The American Poetry Review* was a sustaining force.

As there was not enough time to prepare an appropriate memorial for this issue, we will publish a remembrance of David Bonanno in our March/April 2018 issue.

in this issue

David Tomas Martinez

eight poems

And One

Look at the homie,
even when in a gang
he came home to crack Nietzsche, *Beyond*

Good and Evil, Will
to Power. Believing everybody dies at twenty-four,
not seeing a future in pump-faking, even then.

You ever try to read philosophy high?
Gone to the hole and hoped for the foul,
wished only to finish.

After rolling joints in two Zig-Zags,
after an hour of starching pants,
he transferred trollies and buses.

He's going places.
Look at homie, trying to fix himself. Thinks,
out of repetition comes variation.

It takes a lot of effort
to look
like you're not trying.
It should be an air ball
to go to college

at twenty-one, the father of two, just
to play basketball. When

most folks say they want to change the world
they mean their own.

And Two

extra shots. Look at homie. Out pokes
a neck tattoo. Winter couldn't possibly
follow fall's fallals.

Deck the halls. The oldest two-step,
dualism. Fire and Ice.

Robert means bright. Look at homie.
The Paul Atreides of
it's complicated, wears burden

perfectly, like a stillsuit.
Not one drop on Arrakis. Quit drinking

but didn't stop
popping sham
pain.

The homie: You need to need. Best bick back,
Young Blood. Bool it. Think you tough. Half
y'all bitch made. King Kong got nothing on
god. Don't know me, dawg. Woot. Hounds
run these Southeast Daygo streets. (Claps twice.)
Pressure bust pipes. You a sweet cake, Kool-aid.
I'm chingon, homes. You off. I'm hood lifted.
Fuck yo couch. That rare breed. (Ring tap tap.)
Let a nine fly. You ain't talking me to death.

Barista: Yes, sir. No foam. Nonfat. Quad.

The homie: (Puts on shades.) Thank you, g.

Falling

Nothing
about
wounded animals

makes me weep,

but something about
a woman with eyelashes

like broken wings,

about a woman
in red bottomed heels
and an absent father that pulls

the hood over my head,
leads me

to a stump. One.
Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

After Imagism

i did not learn
that love

like writing
is a twisted

game of hard
light and
clear
lines until

i was divorced
twice which doesnt

mean much unless
youve been

forced to wear black
socks embossed

with yellow tacos
a gag from a man

you were allowed
to call grandfather

for only two years
every man wants

to hear
he is grand

at something
i hear the devil

wears prada
but my ex

would say taco
socks let me

ruin the surprise
it gets worse

my second marriage
was an act

of god inevitable
i tell myself

even ezra needed
a *come to*

jesus moment
pound quit

imagism for
a movement he

coined vorticism
he said imagism

had lost its edge
that they waxed

fat and romantic
though ezra

really left
because amy lowell

had seized
control of his hard

light and clean
lines club which

makes me wonder
if what pound

really meant
was divorticism

if tradition
is a joke

we retell but
dont understand

Playing Hangman

I have read through enough of the Bible
Belt, the Rust Belt, down Appalachia,

all across Los Angeles, Carbondale, Louisville,
through enough extended stretches

of Texas, alone,
under lightning from clouds at half
mast, played hangman
in the marginalia

of lit magazines
with enough freshmen shrugged

off to college, a box of books
for at-risk teens orphaned
beneath my feet,

to know
family is not forever.

Smiles and helloes
go a long way on the road
to saying goodbye. Often

a poet's only grandeur
is a faux-leather seat

connected to sloshes of internet. I am hung
up

on so much. On a Megabus
there is nothing more tragic

than a boy with headphones
singing
next to my seat by the restroom. Eighty
miles later and I still *Superman*

them hoes. Eventually you become
your penetralia, your addictions,

even if it's diction. I've become the patron
saint of high school seniors sentenced

to poetry. I am the poet laureate of angst.
Call me Subordinate Claus,

ho ho hum.

On my way home from Houston,
I watch as a young couple

climb down the upper deck. This young
man sports the same fade as my eldest son,

the same wonder razored
in his head. *Bitch, you can skirt,*

ya dig?
said the young man typed
to life.
He is the color of my desertion.
She is the shade of expectations thrown.

It is deeply ingrained
that things are wrong

with me. So I blame
the fates that I travel far, that I live young

to die old, that I
confuse my experience
for loose change in a mother's purse.
When playing Words With
Friends with my sons

we never spell out *absent*.
I tell you what's wrong with me
because I love you.

This young man
reminded me that to skirt means leave
and when one skirts from a skirt,

an odyssey embarks. Not from shadow
but into shadow does the animal
of the mind leap, and I have miles to go,

thin walls to hold,
and cages to keep.
We hang from what makes us great.

Drinking Alone

Drinker, drinker, burning
bright, unbridled hoarse
throat, truther of the empty well, playing
follow the liter.
Sometimes
simply brewing
coffee makes rain. Starts

water
works. Uphill holds no
downpour. It is
the first. Drinking is a permanent
companion. It fixes time.

My religion,
my science, I worship rigidness. I
plan and God chuckles,

pours a drink, answers Chuy
from Boulder's plea.

Godhood hard, manhood
harder, being present not omnipresent
the hardest. Sobriety doesn't make
me a saint. Drinking isn't

my Beelzebub. Distance
is my higher power. Everyone's success
is an affirmation
of my failure. Looking at the moon

is time travel, peering exactly
one second into the past.
Achievement is the hangover of a need.

Found Fragment on Ambition

v.
if a hood is a sense of place
& a sense of place is identity
then identity is a hood & adult
hood is being insecure in any
hood a hood scares the whitest
folks why folks scared to stop
in the hood & why folks stop
wearing a hood & call it white
nationalism if i tried i would
fail to pass if i failed i would
try to pass when can i retire my
bowl stop needing to beg for my
person hood you see academically
my ghetto pass was revoked please
sir can you direct me to the window
to turn in my man card where
can i apply to enter the whiteness
protection program ive lost
my found identity is a hood
a hood is a sense of place
a place places a hood hood in us

Dedication

Lately,
I sleep

most hours
of the day,

not because
I'm depressed,

but so as not
to give up
on my dreams.

David Tomas Martinez's debut collection of poetry, *Hustle*, was released in 2014 by Sarabande Books, winning the New England Book Festival's prize in poetry, the Devil's Kitchen Reading Award, and honorable mention in the Antonio Cisneros Del Moral Prize. Martinez is a CantoMundo fellow, Bread Loaf Stanley P. Young fellow, NEA fellow, and Pushcart Prize winner. In March 2018, Sarabande Books will publish his second collection, *Post Traumatic Hood Disorder*. Martinez lives in Brooklyn and teaches creative writing at Columbia University.

Simone Muench and Dean Rader

two sonnets

For one thing, it's on the air, you can hear music

For one thing, it's on the air, you can hear music,
its sweet trance stretching between shelter and
wreckage. In some region of the human
form an echo draws to a lilting end,

but in another everything is pre-
note, pre-noise, pre-nerve, even the sound
we make before we make a sound, like the
way we hear before we learn to listen:

when we are more animal than human,
more hunch and urge. Our primitive antenna
expanding. Bodies alive with omnivorous
brightness, skin creating its own sparked song

that is part wave, part field fire. Part voice,
vein, and sky scorch. Part echo. But all yours.

Note: Title/first line by Kenneth Fields

We tunnel through your noonday out to you

We tunnel through your noonday out to you.
The world shivers with flashing wings and rain.
The body's acidic music breaks through
asking who will be anointed to mourn
for those who have for the first time folded
back that black petal of despair. We wait
every day for someone we have been told
will carry a key that unlocks the gate.

We wait for transparency in darkened
geographies, a strange dawn glinting, sewn
with odor of apricots. A postponed
departure does not mean there will be no
journey. Who cares if the metaphors are
endless? We'll keep digging. We're beyond stars.

Note: Title/first line by William Empson

Simone Muench is the author of several books including *Wolf Centos* (Sarabande, 2014). Her most recent, *Suture*, is a book of sonnets written with Dean Rader (BLP, 2017). She and Dean are also editing *They Said: A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing* (BLP, 2018). She serves as faculty advisor for *Jet Fuel Review* and as a poetry editor for *Tupelo Quarterly*.

Dean Rader's three new book projects—*Suture*, collaborative poems written with Simone Muench (Black Lawrence Press), *Self-Portrait as Wikipedia Entry* (Copper Canyon), and *Bullets Into Bells: Poets and Citizens Respond to Gun Violence*, edited with Brian Clements & Alexandra Teague (Beacon)—all appeared in 2017. He is a professor at the University of San Francisco.

Brynne Rebele-Henry

three poems

Self-biography as a girl with no mouth

Let me be pure/let me be holeless
The safest girls are those who stay quiet
Saints would stitch their lips shut with black wire
I always said that one day I would be holy
I always said that one day I would be a swan
Mute and nothing but tar and lovely feathers
We used to mix vinegar with salt water
Gargle it to look for cuts inside our throats
I used to swab my own throat until I choked on the cotton
Once I coughed for so long my lungs fell out
Once I forgot how to speak
Once I became all stone
Once I was something not girl
Once I was a bird

Self-portrait as a wound, a bird skull & a stone

The cats still in the dark outside your house,
at the beach we let the sand chap our bodies
into something not our bodies and you drew
lines over my skin with the crooked edges of shells
and we forgot your fingers on my spine in the night.
Your father is a man turned to stone,
one of these days we will find him rocked over
on the very same porch step but this time
his eyes won't open again, or they will be open
and unblinking, shards of broken-bottle blue
and a half-whispered promise, the touch we tried to forget.
Your mother said a body is an engine
and girls like us are scorched, gasoline cans
left on the pavement. After the brushfire
we sat in your attic, sucked
the singe off our fingers, mouths full of soot.
Your father said to pray for a flood
so we started burning everything up,
let our knees start to blacken
and took up smoking, as if a lungfull
of ash could save us, as if the sky weren't red,
but some nights we still climb the reservoir,
swim until we can't anymore and then we float

Self-portrait as the lake in which they were drowned

I wanted to be a girl gone stone so I got naked in the water.
One day I looked down and found blood.
We drank ocean water mixed with vodka,
the sky a broken reckoning.
When I walked through the snow I found my body.
I will be stone. I will be fertile.
In my dreams I'm always drowning, in my dreams her hands are small birds.
Once we ate snow mixed with syrup and got sick off ice.
I held a molar in my palm.
In the fall we didn't eat and drank kahlua,
had sex in churches. Once I waded into an ocean, salt and chlorine.
Once, a girl said she could teach me how to drown.
Forgive me for I have learned the feeling of hands wrapped
around my neck, for I have learned how to break,
for in the summer I became something other than pure stone,
for I have swallowed blood, both my own and not.

Brynne Rebele-Henry's poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have appeared in such journals as *Prairie Schooner*, *Denver Quarterly*, *jubilat*, *Rookie*, and *So to Speak*. Her writing has won numerous awards, including the 2015 Louise Louis/Emily F. Bourne Poetry Award from the Poetry Society of America, the 2016 *Adroit* Prize for Prose, and a 2017 Glenna Luschei Award from *Prairie Schooner*. Her first book, *Fleshgraphs*, appeared with Nightboat Books in 2016. Her second book, *Autobiography of a Wound*, won the AWP Donald Hall Poetry Prize and is forthcoming from the University of Pittsburgh Press in 2019.

Sun Yung Shin

Writing from the Uncanny Valley

An Interview by Elizabeth Hoover

In terms of genre, *Unbearable Splendor* by Sun Yung Shin is hard to pin down. It includes astute academic discourse examining Antigone through the lens of Donna Haraway's theoretical text "A Cyborg Manifesto." But it also breaks into lyric moments ("I am like one hundred electric eels. Our skin is an extravagant tongue, tasting everything . . .") or scatters lines across the page. One piece unapologetically announces itself as "a story." Writing for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Kathleen Rooney calls *Unbearable Splendor* "a strange and captivating hybrid."

Born in South Korea and raised by adoptive parents in Chicago, Shin uses the shifting form of *Unbearable Splendor* to explore riffs in identity. She writes, "Abandoned and then re-en-familied, re-kinned, an adoptee is many things, including, I would posit, both a form of ongoing transit and a re-territory, a re-form. This form takes on different meanings depending on the place, the language, and the people looking, listening. If our form is different, if we are no longer recognizable, if no one speaks our language, who are we?"

She mines literature, science fiction, myth, and astrophysics in her obsessive examinations of family, migration, and the significance of displaced persons, or "potential enemies as well as guests."

She is the author of two other collections of poetry: *Rough, and Savage* (Coffee House Press, 2012) and *Skirt Full of Black* (Coffee House Press, 2007). In 2016, she edited an anthology of essays, *A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota* (Minnesota Historical Society Press). She is also the editor, along with Jane Jeong Trenka and Julia Chinyere Oparah, of *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (South End Press, 2006).

She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and two daughters and teaches at Macalester College.

In this interview, conducted over the phone, we discuss her obsession with cyborgs, the allure of etymology, how she engages with genre, and what it means to be human.

ELIZABETH HOOVER You begin *Unbearable Splendor* with a long quote from Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" that starts, "The cyborg is resolutely committed to partially, irony, intimacy, and perversity." The other epigraph is a short line from *Blade Runner*: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe." How are you hoping these quotes set up the book for your reader?

SUN YUNG SHIN I call the quotes epigraphs because I don't know what else to call them, but I place more emphasis on them as source texts than you do with a traditional epigraph. It's almost as if I was going to write a critical paper on "A Cyborg Manifesto" and then moved into some other strange register. In some ways, the logical conclusion of what I'm trying to do is just an annotated version of the quote. I could take the story of *Pinocchio* and annotate it with poetry and things around the side.

The other thing I am doing with the quotes is making the sources of my ideas transparent. I feel like it's more honest to include more. Lately, I have been feeling like a "more is more" person, so I want really long quotes.

EH Haraway links the cyborg to "partially," gesturing to the fact that it is a hybrid of mechanical and human parts. The form of *Unbearable Splendor* feels cyborgian because it's a hybrid of poetry, criticism, essay, and memoir. What were your models for the form of this text?

SYS When I was first starting to read poetry, I read *The Midnight* by Susan Howe. It was so intriguing how she set aside genre. It's a text I return to over and over. More and more I'm drawn to hybrid texts like that that have images, documentation, and copies of primary sources, among other things. It's a magpie methodology of picking things out of the ocean of text.

To me genres are meaningful, but it's hard for me to stick with one within a book. I get a little bored or I think that is a little monotonous for the reader. So I hope that each piece is waking up something new in an exchange with the reader.

EH Why do you find cyborgs so intriguing?

SYS This doesn't make it directly into the book, but my adoptive father lost both of his legs to amputation. He wore these very expensive artificial legs. When he was wearing them, he was a cyborg. I was thinking about that and about other family members who are in wheelchairs or nonverbal or both. They are living very different physical and communicative realities. It brings me to the question: What is the limit of the human?

When do we stop recognizing people as human? The answer is different at different historical moments and in difference places. Is it because the person is Jewish? Or Queer? Or an unmarried woman? Or African? Who do we deem subhuman? Japanese ideology considers Koreans inferior, for example. Women are considered inferior to men or deviant version of men.

EH A cyborg we meet in *Unbearable Splendor* is Antigone. In "The Limit Case" you ask, "Is Antigone the original cyborg?" How is Antigone a cyborg?

SYS I know! Such a good question. I became fascinated with her for many reasons. One is that she is the product of incest, but she doesn't know that until later. Her origins are obscured, like an adoptee. Also she's all wrapped up in the family, which is her reason for doing what she does. Family is her demise. She's trapped in the family. She can't get out. She has to go down into the underworld with her parents.

So how is that like a cyborg? To go back to the Haraway quote: "Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through restoration of the garden . . . The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden." For Antigone, there is no Garden of Eden since she's the product of incest. There is no innocence for her. She is an illegitimate offspring, like a cyborg. She creates a genealogical disruption by not marrying her cousin and refusing to have children because she dies instead.

The cyborg doesn't expect its father to save it, and Antigone has said goodbye to her father. She's determined to make this sacrifice. She's partial. She's ironic. She's intimate. She's perverse. She's certainly oppositional. She's utopian. She's a very transgressive young woman. She doesn't submit to the laws of man. She doesn't ally with her sister. She's just rough with everyone. She's a body in the wrong place, which I think of as cyborgian.

I'm really interested in her because, emotionally, I always want her to turn back. I always want her to make a different choice.

EH The idea of the uncanny is central to this book. You open with the prose poem "Valley, Uncanny" and include a diagram of the "uncanny valley," the spectrum of humanoid objects from the least life-like to the most that indicates the point at which an object is so life-like we experience a sense of eeriness and revulsion. How did you arrive at the idea of the uncanny and what is its allure for you?

SYS I've been thinking about the adoptee as a cyborg. The adoptee performs childhood for strangers, and the transracial or transnational adoptee goes through a metamorphosis that can be very disturbing to the self and to other people. I was thinking about the idea of racial drag, how the adoptee of color who has a white name and a white family triggers a sense of the uncanny in a white person because that white person hasn't experienced genealogical isolation.

For Asian Americans, no matter how long we've been here, there is a constant foreignness about us. You could be fourth-generation and you'll be complimented on your English. It's sort of like "Oh this dog is walking on two legs, how strange." It just reveals what we, as nation, construct as American and what we construct as permanently foreign.

EH You present the diagram with the uncanny valley, which charts the uncanniness of various liminal beings like the humanoid robot and the zombie along an x and y axis. On the following page, you write, "I lost my name and stepped into this corner, this half frame, the axis." Under that is an x and y axis, but the chart isn't populated. It's blank.

SYS I was trying to explore the lie of the child as blank canvas. As an adoptee, my name and particular history were erased, but I wasn't tabula rasa ready to be rewritten like a floppy disc. The empty diagram is almost like clock hands frozen in time or the corner of a room. I hope it is evocative of different frameworks and different options.

EH In this book, you investigate individual words, examining their definitions and etymologies, but also how they sound and how your mouth moves when you say them out loud. At one point you describe what happens when you type "adoptees" into Microsoft Word. It's "underlined in little red Vs that look like the stitching that ran across some of my dresses when we were younger." Where does your interest in words as objects, particularly as historical objects, come from?

SYS I am influenced by my childhood. I played piano. I did ballet. I was in choirs. I was a spelling bee geek. All of those things teach you about rhythm, sound, pitch, and duration. With choirs and with spelling bees, you have to get really granular about how things are pronounced and the relationship of sound to meaning. From ballet and piano, I learned French and Italian. My maternal grandmother spoke Polish. My dad's German-Irish and used German slang. I took a lot of language classes and was always interested in American Sign Language. Just through study-

ing literature and words, I started learning Latin, Greek, and Anglo-Saxon. English is such a capacious language that absorbs every other language. It is so fascinating that each word has its own history as if it has evolved the way a species evolves. Etymologies are a way of trying to understand. Each word contains so much civilization. Each word migrated, picked up meanings, and left some meanings behind. If a word was a person and you wanted to get to know that person, you'd want to know their past, how they got here.

EH You enact how a word's meaning can change on a micro-level. As you repeat words, you use them in new ways. For example, you write, "A valley makes a kind of hole." This is a meaning the reader is familiar with: a hole is an empty space. A few pages later, you write, "I spent sixteen years living with American parents. / They are inside me now, they are my guests. / They are my holes, like babies, like stones." Now *hole* means something different, it suggests a presence.

SYS I am always risking and falling into excessive mixed metaphors, but to me a hole is all those things. A hole is abjection, disappearance, death, caves, and graves. Depending on the point of view, a drawing of a hole could look like a stone. Also, women are associated with our orifices and our bodily integrity. Women are associated with our inability as a gender worldwide to defend and fend off lifelong violations of our bodies.

In my work, I take images or words and start riffing off of them. I think, can I exhaust this image? How many meanings can this image or thing yield up to me? Some words like *adoptee* carry a lot of shame. I can feel like a victim to a word like that. It feels good to address it directly because it takes away some of the power of the word to shame me. This word exists in me like some kind of sharp object. I ask, what if I take it apart or befriend it with curiosity?

EH Why does the word *adoptee* carry shame with it?

SYS Korean adoptees are the direct result of the U.S. involvement in Korea. The first adoptees were mixed-raced offspring of American GIs and Korean women. Many of these women were sex workers. They were called "dust of the streets" and were unacceptable in Korean society. Korean adoptees were the result of a purge by a society that wouldn't support single mothers and wouldn't support mixed-raced children. They needed to get rid of us in order to uphold an ideal of the Korean family as headed by a man and ethnically pure. On the other hand, Korean prostitutes were encouraged by the government during the war because American GIs brought in American currency. Korean sex workers were considered patriots, but also very oppressed by both the U.S. and the Korean government, which were exploiting them to keep the American soldiers entertained and comforted.

Up until recently it was a shameful secret in South Korea, but it has come out that many of us were kidnaped or went through a child laundering process to be made available for western consumption. There was good money in American adoptions.

EH In *Unbearable Splendor,* you include a copy of your hojuk. Can you explain what that document is?

SYS In Korea, when someone is born, they are added to their family registry or hojuk. Some registries go back hundreds of years. When someone is born and abandoned, they still have to register, but they are the only one on that registry. The hojuk I include in the book is actually my own, and it states I am the chief of the Shin family. But the Shin family is just one person. It's just a very strange sort of paper. It establishes a family of one. It is an orphan hojuk.

EH You often use the first-person collective. For example, you write "Perhaps our father and mother were people from the north, refugees to the south . . . Perhaps they were married but we were the fourth child, one too many." Does this use of the first-person collective relate to the hojuk and the idea of being a family of one?

SYS I was thinking about the idea of multiple selves. I left my Korean self—whoever the person was going to be and whatever that person was named—in Korea, but that person also lives inside me like a ghost or a haunting. Also my story is very similar to the other 200,000 Korean children who were removed from Korea. I was trying to communicate that this isn't about me as an individual. This is about our collective condition, our collective trauma.

EH Your use of the prose-poem makes *Unbearable Splendor* formally very different from your earlier book *Rough, and Savage*. How did your approach to the page change between these two books?

SYS It doesn't totally make sense to me, but I've been having trouble using line breaks. They feel fake. When I read other people's poetry, I don't feel that way. But when I use them myself they feel really dramatic, like I'm announcing that I am making a double-entendre or pausing for effect. When I started writing *Unbearable Splendor,* I tried using line breaks but there wasn't enough drama in the line to justify them. There weren't enough phrases that I wanted to isolate on the line. I kept coming back to the rush and breathlessness of prose. There's a lot of manic energy in this book. The narrator is someone who is frantic. Well, the narrator is just me. I'm a frantic person.

The slowness of shorter lines felt overly precious for the kind of angry and weird propositions I was making. I just didn't have enough prettiness or lush lyricism because it wasn't serving my project of thinking through theoretical ideas about monstrosity, hospitality, calamity, loneliness, and sacrifices.

EH Both *Unbearable Splendor* and *Rough, and Savage* have a sense that they are projects bound to fail. In *Unbearable Splendor* you write, "We think that if we keep trying to get closer and closer to those non-memories that we can go back in time and change the course of events." This is, of course, not possible. In *Rough, and Savage* the narrator seems to be trying to recover a Korea that doesn't exist anymore. How is failure part of your work?

SYS Lots of individual things fail, and I throw them away. But in terms of trying to create some kind of unified theory of poetry that is enacted in the book: it's never going to be seen, even far away on the horizon. I feel a yearning for perfection and utopia in the text. I yearn for a total wholeness, however that might look, although I know I will never achieve it. I'm sure that it's related to the ambiguous loss of not having my Korean family and going through my life—most certainly ending my life—not knowing where I come from family-wise.

EH When I reviewed *Rough, and Savage* for the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune*, I used the word "fragment" to describe the syntax of the book. This word feels very unsatisfying and maybe even inaccurate because fragments are part of a whole. If you recovered all of the fragments of something, you could put it back together. I don't get a sense that there is a recoverable whole that you were working towards or away from.

SYS I used to feel really defensive about the word "fragment." It seemed reductive, but I don't mind it any more. However, I also think that "fragment" doesn't really say it all. The idea of wholeness is so colonized by patriarchal ideas that don't help us think about language in new ways.

I use the sentence fragment to bring up questions: What is language actually for? What is the sentence for? What is the narrative of cause and effect for? And what things aren't they for? I also want to open up space for the reader so the poem is more of a dance between the reader and writer, not a solid performance from beginning to end. That is not to say because something is conventionally complete the audience is passive, but I want to create more spaces to make new things in—things we need but don't even know exist yet.

EH I also think using the word *fragment* discounts the white space. Instead of thinking of a poem as fragments, what if it's a project made up of text and white space? What if the white space is as significant as the text?

SYS If the whole piece is a piece of music, then each "fragment" is a musical phrase or even just one note. I think of the white spaces as time, as different moments of caesuras. Time is musically meaningful and durationally meaningful, therefore the white space is meaningful. Or the fragments could be fish in the sea. There's water and there's fish. Each fish isn't a fragment of the school; they are something more alive. They are not broken.

EH I think *fragment* is a kind of shorthand term rather than a substantial way to describe a text. The word *experimental* feels like that to me, as well. I wonder if it's even a useful category.

SYS What does that mean anymore? A lot of the so-called experimental techniques have been embraced by more mainstream lyric or narrative poets, which I think is awesome. So I don't feel tied to any particular category or mode of writing. When I describe my work, I say "experimental, for lack of a better word." I think my work in *Unbearable Splendor* isn't that formally experimental. It's recognizably prose-poetry or essays. But it can feel experimental to some readers because it's disorienting. Some of that disorientation is a lack of understanding about the cultural or historical context. Sometimes readers might find my work dense or confusing. But I don't think it's confusing. I am always more worried about being too obvious. I'm always worried that what I write is really plain or obvious. I'm not trying to be obscure. I'm trying to find some authentic expression that brings together the intellectual and the emotional.

I'm questing and searching for new visions. I want to write in a different or new way, a way that doesn't feel like a cover-up. I don't want to write something that says, "Let's just cover up the flaws, the holes, the breaks, the things that don't make sense, so that we can consume it and move on with our day." I hope to let the text be porous the way our own psyches are a porous text. ◂

ELIZABETH HOOVER's poetry has appeared in *Epoch*, the *Crab Orchard Review*, and *The Awl*, among others. She received the 2017 *Boulevard* Emerging Poets prize, the 2015 Difficult Fruit Poetry Prize from *IthacaLit*, and the 2014 *StoryQuarterly* essay prize. Her book reviews and criticism have appeared in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, the *Dallas Morning News*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *Prairie Schooner*. You can see more of her work at ehooverink.com.

Jared Harél

two poems

Changing the Subject

In the kitchen, with the kids finally asleep,
and news of another shooting
in the space between us,
you confess you think death
might feel like giving birth, the body
insistent, having its way.
You say you'd never been so at the mercy
of yourself as you were on that bed,
in that cloud-thin gown, and just the knowing
it was coming: ruthless
transformation.
I have no good response
to *ruthless transformation*, and so it hangs there
beside a bowl of old tortilla chips
and black-bean salsa
we've decided will be dinner. It lingers
while a reporter frames chaos
as *developments*; her shoulders rinsed in darkness
and revolving red lights. I want
to kiss you. Build asylum inside you.
Let our bodies change
the subject, the channel
to cartoons. Before night pulls away
down the flickering interstate,
I want one ruined thing utterly redeemed: a death-
toll rescinded, a swastika removed,
my uncle's melanoma caught early enough
to be a chat, a beige Band-Aid
halfway down his calf. *It had looked,*
my aunt said, *like little more*
than an ink-spot. I didn't get nervous
till it didn't wash out.

Training

For our son will not sleep,
or immediately snaps awake
without song + steady pat
upon his back, we must make him
wail the wail of the forsaken.
At our pediatrician's strict instructions,
we must stop picking him up.
Shut the door. We must make him wail
the wail of the forsaken.
Though his stunned face may break
into howling, his mouth
a tiny cavern of despair, we must
betray him. We must train
our hearts for the marathon ahead.
We must fashion a solid muscle
of our love and make him
wail the wail of the forsaken.
There are so many ways to be cruel
in this world, small takings
that giveth none. I just want our son
to go to bed, but he pulls up
on the crib in his banana-print pajamas,
demanding answers, demanding
a hug. *Must you make me*
wail the wail of the forsaken?
I try to explain our predicament to him
through a wall which separates
his bedroom from ours. I try
not to hear the wails of the forsaken,
though his tears are real,
and each wail is holy in its appeal
for affection; this bone-pierced prayer
he must answer alone.

Jared Harél is the author of *Go Because I Love You*, forthcoming from Diode Editions (Spring, 2018). He's been awarded the Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize from *The American Poetry Review*, as well as the William Matthews Poetry Prize from *Asheville Poetry Review*.

Li-Young Lee

The Undressing

Listen,
she says.

I'm listening, I answer
and kiss her chin.

Obviously, you're not, she says.

I kiss her nose and both of her eyes.
I can do more than one thing at a time,
I tell her. Trust me.
I kiss her cheeks.

You've heard of planting lotuses in a fire, she says.
You've heard of sifting gold from sand.

You know
perfumed flesh, in anklets, and spirit, unadorned,
take turns at lead and follow,
one in action and repose.

I kiss her neck and behind her ear.

But there are things you need reminded of, she says.
So remind me, Love, I say.

There are stories we tell ourselves, she says.
There are stories we tell others.
Then there's the sum
of our hours
death will render legible.

I unfasten the top button of her blouse
and nibble her throat with more kisses.
Go on, I say, I'm listening.
You better be, she says,
You'll be tested.

I undo her second,
her third, fourth, and last buttons quickly,
and then lean in
to kiss her collarbone.

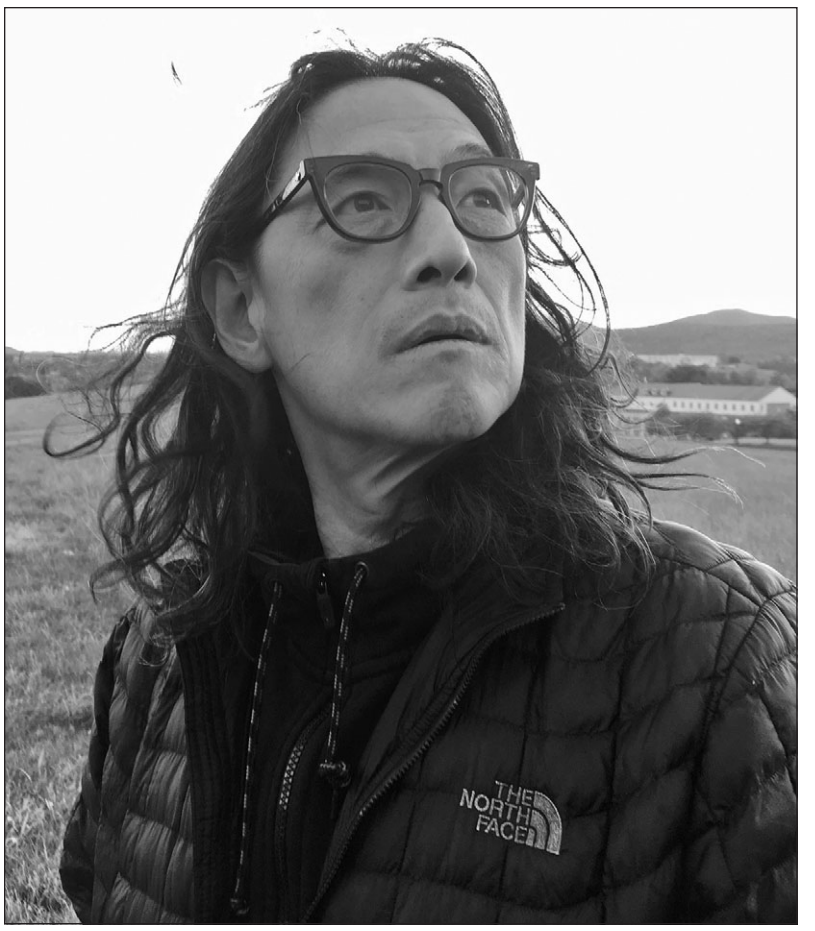
She says, The world
is a story that keeps beginning.
In it, you have lived severally disguised:
bright ash, dark ash, mirror, moon;
a child waking in the night to hear the thunder;
a traveler stopping to ask the way home.
And there's still
the butterfly's night sea-journey to consider.

She says,
There are dreams we dream alone.
There are dreams we dream with others.
Then there's the lilac's secret
life of fire, of God
accomplished in the realm
of change and desire.

Pushing my hand away from her breast,
she keeps talking.

Alone, you dream in several colors: Blue,
wishing, and following the river.

In company, you dream in several others:
The time you don't have.



The time left over.
And the time it takes.

Your lamp has a triple wick:
remembering, questioning, and sheltering
made of your heart's and mind's agreement.
With it, you navigate the two seas: Day
with everything inside it;
night and all that's missing.

Meanwhile, I encounter difficulty
with her skirt knot, her fingers
confounding my progress,
as she goes on reviewing the doubtful points.

There are words we say in the dark.
There are words we speak in the light.
And sometimes they're the same words.

From where I've been sitting beside her,
I drop to one knee before her.

There's the word we give
to another.
There's the word we keep
with ourselves.
And sometimes they're the same word.

I slip one hand inside her blouse
and find her naked waist.
My other hand cradles her bare foot
from which her sandal has fallen.

A word has many lives.
Quarry, the word is game, unpronounceable.
Pursuant, the word is judge, pronouncing sentence.
Affliction, the word is a thorn, chastising.

I nudge her blouse open with my nose
and kiss her breastbone.

The initiating word
embarks, fixed between sighted wings, and
said, says, saying, none are the bird,
each just moments of the flying.

Doubling back, the word is infinite.
We circle ourselves,
the fruit rots in time,
and we're just passengers of our voices,
a bird in one ear crying, *Two!*
There are two worlds!
A bird in the other ear urging, *Through!*
Be through with this world and that world!

Her blouse lapses around her shoulders,
and I bend lower
to kiss her navel.

There are voices that wake us in the morning, she says.
There are voices that keep us up all night.

I lift my face and look into her eyes. I tell her,
The voices I follow
to my heart's shut house say,
A member of the late
and wounded light enjoined to praise,
each attends a song that keeps leaving.

Now, I'm fondling her breasts
and kissing them. Now,
I'm biting her nipples.
Not meaning to hurt her,
I'm hurting her a little,
and for these infractions I receive
the gentlest tugs at my ear.

She says,
All night, the lovers ask, *Do you love me?*
Over and over, the manifold beloved answers,
I love you. Back and forth,
merging, parting, folding, spending,
the lovers' voices
and the voices of the beloved
are the ocean's legion scaling earth's black bell,
their bright crested foam
the rudimentary beginnings
of bridges and wings, the dream of flying,
and the yearning to cross over.

Now, I'm licking her armpit. I'm inhaling
its bitter herbal fumes and savoring
its flavor of woodsmoke. I've undone
the knot to her skirt.

Bodies have circled bodies
from the beginning, she says,

but the voices of lovers
are Creation's most recent flowers, mere buds
of fire nodding on their stalks.

In love, we see
God burns hidden, turning
inside everything that turns.
And everything turns. Everything
is burning.

But all burning is not the same.
Some fires kindle freedom.
Some fires consolidate your bondage.
Do you know the difference?

I tell her, I want you to cup your breasts
in both of your hands
and offer them to me.
I want you to make them wholly
available to me.

I want to be granted open liberty
to leave many tiny
petal-shaped bruises,
like little kisses, all over you.

One and one is one, she says,
Bare shineth in bare.

Think, she says, of the seabirds
we watched at dawn
wheeling between that double blue
above and below them.

Defined by the gravity they defy,
they're the radiant shadows of what they resist,

and their turns and arcs in air
that will never remember them
are smiles on the face of the upper abyss.

Their flying makes
our inner spaciousness visible,
even habitable, restoring us
to infinity, we beings of non-being,
each so recent a creature,
and only lately spirits
learning how to love.

Shrill, their winged hungers
fill the attic blue
and signal our nagging jeopardy:
Death's bias, the slope
of our lives' every minute.

I want to hear you utter
the sharpest little cries of tortured bliss, I say,
like a slapped whelp spurt
exquisite gasps of delighted pleasure.

But true lovers know, she says,
hunger vacant of love is a confusion,
spoiling and squandering
such fruit love's presence wins.

The harvest proves the vine
and the hearts of the ones who tend it.

Everything else is gossip, guessing
at love's taste.

The menace of the abyss will be subdued, I say,
when I extort from you the most lovely cries
and quivering whispered pleas
and confused appeals of, *Stop*, and, *More*, and, *Harder*.

To love, she says. For nothing.
What birds, at home in their sky,
have dared more?

What circus performer,
the tent above him, the net below,
has risked so much? What thinker, what singer,
both trading for immortality?

Nothing saves him who's never loved.
No world is safe in that one's keeping.

I know you more than I know, she says.
My body, astonished, answers to your body
without me telling it to.

She says, I want you to touch me
as if you want to know me,
not arouse me.

She says, We are travelers among other travelers
in an outpost by the sea.
We meet in transit, strange to each other,
like birds of passage between a country and a country,
and suffering from the same affliction of sleeplessness,
we find each other in the night
while others sleep. And between
the languages you speak and the several I remember,
we convene at the one we have in common,
a language neither of us were born to.
And we talk. We talk with our voices,
and we talk with our bodies.
And behind what we say,
the ocean's dark shoulders rise and fall all night,
the planet's massive wings ebbing and surging.

I tell her, Our voices shelter each other,
figures in a dream of refuge
and sanctuary.

Therefore, she says,
designations of North, South, East, and West,
Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall,
first son, second son, first daughter, second daughter,
change, but should correspond
to a current picture of the sky.

Each of our days fulfills
the measures of the sanctum
and its great tables' rounds.
The tables are not round.
Or, not only round.
At every corner,
opposites emerge, and you meet yourself.

I bow my head
and raise her foot to my mouth.

The pillared tables make a tower and a ladder.
They constitute the throne and the crown.
The crown is not for your
head. The throne is not your seat.
The days on which the tables stand
will be weighed and named.
And the days are not days.
Not the way you might understand days.
The tables summon the feast
and are an aspect of the host.

The smell of her foot
makes me think of saddles.
I lick her instep. I kiss her toes. I kiss her ankle.

Don't you kiss my lips
with that mouth, she says.

Gold bit, I think.
Tender spur, I think.

I kiss her calves. I kiss her knees.
I kiss the insides of her thighs.
I'm thinking about her hip bones. I'm tonguing
the crease where her thigh and her belly meet.

The rounds enclose the dance,
she says.

The round and the square together
determine the dimensions of the ark, she says.

The water is rising as we speak.
Call everyone to the feast.

The smell of her body
mixes with her perfume and makes me woozy.

All being tends toward fire, I say.

All being tends toward fire,
sayeth the fire, she says, correcting me.

All being tends toward water, sayeth the water,
Light, sayeth the light.
Wings, sayeth the birds.
Voice, sayeth the voiceless.

I tell myself,
Give up guessing, give up
these frightened gestures of a stooped heart.

I think, Inside her is the safest place
to be. Inside her, with all those other mysteries,
those looming immensities:
god, time, death, childhood.

Are you paying attention? she says,
This is important.
One and one is two.
You and me are three. A long arithmetic
no temporal hand reckons
rules galaxies and ants, exact
and exacting. Lovers obey,
sometimes contradicting human account.

I'm drooling along her ribs.
I'm smacking my lips and tongue to better taste
her mossy, nutty, buttery, acrid sweat.

Listen, she says,
There's one more thing.
Regarding the fires, there are two.

But I'm thinking,
My hands know things my eyes can't see.
My eyes see things my hands can't hold.

I'm telling myself,
Left and right grow wiser in the same house.

Listen, she says,
Never let the fires go out.
The paler, the hotter.

But I'm thinking, Pale alcove.
I'm thinking, My heart ripens with news
the rest of me waits to hear.

Are you listening?
But I'm not listening.
I'm thinking,

A nest of eggs for my crown, please.
And for my cushion, my weight in grapes.

I'm thinking, In one light,
love might look like siege.
In another light, rescue
might look like danger.

She says, The seeds of fire are ours to mother.

The dust, the shavings,
and all spare materials

must be burned in both fires,
the visible and the invisible.

Even the nails burned in them.
Even the tools burned.
And then the oven dismantled and burned.
Have you been hearing me? It's too late
for presidents. It's too late for flags.
It's too late
for movie stars and the profit economy.
The war is on.
If love doesn't prevail,
who wants to live in this world?
Are you listening?

You thought my body was a tree
in which lived a bird. But now, can you see
flocks alive in this blazing foliage?

Blue throngs, green multitudes, and pale congregations.
And each member flits from branch to living branch.
Each is singing at different amplitudes and frequencies.
Each is speaking secrets that will ripen into sentence.
And their voices fan my fragrant smoldering.
Disclosing the indestructible body of law.
Ratifying ancient covenants. Establishing new cities.
And their notes time the budding
of your own flowering.
Die now. And climb up into this burning.

Li-Young Lee was born in 1957 in Jakarta, Indonesia. He has authored several volumes of poetry, including *Book of Nights* and *Behind My Eyes*. He lives in Chicago with his wife and two sons.

Kyle Dargan

The Darkening

A murder of crows for the many
whose blood vessels will be shred
by barrel bombs' shrapnel—the intent to maim
without exclusion. A murder of crows
for each mother and father who pawns all
except what will cover their backs
so they may join the thousands
driven into exasperated seas
to shirk their turn at becoming
casualties. A murder of crows
for the tiny bodies those seas swallow.
And do you see? A murder
of crows for those of us with eyes
keen yet uncurious. A murder of crows
for those who cooperate
and are slaughtered nonetheless.
And do you see the sky? A murder of crows
for those well aware of how easily
rights to a homeland can be voided
by militias adorned with flags and royal
rifles. A murder of crows for those
who have never worn a uniform but have
had war waged against them. A murder of
crows for a uranium pact feared fragile.
A murder of crows for the airmen who study
display screens on an armed force base,
waiting to tap triggers that incinerate
bodies in another hemisphere. A murder
of crows for the downed pilot—his parachute
guiding him into a lake where he is rescued
then burned alive for the camera. And do you see
the sky feathering in iridescent, dark—
how it does not resemble the sky you know?
It is the only sky the many have seen
for years. What little light in condolences
you offer—you, like it or not,
born with bread in your fists,
born adorably feeding the crows
the way your father fattened the crows
and his father fattened the crows. When
the murders of crows arrive broad
as a giant black stork, they claw apart
the hospitals, the nesting beds.
They bundle the last obstetrician in rubble
then soar up to perch above
the scrum, blocking the sunlight.
When the first mother abandoned during labor
breaks—when her bloody yolk runs
and makes a mud of all the dust—no longer
is there a murder. A birth: the debris and rust
tinged clay shape themselves into an unforgiving
mountain—a new scar we give the earth's
flesh. And sometimes a scar
marks healing. And sometimes a scar can
only remind you what burned, what was
severed, what had to flee
a body—to be beheld never again.

Kyle Dargan is the author of four collections of poems, including *The Listening*, winner of the Cave Canem Prize, and *Honest Engine*, finalist for the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. His forthcoming fifth collection, *Anagnorisis*, will be published in 2018 by Northwestern University Press. He lives and teaches in Washington, D.C.

James Hoch

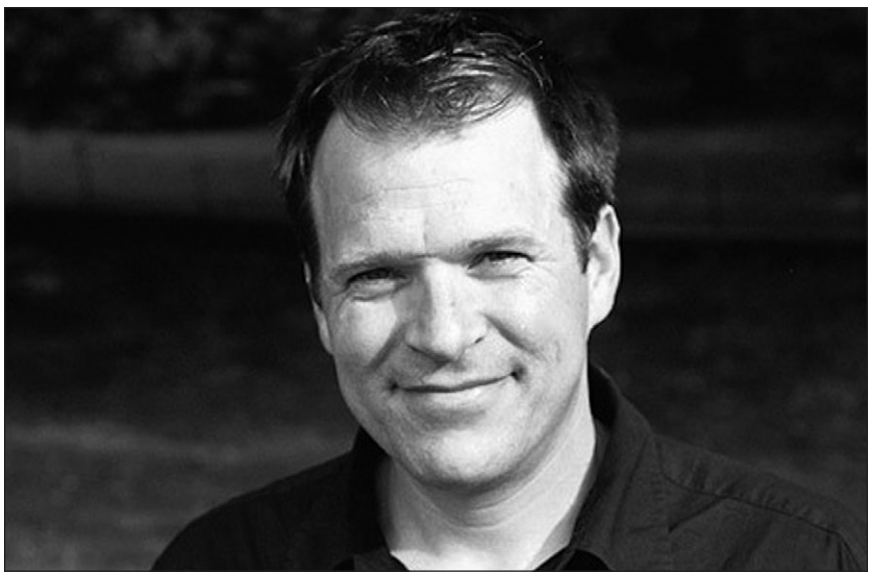
three poems

Sunflowers

Standing in front of Van Gogh's portrait,
the winter one with the bandage and heavy
green overcoat, blue hat with black fur,
every stroke pained as the mangled face
he is showing us, mangled but repairing
as if he's lived through something worth
pleading, shellacked and deft on canvas—
my son asks *What happened to his head?*
He's still a kid and doesn't know the story,
the unbearability of loving the ones who leave.
When I don't answer he eats the quiet,
the way when I turn down the radio's litany
of casualties, as he hunkers like a monk
burying his head in a bowl of Cheerios.
But really, what is there to say about that—
A photo of my brother patrolling a field
of sunflowers in Afghanistan. It'll be years
before he understands the ear, that presence
implicates the missing. It'll be just after
school lets out, driving to the grocery store,
and he will tell me about another Van Gogh,
a vase of sunflowers, they studied in art class.
Simple task: To record in journals how each
differs, this head from that, this paint from that.
We will be crossing the creek bridge
and he will be mid-sentence and I will be
thinking summer— Roadsides lined with flowers
in black buckets, and birds taking seed
out of ones we plant along the garden fence,
wondering if he knows about Gauguin,
the Yellow House in Arles. And just when
I feel I am almost useful, he will ask:
Did your brother have to kill anyone?
What I don't know becomes signature.
What I can't say becomes silence
and silence scores the mind, and the mind,
never letting go, takes the marks and makes
a house of the cuttings. But all that's outside
the frame. We are here now, looking
backward and forward at a painting of a man
injured by love. And if I had the means,
I'd ditch the day, turn all elsewheres noise,
and hold truant the coma calm of a museum.
And if I had the heart not to feel this forever
is not the one my son wants, I'd break it,
strew it against the bric-a-brac and static.
To stay still this long is a terrible thing to ask.

Gainer

Not clutch of groceries smuggled way late
to the park where we conspired to rendezvous
as if spies or French. Not rivulets of smoke
wafting into the pavilion's rafters, as we
gathered disbelieving, but not in disbelief,
a father could do *that* to a son, to Burke,
who seemed too good to be condemned.
Not spoked lights of cops patrolling, the way
they half-forgave us before circling back.
Not the pasty, shifty face of a kid about to run—



No, Blessed Comrades of Perpetual Yearning,
I, Carny of Delinquent and Mustered Earnestness,
present: Burke's Perfect Gainers at the Town Pool.
How we cloyed in the gutters watching him
pound the spring board, tuck tumble turn
inside out toward away held aloft,
and the most ridiculous thing—the way
he entered the water, as if the water knew him.
And the strangeness—not the perfection,
but that he'd rise through the turbulent cloud,
breach our mirrored faces, steady himself,
and be perfect again, beyond work and luck,
beyond our scope, like he was born for it,
and the sharp lamp of this moment being fixed,
that this, if nothing else, would never leave.
In time, like time, we move wayward,
one inconceivable world into another,
forward backward all at once. *Sweet. Wasted.*
I want to yell at the video of kids taking pleasure
injuring themselves—leaping off a neighbor's roof,
landing imperfectly in slapdash pools.
Then say *Don't.* Don't confuse this for another,
that the nature of beauty is not whim,
and deliver the definitive lecture on the shape
of Walter Benjamin's dreams and the parataxis
of recycle and infinity and *Crow Crow Crow . . .*
Attention: Punk Minstrels and Vagrant Youth:
Please, please, stop wearing Burke's face
as if this is a cast party of the dead,
as if this is all one thing, as if you knew him.
Claims are the least thing we make
fleeing this life, if that is what we do,
the way Burke flipped off his parents,
and we torqued our tongues, lied our faces off,
a story practiced, so well-versed
we became the understudies of our bodies.

Elegy with a Landscape of Iceland by Georg Gudni

Some days lay out like a dark suit on a bed
as if we get to choose what to live for.
Some days feel like you are in Iceland,
just off the road heading toward Silfra,
the moss covered lava field and sky,

a smoky bay dissolving into itself.
You could be forgiven if you feel confused
that this is not Iceland, that you are only
looking at a painting you almost walk into.
Our eyes acclimate our body toward seeing,
so that as you move toward horizon line
this way of seeing is a talking in your head.
I had a friend once who, when first meeting
someone new, used to ask: *What are you into?*
You could answer: bands, art, drugs, books,
but really he meant: *Man, how into it are you?*
He had a gift for making you feel fogged
enough you could be mistaken for a field,
and that it was okay to be a landscape.
My friend was into cooking, which means
hungry all the time, which means the day
he collapsed from an overfed heart,
on the kitchen floor, the middle of the night,
he was the happiest man I knew,
and there was no distance between who I was
and losing him. It's hard to explain.
You see, I am trying to find my way through,
as if this suit gets me to the other side of into,
beyond figure and ground, beyond divergence,
so that moving in and out of my own seeing
becomes a way of loving moss sky both rain.
It's like Iceland or Gudni's paintings
if your body has never been converted into
emptiness, then, holding, fills with water.
When his daughter spoke at my friend's funeral,
I could hear his syntax and wanted to claim
some acre of certainty. But I'd have to forgive
all the *Ors* and *Likes*. I'd have to overlook
flawed valve, cracked hinge, cold forehead.
Even this sentence hovers above something
that is not a sentence. Truth is: I am feeling
my age, and my age is wading through
the rain of my losses. A few days after he died,
we ate the meal he cooked that night,
and I thought goneness stays in the mouth.
It felt like setting hunger down, then
his daughter asked: *You still going to Iceland?*
and I remembered Silfra, It is real,
and if you are into it, and enter the water,
you'll need to don some gear. That cold
could stop your heart, and so damn clear
you can see as far as you can see. *Y'know Man,*
you should. She said *He would've dug that*.

James Hoch is the author of *A Parade of Hands* (Silverfish Review Press, 2003) and *Miscreants* (W.W. Norton, 2007).

Shanna Compton

two poems

The Eyes Have Woods

You woke with a line in your head
You tripped on a root realization
You lost the path deranging itself from fact to conjecture & back again
You grew hairy with conflict through evergreen thickets
You wore a cape inexplicably in the warm evening
The woods resinous with amber terpenes & something starchy-sweet like gourd
You didn't know where the trail led
You didn't exactly want to follow it
You forgot everything else thorny, dark as pitch, pulsing
  with the mewling of the mammal snared in the loops of your chest

Congregation at the River

Late hours roll in sooty & untenanted,
the ghosts gone wandering Woe's plateau
feels plain like no terrain at all

From somewhere beyond the reach of this pale lamp
a pack stirs hunched & rangy an evolving promise
not to spring Do you recall the dark-

knotted trees we saw across the river's broad waist?
How they held a number of things
we made no sense of until they fled

gray bodies spanning several feet once unfolded
each neck an arrow pointing resolutely away
Will we find them again if we follow?

They say one's grave is the simplest place
to find You just look down

Shanna Compton's most recent book is *Brink*. A book-length speculative poem called *The Hazard Cycle* is forthcoming. Her poems can be found in *The American Poetry Review*, the Academy of American Poets *Poem-a-Day* series, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Court Green*, and elsewhere. She works as a freelance book designer, writer and editor in Lambertville, NJ.

Danez Smith

summer, somewhere

An Interview by Tyree Daye

Danez Smith is a Black, queer, poz writer & performer from St. Paul, Minnesota. Danez is the author of *Don't Call Us Dead* (Graywolf Press, 2017), a finalist for the National Book Award, and *[insert] boy* (YesYes Books, 2014), winner of the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Poetry. They are the recipient of fellowships from the Poetry Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and they are a 2017 National Endowment for the Arts Fellow. Danez's work has been featured widely, including on *BuzzFeed* and *PBS NewsHour*, in *The New York Times*, *Best American Poetry*, *Poetry Magazine*, and on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. Danez is a member of the Dark Noise Collective and is the co-host of *VS* with Franny Choi, a podcast sponsored by the Poetry Foundation and Postloudness. Find more at www.danezsmithpoet.com.

TYREE DAYE First let me start by saying congrats on your sophomore collection, it's a stunning book, and thank you for the chance to interview you. In the opening section of *Don't Call Us Dead*, in the poem "summer, somewhere" you've created a world for black boys to go after death, a place where they can name themselves, and become anything they want. I was wondering if you could name this world, what would you name it and why?

DANEZ SMITH I think I would call it summer. Summer has a certain duality for many folks, but I'm thinking about black folks. Summer is at once an invitation and a warming, a freeing season but also a dying one. We black kids might rush into summer, ready to get blacker and test the limits of joy for those three months, but our mothers might shudder at it, knowing what tends to go down as the temp goes up. And eventually, we learn that fear too, no? I know I live with that love-hate relationship to the season, always wondering what it will offer, but also who it will take. The landscape of "summer, somewhere" offers a glimpse into the free, boundless summer at the price of the feverish, brute one. To me, there is no other season as beautiful or as dangerous. I think it would be unfit to name such a place anything besides what it is, what made it itself.

TD In the first section death comes as it does in life, from many people and things: a police officer, disease, whiteness, and at the hands of other black boys. By creating this world where black boys can essentially be free, you turn death into a type of joy (for me this is one of the many definitions of duende). How do you see joy working in this section and throughout the book?

DS Joy is weird as fuck. Where it decides to rear its head is strange and marvelous. I wanted this poem to have the feeling of a repast, or rather that's what I was hearing from the poem as I was writing it. To me, joy and whatever is the opposite of joy (fear? mourning? sadness? what?) always live side by side, hand in hand. I see joy as impossible to escape, just as I see its darker twin. This is essential to my poetics in general, I believe. This balance, this doubling up on the feels. So, joy's function in the book is to do as joy does: anchor us, pull us, offer us its cup when the hurt gets to be too much, to braid us up and pull us loose.

TD The poem "dear white america" reminds me of Tracy K. Smith's work in *Life on Mars* in its dealing with race and the universe. Both of you are widening W.E.B Du Bois' theory of "Double Consciousness" into not just being black and American in America, to being a Black American in the universe. Was *Life on Mars* a book you used to develop *Don't Call Us Dead*? If not, what books did inspire you when writing your book?

DS I love me some Tracy K. Smith and *Life on Mars* is one of my top 10 poetry collections of all time. I say that to say that I'm always thinking of that book, but I don't know if I was specifically thinking of it when building *Don't Call Us Dead*. One of the books I really thought long and hard about was *Stupid Hope* by Jason Shinder. It was a book gifted to me right after I was diagnosed HIV+, a time when I was thinking in new ways about mortality. Shinder wrote those poems at the end of his life and the way he settles into those ends of days is brilliant and offered me some peace with knowing the name of my possible exit. I think it also helped me be more considerate of how I talked about life and death in the bodies of others. Touching my own lifeline, in real life and in the work, was a humbling process. It made my elegies more careful, brighter, slower to come, more focused, and more populated with life. Also on my mind were works by Jericho Brown, Lucille Clifton, D.A. Powell, Essex Hemphill, and Toni Morrison. Those authors were the ones who fed me most in the years of writing this book.

TD The poem "dinosaurs in the hood" much like "summer, somewhere" creates a world for black folks and POC to be alive, happy, or just be, by re-making Hollywood's images of POC. For me, films like *Daughters of the Dust* show an accurate depiction of black life. I am wondering what black films show you an accurate depiction of black life?

DS I don't know how to answer this. I don't know what an accurate depiction of Black life looks like when there are so many Black lives to depict. I might not feel one film is accurate to the blacknesses I know, but who is to say that others wouldn't find themselves or their people in the story? I would say *Moonlight*. My mama might say something by Tyler Perry. Who knows if my grandma has ever seen her story on screen, at the forefront, not as a subplot to some man's story. Films that are Black and that I love are *The Color Purple*, *Pariah*, *Harlem Nights*, *Don't Be a Menace to South Central While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood*, *Lemonade*, *Noah's Arc: Jumping the Broom*, *An Oversimplification of Her Beauty*, *Bebe's Kids*, *Crooklyn*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Two Can Play That Game*, and *The Original Kings of Comedy*.

TD Also in the poem "dinosaurs in the hood," we have two heroes in the poem: Cecily Tyson and Viola Davis. I tell people all the time black women have been saving my life since I had a life. So what do these two women represent to you and who has saved your life?

DS I mean, look at them. They are amazing actresses who continue to clear the path for others while looking sickening and doing award-winning work. Who wouldn't want them in a movie? And yes, Black women are the truth, the light, and the way. Shout out to my mama, shout out to my grandmama, shout out my auntie B, my homies Blaire and Krysta and Kamia and Jamila and Britteney and Thiahera and Kelsey and Gethsemane and Cydney and Morgan and Angel n nem, shout out Black women writers, shout out Patricia Smith, shout out black girls in general. Glad we could take this time, lol.

TD Lately I've been thinking about duende and how it operates with my blackness. Your poem "a note on Vaseline" sparks many thoughts for me; including duende. To me, duende means fully developed. If there was a scale with good in one dish and bad in the other, duende would be the fulcrum. I was wondering, what is your definition of duende and how does it operate with your blackness?

DS Honestly, I don't know what people are talking about when they say duende so it means "complicated and probably said by a Black or Latinx writer" to me. What does it mean? I have heard 20 something different definitions so I haven't had time to get comfortable with the word yet. I guess it's what I was talking about earlier if I am to use your framing of it. Duende is (stop listening to me now) are those siblings of joy and not-joy, life & death, that allow us access to our humanity. How does it operate with my blackness? I don't know. I think it is blackness that allows many to understand duende, to know what life is not life if you are endlessly adding to the good side of the scale. Black folks know about balance, that's why we can dance so well.

TD I am thinking about the poem "a note on the phone app that tells me how far i am from other men's mouths." Its bluntness, its being unapologetically gay and black, reminds me of the great Essex Hemphill. You both understand tone to the level that in the same poem you can have lines such as "but i don't want him to think i am dead" right next to lines such as "ThEre Is ThIs OnE gUy WhO sPeLlS EvErYtHiNg like ThIs" and make both of them work. That being said, I was wondering what is your poetic lineage?

DS I live in the house that Patricia Smith built, next to Ross Gay's garden, on Essex Hemphill Road, in the Rachel McKibbens district, on the BAM side of town, in the city founded by Lucille Clifton, in James Baldwin county, in the great state of Langston Hughes, in the United States of Terrance Hayes, run by President Amaud Johnson, and Douglas Kearney, Sharon Olds, Tracy K. Smith, Li-Young Lee, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Aracelis Girmay and Rigoberto Gonzalez are coming over for dinner, Mayda del Valle is making dessert. Whitman cool too. I also very much believe in the linage of the homies, & won't list them all cause I've already done too much but shout out to this generation of millennial poets.

TD The use of blood in this book is complex. At moments blood is used to show history, other times it's used in its more traditional sense, a way to show death and disease. You have this ability to make things new. I think about how HIV/AIDS

was a death sentence not too long ago, but that's changed (for some), so while reading *Don't Call Us Dead* it makes sense that how blood is discussed has changed. In the poetry writing world there are certain words and phrases we are told not to use, blood being one of them. How do feel about these certain words and phrases we are told not to use, and how do you see blood operating in this book?

DS I hate "rules" like that. Language is our playground so I'll be damned if someone tells me what I can't swing from. The challenge with words that are used a lot is that you have to find new ways to use them. That shouldn't be a warning against using those words, it's a chance to rise to the occasion of the word and make it feel needed, like it's the only word that could do. I'm a poet of a fairly simple lexicon. My vocab ain't pressin no tenth grader out there. So my challenge will always be, "what am I doing new with these same old words?" The original title of one of the manuscripts that became this book was *blood* and that manuscript REALLY used the word a lot, but what I ended up doing was exploding my use of the word and then cutting back as I edited to what felt critical. It's a bloody book, but just as blood scares and warns and achieves violence, it also heals and holds and tells us exactly who we are. I want to leave blood on people's hands, in every way, good and bad and beautiful and ugly. Duende!

TD Thank you for your time, Danez. ◂

TYREE DAYE is the author of *River Hymns*, winner of the 2017 APR/Honickman First Book Prize. He was awarded the Amy Clampitt Residency for 2018 and The Glenna Luschei Prairie Schooner Award in 2015. He is a Cave Canem fellow.

Carl Dennis

three poems

At the Graveyard

Now they don't need a thing from us,
However small: not even a cup of water
Scooped from the fountain; not even a slight
Adjustment of leg or shoulder
To ease a cramp, or an offer to read them
A poem or two they used to like.

And now they have nothing to offer us,
Poor wanderers without luggage,
Without maps or pockets.
No blessings, no answers to any questions
We can think of asking, no words of advice
Besides the words that we choose to lend them.

Nothing to give us now or receive, and yet
Here we are with our bright bouquets
As if to say we still remember the light
Lost when they left us, and the light
They bestowed on us that we can't repay.

Nothing

Nothing is more annoying than a stranger in town
Standing forlorn in front of a modest hotel
He's just been told that he can't afford,
Who seems to be hoping some driver like me,
Moved by his plight, will pull to the curb
And offer a home-cooked dinner and a guest room.
Where does he think he is, in a town
That obeys the rules of hospitality
Passed down unbroken from some golden age?
If his parents thought they were doing their son
A favor by withholding the real name
Of the age he lived in, they were mistaken.

The only thing more annoying is a stranger
Who expects too little, who believes he's lucky—
After spending a day in town looking for work,
And failing—if no one tells him to move along.
A man who's delighted, after finding no room
At the inn for the likes of him, to find behind it
A field just right for resting. Where is the anger
He ought to be feeling at that moment?
And then I have to put up with his joy
At being allowed to watch the slow
Procession of stars across the sky
Without having to buy a ticket.

Finding Thoreau

To visit the pond he ranked above all others
Is to be reminded that love sees
What it wants to see.
But to turn again to his book is to be persuaded
His loyalty was rewarded with a revelation
Not granted to those who come for a day.

To his neighbors he was a local eccentric
With little good to say about anyone.
To his readers he's a discoverer of a country
He's willing to share with them if they're willing
To say good-bye for a while to the country
They're used to and travel for many days.
They too can bathe in its waters each morning.
They too can sit on its shore all afternoon
Refining the gospel that less is more,
That solitude, rightly considered, is the best society.

As a place to visit, it's a Sunday outing.
As a place to read of, we can arrive—
After we cross a no-man's land—
On a day that offers itself as a candidate
For a timeless Sabbath, the perfect occasion
To go exploring for something no more ethereal
Than a patch of huckleberries, no more mysterious.
Trust me, he says, and you won't regret it.
I'll be your guide to the spot
Where the earliest are sunning themselves
This very moment at a meadow's margin,
Waiting for you to pluck and eat.

Carl Dennis is the author of twelve books of poetry, most recently *Another Reason*. In April, Penguin will be publishing his new book, *Night School*, which contains the three poems published here. A recipient of the Pulitzer Prize and the Ruth Lilly Prize, he lives in Buffalo, New York.

Natasha Oladokun

two poems

Saturday Night Special

Pageant sash emblazoned on his chest,
White Jesus holds a staff under his arm.

Clean. Serene. Suppressing indigestion
as Sunday's sermon twists, a lodestone bomb

locked in my gut, I contemplate still life—
Still, life in portraiture may smuggle truth,

if truth is where the bread invites the knife.
We nurse our credos like an aching tooth.

When I pray to the Lord, I dream Him moved
in heaven: all ears dragged to the ground—

black earth—I buckle in—steel tracks, bent, smoothed—
The engine of the maker runs me down

and God is both the table and the hunger,
and I am both the bullet and the gunner.

Praying: Combing My Hair, I Worry

I don't love you as I ought—surefooted, coarse
        as knots coiled on my head. Another snag
in the comb-through, combing through more verses:

        who said that the sacred is straightforward?
Foucault would absolve me of vagary,
        "*the soul is the prison of the body.*" And yet

how tawdry the day is without you. Gilt-
        covered. Brash, displaced—to be blessed like Jacob,
toe to toe with your presence, limping & indistinguishable

        in the tangle—today, this is what I can wait for.
Let me wear you in my walking,
        my body ringing its own death knell.

Hair clumps in the sink.
        I won't leave until you touch me.

Natasha Oladokun is a Cave Canem fellow, poet, and essayist. Her work has appeared in *Pleiades*, *IMAGE Journal*, *The RS 500*, *Bird's Thumb*, and elsewhere. She is Assistant Poetry Editor at *storySouth*, and is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Hollins University, her MFA alma mater.

Donald Hall

The Selected Poets

A Special Ap Supplement

James Dickey

All my life I've written about poetry. As I enter the last phase of it, I change my subject from poetry to poets.

Samuel Johnson never got around to writing *The Lies of the Poets*. James Dickey was the best liar I ever knew. He was driving me around in Oregon and telling me about being a fighter pilot in World War II. "One day I saw two Japanese troop planes lazing along, no guns, no armor. I shot the first one down, let the other wait. They knew what would happen." Eventually he dispatched the second plane. "Killed a lot of men that day," Jim chuckled. Almost everything he said was a lie. At first I was dim enough to believe him. When he told me a story about playing college football before the war, he said that an opposing lineman addressed him with disrespect. "The next play," Jim said, "I ruptured his spleen."

When he didn't lie he praised his wife Maxine. She's fat, he said, but—he banged his fist on the mahogany of the bar—"she's *hard*, like a table!" After Jim did a reading at Western Michigan, the Kalamazoo poet John Woods drove him to Ann Arbor for another gig. The two men spent the night at my house, in a bedroom with two cots. As they undressed, Dickey asked Woods, "Are you homosexual?"

John said "No."

Jim answered, "Too bad."

Jim was one of those people who cannot forgive you if you do them a favor. I heard of his work from my friend Robert Bly, who praised Dickey's poems and with his own press published a book collecting Jim's reviews of contemporary poetry. When I first met Jim I praised Bly's poems. I struck oil—a gusher of disdain, nastiness, and contempt. Anyone who ever did Jim a favor, and promoted his work, was subject to reprisal.

We knew each other because he submitted a poem to the *Paris Review*, where I was poetry editor. I accepted the poem with enthusiasm. Maybe "submitted" implies masochism, therefore subsequent sadism? Dickey and I wrote back and forth. He was working for an advertising agency in Atlanta, and mailed me a copy of a one-page celebration of Coca-Cola as his "latest work." Somewhere I read his poem, "The Heaven of Animals," and wrote him in praise. From time to time he granted me generous words about my own stuff.

Jim himself had not yet published a book of poems. I was on a committee that picked four poetry volumes a year for the Wesleyan University Press. We had done James Wright, Robert Bly, Louis Simpson, and Donald Justice. We had published my college classmate John Ashbery. At one editorial meeting, I recommended a manuscript from Dickey. All the editors liked it. Although I praised and admired and promoted it, I preferred a new book by James Wright. We chose five poets for four slots and Dickey was fifth. I wrote him that I was sorry. He took it well, or so I imagined.

Months later James Wright withdrew his manuscript because he found it antiquated—metrical, crafty, reasonable—and he had begun to zap into wild, almost-surreal free verse under the influence of Robert Bly. (His eventual new book was *The Branch Will Not Break*.) When Wright withdrew his collection from publication, the Press cackled like a stricken hen, unable to produce an obligatory egg. To fulfill expectations Wesleyan required a fourth book, and Dickey had been the last poet rejected. It was I who called Dickey to give him the good news. I telephoned him at his office, and he was careful not to sound too grateful.

He never forgave me. Years later Dickey taught briefly at Reed College when its English Department flew me to the campus to talk about contemporary poets. He took me aside when I arrived, and told me that these people—he didn't know why—wanted me not to read my poems but to lecture.

Often Jim Dickey, like John Berryman, was drunk when he read his poems. Sometimes he wasn't. He brought a guitar with him when he traveled, to strum at the party afterward as he chatted with the girls. Often at the after-reading party a visiting poet is surrounded by three coeds, starfuckers who expect him to choose a winner, and once Jim left the usual gathering with the usual student. Later she reported that Jim, back in the hotel room, picked up his guitar and crooned a song complaining that he warn't what he used to be.

Dickey took time away from poetry to write *Deliverance*, his best-selling novel, and to play a part in the popular movie that followed. He took the brief role of a burly country sheriff. He glared at citified menfolk who had survived a lethal assault in the woods, grunting, "*Don't never come back here again*."

Jim's sheriff punched out his line as if he were rupturing a spleen.

Robert Creeley

I met Robert Creeley at the Grolier Poetry Bookstore in Cambridge when I was an undergraduate. He had dropped out of Harvard the term before I matriculated. We chatted happily, and I liked him until I checked out his poems, which at the time sounded like E.E. Cummings. Later, when I was at Oxford, I wrote an essay in which I derided poems by the chicken farmer from northern New Hampshire whom I met at the Grolier. Creeley wrote a fierce letter from Majorca to the editor of the *World Review*. Twenty years later, I found his *For Love* and read it with astonishment and joy. A poetry exact in its images and linebreaks, sublime and sensual in the sounds it made. We met, we talked, we made up. Bob Creeley read his poems in Ann Arbor.

When Jane and I moved to New Hampshire, we discovered that Creeley had graduated from Holderness, a prep school not far from our house. Holderness didn't know. When I told them about their celebrated alumnus, they invited him to speak at graduation. Jane and I picked him up at the Concord Airport. On our sofa he wrote a poem, not half bad, as fast as his hand could move. We drove him in jeans and T-shirt to his old school, where the faculty disguised him under cap and gown. His graduation speech was witty, eccentric, smart, and delivered without notes. When I read my poems at his University of Buffalo, years later, we went on the town together. He flew to New Hampshire for a surprise seventieth birthday party that my children contrived for me. He had just done a reading in Denver and flew past Buffalo to rent a car at the Manchester Airport in New Hampshire and drive to the party in Concord. It was a happy time. I loved him and his poems. I never saw him again. He died on the road in 2005.

Louis MacNeice

When I was at Oxford I met Louis MacNeice. For a while I ran Oxford's Poetry Society, OUPS, and got to choose the poets who read to us. (We paid only railroad fare. Poets charged us for first class tickets, traveled second class, and kept the change.) Dylan Thomas said his poems, Vernon Watkins, Kathleen Raine, Hugh MacDiarmid, Lynette Roberts, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice. When I was fifteen or sixteen I had found MacNeice's "Sunlight on the Garden" and never stopped reading him. After his early death in 1963, he was neglected like all poets after they die. Only the critic Edna Longley attended to him. When I was in Galway a few years ago I saw the MacNeice monument, his lines inscribed in stone, and lately I've noticed expanding response and enthusiasm for his work. "MacSpaunday," the composite name Roy Campbell invented for England's 1930s poets—C. Day-Lewis, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden—was not only Auden. Often one poet of a generation is posthumously celebrated, others ignored. Maybe MacNeice climbs out of his grave.

He came to Oxford, he read his poems, we talked, and I saw him again. My Oxford college was Christ Church, where MacNeice was friend to a German don named Stahl. Whenever MacNeice visited the House to see his friend, he took time to walk over to my rooms. In my early twenties, it was extraordinary to open the door and find Louis MacNeice standing there. Talking with him was not easy, as he often sat in silence, warm and present yet far away. Maybe he was garrulous only in a pub? He was inward; he was friendly. I cannot remember a word we said.

W.C.W.

When we were both trying to hail a cab, in Manhattan after the 1956 Eisenhower People-To-People meeting, I met William Carlos Williams. I began reading his poems when I was sixteen and a teacher loaned me *The Wedge*. At college I praised him in a long *Harvard Advocate* review of the first *Paterson*. Eight or ten years later we both looked for a taxi and I told him how I felt about his work. He grunted in response and stared at the gutter. Although I had grown up admiring modern *vers libre* poets—Eliot, Pound, Moore, Stevens, H.D., certainly Williams—I had recently published a poetry book that bulged with tidy metrical ditties, as modernist as white lace borders on pink linen handkerchiefs. I embodied reactionary youth. Mud from a passing bus splashed on my trousers.

John Holmes

In 1955 Richard Eberhart taught one year at Wheaton College. At the end of spring term he sponsored a daylong poetry celebration inviting Boston

poets. Every moment was crowded with readings and talks, students and teachers. I stood inside a classroom, looking out at the crowd, when suddenly I saw the poet John Holmes collapsing. His right leg jerked up uncontrollably and his torso writhed as he collapsed. An ambulance took him away. In two hours he was back, his old self, because an accommodating doctor had given him a drink. He told his story. He taught his classes a few hours a week. At home almost all the time, he remained in the cellar of his Medford house, working at poems, writing letters, and drinking Sherry by the case. Today was the first time in years he had gone all morning without alcohol.

John stopped drinking and continued teaching at Tufts. I remember him well—soft-spoken, kind, prolific. He existed at the periphery of that era's Poetry Boston—Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur, Adrienne Rich, Richard Eberhart, Ruth Stone, Philip Booth, Robert Frost in spring and fall. We had the Poets' Theater; we had Harvard's Morris Grey readings. Anne Sexton and Maxine Kumin were John Holmes' night school students. Boston's nascent PBS station recruited John, Philip Booth, and me for a television series, talking about poetry at a table in a studio. We were listless, we were boring, we were sincere. So were our poems.

Will any of the Boston poets survive? We will hear of Robert Lowell again. Richard Wilbur in 2011 published a superb lyric in the *New Yorker*. No more. As I write he has died at 96. My literary agent can find no publisher to take on a Wilbur biography. He never killed himself or shot his wife. As far as I can tell, practically no one besides me adores his ecstatic and delicate metrical inventions. In his work he ought to survive but probably like most of us he won't.

Sober John's poems continued to plod into print, patiently wrought, decorous, and dim. A final book came out. The last time I saw him before he died, we sat together in a bookstore speaking of a Boston poet recently dead. We agreed that he wasn't good enough. John went silent and then told me—shyly, with upwelling joy—that in his heart he knew that his poems would last forever.

Stephen Spender

Stephen Spender was the "Sp" in MacSpaunday. Early in the 60s I lived with my family in an English village. I made a few pounds by writing book reviews for Stephen Spender's *Encounter*, which he edited together with a conservative American named Melvin Lasky. (When it was revealed that the magazine was a Cold War device funded by the CIA, *Encounter* vanished like Malaysia Flight 370.) On the side Spender accepted editorship of a reference book, *The Concise Encyclopedia of English and American Poets and Poetry*, to be brought out by the publisher of *The Concise Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians*. As Stephen told me later, he worried about his knowledge of poetic technique. What did he know about meter? He felt overwhelmed and asked me to be his co-editor and to split the fee. I agreed. I remember nothing of making the book.

Both of us were contributors. Entries about Stephen Spender and Donald Hall were both signed "D.H." A few items were attributed to "S.S." The book was enormous, as you would expect from anything called *Concise*. It required multiple contributors, and somehow we enlisted eminent figures—Geoffrey Hill, Hugh Kenner, Thom Gunn, Kathleen Raine, John Crowe Ransom, Victoria Sackville-West, Louis Simpson, Richard Wilbur—and another fifty eminent at the time. We paid little. The entries are remarkably thorough although brief, impressive with impressive initials. Who approached the thousand and one eminent contributors? Who chose the thousand and one subjects and categories? I remember nothing.

Something I do remember: when Stephen invited me to join him, he told me that the book would appear as "Edited by Stephen Spender and Donald Hall." A few weeks later, he told me that the publisher had a problem. Because "Donald Hall" was American and the publisher English, my name on the cover would inflate the US import duty. Our collaboration must appear as edited by Stephen alone, the publisher said, and Stephen in his introduction would gratefully acknowledge my assistance.

I said no.

The publisher wrote me directly. Stephen's encomium would bestow unprecedented praise. The publisher said it would be fulsome, apparently thinking that the word meant "very full" rather than "disgusting."

I said no.

The publisher arranged to meet me in London. I asked my English literary agent if she knew what the import duty would be. When we three met, Stephen was mum while the publisher continued to enlarge upon his praise-to-be.

I said no.

The publisher made a final point. "If you are listed as co-author the duty will double!"

"Yes," I answered. "4% not 2%."

Stephen and I publicly co-edited *The Concise Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poets*.

Stephen talked well on any subject other than poetry. I liked to listen when he spoke about paintings and sculpture—about Matisse and the School of Paris, about Vermeer, about England's Francis Bacon and Henry Moore. One afternoon we walked together to the Leicester Galleries where Stephen would pick up a Picasso print, the author's proof of an etching for a translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It was Picasso in a moment of airy lines, fragile and monumental together. I admired it. Stephen said, "I believe they have another." I gaze at my Picasso now, almost sixty years later, on a wall next to my kitchen window.

We saw each other again. Frequently Stephen lectured on American campuses, coast to coast, about "Poets of the Thirties." When he flew to Ann Arbor to read his familiar talk, one of our new English professors picked him up at the airport, drove him to the Union, and carried his suitcase to his room. Stephen thoughtfully asked if perhaps the young man was tired. "Would you like to lie down?"

Geoffrey Hill

In Thaxted a huge late medieval church—sometimes called the Cathedral of Essex—rose from a hill at the edge of the village. The vicar was Father Jack, a high-church communist, fond of bell-ringing, processions, the Soviet Union, and Greek in the prayer service. Geoffrey Hill, who had been my best friend at Oxford, came to visit us in 1960 at our 15th-century house. He and I had stayed in touch by letter, but for years we hadn't seen each other, and now the old friendship flared up. Our house had a narrow balcony that looked over Market Street. On Midsummer Night's Eve we perched there during an annual celebration. The Thaxted Morris men entertained Morris teams from all over England, dancing together where the street widened to become the market. Hundreds of men pranced wearing colorful, bell-covered, theoretically medieval clothing.

Geoffrey knew about our Morris team and had heard of Father Jack. Inside the church, ancient stone columns were topped with carved stone angelic faces, contrasting with distorted hellish human heads screaming at the end of wooden beams. Not that Geoffrey would enter the church at that time, or any church. If he did, he knew that a lightning bolt would destroy the building and him inside it. Like Cowper's castaway, he knew that his damnation was predestined.

When I spoke with Geoffrey about Father Jack, I mentioned that, along with his communist homilies, in his sermons he occasionally approached the Old Religion. As we watched the dancers, night darkened and the moon rose above us. Music from the market quieted as the Morris men stopped dancing. From the church on the hill ran a cobbled path called Stony Lane—masons had lived there for two centuries of church-building—which ended across from our house. We heard faint music start from the church's hill as the midsummer night's sun dropped down. From shadowy Stony Lane down into the black of Market Street marched in single file six men, led by the vicar in green tights playing an eerie violin. After him followed two green men with flutes, a green drummer, another green man walking with a horse's head protruding from his stomach and a horse's rump from his rear, then a last green man carrying a crossbow. Not only the vicar looked eerie. I reminded my gasping friend about ritual murder. "William Rufus told Walter Tyrell to shoot straight . . ."

We were calm the next morning over oatmeal when I suggested to Geoffrey that we walk around the fields of the village. Above Stony Lane the land rose slowly toward a disused windmill, and we climbed a narrow path among beetroot. A black cat rushed across in front of us. Geoffrey made a noise. "Don't worry," I said. "It's just the vicar."

Allen Tate

My recollections of some poets are brief. Allen Tate always looked grumpy.

Edwin and Willa Muir

Edwin Muir grew old. His last book was called *One Foot in Eden*, which annoyed his wife Willa because Edwin shouldn't even *think* about leaving her. They loved each other fiercely, opposite as they were. Willa told me with pride that in their lifetimes they had avoided regular employment. "We have lived by our wits." Edwin and Willa translated Kafka together. (Willa had better German.) She was assertive, bold, worldly, tempestuous. Edwin's poems looked into another universe, hovering with a luminous tender spirit above the earth. He was confrontational only to cant. I was young and full of myself when I told him that poetry was an embodiment of the duality of . . . He snapped, "I do not listen to *'embodiments* of *dualities . . .'*"

Kenneth Rexroth

New Directions published Kenneth Rexroth's poems, and I read him with pleasure and excitement beginning in my twenties and thirties. Long poems and short, I admired him and learned from him, his diction and his three beats a line. His radio talks on California NPR made his opinions public. A dedicated anti-academic, he bragged, "I write like I talk." Whatever his taste or careful grammar, I kept on admiring his poems as he kept on being nasty about me and my eastern gang. I thought of a happy revenge. Frequently I wrote essays for the *New York Times Book Review*, so I asked its editor if he'd like an appreciation of Kenneth Rexroth. Sincerely and passionately and with a devious motive, I wrote an essay to celebrate the poetry of Kenneth Rexroth. I imagined the consternation in California after my piece came out in the *New York Times*—the

shock, the shame, possibly the reluctant pleasure. Mind you, he would not thank me. His publisher James Laughlin, mumbling out of the corner of his mouth, brought me a meager but appreciative word.

Seamus Heaney

Seamus Heaney, Nobel Laureate 1995, was my friend in Ann Arbor, Dublin, London, and New Hampshire. A farmer's son from Northern Ireland, Seamus attended the University of Belfast with Michael Longley—the magnificent Northern Irish poet who won't get a Nobel because Seamus did. In 1972 Heaney moved south to Dublin out of disgust for sectarian violence. Was Seamus really my *friend*? How many Americans thought of Seamus as a friend? People wrote cherishing essays after he died—who met him only for an hour after a poetry reading, overwhelmed by a man who was being himself. Seamus was friendly by nature, funny, kind, witty, grossly intelligent, and a great poet. That is, he had the luck to be Irish. I've been to Ireland six or seven times, always delighted by the nation's good humor and gregariousness, not to mention its exuberant joy in poetry. The welcoming benignancy of Ireland's people—there must be exceptions like the Cyclops in *Ulysses*—exceeds even Italy's or India's. That Seamus died at only seventy-four, a decade younger than me, was the horror of 2013.

He had visited the University of Michigan to read his poems in 1970 and 1974, brought by Bert Hornback, an English professor devoted to Seamus and his work. (Bert knew Seamus well from visits to Ireland. Bert went to Stockholm with Seamus. A devastated Bert attended his funeral.) In Ann Arbor I was stunned by Seamus's work and by Seamus. Much later, Bert had four of us read our poems together—Seamus, Wendell Berry, Galway Kinnell, and me. Saturday morning after Friday night's reading, Bert entertained us at his house with a three-hour breakfast. After eating omelettes we talked about poetry. Seamus defended Yeats against Galway's misgivings. I said some Thomas Hardy poems I knew by heart. Seamus, Wendell, and Galway each added favorite Hardys.

In 1979 Seamus with his wife Marie and their children visited Jane and me in New Hampshire. The two older boys were shy and quiet, but the little girl Catherine, only seven or eight, sat beside her mother on the sofa, their feet not touching the floor, the two of them singing Irish airs a cappella that filled the room with a delicate sweetness. That afternoon Seamus took a walk along the abandoned railway across Route 4. He came back holding in his hand a railway spike, which he took home to Dublin and kept in his study. When I was recovering from a cancer, Seamus sent me a broadside of his poem "The Spike." It hangs by my bed inscribed inside an orange wooden frame.

The first day of my last Dublin visit, Seamus arranged for me to read my poems at The Winding Stair, a bookstore that took its name from a collection by Yeats. Afterwards the audience and I crossed the Liffey on the Ha'penny Bridge to fill the large second floor of Madigan's pub. The crowd included every young poet in Ireland. I sat against a wall while the poets of Eire took turns sitting beside me. Across the room Seamus and Marie stood quietly, no one drooling to stand alongside the famous poet and his wife. When the Heaneys left the pub I went off with Theo Dorgan and Paula Meehan to talk poetry and drink until dawn. The next day Seamus and Marie had me to dinner and told about driving home the night before. When they reached their car—they had parked illegally—policemen had attached to their rear wheels something resembling a Denver boot. Marie approached the constables, who were disabling further cars, and revealed her husband's identity. The impediment was removed. Seamus said, "It was the best thing that prize ever did for me."

The next morning I saw him for the last time. He walked me through the Glasnevin graveyard, past the grave of Michael Collins and other heroes of Ireland's liberation, past Gerard Manley Hopkins' bones in the collective Jesuit plot, past the grave of Yeats's Maud Gonne. At the pub beside the graveyard we drank our last Guinness together.

Joseph Brodsky

Another Nobel Laureate was Joseph Brodsky. I met him at lunch in an undergraduate beerhall in Ann Arbor, just after he was smuggled out of the Soviet Union. The night before, I stood humiliated beside him on a platform. He said his poems in Russian with a furious intensity, a cavalry charge of poetry, to an audience of a thousand students who understood nothing except that they heard a great poet. My chore was to follow him on the platform saying the inept translations of an Englishman, doodles of rhyme and meter that traduced Brodsky into Hallmark. Next day the professors who smuggled him out of Russia took me to lunch with Brodsky because I was the local poet. Someone must have told him that I wrote mostly *vers libres*, which he loathed, because he never addressed me. Undergraduates jerked their heads around as he bellowed the names of Soviet poets: "Voznesenky is shi-i-it! Yevtushenko is shi-i-it!" Someone at the table mentioned W.S. Merwin, who wrote free verse. He shouted "Merwin is shi-i-i-it!"

But if Akhmatova loved Brodsky I must love him too.

E.E. Cummings

Only once did I lay eyes on E.E. Cummings. (People are cute and write e.e. cummings. The signature printed on his *Collected Poems* is E.E. Cummings.) He was judging an undergraduate poetry contest, listening to half a dozen Ivy League competitors, and his face never looked as if he heard anything. He was sullen, unsmiling, dour—possibly because he was judging an undergraduate poetry contest.

Tom Clark and the Lower East Side

Tom Clark was the best student I ever had. As a senior at the University of Michigan he wrote a forty-four page paper about the structure of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, replete with Chinese characters—Tom's back hurt from carrying Chinese dictionaries—and Greek neatly ball-pointed. What he wrote was not the last word—the last word will never be spoken—but his paper went further into Pound's structure of improvisation than anyone else had done.

Fifty years later, Tom's poems are strong, short, plain, and never worked over. After Ted Berrigan died Tom wrote a brief elegy which I praised. Tom told me it was "the usual fifteen-second poem." Tom has written many books of poems, many prose books about baseball. In 2005 Coffee House Press published a three hundred page selection called *Night and Shade*, beginning with a poem I have loved forever.

> Like musical instruments
> Abandoned in a field
> The parts of your feelings
>
> Are starting to know a quiet
> The pure conversion of your
> Life into art seems destined
>
> Never to occur
> You don't mind
> You feel spiritual and alert
>
> As the air must feel
> Turning into sky aloft and blue
> You feel like
>
> You'll never feel like touching anything or anyone
> Again
> And then you do

Tom is first a poet but also a painter, I neglected to say, and one of his paintings makes the cover of *Night and Shade*. He draws graph-paper lines on photographs, then identical squares on canvas which he fills with color. When we last read poems together, San Francisco 1989, Tom hung a painting on the wall behind us, an oil of Marilyn Monroe stretched out in languor. Fifty-one percent of the audience was not amused. Returned to New Hampshire I commissioned Tom to paint a portrait of Reggie Jackson for Jane, who was a baseball fan. Two decades after her death, Reggie still hangs laughing and triumphant in her empty study.

When he graduated from Michigan Tom won a fellowship to a Cambridge college where he worked with Donald Davie, a professor and poet friend of mine. (Davie wrote me that Tom was the best student he ever had.) Later in Paris at the Shakespeare and Company bookstore, Tom found a magazine—wittily titled *Adventures in Poetry*—assembled by second-generation New York poets, including Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett. In England Tom had been dropping acid every other day, and now he undertook a new obsession. He emigrated to join the East Village and its poetry. He joined Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett, Anselm Hollo, Joe Brainard, Peter Schjeldahl, Anne Waldman, Larry Fagin, and . . . you haven't heard all these names? The editor of *The New Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse* suggests that minor poets tell you more about an era than major poets do. It's possible that these poets are not so minor as Andrew Marvell. A book dealer tells me that in the rare book market they are hot.

The Second Generation of New York Poets, after Ashbery and Koch and O'Hara, began when Ron Padgett emigrated from Oklahoma.

The Second Generation of New York Poets, after Ashbery and Koch and O'Hara, began when Ron Padgett emigrated from Oklahoma first to Columbia and then to the lower East Side. When Padgett was still in his Tulsa high school, he edited a poetry magazine which inspired Ted Berrigan, an Army veteran temporarily in Oklahoma on the G.I. Bill. Ted left Tulsa for Manhattan with Ron, Kenward Elmslie, and Joe Brainard. Together they made magazines like the *Adventures in Poetry* Tom discovered in Paris. Along with other East Village publications, it was mimeographed on legal sized white paper and the pages stapled together.

Ron and Ted together brought out a book called *Bean Spasms*. Joe Brainard wrote *I Remember*, a

long poem followed by *I Remember More,* and more, and more . . . "I remember chicken noodle soup when you are sick." These poets' public space was St. Mark's church, where they did frequent and multiple readings. Anything could make an East Village celebration. Ted Berrigan's wife was Jewish so Ted held a Seder. Some of us drank Manischewitz, others a generic dry red. Joe Brainard was an artist before he became a serial rememberer, and illustrated the poems of his friends. Another artist to the gang was George Schneeman, who sent me the annual gift of a Schneeman image bearing a pasted 5¢ year-by-month calendar. Over my Glenwood range, I nail a red-checked shirt wearing 1968's lumpy January on top of eleven further months. In the bathroom I hang two of George's collages, four inches by six, one foregrounding the white-hatted Dutch Cleanser icon. Once I watched a squad of East Village poets gather to frame George's collages, passing around aluminum struts and cardboard mats.

In 1969 Tom Clark, Ted Berrigan, and Ron Padgett flew to Ann Arbor for a three-headed poetry reading. On campus in those years, performances of poetry filled up cafés and warehouses and rectories. Elsewhere were happenings, teach-ins, Poets Against the War, fucking in the streets, marches on Washington, pills, and The Pill. I was between marriages, hanging out with students who tried to convert me from bourbon to pot. Before the three-headed reading the East Villagers toked me a cigar joint, and on our way to the auditorium we stopped at a pizza place for supper. It was *the best pizza I had eaten in my entire life!*

When Jane and I moved to New Hampshire Larry Fagin and his girlfriend visited us and sat on the living room rug gazing with open mouths at the TV set above them. I bump into East Village poets even today. When I see Peter Schjeldahl's elegant art criticism in the *New Yorker,* I remember a squalid splendid flat on the East Side. Not long ago, I ran into the best poet of them all, Ron Padgett, when I read my stuff in Vermont where he spends the summer. Padgett is a superb translator of French poetry, but he is not only a translator. In *Poetry* Yasmine Shamma reviewed Ron's eight hundred page *Collected Poems*. Mostly I am too feeble to lift the book, but early in the day I struggle and manage.

Poetry's young new editor recently told me in a letter that he had just bought two poems by "old Tom Clark." Ted Berrigan was the East Villager I knew best after Tom. One term at the University of Michigan, I arranged a teaching job for him. I won't forget his arrival at the English Department's September cocktail party. His hair flowed past his shoulders down his back, and above his red corduroy pants a bright yellow shirt billowed under a sumptuous green velvet vest. Tenured professors wore three-piece gray flannel suits while the department chairman stared at Ted aghast. Ted stayed for a while at my house in a room upstairs, and when he moved out he apologized. "Sorry I took your pills. They made me great poems."

James Wright

In my mid-twenties, editing poems for the *Paris Review,* I scouted the best younger poets by reading literary quarterlies. Especially I looked for poets as young and as new as me. In 1955 I wrote James Wright soliciting his work, he sent me a bunch for the magazine, and our friendship began. After many letters exchanging many poems, Jim and I met in the flesh at an MLA conference when both of us were looking for university jobs and our poems were largely unknown. At a hotel bar we were drinking beer when an acquaintance of mine dropped by. I'll call him Zach. He is long dead and I remember only his repeated *shtick*. I introduced him to Jim the poet, and Zach stuck out his hand while he transformed his face into a visage of extravagant awe. "I, I know . . . *I know* . . . *your work*!" Jim fell for it like all of us.

Jim died when he was fifty-three. A few years later I introduced his posthumous complete poems, *Across the River,* talking about the work that I loved and about Jim's scattery life—poetry, depression, the army, college, depression, marriage, prize-winning poems, fatherhood, depression, alcoholism, divorce, emptiness, remarriage, depression, early death, unforgettable lines and stanzas. Drunk or sober, exuberant or depressed, Jim was always passionate about literature. He knew page after page of Dickens by heart. On weekends, when he taught at the University of Minnesota, he often took a bus three hours to a tiny town called Madison, in Minnesota at the edge of North Dakota, where Robert and Carol Bly lived without electricity or running water. Robert edited *The Fifties* which became *The Sixties* and for one issue *The Seventies,* while he translated Neruda and Trakl and constructed his own inventive, dreamlike poems. In his magazine he promoted expressionist, almost surrealist work, while Jim was still writing crafty, straight-shooting, metrical quatrains. Jim understood from Robert that his work was old-fashioned.

The Blys encouraged Jim's visits but Jim could be an annoying guest. He drank all night, taking part in literary argument, and in the morning forgot everything said. Carol Bly was one of nature's practical jokers. Robert came from Norwegian farmers and dinner had to include three food groups. Beef was expensive, so Carol made meatloaf using canned dog food. *Pard*. She dealt with Jim as inventively as she did with Robert. In the winter Jim slept in the sub-zero chicken house, and woke to stand over the Bly's wood-burning kitchen range thawing out his removable teeth, frozen in a tumbler. One summer night after Jim fell asleep Carol slipped into the chicken house and substituted for Jim's dentures century-old false teeth, yellow fangs wobbling from faded gray plastic gums, which she had found in a junk shop. In the morning Jim mumbled, "I thought I had slept for a hundred years . . ."

After several years of visits to Madison, Minnesota, Jim's *The Branch Will Not Break* appeared—free verse with extravagant images and metaphors, a manner or strategy suggested by Spanish and Latin American modernists. Image and narrative leapt from topic to topic, illuminating the one by contrasting the other. I think of his "Lying in a Hammock. . . ." After a visually exact chronicle of the natural world, the poem ended, "I have wasted my life"—and we saw how he said what he meant. His imagination expanded before our eyes, even by way of a linebreak: "I burst / into blossom." Learning from Bly, doing Bly better than Bly, Jim shocked the poetry universe with his new work, his best work.

Afterward, now and then, Jim sent me an old-fashioned, reasonable, narrative, metrical poem. "Don't tell Robert," he said.

Jim stayed with me in Ann Arbor when we were both between marriages. We sat across from each other talking and drinking. I noticed something wrapped on the table beside Jim's chair, and with my usual bossiness told him, "Eat your sandwich." Obediently he unwrapped it and spoke in mournful measure. "Every morning I wake with a cold hamburger beside me." ◂

Donald Hall is the author of over 50 books across several genres, including 22 volumes of poetry. He was the 14th Poet Laureate of the United States, and his many honors include two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, and the Robert Frost Medal. This piece will be part of a book called *A Carnival of Losses: Notes Nearing Ninety*, to be published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in July, 2018.

JEFF ALESSANDRELLI

two poems

Poem for Cindy Sherman

She set the stove to 450 degrees,

waited 15 minutes, then stuck

the snowman's bulbous head

inside. Thick with the greying

drudgeness of the season,

the drudging greyness.

Black the snowman's eyes burned.

Snow wears itself as a corpse

wears its skin.

As a mountain wears against the sky

the sky wears into a mountain.

Deeply in her cot she slept

thoughts unseen.

Black the burn; come see

the blinding.

Outside, slowly,

the sun.

Poem for Hilda Doolittle & Hilda Morley

You made a pond for the moon

and—dusk-quick,

star-struck, silent—

the moon made a mirror of you.

I can't get at it

with these sameold

26 letters anymore,

readymade words,

telltale symbols.

Out of sound,

into music,

the best songs are

seldom sung.

JEFF ALESSANDRELLI is the author of the poetry collection *This Last Time Will Be the First* and the essay collection *The Man on High: Essays on Skateboarding, Hip-Hop, Poetry and The Notorious B.I.G.*, the latter of which was just published by the U.K. press Eyewear. Currently editing a book of poems by the recently deceased poet Mark Baumer, Jeff also directs the vinyl record poetry press Fonograf Editions, which has issued LPs by Eileen Myles, Rae Armantrout, and Alice Notley.

Ananda Lima

Vigil

I.

It took me four years
after having my son
to visit my mother in Brazil
in the new condominium
she had told me
you can actually go
for a walk
outside
at dawn

As we walked
a symphony
of dogs in their electric
fenced yards
took turns accompanying
us, the sky was
peach and pink
and blue
and sliced
by barbed wire
twisted spikes sprouted out of spirals
and pierced the darkening horizon
like the crown set on Christ

The metal tinkled
reflecting light
from street lamps
from the low beams
of commuter cars
and security
guards in buzzing
motorbikes

Next morning, we walked
the same route, the only route
secured
the dogs came out
in twos
a little one
for alarm or
love or
something else
to be protected
and a big one
for its thick head
of muscle and jaw
birds flew away from their barks
and rested their wings on wire
vines and yellow
flowers intertwined with the fence

II.

Back in America, my friend
tells us, as we watch
the children in the indoor pool,
he left our country
for safety

The children practice
getting out of the water
by grabbing the ground
with their baby hands
bending their fat knees
and dragging their small bodies
over the edge of the pool

My friend whispers
something about kid
nappings, something
about having children now
We nod gravely
and turn back
to the water

III.

Having a child sharpened my vision
for danger
in corners
in uneven ground
in hot beverages
in dust, pollen and pet hair
in rapidly moving mean
s of transportation
in water

IV.

Having a child made me lose
room
for animals
They say that pets
look like their owners
if I had a pet, it would be
a Chihuahua
yelping at every little noise
at any sign of motion
aware of her minute dimensions
of her inability to stop
anyone from crushing her
small bones
just because they feel like
sitting
on her
For all her yapping
she would be silent
when lifted
above water
pawing the air
her sad little face
quiet
but for the occasional licking
for mercy

V.

At my son's preschool
they keep a bird
a guinea pig and a rabbit
in rattley cages
in the spring, they brood
eggs under a heat lamp
and learn about the importance
of the right temperature
the strength of shells
the fragility
of the newly hatched

VI.

There were no animals
at his previous preschool
In the winter, parents and siblings
shed their layers
and settled on their chairs
in the auditorium
Teachers coached the children
on stage
my son played
a drop of water
in a wave
The two of us
the only ones
to retain a tan
like that of the stubborn few
late dry leaves outside
sitting on top of a pile
of snow

VII.

Seasons are reversed
as one crosses the hemispheres
It was warm in the condominium
and in the playground
there was no warning
that surfaces might get hot
Rusty metal squeaked
as I pushed my son on the swings
my mother and I put on a stretchy
smile and talked in a rising
pitch about how he would go
to a new school where there were
pets
he listened quietly
his shadow moving
back and forth over the tough
grey concrete ground

VIII.

My brother and I were once pulled
by a wave
our limbs pushed the dark water
grabbed at the empty air
I sank into salt
and stayed still
in the water

I heard
my own throat gasping
and searched for my brother
he was beside me
our mouths open just above
like automated fish
in a carnival game

We made our way to the sand
and stood wet and sniffling
then walked
towards home
crossing the road
to avoid barking strays

our bare feet on the dirt
our long shadows ahead of us

IX.

When we said goodbye to my mother
I gripped my son's hand
and we walked
across the open tarmac
we went up rattley stairs
to board the plane
that last whiff of hot wind
messing our hair

X.

In the plane, so much talk
about safety
belts, smoking and
slides to be used as rafts
masks
to be slipped over our faces
plastic bags
which may not inflate
we sat far
from the nearest exit
my dress covered in dice
and watched through the round edged
plastic window
a body
of water against wing
my mother's condominium
smaller and smaller
then pools
then grids
then crops
then rivers
that looked like veins
mountains
wrinkled like scars

Back in America, I was startled
by the cold
and the loudspeaker
voices that didn't stop
following us
after we got off the plane

XI.

By the pool, two parents talk
about their older children
practicing crawling
processions in their classrooms
and lying under desks
very quiet
very still

XII.

I understood what my friend meant before
though back at home
we would not use the word for *safety*
But the word *violence*

XIII.

The trees outside are bare
the landscape devoid
of green
but the sun comes in through the windows
and shimmers of ripples in the pool
we squint and shade
our eyes with our hands

The children line up
and take turns jumping in
then they practice
floating on their backs
like little stars
still in the water
safe

Ananda Lima's work has previously appeared in *The American Poetry Review* as well as *Rattle*, *Sugar House Review*, *PANK*, *The Offing* and elsewhere. She has an MA in Linguistics from UCLA and is pursuing an MFA in fiction from Rutgers University–Newark. Ananda is working on a full-length poetry collection centered on immigration and motherhood, and a novel set in Brasilia, where she grew up as the daughter of migrants from Northeast Brazil.

Matthew Lippman

four poems

Fuckin' Shit Up

They're fuckin' shit up again.
The guys in yellow hard hats.
Right next door. They have their dinosaur teeth clacking.
Their pink overalls juicing. They're juicing up
the walls with jackhammers,
jamming their knuckles through tile.
I want to join them
but left my nail clippers back at the house.
Lemme give it a go, I say to the foreman.
But he's a forewoman and tells me
I don't got what it takes.
What does it take? I ask.
An absence of self, she says.
But I'm already gone, I say.
The walls come down, the splinters of stone fly.
You come out of your momma knowing how to bust your ass
or you come out of your momma in the fetal position, she says.
I can't figure out *what* is a *who* anymore,
where is a *when*.
I've fathered girls, I say.
She says, The sun mothers the moment.
I want to fuck some shit up, so badly.
The roof tumbles. The shingles shatter.
Please, I say,
let me break something to build something.
For whom? She says.
And I don't have an answer.
Or, the answer, like on most days, is for nothing.
But why can't it be bigger than that?
Nothing squared times infinity squared again.
So I bum rush the job site
and wield my blowtorch,
heat up the joints, the bolts, the steel.
It's some shit getting fucked up.
Like a factory whistle blown, cutting the still air,
or the Big Bang, cutting infinity to pieces.
I mean wasn't that the biggest meanest fuckin' shit up there ever was
and we're still trying to wrap our heads around that one?
It won't work, I say, and figure on it.
That's why I want to be part of the littlest smallest fuckin' shit up there
can be.
That's what I tell her, the forewoman in her yellow hardhat,
raging hammers against the stone,
needle nose pliers into the belly of stars.

The Happiness Pain

What am I supposed to do when the wife is at Target and Trump is in office?
I hang blinds.
I buy bullets. I don't really buy bullets.
I think about buying bullets to stave off the unhappiness pain.
My daughter is upstairs singing *Don Giovanni*.
She doesn't even know it's *Don Giovanni*.
The problem with *Don Giovanni*
is that it is opera.
If it were a pop song that Stevie Nicks wrote,
Trump wouldn't be in office. That's probably a lie.
What's not a lie is that my wife would still be at Target
with the big red shopping cart
racing around the aisles
trying to beat back her mother's imminent death,
trying to beat back the sadness in her heart
so she might fall into it,
right there in the toothpaste section.
I hang the blinds to keep the light in.
To keep the wolves out.
They come to my neighborhood every Sunday
in the form of Russian Orthodox parishioners
who pray at the church across our street.
I love them when they are across the street.
When they are on my side of the street
their fangs drip with blood and wolf spit.
I hang the blinds to keep them out,
and the president out,
and all the president's men, very much,
out.
When my daughter sings *Don Giovanni*
my face hurts from happiness.
When I put the screw in the wood
I try and stay with that pain,
the happiness pain,
where it does not matter
that the color of your shopping cart
is the same color
as the liquid that drips off your teeth
and stains the carpet.

The Ignorance of the Rain That Is Its Delight

All I want is the rain,
the Bill Evans and Joe Pass rain.
The rain that soaks through my car windshield in minor 5ths
and walking crescendos.
The rain that rips my face off in missed notes,
bleeds its wet into my neck and laughs
when I am down on my knees.
It's raining in Antarctica and we are doomed.
It's raining in my daughter's belly and there are more children.
There is nothing to stop the deluge of Louis Armstrong 16th notes
and the birds that want to die in my cat's mouth.
They don't know that they want to die
but it's raining in their death.
Bill Frissell knows this in his upright bass
and Jackie McLean under the covers
with the little devils of horror
nipping at his toes.
We've all got those little numbskulls running through the night
straight for our face
to remind us that whatever good we do
there is more good we can do.
The rain recognizes that it is rain.
It rolls over itself.
It is raining in Antarctica
and we should be scared.
My daughter is scared when the windows are open
and the thunderstorms come and won't fall asleep.
I say it's Anat Cohen's clarinet rain.
I say it's Art Blakey.
The whole thing—from grey cloud to lightning bolt—
it's Blakey rain.
She looks at me with her crazy rain eyes and finally falls asleep.

I have done my job.
It's the job of the rain—
that it makes sure that we do our job.
That is why you have to get up out of bed every day,
walk out into the sun and muggy day
and do your rain dance.
With all your flowers and your feathers.
With all of your spices and fertilizer.
Get outside and boogie woogie to make it rain.
Dance till your face comes off,
till the rain comes and gives you a new face,
a snake face, a Thelonious Monk face
filled with deep rivers
and waterfalls that won't shut up.

How We Become Our Fathers

My father did this thing once—
we were walking the walking mall in Iowa City,
between Washington and Johnson, maybe,
who can remember,
it was so long ago it has no name.
He did this thing
where he tried to leap frog a small light pole in the middle of the mall.
It was Thursday or Saturday
and there was a herd of people shopping for pants.
It was September and wanting to be June.
He's a short man, Mel,
and when he put his hands out, propelled himself up
his body did not cooperate and
he did not clear the black steel rod,
fell right on his face and, I swear, you could hear something inside of him die.
He must have been 50, 51,
and I was trying to write poems and my folks were divorced
and my old college friend Tom Gaffney was in town
and maybe we had all gotten drunk the night before.

And there was my father
splayed out under the Iowa sun like a frog pinned in a 10th grade Biology lab
and I wanted to run so far away from him
into the brick wall behind me—
disappear into it—screaming
I do not know this man I do not know this man,
but didn't and could only offer him my hand.

Later, I could not remember what freaked me out more—
watching him fall or my reaction to watching him fall.

Today, on my walk into school,
I tried to flip a glass iced tea bottle from one hand to the other
and the cap flew off
and the tea showered itself all over my blue shirt
and the bags I was carrying unloaded on the earth
and there I was
a hot mess of my father,
myself, 50, 52,
I can't remember.
It was Thursday wanting to be June
and I wanted to run so far away from the Belmont sun, from myself,
that I couldn't move—
a fly,
pinned to cardboard in a 10th grade Biology class.

All I wanted to do was pick everything up
run into a brick wall,
and scream *I do not know this man, I do not know this man,*
hoping that I might meet my father in there
with some shard of love
inside the red rock
and that maybe, for once,
on a hot July day wanting to be August,
we might actually get the chance
to be more alive than we've ever been and
break each other's fall
before we actually hit the dirt.

Matthew Lippman is the author of four poetry collections—*The New Year of Yellow* (winner of the Kathryn A. Morton Prize, Sarabande Books), *Monkey Bars*, *Salami Jew*, and *American Chew* (winner of the Burnside Review of Books Poetry Prize). He is the Editor and Founder of the web-based project *Love's Executive Order* (www.lovesexecutiveorder.com).

Jennifer Michael Hecht

two poems

Bad Election

They were the worst until much worse came.
To get high they smoked girls fed fury for days.
Things repeat, but they are not the same.

Blood was bad, here comes boiling rain.
He sculpts his hair with the ribs of boys.
They were the worst until much worse came.

They butchered days, then this thief came,
gilding his excrement and lying about rain.
Thug. It repeats. It's the ever in never again.

Now old vile villains look basically sane.
Let's take a break. Rest here in stanza four.
They were the worst until these villains came.

Howl, howl, howl, said Lear to Cordelia, too late.
Growl down greed and his henchdogs of hate.
They were the worst, then the real worse came.
Things repeat, but they are not the same.

Waking Greenwood Cemetery

Thirty years ago in the woods
I photographed a deer corpse at my feet,
her face barely changed by death
but all the rest of her was bare spine,
clean bones, curving up behind her,
in black and white on photographic film.

Here on poured-stone city floor, little
bird corpses visit for a day, maybe three,
and vanish long before they dwindle
to bone. 20 years ago in the East Village
there was a dead rat on the sidewalk
at 9th Street just off 1st Avenue. Rat
was there the next day and the next.
Then was gone and someone chalked,
"Who stole my pet dead rat?" Memory
makes a cemetery of any landscape.

Donne sermonized, "Do not ask your
iPhone, 'Which way to Greenwood?'
Focus up. We're in Greenwood now."

Jennifer Michael Hecht's poetry books include *Who Said* (Copper Canyon), *Funny* (University of Wisconsin), and *The Next Ancient World* (Tupelo), which won the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber First Book award. Her poetry appears in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, and the *Kenyon Review*, and she has taught poetry in the MFA programs of The New School and Columbia University. Hecht holds a PhD in History from Columbia, and her books on ideas through time include *Doubt: A History* (Harper) and *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Arguments Against It* (Yale). She is writing a book on poetry, *The Wonder Paradox*, for Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Nathaniel Perry

I Believe in Myself Slowly

The Perfect Imperfections of Primus St. John

When you sit down to think about imperfection and where it is manifest in our lives, it's hard to know where to begin. For instance, even as I was writing that first sentence, I was reflecting on what a beautiful summer morning it is here today—the steam from a wet July 4th night was rising off the meadow as I jogged by this morning, the blueberries at the far end of the yard just beginning to stop their blushing and be blue, cantaloupes stretching new-found arms across the garden rows. The kids, all up too late last night—sparklers and watermelon and friends—are slowly making it into the day by watching Netflix in the other room. But they were, moments ago, laughing and singing along to the tinny theme song of whatever show they'd found. Despite the screen-induced guilt that flickers like a pilot light down in my twenty-first century parenting self, it was a happy moment. Then (you knew this was coming) the screaming started. Someone was putting their feet in someone else's face, someone couldn't see over someone else's big head, someone was choosing the wrong show, someone was breathing wrong. The ideal of a moment shattered by the imperfection of a normal day.

So normal, but that imperfection can be immensely frustrating. One thing about imperfection is that somehow, despite being daily shown otherwise, we still think we can aim for the ideal. It's like Charlie Brown and his football (thank you Charles Schulz for filling so many of our childhoods with a big dose of pathos)—Lucy always pulls the ball away. I can remember spending hours in my grandparents' house in Nashville, Tennessee reading the original Peanuts books and feeling so sorry for Charlie Brown. Though now I can see the joy (or something darker but like it) in his still always trying. Despite our awareness of the near-sureness of imperfection, or even failure, we still can always try. Hope, weirdly, is itself a kind of already-realized joy. So when the day dawns as calmly as this one did, some comical but faithful romantic part of me still thinks it might last, though my kids are often, always, gearing up to prove otherwise. It is up to us, as both recipients and makers of imperfection, to decide what our reaction will be. Will we be frightened of life's limitations? Angry? Will we ruthlessly pursue perfection? All of these seem like valid responses, all with their own rewards and dangers too, I suppose.

A poet who has thought for a career on our limitations, the world's limitations and imperfections, is the undervalued Primus St. John. St. John is perhaps best known for "Dreamer," his 1990 book-length meditation on slavery and the responsibilities it still calls us to. But that book also, along with his three other slim books, spends a lot of time thinking simply on what it means to be human—what responsibilities *that* calls us to, and the ways we often fail in recognizing our movements through the world, or the world's movements around us. Here's an early poem from St. John's first book:

A Poem to My Notebook, Across Winter

The flock of birds takes shape.
        If there is faith
In the world, today
It is scattered, and the space
Is lonely,
High up there, and cold.
        The leader
—I am afraid of these birds—
Thumps for things . . .
This is hope   or
It is not a poem.
The tradition keeps flapping,
        Wrong,
Across the sun,
Obtrusively like an author's intervention.
It's incomplete, rich experience,
But the best tip yet is dipping,
Then diving, deep to the left . . .
        I hope

First of all, I love the tongue-in-cheek awareness of the artificiality of artistic revelation built into the first line. We can see just at a glance that the poem itself resembles those flocking birds, but the writer is all too aware that that is as close as he'll get to understanding them. We cast and recast the world in its own image, he seems to say, but that is not the same as really seeing. Ours is an imperfect sight. The poem is about keeping faith—perhaps a religious faith (as St. John suggests in other poems), but also just faith in the world, faith that we can understand and be. It is not an easy faith, either. The birds represent the trust he's looking for (the perfection we seek)—but it's frightening—the space between them is 'lonely,' and the leader of this bird-movement, this reminder of what we seek, is scary. He makes demands, and the poet doesn't know how exactly to respond.

Just after that moment of admittance, the poem turns with the beautiful lines, "This is hope or / it is not a poem." There is always hope, he seems to say, in attempting to recognize the world. Or even if we feel inadequate to the demands that faith puts on us—even if we turn away ashamed or run away screaming—a poem, like this one, shows us that that faith is still out there, if only barely accessible by us. And look, this poem of total inadequacy, where the speaker feels utterly lost and left out by these cold high birds, has a real revelation built inside it. St. John writes "It's incomplete, rich experience" just before the final image of hope in the poem. I love that small comment—that experience can be 'rich,' full of meaning, without feeling complete, or perfect. In those four words, St. John really gets at the idea of imperfection that I've started with here—morning is beautiful and complex, but it is not perfect. Our lives are too complicated even to explain for a minute, but we hope still to complete the picture one day. We have to, St. John seems to suggest, at once recognize the 'richness' of what we are experiencing, and the 'incompleteness' of our awareness and of our response.

For his part, St. John's response is frequently to keep still and keep watching. In "The Fountain," also from his first book, he writes that when he hears our lives pouring like a fountain he "[believes] in all of the storms— / where it came from," and then pretends to be a "mossbacked" prophet (so fantasizing about becoming one with the world) who just sits and waits for understanding to come. The poem concludes with the fountain telling him: "We are all pouring toward the same conviction / . . . / But we believe that, separately." St. John's response is to say "So I believe it all— / The whole thing's that mindless." And maybe this is a less dark iteration of the same thing we see in "Poem to My Notebook . . ." We believe despite the evidence, or because it seems we shouldn't. To be 'mindless,' he maybe suggests in this short poem, is to have our minds, if only briefly, out of the way, allowing us to be more fully human.

St. John is perhaps thinking about meditation here, I'm not entirely sure, but I know I might think of this poem when I'm faced, as I was this morning, with the unavoidable presence of imperfection in our lives. My love for my kids is so big as to be undefinable, but they test it (enlarge it?) every day by being unpredictable, rushing, wild fountains of thought and emotion. I think they and I most certainly are 'pouring toward the same conviction'—that complex love will more and more bind us together, but, of course, we believe that separately. We go about it our own ways. I seem to think we need some rules in the house to keep things sane. They are fully against sanity. They succumb to a few of the rules; they convince me to be wilder. What I should do, more often, is see myself as waiting and watching. When Jane Bell wants to do headstands in the den, when Lois wants to paste Band-Aids all over her critically injured stuffed dog, I should relent, and listen to the water rush by. I should watch for the wings in the sky above us to tip my way.

◆

There's a twenty percent chance of storms today—now later into July and fully into a real dry spell. Sometimes here in Virginia summer seems suddenly to put on the brakes—what was green and exploding with wet and growth all at once stops finding rain. What clouds there are move by unnoticing and cruel. The heat slowly rises each day and the winter squash in the garden droop their sad leaves in the blistering sun. It's as if, some summers, the whole world around me is being lulled, or drugged, into some sort of uncomfortable sleep. All we know is heat and bright and it becomes more and more difficult to see the world's gradations. Yesterday my son Horatio insisted, despite the above-ninety temperatures, that we all walk the circuit around our neighbor's farm. There is a field road there which loops around about a mile—it passes a cow pasture and slowly turns downhill towards Horsepen Creek. There, in the lowest patch of land for miles around, the creek winds through wild peas and poison ivy and sycamores. It is beautiful at all times of year—though too choked up with poison ivy in high summer to get down to the water, at least for the kids. However, I, on that sun-oven afternoon, resisted going on this walk at all—too hot for the little one, not late enough in the afternoon, I was feeling lazy, etc. There was nothing to see. But in the end Rache won and was right—at least down by the creek there was a lot to see: old landmarks that had changed in the turn of this year (we hadn't been down there for a few months), the original bridge over the creek really rotting now into ruin, dry flood-made spring-runs alongside the creek deep as small canyons, which the kids leapt like fawns across.

As we turned back west toward home, passing the pond and the healing clear-cut around it, I found myself walking with Lois (our littlest), and we worked together to get up the two big hills the road drapes over there (my wife Kate, done with the heat and my sudden poet-y enjoyment of it, had gotten way ahead of us with the two older kids). Lois puffed and complained a bit, but also noticed the sudden feel of the wind in our face—surprising like something that is always there for you to find. She wanted to know about the corn growing alongside the road, and when I peeled back one of the young husks to show her its little golden pegs, she was delighted and wanted to peel each one (it's not our corn, so I demurred). So up we walked, not sleep-walking through the heat, as is so easy to do, but more and more awake to the way the imperfect world surprises us.

Here's another poem by Primus St. John that touches on this way of handling imperfection:

Lyric 13

With emotion
The wind holds out its empty hands.
Let's stop all this; let's stop.

The dry grass stands up
In the dust it must learn to live with
And laughs and laughs.

Such tormented lovers
Have at last found trust.
And I wonder this morning

Outside near the edge of everything
Was I really awake when I saw this.

So beautiful this humble little poem. This lyric comes from St. John's second book and is one of many such fragmentary observations scattered around that strangely constructed volume. I love so much about the poem—the voice is a similar one to the first poem I discussed—this observer who feels at once a part of the world around him and also surely separate. There is a sense in this poem of seeing for the first time—the personified wind is suddenly filled with a recognizable kind of grief or pain. The speaker feels like he can barely believe it. And then the grass 'stands up' laughing at the wind's strange, and impossible, request. So who, I want to know, in the third stanza, are the lovers? Is it the grass and the dust, as the syntax of the previous sentence would suggest, or is it the wind and the grass? The man and the world? Or is it the emotions suggested in the first line? Is it pain and laughter, ache and joy that have found trust in one another? St. John, of course, is too good of a poet to decide for us, or for himself, and instead wants to know if he was 'awake'—if he had understood things correctly. Or, perhaps, leading my mind back to my little hike around the field, maybe this kind of understanding, on the edge, watching, is what being really, actually, awake might feel like. Perhaps that is the distinction St. John is drawing here—the difference between awake and really awake. Maybe when we are really awake, we see and acknowledge the imperfections themselves—the grieving wind, the mocking grass, the death-like dust—as the beauty we were after all along.

◆

But it is so hard to stay awake to everything. Raising kids in the United States has many pitfalls, and one of the hardest things to make sure your kids are awake to is the reality of race in our culture. As a white person, whose life has been no struggle in the meanest sense, I feel almost unqualified to explain to my children the full ramifications of what our culture's insistence on race as a tangible thing does to us. Kids, of course, are more perceptive than most adults give them credit for, and they know that we all have some explaining to do. They can feel the burden of history on them—who can't when they drive through a nearly-segregated small town like the one we live outside of? But kids don't want it explained away. They don't want merely to feel guilt either. They want to be awake to what it is we have done, are doing and can do; they want to see the corn beneath the husk, I suppose.

A few weeks ago my family went to a political fundraising brunch at the volunteer firemen's auxiliary hall. We were meeting a friend there who was running late. While we stood outside the hall, we waved to the other people coming to the breakfast, almost all of whom were African-American. As these fellow community members entered the hall, I realized that I knew none of them. Even in this little town of ours. I was so disoriented that I went inside to check to make sure we were at the right place. The kids were totally content running around outside and seemed unconcerned at my concern. Kate was concerned about our missing friend, but seemed also unimpressed by my consternation. What was it that made me feel suddenly out of place? Our difference in appearance? A sense of estrangement from what I perceived as my community? I was even hesitant, for days, to sit down and write this particular part of this essay. People, parents, and maybe white parents especially, find it very hard to take stock honestly of the realities of race around us, to the fact that active awareness is required, and to the responsibility we have to try to show our children what that kind of awareness looks like. I'm not saying I have worked off much guilt here, by the way. I'm still fighting my way through the paragraph. No action feels enough. It is instead a wakefulness I need to pass on—us somehow awake to the true heat of the day, awake to the beautiful difficulty of community, to our communities of difficult beauty.

There are a lot of difficult moments in Primus St. John's major poem on slavery and race "Dreamer," but here my mind returns to a moment partway through the poem where his main character, John Newton (the composer of "Amazing Grace") is beginning to regret his participation in the slave trade. St. John writes, in a flash of lucid commentary:

> The trouble with atonement is it is like
> a sphinx, several parts human, several
> parts bull, dog, lion, dragon, or bird.
> When we are dreaming of atonement, no
> matter how subtly, we must remember
> we are not dreaming of a verb.

Strong stuff. It is easy quickly to rebuke this by saying that, in fact, actions are important, louder than words, as it is said (all the self-righteous smugness of a protest with witty signs and 'Hey, hey, ho, ho' chants comes to mind). But St. John, here, is backing me up; no action is enough. What is more important is the noun at the heart of the verb. Atonement is a state, a putting together, inside oneself. Actions, he argues here, are external manifestations of what things are inside. And what is inside might be an ugly mess. But we have to work towards putting things right in there.

He foreshadows this moment in an earlier passage:

> If this is a story
> Of the reasoning of slavery,
> Where are we?
> What have we been doing
> To people,
> To the light
> From which life emanates?
> Slavery is a story
> Of procreation,
> Of magical religious thinking,
> Of the androgynous divinity
> Within us.
> No story can be this happy
> Unless it is married
> To something deeply within us.
> It is not *them*
> Who have done it to *us*,
> Or *us*
> Who have done it to *them*.
> It is the antagonistic dream
> Of unreconciled love.

Few writers I know of are as bold as St. John, though the difficult point he is making hides maybe behind the careful line breaks. At first one reads this passage and wonders how the poet could *not* assign blame to the white slave traders (whom he excoriates in other parts of the poem). But our easy reading has us miss the point. St. John wants us to look past the verb ('have done') and towards instead the nouns: us and them. He is arguing in the passage that we must not understand the two sides as an *us* and a *them* but instead as just an *us*. We are unrequited with ourselves. The procreation—the erotic, even, desire for love—he hints at in the beginning of this passage is a procreation with ourselves. A making whole and bearing from that. We must, he says, aim for a state of real atonement, but also that merely aiming is not enough. We must try really to know the noun in our sights.

At the end of "Dreamer," St. John keeps thinking of dreams. Writing of Newton (who was a slaver and then, later, an abolitionist), the poet says:

> I dream I will not be forgiving him
> for the timeliness of his innocence, for
> betrothing the dead to the dead,
> but will be lifting
> up my hands to an appetite for life
> that will take slavers and slaves with me.

So St. John, who sees himself in the poem as a possible vessel of atonement, is also pretty angry. It is important, when we talk about love and forgiveness, that we keep in mind that such things are not always quiet and sweet; they are in fact rarely weak or submissive. There can be a lot of anger in love, and difficult strength in forgiveness. Notice that in the above passage St. John says at once that he will not be forgiving Newton in the traditional sense, but will instead push upwards through him, will raise his hands in a gesture of union, of bringing together, of atoning. How different our ideas of atonement and forgiveness really are, we realize here. And the poem ends angrily—it wishes that slavery was something far away, something distant and historical, "but it is *right here* / In my pouch, today, / Like the acori beads I have been swimming with / For hours—." So the painful is mixed up with the sacred, carried around with us every day, in our pockets, in our imperfect hearts.

And I guess that is what I was reminded of that day outside the firemen's hall; I forgot, as I so often do, my everyday duty to know what I've got with me—to recognize that the reason I didn't know those people streaming into the same event I was going to was my own inaction, or my own trusting in my own actions. I thought I had done enough to be a part of my community, or I told myself that my actions have been enough. I forgot about the nouns inside: my own quiet racisms, my privilege, my responsibility to love and atone,

even my anger. For my kids, I realized I must try harder to bring those things, these imperfections, out into the open more and acknowledge them, to make myself aware of myself. Again, we are modeling here. Kids are not always introspective creatures, but they can see us and absorb the way we take stock of our own natures.

St. John can step in here again to make me feel better. In another of the short lyrics from his second book he moves from pain to wonder. This is the entirety of "Lyric 12":

> I believe in myself slowly.
> It takes all of the doubt I've got.
> It takes my wonder.

This is marvelous economy. I love the way doubt and wonder are put together here. It is so easy to forget that they are really rooted in the same not-knowingness. It reminds us too that all of the actions in this small poem—believing, doubting and wondering—are actions, of course, whose end-goals are their root nouns, and which take work to accomplish. The present tense of this poem suggests that it, like the awareness I alluded to earlier, is daily work. We must work at wonder, and work out doubting, and work at believing. It is when we forget to do those things that we get stuck in the other kind of not-knowing: ignorance. So it is with race, I think. The more we presume to ignore (there's that word again, the action this time) of race in the communities around us, the less of ourselves we see. Whom, when you walk down the street, do you look in the eye? Whom do you smile at? What will our children see? Can they see me? I wonder.

Anger is most useful when it is turned inwards. There really can be no righteous anger unless the self is implicated. Otherwise, it is merely self-righteous, and the difference between righteousness and self-righteousness is perhaps the difference between a telescope and a mirror, one a way of seeing, the other a reflection of what you already knew. So, as St. John suggests in the poems above, if we are going to help our children think usefully about race, they must understand that they also are implicated. Too often, I think, we act as if children were perfect vessels of innocence who can somehow 'choose' to see color or not, or distrust other people, have faith, etc. But they begin the process of becoming themselves as soon as they are born. Like all of us, our children, even as young as Lois, our five-year-old, have preconceptions, underlying biases and preferences. What makes them different from us is that they tend to be more willing to acknowledge those things. So the more we can be angry with ourselves, angry at our failure to be better people, the more our kids too will understand that that sort of thing is a process. Kids are not born 'good'—they are born people, who are paradoxes, imperfect and always in need of work, just like the families and communities they are born into.

Here's Primus St. John one more time, from his unfinished long poem, "If There Were No Days, Where Would We Live," on the dangers of not recognizing our preconceptions:

> I am near that elaborate house
> where all the people killed themselves.
> They said they were angels
> on their way back home.
> I can understand how it feels
> to want the hand of God to hold onto
> when it's excruciatingly painful,
> but it is also true
> that all the angels are gone
> and we are the women and the men
> that they've left
> with only each other's hands
> to hold onto.

In a marvelous reconceptualization of faith, St. John at once denies these true believers their present angels, while still admitting the angels' past existence. He does not decry the faith itself, just where it is placed. In the image of the cultish suicide, we see a metaphor for any understanding that leaves out the self's true complicity—be it facile thinking on race, on rights, on poverty, etc.—when we ignore the self, its true power can be erased. And while it is true that theologians and mystics of various stripes have argued for the negation of the self, it is almost always in the context of understanding the self as part of a larger community, so the self is not erased but subsumed, or sublimated. We are not meant to leave the world, but to join it. And that is exactly what St. John wants for us here as well—that we can't put trust in ideas only, but the ways those ideas are rooted in the physical bodies of the people around us. No prayer, no poem, is as strong as a held hand, he seems to say. And is there any better place to practice this challenge than in a family? We must model the erasure not of the self, but of the *us* and *them* St. John wrote about in "Dreamer." Though, of course, it will be an imperfect erasure. We will not reach the understanding we seek; we will not fully impart to our kids why our communities are broken and how to fix them, but can keep the nouns in our sights, can reach out for whatever hands might be there to hold and try to hold them. ◂

Nathaniel Perry is the author of *Nine Acres* (Copper Canyon/APR, 2011). Recent work has appeared in *The Common*, *Cincinnati Review*, and *Terrain.org*. He lives in southside Virginia and is the editor of the *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*.

Note

All poems cited are from: St. John, Primus, *Communion: New and Selected Poems*. Copper Canyon Press, 1999.

Letters to the Editor

APR welcomes comments, criticism, and dialogue in response to work in the magazine. Authors of poems, essays, and other work will be given an opportunity to respond to letters scheduled for publication.

Letters should be sent to: Letters to the Editor, *The American Poetry Review*, The University of the Arts, Hamilton #313, 320 S. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102-4901.

Thomas Devaney

three poems

Where in the great glare was I

Under the sun I saw two kids along a long fence
walking and then fast to a cut, and then we all
were gone. I saw an empty delivery truck with its back
opened as it sped away, twice in the same day.
There was a side field under the sun and I could see
that the grass was wet and dense, with some night still in it.
It had to be freshly cut, but there were no mowers or municipal
ground crews anywhere. A field in my nose, and even now
not a soul to share it. On the edge of Chinatown an older
couple had just found a bench. They sat closely and looked
straight ahead, one or the other patted the top of the other's hand.
  I saw that the secret source of light appeared from a brick
pavement stained white at the edges. I saw a splash of little suns
scatter and then re-station themselves in the air, light speaking
to light in the eyes of a pair of sunglasses.

Raccoon

I didn't know the strength of a city raccoon,
  which busted out through
my chest, escaped down the side street.
Wild red eyes of the raccoon's lightning,
lighting up reflectors
from here to Water Street.
There's no making nice.
A raccoon uses the weight of its body
to get what it wants. Something
in me, some wish to escape.
Unburdened by one weight, lit
by another. Cravings
still in the headlights. On the night
in question, I was a wretch along
railroad tracks, just an old t-shirt.
A hunger, a hanger steak. Christ and
mouth-thirst. All my Jersey devils.
Everyday people and raccoons share a single ritual:
they wash their food.
The row homes sleeping.
The row homes counting their bricks.
    Every night raccoons follow
the same path, they don't go far.
Knit-hat in the bushes, dogs down by the river,
this one out on its own.
Reflectors everywhere: sneakers,
bicycle parts, a STOP sign in a pile of junk in
someone's shared alley space; and many rows
of painted and rusty poles. Poles of concrete
sunk into the sidewalks so no one can park there.

The Book of Jonah

Did he get on the first ship he could find that was going out?

From what was he running?

If you wished to fall off the face of the earth, was there a better place to stow away than in a ship destined for Tarshish?

And why ask if the great wind sent into the sea was sent by God?

What about waking nightmares, how do you wake from those?

Was the great fish really a whale? Either way, is it surprising that such leviathans haunt the imagination?

Was there ever a moment in the belly without terror? Could there be some private joy?

How is it in your own stomach? Your chest?

What could be more aching than a cry from such a place?

What if those prayers were actually heard?

Who can say what power is held in that?

Why does the specter of a pointed finger rarely fade?

"Even to the soul." If it was a question could it be one for long?

When the fish spit him out on the Lord's command, how far did he go? It was far, I just keep wondering how far?

What distances, what actual depths, and just how deep do the conventions of the horror story go into the psyche?

What could be more inventive than the mind of an addict, an improvised allegory?

Was this just another elaborate yarn spun by a junkie?

Did an inkling that it might have been so ever make you feel judgmental?

What is the space between the voice of thanks and true thanksgiving?

And when others believe you more than you believe yourself, isn't that its own special kind of hell?

To what degree do *they that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy*?

But if you didn't feel that you weren't feeling it, was it possible that affecting gratitude was not exactly a lie?

How much patience does even a patient god have to have?

Do people change?

Yet didn't he convey that *kingdom come* was coming as he was commanded?

How was it that you could convince a city of its own doom and still be hustling yourself?

How was it that you could ask people of a great city to mend their ways, and yet when they do, you're still AWOL to yourself?

Is this what anger which is greater than fear looks like?

When you did everything you could to *do yourself in* and yet still didn't go, was that the sign to beseech the Lord to end it right there?

What about the plank pushed down over your chest so hard that you didn't know it was there at all?

Is this how the body speaks itself past words?

The night Jonah found himself sitting outside on a blanket, and saw that it was he himself who was sitting. Was this the first time there was no question?

Did his name really mean dove?

Did building the makeshift shed give as much satisfaction as the shelter it provided?

In pencil drawings of apples have you ever detected a skull?

And what of the gourd?

Did the worm that would soon wither the gourd really take anything away from the first gladness of its shape?

Was it true that anyone had to focus on the vehement east wind just because it was coming?

Could the question *is there such a thing as silence* ever be asked again?

Thomas Devaney is a poet and 2014 Pew Fellow. Devaney is the author of *Runaway Goat Cart* (Hanging Loose Press, 2015), the solo-opera *Calamity Jane* (Furniture Press Books, 2014), *The Picture That Remains* with photographer Will Brown (The Print Center, 2014), and *The American Pragmatist Fell in Love* (Banshee Press, 1999). His work has appeared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Hyperallergic*, and *BOMB Magazine*. Projects with the Institute of Contemporary Art include "Tales from the 215," for Zoe Strauss's "Philadelphia Freedom," and "The Empty House," at the Edgar Allan Poe House for "The Big Nothing." He lives in Philadelphia and teaches at Haverford College.

David Roderick

three poems

God of Wind

Pearl Harbor

Kamikaze,
divine wind,
so there's nothing left to do

but own
the sharp shapes of the word

and draw a prayer on wood
and hang it with others
on a brass hook,

then dip a ladle into a dragon's mouth
and drink.

Marked by parchments,
wheels afire,

is it possible in this rough music
and space

to simply *do* something,
feel full of a moment,
then let it go?
There were puppet hands

at the controls of the planes
clipping low
over what we deem *Pacific*.

Long veils
of smoke rose from where
the dead
and gunners gripped.

Saliva pooled
in the god's mouth
as he wondered
why we maroon
in webbing
like creatures of sky and sea.

I saw
where the coral scorched
and boned over.

I, meaning *my body*,
which loaded itself onto a ferry
from a coin-bright shore.

The oil still
bubbling to the surface
after all these years

shocked me,
those tiny dissolving eyes,

and I felt a hair
of wind then, the hide of it,
the wings
of a curtain drawn shut.

Leading up to the fight,
lying on a palmy hill,

you may have heard the engines,
thought *swarm*,
and hammered in your mind
a lacquered box

to hold this element,
this god of wind,
who speaks with many voices

through a single mouth.

Selfie

He was so vain
he loathed everyone who had loved him.
After he died alone,

while Charon ferried
his spirit across the stream
encircling the dead,

he leaned over the boat
to snap one last
shot of his face in the water.

The Lonely Gods

We're each a little fire
untended, fed on gas—

each a spark stolen
from a bank of cloud.

That's why the gods
are obsessed with us,

why they can't help
playing jokes on us

or changing into animals
that rub against our

skin and weathered hair.
They need us to warm

their hands, our makers
that live in the sky—

because we're mortals,
and it's frigging cold

up there, obviously.

David Roderick is the author of *Blue Colonial* and *The Americans*. He is the Program Director of Left Margin LIT, a center for literary arts in Berkeley, California.

Asa Drake

Wearing the Fabric of Another Country

Re-imagining Diaspora in Sokunthary Svay's Apsara in New York

Apsara in New York by Sokunthary Svay
Willow Books, 2017, 62 pages

"Our languages are broken," writes Sokunthary Svay in her debut poetry collection *Apsara in New York*. This is not a judgement but an acknowledgement that our languages, our shifting oral traditions, and written language in particular, the language of record, have become tools for cultural erasure. Our desire to be read as legitimate and knowledgeable, these urges rendered into language have political consequences. Svay's collection insists on preserving speech. Hers is a collection that combats forgetting ourselves, even when what is left to remember is forgetting.

Working against the corrective impulse to make more palatable what has already been processed through multiple languages, Svay's persona poems in particular require that the reader accept her speakers as they exist in America. In "First Generation Cambodian American Mother Facebook Typo," and the poem which grows out of this one-line poem, "Good Luck, Homey," Svay's speaker addresses two audiences. She speaks to a digital audience and to "you," an immediate, intimate figure. The first poem, written in quotation, "'Good luck, homey,'" is a child's record of her mother. Reading the two poems together in order to acknowledge the silent speaker of the first poem gets to the heart of the 1.5 generation Khmer American experience, one that balances protecting a Khmer past and future. The speaker celebrates her mother who is in turn celebrating her acceptance into a digital community. In "Good Luck, Homey," the mother's declaration of beauty is approved and amplified by the reactions of others on social media.

> How you write 'beautiful'?
> I want to write when I see
> the picture of my friend
> say 'how are you'
> 'look good, sister'

What is striking about this poem is how it defines a Khmer community overcoming diaspora. This is not a poem of assimilation, but one where the Khmer community exists far outside of 1979. Furthermore, it is the speaker who defines how her community will be represented. She determines who is "sister," who is "beautiful." She has a platform for her desire, the important part of any platform being that the user has something to say. And yet, this is not a utopian treatise on social media. The mother who says "You see honey, you my good luck," is done talking about what is loss, but her omission, too, is the survivor's discourse.

Throughout the collection, Svay records and repeats the language of those discredited by academic establishments. Who are her speakers? They are new Americans, mothers, daughters, students with day jobs, participants in an oral tradition. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say Svay elevates the voice of the marginalized, except this is a text that refuses to offset identity against a whiter America. Here, the record of speech legitimizes speech, making the speakers central, unalterable. Their language is all that defines their communities, so that they are no longer "the other" but the authorities of their own narratives.

What does this mean for the record keeper in "First Generation Cambodian American Mother Facebook Typo," who projects her mother's voice? She is the code-switching "I," physically moving the collection from the refugee camp to the Bronx, to the bad lover and the good lover. She holds her daughter's hand and her mother's hand in a Cambodia that may be home, that may yet be a foreign country. Though this "I" translates the patchwork of cityscapes and rice fields, this is also the "I" who holds back language in an attempt to bypass "a language of pain," where "every English word / is a betrayal of our past."

> Family is planted here like rice. My grandparents interrupt the stalks.
>
> A poke of incense introduces me.
> My uncle chants in Khmer:
>
> *Your grandchild has come,*
> *all the way from America!*
> *And how beautiful, look at her!*
> *She's even as tall as you!*
>
> I throw my head back in laughter.

Though the speaker translates her uncle's song, she does not sing back. Her presence is only through action: laughter, smoke in the air, the movement between stalks. Like the waiting mother in later poems, hers is "not a song about one's self."

Where Svay restricts language, she crafts time. Borrowing dialect in "Mother Monologue #1," Svay manipulates grammar not only as vernacular but as a representation of time for her Khmer speaker.

> Your poor brother alway hungry. He the one I love the most. In Pol Pot time, I gave him all my rice but not good enough. Now I buy you guy any food you want.

The poem emphasizes an oral lexicon that refuses to give into tense. In order to maintain continuity for "your poor brother," the speaker removes the verb of being: "Your poor brother alway hungry. He the one I love the most." The speaker rejects regulations from a language that cannot harbor her child. Her solution sounds like perpetual hunger, perpetual love, but modifies itself by pushing further into the present. Her "Now" does not erase the death of a child, but places her listening children apart from that continuity, into a new present. Time in this poem is one layer of cloth touching another, a conceit echoed throughout the collection. From the opening poem "Apsara in New York," Svay's collection is interested in the consciousness of diaspora. Even before "The airplane ascends above Cambodia's national monument / beyond their powdery orbs," "mother and her plaid" have already departed from the image projected around her. "She's not heard of New York," and yet she is wearing the fabric of another country. Svay's collection sustains possibilities. Her poems revive "decades in static" and imagine future dragonfruit birthed from "grandfather's garden in Georgia." Taking away the threat of cultural erasure, Svay opens a door for Cambodian American writers. It is a door that does not require the narrative of war to be synonymous with Khmer literature, and yet, it is a door she holds open. ◂

Asa Drake's writing is published or forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner*, *Public Pool*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, and elsewhere. She received her MFA in poetry from The New School and was a finalist for *The Seattle Review*'s 2016 Poetry Chapbook Competition. She currently lives in Florida.

Dilruba Ahmed

two poems

Ghazal

I'll never make my way to the pearly gates above us
so long as the pious are preferred above us.

Ahmed, Ahmet, Amadi begins a long line of skeptics.
Will our malnourished hearts make a third world above us?

Do the gods exist? Will we ever know?
Not until we rise to the ghost world above us.

In sleep, we scrape at boulders, dreams with no end.
Will our belief in You, too, be interred above us?

Who now points the barrel nudging our spines
as we're ushered toward the afterlife secured above us?

No need for weapons. Our hearts hold munitions:
no doubt we've earned the rebuke assured above us.

Apocalypse upon us in one lifespan, we are told.
Call it blessing. Calling it curse. All terms blurred above us.

Leave me here on earth, our human inferno
if heaven's simply earthly life mirrored above us.

These prayers in earnest, palms pressed, heads bowed—
it seems our mutterings are misheard above us.

A smackdown among angels: who owns heaven by birthright?
The righteous muscle back into the ring, undeterred above us.

Closing time. Last call for drinks. Their promise of rapture.
Wasted angels give up hope for earth, their prayers slurred above us.

Ahmed is my name, one who thanks God without end.
One of many blind mice, our chatter unheard above us.

Like a Benetton Ad

On a hike up Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay, the wind is strong but not fierce enough to push the fog cover that obscures the promised 360-degree view. When the path narrows, my friends and I step aside to let a descending group of hikers through. As they continue their descent with passing words of thanks, one hiker exclaims, "It's like a Benetton ad!" I, too, turn in surprise to look at my crew: two Filipinos, 1 Irish-American, 2 South Asian Americans. I recall Benetton's marketing campaign from my adolescence: models of various races with contrasting skin and hair colors, slouching together with casual intimacy and staring into the camera with a practiced blankness. Ten years after that hike, the Rana Plaza garment factory will collapse, stark cracks signaling its destruction on a Tuesday but managers still warning workers they'll risk a pay loss if they don't work that Wednesday. The Benetton Group will first try to deny its clothes were manufactured at the Dhaka-based location, then later fail to compensate the thousands of victims and their families after its shirts are found in the rubble.

Dilruba Ahmed's first book of poetry, *Dhaka Dust* (Graywolf, 2011), won the Bakeless Literary Prize. Her poems have appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *PEN America*, *New England Review*, and *Poetry*. New poems are recent or forthcoming in *Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Agni*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Smartish Pace*.

Ethel Rackin and Elaine Terranova

Galaxy Watch

Galaxy Love and *Death Watch* by Gerald Stern

Galaxy Love by Gerald Stern
WW Norton, 2017, 124 pages

Death Watch by Gerald Stern
Trinity University Press, 2017, 212 pages

On March 21, 2017 Elaine Terranova hosted a reading and led a discussion by Gerald Stern and Anne Marie Macari at Arch Enemy gallery in Philadelphia. This collaborative review grew out of an email correspondence, regarding the reading and Stern's latest work, between poets Ethel Rackin and Elaine Terranova.

Ethel Rackin

Gerald Stern ends his latest prose collection, *Death Watch: A View from the Tenth Decade*, with the essay "Death Poems," in which he reflects on poems by Kenneth Fearing, Dickinson, and others. In his characteristic mix of the philosophically rich, the casually inviting, and the comic, Stern ends (as he began) by acknowledging the very impossibility of such a project: essays and poems on death:

> Though there is something too peaceful about it, too Buddhistic, the feeling we are left here at the end. Shiva is over for the night, we are putting our shoes on over our socks, some black, some with clocks, some white and athletic, and we are getting ready to get up from our chairs (or boxes) and drive down—in second gear—to the Second Avenue Deli and have a plate full of whitefish or some lox and cream cheese and be almost murmurous, like birds utterly worn out from a daytime of extreme whistling, and peter down as the light leaves us, in late August where we will have to be retrieving some thick wool blankets from the blanket box, or at least a heavier sheet than usual, maybe something netted or cottony. (208)

Here at the end, we are both welcomed in and cautioned. Will the book's ending, the poet's end, be too smooth and peaceful, somehow contrived, or will the sensual details of everyday life "at least" buoy us up? Will the end simply "peter out"? Will it warm us or be "heavier . . . than usual"? How to end a book about endings?

We are left with "a few poems about the awful subject," retrieved by the poet, and by a series of luminous moments of transitory beauty that move us as only Stern can do. The poet recounts the "time a Florida Amerindian family parked their truck in front of [his] old house on the Delaware River," fished, and made supper: a dream supper, in which the speaker "was sleeping last night with someone who was a cross between Franz Kafka and Martin Buber. Latkes and sour cream. Goes well with bass. Goodnight, Irene" (212). Each moment is punctuated by its rich history, its beauty, and the fact of its passing.

Elaine Terranova

So interesting how the two new Stern books seem so interlocking in theme. Not that strange, considering what must more and more be on a 92-year-old's mind—residence on earth and looming departure. In the interview we did before his reading with Anne Marie Macari at the Arch Enemy Gallery, I asked, a little presumptuously, I realize, "Did you know you would live so long?" and "Would you have done anything differently if you had?"

Stern's lifetime has spread over nearly a century. And what a packed century, though maybe they all are. His most recent poetry collection, *Galaxy Love*, I'd never say his last, especially as he has admitted to having a whole new book ready to go, reads like a gathering of souvenirs from the world, experiences, beloved people, objects, good stories. I started in the middle of *GL*, as you, Ethel, say you started at the end of *Death Watch*. And opening there, I thought of devouring these poems the way you eat an apple, going from side to side, or maybe that would be more like eating an ear of corn.

I began at "Midrash." The title refers to an exposition or explanation of a biblical passage. In this case, not strictly so. This is a Holocaust poem. The horror of the Holocaust, after all, broke the century nearly in half. It is reminiscent of the devastating "The Dancing," one of Stern's signature poems, which commemorates the release of prisoners from the concentration camps in 1945. "Midrash" is a questioning of God and his purpose:

> The women knew the Lord was busy arguing
> with the bearded ones in a study house
> nor would He ever whisper in a poet's ear
> "All is good despite everything."
> Not that God. (50)

The subject is suffering of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis, the question, could there be a good Nazi?

A few pages on, in "Ravenous," I see that Stern too has been reading and "eating" words. "My hands are red from dictionaries / . . . but I was never a sponger, or a *schnorrer*— // but before this day is over / I will finally just eat the / one thousand year old egg / from inside the glass cabinet / that was there for display purposes only" (53).

I go left to "Route 29," then back to "No One": "No one there to remember with me / the election returns of 1931" Stern is sad to say (actually, the election took place in 1932). He has outlived so many of his cohort and certainly his family. "Aunt Bess died from forgetting" begins "Bess, Zickel, Warhol, Arendt," meaning the forgetting that characterizes Alzheimer's. I can identify. I might have had the same Aunt Bess. Warhol, a fellow Pittsburgh resident, is taken up again in *Death Watch* in the essay, "Andy."

A poetry collection can in fact be just that. What's remarkable about Stern's collection is that he seems to leave nothing out. A lifetime is an exercise of collecting, after all. I go on to maybe my favorite poem here, "Poverty," which describes "two pigs disguised as salt and pepper shakers" and nearly every other thing a poet might contain by now in his house or his life (41).

I turn to "Merwin," for admired fellow poets turn up as well, Merwin, Ritsos, and scattered along, Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, Shelley. Merwin here is a young man, mourning the Chow dog he just lost, on a walk with Stern in New York. He runs back "a whole block south" to enrich a second time a beggar with a dog, reaching out like Stern to our companions in the galaxy (46).

ER

Yes, as you put it, Elaine, Stern seems to leave nothing out of these two intertwined collections. Documents from a life well lived, despite its inevitable difficulties and disappointments, Stern's poems and prose recollections put us in mind of both the sacred and the profane. And one of the central tenets of his work continues to be the ethical dimension of what it means to be human and to be a poet.

Part of this ethos involves the act of memory, whether remembering historical atrocities or paying homage to literary ancestors and fellow travelers. As you mention, admired poets turn up throughout *Galaxy Love*, and chief among them is the Greek poet, Yannis Ritsos, who endured countless hardships, served as a member of the resistance during World War II, was exiled, and whose own work often speaks of the power of the human spirit to resist and endure. Here's the first stanza of Stern's poem "Ritsos":

> They thought if they cut off one finger at a time
> he would stop his complaining,
> but he buried his work in laundry baskets and refrigerators
> and sang, as the blue jay does,
> at the top of his voice. (63)

The comparison between poet and blue jay is significant here, not only because it figures Ritsos' power as lyric in nature, but also because the blue jay is boisterous. Singing "at the top of his voice," Ritsos (like Stern) is both virtuosic and radical in his ability to disrupt.

Speaking of animal life, *Galaxy Love* is full of creatures: from the camel in the opening poem, "The Truth" to the blue jays of "Blue Jay" and "Ritsos," to the rabbit of "Ghost," to "Dead Lamb," "Dark Blue Geese," "Goldfinches," and more. Sometimes personified, as in "Ritsos," Stern's animals are nonetheless unromanticized. Calling up John Clare or Marianne Moore, Stern's descriptions sometimes sound a bit like field notes. Take, for instance, the opening of "Ruby Red": "Watching a grackle and a cowbird have at it / over an oversize egg . . ." (58). But importantly, there is no set formula; animals exist as humans, places, politics, love, humor, and grief exist. They are part and parcel of Stern's galaxy of love.

As I listened to Anne Marie Macari, Stern's longtime companion, read from her most recent collection of poems, *Red Deer*, it occurred to me that Macari's finely tuned poems on animals must have affected Stern's work on these subjects.

ET

In the poem "Blue Jay," which comes earlier in the book than the Ritsos poem, the bird is described as cantankerous too, yet Stern identifies with it and finds reason to pity it. I like the way you put it, that "animals exist as humans," in Stern's poems. In a short film about him, *Still Burning*, Stern admits to re-reading Aesops's Fables frequently. And your words remind me of something Saul Bellow once said: "In the stories of the Jewish tradition [and I think Stern would consider himself a writer in that tradition], the world, and even the universe, have a human meaning." Certainly true of *Galaxy Love* as well as other collections of his.

Stern's emotional connection to animals is reminiscent of Yiddish folktales and the works of Yiddish writers like I.B. Singer and Isaac Babel. I'm thinking of Babel's story "Dovecote" where the protagonist is a small boy whose greatest wish is to fill a dovecote with pigeons, but is waylaid by a pogrom, and Singer's "Gimpel, the Fool," when, in response to his wife's deception, Gimpel checks in the barn to make sure that his little goat is well. He wishes her a good night and she responds, Maa, "as though to thank me for my good will." There's a Buddhist element here too, related to the suffering that unites all sentient creatures. Anne Marie Macari, as you note, also writes with compassion about animals, but it seems to me in a slightly different way. She breaks through the boundary between human and animal, tries to enter into the spirit of the "other." In "Mammoth in Snow," from *Red Deer*, for instance, she imagines herself in a future without her human form but returned at least in art as the mammoth, "When I / am just an image I'll wander all through / the long torrent-scoured tunnels, along walls / of moonmilk" (great word) to be painted on the ceiling and come "alive again with / many herds." (58)

Death Watch is an odd if intriguing memoir, a kind of *wunderkabinett*, jumping around as it does, dealing with history, remembrance, soul-searching, a perfect companion piece to *Galaxy Love*, a collection in this case of essays, almost a gloss in some cases. One deals with Stern's sister who died as a child. He invents a series of possible futures for her if she had survived. He also assumes part of her identity; she was the wild one and he the good boy. Wildness in a way came to him as the legacy of her loss. In "Transgressive Behavior," a later essay, the poet recounts with a kind of pride some of his antics and the unpopular stands he has taken on social issues, though he admits they might have come more out of the Marx Brothers "than the great 'Karl.'" There is such a madcap innocence to Stern's accounts, a trust in where the world is pointing him. He invites interaction with the reader: "Hey, I'm talking to you," he seems to say. And in the poems too there's an intimacy, a sense of confiding, not confession.

Ethel, you talk about the ending of the book and the essay "Death Poems." Here Stern searches well-known poems as if to find a "good end." He has lived by literature and seems to want to die by it. In "New Year's Party," a little irony in that title, Stern receives from a friend the gift of four books about death and dying. One that especially captures his interest is *Being Dead* by Jim Crace, so much so that he spends several pages retelling the plot. He's so taken by the author's exactitude about the processes of death, he wonders if Crace might be a biologist. But a better explanation might be that the protagonists are zoologists; this is how they themselves would explain the disintegration of their bodies by natural processes.

ER

It is interesting that you mention the disintegration of the body, Elaine, since one of the threads of *Death Watch*, which lends the book a kind of narrative drama, is the poet's search for his place of burial. Early on, in the essay "Trip to Kehilat HaNahar Synagogue," Stern first mentions his time spent with the former rabbi Sandy Parrian, looking at graveyards in and around Lambertville, New Jersey, the beautiful river town which, for many years, the poet made his home. The essay "Cemeteries in Lambertville" delves in deeper, offering further description and recounting author of *The Whole Death Catalog* Harold Schechter's views on the death process in zany detail, followed by a discussion of views on cremation within various religions, the poet's own ambivalence, and his parents' deaths.

What strikes me about these passages is Stern's frankness in the face of death, his willingness to look at its terrors and mysteries head on with both solemnity and humor, as well as the continuing importance of place. For Stern, place functions both as a physical, historical marker in the world with which we are familiar and as a portal to the less concrete, though no less vital world of mystery, dream, and imagination.

One of my favorite of Stern's descriptions of place falls at the beginning of the essay entitled "Lost in Time":

> It was yesterday, September 24, 2013, while driving north along the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River that I had my wild argument with time. That was one of the most perfect rides I took—every day—all during the 1970s, crossing the bridge from Riegelsville, New Jersey, to Riegelsville, Pennsylvania, and driving up 611 to my home on old 611, between the canal and the river. . . . It was not that I was "lost in time" or "forgetful," or suffering from either illusion or delusion. Although I was suffering from what I have to call temporal identity, though it was a pleasant kind of suffering and not a crisis of any sort. (60–61)

What follows is a meditation on the nature of time, which mentions important books "on the issue" that Stern "had available on [his] second floor," as well as a passage on the poet's old house in Raubsville, Pennsylvania as a heavenly place (63). Once again, the actualities of daily life, including the diaristic mention of "yesterday," open onto questions of literary legacy and ontology, rendering all of it somehow more luminescent, resonant, real.

Elaine, you discuss Stern's *Death Watch* as a kind of *wunderkabinett*, jumping around as it does, which is equally true of the poems of *Galaxy Love*. Ultimately, the power of Stern's associative imagination recalls Robert Bly's theory of leaping poetry from the 1960s, in which Bly traces poetic movement or range of association in the work of his contemporaries. For Bly, such leaps represent a movement from "an object or idea soaked in unconscious substance to an object or idea soaked in conscious psychic substance" (4). This process is evident in Stern's "Hamlet Naked," in which the speaker wanders into a "theater west on 47th," where a lewd version of *Hamlet* plays, only to later encounter "Gregory Corso playing the harmonica, / Diana Trilling with a toy cello" "one day on Avenue A" (107–108). From the bowels of the theater's interior, to a dream-like stroll through a city itself described as changing, to the comedy of sighting "a learned / couple with a five-year old, all three [with] / matching neckties," Stern's poem, like much of his work, is populated with a series of "conscious psychic" shifts.

The end of "Hamlet Naked" reads:

> in New York a crowd can form in a second, think
> of Gregory, a blue jay on his head,
> think of Diana seeing a live rat,
> think of me lying on the gunnysacks
> my left arm up
> conducting. (108)

Finally, we are the crowd, and all is animated. How fortunate we are to have Stern as our conductor. ◂

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Elaine Terranova has published six collections of poems, most recently *Dollhouse*, which won the 2013 Off the Grid Press contest. New or forthcoming work appears in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Women's Review of Books*, and *Mom Egg Review*. Her awards include the Walt Whitman Award, NEA and Pew fellowships, and a Pushcart Prize. She is presently working on a memoir.

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MARIANNE BORUCH

two poems

In Dürer's Engraving

Adam gets three for his privates—a triplet affair
as in poison ivy, as in the venerable
box elder. Eve, one wide leaf
or it could be a smashed, very sorry rose. I need
better glasses. Engravings
take time. And still Adam looks at her—
curious or just wary, was love
invented yet?—and she, only at the snake wrapped
sensibly for balance around a young tree.
An apple. Sure, *the* apple,
okay tempting enough, even as E and A stand there
fully bodied and souled, not terribly young, years
to build up such muscle (Adam), such flesh (Eve) though
I can't say they're long in the tooth. Nary a tooth
to scare that garden. The rumor: no weapons, no way.
Those creatures in the foreground or behind,
oblivious or bored with each other as prey in whatever
shaft of light for naps: a mouse, a cat,
an ox, etcetera, each different-dreaming day or night if any
beyond the likes of us dream. Curly hair (Eve, with her
lots more), side by side, roughly same
height, breadth, the standard
wedding pose—minus outfits—except
between them the snake so soon to be famous
I almost forget Eve's set there to
take her bite. Hunger's urgent echoing no end-to-it,
but whose, and for what. . . .
Because Dürer *is* a tad ambiguous.
Maybe the snake's merely
a snake famished at this point, mouth
wide open at, on that apple
right out of Eve's hand. And she's not generous,
or just can't imagine—
And will not not not release. Maybe that's
the bloody real thorn of it.
No sound in the garden. And closer, so much
weirdity to love. Which one, Adam
or Eve smarter, more full of wanting, of bravado,
wonder, all grief finally but first
able to talk those animals into lounging about,
no vengeance, no tricks, assuming
chats with a snake don't count. I'm not sure what counts.
Or who's even counting though the parrot
(a parrot? large, strange in that setting, a so-what-if-
history-begins-as-some-mythic-dire-reboot
all over him) looks away, in profile, ready to tell not yet
the again again
calm enough on a branch held high by
the first man. Now a distant *just let me lie here*,
an apple, to take or to give.
It's those was-and-will-be stories my whole life
with a fuck-up inside. Starting sweet,
out of place. Pre-unbearable.

Susanna and the Elders

No, there really are
protocols of submission, my longest-running
friend in the world tells me, a noted historian of maps
and chaos, cities back to blood,
to ancient, those tide-battered fleets
seen through a cloud,
then a fever. My friend who brilliant-darks the old wars,
the hard deliberate they do and do
to heads once attached . . . So I think past
the noisy solace of chickens
centuries crossing courtyards, near children grateful now
for one toy in the briefest childhoods on Earth,
toward boys conscripted as men for murder and revenge,
no choice in the matter. And always
what's done to the private parts of women who
days or for a lifetime refuse—closed eyes—to discuss it,
whatever medieval age we live in.

Protocol, such an elegant word. So *submission*
might pick up grace the way
suffering is framed for the wall, at least a kind of
please, tell the others
in sacred drafty spaces where the old
still pray their rosaries. Sometimes
their lips move.

In Rome, in a certain church, I liked best our gazing rapt
at the Caravaggios though I mixed up
this part: his doing a Susanna at all. Later it seemed
right to get it wrong, my recall where
she never was, sure he'd brought her out of that gloom
with his deepest cobalt, rose madder a flare.
And the well-off dignified lechers too, who hide and peer
as she bathes oblivious, all beyond-body joy, she
of the secret places standard for the young,
those elders agog in their
sick dream, grave glimmer of brush after brush
marking that window of their pleasure.

You can write it off
as apocryphal, my swearing I saw such a thing.
But under the earth are
tremors and at sea bottom the most horrific-looking fish
show off their battle scars.
Susanna not knowing, but our knowing, private
to public, the past into present as
submission, the future making of that a *protocol*
because history must do its job of
endless awful recording, because mere memory
is clearly finite.

In those churches, they're shrewd
how they light the great paintings. It's funny
then isn't—the suddenly stopped, the clicking off
every few minutes. No way to see,
as though time itself hasn't started yet, no way
to understand this world until someone works a coin
from a pocket and drops it
into the box on the wall. *For the poor,*
the sign said, still might say.
And Susanna, wherever she is, flooded luminous
all over again unaware of
her beauty. Or her fate to be so remembered.

MARIANNE BORUCH's most recent poetry collection, *Eventually One Dreams the Real Thing*, was cited as a "Most Loved Book of 2016" by *The New Yorker*. University of Michigan Press published her third book of essays last spring—*The Little Death of Self*—in its "Poets on Poetry" series. Her forthcoming collection, from Copper Canyon, is *We Jumped out of a Hole to Stand Here Radiant*.

YUKI TANAKA

Homecoming

In the heart of a forest, a boy leans on
a light-lashed horse. He's not crying.
The horse unhurt, just as a husk
is unhurt. Lost in the forest, stroking

the frosted skin of its muscular neck,
he looks far ahead. Someone waiting.
He thinks, Make our journey last
a little longer. Say: it was a small

beautiful town. He was loved by friends.
No, he says, he had only the horse. Horse
made of white threads. Pull them out,
and the horse would lose its strength

and collapse into a man. The idea
is comforting. He could tell the horse,
who is now a man, he is tired
and cannot go on.

Born and raised in Yamaguchi, Japan, YUKI TANAKA is currently an MFA student at the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas–Austin. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Best New Poets*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Poetry*, and elsewhere. His translations of modern Japanese poetry (with Mary Jo Bang) have appeared in *New Republic*, *Paris Review*, and *A Public Space*.