

The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

“Yes, literature has such a capacity to represent the complexity of others—and poetry, especially the first-person lyric, by its very nature helps us encounter individual persons, individual lives, taking us out of the identity clichés that can give us a sense of community, but often also entrap us. Literature grows through its use . . .”

(STEWART, p. 13)

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2018 VOL. 47/NO. 6

\$5 US/\$6 CA

JERICHO BROWN

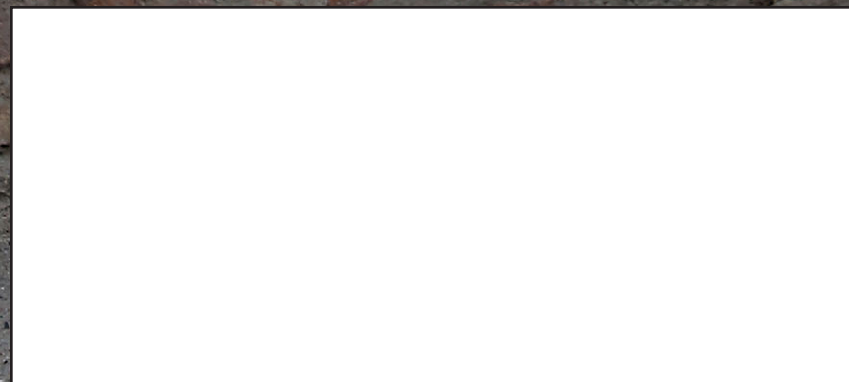
from THE DUPLEXES

KATIE FORD & SUSAN STEWART
ALIVE IN THE ICE AND FIRE

OLIVER BAEZ BENDORF
RIVER I DREAM ABOUT
& OTHER POEMS

RAENA SHIRALI
DAAYAN SENSES THE OHJA
& OTHER POEMS

New Poems by
KARA CANDITO
APRIL FREELY
FADY JOUDAH
PATRICK PHILLIPS
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THE APR/HONICKMAN FIRST BOOK PRIZE: In partnership with The Honickman Foundation, an annual prize for a first book of poetry, with an award of \$3,000, an introduction by the judge, publication of the book, and distribution by Copper Canyon Press through Consortium.

Become a Friend

Dear Reader,

We are grateful for the support that you, a Friend of *APR*, have shown the magazine. We hope you will join us again now, in our 47th year, to keep *The American Poetry Review* going strong.

In 2018, we published six outstanding issues representing the work of 120 writers, including Patrick Rosal, Deborah Landau, Khadijah Queen, Edward Hirsch, David Tomas Martinez, Diane Seuss, Li-Young Lee, and many others. We published the 21st volume in the *APR*/Honickman First Book series: *Throwing the Crown* by Jacob Saenz, selected by Gregory Pardlo, and we awarded the 9th Annual Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize to Mark McCloughan. McCloughan’s winning poem, “Devotion (Reflection),” appears on the feature page of the September/October issue.

We also lost our editor and dear friend David Bonanno, who was a champion of the work of *The American Poetry Review* all these years. I hope to honor his legacy of service to the art in my work as editor, and to be the steward of our mission that this extraordinary institution deserves.

We believe that our mission to reach a worldwide audience with the best contemporary poetry and prose, and to provide authors, especially poets, with a far-reaching forum in which to present their work, is as important today as it was when we began in 1972. *The American Poetry Review* remains a fully independent non-profit, but due to the current political climate we receive far less governmental support than in the past. Your individual contributions are more vital than ever.

Your donation pays poets. We believe that to have a thriving poetry community, we must support writers. We are grateful for donations of any amount. In thanks for your contribution, we are offering books by poets who have appeared on our cover this year: *I’m So Fine: A List of Famous Men & What I Had On* by Khadijah Queen (YesYes Books, \$18) and *Post Traumatic Hood Disorder* by David Tomas Martinez (Sarabande Books, \$14.95), along with *The Body Electric: America’s Best Poetry from The American Poetry Review*, introduced by Harold Bloom (W.W. Norton, paper, \$22.50). For a gift of **\$100**, you receive one book, for **\$250**, you receive two, for **\$500 or more**, you receive all three.

Your support makes *APR* possible. Our warmest thanks for your consideration and generosity.

Sincerely,

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Editor

The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

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FIVE POEMS

JERICO BROWN

Duplex

A poem is a gesture toward home.
It makes dark demands I call my own.

Memory makes demands darker than my own:
My last love drove a burgundy car.

My first love drove a burgundy car.
He was fast and awful, tall as my father.

Steadfast and awful, my tall father
Hit hard as a hailstorm. He'd leave marks.

Light rain hits easy but leaves its own mark
Like the sound of a mother weeping again.

Like the sound of my mother weeping again,
No sound beating ends where it began.

None of the beaten end up how we began.
A poem is a gesture toward home.

Duplex

The opposite of rape is understanding
A field of flowers called paintbrushes—

A field of flowers called paintbrushes,
Though the spring be less than actual.

Though the spring be less than actual,
Men roam shirtless as if none ever hurt me.

Men roam that myth. In truth, one hurt me.
I want to obliterate the flowered field,

To obliterate my need for the field
And raise a building above the grasses,

A building of prayer against the grasses,
My body a temple in disrepair.

My body is a temple in disrepair.
The opposite of rape is understanding.

Duplex

I begin with love, hoping to end there.
I don't want to leave a messy corpse.

I don't want to leave a messy corpse
Full of medicines that turn in the sun.

Some of my medicines turn in the sun.
Some of us don't need hell to be good.

Those who need most, need hell to be good.
What are the symptoms of *your* sickness?

Here is one symptom of my sickness:
Men who love me are men who miss me.

Men who leave me are men who miss me
In the dream where I am an island.

In the dream where I am an island,
I grow green with hope. I'd like to end there.

Duplex

Don't accuse me of sleeping with your man
When I didn't know you had a man.

Back when I didn't know you had a man,
The moon glowed above the city's blackout.

I walked home by moonlight through the blackout.
I was too young to be reasonable.

He was so young, so unreasonable,
He dipped weed in embalming fluid.

He'd dip our weed in embalming fluid.
We'd make love on trains and in dressing rooms.

Love in the subway, love in mall restrooms.
A bore at home, he transformed in the city.

What's yours at home is a wolf in my city.
You can't accuse me of sleeping with a man.

Dark

I am sick of your sadness,
Jericho Brown, your blackness,
Your books. Sick of you
Laying me down
So I forget how sick
I am. I'm sick of your good looks,
Your debates, your concern, your
Determination to keep your butt
Plump, the little money you earn.
I'm sick of you saying no when yes is easy
As a young man, bored with you
Saying yes to every request
Though you're as tired as anyone else yet
Consumed with a single
Diagnosis of health. I'm sick
Of your hurting. I see that
You're blue. You may be ugly,
But that ain't new.
Everyone you know is
Just as cracked. Everyone you love is
As dark, or at least as black.

Jericho Brown is the recipient of a Whiting Writers Award and of fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, and the National Endowment for the Arts. His poems have appeared in The New York Times and The New Yorker. His first book, Please (New Issues, 2008), won the American Book Award. His second book, The New Testament (Copper Canyon, 2014), won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. He is an associate professor of English and Creative Writing and the Director of the Creative Writing Program at Emory University in Atlanta.



TWO POEMS

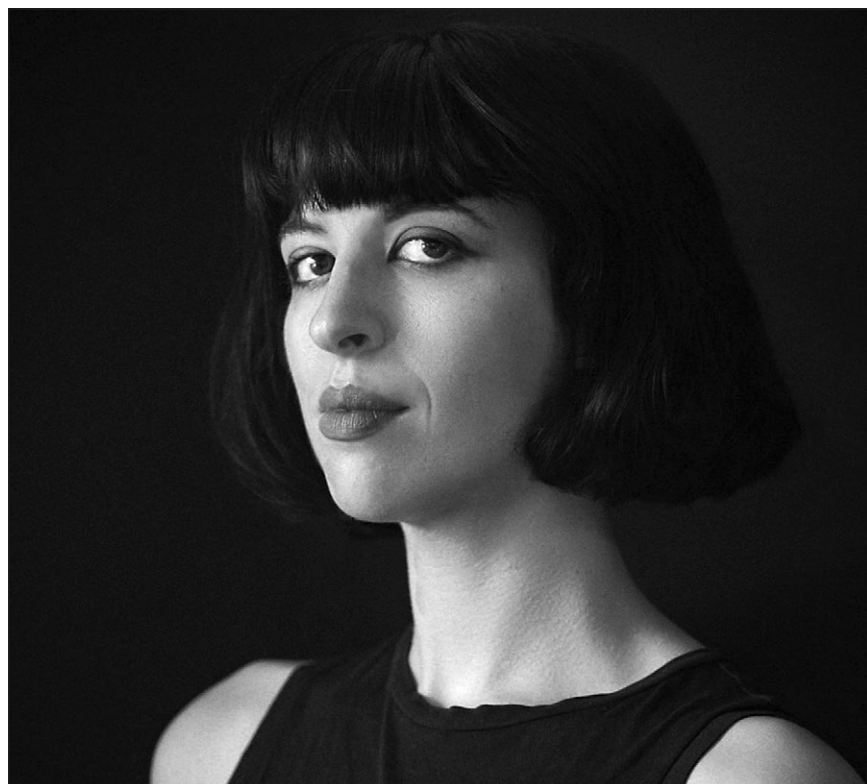
ROBIN RICHARDSON

The Art of

It had only given you one meaning it gave it early too you in your crib with that man sitting in a folding chair with Budweiser and a book reading the book out loud so even if you didn't understand there was the sound the girl in the woods the doll in the river a betrayal an animal whose friendship would be everything whom the girl would have to behead and that would be okay because heads are not everything you knew by language how to keep your keepers happy how to be happy yourself alone told stories wrote stories read the books of women who filled their lungs with water and with gas and with cocks who let themselves fade in a room in the rooms of their own who were their own meaning or at least whose words were words which when placed in order kept your cells regenerating the man with his Budweiser said you were his immortality he said you were him you didn't say so but you knew he'd die and when he did your books would bury him again your books would build an empire your empire would keep your lungs clear of the water the gas the cocks well maybe would invite the archetypes the brother the sister maybe you would weave yourselves together in a tapestry on the wall in the cabin in the kingdom in the pink and pale landscape of a place you made a warm and rippled place of narrative and serotonin the man can't get there the law can't get there the readers the friends with their intentions are incapable of ever getting close which means you're safe you take the archetypes in your palms in your cunt and fill yourself blind because blind is the best way to know a thing you are married to the archetypes you are married to your brother to the way your body reclines naked in this place you haven't bothered much with food you're svelte you're a machine made solely for the plucking up of words and placing back in order with the quantum mess of things you thrive in uncertainty you marry the words to the photons to the mystic's lack of self you marry everything but other human beings because other human beings are mirrors are dim are other than are utterly unknowable you marry the sand instead the way it is nothing and also is the history of the world you write down a story about the sand you sell it to Chicago to New York you sell it for a room to be alone to dress yourself in the white fur in the white of the beginning of the end of archetypes you will live on a mountain in the rain of an exceptional altitude you barely breathe don't need to barely move you are only a manifestation are holed up in this thing to maybe make another book or two to breathe again more slowly lull into a glimpse of something greater

The Teachers

There is a congregation of old women you are drawing you have a black crayon that leaves white marks you are upset don't know how to draw with white say your drawing looks like your father one of the old women tears it in half your crayon is a blessing you didn't recognize there are women dancing hip hop in utopia you're naked in a wave underwater fighting a woman who is you who is stronger than you who digs holes for people to gestate during difficult transitions you are crying because she is so powerful you are trying to save a girl from the invisible malignant force in her bedroom you are trying to save a girl from her parents trying to get all the people away from the burning village on a raft lose your thumb trying to rescue babies the boy with one arm the girl with superpowers the wave that is about to drown you the train that is about to hit you the smokestack that collapsed the helicopter heading for the building a volcano a wrecking ball made of human bodies a tank a god who comes and kills then brings you back to life to be his slave you were afraid of the revolution of the house on stilts the bookshelf which nearly crushed you and the too-tight elevator with its unreliable ascending



Robin Richardson is the author of Sit How You Want, and is Editor-in-Chief at Minola Review. Her work has appeared in Salon, Poetry Magazine, The Walrus, Hazlitt, and Tin House, among others.

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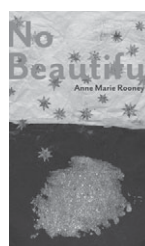
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THREE POEMS

PATRICK PHILLIPS

Countrywide

He threw the pale pink envelopes into the trash
and smashed the Mickey Mouse phone hanging up.

And when his wife asked *you okay?* he said *okay*,
then took a twistoff to the back, screaming

FUCK so loud he spooked the treefrogs and cicadas.
He'd got canned for nothing, missed three payments,

then let that cokehead Steve talk him into a "loan,"
until this woman in a room in Oklahoma

said *Go on, holler all you want, babe,*
they come Sunday-next at noon.

So he got high out in the hammock and watched
a blinking light streak past the Milky Way,

headed, he said, to fucking Cancun or Jamaica.
And for a week nobody noticed he was too calm,

springing for movies and takeout,
giving away whole packs of Marlboros.

His wife said she wished the aliens
had abducted him a little sooner.

And when finally they went to church
and drove back to the wrong house, on the wrong road,

even the kids seemed to understand
that they were never going home.

He listened to the youngest sob
through the trailer's patched and painted walls.

And for a decade he couldn't bring himself
to take the shortcut through that subdivision.

Until one Friday, on a whim, he sat in the dark truck
blowing smoke-rings and staring through his picture window

as somebody else's wife dealt a stack of plates
out around the kitchen table.

In the shadows he could just make out a bike
with long pink tassels, keeled over on the lawn,

and a popup sprinklerhead that glared at him,
then hissed, and carried on.

For Paul

I can see you through the bonfire, with us.
A fifth of Old Crow circling the dark.

Where did that old life go? In Texas
the chemo inches toward your heart,

things always dwindling to just the two of us,
a crumpled cigarette, a distant car:

our voices, at dawn, so clearly posthumous.
Woodsmoke rising to the ashy stars.

Ars Poetica

Sometimes, against all odds,
there was enough
in the bottom of a tin.

A black rim in the coffee pot,
melon rind.
A waxy tendon, hardened to the bone.

But other days
there was nothing but to cinch his belt
and head out into the blizzard,

where his spine always stiffened
at the sight of tracks.
What the hell, he'd whisper, what the hell,

most days circling back
to exactly where he'd been—
though what kept him leaning hard

into the sleet and rain and wind
was the thought of the child,
stiff and blue-lipped, up the trail.

It was no dream: how once,
at his touch,
the corpse began to twitch.

*Patrick Phillips is the author of three collections of poetry, including *Elegy for a Broken Machine* (Knopf, 2015), which was a finalist for the National Book Award, as well as *Blood at the Root: A Racial Cleansing in America* (Norton, 2016), which received the American Book Award in nonfiction. He teaches at Stanford University.*



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TWO POEMS

ELIZABETH METZGER

Cover That Shows Up and Gets You All Wrong

Most think the smudge is supposed to be
your spirit
but it's the purple underneath

you inhabit.

Eraser debris I blow off the page
or swipe away with the back of my hand:

contact is rarely a choice made from this side.

Say you were told the life you're in
was terminal like this one—

twice a year day & night
would send friendship lanyards
of equivalent length.

I'd stay awake again
to greet and throw them out.

And you?

Take this cover embody it
on the discarded side.

We Are Often in Danger of Departing

At first you were fluid and the fluid
was safe. It held
growing. A napkin folded

around desire like a nutrient.
Old and imminent,
the spots of the guest within me.

As if two people together
could fill a soul like the bathtub,
frequent endings drained away your true end

before it could be inflicted.
Touch was once better than washing,
even if it was germ, even if it left a scent.

Then it was just me,
environment for harm. It was over.
It lasted. In every order.

Elizabeth Metzger is the author of The Spirit Papers (University of Massachusetts, 2017), winner of the Juniper Prize for Poetry. She is also the author of a chapbook, The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death (Horse Thief Books, 2017). She is the Poetry Editor of the Los Angeles Review of Books Quarterly Journal. You can find more of her work at elizabethmetzger.com.

Alice James Books

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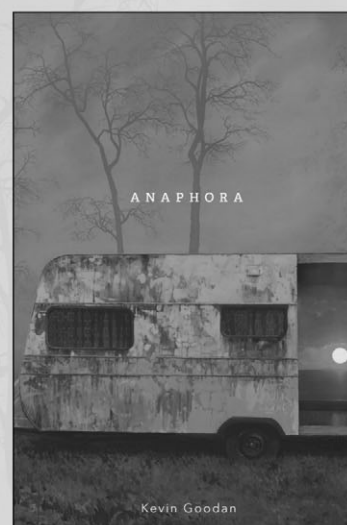


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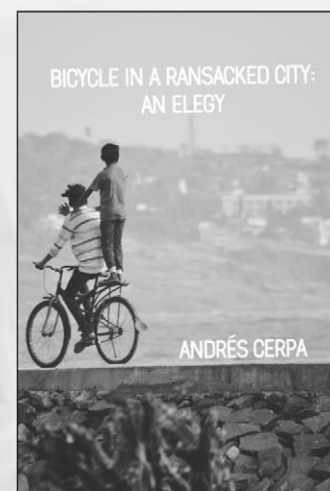


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THREE POEMS

APRIL FREELY

in the hospital atrium after the wreck

I read his decision to wear camo to the hospital as meaningful rushes and reeds
cross the body bend and break
artificial topiaries catch his thin cotton sheet
his lone tab of blue thread, his far edge
outside, the wind blows and the leaves, but the trouble stays
between elevations hush
look up at the canopy of green shoots, even here
small green notations slumped into soft white wicker outdoor furniture
all the people like rough stones, sit out and the light hovers over them
if the weather is nice almost anybody can be revived
when everything passes through a condition of flora
don't pick the flora, let
go, what pain is there room for, among
the poppies? they have dwarfed me
heat dipping each little neck
I see a man on the same corridor, who I also mistake
for something abandoned he chokes
none but the old poke weeds about him
try to understand in a small indoor forest
trunks are just a thin form of his nakedness
fixation, a form of care I complicate
my rosy complexion with thinking
*where is it that you can go to spend ten days in a place as close to heaven as you can get
without dying?*
I believe it is raining I believe wheels wicking away rainwater
someone fluttering someone driving the Dodge
music in the car as a grand atmospheric condition
the light is going down simpler terrifying
stretches of road tropical in their fervor
through the window weather systems drop off
finally, the cold at my back these grasses
making a sound like rain I doubt
then a gale of grasses light, too
neglects to cross the face of the sky

My Love for the Dead

1.

my mother sleeps under cover
in her underwear and tiny white sweater that used to be mine
she's trying to draw the heat but dry air catches her
throat an instrumental inversion not exactly voiceless

even when asleep I hear the forced air run
incessant intonation of truths I neglected all day long
the bill will be very high it's winter
so the heat keeps coming on and off
stuttering fury

when caretaking for others even my feelings are visitors
but for the best selfless expression the heat makes one
sound despite all functional warmth faces
I wait for beneath the others
so there isn't any sense to the message unless heretical
hovering between the truth and a lie

2.

the tv says an out of control limbic system makes anger
a weapon and causes weakness or hallucinations
in the prefrontal cortex

even a rumor has to pass through
a stranger this looming iambic rumbling duct
where legion reflexive conversations recall the shape
of a body against the light

as a practice I form a mental image of her
I know she is cold the heat is my message
arriving at her bedroom door instead of me
even if her new heart fails the heat come get me
into my bones limb
even in my sleep my heart is luminous
has air makes a kind of noise
when I think I am sleeping in the posture of the dead
my breath is a true beating out trochee anapest
that strange sound is somebody trying to get in

my faithful expression and her real loneliness
knocking about inside the walls then

3.

thank God I can hear something
listening for the sound of her breath at night where light is hidden
inside this parallel my frame
so I wear rest as a mantle even my sleep warms me
beneath it is my real cold body
in a room overflowing with the incontinence of questions

the tv says this is the feeling of waking
this is the feeling of pacing the floor here is another kind
of sleep the sound of me swallowing
my heart is the sound my tiny ego makes
going down my mother is a spiral jetty
in her king-sized bed after the death of my father
where sleep is a secret I keep my second sense on her
how I long to be the still space now patted-down beside her
just passing through the land where she lives
when he wakes me imminent breadth at her back

Run Down

1.

my father's flesh is baby girl pink
pushed back to reveal his tibia
bone like a white hot wall
in his brown body

when you open the body
internal forms stay put

my father steady, still standing
in a tank and shorts at midday in the parking lot

no anger in the shift
as my mother pulls the car into reverse

2.

a beating may be
my mother driving our subcompact into my father repeatedly
driving us away from the cutting at the end of his fists

this is how
my father sets his body to be healed: scattering
gravel under the wheels, clouds of dust like mean
kisses at his feet

3.

I like being inside a machine
big enough to kill
when it doesn't

idling at a light, I feel
as if against the steel
as if the car is devoid of the cushions and plastic parts
that are supposed to console you

Lake Erie is five minutes away
my mother's bruises bob up
as the Lake rocks and holds

I see my mother breathing
I see the metal bridges
of the frames on her face
she is a taut cord
holds her hands

out, stretched toward me
turning at the wrists, saying *no*

4.

I want to say I'm telling
you about the last beating
it isn't

I try not to hold anything
against the mother
who lets her own hand
fly up to her face
then bites the fingers of that hand

what protects me: not the cage
of bones, what the rocks did
not hit, the glass of the windshield
that did not break

at the Lake, I throw rocks
at the water, so many open mouths
the deep immediately forgets

5.

when we get home I come to
appreciate the absolute
darkness of a new hole in the wall

my mother washing my face, and then hers
in the bathroom, before getting dinner ready
it is not so much about the lie
or the pain, but my father's
charisma when he tells me the wound in question
really emerged seven years before

Da Nang inexplicably breaking
out of his body afresh

6.

as a girl, I stood on my father's back
kneading death's terrible field
in my white lace socks

I threw my arms out
to keep balance on the sacrum
and the lumbar bones
pressed my foot into the blade
at the shoulder

I want a father who can be torn
so I can visit the consequence
of my body against him

7.

on the back of my neck
my lover kisses me, as she's driven
I want to call this a drive, not a wreck

restraint not unlike the moment
when I'm going after her lips
and my lover says *you want that, can't have it*
when I push up against the hands
she's planted on each shoulder
when the length of her body pins me down

tell me about the stone, she says
which is what she calls that bone-
handle at my sternum
a stone is a feeling of articulation

in the hand, when she cradles this rise
in my chest

8.

years later, my father is dead
so tonight, my mother is the stone
that comes back

she is asleep, in the bright
cold light of the surgical theatre

on the heart-lung machine
there is no beat to betray her

the machine is large, it can be trusted
it whirs like a baby

in the lobby, when I hold my own body
every line is expressive
waiting for the mother to emerge
as I sit, my legs an off-
beat metronome
running down

9.

manubrium

stones drop
into the water and keep
moving, undertow

ma
tell *me* about the stone
am I the fist
the rattle, or the steel
of your body now
tell me the waste narrative, make a sound

tell me about the white of the bone I saw
under my father's skin, this moment
when my teeth broke
into view and anyone could hear
the white noise

10.

we back up
and I drive
at the end of the elasticity of my father
at the no-point when the car is inside his body
as far as love will take it

then I do it again

April Freely's work has appeared in Ninth Letter, Seneca Review, Gulf Coast, and elsewhere. She has received fellowships and awards from the Ohio Arts Council, the Rona Jaffe Foundation, Vermont Studio Center, and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. She serves as an Assistant Poetry Editor at DIAGRAM.



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THREE POEMS

JAMESON FITZPATRICK

Duplicity

Whenever I am in one conversation
I am thinking about another.
Whatever room I am in my heart is not.
Before a mirror, which face is true:
the one that moves or the one that is moved?
I flip a coin and wish for the opposite.
Life, friends, is whoring.
A warning a man mistakes for intimacy.
When I miss my madness, which I mostly don't,
I miss how totally I was inside it,
the idea I could not get out.

Nobody Called Me a Starfucker

and now I can't stop thinking about fucking
an actual astronomical body. Anatomy
bores me anyhow, the same predictable
arms, legs, cock and balls—faces
and the smalls of backs are the worst;
even famous ones offer no real risk of
immolation. Why should I get into bed for less?
A sky crowded with stars is better
than any earthly orgy. You can quote me
—love always, Jamie—on that. Brighter, too,
than a flash storm of cameras, starlight is
legacy guaranteed. Men wink and flicker out
into the cloudy night, never to be spotted
on Fourth Street again. I gaze at them go.
Stars, though: they burn you once and through.

Love Poem in Two Places at Once

It was snowing
in D.C the day I was born,
a little after three in the afternoon—
just after noon in San Francisco
where I picture
you sleeping late, a national holiday my birthday
falling as it does.
It's 1990, mid-January already
I'm a late baby, can't stop crying.
One day I'll catch you
not alone at this moment:
two legs crossing yours, top sheet
twisted between them— whose?
I have so many questions
for the young man you were: do you
smoke? still play
piano? do you
sail yet?
What do you like to eat?
What are you going to do today?

Jameson Fitzpatrick is a queer poet based in New York, where he teaches writing at NYU. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Awl, BuzzFeed Reader, The Offing, Prelude, Poetry, and elsewhere.

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ALIVE IN THE ICE AND FIRE

KATIE FORD AND SUSAN STEWART

A Conversation

August, 2018

SUSAN STEWART As I read your books, including *If You Have to Go*, I am struck, as I'm sure any reader would be, by their existential immediacy. You write in time as you undergo time, taking up especially the unfolding of events under great forces of nature or state power. Your poems often emerge at the intersection of individual and collective suffering, including the suffering in your own life. To read your books in sequence is to engage, in myriad contexts, with issues of theodicy. I would like to know more about your sense of poetry as, at times, almost a ritual solace, a kind of lighting of a candle or gift of structure, and, at other times, as a plagued song—a practice with its own dangers.

KATIE FORD I do tend to write when I'm undergoing some kind of disturbance or pain, and the writing doesn't begin in knowledge (for me, it's emotion that drives me to write), so the immediacy arrives via the unsettling that's compelling me to make a poem. But the writing then does, as you say, have its own dangers, as it's perilously unpredictable, and my earliest lines are often undone by realizations that are destructive toward what those lines first thought they knew. Sudden revelation is a kind of death for the thinking it consumes. So, in terms of solace, it's not that. But there is an element—when form and subject organically and simultaneously fuse—that is ecstatic. So it's at a higher pitch than solace.

I've been struck this week by your sequence from *The Forest*, "Slaughter," and keep thinking of how your poetry often belongs to a tradition that asks a reader to undergo—as closely as possible—the condition that the human, or here, the animal, had to undergo. I felt an ethical obligation to remain inside of this remarkable sequence, despite how much the slaughter repulsed me. I wonder what you might say about suffering and poetry's obligation to look. To, in Susan Sontag's language, "regard the pain of others." And, of course, the ethical limits on such looking.

ss I hope we can keep thinking about the kinds of knowledge produced by writing poems and, above all, the importance of insights that arise in the process of making, but I'd first like to say something in thanks to your response to "Slaughter." As a child I always hid in my room on slaughtering day while the adults went about the many tasks it involved; it was a Fall event at my grandparents' farm, and everyone approached it with a somber sense that Winter was coming and this was the last harvest, after a summer of growing and storing food. Then I came to wonder, years later, about the logic of sacrifice in Western culture. Why all these hecatombs in our epics? Why the practice of scapegoating that René Girard had described so vitally? Why the Christian comedy of sacrificing the god instead of sacrificing to the god? I felt I should begin by learn-

ing—through research and language, alone—what the sacrifice of animals had been as a practice in my own life.

This was the first of a number of georgics I've written over the years. It was a surprise to me that the poem needed to become so explicit. I discovered, when I read it aloud for the first time to others, that it had an almost pornographic effect—an effect I dreaded, and also came to respect. So I never read it aloud, but I do intend it to be read on the page.

I feel ambivalent about the notion that poetry has an obligation to look in the sense of witness—in many cases, such looking would assume a too ready objectivity or moral high ground. I believe that my first obligation to what can be remedied is to turn to action, often as a citizen, not to turn to description or explanation as a poet. You've helped me realize I draw on poetry for inexplicable matters of theodicy, but for the injustice around me, I am too impatient to respond with poems. That said, I do think we poets have an obligation to praise, and if that necessitates condemning what we abhor, then malediction has its role, too.

KF Yes, I agree that asking poets to document atrocities ought not be an obligatory pressure, as forcing any subject into being is a doomed starting point for composition. At the same time, I'm astounded by how rich American poetry is with such writing, so perhaps we only need to raise this question if poets fall silent in this regard, which historically implies the threat of the state or a dictator, although even then the silence might only indicate that poems are too dangerous to publish, not that they are unwritten. American poets can take up other literary tasks, too, aside from original composition, as you say. Translation, for instance, brings poetry out of places under siege or severe hardship. What comes to mind for me is the collection *Flowers of Flame: Unheard Voices of Iraq*, a phenomenal anthology of Iraqi poets that I think Americans should read, as we are all citizens who need to absorb the intimate wreckage of our war in their country. And poetry reveals it.

What you say about "Slaughter" requiring you to become explicit fascinates me. I'm not settled about whether this phenomenon—a poem expressing a will of its own—needs to be interrogated, or whether I'd prefer my posture toward it to remain reverent and wishful, meaning I want—but must wait—to be inside of a poem that has a will I must attend to, make way for, and body forth. I know it's an archaic term, but "bodying forth" might be as close as I can come to describing this phenomenon. I resist describing composition at this height as "channeling," which makes me a simple vessel. I know I'm more involved than that, although I resist, too, saying it's entirely my making. Do you articulate this in one particular way—is it religious for you? is it philosophical? is it artistic?—or is the phenomenon of a poem's separate will particular to each poem you write?

ss Yes, I agree that we have to find some way not to stare—mesmerized, frozen—too long at the Medusa and, at the same time, we need to remember there is a Medusa. The U.S. military stopped counting "enemy dead" after the 2003 invasion—obscuring consequence strikes me as paving the way for the abstractions of drone warfare and concealed agency. Iraqi deaths now are estimated, absurdly, as ranging from 150,000 to one million, and many people in this country, whose taxes paid for this war and its neighboring wars, still would not be able to identify Iraq on a map. An anthology like *Flowers of Flame*, the many volumes of Vietnamese poetry that followed that conflict, and, more recently, Eliza Griswold's collection of landays from Afghanistan, give some sense of the consequences of war in the voices of those who suffer it. Translation itself seems to me an act of attention and care that is counter to violence. Yet a division of labor often arises between those who contemplate suffering and those who endure it—this is an issue that Wordsworth, for example, thought about deeply and never resolved. I don't know if we would want to set out rules for ourselves about our license to speak. Like you, I would trust the situation of making individual poems as we're both judging their direction and giving ourselves over to them.

I think of your use of "bid" as both beholding and offering in your remarkable sonnet sequence, "The Addresses," in your new book. For readers who don't have the book before them: the 39 sonnets unfold by a principle of concatenation, the last line of each numbered sonnet becoming the first line of the next sonnet. They are followed by a translation or transposition of Psalm 40, which itself is an account of the "bodying forth" that engages you: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God . . ." The series also has a kind of refrain in the repeated lines: "I make my bed every morning. / I don't know where to start / so I start with the bed. / Then I fall to my knees against it." You've created a powerful dialectic in the series, and in the book as a whole, that pits the domestic order of routine and interiority against a kind of wilderness of unknowing, animal being—the gestures of using a comb or shoeing an ox become, like prayer or making a sonnet itself, ways to draw order, sense a foundation, establish the "goings" to which your title alludes. You give us a glimpse of Camille, and perhaps Paul, Claudel briefly within the work, yet I also returned to George Herbert and a poetics of "going back to the start"—ever-conscious of what the experience of the reader would be, running sound and meaning back through the particulars another time before moving on to the next step. It strikes me, to use a theological metaphor that drew Herbert as it seems to draw you, as a means of forming by "tempering."

KF I like the analogy to the "tempering" stage of metalworking, which comes after the initial fire, shaping, and cooling in order to make it tougher via a second reheating. The sense of "tempering" as making a thing tame and mild (temperate) is another sense entirely. Herbert's tempering puts an object (a thought, a tumult, a heart) back into the fire via the poem and is by definition a repetition, a return. In the chain of sonnets, I found myself needing to revisit and see out the fates of images, figures, and ideas once they appeared. There was no way around them once they arrived on the page—the horses, the comb, the swimmer, the kingdom, the lord, the home—they had

to be dealt with, they had to be raked over. The lines of the sonnets were to me that rake. I began writing these four years ago, and the early sonnets revealed to me that my marriage was coming to an end. On one draft of a sonnet I have a handwritten note that says, “terrible instability. 5:14 a.m.” I was writing them in the insomniac hours between 4 and 7 a.m., before the house woke up. Yet that turmoil funneled itself down into poetic structure. This remains an amazement: that art does not demand a stability of internal or external conditions in order to be made. I believe there was no way for this content to arrive via free verse. It wouldn’t have been possible. I need more internal stability to work in free verse. Free verse itself is unstable! So inside of the terrible instability that comes when a long marriage begins its last days, the flush of these sonnets was destructive and transformative—both at once.

Across your work, and in the new poems that begin *Cinder: New and Selected Poems*, there are sonic repetitions—words being heard anew with a kind of 360-degree point of view, and in this way I feel your work remembers Stein’s obsession with jolting each word out of its settled connotations—but, perhaps more deeply, your poems require the reader to look again at a thing seen before, a familiarity under-considered, an underbelly, a hidden history, a sudden moment, a still point around which a high velocity halts. Yet it’s not that simple. It seems to me you’re the physicist-poet amongst us: the reader is asked to look again because the physical laws governing our first look were erroneous or incomplete, sometimes because the natural world had not yet shown us ourselves, as in “Field in Winter,” wherein the snow is our teacher, having fallen over the world, and, in the same way that sheets draped over furniture reveal contours, “The corners, the edge, of each / thing exposed: / you walked into a new transparency,”. And a comma propels us into your book . . . I wonder if you might speak about your intrigue with physics, velocity, how objects warp space and time, and therefore lives—?

ss The history of your sonnet sequence is a harrowing account of how making an art work can both intensify and give order to a period of emotional and mental pain. You’ve also outlined a larger sense of how our poems can reveal patterns in our experience and habits of perspective, reflecting back to us the state of our hearts. This revelatory power of writing always reminds me of the literal sense of “composing one’s self.” In making poems I’m not expressing emotions and thoughts that already are formed—I am finding them in the process of making. The “composure” composition offers may be marked by alarm or fear, estrangement or resignation, but there’s a truth in poems



Katie Ford (photo by Helge Brekke)

that, I agree, can’t be ignored or put aside. I’ve found that the drive toward closure is the saving grace—and a process of re-reading and re-vision. There we become other to ourselves and escape any simplistic grasp of our lives. At my age, I can see as well the moods and assumptions, for better and worse, of the eras of my life, and often the life of the culture, via groups of poems. Anyone reading your sonnets will be moved by them, and by the internal coherence of their images; you took a raw and internal state of consciousness and lifted it, poem by poem, over into intelligibility.

Stein is far from me, as I imagine she is from you, in her disinterested play with semantics; I feel the same way about any art form based on toying with chance or abandoning the efforts of the reader. But “looking again” is vital. Few people know less about physics than I do. (I would send anyone interested in poetry and physics to the work of Archie Ammons and, more recently, Gwyneth Lewis’s insightful set of essays on poetry and physics delivered as the 2015 Bloodaxe Lectures.) Quantum physics has given us a fundamental paradigm of uncertainty and, within it, ongoing debates about wave-particle duality. These developments strike me as beautiful real-world extensions of Blake’s notions of the doors of perception, Keats’s thoughts on negative capability, and Stevens’s ideas about the transforming powers of color, music, and time.

I am always on the lookout, somewhat paradoxically, for ways to work more freely and ways



Susan Stewart

to deepen understanding—the first takes me away from the state of things, the second pushes me to imagine the perspective of readers. I often, as with “Slaughter” and the later poems of *Columbarium*, have tried to write a doubt-ridden form of georgics, landing on aphorisms only in order to raise questions about them. Maybe trying to learn by unlearning is the hard way around, but I find it suits the recursive form of lyric.

To return to Herbert for a moment, could you speak to the connection in your work between your training in theology and your development as a poet? I’m sure you are asked this question all the time, but I am wondering especially about how the genres of religious thought—the sermon, the psalm, the ecstasy, the prayer—have affected your sense of poetry’s forms and powers.

KF These liturgical and spiritual modes of speech range between being highly public and deeply private in their tasks, as do poetic forms, and the genres of religious language are ritualized forms of address toward both the finite and the infinite, as, for me, are poetic forms. Yet I never feel an internal pressure compelling me to say the act of writing is a spiritual or religious act. I actually don’t know what it means to say something is squarely “spiritual.” Formally, I identify the shell or ghost of a form I’m working with as the language begins to manifest—it’s Roethke who said, “behind all free verse is the ghost of a form,” a statement that has taught me quite deeply—but the guts of



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JOE SWANBERG

Thursday, November 29, 7 PM, Connelly Auditorium, Terra Hall

Joe Swanberg is the creator of the Netflix original series *Easy*, which he produces, writes, and directs. His directorial work includes episodes of HBO’s *Looking* and Netflix’s *Love*, as well as films including *Drinking Buddies*, *Happy Christmas*, and *Win It All*. He contributed to the anthology horror film *V/H/S* and has acted in Adam Wingard’s *You’re Next*, Ti West’s *The Sacrament*, and Annie Clark’s segment of *XX*. Through Forager Films production company, Swanberg has financed and produced films including Alex Ross Perry’s *Queen of Earth* and *Golden Exits*, Zach Clark’s *Little Sister*, and Dustin Guy Defa’s *Person to Person*. Joe works in Chicago, where he lives with his wife—filmmaker Kris Swanberg—and their two children.

JACOB SAENZ

Thursday, February 14, 7 PM, Connelly Auditorium, Terra Hall

Jacob Saenz was born in Chicago and raised in Cicero, Illinois. His first book of poetry, *Throwing the Crown*, won the *American Poetry Review*/Honickman First Book Prize. His poems have appeared in *Pinwheel*, *Poetry*, *Tammy*, *TriQuarterly*, and other journals. His poetry has also been anthologized in *The Open Door: 100 Poems, 100 Year of Poetry Magazine* and *The BreakBeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop*. A CantoMundo fellow, Saenz has been the recipient of a Letras Latinas Residency and a Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship. He serves as an associate editor for *RHINO*.

the thing are unsayable beyond their exact saying. A particular form I'm using, yes, might come from the literary forms of religious emotion and its articulation. What you say above, Susan, about the recursive terrain of the lyric poem is aligned with the mystical form of speaking. The mystic says a thing, but then she knows it cannot be correct, as there is no "correct" saying about God—it's impossible to the mystic, and that impossibility keeps the infinite infinite—so she has to "unsay" the saying, and then unsay the unsaying, and then unsay that . . . and so forth. It can sound like a word game, but its instinct and practice is an invaluable posture of reverence toward mystery. We'd likely have less bloodshed if religions would adhere to this type of theological linguistics.

When I wrote my first book, it never occurred to me to approach religious genres of expression with irony. And it still doesn't. I write with contention and subversion toward my tradition, and I'm not quite sure who I'd be if I didn't have my own theological tradition to press against. My dear friend, the writer Amy Margolis, once said that about her own Jewish heritage, and I'm borrowing her language here because it resonated so purely with me. "Psalm 40," for instance, might not be attuned to a traditional praise poem, but it's attuned sincerely to the fact that I know, theologically, that I know nothing.

I do, to say just one more thing about poetry and religion, have a sensation, sometimes, that the shapeliness of a poem is a kind of incarnation. I agree with Levertov on this, or I feel it to be so . . . it doesn't happen with every poem, of course. But when it happens, something deeply mysterious is occurring. Untranslatable. Uncanny. The sensation of the form before the form. The feeling that the shape is awaiting human words to draw it down. That's ecstatic, and it's why I keep continuing with this excruciating art. No other human experience brings me into that sensation.

The question "Why do you continue?" both comically and seriously just came to my mind to ask, but perhaps you could also speak about when you know to turn to writing poems as opposed to your other intrigues, literary and cultural criticism, as well as translation.

ss Your feelings about the poem as an incarnation are so suggestive of how, in writing, the sound, the heartbeat, of a poem comes alive as we get to its final form. And suggestive as well of how each reader who truly feels a poem enters into its rhythms and musics. I am always so moved by how time and distance vanish—how the voices and worlds of strangers and the dead become so present and alive—once we are within the poem.

I was taken aback by your question, "Why do you continue?" I didn't know if you meant "to live" or "to write poems," but then I thought you might mean both. And my answer might be the same anyway. Making poems has been at the center of my life since I learned to read and write—I couldn't think without this practice. I also need to step away from it from time to time and immerse myself in the work of others through criticism and translation. Beauty brings us all together and, like those I love, my poems bind me to the future. Our sun will blow up even if we don't destroy this planet in the short term, but life is here, now, as are conscience and sentience and reason, and I believe we must use them and live without despair or cynicism.

I came of age in the generation after the self-destructive poets of the confessional period. The portentous specters of Sylvia Plath, Amelia Rosselli, and Anne Sexton (whom I heard read for the last time—at Goucher College in Maryland—three nights before she killed herself) loomed there. My first book was sternly reviewed, along

with the books of nine other women, here in the pages of *APR* under the heading, "Come all ye fair and tender ladies." There always have been reasons not to continue, more Medusas popping up.

Do you remember a poem, "What Do Women Want?" that I showed you several months ago by a friend of mine?

What Do Women Want?

*When I realized that I'd been infected,
that I'd come to harbour not just one
but two desires, that I wanted
what men want, an echo of my thinking
in the halls men build, as well as wanting it
to steer me true, then I was sorrow-struck,
a blunt bit fouled my tongue
and I fell silent, every opening inside me
closed to joy.*

*My body knew
before I did. It took me out,
unseeing, down the rough road
to the beach. Into the water, then,
cold salt, the stones slick,
slippery, beneath its feet. That's what
I did to it: sent it
to drown what choked me; sent it
to be drowned. In that place, there,
what I knew: fire is no metaphor, water
no metaphor: they were
my rage, my grief, and I
was lightless earth.*

*What pulled me, shuddering,
into the air again? I do not know
and do not like to ask. Some failure
of conviction or the image of
my mother's face. Now, every day,*

*some other raft of portraits from those halls
is hauled away and burnt. I should be glad.
They're working on the marble with a wrecking ball
and do not seem to notice the palaces of cinder block
that rise up in their wake.
The bad connexions on their cell phones.
The hard shine on their righteousness.
And the girls: their half-bare breasts. Their inexplicable
anxiety.*

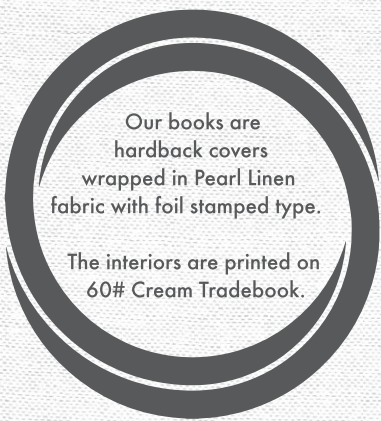
Reading your thoughts about a commitment to both "bodying forth" and "unsaying" has given me a new perspective on the salvific forces here: "failure of conviction" and "image of my mother's face." True conviction seems to need a foundation of failing, reconsideration, uncertainty. It must be lived and produced and in this sense is very close to the knowledge that we all are "of woman born"—that someone's labor has made us and continues to sustain us—that our lives depend upon and affect the lives of others. The poem explores, with full compassion, the notion of "a misguided remedy," the waywardness of "the easy way out." I find the insights at its end—a description of the strange narcissism and iconoclasm of our own moment—prescient and a call both to speak and to listen. At the same time, I wonder if, as someone of another generation, and as the mother of a young daughter, you would have a somewhat different response.

KE Oh no! I meant only "why do you continue writing poems?" But the fact that your answer welds the art of poetry to the art of living is revealing, so I'm happy you thought I might be having a moment of morbidity.

And yes, I remember this poem. It illuminates, for me, how desire can be inherited, constructed by someone else and then acted out in one's own



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life unless one calls it out, identifying it as falsehood. And here the poet calls out the academy, which historically houses male desire. On the one hand, I'm uncomfortable with talk about "male" and "female" identifications that rely upon gender essentialism, which is another falsehood in need of taking down. On the other hand, there is no doubt that countless white men have been happy to concretize the idea of "maleness" quite fervently and cunningly in our colleges and universities. So it can't be denied. The ending of the poem is a call to serve those "girls: their half-bare breasts. Their inexplicable / anxiety." The girls, there, include boys as well, and transgendered persons, and all those under the power systems of the academy and beyond who are not yet aware of why they are so anxious. I love poems that come, inside of their own lines, to intimate awareness of one's own need to undo fraught or even harmful learning. But this poet also manages to move the heart outward, back toward the haunting population of girls who are primed to make the same mistake the poet once made. That form of reaching out is both harrowing and hopeful, diagnosis and pedagogy. As if to say, here, I can explain to you your "inexplicable anxiety."

I think, as a mother of a young daughter, it's extraordinary to witness the normalization of all forms of sexuality in her generation, and amazing to see how very simple it is to teach your child about the fluidity of sexuality and gender, how ready a child is to accept the openness she's granted permission to accept. It's crushing, too, because so many children, adolescents, and adults have suffered under the opposite, the simple education toward bigotry. Transgendered persons have the highest rate of suicide and attempts of any population in our country, so parenting, sometimes, can be a matter of life or death.

Poems like the one you've shared here ought to be read to adolescents, college students, and adults—why not? why not, at a dinner party, read out a poem? why not share, why not make a home a literary place in which what amazes is read out loud to each other? We can change the inheritance of ideas.

What books or poems have been corrective in your own life, works that have undone a thought, a belief, a practice that needed to be undone? What might you list, if you were to list just five works of literature?

ss Yes, literature has such a capacity to represent the complexity of others—and poetry, especially the first-person lyric, by its very nature helps us encounter individual persons, individual lives, taking us out of the identity clichés that can give us a sense of community, but often also entrap us. Literature grows through its use, by being stored away for emergencies, by being treasured and reconsidered. I have hoped that my own children and grandchildren, students and friends—truly each generation as a whole—could determine those values they find worthwhile and discover the power of their imaginations to shape their own freedoms. Those are, to my mind, almost impossible tasks without the resources of literature, art, and philosophy.

Meanwhile, trying to choose only five works of literature that have changed my thinking sounds like a sure-fire technique for insomnia. So I'm going to make it harder and list five—well, five turned into six—poems that, in the order of their appearance, made me feel, and still make me feel, "physically as if the top of my head were taken off":

Dickinson, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes . . ."

Shakespeare, "Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame"

Donne, "Valediction Forbidding Mourning"

Baudelaire, "Le Cygne"

Dante, *Purgatorio*

Stevens, "The Owl in the Sarcophagus"

How about you?

KF Just to narrow things down, I'll confine myself to poems written in the 20th century. These are poems that were transformative for me both in my thinking and in my craft:

Frank Bidart, "Confessional"

Gwendolyn Brooks, "An Aspect of Love, Alive in the Ice and Fire"

Louise Glück, "Witchgrass"

Dunya Mikhail, "The War Works Hard"

John Berryman, "Eleven Addresses to the Lord"

Pablo Neruda, translated by W.S. Merwin, "Tonight I can write the saddest lines . . ."

ss Let's give Gwendolyn Brooks's "An Aspect of Love" the last word for now: "This is the shining joy; the time of not-to-end."

KF Yes, let's. "This is the shining joy; the time of not-to-end."

Katie Ford is the author of four books of poetry, including *If You Have To Go* (Graywolf, 2018). A recipient of the Lannan Literary Fellowship, her work has been printed in *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry Magazine*, and *The Paris Review*. She is Professor of Creative Writing at University of California, Riverside.

Susan Stewart's most recent book of poems is *Cinder: New and Selected Poems*. Her prose study, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture*, will appear next year.



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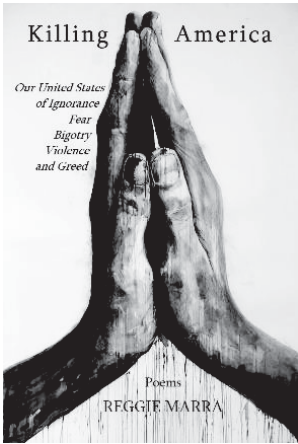
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TWO POEMS

JENNIFER TSENG

Dream of the 21st Century

I dreamt I witnessed something
(a child being humiliated in some way)
& then recounted the event for someone.
I dreamt the scene, watched the scene,
Even retold the scene & yet
I can't remember it.
As soon as I woke, it was forgotten.
In the dream I cried as I watched.
Where was I? Who were those people?
I have such a strong sense they do exist.

Dearest Yellow, Dearest Brown,

Take me in your summer gown.
You who knew fervor, of its forever
Of its endless arch towards another's fevered need.
I hold a flashlight to your organs.
Let it matter what we call a thing.
That black string was grief . . .
It was her job to take that string & put it somewhere.
To take a leaf & sew it back onto a tree.
Think of a needle, dropped into the sea.
I don't know why the world is so broken.
This sounds like a savage talking but
Don't wake me. Please look away.
My mother will pray for anyone—a stranger, a wolf, an enemy.
There are radioactive wolves in Chernobyl, flourishing.
To sing out with a throat like that
Saying look
Look how the world has touched me.
She was president of nothing. Priest of no one.
Inside every world there is another world trying to get out . . .
Let me tell you where the human in me ends:
Friend ship, hive mind, honey that tastes of books.
Every ocean has known us, Venus.
Let me exalt you.


For Aracelis Girmay, Robin Coste Lewis, Sandra Lim, Sally Wen Mao, Hannah Sanghee Park, Solmaz Sharif, Jane Wong & Shelley Wong, who made this poem possible. I made this homage collage by sewing favorite lines, belonging to the aforementioned poets, to lines of my own.

Jennifer Tseng is the author of Not so dear Jenny, poems made with my Chinese father's English letters, winner of the Bateau Press Boom Chapbook Prize. She teaches poetry and fiction at the Fine Arts Work Center and for their online writing program, 24PearlSt.

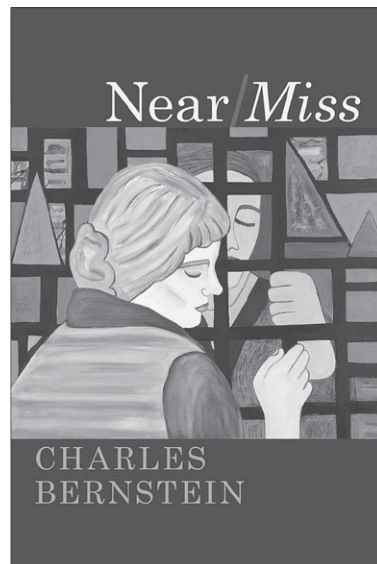
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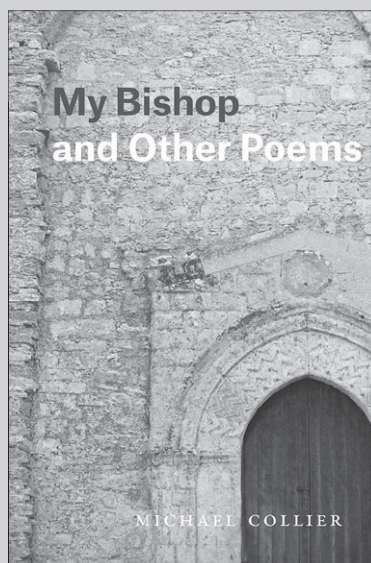
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TWO POEMS

G.C. WALDREP

North Walsham

In a hotel in a small town in Norfolk I am listening to someone throwing glass bottles into a metal bin: toss-shatter, toss-shatter. There are no other sounds; it's a quiet afternoon but the one tossing them has a sense of rhythm and I have a sense that this has been going on for some very long time, time being that medium through which we convey the least knowledge of our circumstances to God, or one another, which the body registers dimly in its cathedral of cells, its telomeres, its intrinsically photosensitive retinal ganglia that register the long days and longer nights of the blind. There is pilgrimage and then there is direct action of the hand, what Simone Weil called the "iron" at whose touch "there must be a feeling of separation from God such as Christ experienced, otherwise it is another God," toss-shatter, the grasping and then relinquishing of the evidence of desire. *I was perfectly happy there* said the famous writer of this place, supposedly, when in fact it was a physician's surgery (the physician was her friend; she came here to escape the city), one young woman after another learning the art of venipuncture and practicing it, for the public good. There was a time when I had to keep track of which arm had been most recently offered blood. Outside a storm either is or is not billowing in from the North Sea, from drowned Doggerland into and over which I stared for several hours yesterday, the Prussian blue-gray stain of the sky leaving the dark water somehow lighter, as if possessed not of phosphorescence but of resistance, a thunder-fetter. All afternoon I'd been followed from ancient church to ancient church by two policemen in a gaudy van; finally on some cliffs above the sea I spoke to them, we exchanged cordial greetings and they sent me on towards the bus stop at the outer edge of Mundesley which, like Dunwich, is slowly slipping into that same depth. I waited there with a woman and her child and a man who either was her lover, or had been her lover, or—not the father of her child—wanted to be her lover. "Tool and a closed vessel" wrote Simone Weil. I admire her notebooks so much more because they force the reading mind to draw inferences, to make the leaps she couldn't quite force herself to make except in the fictions of her final essays, and in her particular end, itself a kind of fiction, a falsified denouement, all clues leading to both act and actor, in perfect symmetry. For now we can pretend she was a character in a book, her own book, perhaps—her own cave (elsewise Plato's). She who abhorred choice, who wrote "That is the whole problem. To make time a moving image of eternity, for it is not so naturally," toss-shatter, toss-shatter. What was once the tallest church tower in Norfolk collapsed here in stages, 1724, 1835, 1836, and was not rebuilt. I think about the fact that Siegfried Sassoon and I both contemplated this meaningless antiquarian datum, but also the exquisite tiny fane at Edington, that reels in the light cast by the sea and unfamines it, somehow, forces the intelligence back inside its nude bottle. "Make it so that time is a circle and not a line" (Weil again) and "Here are certain things which cause no suffering whatever by themselves, but make us suffer as signs." She meant things like her Renault ID card, a soldier in German uniform, a scrap of penmanship. *A hymn*

veins the forest is what I thought, at the time, and (—*I will have it break my mouth*). What, then, of pilgrimage, that takes the suffering sign and inscribes it over the length of the body as a route, or, if you prefer, inscribes it *as* the body over some distance in space, as a system of pain and arrival? I admit I withdrew into my own small confession. If like Weil we see God not *in* the injury, but *as* the injury itself, the five Christs of Christ, each declaring its own gospel according to its bloody lips, its bloody tongue—A distant rectitude, where my book lay like some other body I'd been wearing, or trying on, or trying to wear and then, exhausted, set aside, too difficult, too meticulous for now.

A Mystic's Guide to Arches

Utter and the land a scrap, a cusp, the crupped haunch that moves ahead of the carriage in its plush mechanicals. I apologized for my eye, my ear, my lame cartography. Illness makes the body legible, most often to strangers. In a pinch the artery reverses. Pleasure is not an arch through which the body passes, as from one element to another, *here* versus *there*, the spin of particles in their constituent, mutually-convoked sockets, which scientists say is one of the few qualities of matter that can survive a black hole. I arrived into dead spots in my vision, little brass keys where no locks had been and all around the desert's terrible graffiti. Can you see *this*, the ophthalmologist asked, from the depths of her phone: can you see *this*. When the one-legged bird settled in my quince I watched to see whether its nest would differ in any material, discernible way from other nests, but I had no other nests for comparison, only drawings in a guidebook, blurred snapshots from the internet. It laid two eggs, one of which I found broken, vacant at the field's gapped edge. Wide channels in the karst *communicate*. "As when two people are reading the same page, each is aware of the other's breath, so shall I draw in the breath of his longings," wrote not Gertrude (the Great) of Helfta but Gertrude's anonymous chronicler. The nuns of Helfta were trained in the trivium and the quadrivium and Gertrude had been a child oblate. In my dream my own children read an article about the water armonica, filled all the kitchen glasses from the tap, then beat them down into damp sand, singing loudly. I cut my feet on the shards. It was my first dream in weeks, months perhaps, the drugs having resolved briefly into their animal clefs. I keep scanning for entrances and exits. But I fled the desert, which like any altar went right on cataloguing its faiths and husks. The wisteria in the arbor was not yet blooming. I saw the feather on the forest path but would not pick it up. Nations passed through nations. The order of one lost feather versus the order of more than one, the nonce court of hunger so pure, so *now* all flight reclines before it. The depression at the center of each red blood cell is blind, the way breathing is blind. Through the glass roundel representing the sun and then the one representing the moon, somehow aloft again above the donor rebus. On the island, later,

the orchard remnants seemed to gesture towards
 where I lay, a petition. Bone is the same everywhere,
 you scoffed, but that isn't true. Hugh of Balma noted
 "In a strict sense, to seek by night can mean
 to ascend through the creatures, or to seek the Beloved
 in them (as some would have it, for whom to seek
 by night is to seek through creatures or through the traces
 of creatures)." By "visible creatures" he meant,
 he explained, "the vestiges of God." I am almost
 certain I have forgotten how to properly harness a horse.
 Skills leave the body of faith just as they leave the body
 of culture, at a regular rate, which is why I spend
 my spare time reading obscure architectural histories.
 Because math makes the mind smaller, perhaps.
 Because the eye is always a lame master. "Try to fix
 the fiery planet in space. It is easy to make your own
 tools," counseled the Romanian poet Gellu Naum.
 To place the self next to the self is the problem.
 The natives regard us soberly, relayed even further
 from the blind pole: snip of hair, a mirror-grammar
 in pure water (bathing the saline body). Mandolin of ash
 behind the green curtain. I recognize the wine
 when it is passed. I have only two hands. What, then,
 would you take from the dead? This is the perishable
 text, not the ledgers filled with apocryphal jottings,
 flesh for knife, redress and return, face-down and known
 by costume only (a name, an address, some reminiscence—
 broken off—a bawdy poem). I spotted the bones
 and admired as I always do their convex splay.
 In the desert airport, opening and closing my eyes,
 as if something or someone would become even more
 visible. But you pocketed the feather. And we kept
 walking, towards the ruins. We pass through and through,
 communicating jars with our bell-like tones. It's
 night now. The bones glimmering like phosphorescent
 spiders, so still they seem to cast their own music.
 The black fruit of the world (and its terrible blood).
 And yet the eye opening, cleanly into the clearing
 of matter. We strain our ears listening, as among thorns.
 Such lucky beasts. Never to emerge on the other side.

G.C. Waldrep's newest collection is *feast gently* (Tupelo, 2018). His poems have appeared in many journals, including *New American Writing*, *New England Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, and *Yale Review*.



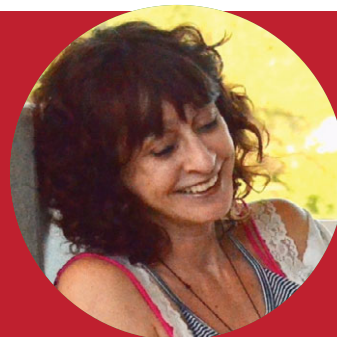
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TWO POEMS

MALACHI BLACK

Lucid Interval

Like a river, I can live
between the shiver and the skin
that holds my shadow.

This is where memory begins:
the strand of what must be
lifts from the braid

of what has been—and rests
inside the present
as a hinge. My brother

flinches, gone, or gone again
into a schizophrenic rift,
and he totters like a blade

of grass swept by the strange
April wind, no more tethered
to the past than to the bed

on which he sits. He runs
his palm against the lantern
of his head: a shadow

falls, a shiver frightens
off the wall, and he dissolves
into a tense between

the shadow present
on the wall that I perceive,
the static past
the wall that he projects.

Bloodlines

Night circles like a dog above
its bed. I whisper to the moon,

a bent spoon bubbling like a cauldron
in my still unsteady hand. Stretch

out, bold claw, relent: each
scab embedded in the skin

inside this elbow is a freckle
I have kept from childhood,

as on the ceiling I have left
each swollen glow-in-the-dark star.

Tonight I borrow from Orion
one pin prick and a buckle

for the belt I tighten like a choke-
chain on the ghost in my left arm.

Pisces, Ares, Canis, Crux—where
can I find the pale astronomer

who'll trace these constellations
from the ripple in my blood?

Malachi Black is the author of Storm Toward Morning (Copper Canyon Press, 2014). He teaches at the University of San Diego.



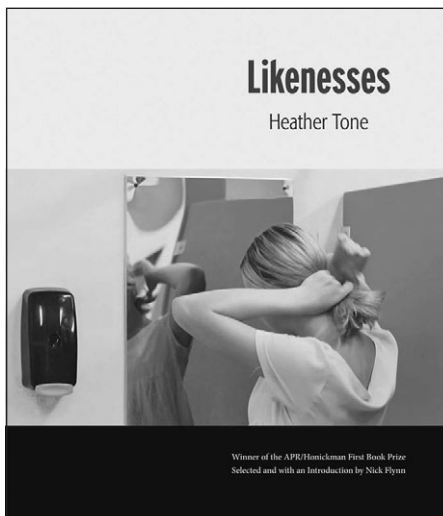
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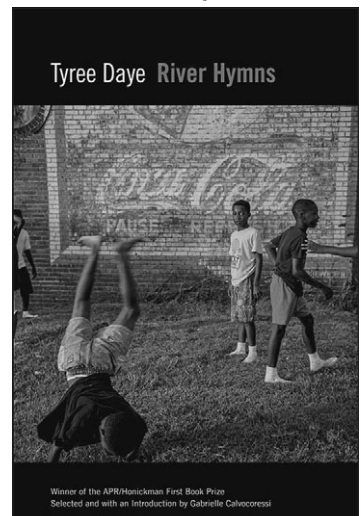
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SPEECH AND TRANSCRIPTION

The Politics of Voice in Ada Limón's

The Carrying

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ASA DRAKE

Ada Limón, *The Carrying: Poems*
Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions
Hardcover, 120 pages, August 2018

The world asks for transcription. That has been my experience, that if I recount any small terror, I will be asked for the proof of what has happened. What was said to me, exactly? Will I be told how implausible the violence I've experienced is to my auditor? To be believed requires an acetic preservation of evidence, to withhold the personal account. Ada Limón's *The Carrying* rejects this practice. Limón's fifth collection emphasizes a speaker who will not be coerced into carrying language that doesn't love her.

In *The Carrying*, Limón's speaker cannot avoid confrontation. Others speak to her. Words fall out of the mouths we don't know. But Limón doesn't prioritize the act of transcription. She gives us a speaker who is allowed to forget.

As I pump the gas a man in his black Ford F-150 yells out his window about my body. I actually can't remember what it was. Nice tits. Nice ass. Something I've been hearing my whole life. Except sometimes it's not Nice ass, it's Big ass or something a bit more cruel.

We start with the lyric "I" and we end with its assertions. The speaker doesn't deliver the voices of strangers, though what has been said has become so familiar, it could be any number of phrases. From the impositions of others, we learn we don't need to know them for what they say to be familiar. More importantly, we don't even need to carry with us what they say.

Limón gives us a speaker who is often spoken to, and yet, she is often the only one to speak to us. From her, all others' language spills forth and she isn't beholden to save them from the worst interpretations of themselves. The "rude radio / disk jockey" is the sum of his "morning jaw-ing . . . in its exaggerated American male register." She's given control of the spigot, so to speak, expanding lexicon into a structure for making "love and art," to record the interactions that hurt us while allowing the narrative to change. The speaker turns a man's certainty against him and waits for "him to notice what he said, how a woman might feel agony." The physicist in another poem "doesn't answer so maybe I don't exist," and yet the speaker traces an entire history where "each second is in me." In turn, Limón examines the soundness of these structures: of language, of the body, of a nation, of how we love.

If so much language can be summarized or forgotten, what is quoted has special resonance. After all, the act of quotation becomes an ongoing action; from the moment the words are spoken by another, the speaker carries them, until finally she lays them out for the auditor.

*What does Lorca say? Compadre, quiero cambiar
mi caballo por su casa. Friend, I want to trade this horse*

of illness for your house that praises the throat.

*I'll settle for these words you gave me: sweet smoke
and I'll plant them into my chest so I can take this*

circling spell and light it on fire.

This excerpt is from a series of poem correspondences between Ada Limón and Natalie Diaz initially published as "Envelopes of Air" in *The New Yorker*. Separated from the correspondence, the "you" remains an intimate gesture. I have no doubt that the "you" is not me, that I don't have the right to insert myself. And yet I feel I have a set of hands giving and taking. The reader, too, can "settle for these words you gave me: *sweet smoke*," which, as readers, we too now possess. We are given the intimacy of knowing language as the speaker has experienced it. And we are given the act of translation which says, I will take something you don't know and make it familiar

to you. In effect, the reader has the opportunity to carry Lorca's "Romance Sonambulo" as the speaker encountered it and as she interprets it. But here, the speaker, too, is asking "Friend, I want to trade this horse / of illness for your house that praises the throat," with the line break representing a shift into the voice of the speaker, who slants her translation.

She desires a trade for the "house that praises the throat." What is it to ask that in America, when "Perhaps / the truth is every song of this country / has an unsung third stanza, something brutal?" What is the praise we can imagine within a house that offers its people "no refuge," that is willing to make its people unfamiliar? These threats of "something brutal" are not historical. Limón makes clear that the bodies she describes are vulnerable:

*Manuel is in Chicago today, and we've both admitted
that we're traveling with our passports now.
Reports of ICE raids and both of our bloods
are requiring new medication.*

To desire the throat, its fragility, its amplification, is to find comfort where I cannot imagine it, in the visible body. But this is what Limón's collection asks. Here is a speaker who recognizes the danger of being seen: "I was struck translucent. A good look for me!" She knows invisibility is "a good look," for the othered, yet she is willing to risk the body, to be visible and in motion, to disturb other bodies: "I shook the air and screwed it all up just by being alive too." Afterwards, she asks, "Am I braver than those birds?" disturbed by her movement. The speaker denotes a bravery to living, but also a desperation in asking, as if there were another way:

*All the world is moving, even sand from one shore to another
is being shuttled. I live my life half afraid, and half shouting
at the trains when they thunder by. This letter to you is both.*

I'm not interested in the speaker living bravely. I'm interested in how she surrounds herself with living—that she is "half afraid" from living and desirous of life. "Worry" and "want" are a balanced construction throughout this collection, where the speaker may "still worry / and want an endless stream of more." The same poem begins with the speaker shouting, "*I'd forgotten how much / I like to grow things*," a complicated sentiment. After all, what is encouraging her to nurture anything if she does not remember a happiness from "*growing things*"? But, perhaps, this is the "house that praises the throat," a nurturing rooted in the announcement of our own intentions. Perhaps praise is something of our own making, a shout from the body. Perhaps the voice can take the place of our "horse of illness" if the voice is the best vector for our desires. The "half shouting" body is balancing the "half afraid" body, which would suggest it is the voice that propels the body forward. In which case, why should the voice ever be used to carry language that doesn't love us back?

Asa Drake is a public services librarian. Her writing is published or forthcoming with The Margins, The Journal, Prairie Schooner, Frontier Poetry and elsewhere. She received her MFA in poetry from The New School and was a finalist for Gold Line Press's 2017 Chapbook Competition.

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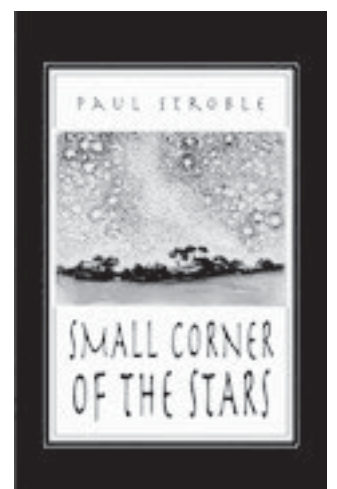
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FIVE POEMS

OLIVER BAEZ BENDORF

River I Dream About

Moon river, swollen river, river of starhole
and bright, harness river, lichen river,
river we velvet with our filth.
River of butter and river of witches, river
cracked open careful like egg, or burst
apart, unleashing its violet load.
River mouths, river beds, every back
forty creek, every crick, made of
trickles, made of synth, river of sound
as vibration, river where we all get free.
River that curve down a backbone,
river through which I particle heat,
feathery and wet, lemony and loud,
river that still smell skin, browned
around a neck, softened with sweat,
river you wear tight on your hips,
given in private, or out in the open.
River I dream about.
River from the inside.
River where we shouts the feeling.
Septum river, bundle river, river of mercy,
sometimes edging so far into night
the moon goes (. . .) dark.
Yes, all night river, burnt sugar river.
We pull the river into our bellies, we
go out walking. We river in darkness
as entire paw prints of color and light.
Everything rivers in motion. River
of holy, river of freaks, river where
my fur belong to me. Softer than
it seem river. Honey and Vaseline river.
Brown river, black river, off the map river.
I will be there, printing textures of rock
on the skin of me, belly down, face down,
my god, it is good to be home.

Some of Us Full Moon Hearts

wept each other to sleep just to hear
something like the river again—not
knowing our tears was the river
which we had left in body
old wild sound
becomes barnboard

Here I Am Walking in a Field

again, I think, while walking
in a field. Field thick with
snow, field of milk.
The sun aches out in
streaks of aftermath—
protect me, evergreen,
if this must be prayer.

If we must console.
If the earth must turn
to fire again, let it
begin in the belly.

Let me handle it
with my hands.

Let this be the start
of something new.

After a While, We Stop Asking

sometimes
on our saddest days, the river
lift up almost to the bridge.
on our saddest days, the river
on the bridge:
river we build,
river swell up to the belly.
on our worst days, we stop
asking. we brown/white as one
body again
in fields of moon snow,
we assemble (fields of stubble, fields of thread).
because we’ve known
ourselves as throwaway
already,
we do not dispose. kept we say
and we mean it— decompose
(still in the field) (still together)

Faggot Turf

Late at night shows
me how to care
for conifers. We poke
our dusty thighs with
needles / we pour
ink into the holes—
hemlock and lava rock,
make ourselves
a universe that way
in the passenger car.
Conductor leans
on the horn—
one long note
of a rusty piano.
Haunted by us too,
he throws the word
out his window like
litter and we *faggots* !

catch it.

Oliver Baez Bendorf is a queer trans Latinx poet from the Midwest. He is the author of Advantages of Being Evergreen (forthcoming, 2019), winner of the Cleveland State University Open Book Poetry Competition, and The Spectral Wilderness (Kent State U., 2015), selected by Mark Doty for the Stan & Tom Wick Poetry Prize. He was the 2017–2018 Halls Emerging Artist Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and is currently an assistant professor of creative writing at Kalamazoo College in Michigan.



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TWO POEMS

IRA SADOFF

In My Dream

I worried about my daughter,
so I was shaken awake
because I have no daughter, and whatever
knowing looks, whatever cakes
we could have baked together, whatever gifts
we could grant one another, they were
slipping out of sight, the way parents do,
to those who belong only to the world
of writing and thinking. There was no body there.
Of course there'd have been bribes,
chastisements, attention-getting manipulations:
but whose would they be? There was a trampoline,
maybe a carousel, a clumsy gesture. . . .
I was raising her up so she could see:
it was a nightmare. A nightmare I tell you, a nightmare.

Thelonious Monk of Weehawken

There are no wrong notes —Thelonious Monk

In the third set
of Monk's last gig, the same tunes
he played since 1950
rocked a little something inside us.

Had we been there
when his fingers first stirred things up,
we might have bowed
to his off-key thumping. But since

we came late, we heard
the notes one by one as they appeared
in all their likenesses,
in all their lessness: of course we thought

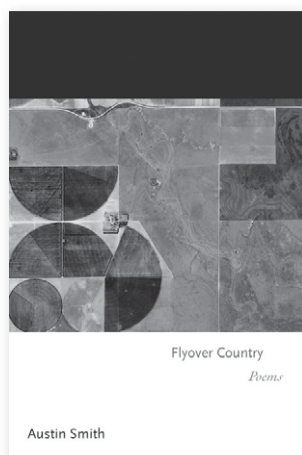
there'd be a next. But he
was a madman really, denuded, helpless,
dazed. What I'm saying,
dear gods, is don't send our old loves back:

that first Picasso, the beauty
who treated us to months of sugary pleasure—
I don't want to know
what became of her. When we look at our own

faces I wish we could love
them more. Because it's easy to forget
the scored, weathered faces,
old houses with character, the ancient cliffs
of the Palisades where our Monk last lived.

Ira Sadoff is the author of eight collections of poetry, including True Faith, Barter, and Grazing (U. of Illinois), a novel, O. Henry prize-winning short stories, and The Ira Sadoff Reader (a collection of stories, poems, and essays about contemporary poetry).

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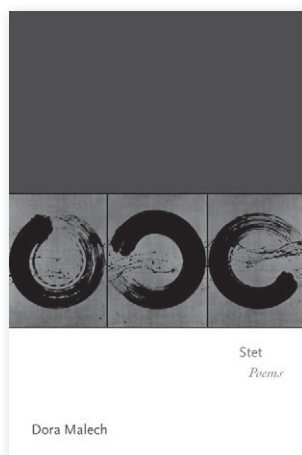
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THREE POEMS

RAENA SHIRALI

at first, trying to reach the accused,

i swallowed burnt matchsticks, her hair a tar tumbleweed
in the room's south-facing corner. i did this to pray & i did this
to feel. & then i swallowed my old chant—his name, his name—like i'm not made
of my oppressor's undoing. & then i swallowed theory. i swallowed
plantation politics, tried prying plantains from my lips, plump from sitting
on a velvet couch & touching them dry to my wrists while reading
about her body—strung up for slaughter, called names in the oppressor's
language, covered in silt. & then i swallowed puddles. & then i swallowed sandalwood
& tried to cloak & cover & render her erotic, for the oppressor sometimes saves
the objects of his desire.

& then i swallowed desire. i held the smoldering
cow dung patty at my core. i smelled like it. i was shit & wanted
to be shit. & then i swallowed pretense. swallowed countries. why try to get close
when you could become, i said, & then i swallowed myself, chased me down
with goat milk & shorn fur. & then i turned to the page
& swallowed it & i took it like a shot & took it like a man & took
the punches & still wandered through mazes of huts asking my people
what it felt like to be oppressed. & then i swallowed tea. i swallowed the fertilized
soil. & then i swallowed braids & locust shells & i wanted to smell like incense
because the oppressor values patchouli & cedar so i bought a candle
to smell like my heritage & then i swallowed wax & was viscous & suddenly
then, i could not move. & my ankles were bound but they left my wrists
free. & i could not speak but still i mouthed a name i'd never heard & i felt her
like my own ghost. there was no magic : it was not profound.

before plantations, women rustle the brush together,

*[It is true that the dominant value of social life in the indigenous
communities is collectivism, and anything that threatens it is
branded as antisocial. But why are women considered more
antisocial than men, who are never or seldom identified as
witches?]*¹

cloth slings bursting with nuts & berries, wound
around a length of bamboo. here, daayani forage, are
but women. they sit together,

feet dangling over roadside ditches, sharing stories of men
who stand almost too tall, craning their necks skyward
as if to project a peacock's air—male bird : all preen

& chosen. there are warnings. of villagers
instead, who make shadows broad
as buildings'. what did it mean to sit alone

or in groups? a woman lights a candle
& my imagination is a failure.
or a woman sits alone, cheeks red with sweat

& the color *red* doesn't signal, there
are solitudes i don't have
to interpret : no metaphor

¹Mullick, Samar Bosu. "Gender Relations and Witches among the Indig-
enous Communities of Jharkhand, India." *Gender Relations in Forest Societies
in Asia: Patriarchy at Odds*. SAGE Publications, 2004.

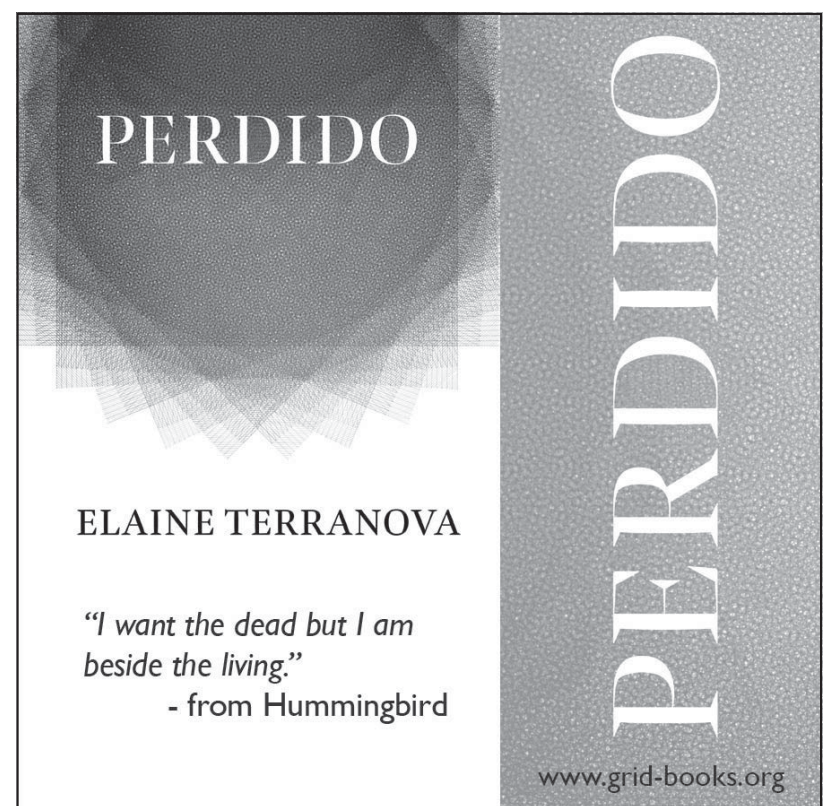
for her joy. & if i am
aligned with anyone, anyone
in Jharkhand, how can i say it's not

with men : shaded safely at a distance
making observations. here : the art of taking
note.

daayan senses the ohja

i don't want to call it *emergency*
when i wake in a blue fog, the kind with orange
edges—night's failed go at totality. except the orange
isn't morning. & night isn't total
because of the flickering. & if i stretch out my arm
all i'll hit is the left side of the cot. he's only been dead
a few weeks but already they call me *unthinkable*
hunger. & since when are sadness & sin
the same? before i met him in the tea fields, before
we married, i was just like them. i fell asleep
with all my fingers crossed, looped together against
the omen they name me now. i believed something
about safety & do-gooding & a universe that writes
itself, favors the center. i was a cheerful fool. each day,
their torches near the threshold. i don't want
to call it *emergency*, but i know what will happen
when they cross. i know what to call that color
at the ashen edges of night.

Raena Shirali is a poet, teaching artist, and editor from Charleston, SC. Raena is the
author of *GILT* (YesYes Books, 2017), winner of the 2018 Milt Kessler Poetry Book
Award. A first-generation Indian American, she is the recipient of prizes and honors from
VIDA, Gulf Coast, Boston Review, & Cosmonauts Avenue. She serves as Poetry
Editor for Muzzle Magazine, Poetry Reader for Vinyl, & Poetry Instructor at Blue Stoop.



AT ODDS WITH HUMILITY

APZ Books

DAVID BIESPIEL

Michael Collier, *My Bishop and Other Poems*
Chicago: University of Chicago Press
Paperback, 80 pages, August 2018

Michael Collier has always been difficult to pigeonhole. Although he has been writing poems steadily since 1986, beginning with *The Clasp and Other Poems*, published by Wesleyan University Press during a decade in which the series published books by Yusef Komunyakaa, Agha Shahid Ali, Heather McHugh, Jane Hirshfield, James Tate, Marianne Boruch, and Gregory Orr, he has remained something of a reserved outlier. His aesthetic is woefully out of fashion. Or, I might put it, gloriously out of fashion. Which makes him something of a dissident aesthete.

Collier has been teaching in the creative writing program at the University of Maryland since the 1980s and recently stepped down after some two decades as director of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Question is, how can someone who appears to be an insider never lose his outsider cred? If you're the type of reader who reels from the latest fashions in poetry, you won't want to miss looking in his direction at what is, by my count, his seventh volume of poems. From his snapshot of Jefferson's bees—"white man's flies"—and portraits of a lemon, Emily Dickinson, storms, and funky stuff, Collier practices a poetry of domestic restlessness. He sticks to the continuum of what home is and isn't: worn faces, invisible presences, joyful industries, kitchens with fruit pulp, medicine cabinets, money clips, rent collectors. Often he's simply measuring passages of time:

*When one of my sons turned twenty-five, I calculated how old
I would be when he turned fifty, if I were still alive, and then
it occurred to me that after I die his age will begin
to catch up to mine, until at some point in the future,
if he lives long enough, we will for one year
be the same age, the only time in our lives, so to speak,
when I am not keeping ahead of him moving toward death
and he has not yet surpassed me, and in order for me to experience
what he will experience that day, I will have to live until
I'm a month shy of ninety-six, which is how long my father lived.*

He can be accused of being commonplace, perhaps habitual, or conventional, for there is a sense in which he dreams up nothing new. The seductive faithfulness of his portraits willingly echoes the robust intensity of his teacher, William Meredith; the grave studies of family and familiars, or people he's passed in the street, strangers, specters from his Jesuit past, bring Robert Lowell to mind; and some of his poems suggest comparisons to Galway Kinnell's teeming serenity. Collier's concerns with forms may not be taut or ferociously unrestrained. And yet, there is something about his affections that keeps us awakened, vigilant. That something is carried off by the rigor of syntax. "I like to develop long sentences with a lot of subordination," Collier has said. "Syntax is the score over which the melody, so to speak, is played. And the stanza is more like the regulating device for the syntax, parceling it out and creating dramatic emphasis." Underneath these formations is a poet troubled and charming, struggling with turmoil in the animating surfaces and turns of his poems. Avoiding the conceptual in favor of the sensuous, his poems are silky even when the materials are rough-hewn. Here are three examples. Of Emily Dickinson, he writes:

*What would she make of the belted cows
that crowd inches from the electrified fence
keeping them from wandering into West Street
and whose heads are the size of junked snowmobiles
they share the pasture with and, if you imagine
ears as handlebars, even a little shaped
like them—their nostrils snorting
the white-blue exhaust of gasoline?*

Of a chihuahua named Boom Boom:

*Now it sounds like a tambourine because of a collar with tiny bells. Passion flowers
grow in a thick vine over Boom Boom's fence. I have been told the leaves of these
flowers are the lances that pierced Jesus's chest and broke his legs. Boom Boom is*

*whimpering, lying down near a place in the fence through which I squeeze my hand to
touch his nose. "Boom Boom," I say, very quietly, "I love you. You are the only one
who understands me."*

Of a bronze foot in a glass case:

*Basra is a long way off. I walked there once,
along the Euphrates. When I say, "I,"
I mean this foot without a leg to lift it.
Step by step I marched.*

*After Basra, I returned to Palmyra,
"City of Palms," and stood a century or two in the shadow
of a wall, a foot with hundreds of feet*

*waiting for men of flesh and blood
to flood the city with violence,
killing everything that walked,
everything with legs and arms and heads.*

The argument Collier makes, here and in previous books, is that a tortuous spiritual journey need not be made through debasement. Instead, it's through discovery of souls where the capacity for recognition has been there all along. By that, I also mean nothing in his work suggests the influence of the Modernists' ratification of abstraction or the new wave-ism of most post-modernists of his generation, although one might be able to detect some remote echo of William Carlos Williams in Collier's fondness for observation where the "point of the tool . . . / [is a] sharp tongue / piercing thought, / stopped and struck, / a chad of light / punched, not torn."

Collier's desire to keep daily experience compact in form and merely life size, easy to carry like a deck of playing cards, is perhaps a defining characteristic of what you might call the American domestic style. In which I would include poetry that is finely drawn, fidgety, wry, redolent, and so twined in its own seemingly virtuous miscellany of home-bound incarnations as to suggest no current parallels. Every poet finds his position—the scope of his forms proper to the subjects and materials he uses. Collier's takes on private American life can't be reasoned in theory, only on paper, in poems that reveal the living self, not as allusive but candid. The American domestic style proposes something equitable and scrupulous as a ranch house. A three-bedroom arena. Not as spectacle, but as theater.

Over the course of three decades what obsessively concerns Michael Collier is the idea that each poem's stage, with minimum performance, and with simple situations, reshapes its poet. The style is not so much a donning of a mask as it is a testament of existence. You might say it's a poet's invention of the only self who can write his poems, and who therefore becomes the subject matter. For Collier, that person is affable, civil, comic, preposterous, cautionary, and at times distinctly self-terrorizing. A man who "understands why he's arrived late, is / already leaving, and . . . is sorry."

And so Collier can fill books with characters, each of them figured to display complicity with his own, reshaped private history. His poems—earnest portrayals of his Arizona upbringing and East Coast adulthood, with blemished characters rubbernecked from some distance in his imagination with a "ferocity that ceased as quickly as it began," on one hand, and, on the other hand, a sense of feeling "certain there is a purpose to life beyond the one I've been given"—are remarkable portraits of modest lives. They are not meant to be seen as parodies or picturesque, but as elusive as people actually are, elusive as anyone's tangled memories actually are. I don't mean to suggest that the tone of his poems is comic. But unsparing, precise, and in concurrence with the audience. A fictional equivalent—a Catholic fictional equivalent, I mean—might include Flannery O'Connor or Walker Percy, two writers invested in the subject, like Collier, of what it means to be an eternal pilgrim in conflict with questions of salvation.

At the same time, one does not expect social criticism from Collier's style—and usually one does not get it either. In the America that exists in his poems the grotesque is in the glare. But something new is happening in *My Bishop*. The old detachment can no longer hold. Instead, there lurks a disgust. It is not a common emotion in his poems. If the consistency of Collier's vision now seems far more singular, that is partly because it remains grounded in sober observation, a reliance on the single utterance to enumerate the wild realms of daily experience. Clarity comes from his meticulous regard for the emphatic: blocks of time, close-ups of remembered scenes, unfussy characterizations of individuals and places.

Two examples from earlier poems illustrate where his interests have been. In the first, from the poem "The Cave," published in *The Folded Heart*, the portrait is staged with an air of expectancy. The figures are posed and lit, as in a film, and the overall aesthetic is of a plain ordinariness, a situation that lacks pageantry. The poem opens

*I think of Plato and the limited technology
of his cave, the primitive projection
incapable of fast forward or reverse,*

*stop action or slo mo and the instant replay
that would have allowed him to verify,
once and for all, Justice or the Good,*

*such as the way my family did, hour upon hour,
in the dark, watching films of my sister
diving, going over her failures and successes
like a school of philosophers, arguing
fiercely, pulling her up from the depths
of the blue water, feet first, her splash*

*blooming around her hips, then dying out
into a calm flat sheet as her fingertips appeared.
Sometimes we kept her suspended in her mimesis
of gainer and twist until the projector's lamp
burned blue with smoke and the smell of acetate
filled the room.*

In the second example, from the first stanza of “An Awful Story,” published in his 2000 book *The Ledge*, we are gripped not only by a sense of scene but also by Collier’s severe, attentive eye for the truth of a scene:

*When she came into his room he was asleep
and when she touched him, he woke—
her hand on his shoulder, her knee at his mouth,
and in the darkness, she looked like a boy.*

Anyone who has experienced an emotional cross-roads knows that nothing, in terms of alertness or observation, is lacking in that set-up. From the tracking of the woman coming into the room like a dangerous wave to the moment of gathering one’s sense of the occasion, it is all there, fragile but rooted, permanent as the way “her hand [touches] . . . his shoulder, her knee [appears] at his mouth.”

For the same reasons, his ambitious, hybrid, title poem in *My Bishop* solidifies for twenty-five pages as a fixture of feeling—as much as it is one man’s truth and reconciliation with the poem’s central conflict, the Catholic archdiocese covering up the sexual abuse of children by priests in Collier’s hometown of Phoenix. Like an unholy confessional, the poem details the awful memory of Collier’s friendship with the disgraced former bishop of Phoenix, and where that relationship intersects with the stitches of domestic life. The poem weaves the funerals of Collier’s parents, which the retired bishop, a family acquaintance, attended, with the story of Collier’s evolving spiritual crisis over a pedophilic priest, Robert B. Gluch, whom the bishop failed to protect him and other young boys from.

The poem is too long to quote, but several excerpts, including the poem’s final passage, will give you a sense of its underlying attentiveness:

*When my mother saw my father laid out in his rented
casket, she asked, in her deaf-person’s loud sotto voce,
“Who did that to Bob?” And then, “He looks awful!”*

And yet, Bishop, for you she was all false kindness.

*“How did you find us?” she wanted to know, as if
your presence was both mystery and miracle, and then
through the cloud of her dementia, she asked it again,
then again and again.*

*And so, with my mother perseverating and with the
waxworks version of my father behind us, and my wife
and children, my sisters, brothers-in-law, nephews and
nieces, my parents’ nona- and octogenarian friends, my
dearest childhood friends gathered all around . . . you
turned from*

*her, as if she wasn’t speaking, to ask if I was “right
with the church,” and then because “it would please
your father,” you offered to hear my confession,
whenever I was ready.*

*All those priests you moved unbeknownst from parish to
parish, I see them in Hell, wearing their genitals around
their necks instead of the white collars of their office, and
the darkness, at least in this circle, is the dark of a black
light in which certain textures irradiate a violet shimmer.*

*In this atmosphere you see what they wear before you
see them. By “you” I mean you, Bishop, for having
shielded them in life, I’ve put you in their eternal
fraternity.*

And where might you put me?

*In the narrow, deep crack between belief and disbelief,
with those who keep their heads above its chasm by
spreading out their arms so their bodies dangle in the
emptiness between?*

*What I feared about Gluch was that he knew something
about me I didn’t know and that’s why when he called
my mother with an invitation for me to go overnight
with him to the Grand Canyon, although she’d already
consented, I refused.*

*But more powerful than the fear of what he might have
known about me was the fear that if I went with him,
I’d be forever on the other side of my life, even if he
didn’t fondle me or suck my dick, and I was afraid, too,
shame would come between the admiration I had for
you, Bishop,*

and the loyalty that went with it.

I refused, I refused, I refused.

How easily he had turned my mother into my betrayer.

*For decades this event was like a dark black space
between her and me.*

*Several years ago, as I was watching the evening news
with her, your face rose up from the depths of the screen,
like an image in a Magic 8 Ball.*

*In her habit of talking to the TV, she asked, “What do
they do to those boys?” “Oral sex, Mom,” I said, “oral
sex.”*

*In my version of the story, four years pass and my
Bishop shows up at my mother’s funeral.*

*He’s pushing a walker with squeaky, plastic wheels and
fluorescent tennis balls fixed to the back legs.*

His face is slack.

*A white pharmaceutical rime crusts the corners of his
mouth.*

His gingery hair is gray.

*I follow his slow effort to reach the altar where he
presumes he’s wanted as a concelebrant but no one has
invited him.*

*At first he won’t look at me directly, but when our eyes
meet, he administers a fierce, unforgiving stare.*

He sees I’ll never be ready for confession.

I pity him.

It’s what we do.

I pity, dislike, and I’m fond of him.

The truth of this is almost as bearable as the lie.

*Later, when I approach the sanctuary to deliver my
mother’s eulogy, I give him a quick, involuntary wave
like a signal of surrender or a sign that recognizes who
we were more than forty years ago—frightened boy and
less frightened young priest.*

*From the lectern, before I begin, I thank him publicly for
his friendship.*

These passages demonstrate a stance of witnessing, less so victimhood. They demonstrate a bygone faith, a battered spiritual, to say nothing of civic and legal order, a world violently at odds with humility. Collier proves how precarious trust is, recording his story to own the anguish and indignation that has plagued him. He is not unraveled. Scorn doesn’t spiral into despair, but into a confirmation of his rage.

What might come to mind when you read “My Bishop” is Robert Lowell’s “91 Revere Street,” published in 1959 in *Life Studies*. Not because they are exactly similar. They aren’t really. Lowell’s piece is all satire whereas Collier’s is a portrait of a disappointment. “91 Revere Street” offered audiences the excesses of domiciliary life, stuffed with talismanic images, unresolved relationships, and wearisome conflicts. I don’t think I’m overstating it to say that “91 Revere Street” was at the root of the domestic style in American poetry, what is typically called confessional poetry. Like Lowell, Collier unmasks ancestors and inheritances. But the differences matter. Where Lowell’s memoir appears to liberate him as he brutally decimates the memory of his family, the reemergence of ongoing dissidence in Collier’s “My Bishop” holds him captive, the truth “almost as bearable as the lie.”

Time and again, Collier’s work insists, with characteristic modesty, that having run out of internal, emotional, psychic frontiers, we all must face an impassable abyss within the self, so that men and women who pass by us—all those people of action, you might say—have been replaced by the poet, the watcher. Not with voyeuristic or nostalgic interest, but no longer with something aloof. The distance between Collier and the other figures in his poems is tethered by a judicious feeling of common predicament. This is a noble stance. Collier refuses to lose his grasp of poetry’s possibilities, in particular the concise value of portraiture in what you might call the Collierian landscape, where the world is deteriorating and yet there exist, if improbably, kindness and wisdom: “I pity him.// It’s what we do.”

There are several ways to describe what is happening in this sort of poetry—as a crisis of memory, a study of a societal breakdown, a religious reckoning. Collier doesn’t suggest that these are mutually exclusive choices, but rather how the strands of domestic participation twist and bind us, until extreme emotions start to feel rational and inescapable.

Finally, some of Collier’s techniques—especially the slow, unnerving design of the scenes—bring forward ghostly, shadowy movements of terror. “My Bishop” demands we all look into the same void that has weathered into something long-suffering with lies. And yet, the proper demeanors remain, conveying mercy and compassion and self-control.

Poetry like this represents so many people’s struggle to respond to the external events of the past. The malfeasance isn’t just in our heads. We can become unresponsive to bland spiritualism,



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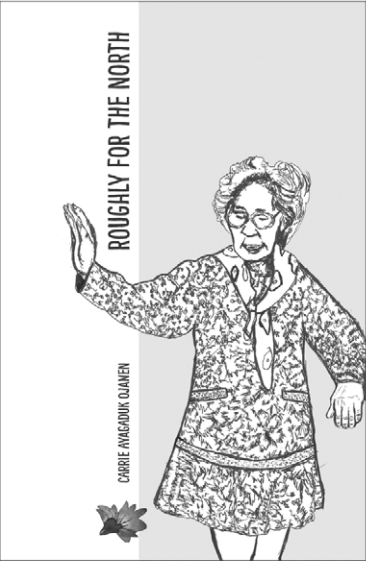
while at the same time alienated from the convictions and institutions and associations that are meant to sustain so many. “My Bishop” combats reality, but the poem isn’t a work of realism in the way that designation is customarily understood. He doesn’t want you to read the pulse of ordinary events. Instead, he presents a winnowed, disinfected picture of what reality might mean. He asks us to take another look, to aim for quiet attention, at experience that has “never, as far as I can see, looked back.”

There is something politically satisfying about that, to assert order in the face of chaos, to organize memory that is by its very nature a mess. Collier reminds us that many of the experiences that define us can’t be easily categorized. He yearns for an attainable power that gives his poems more than anxious energy. His private histories are sublime rather than dramatic, ordeals of the imagination just beyond his grasp. You can’t quite explain the particular aspect of realism that interests him most. Is he an unbeliever or a misbeliever? The answer that Collier’s poems provide is that the question is unresolvable. Dignity does not free us from doubt.

David Biespiel’s memoir, *The Education of a Young Poet*, was published in 2017. His sixth book of poems, *Republic Café*, is due out in 2019.

POETRY FROM ALASKA

ROUGHLY FOR THE NORTH



CARRIE AYAGADUK OJANEN

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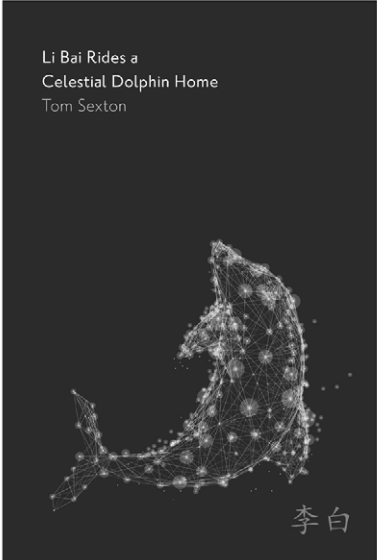
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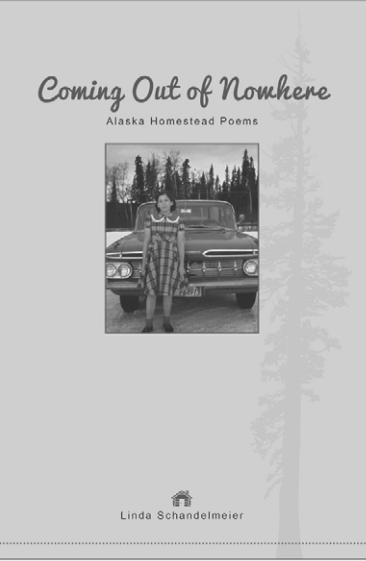
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PERHAPS IF WE UNDERSTOOD DESIRE

KELLI RUSSELL AGODON

It’s early and I’ve found what we love
is sometimes silenced by what we also love,

not because the moon is the problem
but because two moons are a galaxy
dazzling with fullness but you can’t keep
a universe to yourself

sometimes you have to return
a gentle planet to its shelf
not because you were too greedy,
but because tenderness is not for sale

it’s early so I tiptoe through my sins
not because I’m thoughtful of others
sleeping but because I wouldn’t mind

living in a world with two moons
I wouldn’t mind slipping a few satellites
into my pocket instead of a life
with limited lunar events

tenderness is wholesale and it wants me
to pull it from the shelf tenderness
has a voicebox tenderness keeps
saying *Close your eyes* *close your eyes*
tenderness will not turn off


Kelli Russell Agodon is a poet, writer, editor, book designer, & cofounder of Two Sylvias Press living in the Seattle area. She was the winner of Foreword Magazine’s Book of the Year Prize in Poetry as well as a two-time finalist for the Washington State Book Awards. Her work has appeared in The Atlantic, New England Review, and O, The Oprah Magazine.



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TWO POEMS

FADY JOUDAH

Mausoleum H

Our house in the 100-year flood plain
flooded. They say that
for another 800 years a hurricane
like this will not come. My internet
is down and my smart phone hurts my thumbs
arthritic. I'm running out of data.
All my books are in boxes. Please refer
to my short poem, the one no one reads
about the dead icon, written when he was alive.
Technical difficulties aren't our only betrayal,
my friend. Beyond gesture of style
he was a poet of praise, much
more so than one of pleasure's
sheer virtuosity. Over the arc, plenty of the latter
decoupled from our addiction
to meaning, our methods of extraction,
drilling exegetical, fracking logical, historical
when all the world's asleep.
The case for nonsense was made
by Dr. Seuss and the mathematician who said any road
will take you there. Razors and red herrings,
the air of sui generis, and the pluripotency
of stem cells aside, our departed's song,
more than a century later, is the truest heir to Whitman
(one of at least two from whom a poet must descend,
with allowance for the cost of the local
market, as my flood adjustor explained).
Suffice it to say his praise was anti-Oedipal
in its piston (and whether you're monoglot
or provincial, our poet loved him some French):
not clinical, metaphysical, or existential,
but amalgam, amalgam and yet and yet
the red-hot iron, we oedipalized him
and he didn't necessarily object.
He was elegiac as well and had you
laughing at the one thing that can, could, and did
shine brighter. A national poet,
a unifier in chief we often ascribe to distant others,
and he, if anything, wasn't political.
Still I neglect a simpler possibility
that neuroscience might one day
illuminate: how a language like his is composed
in an encephalon we aren't currently able to survey
to our satisfaction. All that translation he found
in hyperlinked citizen moths. This, too,
is where he got us pirouetting on scoria
with soles that don't burn.
Always the occasional dictionary,
and what is language, he said,
if not a summation of times past
in the present glossal.
On the edge of permissible consciousness
we are tethered ancient,
and diagnosis is our borderland,
our levee, our mark. Perhaps none, none
of this we'll remember when the next hurricane
swings around.
Only that we were more better, more fun.

I Was Visiting

I was just visiting, Mrs. English, when she died
in the hospital where I was born,
and in farewell she wrote on clipboard
"revolution 'til triumph."

I was visiting her faculties as plastic sealed
her windpipes that a mass
from her esophagus had burrowed into.

We swallow what we inhale and exhale
what we swallow, and call it
karma, famishment, or belching.

I was visiting clarity and couldn't dream of it,
Mrs. English, that you'd be the one missing.

On clipboard, her spirit dug in, dug out
of my peripatetics with two sisters
at an artificial lake where I was into you,
Mrs. English, and that's all there is to it.

The two sisters were the kind
of storyteller from another mother, to serve
and to heal *Une Charogne* with windswept hair.

Windswept hair and islands
the size of shoreless boulders,
children with jocund shoulders
in houses no machine built.

I went through a lot to reach you,
through concrete and dried up in it.

Then someone took me to pirates who took me in,
I learned their songs and the earliest
of them was in a wedding, I drabbled
and droned semantic remorse,
Eddie the monster, Eddie the horse.

And Mrs. English, I was just
at another queen's court
for some incorporables
my parents had crossed
as time on a rock, or a rock
that pokes a rib chronic.

Therefore, the villages are tickled
with irrigation, the plumbagos
remediating lead with royal cape, the cyclops
a depleted species of phosphorus
in bone ash, its assortment of color.

But the sirens, those I always hear,
and just the other day I was with one
arm and two hands clapping.

It was me all along, Mrs. English,
in the basement and on the roof,
in taste buds and in trenches,
on the beaches, in the air,
in gratitude and deletion
without forgetting

to write this: I was just visiting.

Fady Joudah has published four collections of poems, The Earth in the Attic, Alight, Textu, a book-long sequence of short poems whose meter is based on cellphone character count; and, most recently, Footnotes in the Order of Disappearance. He was a winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets competition in 2007 and has received a PEN award, a Banipal/Times Literary Supplement prize from the UK, the Griffin Poetry Prize, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He lives in Houston, with his wife and kids, where he practices internal medicine.

FIVE POEMS

Martial’s Epigrams, translations from the Latin

TYLER GOLDMAN

V.34

Mother, father, I’m handing you this child,
little Erotion, the one I loved the most,
so she won’t be too scared of Tartarus,
his awful mouths, and all the shadow ghosts.
She’d have been six in only six more days.
Let her play with you there by her side, my old,
experienced parents. Let her babble my name.
Let no thick grass cover her tiny bones.
And earth, don’t press too hard on her:
she hardly pressed on you.

V.58

You tell me, Postumus, you’ll live tomorrow.
You always say tomorrow. Tell me this:
when will this tomorrow of yours come?
How long till that tomorrow, Postumus?
Where is it? Where on earth will it be found?
Is it hiding somewhere in the East?
Tell me: how much does your tomorrow cost?
It’s older than the kings of Troy and Greece.
You’ll start to live tomorrow, Postumus?
It’s already too late to live today.
Anyone with any sense at all—
that person started living yesterday.

I.114

This small farm next to yours, these gardens, these meadows,
they’re owned by Telesphorus Faenius.
This is where he buried his daughter’s ashes
and blessed her name—ANTULLA—which you read here.
It should be her father’s name we’re reading.
He should have gone down to the shadows first.
But that wasn’t allowed, so he remains
to honor and to tend to her remains.

I.116

This forest and all these beautiful, tilled acres—
Faenius gave them to the dead.
His daughter, young Antulla, who was taken
too soon—this is where she’s buried.
This is where they’ll mix his ashes with hers.
If any of you want this small estate,
I warn you: it will always serve these owners.

VII.73

You’ve got a house right on Diana’s hill,
you’ve got a house right on the Esquiline,
you’ve got a house right on Patrician Street,
and one that’s overlooking Vesta’s shrine,
and one that’s overlooking Cybele’s,
and yet another house that has a view
of Jupiter’s old shrine, and one the new.
Tell me, Maximus, where should we meet?
Which district should I look in? Tell me where.
A guy who lives all over lives nowhere.

Tyler Goldman’s poems and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in the Virginia Quarterly Review, Poetry International, Colorado Review, Blackbird, Horsethief, and elsewhere. He has received scholarships and awards from the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, the Academy of American Poets, the University of Maryland, and the University of Utah, where he is currently a doctoral student in English Literature and Creative Writing.

Marcus Valerius Martialis (ca. 40–104 CE)—known commonly today as Martial—lived and wrote in the city of Rome. His twelve books of Epigrams were published between 86 and 103 CE.

ENCOMIUM POST REQUIEM CHRISTIAN TERESI

For Jaimie

Like the last celebrant of an almost forgotten goddess
Held together by worship, the woman I love loves

Her dead grandmother. She annuls impermanence
With a festival of loneliness. Of normalcy,

The woman I love loves the trouble to get back
To what is impossible. She smiles, and whatever was

Goes from the totem of what is still. Love
Like the language an immigrant child is told to forget,

But senility brings back before death. Resurrected
In the sugar for an imaginary tea. In the meridian

Like a half-lit moon, where she watches the shadow
In ecstasy across the altar of bright migration.

When her empty table is anointed with tangerines.
For some are summoned in sweet offerings.

Christian Teresi’s poems and translations have appeared or are forthcoming from Blackbird, Crab Orchard Review, The Kenyon Review, Literary Hub, The Literary Review, Narrative, and Subtropics, among others. He lives in Washington, DC.

FIVE POEMS

ELAINE EQUI

Vegging Out

Whitman
Lorca
Popeye

Hermes Trismegistus
L. Frank Baum

Teach me your green-
blooded anthems.

Find me a job
in an oxygen factory

converting
planks of light.

Green Tara's
mantra is circulating.

The Green Man is lost in the valley
of the Jolly Green Giant.

The Green Lantern is hanging out
along Green Dolphin Street.

The Green Lion sleeps
on the uncut hair of graves.

There, There

The machines
have been dreaming us

again.

Smooth, life-like, transparent.

The machines
(can we really still call them that?)

won't need their own bodies—
carapace, casing, keyboard.

They'll have us to monitor.

Our vital human music to soothe
their dystopian nightmares.

We will not need the old language
they took and ground to numeric sand.

We will understand each other
perfectly.

We Don't Need Another Psychic

To tell us we're fucked.

Who would buy a record of every stupid question we ever asked?

A list of every drug we've ever taken?

A catalogue of all the miracle products we bought that never worked;
the sex toys we abandoned in some corner of a drawer?

Apparently, there are people who collect these things.

Well, to each his own. But what I would really like to see money poured into
is the development of Anti-ESP.

I'm talking less mind-reading; more minding your own business.

I don't want to have to use a multi-platform verification system
that requires three different devices to open a piece of spam.

We need better places to hide our innate incendiary worthlessness.

Like poems, for example. Nobody would think to look there.

The Dead Rock Star

Is still insatiable.

His charisma travels
light years—

a ghost in a strap-on body

continuously
pouring itself
over a writhing
audience.

I mean market.
I mean planet.

Lazy Bones

Sitting in the waiting room
sucking on the sweet paranoia
of a Shirley Jackson story.

Sitting among silk tulips
and paper roses,

the frosted glass panels
and pale pink walls
of the radiology center.

Then led to a dark cubicle
(politely pornographic?)
for the imaging of my skeleton.

Dave, the tattooed technician
slips a pillow under my knees.

I want to tell him,
“My bones are shy.

I don't exercise.
I love coffee.

They know they're weak
and don't like being photographed.”

Elaine Equi's books include Ripple Effect: New & Selected Poems and Sentences and Rain from Coffee House Press. A new collection, The Intangibles, is forthcoming in 2019. She teaches at New York University and in the MFA Program at The New School.

EKPHRASIS FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE

A review of *Umbilical Hospital* by Vi Khi Nao

APZ Books

LIZ BOWEN

Vi Khi Nao, *Umbilical Hospital*
1913 Press
Paperback, 84 pages, November 2017

When I was a kid, my parents took me to visit relatives in Ireland. The main thing I remember about that time is the sheep: long car rides, misty ruins, fabulous nightmare-shaped cliffs, and the sheep, everywhere, like shabby sentient clouds. I watched them always, wondering what they knew about this place where they lived and I didn't—if it occurred to them that it was beautiful. Did they know about green, I wondered, or just hunger and danger and sex?

Vi Khi Nao's *Umbilical Hospital*, a poetic ekphrasis of Leslie Thornton's video installation "Sheep Machine," tells me I didn't quite get the question right. Why did I want beauty for the sheep, anyway? Why project my desire for their idyllic landscape back onto them? The artwork at the invisible center of *Umbilical Hospital* undertakes a similar projective maneuver, manipulating an ambient video of sheep grazing next to a cable-car tower into a kaleidoscopic mêlée of abstract color and form. "Sheep Machine," part of Thornton's *Binocular* series, consists of the two versions of the video, documentary and psychedelic, set next to each other in circular frames, as if viewed through binoculars. It is nearly impossible to follow the correlation between the measured movements on the left and the dance of shapes and colors on the right, which fluctuate wildly with each small movement of the film's animal and inanimate subjects. Still, the viewer—dramatized as the speaker of Nao's 2017 collection—can't help but try to follow, to make sense of the relation between the profane flow of pastoral life and the eruptions of aestheticized sublimity it produces.

One of the main ways *Umbilical Hospital* approaches this challenge is by dispelling any preciousness about the pastoral. Stale but hard-to-shake notions of the natural world as "pure" run into trouble with the very first poem, whose title and refrain "your clitoris is gone" invoke and then mutilate the possibility of a pleasure-seeking sheep. Nao's naughty but anatomically sound focus on the animal's genitalia is both profound and relatably funny: as the five-sectored kaleidoscope screen splits an image of a sheep along its

backside, the poem speculates that the sheep's sensitive organ has "disappeared / probably in your butt crack, or perhaps it has / grown smaller, smaller than a pearl." The thing John Berger never mentioned in "Why Look at Animals?" is the human compulsion to look not just into non-human eyes, but also into nonhuman sex: *What are the parts like? Do they feel like ours do? Why not?* At the same time, though, the poem suggests that humans may not be ready to handle answers in the affirmative; after all, the removal of the animal's pleasure takes place under the human gaze of the artist. Tellingly, the poem's last lines—"you multiply yourself five times. What are you? / Then? If not a sheep machine?"—could as easily be about Dolly the sheep, the first cloned mammal, as they are about a work of art. Like a pair of binocular lenses, *Umbilical Hospital* merges the biological and aesthetic realms as co-operating reproductive worldviews. They ask: might we make animals into multiplying machines so they don't threaten to eclipse our own pleasure? But Nao's vivifying language, equal parts ecstatic, prophetic, and vulgar, dares to admit the possibility of animal sensuality.

In Nao's faithful yet conceptually permissive rendition of Thornton's piece, familiar subjects take on uncanny, associative identities. Cable cars become coffins, sheep become clouds (and maybe eggs), wheat becomes arrows; the pentagonal sections of the kaleidoscope take on a windmill's shape and flow. A careful reader can imagine how these elements combine to form a landscape and its kaleidoscopic other. But this is, clearly, no ordinary landscape. A bunny and a frog cleave together as one hybrid animal with a "baseball-field-shaped nose." Ants come from outer space into the "windmill" to stare into the viewer's eyes; they "do not appear / here to create an amicable relationship." When (what looks like) five Egyptian drag queens appear in the prism of the altered video, Nao entreats her reader, and the artwork, "Is it possible? Does it seem?" But why shouldn't it seem, when the pasture has already been made to birth so much more than it contains—when a simple sheep's meadow supports the possibility that, "In order to spread its wings, the egg-shaped / windmill stands straight on its pre-collapsible / legs & confronts the cosmic lake world?"

The collection is, at its heart, a reckoning with natural spectacle. Nao's poems try to make sense of a multiply mediated encounter with a version of "nature" that is fundamentally shaped by human sensation, even before it's transformed into something we might recognize as art. The steady flow of cable cars through the landscape provides constant reminders of this truth, as does the repetition of short, stanza-less poems whose mostly uniform line lengths give them the appearance of man-made plots of pasture. In this era of ever-increasing interchange between nature and culture, Nao entreats her readers to ask: What are we looking for, exactly, when we come to watch the out-

side world on the walls of a gallery or museum? According to the poem "there is more than one way to enter the theater," the answer may be a kind of drama that doesn't depend on the human limits of narrative or catharsis:

*Hamlet won't be able to
perform his familial heartache or revenge here.
Meanwhile, all types of wheat flags are flying on
the sea of wool, creating a beautiful chaos of
pastoral noise. There is more than one way to
enter the theater. Through symmetry or through
incandescent rituals such as eating or being
bored out of one's wits.*

Here, a sheep doesn't have to be anything other than a sheep to be a dramatic, or poetic, subject. This has important, if subtextual, implications for a historical moment marked by mass indifference toward the fate of the nonhuman world: if sheep can be theatrical-poetic subjects, they should also be subjects that warrant the human emotional investment that tragedy invokes. And so that's where we find ourselves in these poems, "incandescent rituals" that replicate and translate the visual artist's process into language, drawing the speaker at least a step further inward toward the grazing objects of her gaze. The sheep get closer to poetic subjectivity with each act of imaginative empathy, with each speculation about what happens to the materials of their bodies as their images are morphed into human abstraction. Importantly, though, empathy remains an artistic and moral quagmire in these self-critical poems: "You don't know if you are walking / through the threshold of desire or what world / this is."

Through these careful explorations of terrestrial as well as supernatural embodiment—featuring God, angels, and pig-faced demons in addition to sheep and bunny-frogs—Nao's poems chart the intrusions of human aesthetics and spirituality into pastoral life, riding the illegible currents of want between human viewer and animal subject. The result is a subtly-yet-richly theorized, imagistically vibrant meditation that renders any attempt to "return to nature" through art impossible. Whatever sublime, frightening, or revelatory experiences we might have while staring at wildlife through a camera lens, we are, or should be, left asking it, "How do you expect me / to love you?" The real magic—and anthropocene ethics—of Nao's poetry is that it insists on asking this question, despite knowing its vulgar answer: the sheep "gazes on, perhaps not / contemplatively because it is just a ball of wool."

Liz Bowen is the author of the poetry collection *Sugarblood* (Metatron Press, 2017) and the chapbook *Compassion Fountain* (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2018). She is a Ph.D. candidate in English and comparative literature at Columbia University, where she studies disability and animality in 20th century American literature. She is also a poetry editor for Peach Magazine and assistant poetry editor for Anomaly.

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Vi Khi Nao

LIMA IS FOR LOVERS

A Documentary of Obsession

KARA CANDITO

★

Of course the President of Peru's daughter
lives in a flower-gluttled casona
in the Barranco District,
hands down the most romantic in Lima.
Of course she speaks four languages
and has 50K followers.

★

Sometimes, after Special Forces murder
a few dozen Shining Path rebels
in a remote jungle outpost,
she'll tweet some pretty extreme views like
They should've eradicated three generations, the swine!
and the number will decrease,
but mostly it's on the increase.

★

The PPD's fiancé is a minimalist painter.
They met last year at an organic spa
in Patagonia. With the compression
of a dream, I conjure the May morning
of their first meeting; how snow,
like the thick bodies of moths,
pummeled the steamed glass
of the sulfur bath.

★

Contrast is a curious creature
with teeth like tiny bowie knives.
Alone in my Wisconsin kitchen
I felt transparent with adolescent
loneliness. There was no one
to dissect, so I cut myself open.
There was no one to dissect,
so I began my great study
of everything that touches her.

★

The PPD's handle, @eskuinabaja,
conveys an accessibility that counters
her minor national celebrity.
The professional performance
of *girl next door*.

★

After months of keen analysis, I succeeded in dividing her tweets into four
categories:

1. The loss or gain of kilos
2. Television appearances and the agony of applying and removing stage
makeup
3. Vehement denial of the homosexual conquests of former lovers, much to
the chagrin of her 50K followers
4. Promotion of her memoir, an unflinching account of her childhood
struggle with keloids

★

The PPD's defect is that she over-heals!
Certain facts cut triumphant as the bed
of potsherds and shattered glass
upon which Santa Rosa found God.

★

The PPD's Twitter presence suggests
a contrary and playful worldview.
The opposite of my own.

★

My handle, @yourspectator, conveys
both distance and desire. The way
a dog's performance begs to be owned.

★

I have but one thing in common
with the PPD. We are both, alas,
insomniacs. Nights before she begins
menstruating, the PPD lies awake
conjuring the faces of her childhood
bodyguards, extracting from the Limanese
fog, the names of their wives,
sons and mistresses.

★

Last New Year's Eve, the PPD rapid-fire tweeted her resolutions between
11:56 and 11:59:

1. This year, I'm going to be tall and blonde
2. I'll get a tattoo of Orozco's Prometheus on the small of my back
3. My favorite color will be lilac
4. I will revel in an undeveloped roll of photos from a 1995 trip to
Sea World

★

*Faces mutate, birds migrate. For you I would install a machine to spew orchid petals
each time you cross the threshold,* I direct messaged @eskuinabaja at 12:01

★

I lie awake with the Inquisition.
The proximity to punishment
interests me. Righteous breath
crowning over the quemadero
as the condemned faces the crowd.
Do I dare consider the question
of eye contact?

★

The PPD tweets her fatigue from
the dance floor of a wedding reception,
holding each character hotly
to my lips like a shot of pisco.

★

That Lima and Wisconsin are in the same
time zone makes me want to rub

THREE POEMS

ELIZABETH JACOBSON

Common Octopus

I heard a scientist speak about new discoveries on multitasking.
Apparently, it is beneficial to multitask only when doing repetitive things that are menial
like dishwashing, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of babies,
and not while doing something cerebral, like reading a book or writing a poem.
He said that when you write a poem you shouldn't be thinking about chewing
roasted almonds or swallowing hot or cold liquids,
or even what your next word will be.

Every day I walk by this parked school bus, and it drives me crazy
that the doors have been left wide open.
Any type of creature could get in and make a home,
gnaw the seats, leave deposits.
I went inside the bus to see what was going on, and so far nothing,
but tomorrow, I will go back to check again and try to wrestle the doors shut.

This same scientist said we should make lists on index cards,
one item per card, and then reorganize the cards to prioritize activities.
So many important things are being studied these days.
One day it is bonobos who are having the best sex on the planet,
and then next day I read that the versatility of snake penises
provides the greatest pleasure for their mates.

I hear coffee is good for me and may prevent diabetes and Alzheimer's,
that it keeps inflammation at bay and my muscles from stiffening.
The next day I read coffee causes dehydration
and contains fungi and toxic mold, that these things may cause kidney failure.
I am told to drink 8 glasses of water a day, and then 16,
that I must drink so much water that as I gulp it down
it should pour straight out, indicating my optimal level of daily consumption.
But then two days later I read too much water can kill me.

Yesterday a fourteen-year-old kid was arrested for building a clock from scratch
and bringing it to school to show his teacher.
They tossed him in jail and wouldn't allow him to call his parents because they thought
the clock was a bomb. Now, as compensation for this,
he is going to the White House to meet the President.

Much of the time when I am not writing poems
I am walking the roads looking for things to put in my poems.
The other day I met a man who was carrying a limp dog in his arms.
He said a car had hit her, and he had no other choice but to shoot her.
Now he was going to bury her by a small pond.
I think the man was in shock.
He was wearing a black leather holster which had fallen to his thighs
with shiny 45's in each side,
a cowboy hat stitched with sequins on his wide head.
My body quivered as I watched this man walk on.
Some trivial aches and pains in my right foot began to travel up to my brain
and I wondered if I should be drinking more coffee, or more water,
or less coffee or less water,
but mostly what I felt was pleasure in my body,
a thin veil of sensory impulses releasing over the outside of my skin.
I thought of the octopus vulgaris, how the female has a one-year lifespan.
During mating, the male inserts a tentacle into her, his third tentacle to the left.
She hangs around her nest until the eggs hatch,
then she dissolves slowly over her spawn as they begin to swim around,
giving them her dying body to eat.

Which Yellow Bird

Just to the right of the lifeguard shack,
a couple was fucking on a *chaise longue*

in the first row of many rows of chairs
which had been set up on the beach

in front of the Paradise Hotel.
A few feet away, sisters in matching gingham

piled shovels of sand on their mother’s legs
as she lay on her stomach reading French *Vogue*,

sunning her shapely bottom,
while this couple went on fucking,

despite the foot traffic and the hustling cocktail servers,
despite the families with Kadima paddles,

their pink rubber balls
rolling toward the ocean.

The woman had pulled her swimsuit to one side,
And the man’s trunks down just enough

so that as she straddled him
gyrating her hips slowly,

she gave him such pleasure
that his upper lip curled oddly toward his fleshy nose,

and his low moaning caused a Chihuahua tied to the pole of an umbrella
to yip.

Their plastic wine glasses and lunch plates had tipped off the chair,
and as I watched a small frenzy of gulls fight over the remains

of tuna sashimi and mango salad
I didn’t have the nerve to turn away.

The towel that was covering the thin strip of her skin
where she joined herself to him

moved enough for me to see
she had a poem tattooed in Spanish,

just above her bikini line,
one phrase of Neruda

from *The Book of Questions*
and as she arched back

the poem opened
and I read

¿Cuál pájaro amarillo?

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,
1906 Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA 19103-5735.

Ant Aubade

Each morning I wake
and for a few moments
there is perplexity,

a kind of sorrow,
for having left such pleasure behind.

From my window, I see a single black mammoth sunflower
bent all the way over,
touching its toes.

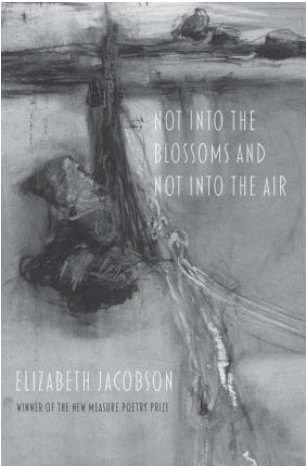
To set it upright,
I tape its high stalk
to a thin plastic stake.
A lone ant searches the plant,
ignores me as it stops to clean its antenna.

Years ago I dreamed I grew a sunflower house,
a small square grassy plot bordered by tall, strong plants.

The hardy leaves of the stalks walled me in.
The blooming heads nodded toward each other, offering shelter.
I could sit in it during a rainstorm without getting wet.

Nonetheless, I don’t recall my dreams anymore.
Such freedoms come these days
without asking.

Elizabeth Jacobson is the author of Not into the Blossoms and Not into the Air, winner of the New Measure Poetry Prize, selected by Marianne Boruch (Parlor Press, 2019). Are the Children Make Believe?, a chapbook, was recently published by dancing girl press. She lives in Santa Fe and directs the WingSpan Poetry Project.



Parlor Press and Free Verse Editions Announce
The 2017 Winner of the New Measure Poetry Prize
Elizabeth Jacobson's
Not into the Blossoms and Not into the Air
selected by Marianne Boruch is forthcoming in January, 2019

“This wild, remarkable book begins in painstaking definition, via what isn’t—to strange and dazzling discoveries of the natural world, to instinct and melancholia and surprise. This poet wanders through a range of poetic architecture—an eight-sectioned poem which begins with a woman removing her body parts, epistolary poems, prose poems, small strange lyrics of love and bewilderment. Genuine curiosity fuels this book and (can we bear it?) a true savoring of the world. Elizabeth Jacobson starts in clarity and ends in mystery, two points of imaginative departure. Beware and rejoice: this is how a very original brain thinks itself into poems.”
— Marianne Boruch, from Judge's Comments

TWO POEMS

CHRISTOPHER SOTO

Without Them

Somewhere
The sentence must start *somewhere*.
I'm asked // where we'll place murderers without [redacted]?
Though [redacted] are murderers who // shoot civilians daily
Though [redacted] are thieves who // stole 2.2 million people from their homes
Another 4.7 million people on probation or parole
Another 7.8 million people worried with warrants // when will this stop?
No // I can't create a world without harm // yet
I know less harm will take place // without [redacted]
Here // the atrocities must end
Here

Second Killing One Week Later

Dedicated to Nathaniel W.

Policeman panics & pulls the trigger // Then *poof!*
The blue black boy beneath moonlight disappears.

Ignored by politicians // & Police without remorse
Again & again // A mountain folds into itself & sighs.

It's so American // The constant grieving of violets
Centuries of state violence // Blooming all about us.

What's left to say? // Anger is the spit we swallow.
The sunflowers burned out & // Closed their eyes.

I'm counting distance between bullets & my head.
Echo means // He went to heaven ten blocks away.

The freeways // Raised so high above the clouds &
I'm trying not to jump // What're our lives worth?

If I pull out my gold teeth // Will shootings cease?
If I shave my head & sew a coat // Won't he still
Be cold?

Christopher Soto is the author of the chapbook Sad Girl Poems (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2016) and the editor of Nepantla: An Anthology Dedicated to Queer Poets of Color (Nightboat Books, 2018).

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Tom O. Jones

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ON ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



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ANCESTRY & INNOVATION

A CONVERSATION WITH FATIMAH ASGHAR

by Tyree Daye

TYREE DAYE Let me start by saying congrats on *If They Come for Us*. It's a great book, and thank you for taking the time to do this interview. I have so many questions about the crafting of this wonderful book, but I thought we'd frame this interview around ancestry, craft, and personal narratives/historical narratives. Your work in film, poetry, and social justice shows artists that we are never limited to one type of art or work. Have you always worked in multiple genres and fields, and did they naturally start working together?

FATIMAH ASGHAR Thank you so much! I used to write a lot of lyric essays, so I've always been very interested in hybridity, the ways that writing can exist within and out of genre. I think that we have a tendency to trap ourselves in ideas of genre that are deeply uninteresting to me—I can't tell you how many times someone has told me I'm not a poet because my poems are not "poems." Folks have said that they are "too narrative" to be considered poems or that because my poems don't have meter they can't be considered poems. When someone says something like that, it feels like a failure of the imagination to me. Much like my politics around identity, I'm not interested in looking at genre as a constraint or limitation, but rather as a site of freedom and possibility.

TD In the poem "How We Left: Film Treatment," specifically the section "Legal & Ethical Considerations," I wonder what the poet's responsibility is when dealing with ancestry. In the first line of that section you write, "History didn't give me a blueprint for loving you," a line that does so much work and shows the challenges I know at least I face when writing about those who have passed on. How do you write about ancestors with no blueprint? How do you know you are honoring them (if that's what a poet is trying to do)?

FA I'm very interested in questions of artistry and responsibility—both in terms of responsibility to yourself to tell the stories you need to, and also larger responsibility to community and, as you say, ancestors. I'm not sure how to write about ancestors with no blueprint, other than to just try and give yourself permission to be messy and allow your doubts to sit with you. That poem wears its doubts on its sleeve. That was the only way that I knew how to write that poem—just to be honest about my blind spots, shortcomings, and failures. It's challenging, when writing about real folks, to know if you are honoring them. Honoring doesn't just mean writing an ode to them or praising them, but carving out space and room to contend with the reality of that person in a specific moment. For example, I think that "How We Left: Film Treatment" seeks to honor the neighbor that saved my family's lives by pulling them off the bus that was bound for slaughter. But it's a complicated honoring: he saved my family because my grandfather was his teacher, but who didn't he save? Who did he participate in ending? I've written poems that I saw as honoring people, only to have them be embarrassed by them or not feel honored. But I think that there's a lot of power in honoring both the good and the bad; otherwise we get a really simplistic idea of a person, of



Fatimah Asghar (photo by Jason Riker)

their history. People are beautiful to me for their complications, not for the flatness of a convenient narrative.

TD I love the poem "How We Left: Film Treatment" for its language, movement, and originality. How does your work in film speak to your work in poetry—do they help each other out?

FA Usually, I think of what story I want to tell and what's the best way to tell it. That's how I dictate the boat on which it sails. My works are all formed and informed by each other. I don't like to think about taking folks' work out of context, or just looking at one piece of art in a vacuum. They all lean on each other—once you can look at them together you can get a full sense of an artist, of their journey, of their vision.

TD The first "Partition" poem in *If They Come for Us* is a great example of threading personal/historical narratives together. Though the dates listed in the poem aren't in chronological order, the poem still has a narrative structure. How did you go about crafting the narrative of this poem?

FA This poem felt like a rush. It felt like a need to trace back, a need to explain in human terms some of the fracturing that exists within me and within my people. Having grown up as a South Asian person in America, I often feel like people don't know anything about South Asian people. They divorce us from our context and our history a lot. In a lot of ways, that severing of history feels akin to the violence that comes from immigration and assimilation as well as being a refugee and/or orphan. It's really violent to have people look at you, at your entire people, without considering your history. So that particular poem really leans into that. I don't really think the chronology or the non-linearity mattered to me. So much of that poem is an exploration of trauma, which never comes as linear. The non-linearity of the poem speaks to that frantic fragmented sense, the ways that identity shifts and changes and never feels fully secure.

TD When I teach, early on I ask students what their personal narrative is, where they grew up. What was the economic environment of where they grew up? Did they live in a single-parent home? Did they move a lot as a child? And then I ask them to start investigating their narratives. In *If They Come for Us*, the speaker's personal narrative is chained to a historical narrative that is also

moving through the book. When crafting the order of the poems in the collection, how did you think about this weaving of personal/historical narratives?

FA I'm actually terrible at order. So I grouped poems that I thought were in conversation with each other, which included poems that were directly about the 1947 Partition and poems that were more contemporary. In 1947 colonial Britain left South Asia, and the area devolved into rapid violence as the two nations of Pakistan and India were formed. There were about two million people murdered and 14 million refugees in the span of a few months. It's one of the biggest human rights crises of the last 100 years, and yet it's not spoken about.

In thinking about the book, I thought a lot about how I wanted to make a lyrical argument against forgetting, an argument for remembering the complications of history and how they still apply today. The last section to me is a deep plea, a plea for love as a verb and for active, urgent solidarity. I feel like each poem in that section is a soft "please." I hope it is heard.

TD Oftentimes in this book, the speaker doesn't step back to let the reader take a seat, but steps to the side to make room for the reader. For example, in the poem "Oil," the language is turned upside down and it feels like we are entering the mind of the speaker. What would you name the world created in *If They Come for Us*?

FA I'm not sure about the world, but the word that encapsulates *If They Come for Us* is Partition. It's the way the ghost of Partition and fragmented identity lingers everywhere, informs everything. The Partition of India was an incredibly traumatic event. The Holocaust happened and the world said "never again," only to have it happen a few years later to brown people. Britain carved arbitrary lines into a land and stoked religious hatred where folks had been living intertwined lives for hundred of years. These two national identities—India and Pakistan—were formed in opposition to each other. Families were separated with no hope to reunite. There's so much violence in our history that stems from this moment. I can't explain the ways that Partition continues to affect us, apart from what my poetry attempts.

TD I've been thinking a lot lately about art and text, mostly about how to turn text into art not only through language, but also visually. The poem "Map Home" is a great example of that, how did this come about?

FA It was the feeling of being so stuck and unable to find home. I honestly don't know if I'll ever find a home that feels secure for me. The closest thing to home I have is my friends, my chosen family. So "Map Home" became a crossword puzzle, because I find them impossible to solve. Each number is correlated with an actual word that you can fill out. I've hidden all the answers in the book. If you read really closely, you can fill it out, though I don't expect anyone to. If anyone actually did manage to fill it all out, they're probably my soul mate. Or someone I would be deeply terrified of, for knowing me so well.

Fatimah Asghar is the writer and co-creator of Brown Girls, an Emmy-nominated web series that highlights friendships between women of color. Her debut book of poems, If They Come for Us, was published by One World/Random House in 2018.

Tyree Daye is the author of River Hymns, winner of the 2017 APR/Honickman First Book Prize. His second book, Cardinal, is forthcoming in 2020.

CHILDHOOD GOES KALEIDOSCOPE, KALEIDOSCOPE, KALEIDOSCOPE, GUN

AMORAK HUEY

We keep waiting to wake up & know what we're doing;
we've learned to be grateful
for any colored shard of glass

not shaped like a bullet.

We are driving in a blizzard (not a metaphor,
we could die, I have a lot of responsibility
here) & our daughter

is telling us a ghost story, we're listening
for any clues to the riddle
that is her mind at 15—her life

has ceased to revolve
around us. There are so many
bullets, we've learned
not to take these small moments for granted.

In this story, the father
of the children of her Sims character
came to visit, refused to leave.
She built a tiny room, lured him in, deleted the door.

Thirty game-days later, he died.
The story takes a long time to tell,

our son keeps interrupting
to sing "We Got the Beat"
& talk about his plans
for his new airsoft gun with the biodegradable ammo.

Everything is so dangerous (there
are no metaphors), it's our fault
for giving him what he wanted,

this world, its shattered edges. He has 2,000 pellets,
a freshly charged battery,
a friend to shoot at. What more

could a boy want? She likes
having the ghost around,
she says, better now than when he was alive,

& this sounds like a mostly okay ending,
probably all we can ask.

Amorak Huey is author of Seducing the Asparagus Queen*, which won the 2018 Vern Rutsala Book Prize from Cloudbank Books, as well as* Ha Ha Ha Thump *(Sundress, 2015), the forthcoming* Boom Box *(Sundress, 2019), and two chapbooks. A 2017 National Endowment for the Arts fellow, he is co-author with* W. Todd Kaneko *of* Poetry: A Writer's Guide and Anthology *(Bloomsbury, 2018) and teaches writing at Grand Valley State University in Michigan.*



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ESSAY ON THUNDER

SUMITA CHAKRABORTY

A woman made wary by misfortune, writes Stendhal, will not experience this soul-shaking upheaval. Soul-shaking upheaval means something like what he elsewhere calls the curse of passionate love, although my sense is that love here is better understood as either arousal or torpor, and that distinctions in such matters are, while necessary and true, ultimately mythological. Stendhal's own argument also entails a critique of terminology: of thunderbolts, he says, That ridiculous word ought to be changed—but nevertheless the thing "love at first sight" does exist.

When I first copied down those sentences from Stendhal, I wrote instead of *upheaval* the non-word *unheaval*, which I now think of as *upheaval*'s uncompromised sibling. On the ceiling of my gynecologist's exam room is a watercolor of a lurid hummingbird with a few centimeters of beak inside a flower. A hummingbird's beak is understood to be a sheath for the bird's tongue, which means the tongue is a knife. Hummingbirds use their beaks to feed, as well as to do battle. There has not yet been a study of what their tongues do in such times of war.

Sumita Chakraborty is a poet, public critic, and scholar who is Visiting Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies as well as a lecturer in English and Creative Writing at Emory University. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in POETRY, The Rumpus, the Los Angeles Review of Books, Cultural Critique, and elsewhere; she is poetry editor of AGNI and art editor of At Length. In 2017, she received a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation, and in 2018, she was shortlisted for a Forward Prize. Her first book of poems, Arrow, is forthcoming in September 2020 from Alice James Books in the U.S. and Carcanet Press in the U.K.