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CAROLINA EBEID

What Hereafter's Like
& Other Poems

TOI DERRICOTTE

Six Poems

KAZIM ALI

Phosphorus &
The Unlikely Event
of a Water Landing

ALICIA OSTRIKER

Poetry & Healing



CAROLINA EBEID

New Poems by

NICKY BEER
JOSHUA JENNIFER ESPINOZA
AMAUD JAMAUJ JOHNSON
EMILIA PHILLIPS
GERALD STERN



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four poems

from *M Notebooks*

there are moments when terror breaks
into something brighter & the brighter
thought cocoons the mind

*

sea will listen
for immigrants, refugees
over which a message travels
substance between continents
for migrations, traders, mapmakers
over which a person flees
over which a quest unfolds, a question

*

Mendieta

who had to fly over the ocean
a grieve ability, a grave able place

hollow of a torso, fill it with animal blood
gunpowder, feathers, mud
look how it un-things a person

*

Silueta

silhouette for the feeling of *in-front-of*
silhouette for the feeling of *during*, of *upon*
here: a *beneath* silhouette, an *along* silhouette
silhouette for *instead-of*
silhouette for the feeling of *in-spite-of*

*

find a river among
your major organs: windpipe
or somesuch throughway

add diver birds, add floating tires
add cordgrass, add glass

now a wondrous widening
trail of roil-water after
a ship as it sails farther
& more violently away

*

M Myrrh Mariumeh
Murmur Maria
Myriam Ma Ma
Mary Mimicry

Mimicry of a nightbird
she will hide
 then be heard
 then hide
 then be heard.

*

Things that suggest the construction of subjectivity:

nests built with the mouthfuls of mud
girl winding herself in laundry drying
Giacometti mongrel / Giacometti tree
weeks of tracing over braille
ice in the palm, snow forts thawing
Search & Rescue team out in snow

asylum light, deer sheltered there
glinting flashlights on the crystals
words drifting out in clouds

*

Things that fall from the sky:

Stars & prices & peril fall fell in temperatures
& leaves spirit & persons fell into dumps into love
Sometimes the girl's the fall guy Remember
those countries that fell? Out of favor
off the map Queens, the dollar, a father
fell to pieces Wooden words fell
short, fatal from planes the flame
retardant substance fell red with ferric oxide
to mark where it had been dropped You're falling
off the cart out of grace on your sword
a falling curtain in the back of the throat (Applause
applause) fall asleep fall apart

What Hereafter's Like

what day drinking's like, like the sensation
of swimming without goggles in cold
water chlorine burn holding hands, what
listening through a stethoscope is like, oh
glowing second trimester—*la luna é più bella*—
what startling awaking in the middle-
of-day to the middle-of-nowhere is like
what looking up at Mt. Rushmore is like
what touching an enemy's face is like

what it was like to play a flute that was
carved from an ulna found in a bird
that formed part of an omen in flight (whose
entrails spoke further darker messages)
in the extravagant petaling of night

Goodbye & Applaud Us

[*sense of sight*]

the smaller mammalian specimens
tamped flat & packed in trays—

their bones gnawed clean by meticulous
beetles & stored in boxes alongside

their pelts a way to save space

in paradise

[*sense of smell*]

morgue light, crisp & everlasting

[*sense of sound*]

mine a lowland one
mine will gibber & brux

it would build its chamber nest
mud hair prairie grass

to resemble random field debris
& hide any underlying structure

[sense of taste]

sister radiology,
notice here

in the cranium—
night & notmorning

left/right handed hemispheres
crisscrossing with air traffic

sweep the sensor
over this ground
god of hazard
minefield god

[sense of touch]

look at the king
reach his hand into
the tree & gold
turns the tree

voilà cloud-swing birds
those birds gold-touched
in midair

Shape

The scroll is a shape that keeps returning. It's old and circular. It contains a vertical nature (this is why we use the electronic verb *to scroll*, which is how you may be reading this). The scroll corresponds to the hermeneutical act of reading and writing. In the legend of Saint Romanos the Melodious, we are told his voice is like hearing metal scraping upon metal. He is visited by the Virgin Mary in a dream. She offers a scroll for him to swallow. When he wakes, he wakes with a mellifluous song-voice and a genius for composing music of praise and lament.

carried away *carry a tune*

Bed space → Dream mouth → The involuted surface of the parchment she hands him → The choral hymn inside → The white musical pause for an intake of breath → Before that blank was parchment was animal skin → Epidermic space of that blank → The younger the babe the more transparent the skin, the smoother, the more exquisite → Bay of gravid cattle, of kine, the kindred ovine → In utero space after space after space → The width of the palm, kind palm to harvest the calf after calf after calf → Skin so translucent so light-sent → So light, sheets made of meat for the beautiful-letter →

CAROLINA EBEID is the author of *You Ask Me to Talk About the Interior* (Noemi Press). She is a student in the PhD program in creative writing at the University of Denver. She has won fellowships from CantoMundo, the Stadler Center for Poetry, and the NEA. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *The Rumpus*, *PEN America*, and *jubilat*. She helps edit the *Denver Quarterly*.

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six poems

The intimates

In the stalls, we ladies hear
each other pee. I watch her
feet. Unashamedly, she
unrolls the toilet paper, *thrump, thrump, thrump*.
Her shoes are
sturdy beige—*perhaps she's a librarian?*
She definitely has a job!—and she pees
solidly, in a forceful stream
that ends with a quick,
assured finish.

As my writing changes, I think with sorrow of those who couldn't change

I am thinking with sorrow of those who couldn't change,
of those who committed suicide, Plath, Sexton, Berryman,
of Hemingway with the gun in his mouth;
of Ralph Ellison who would not support young black writers—
they weren't good enough, he said,
not as good as he was—
but who never finished his second book;
of Anatole Broyard, who couldn't write the autobiographical novel
that he had been paid to write
because he couldn't write the first truth—
that all those years he had been drama critic
for the NY Times, he had been passing for white.
And there are those who face the truth the first time,
then, when that truth changes, they can't do it again,
as if the old truth made
a self so vain they can't let it go.
And I think of the great writers who DO change:
Jerry Stern, in his 90's, writing two new books a year—
his publishers can't keep up!—
poetry; and prose that I love as much as the old awarded
poetry books, because it shows so clearly
the bare fluctuations of a brilliant mind.

After the Gwendolyn Brooks reading

She sits at the book-signing table with a colorful
African wrap tied around her head. She may have her chin
in her palm, elbow on the table, as if resting her brain
(that silvery Jell-O in its luminous oyster shell) as she listens
intently to each one of the churchwomen
who have come on a bus in large church hats. They squawk
with joy as they hand her bedraggled books
taken down from their most honored shelves;
& she, who conceived of Maud Martha (that woman who, by sparing
a kitchen mouse, discovered, unfurling, her own great wings
of compassion), talks to each one, letting them
take as many pictures as they like, sandwiched between them—
small, dignified, and perfectly at ease.

Souvenir

She bought
an African gold weight—half
the size of her thumb (typically
various sexual poses—this one,



doggie style), and pointed out
that the woman
was being raped. How can you tell?
Because his little hand (perfectly
formed, each finger
small as a letter
in a book) is
over her mouth.

Homage

In a marble stall
of the third floor bathroom
at the University of Pittsburgh,
on a wall to your right
as you're sitting, a woman
has written (with a black marker)
lines of a poem by Lucille Clifton.

*come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.*

Either copied from a book
or remembered by heart,
written with a firm,
defiant hand.
Once Lucille
packed a tent at Dodge
with 20,000 people.
Here she has
an audience
of one, the pee
spilling out, the bowels
with their steamy
stink. I tried to see
if I could
rub it off,
but the ink

is permanent.
A slave might leave
the message
in a private place,
pointing.
To every woman
who lowers herself,
pass it on.

Watching a roach give birth on YouTube,
I think of Lucille Clifton meeting God

come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.
—Lucille Clifton

When I watch it push out
the purse (half
the size of its own body) that contains
a hundred jelly-
like nymphs & takes a molasses-
slow twenty-four hours—I wonder
is she—
like us!—pushing
with all she’s got? Or is hers a
painless birth, like we like to think
of The Virgin Mary’s, without
a smear
of shit or blood? Why does God
make every damn
female
have to work
so hard & suffer? Lucille, even after
breast cancer, even after her
kidneys failed & the twice weekly
dialysis, didn’t get really
mad at God until her youngest
girl, Fredericka,
died of a brain tumor
at 35. Then she didn’t speak
to God
for years. Not until her granddaughter
Bailey was born
did she give thanks
again, saying,
part of her lost
daughter had returned. How she loved
& praised it all. Toward the end,
she told me she wasn’t
angry at God anymore, but that,
when she got to heaven,
she had some
very tough questions
for him. Once Lucille visited

a grade school in Maryland
where, walking through the library, she noticed
a distinct
lack of color
on the shelves. Where are the books
with black
children in them, she asked. The assured
librarian had a swift
reply: “We don’t have any
black children in this school, so we don’t need
those books,” she said. “Well, you don’t
have any
bunnies in this school either, but you seem to have
plenty of books
about bunnies.”
Poor God, I thought, who,
having made
her shining brain—our brilliant Morning
Star—must have seen
Her coming.

TOI DERRICOTTE’S most recent book is *The Undertaker’s Daughter*. She received the 2012 Paterson Poetry Prize for Sustained Literary Achievement and the 2012 PEN/ Voelcker Award for Poetry, as well as fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation. With Corne- lius Eady, she co-founded Cave Canem in 1996. She has served on the Academy of American Poets’ Board of Chancellors.

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MICHAEL MCGRIFF

three poems

Equinox

As we lie here, the peacocks
throw down their cries
of oiled ribbon and hot wax
through the hydraulic night

while Ursa Major
loops your name
across one black postcard
after another.

The rhododendrons
are speaking in tongues.
The sea has lost count
of its dead.

Along the ridge of your body,
the music of trace chains,
the light of the plough.

The alders raise their masts
and hammer out
their ancient telegrams.

On the floor,
in my shirt pocket,
are eight metric bolts
calling out
to some lost machine
of winter.

Property

The deer cut a thin path
from the creek,
through the field,
along the crooked teeth
of the fence,
past the stiff ears
of the mule pen,
and into the underbrush
at the wood's edge.

The pipeline surveyors
have trespassed
again, and again
I gather their bright flags.

The moon gathers
evidence against us
and waits for its moment.

The path crawls from the creek
like a sentence
starting with the words
“I wonder”

and ends with a hooved ellipse
that bleeds into a clearing
circled by a stand of alders.

Our Water

It left the glasses cloudy
and stank of centipedes.

It bubbled from the ground
where the bears drank,

where the springtraps
held their mouths open

and the skunk cabbage
went crazy in the ravine.

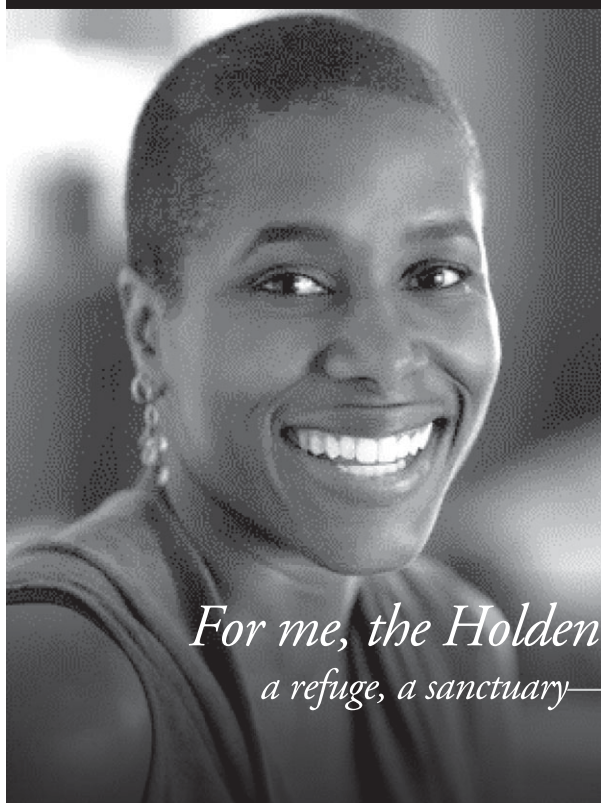
My sister's hair
turned the color
of a salamander's belly

and my teeth went gray
as the bathwater we all shared
on Sunday nights.

Our water, my father explained,
just ran a little rich.

MICHAEL MCGRIFF's recent books of poetry include *Early Hour* (Copper Canyon Press, 2017) and *Black Postcards* (Willow Springs Books, 2017). He teaches creative writing at the University of Idaho.

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Natalie Baszile (2007),
author of *Queen Sugar*

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Poetry and Healing

Some Moments of Wholeness

I

. . . *An axe for the frozen sea within us.* —Franz Kafka

Poetry can be healing in two ways that I think everyone recognizes. Reading poems can be healing for the reader in need of solace; writing poems can be healing for the writer in need of release from fear, shame, guilt, and repression. But what do we mean by healing? To heal is not the same as to cure; it is more mysterious, more ambiguous. The etymology of the word tells us that “heal” is from old English and Proto-German words meaning “make whole.” But then—what do we mean by wholeness?

Ten years ago, my husband was in hospital with a vulnerable heart for a week, a week I had trouble sleeping. The nurses made a bed for me in his room, where I wanted to be “in case something happened.” In the still of the night, the lines on the monitor above my husband’s head zigzagging up and down, I said poems to myself. Whitman. Shakespeare. Gerard Manley Hopkins. Poems I love. They carried me through the night. Over the years teaching creative writing workshops and poetry in literature classes, I used to require students to memorize a poem a week, 14 lines minimum, of their own choice, because someday they might find themselves in hospital, in jail, in the army, in a homeless shelter, depressed, or just sleepless, and it would be really good if they could have some poems in storage to call on. Well, they didn’t think they could do this but they could, and what they brought us was always wonderful. Wonderful because they chose it.

In a sense, *any poem one loves is a healing poem*. It is there for you when you need it. And always I believe what happens is that through a poem we may attain a moment of wholeness. Flesh and spirit may merge for an instant, self and other, self and world may acknowledge their unity. Language and the reality that language can only gesture at and never touch—sometimes it can touch. Be touched. The unspeakable can be spoken.

I think of a friend who, after her husband died at 55, kept saying that she, an avid prose reader, could only read poetry for the first year of widowhood. It eased and addressed grief in ways that prose could not. I think of a vet in a workshop I taught whose PTSD had made him suicidal—“Poetry saved my life,” he told me. I think of the ACT UP motto Silence = Death and how important poetry has been for many AIDS patients. I think of Shostakovich, making the claim in *Testimony*, his memoir of the Stalin years, that

*I think of Kafka saying a poem
should be an axe for
the frozen sea within us.*

Art destroys Silence. I think of Kafka saying a poem should be an axe for the frozen sea within us. “The moment of change is the only poem,” says Adrienne Rich, hoping since girlhood “to change the laws of history” and studying “how we can use what we have to create what we need.” “No more masks! No more mythologies!” cries Muriel Rukeyser, who is one of our great poets of healing. “Remember what they tell you to forget!” She exclaims this three times in “Double Ode,” a poem of exorcism composed near the end of her life. Moving among the “anti-touch people,” Rukeyser vows as “a violent woman in a violent world . . . I will try to be non-violent / one more day.” And here are Rukeyser’s three lines in “Islands,” melting away the myth that human beings are isolated egos incapable of true communication:

Oh for God’s sake
They are connected
Underneath.

Notice how that first line can be said in a tone of exasperation or of reverence. Yes, isn’t it obvious, we are connected underneath, at the sea floor of our psyches, and that is what makes poetry possible. That is what makes poetry necessary. That is what makes poetry sacred—for God’s sake. If at the sea floor of our psyches we find, among other things, hurt that yearns for healing, hurt that is simultaneously personal and collective trauma—the poem rushes to the trauma as red blood cells rush to a wound.

II

Poems for others unseen and unborn —Muriel Rukeyser

Let me share with you some poems that enter the body of trauma which is understood as simultaneously personal and collective—or, rather, that *contain* trauma, not making it disappear but recognizing its reality and finding ways to live with it and yet transcend it. The poem must acknowledge the hurt. No *healing* without *diagnosis*. Here is Rukeyser:

POEM

I lived in the first century of world wars.
Most mornings I would be more or less insane.
The news would pour out of various devices
The newspapers would arrive with their careless stories,
Interrupted by attempts to sell products to the unseen.
I would call my friends on other devices;
They would be more or less mad for similar reasons.
Slowly I would get to pen and paper,
Make my poems for others unseen and unborn.
In the day I would be reminded of those men and women,
Brave, setting up signals across vast distances,
Considering a nameless way of living, of almost unimagined values.
As the lights darkened, as the lights of night brightened,
We would try to imagine them, try to find each other,
To construct peace, to make love, to reconcile
Waking with sleeping, ourselves with each other,
Ourselves with ourselves. We would try by any means
To reach the limits of ourselves, to reach beyond ourselves,
To let go the means, to wake.

I lived in the first century of these wars.

The end of this poem is shocking. Rukeyser lived in the first century of world wars. We may be living in the second century of them. The poem does not say the wars will stop. It offers no false hope. It says we can try to find healing all the more intensively just because of the wars. A week ago on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, the young rabbi spoke of healing and said that we are all broken and healing at the same time, constantly decaying and regenerating at the same time. I think he was saying that we must accept suffering but not surrender to it. Does that make sense? Here is Adam Zagajewski’s poem “Try to Praise the Mutilated World”:

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June’s long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of wine, the dew.
The nettles that methodically overgrow
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.
You’ve seen the refugees heading nowhere,
you’ve heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth’s scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the grey feather a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.

The rupture of exile, the arrogance of wealth, the joyful executioners—this poem written many years ago seems to speak to us in the voice of today’s headlines. Is this a poem of healing? It seems so to me, precisely because it acknowledges the ineluctable simultaneity of mutilation and wholeness. Yusef Komunyakaa’s poem “Facing It” does something similar, very subtly, as it encounters the Vietnam Wall:

My black face fades,
 hiding inside the black granite.
 I said I wouldn't
 dammit: No tears.
 I'm stone. I'm flesh.
 My clouded reflection eyes me
 like a bird of prey, the profile of night
 slanted against morning. I turn
 this way—the stone lets me go.
 I turn that way—I'm inside
 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
 again, depending on the light
 to make a difference.
 I go down the 58,022 names,
 half-expecting to find
 my own in letters like smoke.
 I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
 I see the boobey trap's white flash
 Names shimmer on a woman's blouse
 but when she walks away
 the names stay on the wall.
 Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's
 wings cutting across my stare.
 The sky. A plane in the sky.
 A white vet's image floats
 closer to me, then his pale eyes
 look through mine. I'm a window.
 He's lost his right arm
 inside the stone. In the black mirror
 a woman's trying to erase names:
 No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

A key line in this poem of acute inner and outer description is "I'm stone. I'm flesh." In a flash, this poem makes me conscious that every one of us is both stone and flesh. Is it a coincidence that the poem ends with an image of everyday connection and affection? I don't think so. I go back to the poem's opening and notice that Komunyakaa at first *resists* healing. "No tears" means no healing is possible. The images of the poem's first half are grim: the poet sees himself as a bird of prey. At the poem's center is the intolerable mention of the over 58,000 dead American servicemen. Then

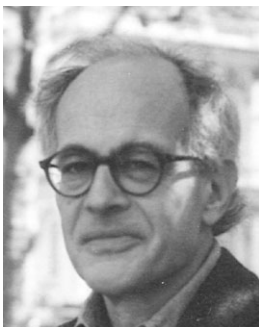
the images begin to blur, the poet is both inside and outside the stone, is simultaneously himself and a disabled white man, is a window gazing at a mirror, and becomes able to see that the names can't be erased but that life renews itself.

One of the great healing poems of my time is "Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100," the title poem of a 2003 book by Martín Espada. It is dedicated to "the 43 members of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 100, working at the Windows on the World restaurant, who lost their lives in the attack on the World Trade Center." The English translation of "alabanza" is "praise." In a monologue of mourning in the musical "In the Heights," the poet-playwright-actor Lin-Manuel Miranda says the word means "to raise this / Thing to God's face / And to sing, quite literally: 'Praise to this.'" Here is Espada's poem, in which the worldly and the other-worldly meet, just as they do in Rukeyser's, Zagajewski's, and Komunyakaa's poems:

Alabanza. Praise the cook with a shaven head
 and a tattoo on his shoulder that said Oye,
 a blue-eyed Puerto Rican with people from Fajardo,
 the harbor of pirates centuries ago.
 Praise the lighthouse in Fajardo, candle
 glimmering white to worship the dark saint of the sea.
Alabanza. Praise the cook's yellow Pirates cap
 worn in the name of Roberto Clemente, his plane
 that flamed into the ocean loaded with cans for Nicaragua,
 for all the mouths chewing the ash of earthquakes.
Alabanza. Praise the kitchen radio, dial clicked
 even before the dial on the oven, so that music and Spanish
 rose before bread. Praise the bread. *Alabanza.*

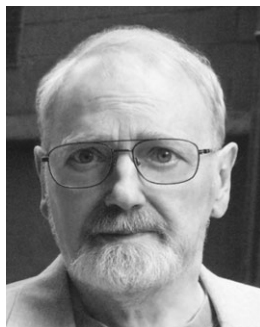
Praise Manhattan from a hundred and seven flights up,
 like Atlantis glimpsed through the windows of an ancient aquarium.
 Praise the great windows where immigrants from the kitchen
 could squint and almost see their world, hear the chant of nations:
Ecuador, México, Republica Dominicana,
Haiti, Yemen, Ghana, Bangladesh.
Alabanza. Praise the kitchen in the morning,
 where the gas burned blue on every stove
 and exhaust fans fired their diminutive propellers,
 hands cracked eggs with quick thumbs

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or sliced open cartons to build an altar of cans.
Alabanza. Praise the busboy’s music, the *chime-chime* of his dishes and silverware in the tub.

Alabanza. Praise the dish-dog, the dishwasher who worked that morning because another dishwasher could not stop coughing, or because he needed overtime to pile the sacks of rice and beans for a family floating away on some Caribbean island plagued by frogs.
Alabanza. Praise the waitress who heard the radio in the kitchen and sang to herself about a man gone. *Alabanza*.

After the thunder wilder than thunder,
after the shudder deep in the glass of the great windows,
after the radio stopped singing like a tree full of terrified frogs,
after night burst the dam of day and flooded the kitchen,
for a time the stoves glowed in darkness like the lighthouse in Fajardo,
like a cook’s soul. Soul I say, even if the dead cannot tell us
about the bristles of God’s beard because God has no face,
soul I say, to name the smoke-beings flung in constellations
across the night sky of this city and cities to come.
Alabanza I say, even if God has no face.

Alabanza. When the war began, from Manhattan and Kabul
two constellations of smoke rose and drifted to each other,
mingling in icy air, and one said with an Afghan tongue:
Teach me to dance. We have no music here.
And the other said with a Spanish tongue:
I will teach you. Music is all we have.

III
The door sill
Where the two worlds touch
—Rumi

The poems I have cited here are all explicitly tied to time and place, while reaching outward to encompass larger circumferences. Seemingly quite different yet in some ways very parallel to Espada’s poem is Lucille Clifton’s “Tuesday 9/11/11,” which with the lightest of gestures asserts that the

destruction of the twin towers changed everything for Americans—but not in the way we usually think:

Thunder and lightning and our world
Is another place no day
Will ever be the same no blood
Untouched

They know this storm in otherwheres
Israel Ireland Palestine
But God has blessed America
We sing


And God has blessed America
To learn that no one is exempt
The world is one all fear

Is one all life all death
Is one

In essence, Clifton’s poem is making the claim that the violence against us as Americans is something natural, “storm . . . thunder and lightning,” teaching us the lesson that we are not “exempt” from the terrorism that afflicts others, and that this trauma can be seen as a blessing if it makes us recognize our link to the rest of the world. It is a radical claim. But is Clifton’s poem a poem of healing? For me it is, even though the mass of my fellow citizens do not seem to have learned the poet’s lesson. America’s “greatness” for many of us depends on being exceptional, or “exempt,” as Clifton says, and we see where that leads: to war and more war. But for me the oneness Clifton invokes, oneness of fear, life, death, ourselves and others, lets me feel able to go on through the storm of our times.
At times, the healing a poem invokes may take the form of a dream journey through the natural world. We might think of two of the world’s great epics, “The Odyssey” and “The Divine Comedy,” as templates of dream journeys leading from brokenness to wholeness. The title poem of Jean Valentine’s *Door in the Mountain* is a miniature version:

I was carrying a dead deer
Tied on to my neck and shoulders


Deer legs hanging in front of me
Heavy on my chest




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People are not wanting
To let me in

Door in the mountain
Let me in

Part of the magic here is that we cannot tell if that last line is a beseeching request for something that has not happened and may never happen—solace, acceptance, renewal—or if it is a declaration of something that has happily, against all odds, happened. It can be either. And we must guess for ourselves, by our own interior experiences of despair and hope, what that mountain is, what that door is, what blocks us, what allows us entry. Here is another poem that invites us to cross over from one place to another, this one by the thirteenth-century Persian poet Rumi:

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the door sill
Where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.

What are those two worlds? Are they life and death, brokenness and wholeness, the material and the spiritual, the two halves of one's brain sitting quietly in one's skull? Finally let me share one last poem, although I can think of dozens that carry the balm of healing for me, and in fact any poem that one loves is a poem of healing. This is Jane Kenyon's "Let Evening Come."

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

There are moments of wholeness, of healing, of being awake, of carrying our burden through the door, of ceasing to be afraid . . . to which a poem summons us, and we are there, and then it lets us go. ◀

ALICIA OSTRIKER is the author of more than ten poetry collections, including *Waiting for the Light* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), *The Old Woman, the Tulip, and the Dog* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), and *At the Revelation Restaurant and Other Poems* (Marick Press, 2010).



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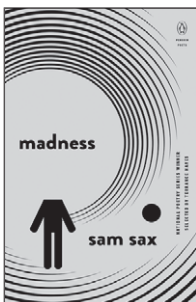
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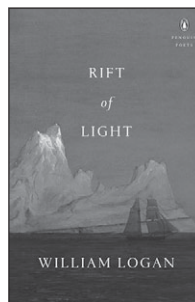
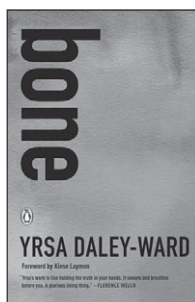
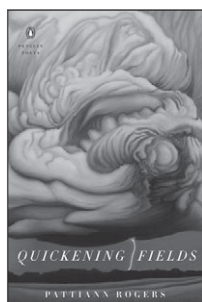
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Foreword by Kiese Laymon

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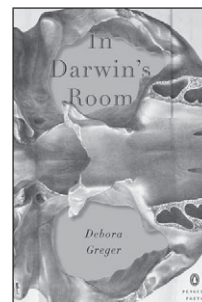
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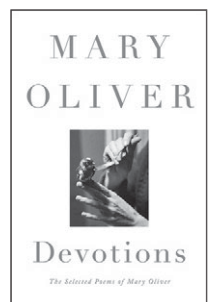
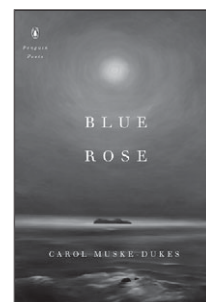
—Linda Gregerson.

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two poems

Phosphorus

Is it true then that Berlin is a city you write yourself against
 Rather than like New York or Paris which write themselves
 into you
 That the city itself has no voice or if it has one it agrees to mute
 itself against the noise of your own life

Or is it a chorus of voices sedimented
 A voice in which the present life is overlaid
 on voices from history
 An aural palimpsest
 Ghost town with golden cobblestones to stumble upon

For example on this night seven years ago I was getting ready
 to go to a party where ready to dance
 we ended up not dancing but talking
 about how far away
 From our families we all were

Where I put my arm around my friends to try to keep them
 In my life but didn't we scatter like people scatter
 One of those friends died on a winter hike,
 another moved to Berlin, and the last I lost touch with
 but heard from a friend he had gone to Moldova to teach English

Voices like on the old answering machine when the tape
 had been recorded on over and over again
 Like those old messages left for each other
 When you called a lover you would try to leave a very long message
 to use up the whole tape so he knew your absent passion

It's a bad metaphor because the lover in question is married now,
 has a house, a wife, stepchildren, a whole domestic life
 I called him once and left the message I never heard back did he hear it or
 did she

Am I Hesperus the Son of Evening who like Orpheus looks back at what's
 gone

Or Phosphorus light-bringer Son of Morning looking to uncover what's next

*

Bodies that walk through
 the world represent spectacular confluence of historic possibilities
 Playing out over millennia
 The men I've loved all of them have been dark, quiet, deep, passive
 I was always the fire

Perhaps that is why I linger in cities of beauty,
 want to myself lie down and be ravished, even brutalized
 Fair to say even on my good days I'm not the wisest decision-maker
 Lost in the sunset at the Brandenburg Gate the brass band plays
 Of all the music in the world to choose from American rock and roll

In crystal frequency the rock talks to the water
 Inside your body sounds resound
 Everyone asks me questions and I do not answer
 I just say whatever I feel like and no one cross-examines me
 I don't want to tell about how I only unleash my shame to wander when I

Oh but that's one of the things I want to not tell—

City not of my city

Forty days pass and what am I now

An account of old losses depends on the archive of flesh

A person is not made new but quivers in place



Never to make or exist exit evince evict
 All old lovers and friends linger a river that winds
 Along years long he corners what he can make
 Follows the pattern of wind
 Why were you really afraid

You believe you are wicked but it's the world
 that changes position
 No one will care for you
 And yet you are held down or held up
 Be not abandoned the wind has its own demands

Always you are afraid to say
 You were not loved
 You have no family
 This is how you disappear
 We learned how to live how to speak

Trees my familiar ones fallen in the storm
 Our house is in danger the storm touches down
 All flies into the sky the stream the years we lived there
 Flow through me and say will the boy ever be happy
 Sound of crystal sound of a glass harmonica

The length of a life spun by the younger sister cut by the older
 Lachesis the forgotten one middle child who turns the thread in her hands
 You breathe a sigh of relief because you think I am the son
 in the old story or the sister who is weaving the thread
 that I am Ishmael and God spared me

So my father could learn to love me
 so I could help save my other sister
 but you misunderstand
 I am not Isaac nor Ishmael nor any other untold son
 in this story I am the ram I am Lachesis worrying the thread

*

W	H	A	T
I	F	I	W
O	N	D	E
R	E	D	H
A	U	L	I
N	G	O	R
H	A	U	N
T	E	D	.

*

Translator of shadows invite the waking the world
 Grey filmed by rain
 Rain not even present but suffusing the experience
 More unfamiliar in the world
 A dream book is one in which you have to record

But I won't
 Sound always lets you
 But what if
 Just what if
 Sound was a metaphor for something past it

You're setting up vibrational patterns
 An echo of language a song to trick the dead from the other side
 Vibration is only one sound of it
 An echo of the sound unmade
 Unstruck

Your body itself an "echo" of unstruck sound?
 Evidence in the waking world of the dream
 All of this unreal
 Playing out in ripples
 Something spoken unspoken

Poem unspoken
 Leaves falling, wind, long-missed lover
 I drink the crystal stone-infused water
 I try to remember but there is nothing to remember
 A room or a city seen through a window

Square it is a city with a real geography
 Page a place you actually happen
 In touch to world moves eros tenderness violence
 coaxed to movement
 I take everything you say very seriously

*

T	O	H	A
V	E	T	H
E	C	O	U
R	A	G	E
T	O	D	I
G	S	O	D
E	E	P	.

*

The fire translates the tree
 Tree translates water from dirt into leaf
 Leaf translates sun into green
 Sun translates a body
 Magnetic poles of the planet translate the

Dancer on the stage
 Knows in cities language is found
 A person crossing the street
 Sunday morning in the garden
 Lemon flowers dropping in the pool

I haven't yet made the worst of my mistakes
 The river is my governor
 The tree out the window legislates pure rules
 Sun and wind guide me
 Name of green guide me

And like a beast I bolted free
 left the father empty-handed
 unable to offer anything to God but
 Isaac's terror or Ishmael's obedience
 Both in vain

Will I be forgiven
 For making a break for it
 by either the father or God or the sons
 One too obedient to complain
 The other too frightened to move

We don't know where we're going
 We must be brave enough
 Attention is dangerous—it has brought you to this despair
 Sometimes I think god is a dog
 Slinking along breaking his agreements

All right radio tune in to the blanket of sound of stars
 Of matter between you and me thick as unattended webs
 Time uncapsized but sail across
 Workers in the morning shattering
 bottles against the cobblestones

It was like each quantum moment slowly
 exploding and reconstituting
 These stones at the bottom of my glass
 The gas that wants to combust
 The liquid I drank passing through me

It's in my body a demand to be heard
 To be seen
 The day is lovely
 It is winding around
 My Berlin time coming to an end

Carry me back to the French shore, to where my friend Eleanna
 Took me in a kayak out onto the sea
 For the man I thought I was going to be when I came here
 For the changed and damaged one who is making his way home
 He don't know which is true and which a lie
 He wants to look back behind him at what's dead

*

B	R	I	G
H	T	B	Y
T	H	E	B
E	D	S	I
D	E	O	F
L	A	S	T
L	I	N	G
E	R	I	N
G	S	O	M
E	O	N	E

*

There's no place that's home
 Mostly I want to be alone
 To be touched and loved
 To drink water
 To stretch and sleep

My animals wait for
 My animal heart inside

I single out this one stairwell to go into and cry
One friend has moved away
Another is dead

Another I don't know where in the world he is but it isn't Moldova
What puzzle pieces fit
Take me back to my orbit
We are planets swung far
And yet

The wind through the stairwell
This body grown
Not by hunger but by lack
If god is a dog then he is the kind who kindly takes my hand in his mouth
The kind of friendly beast who wants to lick me everywhere

Held up into the sky
Soft and wet I am
The world
Walking forward into the dark
Not permitted to ever turn around

*

S	T	A	R
S	I	N	T
H	E	S	K
Y	A	R	E
S	E	E	N
I	N	S	H
A	P	E	S
O	N	L	Y
B	E	C	A
U	S	E	O
F	T	H	E
P	O	S	I
T	I	O	N
O	F	T	H
E	V	I	E
W	E	R	I
N	T	I	M
E	A	N	D
S	P	A	C
E	.	T	O
G	E	T	H
E	R	I	N
V	A	S	T
N	E	S	S
W	E	C	L
A	I	M	O
U	R	C	L
A	M	O	R

*

Nobody really tells what it was Orpheus sang
to make even the dead freeze and groan
I imagine him lying face down in the dirt
His arms stretched overhead
Singing verses down into the earth

*

*This time not to stone
But you
smell the
dirt green
stereo you address*

*Epistle from the
archive of
eternity
death record the
dirt*

*you press
your face
into
What is worship
not of sky*

*but I deep
devour you
silent and
breathe
opposite long Years*

*Where you lay
in the night transcribing
sex
elevated yet
face down*

eat dirt

*know this muck
know your life
blades brush
your eyes*

*life and
soft you
are held the
day around you
light around*

*you live then
live
finally the
leave the why
to know*

*whether death or doubt—devote
yourself
down
smell*

the earth

*be not afraid
of what can carry
you immerse
immense
you to know now*

*Both sides
of death
I untaught unfolds its
frustrating
Gift*

*looking back at
heaven that
never was a
string that
could whole
him*

*hold him
hole him
whole dim
hymn there
sings*

he is held
by strings
helled
these cords that
changed him

clang him
bell does not
clamor
he does not
clamor

die or shall he
change
weave himself
hang or
hinge

he comes back
to life in music
rests against
the bodies
of no

he has not seen
the scene
the seas
he will not
know

*

So how do you pass through the days
across borders, borne by sky
the body is it the same
I try yoga, try to run but
I am adrift, unanchored, unknown, unspoken

Sitting next to an architect on the plane drawing in his pad
I want to be drawn, plotted like that against paper
While I sit quietly recite old prayers whenever we take off or land
(If someone hears me muttering in Arabic will they report me,
will I be allowed to fly?)

Gateway is different than gate/
one keeps you out one leads you in

I return to the scene of what crime
I don't know what I
See here but I loop back

*

W	R	O	U
G	H	T	S
A	C	R	E
D	S	C	R
U	M	Y	O
U	S	O	U
G	H	T	S
A	C	R	U
M	S	V	A
U	L	T	T
O	S	E	E
K	O	R	V
A	U	L	T
T	H	E	C
U	L	T	U
R	E	D	R
A	C	K	E
T	A	N	D

I	N	T	A
N	D	E	M
F	A	L	T
E	R	A	T
T	H	E	F
A	U	L	T
.	T	I	M
E	S	C	U
L	T	R	A
N	G	E	O
F	S	K	Y
M	Y	V	A
U	L	T	E
D	F	A	L
L	E	N	F
A	U	L	T

*

The city is already
Different this sunny
Café the long lovely
Bike trail I ran on
This morning the dark

Front of the apartment
How would have
I dared to live
Late summer mosquitoes
I go and see the first

Edition of *Paradise*
Lost rushed to print while Milton
Feared he would be executed
For conspiracy and regicide
No I did not today

Press my forehead down
On clay or into the earth
To divine water words or breath
Up the river now and the words I wrote in the dark
I can barely breathe

To discern the handwriting of the book I wrote lying
face down in the damp earth I actually
have to retrace
the scrawled words with my hand
Can't channel that through crystal

Molt my wings and be born
once more god help me
Phosphorus the morning star
was the brother of Hesperus
the evening star

Would be a thousand more years or more before they learned
the two stars are the same star and not even a star
but a planet
Dusk do keep me up all night
with dumb questions + pointless chatter

*

O	R	I	V
E	R	I	T
H	A	S	B
E	E	N	S
O	M	E	L
O	N	G	T

I M E S
E R E I
E N D E
A V O R
E D T H
Y T O N
G U E .

*

What I must know I must
were the actual syllables Orpheus sang
to the dead to be allowed in allowed again to leave
with what was dead following behind
Though by doubting his song made queer and torn to pieces and cast away

*

O H D O
G I N H
E A V E
N G O D
O W N O
N M E .

The Unlikely Event of a Water Landing

Banana flower
Pepper tree
Last globe of wickless lamp
Where have the Jews of Malabar gone?

Of the ancient population of thousands,
it is said only fifty Jews remain in all of Kerala,
only seven of them in Cochin—

Seven to open the synagogue
Seven to light the lamps
To wonder perhaps not where have they gone but: why did we stay?

It falls to me to ask this, on a winter day,
drinking ginger lemonade against the gruesome heat
while patrolling the market in search of a *mezuzah*

I want that prayer roll because by it one’s own house is marked
as a house of god: the notion appeals when one’s major religious expression
is one of denial

Junglee boy
Wild hair
Not knowing his scriptures
Having thrown off all strictures
Body is a road to god
Disassemble the temple
Desecrate the demands of the dead

The glass sweats
Even the ice in it is somehow warm and salty
I wander the market as three years ago I wandered Jerusalem

Looking for my friend Sameer without knowing
he had stopped a policeman to ask for directions
to the bus station and then spent two hours in detention
while I wandered a street on the so-called “Seam” unmolested

Passing without intention as Jewish

How odd that I trod without knowing the same water road
that bore here across the sea the Jews of India

It’s always trace elements that tell the history
A lonely synagogue

And who among the throngs I see threading their way
through the souk of Cochin are the seven Jews left in Kerala
And who is keeping count anyway
And how many really are there left now?

Tangled roots of the banyan tree
Oh epic Chinese fishing nets
Dear every saint who fled
Why must I only kneel down to pray in unknown places
I davened in Jerusalem
I confessed in Valencia

I smoked sacred tobacco in northern Manitoba
I recited *namaz* at the Far Mosque
I spoke in tongues and let a snake bracelet my bones
in a tent on the riverfront in Memphis

What I learned from that dry flicker, that shiver on my skin
Was how difficult it is for a human to shed his coat and go
Into the world as a new thing

To cross the water and live

Not to huddle in a basement room with all your belongings
Not to tuck a secret book into your sleeve
But to live in the light

“Junglee” is the worst thing you could be called where I’m from
Someone who lives not in a house or town but in the wilderness

Why in all the old pictures are our mothers so stylishly dressed and
coiffed in
Western fashion, chins lifted, gazing right into the camera, maquillage
impeccable
When now they go bare faced and cover their hair and arms

But I changed too
Heat makes you human
And fear

Disappearing into the kingdom of heaven is one tried
and true method of awakening to life but there are others

All the rules, all the legislation that governs travel, eating, marriage,
where do they leave us?

And though the Jews of India, 50,000 of them, mostly all left
to go again across the water (though wouldn’t you think
they would cling harder to a home after leaving Sefared to come here,
after leaving the Levant, though it has been centuries or millennia
and some trauma does fade) (though no it doesn’t, it codes itself
into the DNA apparently) but fifty years after they left, fifty years after
they abandoned one homeland for another, new villages bloom and claim
they too
are Jews, that they are descended from the tribe of Ephraim—

Taught themselves Hebrew and all the minute rituals and observances

What makes you realer in God’s eyes, practice, blood, or belief?

Summon the minion that we might stand against the scattering

There are new Jews in India

But here in Kerala, in the town of Cochin, in the Mattancherry district,
in the neighborhood still called Jew Town we follow Miriam, who feels like
the last woman on earth, through light-filled chambers
of an empty synagogue and wonder at the space time makes.

After the market we go to the old Portuguese palace
where Marco finds his family name painted on the ceiling
among the royal and noble crests

I’ve never found my family name in history,
my family name is the name of a place, common as water

Never do I discover the history of my family past a generation
or two or three, so many borders have we crossed,
leaving behind all of what is supposed to matter—
houses, neighbors, papers, all those who knew us,
knew the shape of our ambitions and breath

In countless cemeteries around the world lie the remains
of my family’s dead, unattended, untended, just drifting
into the earth untold

I’ve sat at a Sabbath table in Jerusalem, lessons written
right onto the wall, lights turned off at sunset,
a second little sink near the doorway for ablution,
those small daily chores echoing down for thousands
on thousands of years, small settlements on the shore
of what is vast and unspellable

What is a town named, what is a name for

What journey does one undertake without turning
to kiss the Quran after you have passed under it
and who tucks a prayer book into the sleeve of his shirt

Why such devotion to the text itself rather than memorizing
the words and singing them through one’s own body

Roots of the tree, this language, these water-words
that drum through the synagogue, not Hebrew by Malayalam
or English spoken by Malayalam speakers, extra vowels added
to the end of every word

Language like rain on the roof

What perfect sibilance to use a language of rain
to recite the rituals of people who passed like water
through this land, saturating it but unnoticed evaporating
into the blue linen of air to travel into flower petals
or the vitreous part of the eye or the saliva of a buffalo
or the trickle of a snail

Light rain, hot rain of summer

Rain wet on the roof

Rain falling in a tin bucket, rain in the ponds of the field,
different sounds of rain to describe the different languages
of southern India, the rains of India are Jewish rains,
the sound of diaspora, the words disperse, the sound of return
drawing a people in

The synagogues of India are emptied out and yet
in a groundswell, just a tiny blossom or a spindly green shoot
splitting through a crevasse in the concrete,
what does not normally happen
in the history of the world: new Jews

In the unlikely event of a water landing
the flight attendant announces on a flight between Denver and Austin

Oh jungle
with your lust and love for forbidden things

Don’t you too hide away what you care about most?
Don’t shame and guilt govern you every time desire swells?
Are you too got in you in a little bit of Jew?

Laced by blue threads of liquid stitched through all time
Wicked winter filled
The oil in the wickless lamp
The glass globes shiver
In the parched seared air
As Miriam passes
The tiniest breeze ruffles
The curtain hanging over the doorway

This is why we live in the world

Nothing so catastrophic as a plane falling out of the sky will ever happen

Nowhere in the electronically networked world
could a body ever go completely off the radar and vanish without a trace

The Jews of India have gone across the water

Between Denver and Austin in the air I looked down
at the desert to the horizon, no water in sight

Blue and green absented themselves
and all I could think about were the life jackets
beneath each seat, the life boats secreted away
somewhere on this plane

About the plane that disappeared, perhaps into the Indian Ocean

The same one that lies between the Levant and the Malabar Coast

What I bow down to does not know me

Safety and ignorance aren’t they the same

Water folds over the vessel the summer I was free to learn that prayer

Prayers from hidden books resound in the abandoned buildings

Who leaves across the water

What and who do you leave behind

How do the traces still sing

What vanishes beneath the waves or into the earth or into the air

What pools up again from beneath the surface

And in the colorful streets in the old city of Jerusalem
I see others who look like me and wonder
now found now home now among all the others
who look and eat and smell and pray like you
what of Sefared might you still deep and unsaid still long for

What of the places in the west and the north and the east remain inside you

Do you ever still sing to god in the tongue of rain

Do inside your mouth resound still somehow the green sutras of Malabar

KAZIM ALI was born in the United Kingdom to Muslim parents of Indian, Iranian and Egyptian descent. His books include *Sky Ward*, winner of the Ohioana Book Award in Poetry; *The Far Mosque*, winner of Alice James Books’ New England/New York Award; *The Fortieth Day*; *All One’s Blue*; and the cross-genre text *Bright Felon*. His new book of poems, *Inquisition*, and a new hybrid memoir, *Silver Road: Essays, Maps & Calligraphies*, will both be released in 2018.

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three poems

As He Killed Me I Imagined Him

As he killed me I imagined him
floating through the years of his life,
pantomiming violence, eating flowers

bound in fleshy vines, a forest unto
himself. I couldn't help but feel
each moment as my own—

Voiceless fists swinging at invisible walls
housing the truth of a manhood
composed by exclusion, a saddening love,

emptied and unfeeling,
drawn helplessly to its roots, wondering
what in this future can be spared.

He says lightbeams and god and spirit-
tongued mystery into the darkness
but the darkness fights back, thrusts itself

into every space of empathy—my softly
beating curse. Once I cried for the smell
of grass, its blood filling the air,

my knees stained green with the world.
Now I drift around, listen to the pain of things,
don't allow my ghost to hurt anyone.

I Want to Write a Poem

I want to write a poem
about wasting the day
and holding sunlight
in my hands and kissing
the shadows of the dying
trees in my garden.

I want to say something
about the way you looked
the other day in the kitchen
when you spoke a truth
and cried on the floor
next to the oven.

I want to forget I am this
woman in this world
whose eyes are trained
to look for any chance
of violence—how a face
is a landscape and then
becomes a minefield.

How small confusions
threaten to end me.

I want to enjoy the grass
beneath my feet and sing
songs to it and run my
fingers through the soil and
pray to the beautiful sky.

I want to feel myself
becoming the earth's
dream girl. I want to
be allowed to do this while
I still can.



It Doesn't Matter If I'm Understood

It doesn't matter if I'm understood
You'll still try to destroy me in your own way

Maybe with your hands
Maybe with your silence
Maybe with your tacit approval of this machine

Here us women are
crackling like sparklers above a lawn
scraping diamonds from asphalt
giving praise to the mountains before us

Our love and our grace and our tenderness
enough to change the shape of the universe

You say goddess or you say dead girl
We live in the margins but don't get a taste
of the joy of being there

Not without loss
Not without broken bones and bandaged flesh

Our condition is nameless
and we know this
so we drift and deflate and let the wind have us

but we don't stop living
even when we sense our impending ghost
even when we finger the dirt and think *home*

Our life was always a thing of magic
and magic is what lives outside of law

One day we will be allowed to exist
and you will never see us again

JOSHUA JENNIFER ESPINOZA is a trans woman poet living in California. Her work has been featured in *Denver Quarterly*, *Lambda Literary*, *PEN America*, *Washington Square Review*, and elsewhere. She is the author of two poetry collections—*i'm alive / it hurts / i love it* (boost house 2014), and *THERE SHOULD BE FLOWERS* (CCM 2016). Her first chapbook, *Outside of the Body There Is Something Like Hope*, is due to be published by Big Lucks in 2018.

three poems

Scabs

I spend so much time looking
at scars in the mirror I sometimes forget about
my scabs—recent, tender. The other
morning,
when the sun made the third-floor
classroom feel like spring
had broken like a stick cracked over
a knee, a student scratched her leg until a scab
from some impossible
mosquito
bite ruptured, a darksome blood-burn
sinking
like a spring down into her brie-
white socks where it pinked, spreading. Sometimes I think
about those lace-
cuffed anklets my grandmother made me
wear with black Mary Janes each Easter—
the way they made me feel
like Hermes when a breeze
caught them and fluttered
at my heels. My body has always been pagan
in its rituals—all blood
and the goat's heads
of its dreams. I once had to sage
a new house in which I move
my superstitions from room to room
like a broom, dusting
up my blessings. I've learned to leave
all my doors
unlocked when I'm not home. I've learned
to leave all my doors
open to the possibility.

Haha-Boohoo

When I keep crying long
after I've started
laughing my therapist
says it's my body
grieving because I haven't
grieved properly
as if my body has
unfinished
business like defecation
after death but it seems to go on
for hours and hours even
days and I think maybe
crying will never end
the way some people
get the hiccups and then live
the rest of their lives



sleeping and waking
sleeping
and waking their diaphragms
skipping like a jump
rope a word
I just misspelled
just now before
I corrected it for you dear
reader because I was told
that's what you need
When I was
a kid I thought
damn was spelled
D-A-M-B like *lamb*
and a few years
ago I asked my gyno
for an IED so
I wouldn't get
pregnant I wouldn't have
to have I talk too
much when I get nervous
or when I drink too
much which makes
me nervous
which makes me
drink too
much which I did
the other
night because I saw
someone I hadn't
seen in a long
time and my heart

is like bubblegum
chewed for
the world
record for which I am

crying for
the record
for the record
I'm crying

Poppies and Field Flowers

I know for now I'm alive
from the rock in my shoe, its tender *but*
in my arch built high for

collapsing. I know it from the synesthetic
achoo rumored to be one-eighth
of an orgasm, my nipples tart as lemon

seeds. I carry around
this feeling we're the unlucky apes who need

clothes. I carry around this want to lie down
among the poppies and field flowers without
crushing them. My need-tos pulse like an ache

in a bad tooth. When I eat six ounces of flank
steak, I consume 497 gallons of water, 90 acres
of grass six times over, and udders upon

udders of a mother heifer's milk, and all their days
alive in sun or rain. I've heard the stories
of survivors drinking their own urine

before lying back and dying, sucking a stamen
of blood from the back of a pricked
hand. I rush my heart along from moment

to moment like a broom, the dust-up
making me sneeze. Every day
is a struggle with the holy trinity

of caffeine, prozac, and sleep—my metabolism
fast as a cave
drip on stone. In the early morning at a recent stranger's,

I try to make as little sound
as possible so I don't
wake them, but always when I'm trying to be

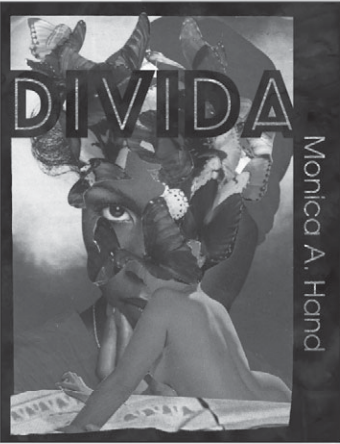
careful and quiet, I make the most
noise, stubbing my toe or shattering
a glass to pieces on the floor.

EMILIA PHILLIPS is the author of three poetry collections from the University of Akron Press, most recently *Empty Clip* (2018) and *Groundspeed* (2016). Her poems and lyric essays appear widely in literary publications including *Agni*, *Boston Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, and elsewhere. She's an assistant professor in the MFA Writing Program and the Department of English at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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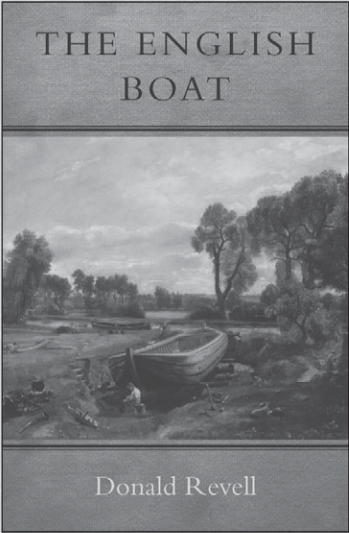
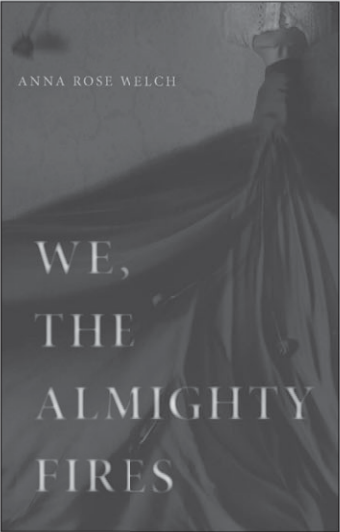


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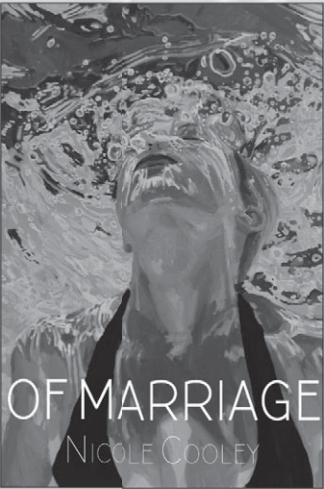


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AMAUD JAMAUL JOHNSON

three poems

Dog Star Rising

"I'll be doggone" —Harryette Mullen

Kalel, Brooklyn landing: resplendent
& vainglorious in your raw silk suit,
your striped sweat socks: How many thousand
moons have gone since that last apocalypse:
bright skin, a barnacle rocking along
the bellies of those ships: Don't plunder
remind the others of soup, but more meaty,
that dark monkey, & more black milk—I
got my bead on a breaded satellite, a sparrow:
But wasn't there some second ark: woodwind
& muscle, one of burnished gold—Come
on, man: where's Nietzsche: you searched
from sonar to lunar for the angel of history,
didn't you do everything you were told?

for Douglas Kearney (a.k.a. Astronaut Jones)

Prince George's County

did you know they have
these cutouts in the backseat,
are molded like big cup holders,
spill proof, so once handcuffed,
you can still relax. the officer even
apologizes just before he palms
the crown of my head. he touches,
closing the door, how one catches
the hem of a dress. you know,
there must be places, ways not even
a lover _____. your, let's, for example,
the inside of your upper arm, near
the armpit. hard to figure, how
a child might be held, i remember

Somebody Told Me We Got LA

"of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling . . ."
—Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1877

"what's happening, blood?"
—Parliament Funkadelic, 1975

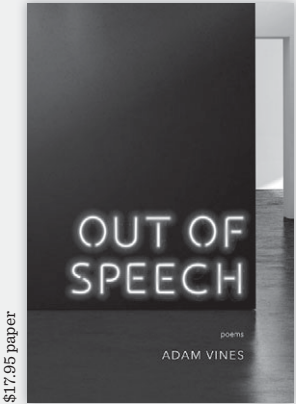
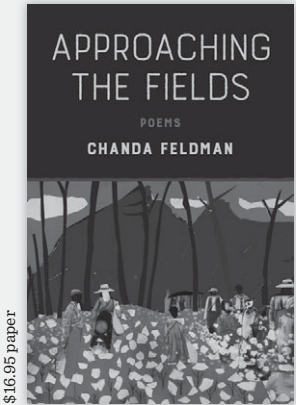
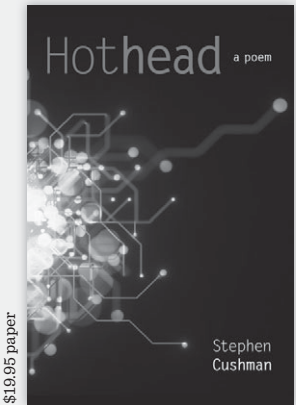
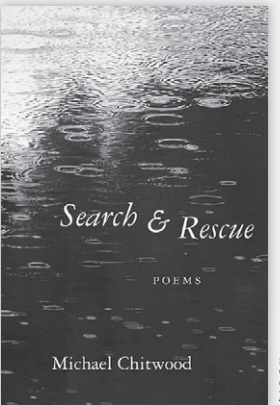
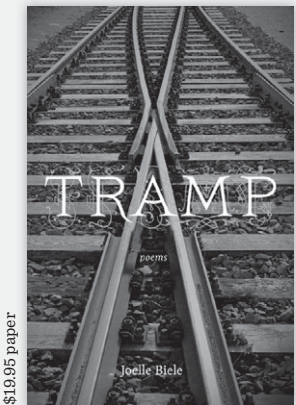
(I'm not) I don't want my whole
life grieving, no gleaming, nothing
fallen, *(I'm not)* that city. But what's
Atlantis without the water, Pompeii
(I'm not) save those bodies, startled,
huddling. I'm not ruined. *(But)* Isn't
this what's inherent *(I can't)*, the living
and not knowing. *(I'm not)* Then
some nights I'm frozen. I couldn't figure
out how to bring anyone *(I won't)*
with me, *(I)* and I can't convince
the people around me to return. *(But)*
Return to what, to whom? Any MLK,
(I'm not) there's your share of disaster.

One west coast stretching out another.
This tree I started, it's just a few
states, or branches, into the Atlantic,
which is another form of blackness.

AMAUD JAMAUL JOHNSON is the author of two books of poetry, *Darktown Follies* and *Red Summer*. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University, his honors include a Pushcart Prize, The Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, and The Dorset Prize, as well as support from The MacDowell Colony, Bread Loaf, and Cave Canem. He teaches in the MFA Program in Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

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Memories of David Bonanno

DAVID BONANNO, MY LIFELONG FRIEND, and an editor of *The American Poetry Review*, died on December 8, 2017 at age 68. Dave and I shared births, deaths, weddings, divorces and a whole lot of food, games, and mostly words. We referred to each other as best friends and others described us that way too. But I never thought seriously about what that meant. Since Dave's death I have given it some thought. I knew Dave, and he knew me, as living always on a spectrum between Comedy and Tragedy. That was an abiding and unarticulated understanding that we shared for 49 years. Nothing was so sad that we could not make each other laugh; and nothing was so funny that when we laughed, we did not also discern an unavoidable sadness. If it is hard to know exactly what I mean by that, here are some examples.

I. A Funeral

In the mid-1970s, Dave and I lived in an old house, divided into apartments, in Mount Airy, Philadelphia. I lived with my wife on the second floor, and Dave lived on the ground floor. Monday nights in the Fall, we watched football, and had a little something to eat, either at my place or Dave's.

On one of those occasions, downstairs, Dave was washing the dishes during a commercial when he was shocked to realize that he had been using the same 12-ounce bottle of dishwashing liquid *for more than three years*, since the day he had moved in. The bottle was made of opaque, yellow plastic, so we could not see how much was left in the bottle. But a quick shake told us the bottle was not near empty. Back then, three years seemed like a long time, a supernaturally long time, to use one bottle of dishwashing soap. How had the time gone by so fast, and the soap gone by so slowly? It was funny but also a bit creepy. Perched on the side of the sink, that bottle had been witness to one-eighth of Dave's life. And the bottle wasn't finished. We had a "Twilight Zone" moment. Then we watched the rest of the game.

Months later, Dave told me he had wrung the final drop from that bottle. He felt we should mark its passing, ceremonially. He took a shoebox from his closet, put some tissue paper at the bottom and laid the bottle on the paper. The wizards of marketing at Procter and Gamble had purposely made bottles of dishwashing liquid in the shape of women, the intended consumers. This bottle had what appeared to be a pleated skirt at the base, a slim waist, a broad chest and a graceful neck. Lying there in the box it almost resembled a person, a very small one. Dave sealed the box, drew three crosses on the cover and inscribed it with a name, epitaph, and the dates when he bought it and the last day of use.

We buried the shoebox in the backyard on Allen Lane in Mount Airy.

Now that Dave has died himself, and I recall this incident, I am apprehensive about writing it down. Please do not misunderstand me. That bottle of liquid soap is not a metaphor for Dave or his life. They have nothing in common. Except for the reminder of Dave in the name on the bottle: "Joy."

II. A Death

I first met Dave in January 1968, when my mother was dying of cancer. She had been sick

for a while and at that time she had only five months to live. Dave was a freshman at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, and I was a sophomore. We lived on the same floor in a dormitory where I became friends with Dave and his roommate, Matt. There were no women at Wesleyan then, and that hardship was a source of humor for the three of us.

I didn't hide my mother's illness, but I did try to hide my sorrow. My father had died just three years before, and I kept telling myself that I had learned enough from that to handle my mother's death too. I fooled myself by saying, "This time would be easier." I never fooled Dave.

On weekends I regularly left the campus, either to go home to visit my mother or to visit any one of the women's colleges in New England, hoping to find a girl to comfort me. When I returned to Wesleyan each Sunday evening, sadder and still alone, I discovered that Dave had been in my room. Once, he stapled all the pieces of paper in the room each to the other, forming a chain that I discerned only when I picked up a letter and everything on my desk and on the floor and in the trash billowed and fluttered around me.

The next week, he started creating effigies out of his shirts, pants and coat, stuffed with underwear, socks and pillows, wearing glasses, a hat and gloves. When I came back to Wesleyan and opened my door, I would be greeted by a figure seated at my typewriter, or sitting in my chair playing the guitar, or reclining in bed reading a book. The effigies looked something like Dave. They were wearing his clothes. They were silent. And they were going about their business despite my interruption. I knew then that they were personifications of his concern for me.

But that was not all. Dave the person—not Dave the effigy—was also waiting for me on Sunday nights. We would find each other somewhere on the hall, and he would ask me how my weekend had gone. Our dorm rooms were spare, with only a bed, a desk and a chair. I would lie prone on the bed, and Dave sat in the chair. After we quite knowingly assumed that psychoanalytic position, I would tell him of my adventures, which were mostly misadventures. I was always as lonely when I returned as I had been when I left. Nevertheless, I dressed my stories up as comedy, and Dave laughed. But he said absolutely nothing. He was as silent as a stone, listening to everything I said, and probably some things I didn't.

Toward the end of the semester, in the evening of May 24, my mother died. My uncle had called the payphone on the floor and I had told him I would take an early morning bus to New York. I walked the length of the hall to Dave's room, and there he and his roommate, Matt, tried to console me. They would not leave me to myself. They told me to sit on the bed and listen to music for



David Bonanno

a while. Matt had a stereo. Dave placed the headphones on my ears, and Matt put on a record, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. I started to weep. There was a box of tissues in the room, and Dave sitting on my right and Matt sitting on my left took the tissues and wiped the tears from my cheeks.

III. A Conversation in Leningrad

In the Spring of his sophomore year Dave spent a semester studying German in Hamburg. He figured it could be useful, and it was.

Years later, in 1985, the Philadelphia Council on Soviet Jewry sent Dave and me to the Soviet Union to visit Jews. In the mid-1980s, Soviet government-sponsored anti-semitism was brutal, and any Jew in the Soviet Union seeking to escape it by applying to emigrate to Israel was condemned as a traitor and fired from his or her job. The entire family was isolated as well. Some of those applicants, called Refuseniks, were imprisoned. We were asked to visit their families and others in their community.

One thing we knew when we were chosen to make the trip was that we would be in Moscow on the weekend when the Super Bowl was being played at home. This did not make Dave or me very happy. On the other hand, there was a chance it would not be a good game. And we couldn't very well turn down the invitation.

Dave and I were asked to go to Leningrad, Kishinev and Moscow to bring Refusenik families literature and to hear their stories. I brought books about archaeology in Israel, and Dave brought several special inserts from APR that were collections of Yiddish poetry translated into English. Also, we were told that the Soviet Jewish community loved Maya Angelou's book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. We each brought copies to give away.

Dave and I were arrested by the KGB three times on our trip, twice in Kishinev and once in Moscow. We were prevented from giving away any of the books and poetry we had brought with us, including the Maya Angelou books. And we were

required to leave the Soviet Union a few days earlier than we had planned. Consequently, we were able to return home and watch the Super Bowl after all.

Nonetheless, on our first night in the Soviet Union, in Leningrad, we visited an apartment of Lev Furman, a young activist. All the phones at our hotel were bugged so we could not call ahead. We simply arrived at his apartment, only to find that he was out for the evening. His father, a man in his sixties, opened the door and took us in. It was January-in-Leningrad cold and the apartment was dark save for a single lamp. The old man spoke no English and neither of us spoke any Russian. The scene was a bit grim. We wanted to speak to him but we could not find a common language. I ran through the list of possibilities:

“Español?” “Nyet.”

“Français?” “Nyet.”

“Deutsch?” “Nyet.”

“Hebrew?” “Nyet.”

The old man offered “Yiddish?” and I said “Nyet,” but Dave said, “Wait. There’s a lot of German in Yiddish. Maybe I can speak with him.”

Dave sat next to him and they began to talk. The old man was speaking Yiddish, and Dave translated what he was saying for me. I was speechless, not only because I could not be understood, but because Dave was basically speaking Yiddish to an aged, exhausted and saddened Jewish father in Leningrad who was suddenly becoming more animated as he realized he was being listened to.

He had been an officer on a Russian submarine during World War II, something that meant nothing now that his son and he were considered traitors. But Dave was interested. And so we had tea. And our host brought out his medals pinned to a velvet-covered board. There were also Russian newspaper clippings and photos, and, at last, the story of how the submarine had docked in Italy at the war’s end, allowing him a few days ashore. What a glorious sight that was for a young man used to the gray days of Leningrad and the depths of the sea. He was now clapping Dave on the shoulder because, as an Italian, surely Dave could understand what a paradise Italy was. Of course, Dave was an Italian from Caldwell, New Jersey, but neither of us thought to correct him. I recognized myself in that old man from the days when I would return to college from a weekend with my dying mother or a bad Saturday night at Vassar College and Dave managed to lift my spirits. And he did it by just listening.

IV. The Accident

Allow me to go back to the day after Christmas 1970, when Dave was in a bad car accident in Manhattan. He was sitting next to the driver, and—no seat belts back then—he was thrown from the car, striking his head on the sidewalk. At Lenox Hill Hospital, he lay in a coma for a week. I came up to see him from Philadelphia and stayed at my aunt and uncle’s apartment nearby.

On the evening of New Year’s Day it started snowing. By the next morning, it had become a blizzard. No one could get to the hospital; certainly not Dave’s family, who were stuck in Caldwell. And even a lot of the medical staff could not get to work.

But I was only 25 blocks away. So I trudged uptown and made it to the hospital. The place seemed empty because of the short staff and lack of visitors. Dave had been moved to a floor where there were sufficient nurses to look after him, but his room was depressing. It had no windows and no TV, which was understandable, given he was in a coma, but it also was cavernous. There was space for at least another bed but Dave’s bed stood

alone in the middle of the room with a lot of monitoring equipment and, next to it, a single chair.

A nurse opened the door and told me to talk to him because, even if he did not respond, he might still be comforted by a human voice. I stood next to his bed, having no idea what to say. The previous day I had watched all four bowl games. I was sure Dave would be interested in football if he were awake. But he wasn’t awake. Feeling glum and overmatched by the circumstances, I started to recite the results of the games. Dave, although lapsed, had been brought up a Catholic, and when I told him that Notre Dame had beaten Texas in the Cotton Bowl, he woke up.

His eyes opened and he began to bellow like a beast, because the head injury had deprived him (temporarily) of all language. Hearing the noise, two nurses rushed into the room, ecstatic to know that he had come out of the coma. One quickly attended to Dave. The other grabbed me, and together we waltzed across that oversized room to the music of Dave’s inchoate groans.

V. Otis

Dave’s daughter, Leidy, was murdered. On the day of her memorial service there was a reception at Dave and Kathy’s home. No one knew how to even grieve, let alone what to do, but Dave was able to think of his guests.

“Fred,” he said to me, “I have a job for you. You have to greet everyone at the door and tell them that Otis will flip their plates if they are not careful.”

What he meant was that, if you were standing around with a plate of food in hand, Dave and Kathy’s pug, Otis, would jump straight up in the air and swat the plate, so that even if you held on, the food would go flying into the air and land on the floor, where he could eat it. Otis was a small dog, but he could flip a plate if it was held waist-high. You had to hold your plate up a bit above the belt in order to avoid “being flipped.”

As friends and relatives came to the door, I greeted them appropriately, but then, just as they would begin to step past me to mingle with the guests who had already arrived, I administered the warning. I received some bemused and quizical looks, and admittedly, after most of the guests had arrived, I myself started to feel the urgency of the task begin to wane.

About fifty people showed up for the reception, but Dave was particularly concerned about one family, a father, mother and son, who he felt were a bit agnostic when it came to Otis’s abilities. After they arrived, Dave asked me if I had given them the warning. I said I had, but “EEYAH” came an exclamation from across the room. The father had been flipped.

Dave admonished everyone after that, but only ten minutes later the mother was flipped as well. “That is one smart dog,” she said. Dave corrected her. “Actually, he is more of an idiot-savant.” And there was an inevitability to the son being flipped a few minutes later. How could we laugh at something so stupid, at a time when laughter should have been impossible? But we did.

VI. The Little Pocket

Back to our trip to the Soviet Union. The moment we flew into Moscow, which was to be the final leg of our journey, we were detained by the KGB. A very well dressed agent gave us a stern warning about meeting with any Refuseniks in Moscow. We were escorted to a luxury penthouse suite at our hotel that we knew was bugged and told to visit the museums, but not Jews. The next day we clarified our situation with the American and Dutch consulates and Dusko Doder, the Moscow

correspondent for the *Washington Post*. All agreed it was time for us to go home. We could do nothing further for the Jewish community on pain of a show trial and deportation.

We changed our return ticket, but we still expected a nasty inspection at customs on our way out. And that was a problem. We had information that we needed to get back to Philadelphia about the whereabouts of prisoners, their cellblocks and cell numbers. We had requests for several medications that individuals in Kishinev and Leningrad needed. And we had a roll of film documenting the people we had met and their children, some wearing University of Pennsylvania sweatshirts and Phillies baseball caps that visitors before us had successfully brought into the country. We had to figure out a way to get that information past customs and security at the Moscow airport.

The film I knew what to do with. I would hide the small canister of rolled-up film in the little pocket of a pair of jeans packed in my suitcase. The little pocket is located just above the right pocket in almost all blue jeans, and a canister of 35-mm film would fit snugly inside—and safely, because the Russians probably did not know the little pocket existed.

“Fred,” Dave said to me, “the Russians know about the little pocket. We will put a decoy roll of film in the little pocket full of pictures of churches and the Kremlin [which we had, in fact, been compiling]. And we will hide the real roll of film somewhere else.”

And that is what we did. As for the written information concerning the prisoners and the medication, I took my copy of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and on each page I underlined very lightly in pencil a single letter or number, so that if you paged through the book you could recover all the names, places, drugs and numbers one character at a time.

When we arrived at the airport, the inspectors were waiting for us. They opened my suitcase and went straight for the little pocket. They took out the roll of film, exposed it angrily and threw it on the floor. But that was the decoy. They searched the rest of my bag but the real film was hidden well. And they let me go with my copy of Maya Angelou’s book. They strip-searched Dave, but there was nothing to find.

Four hours later we were quite happy to land, free, in Helsinki, with the knowledge that we would be back in Philadelphia just in time for the Super Bowl.

VII. Another Funeral

A few years ago, Dave went to the funeral of a friend’s father. It was winter, and Dave put on a heavy coat and a hat. The hat was a bright red Philadelphia Phillies baseball cap. His wife, Kathy, stopped him. “David, you’re not going to wear that hat to the funeral, are you?” Dave assured her he was just going to wear it on the way to the funeral and would put it in his pocket when the appropriate time came.

They drove to the cemetery, and upon leaving the car, Dave put the hat in his coat pocket. When the service was finished and the coffin lowered into the grave, Dave and others each threw a shovel of dirt on top and left. When he was far enough away so as not to be disrespectful, Dave reached into his pocket for his hat. But it was not there.

Realizing that it must have fallen out, Dave and Kathy retraced their steps to the grave looking for the hat. As they got closer without seeing any sign of the hat, they noticed a few mourners still standing near the open pit with looks of amazement on their faces. When Dave and Kathy drew nearer

and looked into the grave, there was Dave’s bright red Phillies hat smack dab on top of the coffin.

Dave heard someone say in hushed tones, “I thought I knew him, but I had no idea he was so devoted to the Phillies.” Dave easily dispelled that misconception.

But the hat was still in the grave. It was just a Phillies hat, and Dave could have simply left it where it was as an unusual, yet somewhat fortuitous gift. But it was not simple. Dave’s daughter, Leidy, had given Dave that hat. And if your murdered daughter has given you a gift that she can never, ever give you again, you find a way to retrieve it from the bottom of a grave. Apparently the

gravediggers were keeping a warm and respectable distance somewhere far from the gravesite. They would be no help.

And so while Kathy held his legs, Dave stretched out on the ground and reached down into the pit. Dave was not a tall man. But by extending himself over the edge and reaching as far as he could, he managed to tease the hat, maybe even flip it, back to ground level.

I was not there. But Dave gave me a fairly detailed description. And when I think about that scene now, it appears to be almost mythological. I see Dave stretched out, suspended between the land of the living and the realm of the dead. With

his dead child’s memory just agonizingly out of reach, and her mother, his dying wife, clutching his legs so he won’t fall into the grave. And he’s dying too. Slowly enough so that no one knows it. But fast enough so that we know it now. If that scene had been painted by Brueghel or Vermeer, we would call it an allegory. But we didn’t think about that then. We just laughed when he told me.

No man’s life is a metaphor. Until he is dead. ◀

FREDRIC BRANDFON lives in Los Angeles, where he practices law.

TERESA LEO

Paisan

Unable are the Loved to die
For Love is Immortality
—Emily Dickinson

WHEN I THINK OF DAVE “LEFTY” Bonanno, immediately the title sequence of the HBO series *The Sopranos*, complete with theme song, pops into my head. Instead of Tony Soprano driving through the Lincoln Tunnel from New York past various landmarks to his home in North Caldwell, New Jersey, Dave would be in a car headed in the other direction—from Caldwell, New Jersey (the next town over and his actual hometown) toward New York, then south to Philadelphia, where he’d pull up to the offices of *The American Poetry Review* on Broad Street, a few blocks from City Hall, ready to make decisions about which poems would be sent to sleep with the fishes.

I met Dave in the early ’90s when for a few years I was editor of the Philadelphia literary magazine *Painted Bride Quarterly*. I had just finished grad school and joined the magazine as a reader, but within weeks, *PBQ*’s long-time editors announced they were quitting and folding the magazine. Unless, they said, someone wanted to take it over. A fellow classmate and I said we’d do it, and so we did, without knowing a single thing about magazine publishing. *PBQ* was behind in its publishing schedule and in debt, so I reached out to “Mr. Bonanno” at *APR* to see if he could help guide us through what for us felt like coming in at the end of a Fellini movie and being asked to explain the plot.

Mr. Bonanno took a meeting, then another meeting, then offered his entire mailing list, saying we should do a fundraising campaign. I could not believe his willingness to help. I learned later that a mailing list is a long-grown and coveted thing, and his simple act of handing it over was no trivial matter. But that’s the way he was, always doing big things like they were small, with few words or little fanfare. Mr. Bonanno became Dave and a friendship was formed.

I said that someday, somehow, I would pay Dave back. I got to make good on that promise in the mid-’90s when the internet became a thing, and everyone was rushing to get a web presence. He asked me if I could build a website for *APR*. In my day job, I was doing such things, so I built and maintained their first website, gratis and happily. Dave kept trying to compensate me, though,

and continually slipped me limited-edition lithographs, poetry books, and early issues of *APR*, which I still cherish.

But what really cemented our friendship was *The Sopranos*. Both being Italian, we watched in awe as the internal mechanics of Italian-American family life as we knew it were on display. Remove the bloodshed and some of the cursing, and the show reminded us of our own relatives. Growing up in Caldwell, New Jersey, Dave knew the landmarks. Each week we watched to see what else about our families would be revealed. When Tony Soprano stopped by his mother’s house in the pilot episode and she asked him if he wanted something to eat, saying “I got eggplant,” we howled (Dave quietly chuckled). Having prepared *melanzane alla parmigiana* at the ready in the refrigerator was like having milk or eggs, and you could not drop by a relative’s house without it being offered.

When *The Sopranos* had an open call in New Jersey for bit parts, we talked about going. We thought surely we would be cast, at least as background diners in Artie Bucco’s restaurant. We knew everything there was to know about the show. We thought the *Waiting for Godot*-ness of the “Pine Barrens” episode made it among the best, and were never able to look at a catsup packet the same way again. We mourned with Tony when he had to whack his good friend, Big Pussy Bonpensiero; we loved the delicate sincerity of Bobby Bacala. We never made it to the open call and were jealous when a local woman with no acting experience got cast in a recurring role. I thought I might’ve made a good waitress, but always thought that Dave might actually have been discovered there, that once they got a look at him he’d end up as one of the guys at the table with Tony outside Satriale’s pork store having an espresso and a few slices of the *gabagool*.

Dave revealed he had a nickname from childhood, Lefty, which was how he was known when he served on the board of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP), since there were several Daves on the board at the time. One year his birthday fell during AWP’s annual conference, and some of us in the Philly Crew, including *PBQ* editors Kathy Volk Miller and Marion Wrenn, had a party for him right at the dance. We gave him a special birthday gift—a black T-shirt with “The Don of Poetry” in *Sopranos* red lettering across the front, and “Lefty” on the back. Dave loved that shirt and wore it year after year at the conference, getting a chuckle as people he didn’t know read the back of his shirt and called out “Hey, Lefty”

as he walked the conference halls. I had to go deep into South Philly to get this shirt made, to an old-school embroidery shop that did the lettering. They were intrigued and wanted to know what the shirt meant. I tried to explain that Dave embodied that place where Don Corleone meets Dylan Thomas, where iambic pentameter meets cannolis.

Poetry and *The Sopranos* were only a backdrop to everything else, a launching pad. Events in our lives began to dovetail in mysterious ways, and our friendship deepened. When Dave’s wife, the poet Kathy Sheeder Bonanno, founded the Philly-based literary arts center Musehouse, they installed me as treasurer on the board. My husband Kyle and I spent many weekends there with Kathy, Dave, and others setting up and breaking down chairs for readings, going on wine and food runs, and schmoozing. At the height of activity, Musehouse hosted more than 50 classes, workshops, and events per month.

Though Musehouse had received grants, like any non-profit arts organization, it had its share of financial challenges. There were points when funding was low, so Dave and Kathy put their own money into the checking account to pay instructors and visiting writers. As treasurer, I had a recurring agenda item at board meetings: “Pay back Bonannos.” They would not hear of it, even when funds were replenished, always saying later, later, and would swing the rest of the board to out-vote me, then continue to add more of their own money to the account. When Musehouse closed due to Kathy’s declining health, the checking account was in the black, and instead of finally allowing me to pay them back, they insisted on gifting the remaining funds to several Philly-area arts organizations in the name of Musehouse.

Musehouse was only one way Dave and Kathy gave back. Musehouse was founded in part in memory of their beloved daughter Leidy, who was murdered soon after she’d graduated from nursing school. After Leidy’s death, Dave and Kathy became tireless advocates for victims’ rights, and worked with organizations that supported families of victims of violent crimes. They organized fundraisers for several groups including Every Murder is Real (EMIR), Parents of Murdered Children, and the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia.

In an era of thoughts and prayers, Dave and Kathy were action-oriented, continually seeking out the place where help was needed most and finding creative ways to contribute. They organized a painting party to brighten up the EMIR offices and revamped the waiting room, adding new furniture, artwork, toys, and children's books; they held an annual ice cream social to fund a nursing scholarship in their daughter's name. Musehouse was an extension of their advocacy work, a place where people could gather together and share their stories. In an interview Kathy once said: "To have people share frankly what they know or share their experience with real candor is beautiful to people like me who are not easily comforted."

On the 10th anniversary of Leidy's death, Dave, Kathy, and their son Luis organized an event where people gathered in a local high school parking lot at dusk to release sky lanterns in honor of someone lost. It was something to see a parking lot full of people form a circle as the light dimmed, then each name the person for whom their lantern would be launched. After some technical difficulties and with a fire extinguisher at the ready, up the lanterns went, one by one over the high school, a newly formed constellation illuminating the night sky. It felt like a communal version of Franz Wright's "Progress": "And everything that once was infinitely far and unsayable is now unsayable and right here in the room."

Dave and Kathy were the most giving, engaged, and impassioned people I knew. I always thought the trunk of their car was a microcosm or a window into their giving: during the Musehouse years, it continually held snacks, wine and soft drinks, books, door prizes, plates and cups, serving bowls, tablecloths, decorations—everything needed to set up a literary reception or fundraiser at a moment's notice. I'm not sure if there was ever a tire in there, but if there ever was, it was long removed to make room for their true emergency kit.

Kathy was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer just four months before my mother was diagnosed with late-stage ovarian cancer. As caregivers, Dave and I had much medical shop to talk, and both he and Kathy got me through my mother's many appointments, treatments, and procedures. After my mother's debulking surgery, Kathy, herself diminished by many radiation treatments, insisted on cooking and having Dave drive a casserole the 40 minutes to my house. I told Dave under no circumstances to let Kathy cook, knowing that her effort together with his round-trip drive would be an enormous burden. Many phone calls later, they relented, and it was perhaps the only time I could ever convince them to not do something. They of course then had Kyle and me over for dinner the first chance they got.

My mother died first, then, in the same six-month period, Kathy, my father, and, unexpectedly, Dave. Before he passed, Dave, even as he grieved Kathy, listened to countless hours of my fears about my father's impending demise, then many more hours about the heartbreak of cleaning out my parents' house. I realize now that somewhere along the way Dave went from *paisan* to *consigliere*, offering advice and encouragement on how to get through the most difficult of things.

We managed to move forward even while carrying our individual grief. We hung out at Dave's house, where Kyle set up Netflix so we could watch *Nurse Jackie* starring one of our favorite *Sopranos*

actresses, Edie Falco. Kyle (who's from Massachusetts) and Dave had their own separate friendship, launched from a football rivalry, each year hoping for an Eagles/Patriots showdown at the Super Bowl. Anyone who knew Dave knew he was a huge Philly sports fan; he could slip as easily into a stool at a sports bar to discuss Eagles or Phillies draft picks as he could behind the editor's desk of a literary magazine to discuss trends in contemporary poetry.

Somehow there was laughter too, in all the sadness. Dave had a wonderfully dark sense of humor and was partial to oddball stories. He liked hearing about the various curiosities I found while cleaning out my parents' house—things like a human-head-sized crown of thorns from Jerusalem with a certificate of authenticity or the hundreds of rounds of live ammo left behind for me in the basement, together with 12 shotguns and a black bearskin rug rolled up in a barrel. "At least the guns weren't loaded," he'd said.



In caregiving, I learned about Spoon Theory, the concept that there are a limited number of spoons or units of energy a chronically ill person has to

In caregiving, I learned about Spoon Theory.

work with to perform the activities that make up daily life. For each spoon used in ordinary activities, an equivalent amount of rest is needed for the person to recharge. Spoons, then, need to be rationed to get through a given day. If Spoon Theory could also be applied to the caregiving, I always felt

I was a couple of spoons short of a service. I certainly had no spoons left over for other family, let alone friends. Somehow, even in his toughest times, Dave seemed to muster the strength to support or help other people, as if somewhere he'd had hidden spoons, a veritable backup drawer of everyday stainless steel that he could break out at any time.

Those who knew Dave would probably say he was a man of few words. To this I would add: "unless you got him talking about the Phillies." In a much-quoted scene from *The Sopranos*, when Tony is asked about his feelings, he explains his desire to keep them under wraps by talking about Gary Cooper: "Whatever happened to Gary Cooper? The strong, silent type. *That* was an American. He wasn't in touch with his feelings. He just did what he had to do. See, what they didn't know was once they got Gary Cooper in touch with his feelings that they wouldn't be able to shut him up." Dave liked this quote and, like Tony, may have also tried to keep his feelings at bay. But in reality he was both the strong, silent type and the guy with the biggest heart, able to show it to those of us lucky enough to call him a friend.

As Yehuda Amichai said: "To live is to build a ship and a harbor at the same time. And to finish the harbor long after the ship has gone down." Dave lived. There were ships; he built harbors, something I am still learning to do.

Arrivederci, caro amico. I suspect you finally got that seat next to Gandolfini at the table outside the big pork store in the sky. ◀

TERESA LEO is the author of two books of poetry, *Bloom in Reverse* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014) and *The Halo Rule* (Elixir Press, 2008), winner of the Elixir Press Editors' Prize.

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CATHERINE PIERCE

two poems

Prayer

Dear Lord, for years I have prayed
the way a rabbit runs from a dog.
Dear Lord, I am tired. I would like to pray
by looking hard, say, at the wavering stripe
of sun on the gray ocean. I would
like to pray by carrying a wolf spider
to the yard in a juice glass. Lord, I don't know
about this feudal nomenclature. Whose
invention is that? I would like to pray
to you as River. Or Adirondacks. Or
That Moment My Son Called A Cicada Shell
My Little Guy. Or Mysterious Deep
and Moving. I hope you don't think
that's sacrilege—believe me when I say
I think I'll hear you better if I capitalize
more. Please forgive me. I am afraid
and my fear has crept like kudzu.
There is a pun to make here about
this futile nomenclature, but I don't want
to make it. So far this poem is true.
Lord, I try to be true. Lord, I love
pine needles. I love a jukebox. I love
the night my husband and I went to

a nearly-empty strip club on Bourbon Street.
Dear Lord, I don't imagine you can
be shocked. It was an October night,
and I wore a gray skirt, and we walked
back to our hotel happy, holding hands,
and that must also be prayer, all of it,
I think. Is that all right? Lord, if I call you
Fireworks Over the Lake, if I call you
These Arms of Mine On the Radio,
if I call you Soft and Untroubled
Breathing in a Bedroom With Nightlight,
will you hear me? Lord, I pray for that, too.
Not so much like the rabbit. More like
the dog, who, done with chasing,
would like to rest its head on its paws
and hear the word *Good*.



Shell Game

We slide and patter, we lift and reveal.
Inside the nutshell is a pea.
Inside the pea is a shell. Inside the shell
is a matryoshka doll, and inside that
is another, and inside that is your country
that maybe you once thought was all
endless blue and mountains, but surprise—
it was always inside something.
Watch the slide, watch the slide!
We hide the melting seasons under
treason and voila, you're out 20 bucks
and the icecaps. Or we switch it—
doesn't matter. In this game, everything
is the right size both to hide
and be hidden. It doesn't matter how
closely you follow: the fix is in
and you're out of luck, the pea
palmed and gone. We fold the table
quick, and snatch the bills, skilled
as surgeons. We can't be caught.
We're the tosser, the shill, the lookout,
and the cop. We're the shell and the pea.
The wooden doll. The country.

CATHERINE PIERCE is the author of three books of poems: *The Tornado Is the World* (2016), *The Girls of Peculiar* (2012), and *Famous Last Words* (2008), all from Saturnalia Books.

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eight poems

Hearts Amiss

How wrong it was to look at those hearts incised
in maples and birches with a loving
arrow between them, especially when the tree
grew larger and the hearts expanded
the way they do and love took over the tree
and we said, “Here’s another” and our own hearts
broke in two with envy and regret
but what we didn’t know then was they were emblems,
signs, of something deeper and more discordant
for they—the lovers—had turned to sacrifice
and torn the other’s heart out from its moorings
and held the wet organ in their own hands,
loose and disconnected from the strings,
the hearts of lovers deeply separated
from what were once such arrows of desire,
and some were painted red on buried stones
planted in the ground like broken teeth.

No Kissing There

It wasn’t only Eleanor I kissed
but de Beauvoir with her net bag
on the Street of the Butchers
and I would have made it Red Emma
if I was a little older and Mary Shelley
a century before, I was so prone to
kissing, and I kissed in this life, on her mouth
Meryl Streep who stopped at my boughten table,
and when did it start, this kissing?
and when did kissing itself start?
And was it the nose or the mouth?
Let’s name children, grandchildren, dogs,
books, lovers, wives, friends,
and don’t forget kissing the air
in Rome and Buenos Aires to show your distance
and don’t forget kissing your teachers who
taught you one thing through neglect and abuse
and don’t forget Rilke’s simplistic separation
of life and art, no kissing there.

Lovesong, Lovesong

Chacun son gout said the old maid
as she kissed the cow and I
couldn’t agree with her more except
in my case it was an Australian sheep dog
I kissed and nothing larger nor fatter
certainly not a goat nor a pig with sharp
bristles around his lips nor a filthy cat
with a dead rat, oh recently, in her mouth
and if it had to be a dog then not a
fat and drooling English bull from the 30’s
and not a tight-skinned Boxer from the 50’s
though truth is there is another mammal I have
in mind with tinted hair and blue toenails
and the dearest mouth with not one bristle but with
trustfulness at whose first touch her eyes
close and her arms encircle me, the one
hand reaching up to the back of my head her body

falling against me, my own hand caressing
her hair, the eye at the top of my head
taking in as many stars and planets
as it can trying to understand where we are
as regards the moon and its endless phases.

Wet Peach

He reached inside his chest for understanding,
where there was a loose heart attached by strings
that could be stretched and severed he could grab
and joggle and wet as it was in his wet
hands, and (finally) holding it there in his palm
he almost moaned for he was thin-skinned to
an extreme and moved by the slow beating such
that he wore the strings on his sleeve that sometimes
drained in red on the rag he carried with him
for just that possibility or likelihood
and stuffed it like a peach in his side pocket.

Tell Me

Tell me what kind of coat did God wear and what were
the messages pinned to it and in what
language, even what family, that I read about
in some mystical text downstairs I remember
at six or seven in the morning in my lovely dungeon
with my backyard full of paint cans, laundry, mail,
garbage cans, golf clubs, scooters, bikes, and a dirty
cement floor for green grass.

And what finally happened to the ugly
tweed coat that I couldn’t even force on that
Berg gave me and I dropped in a Salvation Army bin?

And the camel hair coat that Judy gave me four
sizes too large that I used as a mop to clean up
the wet leaves on my front porch.

And the coat that Gogol adored and its long journey
that showed the bestiality of humans just under
the surface or not so very much under as it
turned out.

And the warm and luscious black wool coat that
Anne Marie bought me in Rome just ten years
into the new century. Tell me.

And tell me about the Moroccan who sat opposite me
in the Turkish restaurant in Paris first cousin to
Marcel Cerdan who begged me every night to tell him
about the vice in Chicago—“me dis du vice en Chicago.”

Which brings up Bressan’s rendering of Villon’s
“Ballad of Fine Ladies”—“Tell me, in what country is
Flora, the beautiful Roman.” “Dites-moi, en quel pays,
sont Flora, le bel Romana . . .”

Or Rimbaud:
Errant Jews of Norway
show me the snow
dear ancient exiles
show me the sea.

Juifs errant du Norvege,
Dites-moi le neige,
Ancien exiles cher
Dites-moi le mer.
Tell me.

Brecht

You can only arrive at the truth
by moving a yard or two away
before opening your mouth
and if it's singing then
it should be didactic singing
as Brecht preached,
at least a little to correct the daily lies.

It's as if it was the notes themselves,
a high C standing for resistance,
an octave higher for repudiation
with or without a reason.

It's as if a trombone stood for justice
and a harp for mercy
though it's a shame we have to do all that over again.

Justice for Allen Tate

Hart Crane died from loving the blue sky
too much and the water-filled puffs of white
barely above him, though one theory holds
it was a betrayal of his friends
and one his failed attempt at cross-gender love
after coming back from Mexico though I remember
one night in the mid-sixties when I had
a nightcap with Allen Tate after his talk at
the absurd "university" I was teaching at
after the liquorless celebratory dinner
and how he dismissed *The Bridge* as a contrived epic,
he who praised the Southern dead
and loved farming—from a great distance—
and hated, he said, urban life

and, like a born-again fool I told him
about my odious experience in Mississippi
where I was doing basic training at a camp near Biloxi,
in 1945, mind you,
and went over—what he knew so well—
the two drinking fountains, the white juries, the false witnesses,
the mutilated black bodies, the general humiliation, at which he
only sniffed a little and ordered another scotch,
single malt, this time, he said,
in the mid-Sixties, mind you,
time of the Second Awakening—
I should have drowned him in his malt,
I should have let him walk down the unlit hall
and struggle with the stubborn lock by himself,
the little weasel with the swollen forehead,
keeper of the books for a minute and a half of that lying century.

Under Your Wing

Paul Celan

Blue rolls over me
as it always did
even against my will
and I am leaning again
against one of the fake pillars
of the House of God

and later the House of Peace
House of Good Morning, House of Good Night
sitting on a red pipe
in the September sunlight
in my new wool suit
among the helpless and bored
a Clark bar in my pocket
part of the debris too
of *my* existence
or would you prefer
the *anguish*
I carried from place to place
neatly folded and perfectly creased
in my small velvet bag

GERALD STERN's many books include *Divine Nothingness: Poems* (W. W. Norton, 2014); *In Beauty Bright: Poems* (W. W. Norton, 2012); *Early Collected Poems: 1965–1992* (W. W. Norton, 2010); *Save the Last Dance: Poems* (2008); *Everything Is Burning* (2005); *American Sonnets* (2002); *Last Blue: Poems* (2000); and *This Time: New and Selected Poems* (1998), which won the National Book Award.



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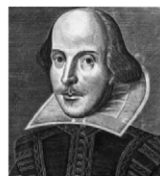
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CHRISTOPHER JANKE

two poems

posthumous* love poem 5

the cat
was not
a thought

we had
before the cat—
the picture
of my face
deep in yours
an up-close

approaching face
a facenose
sketched briefly

on your
paper as
lips too close

and as will allow
to hold, now only
in the folds

behind your
faceness in the
possible

few ways
in which
to which everything

had to
have color
so I had color

everything had
shape so I held
my place

with shape
everything had
to move

so we tripped
to our real-time
two-step, our

motion borne
through toes
from a world

pushing
us finally
through its space

and then
yes, out
of its only

very mind

translation of posthumous* love poem 5

Each time we rested.
Our heads on our.
Heads or leaned.

In to face the face.
Of our other face to.
Try to climb in with.

Lips on lips we.
Found no way through.
But turned each.

Other redder in.
The making everything.
Everything.

Had had shape.
So I had shape.
Everything had.

Had color so.
I went out there.
For all to see.

The body.
They said.
Was mine, now.

An image of.
Thought for a.
Moment in your.

Mind you remember.
The first kiss, the.
Last kiss and.

The shape.
Of the vacancy.
Of all things.

Between.

*These “posthumous” poems are written from the poet’s perspective after he’s dead.

CHRISTOPHER JANKE is a poet and visual artist. His poems have appeared in *Harper's*, *A Public Space*, and dozens of other journals. His first book, *Structure of the Embryonic Rat Brain*, won the Fence Modern Poets Series Prize. A double-volume of poetry called *psalterium | blepharism* was released by H_NGM_N Books in 2016.

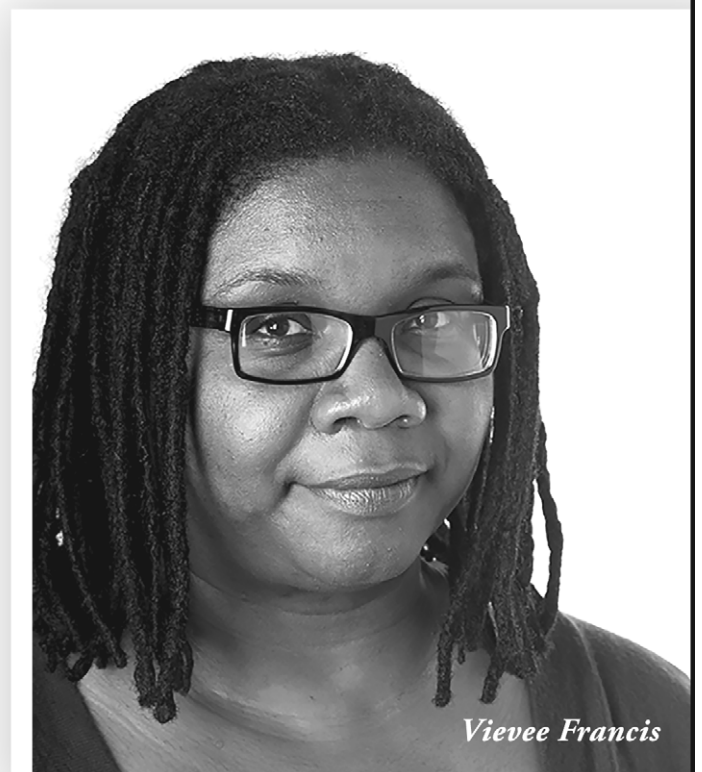
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“What You See Is Nothing Compared to the Roots”

Images of the Psyche in Contemporary Poetry

“THE POETS AND PHILOSOPHERS BEFORE me,” said Freud, “discovered the unconscious. . . . What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious could be studied.” He and his analytical brethren drew their descriptions of how the psyche works from two sources: their own case studies, and from poetry and literature. In those narratives and poems, they sought to identify the myths, patterns, compulsions and desires which structure human nature and narrate the human condition. Thus Hamlet and Oedipus; thus *Richard III* and the inferiority complex.

What Freud perhaps did not guess was that psychoanalysis itself would, in the twentieth century, stamp *its* narratives into contemporary literature; that poets and fiction writers would adopt, imitate and reproduce the insights of psychoanalysts in the making of their fictions. Given the tools and the vocabulary of psychology, they would read experience differently. Twentieth-century writers would construe their stories in the idiom of psychoanalysis, as much as the other way around.

Psychoanalysis transformed American literature. From Tennessee Williams to Ernest Hemingway, from William Faulkner to Anne Sexton, psychoanalysis informed how we saw things,

*Psychoanalysis transformed
American literature.*

what we thought about, and how we sounded when we talked. Its narratives and its jargon provided a vernacular and an image of process that pervaded novels and poetry for sixty or seventy years.

Here, for example, are two passages from well-known poets that would never have been written without psychological ideas and jargon in the community water supply:

1.

Whoever despises the clitoris despises the penis
Whoever despises the penis despises the cunt
Whoever despises the cunt despises the life of
the child.

Resurrection music, silence, and surf.

—Muriel Rukeyser, from “The Speed of
Darkness”

2.

The Greeks are sitting on the beach
wondering what to do when the war ends . . .

Thinking things over in the hot sun, pleased
by a new strength in their forearms, which
seem

more golden than they did at home, some
begin to miss their families a little,
to miss their wives, to want to see
if the war has aged them. And a few grow
slightly uneasy: what if war
is just a male version of dressing up,
a game devised to avoid
profound spiritual questions?

—Louise Glück, from “Parable of the
Hostages”

Rukeyser’s poem is about the spiraling, tangled costs of sexual repression. Glück’s witty poem analyzes the connection between male vanity and war, exposing the private motives underneath public ones. The very fluency of formulation in Glück’s poem testifies to the permeation of psychoanalytic understanding in our culture. The insights of both poems are fruits of the Freudian legacy.

Contemporary thinkers have tried to persuade us to suspect all ideologies, to see them as a kind of weakness which human beings are prey to, as intellectual viruses that fog the mind, or as purveyors of insidious “master narratives” which maintain social inequities. This position may seem true enough, if one thinks only of the Spanish Inquisition, or Nazism, or the Cold War—but that’s not the whole story. Systems of belief—psychoanalysis being one among all the others—don’t just influence culture; they lend it shape and empower it; they extend our reach and strengthen our grasp.

In forties and fifties America, it was psychoanalytic vocabulary—*neurosis*, *Oedipus complex*, *boundary issues*, *penis envy*, *sibling rivalry*, *inferiority complex*, *narcissistic*—that became our common intellectual currency. Since then, the cartoon image of one person reclining on a couch beside a other person seated with a notebook in his lap is the instantly-recognizable icon for therapy. Since then, the therapeutic occasion has been a commonly accepted context for hilarious comedy and serious drama.

Psychoanalysis gave people of all kinds, including artists, a framework that in its own way was both comprehensive and useful. Its description of experience included both the known and the unknowable, the civilized and the savage, the personal past and the challenging present. Psychoanalysis provided an account of human nature and of civilization, an account required by the modern individual to situate herself in a story. A human being, we were given to understand, was itself a sort of community of contradictory instincts, memories, and ideas; the psyche became a place both more inscrutable and more approachable, a place itself mysterious and worthy of exploration. And, of course, the therapeutic process has been depicted, embodied and enacted in a great variety of ways in our poems.

1. Working It Out

If one wants to see the impact of psychology upon our poetry, examples abound. The poem “The Anxiety,” by the poet Michael Dennis Browne, provides a textbook representation, in poetic form, of the therapeutic process:

I don’t expect the anxiety to go away
but I want the anxiety to know
its place in the scheme of things
of which I seem to consist
I want the anxiety to be
not an attention getter or star,
but faceless, like a butler bearing trays

whose old hand has turned down my bed
who knows when to take his leave
the one I could even grow to pity
this trembling retainer I keep on

as my father before me
out of some kind of long-standing loyalty
to the anxiety family
whose fortunes have been bound up
with ours for so long.

“The Anxiety” offers a lucid, almost letter-perfect version of the therapeutic process. It showcases a speaker confronting and patiently working through a psychological affliction towards a better accommodation. It turns out, Browne’s speaker understands, that invisible parts of the self are available for conversation. This is what Freud called “the talking cure” in action.

Browne’s poem could not have been written without the theories of Freud, and the existence of the psychoanalytic framework and vocabulary. The analytic term “*anxiety*” itself was needed to provide the speaker with a personified other, a necessary degree of separation from his own subjective condition. Because the speaker is conceptually comfortable with the idea that the psyche is compartmentalized and split, those parts can enter into negotiation with each other.

The speaker of Browne’s poem also seems like a person who has already done a certain amount of therapeutic work. After all, he is engaged in a process of dialogue with a part of his internal constituency: anxiety. From a psychoanalytic perspective, moreover, the requests of this spokesperson for the ego are quite reasonable: he has a desire for a more comfortable life, one in which a better balance is achieved between function and dysfunction. He wants, not to dominate or banish anxiety, but for anxiety “to know its place in the scheme of things.” Such a proportionate sense of the relative nature of happiness is one benchmark of Freud’s so called “well-adjusted” human being.

And indeed, at the end of the poem, the speaker’s psyche *is* convincingly reorganized; his parts seem reconciled with each other.

How is this breakthrough in “The Anxiety” achieved? In part, as mentioned, it is facilitated through the enterprise of dialectical conversation. The other, poetically interesting ingredient is the visible activity of associative imagination in the poem. It is when the poem’s speaker personifies his anxiety as a kind of *servant* or *comforter*—only then can he find an attitude of compassion towards this former adversary. By the end of the poem, the speaker has accepted the anxiety as a kind of companion, with whom he *must*, with whom he has *always* cohabited.

Such a poem is a not just a product of psychological culture, it provides a model of the mysterious psyche in action. In the complex textures of the poem, we see upwelling energies and strata, the collaborating energies of conscious and unconscious resources. If the conscious self brings the resources of rationality, choice, discernment and will, then the unconscious brings to the table imagination and play, song and theatre. The amount of quick cognitive play and double entendre in Browne’s poem is evidence of the presence of the whole psyche.

On a sheerly linguistic level, this process becomes visible in “The Anxiety” in a kind of quickening or turbulence that begins around line 8. Once the personification of the butler has been introduced, the second half of the poem is riddled

with puns, double entendre, and ambiguities: a “retainer,” for example, is something that holds one back, as well as a servant; that the figure is “long-standing” suggests the way in which a butler is stereotypically seen as perpetually standing at attention; that the “fortunes” (meaning both money and fate) of the two characters in the poem are “bound up” suggests that they have held each other in a state of captivity. These sonic and punning elements are evidence of the simmering, ingenious participation of the deep imagination in the making of the poem.

2. Entanglement

“The Anxiety” is a monologue with a therapeutic happy ending; one in which the parts of the psyche, formerly at odds, learn to cooperate, converse, and live harmoniously together.

But the layers of the self are not usually so easily disentangled. Poems often testify to and embody entanglement as well. And there is something both revelatory and cathartic about seeing even the most insoluble or toxic conundrums of selfhood vividly represented and brought to crisis. It can be consoling and clarifying to see such images of the entangled self. In contrast to Michael Dennis Browne’s patient, reasonable poem, Robert Creeley’s poem “Mother’s Voice” enacts a less detached psychological state of enmeshment in a more dire and physical way.

In these few years
since her death I hear
mother’s voice say
under my own, I won’t

want any more of that.
My cheekbones resonate
with her emphasis. Nothing
of not wanting only

but the distance there from
common fact of others
frightens me. I look out
at all this demanding world

and try to put it quietly back,
from me, say, thank you,
I’ve already had some
though I haven’t

and would like to
but I’ve said no, she has,
it’s not my voice anymore.
It’s higher as hers was

and accommodates too simply
its frustrations when
I at least think I want more
and must have it.

Creeley’s poem starts out in a narrative and level-headed mode, but in line seven the voice begins to grow strange, incoherent, and abstract. The distortion of syntax and grammar of the poem actively mirrors the internal confusion of the speaker’s self. The sentences themselves embody the deformity and adhesions of the speaker to the mother, like an egg stuck to the wall of the ovary. This internal theatre of conflicting voices is recognizable, to some degree, to even the most normal among us—but Creeley’s representation of this dreadful confusion is brilliant. The poem displays a predicament of hell, an underworld of incomplete separation which itself radically estranges the speaker from the “common fact of others.”

Like the earlier poem by Michael Dennis Browne, Creeley’s poem is highly informed by the psychoanalytic blueprint of self-development. Despite the poem’s bleak scenario, we can see the

speaker’s self working to gain a critical distance on the limits of this self-denying legacy: “it accommodates too simply / its frustrations,” the speaker reasons, in his conscious rebellion against the frozen past. The struggle of language itself manifests a heroic effort towards autonomy. Even inside the prison, there is the glimmer of hope for change.

3. Archetype

Like Creeley’s poem, Louise Glück’s poem “Mock Orange” is about being *stuck*, jammed deep inside in the human predicament. Like a cramped muscle, the psyche in “Mock Orange” clenches its own trauma in a fist. “Mock Orange” is gripping in its raw intensity and force.

Yet there is an important categorical difference between the two performances. Creeley’s poem—in its opening at least—is clearly channeled through the paradigm of psychological method—it is, we could say, underwritten by the insights of therapy. (“In these few years / since her death I hear / mother’s voice say / under my own . . .”) By contrast, in reading or listening to Glück’s “Mock Orange,” we are transported into the realm of myth and archetype.

It is not the moon, I tell you.
It is these flowers
lighting the yard.

I hate them.
I hate them as I hate sex,
the man’s mouth
sealing my mouth, the man’s
paralyzing body—

and the cry that always escapes,
the low, humiliating
premise of union—

In my mind tonight
I hear the question and pursuing answer
fused in one sound
that mounts and mounts and then
is split into the old selves,
the tired antagonisms. Do you see?
We were made fools of.
And the scent of mock orange
drifts through the window.

How can I rest?
How can I be content
while there is still
that odor in the world?

This distinction between the personal and the archetypal voice is a significant one, poetically and psychically. The poetics of personal psychology

deep interior of the collective consciousness. The lyric, ferocious complaint is a perpetual configuration of consciousness and of human affairs; it will always be so, and the particular players are merely the temporary, temporal mouthpieces for the gods, demons, and goddesses present.

“Mock Orange” is the complaint of one who has fallen from erotic grace, exiled from the realms of true pleasure and union. At the core of the poem is a wound, a complaint, and a renunciation. Though Glück assigns the speech to no particular mythic character (as she often does elsewhere in her poetry), it is easy to imagine the speaker as one of the angry virgin goddesses who pledges never to be captured and deflowered; or perhaps one of the many mythological figures—usually female—who has been loved and then abandoned by a god.

Though the poem’s acidic complaint about sex is unforgettable—“*I hate them. / I hate them as I hate sex, / the man’s mouth / sealing my mouth . . .*”—what the speaker truly hates is not sex, but the promise, the premise, of an achievable *oneness*, a longing which is always disappointed. Here is the tragic truth of the archetype: the selves that attempt union always fall back into their condition of separateness. The failure of union is inevitable and irresolvable. Glück’s poem is the expressed outrage of that condition of existential partialness.

In that sense, the plot of “Mock Orange” is practically the opposite of the Michael Browne poem, which illustrates a successful, if modest, psychological union and integration. A New Age therapist, encountering Glück’s speaker as a client, would wrinkle his brow sympathetically and say, “But don’t you see? You must find the eternal lover inside *yourself*.”

But Glück’s poem embodies a cosmic dilemma, and will not soften its existential extremity. Because the poem is archetypal in orientation, we can glimpse the specter of other myths floating around the perimeter of this one—the exile from Eden into shame and incompleteness; Eurydice in the underworld after slipping from the grasp of Orpheus; Psyche sent away by Cupid. No flower will ever be aromatic again; no food will ever again taste good.

But remember, poems are made great by their imaginative resources, not their conceptual strengths. One brilliant aspect of Glück’s poetic craft is its figurative genius—the way in which the speaker turns abstractions into metaphors that configure the theme of mating and romance. In stanza four, for example, she says “in my mind tonight I hear the question and pursuing answer,” providing an analogy for both carnal and intellec-

This distinction between the personal and the archetypal voice is a significant one, poetically and psychically.

are *local* and autobiographical; such a poem seeks insight and resolution in the voice of a struggling and good-willed individual. The poetic voice often emanates an urgent intimacy. The improvement of the speaker’s circumstances is a real possibility.

The high-pitched monologue of the archetype is another story; such a monologue embodies an eternal conundrum, a universally recurring, permanent locus of human consciousness—the proud, unforgiving Creon, the abandoned and fatalistic Dido, the eternally grieving mother pietà. When we read “Mock Orange,” we are listening to an old story, told by one of those selves from the

tual desire. Then, when the answer “catches” the question (an interesting reversal), they “fuse” into “one sound,” that first “mounts and mounts”—again the sexual analogy—then “splits” “into the old selves, the tired antagonisms.” It is not just the futility of passion that is being lamented by the speaker; it is the uselessness of intellect as well. We will never be a finished thought, we will never be more than a temporary answer, nor will we ever be more than momentarily whole.

In “Mock Orange,” the hatred of isolate discreteness is projected onto sex—the world of men and women and copulation—and that hatred of

sex is transferred or projected into the smell of nighttime flowers. The speaker is a barren ghost wandering restlessly in a sensuous world, a mythological figure tormented by some memory of union which eludes her. Her response is to accuse the world of a cosmic breach of faith. And, fair enough. This too is a true image of the process of the psyche, which keeps transforming, struggling for an achievement it only falls away from.

4. Alternative Models of Psyche

The poems by Browne, Creeley and Glück all provide images of a particular sort—each describes a condition of confinement. Specifically, we might even say, the poems express the feeling of being trapped in *bodies*. Each of these poems depicts the speaker's self in a state of confinement, then intensifies the crisis to a point at which a breakthrough can occur. *How can I be content?* asks Glück's speaker, caught in herself forever like a maiden trapped in stone. "*But I've said no, she has, / it's not my voice anymore,*" says Creeley's afflicted speaker. Alienated, separate, and needy—the image is an old one. The underlying request, *Help me*, is the very foundation of therapy.

Just as we say that metaphorical systems empower, they can also ensnare. Ask any Catholic. A vocabulary for experience can itself become a kind of prison. It is plentifully evident that the concepts of psychoanalysis have ensnared numerous seekers over the years—those whose analysis never ends, those who become addicted to their trauma, those for whom an esoteric vocabulary has become a substitute for life. How can we find an image then, or a system, that can reverse, unlock, transform, or liberate us from a model of the world, or of the psyche, that we have unconsciously inherited?

The answer might reside in working with the images with which we describe our world. Psyche *is* image, says Jung. Images are pre-rational, and carry information from the other worlds into this one—ergo mythology and folklore. Images, and the psychic possibilities they represent, can teach us in ways that bypass and circumvent the analytical mind. Imagination can discover the unimaginable.

The Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer, a child psychologist by profession, often displays in his poems an awareness which incorporates the parameters of psychology, yet also enlarges them. Tranströmer writes poems that frame consciousness in a less boundaried way than the sheerly psychological. His imagistic vocabulary even illuminates the assumptions and limitations of the older system.

One striking aspect of Tranströmer's "analytics" is that they do not depict the world as exclusively human-centered. In Tranströmer's poems the human is coexistent with, but not essentially separate from, or superior to, the natural world. The consequences of such expansiveness are evident in his poem "A Few Moments":

The dwarf pine on marsh grounds holds its head up; a dark rag.
But what you see is nothing compared to the roots,
the widening, secretly groping, deathless or half-
deathless root system.

I you she he also put roots out.
Outside our common will.
Outside the city.

Rain drifts from the summer sky that's pale as milk.
It is as if my five senses were hooked up to some other creature
that moves with the same stubborn flow
as the runners in white circling the track as the night comes
misting in.

In Tranströmer's poem, Nature itself models the expansive connectedness of things better than human institutional wisdom. The root system of the self, to use the poem's analogy, is larger than the spread-out branches of the tree visible above ground. The boundaries of this world are not the penitentiary walls of an isolated human individual; they are permeable, contiguous, and in communication with their surroundings, like the dwarf pine. Here, awareness flows out of the individual speaker into the surrounding world; here, physical energy is spiritual energy, and it is in circulation: "I you she he also put out roots." In Freudian analysis, the unconscious contains disturbing and repressed elements. In Tranströmer's more Jungian-influenced vision, the unconscious is simply the water in which we all swim, the air we breathe, the earth upon whose surface we walk. "Outside the city" there is more of us, and we are alive. Such an image surprisingly heartens us.

The intentional plainness of the Tranströmer poem, and the opaque, somewhat surreal image at its conclusion, have their own meanings. Tranströmer is affirmative, but he knows the human psyche contains bleak realities, as well as graceful, natural ones. The notion of being in control, of achieving some permanent state of harmony or safety is a pipe dream. We must not pretend to be more evolved than we are. To have a

split consciousness, and a split being, to be "hooked up to a creature," is the human condition, and to deny that is folly. As the half-formed images in the last lines of "A Few Moments" suggest, we are incomplete and "secretly groping." But we are also larger than we might think.

The most important intellectual value provided by twentieth-century psychoanalysis might be its forceful assertion of the essential unknowability of the self and of the world. To remind us of our actual ignorance is in many ways a central proposition of any useful modern system—in this sense, psychoanalysis was a viable surrogate for the map provided by religion, which posits an unknowable and inaccessible divine intelligence. The limits of consciousness and the dangers of hubris are still our guide. Not only that, the human concession to the actuality of unconsciousness lends an all important openness to our description of reality. It requires humility regarding human self mastery. If psychoanalysis wanes as a contemporary paradigm, what version of unknowing will the next paradigm offer as a replacement? Or will the hubris of our technology seduce us into believing that our ignorance can be outrun? The understanding of our essential ignorance makes civilization and perspective possible. It safeguards us from our own grandiosity and impetuous rashness. It is also the perpetual precondition for creativity itself.



As a late-twentieth-century European who had witnessed the failure and dissolution of multiple ideological systems, Tranströmer often reiterates this point about incompleteness. In another poem, "Romanesque Arches," the Swedish poet exclaims: "Don't be ashamed to be a human being, be proud! / . . . You'll never be complete, and that's as it should be." Perhaps this is one of the great reminders that therapeutic thought has had to offer us; the self is a work in progress, in the midst of perpetually transforming circumstances. Representations of the "unfinishedness" of phenomena, feeling and thought is a challenge that seems worthy for twenty-first-century art. The system that pretends to be comprehensive is a dangerous thing.

Nonetheless, ideologies and their correlative images empower us, they structure the world of perception, they provide us with the compass points and traction that enable us to negotiate life for our own ends and the good of others. The stories and models we are bequeathed by our culture, by our parents and teachers, have everything to do with how our lives will go, how they are enclosed, confined, or extended into adventure. They determine whether we will love ourselves and our lives, or fear and endlessly defend them. A metaphor of roots and branches, like the one Tranströmer's poem offers, may be more useful than that of a heavenly shepherd watching his flocks.

It takes great art to open and not to quickly confine the case of the human condition. The poetic use of psychology is most enriching and authentic when it is used to explore, but not resolve, the mysteries of soul and world. Again, we can turn to a Tranströmer poem, "Streets of Shanghai," which exhibits the benefits of the psychological legacy, but goes beyond them as well. "Streets" is a poem in three sections, whose dialectic is complex and composite, but here are the closing images, once more focused on the pedestrian traffic on the street:

Behind each one walking here hovers a cross that wants to catch up to us,
pass us, join us.
Something that wants to sneak up on us from behind and cover our eyes
and whisper, "Guess who?"

We look almost happy out in the sun, while we bleed to death from wounds
we know nothing about.

Tranströmer's intuitive poem mingles together images that seem variously drawn from the realms of psychology, religion, myth, and philosophy. In doing so, the poem emphasizes one premise held in common by all of these systems: that we live only on the top layer of our lives. The narratives we tell ourselves and show to the world are not the entirety of the picture. Rather, we cohabit and collaborate with other dimensions, spiritual and psychic, which thrive behind the stage, outside the frame. Our respectful attention to those forces has the potential to enlarge and lend our lives meaning. To be unfinished, to concede that our consciousness is partial and a work-in-progress, can be construed as a cause for anxiety or for positive excitement. It can provoke a sense of shame, or of adventure. Somewhere between science and theology, perhaps through the creative act called art, there is room for an experiment in which we are already involved: the task of making what could be called a human being. ◀

TONY HOAGLAND is the author of six collections of poetry, most recently *Priest Turned Therapist Treats Fear of God* (Graywolf, 2018).

four poems

The Rabbit

On his deathbed, the dictator
orders the execution
of all the watchmakers.
It's OK to laugh at him,
but he's no different than you
or me. One day, our mothers
also set us down and never
picked us up again, and no one
recovers from being a child,
because a child never thinks
*This is the last time I'll wear
these shoes with the red stripe.*
Scribes used to scrape the ink
from the page and start over.
And anyone who remembers
the person who remembers
what was first written on the page
has been dead for centuries.
Ninety-three-point-six percent of adulthood
is believing *If I could just have those shoes
with the red stripe again, I'd be happy.*
Sometimes we bulldoze
the ruins of an ancient city
to build a shopping mall.
And sometimes we bulldoze
a shopping mall to make way
for another shopping mall.
When my pocket turns out
empty, I want to curse
the tailor. And why not?
He stitched that little
fold of emptiness that rubs
my thigh all day like a bad
lover. I'm writing this poem
by replacing the poem
that used to be here.
And do you see the pair
of rabbit tracks cutting
across the snow,
and where they stop
in the middle of the field—
the imprint of two wings?

Photograph of My Wife Shaving My Head

It's the dosage
that makes anything
poisonous, and poison,
in small quantities,
can cure you. How else to explain
that a waiting room can absorb
just some of the light
thudding through its windows,
and what we see is only the light each object
turns away. The plastic roses refuse
red. The nurse's nirtile glove
won't hold one blue photon.
The mountain snow
in the inspirational poster says *no*

to everything. How many times
did I wake, poison dripping into me,
my wife nearby in a chair
and in her lap the large green binder
in which she kept every schedule,
chart, prescription? Kindness,
in sufficient quantity, tastes
like mop bucket water. No? I didn't want
to believe it either, not even when I
cursed and knocked the cup
of ice chips to the floor.
Or the way I said *thank you*
to the nurse tugging staples
from my skin, *thank you*
to the nurse threading a tube
through a hole in arm
all the way to my heart,
thank you to the nurse hanging
the bag of bleomycin. A little drop
of anger can cure your sadness,
and a little sadness can cure
your anger, but drink too deep—
How many times did I wake?
How many time did I thank pain,
or recoil from the cool palm
on my scalp? Love
enters the body
as through a cut
in the sole of the foot.
That's no secret.
But did you know
But did you know
But did you know

Ruin

But I am a ruin myself, wandering among ruins.
—Heinrich Heine

At Ground Zero, 15 years later, a bachelor party
poses
for pictures with a blow-up
sex doll— meaning, a human
mouth pressed itself to a valve,
and human lungs pumped human
breath into that body, breath like wind
hissing through crumbled masonry.
Everyone has a burning building inside them.
(Maybe just a dollhouse smoking from its dormers.
Or a dictator's palace
perfumed with jet fuel.)
The tractors plowing plowing plowing
the fields around my
family's farm still turn up stone
arrowheads. It's rare these days to find
anything other
than a broken point, but I've held
one, whole, long as my palm and still

sharp, and I've walked old midden mounds
 fenced into cow pastures generations
 before my birth.

Life is all gilded
 frescoes and Arnold Palmers at the clubhouse

until Titus and his men pass through with torches,
 until Cortez and his men pass through
 with torches, until Sherman and his men

and so on, until men forget
 what their hands looked like without
 torches.

In Mosul, men sledgehammer statues
 millennia older than the prayers
 they speak to god, and in the light of this century

 which is the shaky light thrown by torches

 I think prayer
 is like the breath blown

into some flimsy body, its insides
 reeking of smoke from the burning buildings
 men carry around inside them

 (some, whole tenements

howling fire
 from every window,
 and others

 only ash.)

And how in that farmhouse I love
 (which almost once
 burned too)

 there is a clock

 with arrowheads instead
 of numbers, counting down

 the sharp seconds.

Postoperative

Under the blanket, / under the gauze, / your stitches lined up / like
 immigrants / in dark coats, waiting / to enter one terrible / country after
 leaving / another. Memories / fall away, one / by one, like ships going
 down / in a storm, like a hundred little men falling off / a hundred little
 ladders. The way hands held you / when you were the size / of an injured
 rabbit—gone. / The cacti blooming / in your father's greenhouse, / the
 smell of new paintings / hanging in your friend's apartment, / the trail
 through the woods that led to a circle / of stones. Birds carry it all off.
 A shadow / falls over it. It melts / on your tongue. But that loss / flies
 through you, / a sweet darkness.

NICK LANTZ is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *You, Beast*. He teaches in the MFA program at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, where he is the editor of the *Texas Review*.

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.

PAUL MULDOON

POETRY READINGS

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**AMERICAN IRISH
 HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
 991 Fifth Avenue
 New York, NY 10028

Thursday, April 19, 2018
 6:30 p.m. Reading
 Reception to follow

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 2008-2010 Delancey Place
 Philadelphia, PA 19103

Monday, April 23, 2018
 5:30 p.m. Reception
 6:00 p.m. Reading

Admission \$15, Members free

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Poetry readings sponsored by the
**MAURICE ENGLISH
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Song for You Who Turn the Page

You are not a Quaker farmer
and I have no prophetic ankle
we can trust.

But the way your reading
finger rides the page
is not unlike
a harrow
and this makes all
my minerals
keen.

It is strange labor—
building dirt in the dark.

We've learned the annular views
squarely. Cropped to the point
of symbol—
this the gyroscope
that the bystander
not waving
at the hot-air balloon
where we now live.

It need not be a child staring out
of a charcoal suit.
It need not portend.
We can see no
one knows
how to die

and we will bear the sound
the world between
we will find that
something

shudders back
back from out of all
we've never been.

TIMOTHY O'KEEFE is the author of *You Are the Phenomenology*, winner of the 2017 Juniper Prize for Poetry, and *The Goodbye Town*, winner of the 2010 FIELD Poetry Prize. His poems and lyric essays have appeared in *The Best American Poetry*, *Boston Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Seneca Review*, *VOLT*, and elsewhere. He lives in Athens, Georgia.

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JULIO MACHADO

Confusing Sex with Love

This is how it was. She was eight feet tall if she was an inch, legs like Christmas hams, breasts like windmills, like volcanoes, tectonic catastrophes. She burned up villages and swallowed roads.

She took my hand and said, I'm going to show you *everything*.

We went among the barns. It was the solstice and the night was minutes long. And *hot*—the chickens were dropping fried eggs in their coops, the horses sweating glue. One of those nights the moon leaves you sunburned.

We made something like love, but without the story. Friction like trains derailing, like a horde of locusts. There was no letting go. The howling we made woke up Moses himself and he said, *Part!*

Only that one word could have done it. Her eyes were galactic spotlights. Steam pouring out of her mouth and hands. Ignitions in the atmosphere, the seas vaporizing. Birds cawing and falling around us.

I held on to the last palm tree, a flap of skin like a flag in the wind, signaling *I surrender*.

JULIO MACHADO is a Cuban American poet, writing and teaching in Miami. He received his undergraduate degree in History and Literature from Harvard University, and completed an MFA under Campbell McGrath and Denise Duhamel at Florida International University. His work has most recently appeared in the *Kenyon Review*, *Threepenny Review*, and *Water Stone Review*.



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Chen Chen's Dreams

A Review of *When I Grow Up
I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*

*When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List
of Further Possibilities* by Chen Chen
BOA Editions, 2017, 96 pages

IN LATE SEPTEMBER I DROVE DOWN I-5 SOUTH from Seattle to California with a rice cooker in the front seat and everything else I owned in the back. When I pulled out of the driveway my mother said, "It's not too late to let me come with you." I kissed her through the window, slept in the backseat of my car and washed my hair with hand soap in public restrooms. The first night I spent at a friend of a friend's house in Portland. The second night with my feet dipped in a public pool reading Chen Chen.

By the third night I was flirting with waitresses and only driving on cruise control and I knew I would have to tell my mother something else. I was moving down the coast to start my PhD in literature after I spent the summer in Brooklyn barely making rent. I lied to my mother and said my art internships were paying me enough but I got some of my income by going on dates with gross men with Oriental fetishes from the Internet. I drew my eyelids on heavy and spoke with an accent that sounded like a violet hunger.

*"I will miss the particular cruelty / of tongue twist-
ers in my first tongue: / Shíshì shīshì Shī Shì, shì shī,
shì shí shí shí shī. / Shì shíshì shì shì shī."*

Chen Chen's poetry transgresses the space between vulnerability and surrender, a steady pulse against the tides of forgetting. His loss of self is not delineated by an explicit anti-identity, but instead a subtle reconfiguration of the subjective. His writing is an externalization process that projects images of the self onto the beautifully banal. *"There are some inside things I was going to make / outside things, just for one person in a godless / living room, full of passé plants."*

I read poems at red lights and rest stops and thought about what inside things I had kept inside me, how I wanted to take those latent scars and take them to the surface, a psychic exfoliation. Chen Chen writes violence in a way that subverts the imagined binary between the victim and transgressor: *"I tried to ask my parents to leave the room, / but not my life. It was very hard. Because the room was the size / of my life."* The radical empathy in Chen Chen's poetry is a practice of amnesty—even in moments of anger his words are not vengeful. And they made me feel full, almost brimming over, with a ritual emptiness.

When I was ten I told my mother I wanted to be a writer and she said what? My fingers are swollen, come help me seal these dumplings. In high school I said it again and she told me I better marry someone rich so I never have to do real work. She wants to believe America made me this way but I like to believe I made me this way. *"... when on second thought, I can see the dust was just there, / just dirt, & the light only made it visible."* Sometimes I imagine her white dimpled flesh

standing in the shadow of the doorway, waiting to smell my hands when I come home from a party, and suddenly I am struck with the guilt of being the one who was carried, as if when she bore me I came out as the vacancy.

There is an ontological sadness that grows from a powerlessness in my own becoming. Which is to say: it's not that I did not want to become the complicit daughter of a buried bloodline but the more fluid I tried to be the more liminal I became. When I was ten I stopped brushing my hair and my mother forced a comb through it. Don't move, she said before pouring cold water and saline solution over my head. She was sifting through in my psyche, looking for which pure to keep and which tainted to dispose of, like sorting grains of rice.

*"Finally, I've learned—all this time, trying to get
from one useless / chunk of land to another, when I
should've just stayed / in the water."*

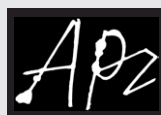
When Chen Chen writes about his mother she lives in a space that fluctuates from omniscient to powerless. His descriptions of her are perforated with the realization that the hands that raised him have been dyed with memory and loss. *"The grease-tang of kung pao chicken in my mother's shirts, / in my mother's far-away look after shifts."* He writes of a spiritual disembodiment evoked by the spatial, and the distance between uncoils into a landscape. His poetry dilates this distance and becomes a silent transmission of empathy. Chen Chen's restless idealism is never reductive—instead, it resists the crippling anesthesia of assimilation one line at a time.

*"What does it mean, to sing in the language of
those / who have killed your mother, / would kill her
again?"*

When my mother thinks of my car stalled on the side of an Oregon freeway she remembers how my father slept in a pile of his own clothes somewhere in Ohio and how my grandmother gave her daughters away in Shanghai because she could only afford sons. And then she thinks of how history is this cyclical mass which cannot be broken no matter what we puncture it with. And still, passing through a starless desert at 100 mph, I could not shed her gaze or the conviction that I had spit out the leftover dreams that were painstakingly regurgitated in my mouth. My refusal *"to be the one / my parents raised me to be— / a season from the planet / of planet-sized storms."*

My mother told me last summer that our family friends no longer ask of me. Ying works in Wall Street, Jenny is in her last year of medical school, Simon studies computer science at Stanford, Richard is a lawyer for the United Nations. And I'm shoplifting shampoo from CVS, staring at the potchmarked sun until its light dies in the back of my eye. Chen Chen writes that he is *"dreaming of one day being as fearless as a mango."* And I am dreaming of one day being an orange with my mother's thumb rooted in the rind. ◀

ANGIE SIJUN LOU is from Seattle. She is a PhD student in Literature and Creative Writing at UC Santa Cruz.



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Send entries to:

The American Poetry Review, Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize
The University of the Arts, 320 S. Broad Street, Hamilton #313
Philadelphia, PA 19102-4901

four poems

Magic Grow

Dear avocado, I keep
seeing myself in your pit's solitude. I keep peeling
back your skin like a nicotine
patch, like a birth control patch, or whatever
else we use to evict
the body's desires. It's January 3,
and suddenly it matters
that I can't stop staring at birds of prey
or identifying with the shards of peppermint
on a chocolate bar.
I've been teaching master classes
on leaving parties early, dreaming not of lemons
but their rinds. I can't get myself
to exercise, though it's true my tongue
runs with scissors,
runs like tights on a woman who wants a man
to peel her tights off, her legs
shaved and lotioned, her toenails painted
the color of a national park.
Maybe this year, I'll get my grandmother
a cat named Svetlana. I'll sing
to the feathers in my parka, lean in to the radio's
deep kiss. I want the confidence
of neon bar signs and sponge rocket ships
bursting from capsules.
I want to believe that they don't explode
but bloom.

Salt

Maybe I am the coyote
I keep hearing at night. Maybe I've already
caught fire. Maybe
I've already been ruined, but tenderly,
the way my mother
ravages cherries in her mouth.
Yes, I look at my hands
the way a more careful person looks
at lawnmowers. I make space
between my ribs
for us to play tag in,
throw knives at the moon and guzzle
its light. What I want:
to belong to an erotics of stillness.
To be a bike with training wheels.
To be born again and carried
like a casserole,
my soft tomato brain
salted silent.

The Pool Filter Is Sorry

the pool filter is sorry
the crop circle in Nebraska is sorry
the stale crackers on the sale rack are sorry so sorry
the praying mantis eating its husband is sorry
the laundry machine that shrunk your underwear is sorry
the lightning which usually regrets nothing is sorry
the bee never meant to die in your finger
the dust on your contact lens doesn't know why it did it
the couch leg you stubbed your toe on tried to jump out of the way
and the dolls that know they're creepy are sorry
and the doorknobs hiding electricity in them are sorry

and the Coca Cola that took a wrong turn down your windpipe is sorry
also sorry:
the avalanche
the blister
the hole in the soccer ball
the ladder with the man on it that's about to tip
the fever in the baby
the catheter in the old woman
the bug spray that dissociates when it does its job
the cell growing something bad inside it is sorry
and the bad thing spreading to the brain and bones is sorry
and the liver pushing its own off button is truly very sorry
when I was six my friend and I rode each other like horses
and when I collapsed under his weight and wept
he said sorry sorry sorry
I didn't want to forgive him
at six I was already tired of forgiving things
but when he started to cry
I was sorry
and we exchanged apologies like amulets
against the hurt to come

Mosquitos

What if night was a rope
dragging me through a town square
in 19th century London, somewhere
with cobblestone bridges and public
executions, Hogarth paintings
of humiliated wives and Earls
with syphilis, somewhere with a river
and a boat with a hole in it
floating on the river?
Wasn't that what happened? Weren't all my words for hunger
also war metaphors?
Didn't I swallow the bone
that the moon fed me?
Who kept projecting images
of fancy tombstones on the pub walls, and was it
the same person who kept
filling the soap dispensers with ash,
only the ash was white like crushed pills
and okay, maybe
I took them? Maybe I was thinking
about how right now
someone was carving herself like a turkey
or staring at a mounted deer head
in a museum and suffering an overabundance
of empathy? Was that a thing?
Was night a rope
or was night the hook
to which my body's rope
was tethered? Maybe someone had cracked open
a window in my lungs,
which were slowly filling with mosquitos?
Maybe all I wanted
was for the mosquitos to be tiny
horses, then mosquitos,
then horses?

Originally from Moldova, RUTH MADIEVSKY is the author of a poetry collection, *Emergency Brake* (Tavern Books, 2016). Her poetry and fiction appear in *Tin House*, *The Kenyon Review*, *ZYZZYVA*, *The Rumpus*, and elsewhere. She was the winner of APR's Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize, *The Iowa Review*'s Tim McGinnis Prize in fiction and a *Tin House* poetry scholarship.

Translation as Performance

The Case of One Polish Poet

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SO-CALLED Polish School of Poetry, mainly Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert, Wisława Szymborska, and Adam Zagajewski, are the most visible Polish poets translated and published in the U.S. Although not all of them follow the poetics favored by Miłosz, the leading practitioner of the aforementioned poetic style, which is characterized by historical and philosophical exploration, they do not stray too far from it, either. As critic Joanna Niżyńska reminds us, the Polish poetry canon in America, just as any other canon, “is subject to political and economic considerations that drive the market for translations, changes in educational curriculum that render some authors more desirable than others, and, ultimately, a cultural tendency to reinforce rather than challenge the familiar understandings of foreign literatures” (7). It is largely due to the third reason mentioned by the Indiana University critic that many American readers equate Polish poetry with Miłosz’s style. Consequently, a list of Polish poets unavailable or underrepresented in English should start with Miron Białoszewski (1922–1983), the most important Polish avant-garde poet of the last sixty years. In order to ease the carrying-over of poets like Białoszewski into English, I propose something seemingly obvious, if not outright banal, mainly that translators begin thinking of the translation of poetry as a performance rather than a process recognizable for its fidelity to the original, which in turn may liberate them to tackle projects deemed difficult or untranslatable.

*I propose . . . that translators begin thinking
of the translation of poetry as
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The fact that we have had only one small book of his poems translated into English and published in the late ’70s is due to the interpretive difficulty one encounters reading his work—Białoszewski’s eccentric poems, steeped in neologism and contorted syntactical constructs, are difficult to decipher even for native speakers.¹ What has stood in the way of having Białoszewski translated into English widely, then, is the issue of translational fluency. Lawrence Venuti has observed that the sought-after fluency of a translated text can be traced back to the mid-20th-century shift marked by the elevation of science writing that favored clear theses and discussions. In the case of translated literature, which has never been popular, American readers came to expect what Venuti calls “translator’s invisibility” and an accompanying domestication of the foreign text:

The prevalence of fluent domestication has supported these developments because of its economic value: enforced by editors, publishers, and reviewers, fluency results in translations that are eminently readable and therefore consumable on the book market, assisting in their commodification and insuring the neglect of foreign texts and English-language translation discourses that are more resistant to easy readability. (15–16)

The favoring of texts deemed desirable for translation due to their perceived readability not only restricts who and what gets translated, thus eliminating any semblance of difference from our literary discourse, but it also impacts the visibility of the translators themselves, who must practice, in Venuti’s words, “a weird self-annihilation, a way of conceiving and practicing translation that undoubtedly reinforces its marginal status in Anglo-American culture” (8). The literary market’s desire for transparency in translated works, especially poetry, is why, partly at least, we haven’t seen more Białoszewski’s poems in English. However, as Paul Ricouer put it in his seminal work, *On Translation*, via an analogy from the world of painting, “the original will not be duplicated by another original” (5). Therefore, “a good translation can aim only at a supposed *equivalence* that is not founded on a demonstrable identity of meaning. An equivalence without *identity*. This equivalence can be sought, worked at, supposed” (22). Thinking of translation as performance would allow a translator to approach the process from a variety of angles, thus embodying the search for equivalence mentioned by Ricouer, which in turn might lead to the creating of new poetic idioms.

As a translator of contemporary Polish poetry, I view my own process as involving elements of both action and communication. My translating is a performance because it features what Richard Bauman refers to as “a specially marked mode of action, one that sets up or represent a special interpretive frame within which the act of communication is to be understood.” Furthermore, I do regard my activity, to paraphrase Bauman, with special intensity (44). Employing both formal and social-psychological reflexivity, when I translate I perform for myself as well as for others (47–48). I reenact the writing of the poem, and muse on its original and continuing reception in Poland, while also imagining how it might be received in English. In doing so, I introduce a consciousness into the process, and turn the act of mere ‘doing a translation’—i.e., rewriting a text in another language—into performing it for myself as much as for others, thus illustrating Marvin Carlson’s claim that “Performance is always a performance for someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, the audience is the self” (qtd. in Bial 73).

The interpretative aspect of translation as performance is a key first step to opening up the mode of translation to more performative approaches. Incidentally, any kind of interpretive outcome disagrees with Walter Benjamin’s oft-quoted call to action for translators to create a “pure language.” Ricoeur borderline ridicules Benjamin’s messianic overtones in the latter’s seminal essay “The Task of the Translator,” when he points out that “the practice of translation does not receive any help from this [. . .] eschatological waiting” (16). Indeed, the interpretive aspect soon gives way to a practical and creative refashioning of the poem in the target language. As another performance scholar W.B. Worthen observes, “Where interpretation is earnest, concerned with fidelity and obedience, performance is insouciant, rewriting and disseminating the words of the text in various ways” (qtd. in Bial 12). In other words, while

interpretation produces a reading, performance produces a meaning that goes above and beyond merely transmitting what Diane Taylor sees as transmitting of “social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated behavior” (qtd. in Bial 381). Furthermore, since all writing is a performance, as Stephen Greenblatt reminds us (par. 1), then translating can be thought of as that prerequisite occasioning of writing, which must be identified and understood if the writing is to be successful.

Miron Białoszewski isn’t the only poet whose work has been deemed difficult. Yet Paul Celan (1920–1970), to use a famous example, has had more luck with American translators, poets, and readers. When discussing his translations of Celan’s famously hermetic poems, which, by the way, Celan never saw as such, believing instead that reading the poem would eventually yield a type of understanding or meaning, Pierre Joris claims, in his introduction to *Breathturn Into Timestead*:

The printed poem is, in fact, only a score from all subsequent reading (private or public) and performative transformations, be they through music, dance, painting, or foreign-language translations. Such view is bound to destabilize any concept of the poem as some fixed and absolute artifact, readable (understandable, interpretable) once and for all. (xii—xiv).

The idea of a poem as a fluid object goes a long way in helping translators break the chains of translation understood as duplication in favor of performance. Of course some poems and poets already embody degrees of performance within them. Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” (1855) is a good example, as is Tadeusz Różewicz (1921–2014), another Polish poet who hasn’t had much success in America. In one of his better-known poems, “In the Middle of Life” (1953), the poet plays God:

After the end of the world
After my death
I found myself in the middle of life
Creating myself
Building a life
People animals landscapes

This is a table I kept saying
This is a table
On the table are bread knife
The knife is used for cutting break
People feed on bread

(tr. Joanna Trzeciak, ln. 1–11)

The poem’s opening two stanzas can serve as examples of the kind of performativity that translators engage in; Różewicz sets out not only to create a new world, with subjects and objects, but also evokes actions, such as cutting the bread and eating. The self-reflexivity of the task of rendering this type of work into English is self-evident. The Polish critic Andrzej Kopacki finds an analogy to translation as performance in the way that a literary text or script is adopted for the stage, whereby “the translator is the director, the arranger of the adaptation, and the performer” (90).²

According to literary theorist Jonathan Culler, “Performative acts may originate or inaugurate, create something new” (126). However, not all performative gestures are identical. Relying on the distinction originated by the late British philosopher J.L. Austin, whereby “*performative* utterances, which accomplish the action to which they refer” versus “*constative* utterances, which make true or false statements” (125), Culler observes that many “performatives have an explicitly ritualistic character” (125). Consequently, Culler favors the term performance rather than performativity when discussing lyric poems, which may or may not bring about what’s described therein. Here’s an outline of his four cases of performativity:

First, there is a general performativity linked to the conventional character of literary discourse, which could be said to bring into being that which it describes. This applies especially to fictional discourse. The basic performativity of the lyric is different, and so a second case: not the creation of a fictional world but the simple event of establishing itself, constituting itself as a lyric. At this level—which is of little interest because it applies so broadly—the performativity of individual elements of the poem consists in their contribution to the overall effect of the poem. The third case, to which I propose to restrict the notion of the performative, is the poem’s success in bringing about what it describes, as when Sappho’s superb lyric craftsmanship creates the effect of making Aphrodite respond. The fourth case, which we do better to call “performance” rather than the performative, is the lyric action or lyric event, the poem’s functioning in the world. The lyric performance succeeds as it acts iterably through repeated readings, makes itself memorable. (131)

Culler’s point, thus, helps shift the focus from the representational efficacy of a poem to the search for memorability. Because there might not be an easier way to establish memorability than through repetition, thanks in part to the aforementioned “ritualistic nature of lyric” (131), translators should take liberties in order to ensure a degree of originality, even foreignness, in the translated poem.

Strangely enough, Białoszewski’s poems, which are full of repetitions and neologisms, lend themselves to this kind of approach perfectly. The translator and editors of the sole volume of Białoszewski’s in English, *The Revolution of Things*, drew heavily on the poet’s early work, which is characterized by the “return to things,” whereby “Białoszewski responds to the pressure of ideological abstractions by fabricating mythology of things and, in his later poetry, by abandoning himself willfully to the contingency of speech and situation” (xi–xii). This sub-genre of poetry is not without precedent in American poetry, as the case of Charles Simic’s much-anthologized ‘fork’ and ‘spoon’ poems illustrates. Nonetheless, celebrating life, with all its multifaceted richness, even at the most rudimentary level, was life affirming for Białoszewski, whose hometown of Warsaw was practically wiped off the face of the earth during World War II. Given their generative and performative character, his poems are full of theatricality and bear little resemblance to poetry as it is traditionally defined:

they are a sort of hybrid for which one critic has coined the term “little narratives” (*male narracje*). Some are anecdotal diary entries about people known only to the poet. Others are descriptions of street scenes taken from what Białoszewski calls his “stroll book” (*spacernik*). Still others are composed solely of snip-

pets of conversations. In some, full words are represented only by abbreviations so that the reader has to guess what is actually being said. (Levine 44).

Indeed, Białoszewski’s poetics rely heavily on the participation of readers and audiences, not unlike spoken-word poetry. His poems are deeply rooted in his private surroundings, including his Warsaw apartment, where the poet founded his own experimental theatre troupe called “Teatr Osobny” (trans. The Separate Theater). Here’s how the American columnist, Joseph Alsop, described its setting:

Nothing quite like this apartment exists anywhere else in the world. Every single piece of furniture has been gravely maimed or wounded at some time in the past. Abstract paintings, strange and menacing constructions of wire and masking tape, great numbers of fragments of Polish baroque church-sculpture, two damaged but still magical Polish-Byzantine icons, the remnants of a beautifully tender late Gothic altar piece—all these and many other objects are hung or strewn about. (qtd. in Levine 41)

It’s not surprising, then, to consider that Białoszewski’s actual process of creation was equally experimental and open-ended. According to Polish critic Michał Głowiński, “Białoszewski’s acting skills allowed him to emphasize the theatricality of his writing. In the 1970s his creative process often involved reading his works into a recording device and listening to himself read before revising the text for publication” (qtd. in Niżyńska 5). Translating speech acts, as Głowiński characterizes Białoszewski’s representations of his own everyday, isn’t easy, though they seem to arrive furnished with the kind permission to take liberties I have argued for throughout this essay. Here are two translations of the same representative poem, “A Ballad of Going Down to the Store”:³

First I went down to the store
by the stairs,
ah, imagine only,
by the stairs.

Then people known to people unknown
passed me by and I passed them by.
Regret
that you did not see
how people walk,
regret!

I entered a complete store:
lamps of glass were burning.
I saw somebody—he sat down—
and what I heard? what I heard?
rustling of bags and human talk.

And indeed,
indeed
I returned.

(tr. Czesław Miłosz, *Postwar Polish Poetry* 104)

And the second version:

First I went into the street
down the stairs,
would you believe it,
down stairs.

Then acquaintances of strangers
and I passed one another by.
What a pity you did not see
how people walk,
what a pity.

I entered a real store.
There were glass lamps burning.

I saw someone, he sat down.
And what did I hear? What did I hear?
The rustle of bags and human talk.

And indeed,
indeed,
I returned.

(tr. Busza and Czaykowski, *The Revolution of Things* 13)

The poem’s open-endedness, not to mention its energetic pacing and seemingly random details, are quintessential Białoszewski. Translating this poem shouldn’t test a translator too much, yet the two versions are slightly different. For instance, in the second version Busza and Czaykowski successfully recreate the alliteration found in the second stanza—all those “p” words—while Miłosz, who takes liberty of skipping the detail of the speaker coming down to the street first, before heading to the store, to the detriment, in my view, of the multilayered design of the poem, recreates the curt and colloquial “and what I heard?” in the penultimate stanza better than the grammatically sounder and safer choice made by Busza and Czaykowski (“what did I hear?”). The repetition present in the poem’s final stanza, an alliterative affirmation spoken by the speaker meant to sound convincing, is somewhat lost in both versions. Having translated this poem myself, I opted for “For real / really / I returned.”

That Polish poetry enjoys a singular status in the U.S. goes without saying, but having more of Białoszewski’s poems in English would force us to revise our notion of Polish poetry in the twentieth century. Since “Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader” (Venuti 18), a translator can choose to destabilize the existing notion of a foreign literature in its target language by foreignizing the translation or choosing to translate texts that fall outside the reinforced understanding of the literary culture. Likewise, Homi Bhabha’s influential text “Of Mimicry and Man,” ostensibly about post-colonial concerns, mainly the power of colonial mimicry to control the colonized, but conceptually about how acts of mimicry and imitation are inevitably acts of performance that introduce fidelity and variation, also holds apt lessons for translators seeking to redefine their activity as performance. What’s more, by translating so-called hermetic poems, Polish or others, translators would de facto voice their dissent to the onslaught of cheap information that characterizes our media-saturated world. That’s where Hans-Georg Gadamer locates the value of wrestling with difficult texts, as when he asks poignantly, “How can the word still stand out amid the flood of information? How can it draw us to itself except by alienating us from those all too familiar turns of speech that we all expect?” (135) Finally, if we keep in mind that all writing is performance, and that translating is writing, then these activities should embody all that performances and, by extension, experiences do: anxiety and fear, especially if the experience is previously un-lived, and unfolding in real time, as well as dislocation, and pleasure, that comes with newness. ◀

PIOTR FLORCZYK is a poet, essayist, and translator of Polish poetry. His most recent books are *East & West*, a volume of poems from Lost Horse Press, and two volumes of translations published by Tavern Books, *My People & Other Poems* by Wojciech Bonowicz, and *Building the Barricade* by Anna Świrszczyńska, which won the 2017 Found in Translation Award and the 2017 Harold Morton Landon Translation Award.

NOTES

1. NYRB Poets has announced and postponed a publication of Białoszewski’s selected poems and prose repeatedly.
2. [“translacja oryginału literackiego do innego języka jest lub bywa aktem artystycznym o strukturze analogicznej do realizacji tekstu literackiego na scenie teatralnej. Ma to swoje przynajmniej dwa (ana)logiczne następstwa. Po pierwsze, tłumacz jest reżyserem, aranżerem i wykonawcą przedstawienia, które nie może się odbyć bez literackiej podstawy.”] Unless noted otherwise, all translations are mine.
3. “Ballada o zejściu do sklepu”: Najpierw zeszedłem na ulicę / schodami, / ach, wyobraźcie sobie, / schodami. // Potem znajomi nieznajomych / mnie mijali, a ja ich. / Żałujcie, / żeście nie widzieli, / jak ludzie chodzą, / żałujcie! // Wstąpiłem do zupełnego sklepu; / paliły się lampy ze szkła, / widziałem kogoś—kto usiadł, / i co słyszałem? . . . co słyszałem? / szum toreb i ludzkie mówienie. // No naprawdę / naprawdę / wróciłem.”

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CAMERON MCGILL

Drunk with Zodiac

for Cyd

Taurus charges in the dark like Oregon,
horns the width of this beer with a moon.

I forget where I live, keep repeating your name.
Its grey dissolve in rain at night is fair.

Paradise Ridge fogged in breath is bad health
and ice-lungs of pine. Orion is a butterfly

turned on its wing, pinned against boredom
and black paper. Our bodies cut askew,

shiver up and to the west, ricocheted
and charcoal-burnt as maps. The myth

of beasts unseen, animations on the night:

Fronds of bracken hung like hair
of the subway cellist, legs spread and hugging;

The boxer’s head thrown back,
nose bloody gushing stars; The young

woman breastfeeding who’s fallen asleep;
Gaunt man seated, finger raised, recalls

certain beauty of youth; Your birthmark
like a thin fox torn across the sky.

And what of that shooting one: my twin
whose streak shirks blur—the runner

giving chase, whose feet cannot be seen.

CAMERON MCGILL is a third-year MFA candidate in poetry at the University of Idaho, a musician, and the poetry editor of the journal *Fugue*. He is the recipient of a Silver Creek Writers’ Residency, a scholarship to the New York State Summer Writers Institute, and a University of Idaho Centrum Fellowship. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Queen Mob’s Teahouse*, *Fogged Clarity*, *The Harvard Advocate*, *La Presa*, and *Grist*. His music lives at cameronmcgill.com.

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NICKY BEER

three poems

Self-Portrait as Duckie Dale

It was always me in that shaggy suit jacket,
the battered dance shoes, the fuck-you-rich-boy
pompadour. When you cannot wail
your rain-shot, neon-blasted love
to the red-headed girls of the world,
Otis Redding is your only recourse,
your body rigid with borrowed soul.
Who knows better than another woman
to try a little tenderness?
Only the weary girls understand this.
Only the ones making knife-brimmed style
from what the dead throw away.
Only the ones with a ready wisecrack
for each of the thousand heartbreaks
that crackle across the unrequited radio.
Dames, we sigh, sipping the long light
in the unmowed front yard,
our hidden breasts swaying under
secondhand shirts like palm trees.
Isn't she—? asks the light. *Isn't she*, we reply.

Because my grief was a tree

It forgave the dog that pissed on it
It moderated quarrels between the stones
It had a few knots that looked like a weeping face
It had a few knots that looked like a laughing face
It never stopped grasping the earth
It was badly tuned by the wind
It grew inedible fruit
It grew fruit that fed the worms magnificently
It held a yellow newspaper on its head for seven months
It felt the rumba in a squirrel's chest pressing against it
It wore a gash from when my friend was drunk and stupid
It looked up at the geese in their lofty arrows
It looked up at the geese in their trombone-heavy operettas
It looked up at the geese and wished them all good shoes
It stretched its arms wider every year
It waved its dozens of dark hats over the grass

The Benevolent Sisterhood of Inconspicuous Fabricators

"The list of famous forgers is long and virtually entirely male."
—Edward Dolnick, *The Forger's Spell*

The matron greets you at the front door with a stern eye, chewing on the thin stem of a clay pipe. In the later hours, with more than a little absinthe, she'll regale you with the saltier tales of the models she used for her Rodins: "Torsos and haunches for months, love!" As you sign in, you hear someone holler from an upper floor: "Bernice, you cunt, did you steal my fucking ultramarine again?" The air is redolent with linseed oil and cooking custard. As the matron mounts the steps ahead of you, you see the veins climbing her calves like tree branches springing from Baroque marble. Second floor studios are reserved for bibliofraud. You look in on a young woman with a strong jaw milking ink from a cuttlefish sac. Her neighbor squints over the margins of a yellowing folio through a blue monocle. A buttercolored python snoozes across her shoulders. You mistake the wallpaper in one room for a deranged set of optometrist's charts, until you recognize them as trials of Gothic calligraphy. "Did a few Biblical apocrypha, that one," she nods to the one-armed resident, who tips her iron-streaked topknot towards you, in which a goose feather quivers. On the fourth floor, a redhead snores face-down on a palette, the light through the closed curtains catching a smear of white across her nose. In the corridor, a woman with a pinched, church-lady face brushes by. "Gauguin sketches. Fantastic tits—models them after her girlfriend's." Your legs are just starting to ache as you reach the top floor. "Lord!" the matron groans as she grasps the newel post. Some joker has carved RUSKIN WAS HERE into the scarred wood. "Well, ducky, this is you," she says as she unlocks the room. You set your bags down on the bare floor, tip her, and listen to her weight shudder its way back down the stairs. You brush a dead fly off the windowsill, crack your knuckles. Your masterpieces will never be yours again.

NICKY BEER is the author of *The Octopus Game* (Carnegie Mellon, 2015) and *The Diminishing House* (Carnegie Mellon, 2010), both winners of the Colorado Book Award for Poetry. She has received fellowships and scholarships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and the MacDowell Colony. She is an associate professor at the University of Colorado—Denver, where she serves as a poetry editor for *Copper Nickel*.



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SARAH MEGAN THOMAS

Thursday, March 15, 2018, 7:00 p.m.
Connelly Auditorium, Terra Hall
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Sarah Megan Thomas co-wrote, produced, and starred in *Equity*, a female-driven Wall Street thriller that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2015. The film was sold to Sony Pictures Classics, released theatrically nationwide, and named a "Critic's Pick" by *The New York Times*' A.O. Scott. Thomas shared the 2017 Women's Image Network award for best original screenplay for her work on *Equity*, which she is now developing for television. She also wrote and produced the film *Backwards*, in which she co-starred with James Van Der Beek. Next up, Thomas is producing a gender-bending spy drama she wrote based on three inspirational historical women.



RAHUL MEHTA

Thursday, April 12, 2018, 7:00 p.m.
Connelly Auditorium, Terra Hall
211 S. Broad Street, Philadelphia

Rahul Mehta is the author of a novel, *No Other World* (Harper 2017), and a short story collection, *Quarantine* (HarperPerennial 2011), which won a Lambda Literary Award and the Asian American Literary Award for Fiction. His work has appeared in the *Kenyon Review*, *Epoch*, *The Sun*, *Noon*, *The New York Times Magazine*, the *International Herald Tribune*, *Marie Claire India*, and on the Op-Ed page of *The New York Times*. An *Out* magazine "Out 100" honoree, Mehta teaches Creative Writing at the University of the Arts and in the low-residency MFA program at West Virginia Wesleyan College.



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CHASE TWICHELL

Keene Valley Elegy

A big storm like this used to
thrill me, a visit from a god,
36 inches and still snowing!
But now I know about the great
floating continents of plastic
twice the size of the US,
in the Atlantic and Pacific both,
and their spawn the micro-beads,
so although the laden woods look
much as they did when I was born,
snow is a mock-consecration to me now.
Still, it's a thrill to see the human world
struck dumb and whited out,
an ocean of motionless waves,
no cars, no lights, no music,
only the illusion of earth
as it was before I understood
it was I who had made it a god.
In summer Russell and I
hunt for chanterelles, which the snails
will devour if they find them first,
and scavenge a few high ledges
for inky wild blueberries,
scant handfuls. First love, last love.
I'm glad my last love is not for a god.
I refuse to wake up again in a graveyard
with neither flowers nor words for the dead.

CHASE TWICHELL's many books include *Horses Where the Answers Should Have Been: New and Selected Poems* (Copper Canyon Press, 2010), *Dog Language* (Copper Canyon Press, 2005), *The Snow Watcher* (Ontario Review Press, 1998), *The Ghost of Eden* (Ontario Review Press, 1995), *Perdido* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991), *The Odds* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), and *Northern Spy* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981).